



GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Semester I

MA in English

Paper-4

Non-Fiction - Letter, Essay, Biography & Autobiography

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Gauhati University

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Semester 1

Paper 1.4

Non-Fiction : Letter, Essays, Biography &
Autobiography



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Block 2 : Biography and Autobiography

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Course Introduction

Non-Fiction : Letter, Essays, Biography & Autobiography

As students of literary studies, you are required to read extensively so that you acquire a sensitive receptiveness to different kinds of writing. At first, you might be prompted to ask why there should be a course in "non-fictional prose". Does prose appear or function differently outside the novel or a play (which is not in verse)? This is the discovery for you to make. Our course here is an institutional attempt to extend your literary horizons so that it begins to include writing where the writer, writing in prose, presupposes a definite reader. As we assert this we also imply that there are also some categories of writing where the reader is imagined by the writer very nebulously, unsure whether the writing will bridge a gap of time or distance or even social background. When we normally label a piece of writing as "non-fictional prose" we are definitely outlining a category of writing which is determined to bridge a gap, to address someone, to make a mark on a world which operates as much through actions as through language. In such a work-a-day world perhaps it is not so much the style of expression as the content it delivers. As we know simultaneously, however, content and style are difficult to separate.

All these ideas are for you to take up and develop as you read through the texts prescribed for your study and this study material which has been prepared for you. This is one course which takes very seriously the business of constructing the context in which these instances of writing occurred - we would not find Keats's letters, for instance, as being significant unless we have in mind the literary traditions, the literary environment to which Keats refers and the occasion which gave rise to his writing. The same is true of Addison's essays or even Johnson's "Life of Milton". It is not so much that we recognize Johnson's achievement in mapping Milton's life by setting it against the facts which made Milton's real life but that we see how Johnson is mediating a literary tradition of biography to his readers, a description of Milton in keeping with a social convention. And that tradition cannot be made visible unless we have a proper idea of the milieu that made this writing possible or meaningful.

As with all our courses, our method has been to adopt representative texts for your study. This means that as you study one biography, you should also reach out to other biographies (Plutarch's Lives could be part of your venture!), or while you read Tagore, you should be moved to reading his exchanges with Gandhi. Any course of study can be made more rewarding by touching upon unfamiliar texts outside the curriculum. As you read on, your modes of reading will become

sharper and more refined.

The first block deals with "Essays & Letters". While this may, at first glance, seem to be a combination of disparate forms of writing, you should remember that letters do also partake of a very "public" sense of the self as any formal essay always does. Moreover, essays can be most fruitfully compared with an opposing genre -- private letters -- to explore subjectivity.

The second block sets up as comparable genres, the biography and the autobiography. Both genres give us different perspectives which are bound to characterize the writing itself. In this case, the two genres are also distanced by time so that you can discover differing strategies of writing about human personality. A third difference can be posed here in the sense that while Russell was very definitely informed by a particular philosophy, the same description cannot be applied to Johnson. Such issues make a study of these two writers most promising. As with all the writers prescribed for you here you will clearly gain better knowledge of the various moments of history by the end of this course.

Evaluation

Besides the yearly home-assignment on which you will be assessed for 20 marks, the year-end examination will contain questions totalling 80 marks. Of these, 5 long answers will be required to be written for 12 marks each, chosen from a wider range given to you. Textual questions which will test how familiar you are with your text will carry 4 marks each, and will be five in number.

Block-1

Letters and Essays

Block Introduction:

This block is planned to help you to get acquainted with some forms of non-fictional prose like the essay and the letter. Writers have been chosen from different periods to enable you to recognize the flexibility of the medium. As you read the different authors you will realize how different prose is from verse.

Of the seven units in this block, each unit except the first, will take up a single author. The first unit in this block introduces you to the different genres that are a part of the course on non-fictional prose. It provides you with information about the development of English prose before going on to the different forms themselves. You are expected to read this unit carefully; you will then realize that prose has its own patterns and its subtleties which are not apparent at first sight.

The other units are intended to give the reader information about the form, the author, as well as the social, political and cultural contexts in which the writers were producing their work. Glossaries and suggested reading-lists have been provided in each unit to help you. Use the self-assessment questions to find out how well you have become acquainted with the nuances of the text and then check your progress to develop answers to questions. This block will have the following units:

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Unit 1: Non-Fictional Prose

Unit 2: Joseph Addison

Unit 3: John Keats

Unit 4: Charles Lamb

Unit 5: Matthew Arnold

Unit 6: Virginia Woolf

Unit 7: Rabindranath Tagore

Unit 1

Non-Fictional Prose

Contents :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Development of Prose
- 1.4 English Prose & the Bible
- 1.5 Secular Prose
- 1.6 Essay
- 1.7 Letters
- 1.8 Autobiography
- 1.9 Biography
- 1.10 Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

This unit will help in introducing you to the different forms of non-fictional prose. By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- *recognize* the different forms of non fictional prose
- *identify* these forms through the examples of individual writers
- *relate* the importance of the form to the author's concerns
- *distinguish* the different strategies adopted by the authors
- *understand* how prose can be used in different genres

1.2 Introduction

Let us begin with the notion of how prose developed from a more rigid language used in religious sermons to an extremely applicable form that was used in essays and letters in the subsequent periods.

Prose is a word supposed to be derived from Lat. *prorsus*, meaning direct or straight, and signifying the plain speech of mankind, when written or rhetorically composed, without reference to the rules of verse. There is a distinguishable difference between prose and poetry. Prose is most safely defined as comprising all forms of careful literary expression which are not metrically versified. Earlier it was supposed that the conscious use of prose in the English language is comparatively recent, dating back at the farthest to the middle of the 16th century, and due directly to French influences. However, prose was used in England much before this. "The Code of Laws of King's Inn" dates from the 7th century, and there are various other legal documents which may be hardly literature in themselves, but which are worded in a way that seems to denote the existence of a literary tradition. After the Danish invasion, Latin ceased to be the universal language of the educated, and translations into the vernacular began to be required. In 887, Alfred, who had collected the principal scholars of England around him, wrote with their help, in English. His Hand-Book, which was probably the earliest specimen of finished English prose, is lost. Alfred also produced various translations from Bede, Orosius, Boethius and other classics. The prose of Alfred is simple, straightforward and clear, without any pretension to elegance. He had no direct followers until the time of the monastic revival.

1.3 Development of Prose

After the Norman Conquest, the progress of English prose was violently checked, except in a few remote monasteries. English ceased to be used, even for religious purposes, and the literature became exclusively Latin or French. Modern English prose begins with John Wyclif, who, in the course of his career, abandoned Latin for English as the vehicle of his tracts. The earliest English Bible was begun by Nicholas Hereford, but was not completed. The completion of this great work is usually attributed, but on insufficient grounds, to Wyclif himself. A new version was almost immediately started by John Purvey, another Wyclifite, who completed it in 1388. Towards the middle of the 14th century Englishmen began, somewhat timidly, to use prose as the vehicle for original work. Capgrave, an Augustinian friar, wrote a chronicle of English History; Sir John Fortescue, the eminent constitutional jurist, produced around 1475 a book on *The Governance of England*; and Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, attacked the Lollards in his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (1455), which was so caustic and scandalous that it cost him his diocese. The introduction of printing into England is coeval with a sudden development of English prose, a marvellous example of which is to be seen in Caxton's 1485 edition of Sir Thomas

Malory's *Morte d' Artur*, a compilation from French sources, in which the capacities of the English language for melody and noble sweetness were for the first time displayed, although much was yet lacking in strength and conciseness.

SAQ

In which languages did the Bible exist in ancient times ? (20 words)

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Which languages can be thought to have been in use in England in Alfred's time ? (20 words)

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Stop to Consider:

Like other Western European vernaculars, English developed in the shadow of Latin, and its models for prose were therefore Latinate, at first through translation, imitation, and experiment, later as a consequence of its hybrid inheritance. Old English prose writing was largely a matter of translation from Latin, as in the works of Alfred the Great (9th century), but original vernacular prose was also produced by such writers as Aelfric of Eynsham (10-11th century) and the clerics who compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In the Middle English period vernacular prose could not develop much due to the dominance of French as the language of aristocracy and government and of Latin as the language of religion and learning. However, the vernacular sermon added persuasive rhetorical strength to some English prose texts, notably in the writings of John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, and William Caxton.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, more and more writers chose to develop English prose rather than continue with Latin. Although their

prose still followed Latin models, it accommodated itself increasingly to such vernacular usages as the compound noun and the phrasal verb, as well as less formal syntactic constructions. The Roman lawyer and orator Cicero was the supreme model for Elizabethan prose writers like Richard Hooker and Sir Thomas Elyot who imitated his periodic sentence, formal and ordered in structure, building to its climax before its full meaning is revealed. This apparent neo-classical artificiality tightened up the loose, rambling style of Middle English and took on a powerfully disciplined form in the preface to the Authorized Version of the Bible.

1.4 English Prose & the Bible

The Authorized Version of the Bible (1611), which was widely read and became an integral part of the life of most Englishmen for decades had a far reaching impact on the development of English prose. The language of the Authorized Version is frequently as poetic as that of the most beautiful verse. This can be attributed to the fact that the English language was still fresh and had not become dull because of prolonged usage. The shortness of the verses of the Bible compelled restraint and helped in the formation of a language that was poetic without becoming too ornate. The literate readers of The Authorized Version of the Bible were encouraged to use a language that was simple and did not become verbose and pedantic. Many phrases from the Bible have grown so common that they have become part of the web of current English speech, and are hardly thought of as Biblical at all, except on deliberate reflection. For instance: "highways and hedges"; "clear as crystal"; "still small voice"; "hip and thigh"; "arose as one man"; "lick the dust"; "a thorn in the flesh"; "broken reed"; "root of all evil"; "the nether millstone"; "sweat of his brow"; "heap coals of fire"; "a law unto themselves"; "the fat of the land"; "dark sayings"; "a soft answer"; "a word in season"; "moth and rust"; "weighed in the balance and found wanting"; even such colloquialisms as, "we are the people" (cf. *Job* xii, 2).

Stop to Consider

1. The impact of The Authorized Version of the Bible can be gauged from the comment of different writers:

(a) Coleridge was so impressed with the vigour of Biblical style that he affirmed: "After reading *Isaiah*, or *St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homer and Virgil are disgustingly tame to me, and Milton himself barely tolerable".

(b) Ruskin ascribed the best part of his taste in literature to his having been required by his mother to learn by heart certain chapters of the Bible, adding: "I count [it] very confidently the most precious, and, on the whole, the one *essential* part of all my education."

(c) Carlyle said: "In the poorest cottage ... is one Book, wherein for several thousands of years the spirit of man has found light, and nourishment, and an interpreting response to whatever is deepest in him." (d) Swift writes, almost exactly a hundred years after the date of the *Authorised Version*: "The translators of our Bible were masters of an English style much fitter for that work than any which we see in our present writings, which I take to be owing to the simplicity that runs through the whole"; and again, of the changes which had been introduced into the language: "They have taken off a great deal from that simplicity which is one of the greatest perfections in any language."

2. The language of the Bible was extremely poetic and this helped to make it the medium for essays that were meant to be persuasive.

William Tyndale

Tyndale, the religious reformer, lived from 1494 to 1536. His translation of the Bible into early modern English is probably one of the most noteworthy events in the history of the Bible itself. Tyndale took advantage of the print revolution of the times which helped to make his work widely available. Finally, Tyndale was tried for treason and burnt at the stake as a heretic.

In the history of English prose, twentieth-century Bible-translators noted how Tyndale's contributions were picked up in the King James' Version. This alone is enough for us to surmise how indebted modern English is to Tyndale. Some of the most commonly used phrases of modern-day English look back to Tyndale-- "salt of the earth" is one such instance.

1.5 Secular Prose

Side by side with religious prose a secular literature was also coming into its own. This literature, written in prose, was concerned with philosophy and morals. In the early 17th century, a preference for the Latin of Seneca and Tacitus helped to bring more brevity and precision to English prose as is evidenced by the *Essays* of Francis Bacon and the allusive prose of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton (1577-1640).

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who wrote in Latin and English was one of the most important writers of this time. The prose that he used is marked by balance and terseness, his emphasis, especially in his *Essays*, was always on argument and density of thought. He frequently

used brilliant images, but they were never inserted as ornaments but always to emphasize an idea.

With the advent of the Renaissance to England, prose was heightened and made more colloquial. Sir Thomas More's *Richard II.* was a work of considerable importance; his finer *Utopia* (1516) was unfortunately composed in Latin. Sir Thomas Elyot in his *Governor* (1531) added moral philosophy to the gradually widening range of subjects which were thought proper for English prose. In the same year Tyndale began his famous version of the Bible, the story of which forms one of the most romantic episodes in the chronicles of literature; at Tyndale's death the work was taken up by Miles Coverdale. The *Sermons* of Latimer (1549) introduced elements of humour, dash and vigour which had before been foreign to the stately but sluggish prose of England.

The earliest biography, a book in many ways marvellously modern, was the *Life of Cardinal Wolsey*, by George Cavendish, written about 1557, but not printed (even in part) until 1641. In the closing scenes of this memorable book, which describe what Cavendish had personally experienced, we may say that the perfection of easy English style is reached for the first time. The prose of the middle of the 16th century - as we see it exemplified in the writing of Sir Thomas Wilson, Roger Ascham and Sir John Cheke is clear, unadorned and firm, these Englishmen resisted the influences coming to them from Italy and Spain which were in favour of elaborate verbiage and tortured construction. Equal simplicity marked such writers as Foxe, Stow and Holinshed. But Hoby and North, who translated Guevara, Castiglione and Arnyot, prepared the way for the startling innovations of Lyly in his famous didactic romance of *Euphues* (1579). The extravagances and eccentricities of Lyly outdid those of his continental prototypes, and euphuism became extremely popular. It was characterized by long periodic sentences, with abundant tropes and figures of rhetoric, classical allusions, and improbable analogies from the natural world. A more restrained style, formal but somewhat less mannered was achieved by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Arcadia* (1581) and *Defence of Poetry* (1579-80). The Elizabethans could also produce fresh colloquial prose as is evidenced by the Marprelate pamphlets and the writings of Robert Greene and Thomas Deloney.

Colloquial prose & formal writing

Perhaps one way of defining the difference between formal English and what we generally call "colloquial" English is by seeing how formal language is standardised, made universal so that its meanings are distinctly understandable. In comparison, "colloquial" language employs slang, phrases

borrowed from dialects, and thus not always transparently clear in conveying the sense. Colloquial language is the language of the spoken word.

The Restoration period saw the emergence of a distinctly native prose style, simpler and less ornate, further from Latin syntax, more familiar in tone, though still polished and urbane. The beginnings of journalism strengthened the close relationship between writer and reader. Prose became increasingly used for instruction as well as for persuasion and entertainment. Addison, Defoe, Steele, and Swift further developed the polite familiar style in the early 18th century.

With the rise of the essay and the novel in the 18th century prose took the assured and accepted place in literature that it already held in legal, commercial, and other uses. However, in the late 18th century there was a return to the periodic Latinate style in writers such as Johnson, in the political prose of Burke, and the historical prose of Gibbon.

The 19th century brought much variety and abundance in prose styles with the expansion of the reading public, the increasing popularity of the novel, and the growth of journalism, making prose the major vehicle of news and opinion. Although there are marked differences between the leading novelists of the period, they shared a desire to write accessibly and to keep the interest of the reader. Arnold, Carlyle, Macaulay and others practiced a more didactic type of prose, designed to inform and to convince. Carlyle wrote in an idiosyncratic and sometimes turgid style, but his vigorous use of "Saxon" forms and his defiance of classical smoothness made him a strong influence on polemical prose.

The 20th century has seen vast increase in the quantities as well as the objectives and styles of prose. By and large, although every kind of prose can be found in the 20th century, there is a general tendency towards factual and referential writing, favouring shorter sentences and the vocabulary as simple as the subject allows.

The main kinds of non-fictional prose are - autobiography, biography, the essay, and letters.

Stop to Consider

The prose that was used during different ages reflects the changes in society.

1. The rise of the middle classes and the beginning of journalism was important for increasing use of prose in the Restoration.

2.The Authorized version of The Bible had a profound impact on the development of English prose

Check Your Progress

1. How did the translation of the Bible influence the development of English prose?

(Hint: It helped to transmit a sense of literary standards.)

2. Why was the rise of the middle classes important for the use of prose?

(Hint: Greater access to the world of letters meant more users of the language and more readers. Other reasons also can be found.)

3. Did the increasing importance of science have an impact on the language of prose and its increasing importance?

(Hint: Your knowledge and imagination will be of use here !)

1.6 Essay

A composition, usually in prose (Pope's *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man* were in verse), which may be of varying length and discusses, formally or informally, a topic or a variety of topics. It is one of the most flexible and adaptable of literary forms.

A distinction is often drawn between the formal and the informal essay. The formal essay is relatively impersonal with the author writing as an authority on the subject and expounding it in an ordered and thorough fashion. An informal or personal essay on the other hand is one in which the author assumes a tone of intimacy with the reader, tending to be concerned with everyday things rather than with public affairs or specialized topics, and writing in a relaxed, self-revelatory and often whimsical fashion.

The genre was given its name by Montaigne's great French *Essais* in 1580. The first major essayist in English was Francis Bacon, who adopted a pithy, epigrammatic style, each piece usually dealing with one topic. The form is also associated with the periodicals written and edited by Steele, Addison, Goldsmith and Johnson in the 18th century. The essay flourished in the 19th century with such writers as Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey bringing the personal essay to a level of perfection that has remained unsurpassed. Among the many others

who have adorned the genre, mention may be made of G.B. Shaw, T.S. Eliot, Orwell, Bertrand Russell, and Aldous Huxley. The genre is perhaps the most common prose form ever developed with writers using the form for the discussion of ideas, for polemic, and for political purposes.

The essay in ancient history

We have to refer to the work of Plutarch when talking of the development of the essay. Shakespeare found access to Plutarch's essays and biographies, which he used as inspiration for his plays, through the translations made by Jacques Amyot into French and then translated into English by Sir Thomas North. Plutarch is remembered chiefly for his *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman heroes.

Montaigne is held to have fashioned the modern essay. His famous motto goes: "I am myself the matter of my book".

SAQ

How do essays emerge as a literary form? (40 words)

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1.7 Letters

Latin rhetoricians made a distinction between the private letter and the letter of affairs. A third kind is the open or general letter addressed to an individual or a newspaper editor, and intended for publication.

Personal and official letters date from remote antiquity. Nearly any sort of letter may be of use to the historian and the biographer. In England, the *Paston Letters* (15th century) and *Stonor Letters* (14th-15th century) are important for the study of their periods.

Literary compositions in the form of personal letters were popular in the 17-18th century. The device was used mainly for the circulation of ideas and arguments, with the appeal of apparent direct address to the reader. Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (1724) were widely read and forced a change in government policy in Ireland regarding the grant of a private patent. Pope followed the classical tradition in calling some poetic satires "epistles", indicating the contemporary liking for the idea of the letter. Edmund Burke wrote several political letters which urged resistance to the French Jacobins.

The use of letters in fiction was pioneered in the 16th century by John Lyly in *Euphues*, and taken up in the 18th century by Richardson, who published *Letters to and from Particular Friends*, out of which grew the first major epistolary novel, *Pamela* (1740-1). This form of fiction was also practiced by Smollet, Frances Burney, and experimentally, by Jane Austen, among others, but declined in vogue after the early 19th century. William Golding's *Rites of Passage* (1980) combines the epistolary and diary forms. Although often artificial in style, the epistolary novel combines personal narration by characters with multiple points of view.

There have been many scholarly editions of letters not originally intended for publication, such as those by Keats, George Eliot, Shaw, and Henry James. They reveal the lives and characters of their authors, often providing insights into their literary methods, and showing them using English in a more informal and personal manner.

Stop to Consider

Letters as a literary form require your knowing the history which attaches to them. You would surely understand that letters can provide the most revealing evidence when viewed as sources of information relating to histories of particular persons, etc. But when we study them as 'literary' form many other questions arise, most importantly with regard to why certain matters which seem to connect us to the author's world, came to be expressed as letters.

The answer would certainly lie in the way that matters of the 'real' world can be discussed through the literary art without bringing in 'real' consequences of legal prosecution. Swift's "Drapier's Letters" are to be included in this category where 'letters' is the guise given to writing which is not of the personal kind but reaches out to matters of state where the writer stands in danger of being held up to punishment or prosecution.

Letters provide us with social history. It is for you, as the student of literary writing, to analyse how a form of writing, which is closely identified with the intimate, personal dimensions of a person's life, helps us to a wider, impersonal world of society and social events.

Swift's *Drapier's Letters* is "the collective name for a series of pamphlets

written in 1724 and 1725 to arouse public opinion in Ireland against the imposition of a privately-minted copper coinage of inferior quality. As the subject was politically sensitive, Swift wrote under the pseudonym, "M. B. Drapier".

Paston Letters - "the largest surviving collection of 15th-century English correspondence. It is invaluable to historians and philologists and is preserved mainly in the British Museum" {*Encyclopedia Britannica*}

When you begin to consider 'letters' as a purely literary-creative form, or a form which is avowedly fictional, then you must take into account how the writer adopts the strategies necessary to create a 'real' world in which the letters participate as expressive counters in human relationships. For letters essentially articulate the foundations of human connections.

Lyly's *Euphues* - is a romantic intrigue told in letters interspersed with general discussions on such topics as religion, love, and epistolary style. Lyly's preoccupation with the exact arrangement and selection of words, his frequent use of similes drawn from classical mythology, and his artificial and excessively elegant prose inspired a short-lived Elizabethan literary style called "euphuism." The *Euphues* novels introduced a new concern with form into English prose. {*Encyclopedia Britannica*}

"Letters in the tradition of Pliny the Younger relate to the essay rather than to narrative fiction --such letters, for example, as the curious *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) by the Duchess of Newcastle. These, however, as well as the translation of the witty epistles of Balzac and Voiture, indicate that the English were learning from abroad in part that the personal letter might possibly be an elegant literary composition. Three types which thus early began to influence fiction were the news letter, the travel letter, and the love letter." [p.795, *Literary History of England*, Vol.III, ed. Albert C. Baugh, 1972]

Check Your Progress

1. Define the essay as a literary form.
2. Which literary strategies distinguish the essay from other literary forms?
3. To what extent do Bacon's essays emulate the example of Montaigne?
4. Distinguish between the essay and the 'letter' as forms of literary writing.
5. Consider the essay and the letter as forms of literary representation.

1.8 Autobiography

An autobiography is an account of a person's life by himself or herself with the emphasis on the author's developing self. Dr. Johnson had opined that no man was better qualified to write his life than himself, but this is debatable. Memory may be unreliable. Few can recall clear details of early life and hence depend on other people's impressions, of necessity equally unreliable. Moreover, everyone tends to remember what he or she wants to remember, glossing over disagreeable facts, and sometimes distorting truth for the sake of convenience or harmony.

The first autobiography of any note was St. Augustine's *Confessions* centring on the author's mental crisis and a recovery in which he discovers his Christian identity and vocation in life. This design has been repeated in many later autobiographies, whether these, like Augustine's, are religious confessions of crisis and conversion, such as John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), or secular works in which the crisis is resolved by the author's discovery of his identity and vocation as a poet or artist, such as Wordsworth's great autobiography in verse, *The Prelude*. Among notable British and American autobiographies in prose are those by Benjamin Franklin, John Stuart Mill, Anthony Trollope, Henry Adams, and Sean O'Casey.

Autobiography as a Genre

A definition of autobiography proposed by Philippe Lejeune in 1982 is widely quoted although Lejeune sought to revise it on later consideration:

"A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality."

Lejeune, however, insisted that in autobiography the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must be seen as being identical.

In the aftermath of the controversy surrounding the word "intention" in literary writing which the New Critics had highlighted, critical discussions of autobiography often putting 'intention' at the centre, recognise it as vital link between author, narrator, and protagonist. Roy Pascal, in 1960, saw autobiography as depending on "the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality, and his intention in writing".

Definitions of autobiography centre on questions of representation, author and selfhood, finally the problem of 'truth-telling'.

Robert Southey, the nineteenth-century poet, is thought to have coined the term "autobiography" in 1809 as he sought to describe a Portuguese poet's work.

SAQ

Consider 'autobiography' as a form of writing which implies 'society' as reader. (40 words)

1.9 Biography

The term "biography" connotes a relatively full account of the facts of a man's life, involving the attempt to set forth his or her character, temperament, and milieu, as well as his or her experiences and activities. English biography proper -- as distinguished from the generalized chronicles of the deeds of a king, or the pious lives of the Christian saints -- appeared in the 17th century; an example is Izaak Walton's *Lives* (of John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Hooker and others). Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, written in the 18th century, constituted a great advance in the practice of biography as a special literary genre. As 19th-century biographers tended to write reverentially, the frankness of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857) caused controversy. In the early 20th century, Lytton Strachey set the fashion for a more ironic and debunking treatment: "There was humour in her face; but the curious watcher might wonder whether it was humour of a very pleasant kind". (on Florence Nightingale, *Eminent Victorians*, 1918). Late 20th-century biographers usually seek or claim detachment and generally engage in detailed research. A handful of the most eminent and monumental works since the 1950s are: Leon Edel's four volumes on Henry James; Richard Ellman's classic works on W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Oscar Wilde, and Michael Holroyd's volumes on Lytton Strachey.

James Boswell (1740-1795).

James Boswell (1740-1795), when he met Dr. Johnson in 1763, was known in Scottish literary circles for his work in pamphlets, in the writing of some poetry and correspondence with the Hon. Andrew Erskine. It was probably by 1766, that he had decided to write about his friend, Dr. Johnson, having met with celebrities like Voltaire and Rousseau. Boswell had qualities of sensitivity and perception of human nature of great value in a biographer. To this he added a prodigious memory, meticulous observance of detail, and a thoroughness in the way he gleaned the various facts about his subject, all of which are invaluable in a researcher. "These qualities evidently, and fortunately, won the respect and aid of the ablest scholar of the day, Edmund Malone-- . . . Boswell knew material; Malone knew a competent workman, and so gave up any desire he had to write Johnson's life and by his discreet and judicious aid helped to settle Boswell's final draught of the greatest biographies." [*Literary History of England*, Vol. III, p.1065]

"[Boswell] knew, and transmits, the sound of his subject's voice to a degree unparalleled in other biographers. From the Malahide Papers we now learn that frequently Johnson's talk is more characteristically Johnsonian in the final form Boswell gave it than it was in the first form -- that in which very likely it fell from Johnson's lips. Not merely remarks but scenes doubtless undergo this artistic reshaping to give them character. At least many scenes, such as the first meeting of Boswell with Johnson and the famous dinner with Wilkes in 1776, come to mind as masterpieces of theatrical manipulation, in which every detail has been given priceless organic value." [*Literary History of England*, Vol.III, p.1066]

SAQ

Attempt to distinguish between biography and autobiography by analysing their distinctive relations with the idea of "truth" and "fact". For instance, how does authorship in the two genres interfere with ideas of 'fact' ?
(50 + 50 words)

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1.10 Suggested Reading

1. Anderson, Linda - *Autobiography*, Routledge, London , 2001
2. Baugh, Albert C. (ed.) - *A Literary History Of England*, Vol.3, "The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century", by George Sherburne and Donald F. Bond, Routledge, 1967, 1972
3. *The Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau



Unit 2

Joseph Addison

Contents :

- 2.1 Objectives
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- 2.9 Reading the Text: Of The Spectator
 - 2.9.1 The friends of the Spectator
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 - 2.9.3 Glossary
- 2.10 Critical Reception
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2.1 Objectives

The attempt in this unit is to familiarize you with the essays of Addison. This section, however, will not concentrate on only a textual analysis of the essays prescribed for you but will try to acquaint you with the intellectual climate which gave rise to the essay-form. Also, it is necessary for you to understand the form of this genre. By the end of this unit you will be able to

- *distinguish* the essay as a category of writing,
- *identify* the importance of the form of the essay in literature,
- *describe* the age and feel encouraged to read more essays by Addison and Steele,
- *assess* the role of the essayists in shaping the tastes of the age.

2.2 Introducing the Author

Addison was born on May 1, 1672 in Milton, Wiltshire. His father Lancelot Addison was the Dean of the Cathedral city of Linchfield. His education began in Charterhouse school, which he left for Queen's College, Oxford in 1687. Later he became a Fellow of Magdalen College. In 1693 he addressed a poem to Dryden, the former Poet Laureate and his first major work, a book about the lives of the English poets was published in 1694. The translation of Virgil's *Georgics* enabled him to develop a friendship with Congreve, and through him with Montague, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Montague obtained a pension of £300 for the young poet in 1699, which enabled him to travel abroad and enrich his education, with a view to diplomatic employment, all the time writing and studying politics. During the time of his wanderings through France and Italy, he was more interested in classic association than in mere scenic beauty. In this period his views on religion also changed and he became an ardent follower of Catholicism.

Addison lost his pension upon the death of William III, forcing him to return to England towards the end of 1703. For a short period of time his circumstances has become a little straitened and he had to live without any employment. But the Battle of Blenheim in 1704 and subsequent coming into power of the Whigs led to more opportunities for his advancement. The government wished to commemorate the event with a poem and Addison, who was commissioned to write this, produced *The Campaign*, the success of which gave him the appointment of commissioner of Appeals in the government of Halifax.

In the year 1708 he became the MP for Malmesbury, in Wiltshire (his home county) and thereafter appointed as the secretary of State for Ireland and Keeper of records for that country.

During Addison's stay in Ireland, he met Jonathon Swift and subsequently helped found the *Kitcat Club*. In the meantime he renewed his friendship with his old friend Richard Steele and in 1709 when Steele brought out the *Tatler* (1709-11) Addison immediately became a contributor. The *Tatler* was followed by the launch of the informal daily *Spectator* on March 1, 1711.

The later events of Addison's life did not contribute to his happiness. In 1716, he married the Dowager Countess of Warwick whose son he had tutored and even though his political career continued to flourish (he was Secretary of State for the Southern Department till 1718). Addison was forced to resign as the Secretary of State in 1718 owing to his poor health but he remained an MP until his death at Holland House, on June 17, 1719. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Stop to Consider

If we infer here that Addison's involvement with affairs of State had a direct bearing on his literary methods or productions, how correct would we be ?

This question should occur to you as you read through this brief biography because it will help you to make inferences regarding the nature of literary writing itself. How does the intellectual climate of a period percolate down to the point of writing itself ? Try to make some estimation of this problem.

Addison contributed to the essay-form, as he played a major role in perfecting and popularizing the periodical essay in its evolutionary phase. Addison's writings extended over a number of diverse fields from poetry to drama to criticism. He is, however, best remembered for his essays published in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Before examining his works as a critic, let us have a look at his other works.

Addison's first forays into literature were in poetry and his translation of Virgil's *Georgics* into English in 1694, earned him much fame. The same year saw the publication of his *The Account Of The Best Known-English Poets*. This book, written in his 23rd year, could not claim much critical value and attention. The book lacked accuracy and technique. He also published a series of *Political Essays* and a comedy named *Drummer*. Besides the essays in the *Spectator* his best-known work is *Cato*, a tragedy that stands for the Whigs' defense of liberty against the atrocities of royal absolutism. The play

is based on the last days of Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis. It deals with such themes as individual liberty versus government tyranny, republicanism versus monarchism, logic versus emotion and Cato's personal struggle to cling to his beliefs even in the face of death.

Now let us direct our attention towards the essays published in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, which epitomize Addison's literary and critical genius. If we group Addison's literary essays according to contents, we find the following three groups:

- (a) The first of these groups consists of his early essays on the stage. It includes essays on *Chevy Chase* and *Paradise Lost*.
- (b) The second group contains the famous and elaborate criticism of Milton along with the essays on 'tragedy' and observations on the 'epic'.
- (c) The third group contains the more serious and more ambitious series of eleven essays on 'the pleasure of imagination'.

Addison's purpose was to upgrade the taste of the public and to do this he introduced a number of critical concepts through his essays.

Let us have a brief look at these concepts.

Addison distinguishes between true and *false wit*. But what is wit, in general, for Addison? In *Spectator No. 62*, he says that wit is the resemblance and congruity of ideas giving pleasure to fancy, which gives delight and surprise to the reader. Then, false wit is the resemblance and congruity of "words" and true wit is the resemblance and congruity of ideas. There must be some future congruity than the obvious between ideas. He illustrates this idea by pointing out that when some one says that the bosom of his mistress is as white as snow it is not wit but comparison but if it also suggests that it is as cold too, then it becomes wit.

Also noteworthy is Addison's *concept of tragedy*. It is different from both the classical and modern concepts. He thought that tragedy was the noblest product of human nature. He believed that contemporary tragedy was superior to that of Greece and Rome in the intricacy and disposition of the plot but it fell short in morals. Contemporary tragedy, according to Addison, is defaced by 'Sounding phrases, hard metaphors and forced expressions' and the style is often superior to the sentiment. He denounced 'poetic justice' 'tragi-comedy', and 'double plot' as absurd and unnecessary. The tragic hero, for him, is a virtuous man struggling with misfortunes.

Addison also put forward a concept of '*taste*'. He thought that only a

person of "taste" could distinguish between 'good literature' and 'bad literature'. And taste according to him was a "faculty of the soul."

Addison's most celebrated critical concept is the so-called "*pleasures of imagination*". He touches upon such issues as what is imagination? What are the kinds of imagination? And what are the sources of imagination? Imagination is the impression formed by our 'sense of sight' and which our mind has the power to retain, alter and compound into varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination. The pleasure of imagination is of two kinds. The primary pleasure of imagination comes from the objects, which are directly before our eyes whereas the secondary pleasures of imagination flow from the 'Ideas' of visible objects. He forms a hierarchy of art, nature and imagination, where imagination reigns supreme followed by nature and art respectively.

SAQ

Who were the critics who discussed 'poetic justice', 'tragi-comedy', 'plot', and 'taste' ? (30 words)

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Can we identify 'neoclassical' traits in Addison's thought ? (25 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. Comment on how the 'literary' becomes the vehicle of 'taste' in social culture as seen in Addison's writing.
2. What, according to Addison, are the kinds of pleasure provided by imagination?
3. Why did Addison consider contemporary "tragedy" to be superior to that of the tragedy of Greece and Rome?

2.3 The Context

In May 1660, when Charles II returned from exile, monarchy was restored in England. The Act of Union in 1707 joined the parliaments of Scotland and England and Wales creating the nation called Great Britain. (Ireland was incorporated into the 'United Kingdom' by the Act of Union of 1801.) The prolonged eighteenth century underwent much transformation brought about by the redefinition of monarchy by the rejection of royal absolutism, the acceleration in the growth of population, urbanisation, the beginnings of industrialisation, and the greater commercialization of culture as people became more consumerist. The scope of literature began to adapt to new circumstances for which there had been no precedent:

The restoration of Charles II to the throne at first brought some relief from the "bedlam" of the previous years. The Interregnum had divided England into intransigent partisanship and in the first decade after the Restoration there were statutes to achieve order. Charles II later proved unable to contain the political dissensions not least because his personal estimates were known to be debauched. In 1685 James II ascended the throne but failed to prevent the crisis that erupted until, finally, in 1688 the Glorious Revolution took place when William of Orange was called to rule. However, there was no solution to the series of controversies that had originated even in the Interregnum of which a substantial question revolved around the nature of the right to rule.

In the literature of the period class demarcations were especially very strong. Restoration comedy was for the courtiers and for rising citizens of London. During this time the new middle class was gaining increasing control of the society. This 'new rich' class, whether they were based in the town or country had different tastes. Bunyan was the first to take cognizance of this section of society. The rise of the middle class had made conditions favourable for the rise of prose. Essays, periodicals, and fiction had created new class of readers

among the middle class and prose became their chosen medium of literature.

Factions in 17th-century England

The beheading of Charles I in 1649 itself was the culmination of many years of civil strife. Cromwell's Protectorate followed as the republic was established, the House of Lords was abolished, and conflicting ideologies rift the political atmosphere. There was both Anglicanism and Catholicism despite the Clarendon Code which sought to repress non-Anglicans. There were clashes of ideas regarding Crown-Parliament relations, religious issues, the law, and civil liberties. It was hardly possible that the Restoration should provide more than just temporary relief from such sectarianism. As the question of Charles II's successor came up, the possibility of his Papist brother, James, ascending to the throne led to the fabrication of the 'Popish Plot'.

In just such a time of crisis that the print culture flared up into a propaganda machinery with polemics conducted through pamphlets and other forms of political writing.

One remarkable change was the shift in population from the country to the town. Places of entertainment were no longer restricted to the gentry but became open for anyone who could afford to pay. Art, for the first time, became commercial and London itself became a favourite subject for artists and writers.

The new science of the seventeenth century, enshrined in the work of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, was to combine with Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620) as a stream of thought which later flowered in the Enlightenment. After the Restoration, the new science was gathered into a progressive philosophy. In this movement stands large the figure of Sir Isaac Newton, whose great works of 1687, the *Principia Mathematica*, and of 1704, the *Opticks*, led to new scientific inquiries. After the Restoration, the universe was no longer viewed in the older Aristotelian manner. Members of the Royal Society like Robert Boyle (1627-91) and John Ray (1627-1705) did important work in the field of science. By the middle of the eighteenth century, 'Nature' was no longer to be seen in theological terms as expression of the divine but as inert matter over which man could dominate:

The educated world now took its shape under this new influence. As discoveries multiplied, writers found the new science inspiring. It gave them new images to conjure with and new possibilities of fact and fiction to explore. On the other hand explorers were discovering new lands and new ways of life. The encounters of trade made the European nations rich but it also brought a new class to the society -

'the slaves'.

In the newly urbanized England shops and coffee houses became the scene of social gathering. Londoners began to assemble in these rendezvous and by daily intercourse they learned to feel interested in each other's manners and habits of thought. People tended more and more to seek pleasures of news and conversations and by the beginning of the 18th century coffee houses became the most striking feature of London life. As communication centres, the coffee houses became the platform for dissemination and collection of news and was one of the primary agencies facilitating journalistic enterprise. Coffee house culture had its impact on literary productions as well. For example, Steele's *Tatler* started functioning from St. James' coffee house.

Stop to Consider

A striking feature of the period between the Restoration and the coronation of George III (1761) was that growth in the culture-sector was substantial. That is to say, economic opportunity, promise of employment and profit was to be found in "chocolate house, club and society clienteles". Inevitably, London became the hub of fashionable activity, glittering with exhibitions and theatres, personalities, diversions, parks "shimmering with promenaders", a parade offering a diversity of pleasures.

In this teeming landscape of news, fashion, talk and gossip the coffee houses were the vibrant centres where initially foreign and domestic news relating to trade could be tapped as the coffee houses at first sprang up close to the Royal Exchange and the Custom House. These social and business hubs were an innovation of the Restoration and provided the space where many financial deals were clinched. It was just a matter of time before coffee houses provided the space for cultural exchange. There was Will's, Button's, the Bedford, the Chapter. The magazine, *The Craftsman*, pronounced, "We are become a Nation of Statesmen, our Coffee-houses and Taverns are full of them." Coffee houses were made more attractive by keeping newspapers and gazettes. They served as the prototypes of clubs; the Kit-Cat is remembered as the one patronised by men of letters and Whig grandees.

In the social scene two classes were dominant. The upper class was either the 'citizen' or the country squire and against them were the slum dwellers and the peasants. And the troubled activities of political, religious and scientific unrest were primarily the concern of the upper classes. The field of politics was also haunted by confusions. The Whigs claimed to protect the liberty of the subject and thus helped the dissenters. The Tories on the other hand were mostly ardent churchmen and professed a devotion to royal prerogative and to the legitimate line of succession to the throne.

SAQ

Why is the period between 1649 and 1660 called the 'Interregnum'?
(20 words)

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What were the events of the 'Glorious Revolution'? (40 words)

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2.4 Form of the Essay

The essay occupies a prominent place in modern literature. But its outlines are so uncertain and it varies so much in matter, purpose and style that it defies a systematic treatment. We can however say that an essay is a short prose composition, which undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, persuade to accept a thesis on any subject or simply entertain. Unlike the "treatise" or "dissertation", it does not pretend to be a systematic or complete exposition on any subject, and hence, it is directed at a general rather than a specialized readership. Consequently its style of discussion is non-technical, and liberally incorporates such devices as anecdote, striking illustrations and humour besides others to augment its appeal.

A study of essays by such writers as Bacon, Montaigne and Addison illustrate the diversity of forms under the general term 'essay'. While Bacon's essays are examples of concentrated wisdom with little elaboration of ideas, Montaigne is full of reflections, quotations and anecdotes. Again, an essay by Addison delightfully fluctuates between light didacticism and personal gossip.

These writers differ not only in their use of the form but also in their definition of the essay. One definition of some repute comes from Dr. Samuel Johnson when he says that the essay is a "loose sally of the mind, an irregular, undigested piece, not a regular and orderly composition". But the definition put forward in *Murray's Dictionary* comes closer to the modern use of the term. Murray regards the essay as a composition of moderate length on any particular subject or branch of a subject, a composition limited in length but more or less elaborate in style.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, it is possible, however, to point out some general characteristics of the essay-form. An essay is characterized by limitations of length and range. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Etymologically, the word 'essay' connotes the trial of a subject or an attempt towards it, and not a final and thorough examination of it. An essay thus is always characterized by brevity. Yet it allows diversions like Spencer's essay on *Progress*, or the essays of Macaulay and Herbert, which are almost small books. Writers like C.A. Sainte-Beuve are of the view that a good essay is a combination of both brevity and thoroughness, which can be achieved by the writer's mastery of both form and subject. As a formal feature comparative brevity is a necessary condition of a good essay. But there should be a balance between the material introduced and the method employed and none should suffer from overloading. Despite its fragmentation it should impress the reader as complete in itself.

Another important aspect of the essay is marked by its informality and freedom. It is relatively unmethodical and characterized by freedom of conversation. But in modern essay writers there is a tendency towards greater logical consistency and regularity of structure.

Regarding substance, an essay is subjective while a dissertation is objective. It is essentially personal. It is lyrical in nature or we can say it belongs to the literature of self-expression. It reflects the writer's personality, his attitude immediately towards his subject and towards life at large. Regarding this the selection of subject, the evolution of thought, presentation, exposition, illustration, conclusion and a number of other things come into play. Here we can make a distinction between the 'formal essay' or article and 'informal essay' or 'personal essay'. The essay is relatively impersonal, the writer writes from a position of knowledge or authority and the subject is presented in an orderly way. Articles in scholarly journals and the serious articles in any magazine are examples of this type of essay. The informal essay writer tends to be intimate with his readers; his style is relaxed and self-revelatory. The term essay originates in the Middle English *assay*, which means 'to try' or 'attempt'. Montaigne in *Essais* introduced the modern term in 1580. Montaigne used the term to refer to his

unsystematic commentary on topics such as 'Of Illness' and 'Of Sleeping'. Even before Montaigne, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Cicero and Seneca were writing what is now called an 'essay'. The English use of the word was introduced by Sir Francis Bacon in his 'Essays', which were his short discussions on subjects like 'Of Truth', 'Of Revenge' etc. the essay as literary form was firmly established by Joseph Addison in the pages of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*.

SAQ

If you agree that Bacon's essays are brief and aphoristic, how would you name the style he adopts-formal, or familiar? (30 words)

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In the 19th century the publication of various magazines and their steady circulation has established the essay as a major literary form. The 19th century essays were personal in style and its major exponents were William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, De Quincey, etc. During the same period major essayists like Mark Twain, Emerson, Thoreau, etc. were emerging across the Atlantic. The 20th century has produced a bulk of essayists who tends to be formal in style. Among them the best noted figures are Orwell, Forster, Virginia Woolf, etc.

Stop to Consider

A singular way of defining the essay as a generic form would be to consider its contents. Here we would focus on questions of subject and go on to say that the essay deals with a particular idea, topic, or a branch of a subject.

If we focus on the styles adopted in writing essays we could assert that essay-writing involves a 'public' style, somewhat elaborate and sophisticated. If this feature is common to all essays then we are left to say that the essay-form is commensurate with 'self-expression' only in a qualified sense. Where the writer is adopting a formal style, the 'self' is likely to be a constructed image of the self which the writer is revealing to the world at large. Thus we can say that

the essay is not directly the expression of the 'self' as in the case of a personal private letter. It is useful here to recall that Montaigne used the term to describe 'attempt' or 'try' in 1580.

The other fact that confronts us is that there are scholarly essays where the 'self' is suppressed in order to highlight the thesis or argument being placed. The nineteenth century brings up the fact that the essay became a major literary form in view of the circulation of various magazines and periodicals.

2.5 The Essay and other forms of Literature

The essay is distinguished from other branches of literature by its essential quality of persuasion. But the forms and techniques of one branch intermix with the other branches. Thus the essay may be in narrative, dramatic or poetic form. In narrative essay the author addresses the reader directly by means of an appeal or argument. He is like a storyteller who reports directly to us on persons and events. In a dramatic essay the author recounts the dialogue between two or more characters and he works only as a director of the events and actions. In a poetic essay the author appears to be talking to himself and the reader's position is like an over hearer.

SAQ

Attempt to show "qualities of persuasion" as those devices by which the reader is addressed directly in any essay of your choice. Your analysis should consider features like modes of address, references, etc. (50 words)

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The production of a number of periodicals in the 18th century gave new impetus to the writing of essays. The most significant among them are the *Tatler* (1709), and the *Spectator* (1711) published by Richard Steele. But we can safely trace the roots to the publication of the *Athenian Gazette* by Dunton in 1691. It was followed by Defoe's *A Weekly Review of Affairs in France* (1704). It was Richard Steele who popularized the periodical when the *Tatler* began to appear three times a week from 1709. Most of the periodicals presented stories of gallantry, entertainment and news items from both the local and international arena.

The example of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* was followed a number of publications like *The Guardian*, *Lover*, *The Reader*, *Chit Chat* (all by Steele) and *The Englishmen*, *Freeholder* (Addison), the *Female Tatler*, the *Whisper* etc. but none of them were as successful and as enduring as the *Spectator*.

Check Your Progress

1. Apart from the inference of the spread of literacy in the period, what are the important social changes that are connected to the existence of a large number of periodicals published during this period ?
2. Can you make any connection between the informal art of the essay and the periodicals?
3. Why do you think the art of persuasion is such an integral part of the essay form? Does it have anything to do with the rise of the periodical and the coffee houses?

2.6 Addison and the Essay

Any discussion of Addison's use of the essay-form results in the discussion of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* essays. It is in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* essays where the character and genius of Addison are best exemplified.

Addison's essays became instantly popular. This is because the earlier essayists like Milton or Bacon were rich in eloquence and noble declamation, but with Addison we find the genial intimacy of the writer with the reader. In his writings we realize the delightful plasticity and the various subtle shades of mood and fancy for which Addison finds expression.

Addison's worth and genius came to the fore only with the *Spectator*

essays. Addison contributed to Richard Steele's *Tatler* when it first appeared in 1709. The appearance of the *Spectator* in 1711 provided Addison with a regular platform. The *Spectator* essays, particularly the third division of the essays are not only far more numerous and far more weighty, but they also bear the stamp of Addison's authority and style. The essays include in their purview fable, descriptions, vision, literary criticism, treatise on morals and codes, discussions on questions of marriage and education. He concentrates more on emotional response than mechanical instruments. Hence, he included any subject which was of interest to the readers.

Addison's essays are marked by simplicity of style. The easy flow of the language creates an intimacy of the reader with the writer. His approach to his subject is always direct. Although full of satire and irony, his conversational tone and his mastery of style contributes much to the development of the essay form and secures a place of prominence for him among the English essayists.

2.7 Reading the Text: *The Uses Of The Spectator*

This essay was the tenth in a series of 555 essays, which appeared on the 12th of March, 1711. The importance of the essay is in the proclamation of its aims and intentions. We have already got an idea of the *Spectator* in the preceding sections. In this essay Addison established himself as a preacher and moralist whose aim was to reform the follies and vices of his age. He also attempted to develop a 'taste for literature' in this essay. Apart from giving a picture of contemporary society, he also suggests the absence of formal criticism by establishing a new principle of poetic appeal. What is the use of criticism if it cannot serve the purpose of the people? These were the questions that Addison was concerned with. And we can notice that he attempts to make criticism serve some practical purpose. The critic has his responsibilities towards society, and he must undertake this task however difficult it might be. The epigraphs to the essays suggest this fact and Addison, with all seriousness undertakes his self-declared aim of instructing and amusing his readers at the same time.

Stop and Consider

Perhaps we should use the example of the essay to consider for a moment the status of writing or what is commonly called, the mode of literary production.

You must keep in mind that literary writing formed, between the mid-seventeenth century and the nineteenth century, part of "an emergent culture industry, staking out self-identities as critics, knowledge-mongers and opinion-makers, addressing a growing public, and used as well as abused by the authorities."

So if we try to answer the question as to why Addison's writings are so important in literary history, the answer is that it achieved prominence in a larger climate of opinion-making, social criticism, and the dissemination of knowledge which had an important impact on the literary public. Reading had become a part of daily life and print culture had permeated every level of society.

It was apparent that a new kind of thinker had arisen who was not ecclesiastical. As observed by Karl Mannheim (the German sociologist), "a free intelligentsia has arisen", a contrast to the earlier pedant shut away in a monastic cell. The historian Roy Porter emphasises "the rise of *belles lettres*, novels, magazines, newspapers and pulp fiction" during this period, the Enlightenment. The variety of writing can be judged from the various aims of the men of letters who wrote satire, gossip columns, articles to reform society, and generally educating and holding aloft the standards of society.

2.7.1 Analysing the Text

The essay opens with a couple epigraphs taken from Virgil and Dryden. Both epigraphs suggest the difficulty as well as the importance of the critic's task. The critic's task is difficult but necessary for the refinement of taste and moral edification of the readers and society in general.

If we undertake a close analysis of Addison's essay, we will find that he is concerned mainly with the following themes and aspects. His first endeavour is to show the growing popularity of the *Spectator* and at the same time the growing responsibility of the writer, which it implies.

2.7.2 A reflection on society

Among other things *The Uses of The Spectator* provides us with a picture of contemporary society. He shows the declining standard of English society, both in the professional and in the moral fields. The social picture that Addison gives, although ironical, is faithful. Let us recall here that society after the Restoration was freed from the extreme control of puritan authority and was suddenly transformed into extreme licentiousness. He presents three tableaux of society. In the first group come those whom we can roughly call the 'gentry'. They belong to the upper strata of society either by inheritance or trade as England was expanding its political and merchandising territories by this time. These people assumed high titles but were hardly concerned with anything relevant for society. They used to employ most of their time in the happenings in political and social scenario and used to observe everything. Here he takes a clever dig at the Statesmen and members of the Royal Society:

... either by the affluence of their fortune or laziness of their disposition, have no other business with the rest of mankind, but to look upon them. Under this class of men are comprehended ... fellows of the Royal Society"

In the second group he includes the 'blanks' of society, the morally and intellectually degraded common Englishman. Addison's other concern is the status of women in his time. Women did not enjoy a position of respect in the social strata. Despite the presence of a number of women of significance, they were regarded as the inferiors of society, mostly occupied with minor household works.

Stop to Consider

Addison's criticism provides a moral standard for his times. This was the age when the routine pursuit of happiness and pleasure began to find social acceptance. Addison and Steele helped to set the necessary standards for such a novelty; pleasure could be obtained with rationality, through moderation in enjoyment. Thus urbanity or the pleasures of polite society were desirable aims in the pursuit of pleasure. Hedonism could thus be refined and enlightened.

2.7.3 The Spectator as Social Reformer

Addison declared that he intended to drive vice and folly out of the territories of England. 'Uses of the Spectator' shows us Addison's concern with the practical side of criticism. As he declares "I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee houses". He took up any issue which seemed relevant to the masses of society and which might interest them. In this way he tried to provide some remedy to the decaying society of the Restoration time.

SAQ

Is it correct to include among Addison's themes, the idea of moral reform ? (30 words)

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How far is it correct to say that Addison was only limiting himself to the 'refinement' of polite society? (30 words)

2.7.4 Issues of Gender

When Addison says that his paper will be most useful to the female world, he not only shows the state of women of his time but also voices his concern for their upliftment. Women of his time were mostly occupied with the drudgery of household work. The outside world was completely shut for them. They were regarded as inferior members of society and did not enjoy much respect. He is concerned with such women and maintains that the 'Spectator' will be of much help for their intellectual and social make over. However, he recognizes the existence of an elevated class of women with certain intellectual depth. This class of women commands respect and recognition from all classes of society. He hopes to increase the number of such women and lead them into perfection by pointing out their deficiencies and providing them with innocent entertainment which will help to improve themselves.

Stop to Consider

Addison paid particular attention to the rights and respect of women in his time in this essay. His view of women is remarkable in that he not only blamed society but also their own incapability for their state.

In this patriarchal Georgian century the position and the rights of women became the subject of intellectual debate. While we remember Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) where she explored a new kind of woman, others who continued this discussion included Mary Hay in her 6-volume *Female Biography* (1803), and Mary Robinson's *Thoughts on the Condition of Women* (1799). Women were helped by the print culture; examples included Aphra Behn, Delarivière Manley, Anne Conway and Eliza Haywood. Bestselling novelists at the turn of the century mostly

contained the names of women: Mary Brunton, Maria Edgeworth, Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton, Jane and Anna Maria Porter.

When Richard Steele launched his *Tatler* in 1709, he also targeted women. Both Steele and Addison belittled women's discourse and held out the explanation that there might be "a sort of sex in souls" (Steele). Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu welcomed this view of women: "Mr. Addison has shown them, ignorance, false delicacy, affectation & childish fears, are disgraces to a female character, which should be soft not weak, gentle, but not timorous. He does all he can to cure our sex of their feminalities without making them masculine."

2.7.5 Satire and Irony

Addison's style in the 'Spectator' essays is characterized by an intimacy with the readers together with wit, satire and irony. His irony in this essay, although masterly is gentle. While recommending the Spectator to its readers, he takes a clever dig at the cross sections of society. The descriptions of the social classes like the "contemplative tradesmen", "templers that are not given to be contentious", "statesmen that are out of business", "Titular physicians" etc. are characterized by his satiric wit. His satire is also directed at the members of the royal society. His irony is at its best in the description of the 'blanks' of society. His comments on women and their occupation are also another example of his satire.

Addison attempts to smite hard but his favourite mood is a mood of delicate and playful satire and here he is at his happiest. His satire is not of the vituperative kind that Pope criticized. Here we find him as instructive and concerned with what he calls "enliven morality with wit and temper wit with morality".

2.7.6 Glossary

Becoming : Well suited, appropriate

Three score thousand : 60000 points to the popularity of the 'Spectator'. Sixty thousand readers is a very respectable number in a total population of nine lacs.

Computation: Calculation

Ignorant and inattentive Brethren : The lower class of London, who lived in a very pitiable condition in their overcrowded dens.

To enliven morality with wit and temper wit with morality : Hallmark of Addison's writing, he discouraged both Puritan extreme

morality and extreme licentiousness of the Restoration

Socrates (469BC-399BC): Greek philosopher born near Athens who instructed people in streets and market places, eventually sentenced to death by the rulers

Sir Francis Bacon(1561-1626): A distinguished personality of his age, famous for his essays written in stylized English and his passionate advocacy of scientific knowledge

Moses's Serpent: Biblical reference to a rod in Moses's land which is believed to be coming from the tree of life, and which becomes a serpent when thrown on the ground

Muscovy or Poland: A suggestion that the Spectator was concerned with better things than meddling political matters and craze for news

Titular physicians: Existing in the name but not having any authority or duty

Royal society: A society which began as an informal association in Oxford in the middle of the 17th century. It received public recognition with the Royal charter of 1662

Grave or impertinent: Serious

Sound and wholesome Sentiment: Addison's aim was to introduce good sense and dignity, moderation, kindness and generosity among the masses and thereby uplift the morals of the society

the toilet... of their lives : reflects on the confined state of women in the 18th century

Ribands: Older form of ribbons (from rib or ribe meaning hair)

Caveat: a notice to a court preventing a proceeding

2.8 Introducing The Text: *The Spectator's Account of Himself*

The Spectator's Account of Himself is one of the earliest essays in the series of essays generally known as the 'Spectator essays'. The essay is important for a number of reasons. Addison here sets out to provide the reader with an outline of the character of the spectator, which helps us in understanding the later essays of the series in a better way. The biography and character of the spectator attracts the reader in a lighthearted way. It serves as a 'prefatory discourse'. The irony

and exaggeration helps the reader to develop a kind of intimacy with the writer, which is a key mark of Addison's writing. He starts by justifying his decision of writing an account of himself and at the same time justifies his authority and position as the 'spectator of mankind'. We are given to know that the 'spectator' is a learned yet sullen person from his very childhood. He is widely traveled and commands considerable knowledge of almost every subject. As he says 'I am very well versed in the theory of a husband or a father. can discern the errors of economy, business, and diversions of others. better than those who are engaged in them'.

He also gives the reader an idea of his lineage, the details of which may sound peculiar but well justified. Although some critics are at pains to discover affinities between the 'spectator' and Addison himself, the presentation of the character helps better as an alter ego of Addison. It distances the author from the personae of the 'spectator' and places him in a more comfortable place to express his observations.

Check Your Progress

1. Which strategies does Addison adopt to draw the reader towards identifying with the 'Spectator' ?
2. Wit and irony define the character of the Spectator, more in order to help in constructing the 'character' than to elicit the reader's sense of empathy with the 'spectator'. How far would you agree with such a view of Addison's discursive strategies in his essays ?
3. How is characterisation kept consistent with the views expressed in the essays themselves ? Do you find any inconsistencies between the character of the 'spectator' and the views expressed ?
4. To what extent does 'self-expression' find a place in Addison's essays ?

2.8.1 Analysing the Text

The Spectator's Account of Himself exhibits Addison's characteristics mirth and jovial style of essay-writing. Like the idea of the periodical, the idea of the character of the 'Spectator' and his friends was originally Steele's. But it was Addison who developed it to perfection.

2.8.2 *The Spectator* and its Character Types

In the days of the clubs and coffee houses, it was most obvious that the character of the spectator should be made as a member of a club. Steele appears to have derived the idea from the numerous classical dialogues then fashionable in which each interlocutor is supposed to have a character of his own and to represent a point of view. Along with the spectator Addison introduced five men who moved in different spheres of life and could uphold different opinions on social and moral questions. But the characters of the spectator club did more than just to lend dramatic or dialectic interest to their discussions. The characters represent different classes and they are intended to be a lesson to their respective classes by presenting them as the perfect types. The spectator represented the perfect student of humanity. Mr. Spectator is the type of a new culture that grew out of Puritanism. Men of profound learning had, under the old civilisation, been specialists - theologians, demonographers, jurists, philosophers or university scholars. Mr. Spectator is also profoundly learned; he is acquainted with all celebrated books in ancient and modern tongues. He is a traveler, and, like the great renaissance scholars, has visited every accessible country in search of knowledge. Yet he has no profession; he does not belong to a school of thought. He has simply stored his mind with the wisdom, wit and humour of other countries and ages, and he spends his life in observing his contemporaries and, consciously or unconsciously, comparing their manners, customs and ideas with those of which he has read. He visits "The Exchange," theatres, coffee houses; wherever men gather he is to be found, until, as Addison says, "he has made himself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant or artisan without ever meddling with any practical part in life." Such, Addison had learnt to be, and such, also, without the concluding qualification, was the ideal of the protestant middle class of this century.

Stop to Consider

Although Addison popularized and perfected the spectator, Steele conceived of the original idea.

The portrayal of the character of the spectator as a learned and much travelled man is strategically important for Addison to suit his purpose.

The first in the list is Sir Roger de Coverly, a man of naturally strong intelligence and physical vigour. Whose enthusiasm for life is temporarily blasted by a mysterious love affair. He overflows with

loving kindness and his long career of feudal autocracy has only added a touch of independence and eccentricity to his benevolence.

Captain Sentry, a man of unquestioned energy, ability and personal courage, who has retired from the army, because he lacks the gift of self-advertisement. There is a lawyer who has no taste for his profession and resides at the Inner Temple "to obey the directions of an old humoursome father", who has devoted his leisure to Aristotle, Longinus and the theatre, until he cultivated much of the spectator's own character. Another character Will Honeycomb the fop, had been for centuries a butt in comedy and satire. Will is portrayed as vain and worldly - so a fop must always seem to the serious middle class - but not as depraved. He is the best of his type, a brilliant talker, with a kind heart and an irresistible charm of manner.

The spirit of the 'Spectator' is most clearly seen in the figure of Sir Andrew Freeport the merchant. For more than a century, traders had been characterised as dishonest and avaricious, it was something new in literature to show how a man trained in a counting-house could be the intellectual equal of the Spectator and his friends. Sir Andrew is not a wit; his conversation abounds in homely phrases; his mind is not stored with the wisdom of books; yet he has made himself an original thinker, with ideas not fettered by tradition, but derived from experience in trade and expressed with the lucidity of conviction.

2.8.3 Language

Like all the 'Spectator' essays, *The Spectator's Account of Himself* is marked by Addison's free flowing and conversational style. He gives his readers a sense of intimacy. Of his prose, Johnson said "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison". Addison's style is discursive, not like the thoughtful logical discourse of a speculative personality. He wrote in a fluent, easy and lucid manner. His language is often satirical but his satire very gentle. Irony and wit are the other markers of *The Spectator's Account of Himself*. Sometimes he exaggerates, but it is often used to provoke mirth. To make his presentation more effective, Addison uses a number of images from various fields. These familiar images are blended with a language to suit them.

2.8.4 Glossary

Choleric disposition: Irascible and hot tempered.

Prefatory discourse: In the nature of introduction.

William the conqueror: Ruler of England from 1066-87, William I of Normandy .

Coral: A toy of polished coral given to teething babies.

Nonage: Immature or minor

Odd unaccountable fellow: An eccentric person

Antiquities, of Egypt: Ancient pyramids, tombs and other architectural wonders of Egypt

Grand Cairo : City in Egypt, famous for its pyramids and sphinxes

Will's: Coffee house situated at Russell street, a favourite haunt of Dryden

Child's: Another coffee house frequented by doctors and members of the Royal society .

St. James' coffee house: Coffee house at St. James' street, the Tatler appeared from here

Grecian: Coffee house at Essex street visited by Addison, Steele. and Goldsmith

The cocoa -tree: A chocolate house situated at St. James' street

Drury lane and Hay market: Theatres in London

Exchange: Queen Elizabeth established it in 1571 and was destroyed by the great fire in 1666.

Jonathon's : A coffee house frequented by men of the Exchange

Spectator: An onlooker

standers by: Observers

Whigs and Tories: Political parties, the Whigs supported the supremacy of the parliament and the Tories supported the established religious and political order

Salutes and civilities: Limitations or restrictions of a public life

2.9 Reading the Text: *Of The Spectator*

This essay was published on Friday, March 2, 1711. The epigraph was taken from a Juvenalian Satire. After introducing the character of the 'Spectator' in an earlier essay Addison, in this essay, endeavours to introduce the other characters of the 'Spectator Club'. The central themes of discussion in this essay are Addison's art of characterization and the different traits of the characters of the Spectator club.

In an age when coffee houses were very much in fashion, it was customary for the 'Spectator' to be made the member of a club or coffee house. The original idea of creating the characters was Steele's, but it was left to Addison to develop and bring them to perfection. The idea seems to be derived from the numerous classical dialogues, then fashionable, in which each interlocutor is supposed to have a character of his own and represent a point of view. With this purpose Addison introduced five gentlemen from five different spheres of life, who represent their points of view on social and moral issues. Apart from lending the dramatic or dialectic interest to the *Spectator* they also function as the representatives of their own class and are supposed to be the ideal models of their respective classes. Mr. Spectator is a man of profound learning, like the men of the old civilization who had been specialists and scholars in various fields. The other characters, viz., Sir Roger De Coverly the learned lawyer, Sir Andrew Freeport, Captain Sentry and Will Honeycomb are created as types who possess a sound knowledge of their own society. Their sensibility and different opinions towards moral and social issues are highlighted throughout the pages of the *Spectator*.

Addison and Steele began the *Spectator* after their first attempt with the *Tatler*. This periodical was conceived in a spirit of restrained idealism, and each character was intended, to be an object lesson to his class. Addison appears to be sympathetic towards all his characters. They brought to the task of self-education, the same seriousness that began to guide the more enlightened as far back as the civil war. Their true sphere was found in the routine of daily life. Their practical thoughtfulness centred round their institutions, manners, and intellectual development. All these characters took active part in the issues that were raised in the Spectator Club. They have their own opinions to express in the various discussions and Mr. Spectator's role was that of an over-hearer who reported, faithfully, every detail of these discussions to the readers.

SAQ

Compare the portrayal of the Spectator and the other characters in terms of language, imagery and other details. (50 words)

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Stop to Consider

The 'gaze' of the spectator

The word spectator means an 'on looker' or 'observer'. So it is imperative to study the implication of this 'gaze'. How the spectator looks at things is an interesting aspect of study. In recent postmodern and feminist theories also the 'gaze' is given a prominent place. It will be useful to study the spectator essays in relation to these theories and to try to see how Addison places the spectators.

Are the spectators given a position of vantage? What can be learnt about the society and the writer from the creation of these characters also need to be addressed.

The idea of the 'spectator' should be seen in connection with contemporary discussions of progress, the new culture of commerce, and the changing ideas of human nature. Richard Steele announced in the *Tatler* in 1709, "The general Purpose of this Paper, is to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cunning, Vanity, and Affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse, and our Behaviour." In 1740, after having

published his *Treatise of Human Nature*. David Hume abandoned systematic philosophy for promoting practical morality through writing and publishing essays in the Addisonian mode. The *Spectator* had helped to set standards of taste through its highly popular status as many contemporary readers remarked.

2.9.1 The Friends of the 'Spectator'

Sir Roger de Coverly: Sir Roger de Coverly is the most remarkable of the 'Spectator's' friends. Addison portrays him as a man of remarkable wisdom and extraordinary style. He retains a certain mellowness and suavity of disposition. He is a kind man and his feudal background serves to make him independent. He is a man of strong physical vigour and remarkable intelligence. His enthusiasm for life has been temporarily blasted by his mystical love affair, but he did not succumb to it like ordinary men. His long career among bucolic and admiring tenants could not condemn him to a life of self-importance. The movement of his life has come to a halt and he finds himself at odds with the world. But he thinks that it is the world that is in the wrong. At fifty-six he is gay, cheerful and hearty.

Sir Roger is the most famous of the members of the Spectator Club and Addison is very sympathetic in his portrayal. Owing to his popularity the essays dealing with Sir Roger de Coverly were later compiled as the *Coverly Papers*. Sir Roger embodies the ideals of the preceding age and his portrayal suggests Addison's views on that age.

Captain Sentry: Captain Sentry is perhaps one of the most remarkable characters, in all literature, of a 'man in uniform' outside battlefield. He has proved himself to be a brave soldier but his worth is not merely in his heroism but in his talent that he exhibits in the other fields as well. He has quit the army because he thought that it does not give him enough opportunities to exhibit his talent. But he is not also a man concerned with advertising himself. Captain Sentry is a man of modest and admirable nature. In his conversations he compares the military and civil ways of life with the ardor of a philosopher. His discussions of military endeavors, and his discussion on the relation between modesty and courage will surprise a philosopher.

In portraying the character of Captain Sentry, Addison puts before us a number of remarkable questions. Which way of life is more worthy, military or civil? Can modesty and courage go together?

The Member of the Inner Temple: This anonymous character provides the much-needed clerical and religious point of view to the spectator club. He is a man of great probity, wisdom and understanding, and is held in high esteem among his friends in the

spectator club. He became a member of the 'inner temple' to obey the directions of his father but instead of confining himself to it, he devoted his ample leisure to the learning of Aristotle, Longinus and the theatre. The most remarkable thing about him is " his familiarity with the customs, manners and actions and writing of the ancients makes him a very delicate observer of what occurs to him in the present world." His knowledge of the theatre prompts the actors to attempt to please him.

Sir Andrew Freeport: Sir Andrew is an uncommon businessman in the days of colonialism. He is rich, industrious and experienced but he is against the extension of dominion by arms. England was at that time completely a merchandising nation and Sir Andrew represents the 'new rich' who was receiving more and more influence over the government and the populace as well. But he is a man of great intelligence and eloquence of whom Addison has said that "a general trader of good sense is pleasanter company than a general scholar."

Will Honeycomb: Honeycomb the fop, had been the butt of comedy for centuries. He is a man of fashion who is depicted as ignorant, indolent and insolent by subsequent writers. Nevertheless, he is the person who is more aware about his own age than other members of the club. He is the kind of man that was hated in the puritan period. But he is adept in courtly conversations and is informed about the various fashions in different parts of the world and their origin. He is also extremely knowledgeable about the female world.

Addison is not very sympathetic in the portrayal of this character. His language suggests not only his ridicule of Honeycomb but also his low opinion of women.

The Clergyman: The clergyman is not a regular visitor of the Spectator Club. But his infrequent arrivals were always welcomed members of the Spectator Club. He is "a very philosophic man, of general learning, great sanctity of life and the most exact good breeding". The members of the club always introduced a subject of divinity whenever he was present and he always spoke with much authority on that subject.

2.9.2 Addison's Characterization

Addison carefully picks up characters from different walks of life to create the Spectator Club. All these characters belong to different worlds and have their different and typical characters. They all have their own opinions on the subjects that were raised in the Spectator Club. Addison's characters are depicted with minute details and their

idiosyncrasies add much to their charm and their attraction for the readers.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Addison present the characters' views in conformity with his ideal of social standards ?
2. Discuss how Addison's characters are projections of the current debates of human progress and social advancement.
3. Addison's spectator as the presenter of 'modern' views displaces "traditional rhetorics" against a "flourishing public realm". Discuss with reference to the *Spectator* .

2.9.3 Glossary

<i>Soho- square</i>	: A place in Southern England.
<i>Rochester</i>	: Earl of Rochester.
<i>doublet</i>	: A kind of dress worn by men.
<i>Aristotle</i>	: Greek philosopher.
<i>Longinus</i>	: Greek philosopher and writer.
<i>Littleton or Coke</i>	: Reference to contemporary intellectuals.
<i>Demosthenes</i>	: Greek philosopher and orator.
<i>Tully</i>	: Greek philosopher.
<i>New - Inn</i>	: A London coffee house.
<i>Will's</i>	: A coffee house.
<i>Rose</i>	: A coffee house.
<i>Tom Mirabel</i>	: A Shakespearean character, Here it suggests an unruly and licentious young man of noble birth.

2.10 Critical Reception

Joseph Addison, the poet, dramatist and essayist is remembered in the history of criticism as the co- author with Richard Steele of the brilliant series of periodical essays, published in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. He is more famous as a social critic and became a model for the generation of critics and essayists for his effort to unite politics and literature. In his time, Addison was regarded as an influential

cultural and literary figure popular with the middle class readers. Lucid style of his writing and skillful depiction of characters helped to elevate the status of the essay and prepared the ground for the emergence of the genre of novel. Though he lacks profundity as a theorist, Addison's importance lies in his cultural works and the role he played as a public intellectual. He lacks the seriousness of Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke and Coleridge in his theorization yet he is an important influence on Coleridge and Johnson. Relating literature to the public sphere, Addison provided his readers with the critical vocabulary necessary for categorization of the relationship between words and ideas, between the world they inhabited and the literature they read and remains a prominent figure in the history of ideas.

2.11 Suggested Readings

1.A C Baugh : *A Literary History of England*. Vol.III.

2.Andrew Sanders :*The Short Oxford History Of English Literature*.

3.G M Trevelyan : *English Social History*.

4.A C Rickett : *An Introduction to The History of English Literature*



Unit-3

John Keats

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3.1 Objectives

In this unit you will be introduced to a form of prose-writing which does not conform to any of the more familiar genres of prose like the essay, the travelogue or the biography. This unit will 'read' Keats's letters so that you will be able

- *assess* Keats's use of this form
- *discover* some concepts that interested Keats
- *consider* the prose style of Keats as laying open the possibilities inherent in the form of the letter.
- *understand* why the letter became such an important form for writers who belonged to the Romantic Age.

3.2 Introducing the Author

It is important to know about a writer's life and the context in which s/he wrote to understand certain aspects of the literary work that s/he produced; this is particularly true of Keats whose work is influenced by his short and eventful life.

Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795. He began his education at the progressive Enfield School. However, his school education was cut short owing to his father's death. Finally, he did not receive any university education like Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Leaving school at the age of fifteen he worked as an apprentice to Thomas Hammond, an apothecary surgeon of London.

He began writing poetry around 1814, during the days of his apprenticeship and medical training in Guys Hospital. In 1816, his first published work, a poem named 'O Solitude! If I must with thee dwell' was published in the *Examiner*. In the same year he decided to abandon his medical career and devote himself completely to poetry. In 1816 itself his first important poem, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' appeared and Keats developed a friendship with his poetical and political hero Leigh Hunt, who influenced Keats' personal life and poetic development and introduced him to other men of letters. Keats had a talent for friendship and within a short period he became a friend of such men as Hunt, Reynolds, Benjamin Bailey, Charles, Clarke, Woodhouse, and Haydon. Keats' family, with whom he had a strong emotional relationship, his friends, and later his fiancée Fanny Brawne, were important influences in the development of his ideas about poetry, politics or imagination both through conversation and correspondence.

Keats's first collection of verses, *Poems*, appeared in 1817 and "Endymion" followed it in 1818. None of these was received appreciatively by the literary world. By September 1818, he was introduced to Fanny Brawne with whom he was officially engaged by the autumn of 1819. September 1818 to September 1819 was also the so-called 'great-year' of his intense and sustained poetic creativity when he composed the mythological epic *Hyperion*.

In December 1818 Keats moved to Hampstead to live in the house of Charles Armitage Brown. On the very day of the event his brother Tom died of consumption. This acutely traumatic experience is reflected in his great Odes when he contemplates upon themes like death, sickness and sorrow, etc. Between January and May 1819, Keats produced a number of his great works. He published 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and 'The Eve of St. Mark' consecutively in January and February. 'Isabella; or The Pot of Basil, and La Belle Dame Sans

Merci' followed them. By May 1819 Keats produced the remarkable series of Odes like, 'Ode to Psyche', 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on Melancholy'. Between June and September he completed 'Lamia' and worked on the unfinished 'The Fall of Hyperion, A Dream'. This period of great creation ended with the composition of 'To Autumn.'

By late 1819 Keats was losing his emotional equilibrium owing to financial crises and his worries about the problems of his brother George and his wife in America. In February 1820 Keats suffered a severe haemorrhage and moved to Italy in September 1820 in the vain hope of improvement.

He died at the Piazza di Spagna in Rome on 23rd February 1821 and was buried three days later in the city's English Cemetery.

Stop to Consider

Keats' close ties with his family and friends had an impact on the kind of letters that he wrote. Many of his close friends were men of letters and influenced his ideas about poetry, this aspect is reflected in many of the letters he wrote. He often used letters to clarify his views on poetry.

Keats was an emotional person, the very personal letters reveal this aspect of his personality.

As we observe all of the above, it becomes important for us to note critically that when 'letters' are to be discussed there is a necessary reference to the biographical facts of the author's life. You may be able to understand this point by asking yourself the question: is the private life of a writer more revealing of the personality than the 'public' appearance? Is the 'self' essentially private, or is it to be seen in the public arena too?

A Selective Chronology of Keats' Life:

- 1795 : Born on 31st October in Finsbury, London.
- 1803 : Keats joined Reverend John Clarke's school at Enfield.
- 1804 : Death of his father Thomas Keats. His mother re-married and Keats, with his siblings, moved to Edmonton.
- 1810 : His mother dies of tuberculosis.
- 1811 : Keats leaves school and joins as apprentice to Thomas Hammond, apothecary surgeon.

- 1814 : Wrote his first known poem 'Imitation of Spencer'.
- 1815 : Joined Grey's Hospital as a medical student. wrote a poem to celebrate the release of Leigh Hunt from jail.
- 1816 : Keats first published work, 'O solitude! If I must with thee dwell' appeared in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* completed his medical course and moved with his brothers to Cheapside; composed 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer', 'Sleep and Poetry" and 'I stood Tiptoe'.
- 1817 : Keats moved to Hampstead. Began formulating his ideas on 'imagination', 'negative capability', etc., in various letters to his friends and relations.
- 1818 : Met Fanny Brawne. Death of his brother Tom and Keats moved into the house of Charles Brown. Published *Endymion* and *Hyperion*. Beginning of the year of intense poetic creativity.
- 1819 : Produced 'The Eve of St. Agnes', 'Isabella ; or The Pot of Basil', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', and the great Odes, Abandoned *Hyperion*
- 1820 : Suffered from Tuberculosis, left England for Rome and published *Lamia*, *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes and other poems*.
- 1821 : Died on 23rd February at No. 26, Piazza di Spagna in Rome and was buried on the 26th of February in the English Cemetery in Rome.

3.3 The Context

Keats belonged to the later phase of Romanticism, while Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge are generally regarded as the early Romantic poets. In order to study Keats's poetry or the ideas that he formulated, it is necessary to have a look at the kind of society in his time and the literature of the period.

The multidimensional and sometimes quite elusive term, Romanticism, generally refers to a movement in the early 19th century. A.O. Lovejoy, in *On the Discrimination of Romanticism*, has analysed the difficulties of situating the term definitely.

One remarkable aspect of Romantic aesthetic is the supreme value

given to the faculty of imagination. The importance that Romantic poets attached to imagination distinguishes them from their 18th-century counterparts. Poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats and prose writers like Lamb and Hazlitt have also elaborately expressed their views on imagination.

The 'self' was always at the centre of Romantic poetics. Influenced by the French Revolution, subjectivity, freedom and imagination became the hallmarks of Romanticism. The social context of literature was no longer a primary issue as in the 18th century and in the neo-classical tradition. It became fairly removed from the socially programmed aesthetics of the previous period and for this reason the Romantics are criticised as dreamers by later critics, particularly in the modern period.

Novelty of expression also marks the Romantic writers. Writers like Lamb, Hazlitt, Scott and Austen were trying new formats to showcase their innovations. In poetry, Wordsworth advocated the use of 'rustic' language by forwarding his theory of 'poetic diction'. Lyricism was another important aspect of Romanticism.

The French Revolution and the Romantic poets

This was a most important event for the Romantic poets who took its symbolic significance for new possibilities in their artistic and literary orientations apart from the ideas of social transformation which early inspired them. To a noticeable extent Romanticism overturns the ideals of reason, moderation, universalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment.

The storming of the Bastille which marked the fiery start of the Revolution was received by many English radicals as "the dawn of universal liberty", in the words of Erasmus Darwin. Wordsworth hailed it

"I see, I see ! glad Liberty succeed
With every patriot virtue in her train !"

Wordsworth's and Coleridge's enthusiasm for these new hopes are familiar to us. The support for the French Revolution is named 'Jacobinism' and its philosophy of opposition to tyranny or repression, the advocacy of liberty, equality and fraternity influences much of Romantic poetry. In Keats's poetry, however, the dominant strains are less traceable to this influence than to the well-known Romantic insistence on the powers of the imagination.

Among other aspects of Romanticism the more important ones are their predilection for objects of natural beauty and the opposition to the ideals beloved of the Enlightenment. An exuberant intellectual curiosity, an illumination of the imagining faculty, the reaction of this on the more purely intellectual or rationalizing side of man characterized the works of the Romantic period. Another characteristic of

Romanticism is an instinct for the elemental simplicity of life. This is apparent both in the prose and poetry of the age. Rousseau's emphasis on (a) the dignity of man as man, and (b) the transcendent power of human love, influenced the romantic ideals.

Writers of the Romantic Age are marked by their love for nature and beauty, their concern for liberty, equality, and fraternity. The beginning of Romanticism is dated alternatively in 1785 or 1789 (with the French Revolution) or 1798 (with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*), and is said to have ended in 1830 (with the death of Walter Scott) or 1832 (with the passage of the Reform Bill).

Romanticism had a profound impact on literature, philosophy, art and music. Romanticism was characterized by stress on expression of emotion, imagination and the creative impulse. In philosophy Romanticism favoured mysticism and idealism, and Kant, Hegel and Rousseau became the most influential philosophers of the age.

SAQ

Give some examples from Keats's verses where you see a reference to the ideas of the Revolution of 1789. (50 words)

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Compare the poetry of Blake and Keats in these terms of revolutionary ideas. Do you find a difference, or a similarity? (50 words)

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3.4 Form of the Personal Letter

The personal letter is not generally regarded as strictly a branch of literature like other genres like poetry, novel or drama. The primary function of a letter is communication and perhaps it is the oldest means of communication in human history. But apart from its communicative purpose a letter often contains the writer's views and ideas about literary and social issues. A letter can also throw valuable light on the writer's character and can be of immense help in understanding his/her work. Keats is one of those writers whose letters to his friends and relations contain his valuable meditations on literary issues. Indeed, most of his important critical and poetical issues were formulated in the pages of his letter.

The informal personal letter is remarkable for its flexibility; it provides writers ample scope to present their views without subjecting them to any fixed form. A letter can be written on any subject and writers have often taken advantage of the potential of this form to air their views on personal matters as well as subjects which are of topical interest. A well-written letter can be used not just for communication but also as a tool for persuasion. Letters have been used to authenticate information in biographies and autobiographies, because very often writers provide intimate information in letters which might otherwise not have been available.

Stop to Consider

Although letters are not always regarded as a branch of literature, a personal letter can sometimes throw very useful light on the character of the writer, his/her milieu and ideas. It will be useful to study the letters of some other writers as well and compare the form of the personal letter with other branches of literature.

Matthew Arnold remarked of Keats' letters that they are an 'abandonment of all reticence and all dignity', and to the letter's 'relaxed self-abandonment' as 'something underbred and ignoble, as of a youth ill brought up without the training which teaches us that we must put some constraint upon our feelings and upon the expression of them'. But this negativity is accounted more to the perspicacity and inability of Arnold to understand the fervent and overwhelming love of a highly romantic youth.

3.4.1 Keats's use of the Letter

Keats' numerous comments on poetry and poetic endeavour in his letters exhibit the remarkable workings of his mind. Keats is always informal and the chief appeal of his letters lies in their informality.

Keats constantly endeavoured to understand human life and the problems of human relations, the function of poetry, etc. and he communicated with his friends about the result of such speculations. Keats had a sensitive mind and was rather easily excitable, and in his letters also we see a movement from one subject to another without any precaution. His emotionalism is also expressed in his love letters to Fanny Brawne.

In Keats' letters only a narrow barrier divided pain and pleasure. This is one reason why his letters are more poetical than any other poet, and his letters become almost poetry. His frequent consideration of the subject of poetry in his letters sometimes blends poetry and prose together into one means of expression. Keats in his letters is sometimes journalistic and tries to accumulate all the interesting news about common friends, accounts of his own doings, occasional bursts of humour, efforts at diversion, entertaining narrations, and above all in value for the recipients and to us, the readers, his inmost thoughts and most intimate philosophizing. Unlike Wordsworth, Keats' letters are instances of passionate intimacy, which is sometimes regarded as 'eccentricity'. But what is termed as eccentricity in conventional standards of evaluation is actually a creative impulse in Keats.

One common subject in most of the major letter writers like Pope, Southey or Gray is 'self analysis' but none of them is gifted with the insightful acumen of Keats. Regarding the language of his letters, Keats uses a highly non-prosaic language in his letters but the formulation and communication of his ideas is sometimes mixed with details of trivial matters. Three major aspects of Keats' character are exhibited in his letters - his constant preoccupation with the thought of poetic enterprise, his concern for the welfare of his friends and relations, and his unselfish, tolerant and accommodative character. The character of Keats' writing changes in relation to the recipients. While his letters to his brothers are full of interesting news about common friends, anecdotes and occasional bursts of humour and intense theorising, the letters to Benjamin Bailey are often pacifying. His letters to Fanny Brawne on the other hand, are outbursts of the anguish of his soul.

Check Your Progress

1. Bring out the main features of the prose style that Keats employs in his letters.
2. Compare the changes in language and tone in accordance with the recipient of Keats's letters. Attempt to relate these changes to the subject being discussed.
3. What major aspects of Keats' character can be said to be revealed in his letters?

3.5 Reading the Text: *To Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817*

In Keats' letters we can sense a kind of eagerness and ardour, which is often provoking, and at the same time inspiring. His letters are more poetical than that of any other poet. Keats formulated a number of critical and poetical ideas in the letters to his friends and relations.

His letters introduce the reader into a world full of myriad ideas, connected with the nature and pattern of his readings, writings, thoughts and his non-poetic concerns.

In the couple of letters discussed in this unit, Keats is found to be concerned with such issues as the relationship between beauty and truth, imagination, etc. along with a comparison between Wordsworth and Milton. Like his other letter, these two letters are also very informal and we find lofty poetical meditation intermixed with worries about money and his brother's illness. Sometimes his letters are written in a state of creative excitement and the informality enables the reader to see the working of the poet's mind. It is obvious that the letters were composed hurriedly and often under pressure and fatigue. Yet a kind of spontaneity is one of the major characteristics of these letters. The phrases that he used, like - "beauty must be truth" have now become the testament of Romantic aesthetics.

We can gather from his letters that Keats, was a man constantly occupied by the thought of the poetic enterprise. They also show that he was unselfish, large- hearted and extremely tolerant and accommodative.

The letter to Benjamin Bailey (22nd November, 1817) is Keats' first prose meditation upon themes which inform many of his most important letters and much of his poetry - the imagination, the relationship between Beauty and Truth, and the question of identity,

especially poetic identity.

The letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (3rd May 1818) was apparently prompted by a reading of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. This letter is one of the best of Keats' critical writings. Here, he compares Wordsworth and Milton. However, the importance of the letter is not in the exposition of Wordsworth's worth whatever it might be, but in the fact that it brings out the best of Keats as a critic. Here, he develops an extended simile of human life as a 'mansion of many apartments'. He writes that after the first "infant or thoughtless chamber" there is "the chamber of maiden thought", whose "pleasant wonders" serve to ultimately convince the poet that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression. This letter anticipates the theme of his epic poem, *Hyperion*, i.e. "the grand march of intellect" evident in human history.

SAQ

What kind of light do Keats's letters throw on his works ? (50 words)

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Describe the correlation between Keats's poetry and the ideas you find in his letters ? (50 words)

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3.6 Analysing the Text

This letter is remarkable for the introduction of the Keatsian concept of 'imagination' and is one of Keats's earliest prose meditations. Apart from this, the letter provides insights into Keats's personality and his meditations on human relationship.

3.6.1 Keats' Concept of 'Imagination', 'Beauty' and 'Truth'

Keats in his letter to Benjamin Bailey wrote - "What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth". Keats laid great importance on the truth or authenticity of the imagination. He illustrates with the help of Adam's dream the creative aspect of imagination whose fruit must be concrete. Thus the imagination is drawn into the orbit of sensation and perception. Sensation, here, is not conceived merely as sense experience but as the intuitive perception of truth, as opposed to truth achieved by consecutive reasoning. The actuality of sensation is stimulating and the thought excites Keats, he exclaims, "O for a life of sensation rather than of truth". For Keats imagination is inseparable from beauty and truth. This is exemplified in this letter by Keats' preoccupation with imagination, beauty and truth. While exalting the imaginative process he also voices his awareness of the difficulties that lie in the process of poetic creation.

Keats' concept of imagination cannot be discussed in isolation from the other Romantic poets. Imagination is a major concept in Romantic aesthetics. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats were preoccupied with idea of imagination. Their views did not work out into one unified formula; however, the term 'Romantic Imagination' is commonly used to describe the diverse views of these poets. Coleridge in Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria* puts forward his concept of imagination as:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the finite I AM.

The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible; yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Wordsworth and Coleridge had their differences regarding the relationship between 'fancy' and 'imagination'. Wordsworth felt that fancy was as creative as imagination, but Coleridge held that imagination was superior to fancy. Shelley also said that 'man' is 'pre-eminently an imaginative being'. Even before the Romantic Age the term imagination was in currency; it designated the creative process and was often held to be synonymous with 'wit' and 'fancy'. However, it is with the Romantics that the term gained importance. Keats' views on imagination, however, were not as organized as that of the other Romantics. His thoughts can be found scattered over the pages of his letters. Hence it is incomplete in a sense. The basic idea behind Keats's philosophy is the equation of imagination with truth.

Keats believed that 'beauty' can be arrived at through the 'imagination' and this experience is regarded as 'truth'. What is remarkable about Keats's concept of imagination is that it is integrated with the concepts of truth and beauty. For Keats imagination must have authenticity and it is not necessarily dependent on its expression in art forms. Its place is in the mind of the poet. The poet experiences humans and objects through the senses and his imagination transcends these objects to form a kind of reality.

Stop to Consider

For Keats imagination is creative and intuitive and the experience of its appropriation is always -Truth.

The process of imagination creates an alternative reality for the poet which is of the highest order.

Keats is also conscious about the fruits of the imagination. The product of imagination is dependent on both the mind and the senses. Here Keats is aware of his incompleteness as well as the hardship of attaining completeness. As he writes - a mind "that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits- who would exist partly on sensation and partly on thought - to whom it is necessary that years

should bring the philosophic Mind".

Check Your Progress

1. What is the Romantic concept of imagination? How does it provide a critique of the Enlightenment's devaluation of imagination ?
2. Compare Coleridge's definition of 'imagination' with Keats's. Highlight the significant differences between the two.
3. In what way does Keats's concept of 'imagination' support related ideas of the 'self'?

3.6.2 Keats on Identity and Human Relationships

In his letter to Benjamin Bailey Keats also contemplates human relationships and the question of identity - a concept later developed in his other letters. His letters to Bailey are always pacifying; Keats is engaged in mollifying him. While trying to resolve the tension between Bailey and Haydon, Keats stresses the importance of understanding human characters while forming relationships. In his attempt to understand human relationship Keats laid bare his own heart. A number of instances in the letter show a genuine concern for his friends and his brother. These contemplations lead to the discovery of the truth of human relationship. As Keats said, "one thing that has pressed upon me lately and increased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth - Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the mass of neutral intellect by (for but) they have not any individuality, any determined Character". Keats thinks that men of genius are like the chemical fluid that can extract valuable substance from the inert mass to which it is applied. This observation also raises the question of identity, another favourite topic of Keats. For Keats a poet does not have a determined character. Keats, here, distinguishes himself from the Wordsworthian poetic self. Terming Wordsworth's concept of the self as 'egoistical sublime', elsewhere in his letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October, 1818), Keats writes that a poet has no identity.

Stop to Consider

Negative Capability: While discussing poetical identity, Keats develops the concept of negative capability in his letter written in December 1817. It defines a literary quality as "when man is capable of being at uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." It distinguishes an impersonal or objective author who maintains an aesthetic distance from his work as opposed to an author who gets personally involved in his works or

uses his work as an agenda of expressing his own beliefs. It is the poets' capability of negating his own personality to enter in a new and aesthetic self that is constructed by his imagination and art.

Keats stresses the flexibility of the poetical character which can accommodate itself to whatever structure it is put into, and thus it attains an enduring appeal. Like most of Keats' ideas his concept of identity or poetical identity also germinates in a period of rapid intellectual development and hence, is hardly complete.

3.7 Glossary

Benjamin Bailey(1791-1853): Archdeacon of Colombo. one of Keats' closest friends.

Unsaid: unwritten, a parody of legal language

Crips: Charles Crips, a young painter, disciple of Haydon.

Haydon: Benjamin Robert Haydon, painter who took Keats' life mask.

Ethereal Chemical: The chemical fluid ether.

Octavo: Size of a book (*octa* for eight, eight leaves are formed from one sheet of paper)

My first book: Reference to *Endymion*.

The little song : The song 'O Sorrow' from Book 4 of *Endymion*. Keats enclosed the whole poem in his earlier letter to Bailey dated 3 November 1817.

In my last: Reference to the letter to Bailey dated 3 November 1817.

Adam's dream: Reference to Adam's dream in Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book VIII where Adams sees Eve in his dream and wakes up to find her real.

Consequitive reasoning: Logical reasoning.

O for a life of Sensation: A life of sense experience and intuitive perception as opposed to a life of logical reasoning.

Philosophic Mind: Allusion to Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*.

"In the soothing thoughts that springs
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In the years that bring the philosophic mind"

Jane and Marianne : Sisters of John Hamilton Reynolds.

Rack'd: Harmed, damaged.

Devonshire: A county in England.

Dorking: A town in Surrey, England.

Christie: Jonathon Henry Christie.

Rice: James Rice, lawyer and Keats' friend.

Martin: John Martin, publisher and Keats' friend.

Taylor : John Taylor, partner in publishing house Taylor & Hessey which published Keats'works.

Examiner: A weekly published by Leigh Hunt, started in 1808.

Gleig: George Robert Gleig, Bailey's brother in law.

M Bentley: Mrs. Bentley, Keats' landlady at Hampstead.

Burford Bridge: Bridge on the river Windrush, in the Cotswolds; Burford is a town in West Oxfordshire.

3.8 Analysing the Text

The letter to John Hamilton Reynolds is perhaps the best of Keats's critical writing. Among other things he makes a comparison between Wordsworth and Milton. He also expresses his views on 'knowledge' and the process of its accumulation. Another remarkable aspect of this letter is his development of the simile of human life as a 'Mansion of many apartments'.

3.8.1 Keats on Knowledge

Keats contemplates the theme of knowledge in relation to Reynolds' legal studies and finds that there is a relationship between sense-experience and knowledge. Sense-experience through proper intuition

can lead to knowledge and sense experience that does not lead to knowledge is short lived. He alludes to Adam's disobedience to show that the quest of knowledge is inherent in human history. A position of knowledge elevates the mind to an unbiased position, when every branch of knowledge is seen as working toward a 'whole'. According to Keats, sense- perception and thought are brought together in the process of acquiring knowledge. As he writes, "An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people - it takes away the heat and fever". We can sense some similarities between Wordsworth and Keats when Wordsworth says that in the poetic process a poet must 'ponder over the powerful feeling long and deeply'. But Keats differs from Wordsworth in his views regarding acquired wisdom and terms the Wordsworthian concept as 'egoistical sublime'.

Keats also draws a distinction between knowledge and feeling. Knowledge, undoubtedly, is necessary but feeling, for him, is more important. He finds it difficult to solve the conflict between "breast and head". He writes, "it is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend and the ill". We can have proper knowledge of something only when the objects of sense perception pass through our thoughts and feelings and starts haunting us. This is indeed a painful experience. In this way he formulates an interesting equation "Knowledge is Sorrow", "Sorrow is Wisdom" and "Wisdom is Folly".

SAQ

What kind of reflection do we see here of ideas of knowledge and epistemology of the preceding period of the Enlightenment ? (50 words)

3.8.2 Criticism of Wordsworth and Milton

A reading of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' prompted the letter to Reynolds. It is in this context that he starts contemplating on the themes of knowledge and feelings. In order to examine Wordsworth's concern for Humanity he takes recourse to Milton. His method here has some similarity with Arnold's 'touch stone' method. Keats justifies his method by saying that just as gold is the standard of material wealth, so Milton is the standard of poetic value. While comparing Wordsworth and Milton, Keats is caught in a dilemma, was Milton less concerned about humanity or did Wordsworth lack the epic passion of Milton? Or can epic passions and feelings for humanity go together? He comes to the realisation that no philosophy is valuable unless one can 'feel' its truth. Keats is of the view that the meditation upon human life leads Wordsworth to a point where he realises that life is essentially full of pain and sickness. This is when one becomes incapable of understanding the mysteries of the world and starts brooding more intensely. According to Keats it is this position, which is the source of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. Wordsworth's worth lies in his ability to make discoveries about human life from this position. In *Paradise Lost* and *Comus* Milton did not try to feel deeply about humanity and his ideas are thus facilitated by a change in the society rather than intense feelings. However, Milton remains as great a philosopher as Wordsworth.

Stop to Consider

Although Wordsworth and Milton arrive at knowledge in different ways, Keats realizes that they both are valid. Wordsworth's 'feeling' and Milton's knowledge are equally valid.

3.8.3 Keats's Simile of Human Life

Keats' constant meditation on human life and his reading of *Tintern Abbey*, leads him to the formulation of a simile of human life as 'a mansion of many apartments'. Keats was, to a great extent, concerned about the welfare of his friends. Moreover, his brother Tom's illness, the knowledge of his own health, his unpleasant affair with Fanny Browne are some of the other factors that intensified his sensibility. He compared human life to a mansion of many apartments. The first, infant or thoughtless chamber, is the period of childhood or innocence. It is the happy phase of life when we don't have knowledge of the complexities of the world. After this comes the 'chamber of maiden thought'. It is in this phase that our illusion of the world and its 'pleasant

wonders' is broken. We enter this phase when we start thinking or acquiring knowledge. Acquisition of knowledge comes with sorrow and pain. Keats in this context refers to the punishment of Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Byron's axiom of "Knowledge is Sorrow". Our experience in this 'thoughtful' chamber ultimately leads us to realise that the world is full of misery, heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Keats use the image of the 'mansion' to compare it to different stages in the life of a human being?
2. To what extent does Keats concur with the discourses typical of Romanticism?
3. How did the French Revolution help to create new possibilities for the English Romantic poets?
4. How does Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* provide an important point of reference for English Romanticism?
5. Can you compare Keat's views on poetry with those of Wordsworth, Coleridge and other Romantic poets? Attempt to justify their differences and similarities.

(Hint: You have to display your knowledge of the Romantic movement in general)

6. How do the philosophy of Kant and Hegel find a place in English Romantic concepts?

(Hint : You will have to read related histories of ideas or about Romanticism in general.)

3.9 Critical Reception

Modern criticism concentrates on the relation between the initial, negative reception of Keats and his poetry and his recent favourable reputation of Keats. Marjorie Levinson's (1988) study focuses on the barrier resulting from Keats's social standing, and shows how his lower-middle-class status affected his work and influenced the emergence of negative reviews. Nicholas Roe (1992) stresses on politics rather than class status and opines that Keats's political subversiveness was the cause behind the negative response of the

contemporary critics to his poetry. Morris Dickstein (1983) deals with Keats's association with Leigh Hunt's poetry and his involvement in liberal politics.

Keats's letters are the best examples of his poetical theorization. Wolf Z. Hirst (1981) examines Keats's letters in the context of his family and friends and discusses Keats's theories of "negative capability," "the truth of Imagination", and "soul-making." Keats's letters also reveal his belief in human suffering as a necessary experience in the processes of personality development and soul-making. Critics such as Margaret Homans (1990) examine Keats's remarks to and about Fanny Browne in his letters as a means of negotiating the way in which women are portrayed and objectified in his poetry. Modern critics study Keats's poetry in a more traditional manner, concentrating on his imagery, style, and the structure of poems. Richard Harter Fogle (1949) analyses the ways in which the metrical structure of Keats's poems are affected by the "concreteness" of his imagery. François Matthey (1974) examines the structural complexity of Keats's poetry and John A. Minahan (1992) investigates Keats's use of music in his poetry.

3.10 Glossary

John Hamilton Reynolds: Poet and man of letters, Keats' friend.

Imprimis : In the first place.

Forbidden tree: 'Tree of knowledge of good and evil', (refers to disobedience); according to the myth in the Abrahamic tradition God forbade Adam to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. But Eve yielded to the temptation of Satan and they tasted the fruit of that tree which led to the loss of their innocence, and following which God expelled them from the Garden of Eden.

Sierra-Leone: Sierra Leone, a west African country. Keats figuratively suggests the displeasure he provokes to Mrs. Bentley.

Spenserian: Reference to Reynolds poem 'The Romance of Youth', written in Spenserian stanza.

Your office: The solicitor's firm of Francis Fladgate.

Mystery of Law: the tiring exercise of legal studies.

As **Parson Hugh** does **Pepins**: Allusion to Sir Hugh Evans's comment to Simple in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

"I pray you be gone. I will make an end of my dinner; there's pippins and cheese to come"...

(Act I, Scene II, Lines 10-11)

Pip- civilian: An amateur lawyer or a small scale layman.

Burden of the Myster: cf. Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, line 38.

Fledged : Feathered, growing wings.

Hermes : Greek god, son of Zeus and Maia.

Maia: One of the seven daughters of Titan Atlas and Oceanid Pleione, fell in love with Zeus.

Baiae: A small place near Cumæ on the port of Naples.

Venery: Sexual indulgence.

Patmore: Peter George Patmore, a contemporary writer.

Coleman : George Coleman, a playwright.

Little: Pseudonym of Thomas Moore.

Sea Mew: Reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book XI,835.

Maiden -Thought: Innocent thought.

Paradise Lost : An epic poem written by Milton.

Comus: A masque written by Milton in 1634.

Codpieces: A kind of pouch like addition to men's long hose, located at the crotch. It was in fashion in the 15th and the 16th century.

Smithfield: An open space to the northwest of the city of London, where heretics were burnt in the 16th century.

Sequel: Later on; perhaps a reference to *Paradise Regained*.

"**Nom: Musa**": An inappropriate answer; Keats suggests that he does not want to impose on Reynolds.

Moore's present to Hazlitt: Peter Moore presented a copy of the third edition of *The Fudge Family in Paris* to Hazlitt.

Moore: Peter Moore, one of the managers of the Drury Lane Theatre.

3. 11 Suggested Readings

Bradley, A C : "The Letters of Keats" *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Radha, 1985)

Trilling, Lionel: "The Poet as Hero: Keats in his Letters" *The Opposing Self* (Secker and Warburg, 1955)

Hill, John Spencer: *The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook* (Macmillan, 1977)

Gittings. Robert: *The Letters of John Keats* (OUP, 1975)



Unit 4

Charles Lamb

Contents :

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing the author
- 4.3 The Context
- 4.4 The Essay as a Literary Form
- 4.5 Reading the text: My Relations
- 4.6 Style of Lamb's Essay
- 4.7 Critical reception
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Suggested readings



(Charles Lamb)

4.1 Objectives

A reading of Charles Lamb's essay *My Relations* is designed to acquaint you with the unique position of Lamb in the development of the English essay. However, after the end of this unit you will be able to

- *trace* the history of the essay, and its various forms
- *relate* the life of the writer with his works.
- *place* the text in its proper context.
- *appreciate* Charles Lamb in totality.

4.2 Introducing the Author

Charles Lamb (pseudonym 'Elia'), was born in London in February, 1775. Youngest of a large family of whom only two other children survived - John and Mary, Lamb describes his early surroundings colourfully in several essays like *Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, *My Relations*, and *Mackerey End in Hertfordshire*. Lamb received his early schooling in Christ's Hospital. It was also the place where he formed a lifelong friendship with Coleridge. He pens his memories of his school life chiefly in two essays - *Recollections of Christ's Hospital*, and *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*.

Christ's Hospital

(also called, The Blue Coat School) is the name of an English public school. It was originally situated in Newgate Street, London, but in 1902, was shifted to Horsham, Sussex. Founded by Edward VI in 1552, it was well endowed, and it admitted homeless children. Later it became a leading public school in England. The old buildings of the school in London, where Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were educated, were pulled down, to give place to the G.P.O. The pupils of the school retain the blue coat dress of their predecessors.

Lamb inherited much of his father John Lamb's literary inclinations and also his sense of humour. John Lamb was a clerk to a Member of Parliament. Charles Lamb spent his early years partly in London and partly with his mother's family in Hertfordshire, years which gave him numerous memories of people and places, which he recollected in his writings. Later in life, Lamb took up employment in a London merchant's office before his appointment as a clerk in the South-Sea House. In 1792, he was transferred to East India House where he served for thirty three years. Little is known about his life during the period 1792-1795. Towards the end of 1794, he joined Coleridge in writing sonnets, and by the end of 1795 he suffered from mental imbalance for which he had to be confined to an asylum. This imbalance was attributed to his unsuccessful affair with Ann Simmons, the Hertfordshire maiden to whom his first sonnets were addressed. Insanity, in fact, was inherent in his family. Lamb spent the last six weeks of 1795 in a madhouse at Hoxton, while his sister Mary, in a fit of madness, stabbed her mother to death in 1796. Charles Lamb never married as he devoted all his time looking after his sister Mary.

He died on 27th December 1834, Edmonton, Middlesex, England after complications to a wound suffered in a fall. He was then 58 and was cremated at All Saint's Churchyard, Edmonton, London, England.

Charles Lamb had developed an interest on literature from his early years. He had published sonnets and other verses in association with Coleridge and Charles Lloyd and his first independent book, *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*, appeared in 1798. Shortly, he published a five-act tragedy, *John Woodvil*, besides contributing to newspapers. In the same year, he moved out with Mary (his sister) to their loved temple, 16, Mitre Court Buildings, where they together penned *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1808), and *Poetry for Children* (1809). In 1820, Lamb began those essays signed 'Elia' and contributed to a periodical called "The London Magazine", which confirmed his place in English literature. The first of these, *The South-Sea House*, gave recollections of his brief clerkship there. The pseudonym, 'Elia', was in fact borrowed from the surname of a clerk there. In 1823, Charles and Mary again moved to Colebrook Cottage, Islington, and in the same year published the volume called *Elia: Essays* which have appeared under that Signature in the London Magazine. In 1827, they moved again this time to Enfield, and in 1833 yet again to Edmonton, whence he published *The Last Essays of Elia*.

In estimating the importance of early memories and friendships upon Lamb's work, one cannot overlook his connection with his mother's native county Hertford. His grand mother, Mrs. Mary Field, was a housekeeper at Blakesware, a country house in the parish of Widford. The owner of the house lived elsewhere and Charles and Mary Lamb spent many holidays in their early years at this place. In the autumn of 1799, Lamb revisited the place and wrote to Southey about some of the features of the house. In 'Dream Children' Blakesware is vividly described with its empty rooms, gardens, orangery and fish pond.

SAQ

So far, you are sought to be acquainted with Charles Lamb's early life and family background. Do you feel that such an ambience contributed much to his development as an essayist? (50 words)

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The-contemporary age

During this time, many writers began to find their subjects in the life of the city, especially its low life. Thomas Brown, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, and perhaps best of all the painter Hogarth were the names of great authors of Eighteenth-Century England. However, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Sheridan were also closely associated with the social, political and literary life of the city. Finally, it was a golden age for the theatre and the profession of acting represented by such popular actors as Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, the Kembles, Kean, Fanny Kelly, Elliston, Mathews, Munden, and so on.

Chronological Table of Events in Lamb's Life:

1789: Went to work as a clerk at the South Sea House.

1792: Transferred to India House. Death of Mr. Salt left the family (except for his brother John who had a well paid job at South Sea House) in reduced circumstances

1796: Mary, his sister killed his mother in a fit of madness with a table knife. (Lamb looked after her for the rest of her life and she was to be his constant companion and the "Cousin Bridget" of many of his essays). He contributed four sonnets to Coleridge's "Poems on Various Subjects".

1798: He published "Blank Verse" in collaboration with his friend Charles Lloyd (of Lloyd's Bank fame). This included "The Old Familiar Faces" which became one of his best loved poems.

1807: Charles and Mary had moved around from one set of lodgings to another and most of his literary outpourings had brought neither fame nor the much needed money. He was asked by William Godwin to help contribute to his "Juvenile Library". To this he contributed the work which was to become famous, "Tales from Shakespeare". (Charles worked on the Tragedies whilst Mary worked on the comedies).

1808: They again collaborated on a work for Children "The Adventures of Ulysses."

1809: He was commissioned by the publishers Longmans to edit and criticize selections from the Elizabethan dramatists.

1812: He published works on Hogarth and Shakespeare which appeared in the journal "The Reflector" edited by Hunt.

1818: His many works for various publications were brought together in the "Works of Charles Lamb" and because of this he was asked by the "London Magazine" to contribute a series of essays. These essays, under the pseudonym "Elia" (named after a fellow Clerk in India House) were to secure his fame once and for all.

1820-25: First series of "Essays of Elia".

1823: He left London and took up a cottage in Islington now he was earning more money. Charles and Mary took with them Emma Isola a young orphan whom they looked after until she married.

1825: Retired from India House on a pension of two thirds of his salary. The Lambs went to live at Enfield and then Edmonton.

1833: Marriage of Emma Isola to the publisher E. Moxon. Completion of "The Last Essays of Elia".

(1847): Death of Mary Lamb.

Written Works:

1798: "The Old Familiar Faces". "A Tale of Rosamund Gray".

1802: "John Woodvil". (Drama).

1803: "Hester".

1806: "Mr. H". (Farce).

1807: "Tales from Shakespeare". (With Mary Lamb, published at the invitation of William Godwin).

1808: "The Adventures of Ulysses".

1809: "Poetry for Children".

1811: "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare". "A Bachelor's Complaint on the Behaviour of Married Couples".

1818: "Collected Works". "Queen Oriana's Dream".

1819: "Valentine's Day".

1820: "Essays of Elia". "The South Sea House".

1821: "My Relations".

1823: "Essays of Elia". (2nd Edition). "Poor Relations".

1825: "The Superannuated Man".

1826: "The Genteel Style in Writing". "Sanity of True Genius".

1827: "Angel Help".

1828: "On an Infant Dying as Soon as it was Born."

1830: "To a Young Friend". "She is Going." 1833: "Last Essays of Elia".

(1837): "Letters with a Life by Talfourd".

Personality and Character

The humanity of Charles Lamb was ingrained in his nature and it drew from Wordsworth the title of "gentle-hearted". There was a heroic determination in his character, which is evident in his handling of the crisis that had befallen him and his sister when their minds became imbalanced. Lamb, however, suffered from a chronic melancholy, which was to some extent inherited. There is a deep feeling of gloom and sadness in essays like *New Year's Eve*, *Witches and Other Night Fears*, and *Confessions of a Drunkard*. In the *Preface to the Last Essays* which was supposed to be written by "a friend of the late Elia", but was actually written by Elia himself, Charles Lamb gives us an interesting analysis of his own character and temperament. In it he defends himself against the charge of egotism by saying that he talks not about himself but about others too. He calls himself a "singular character", whom some hate bitterly. The severe religionist considers him a free thinker, while the opposite school of thought accuses him of being a bigot. Lamb was fond of employing irony and could lighten the gravest discussions with his jest. The informal nature of his mind, coupled with the stammer in his speech, made it impossible for him to be an orator. He was accused of trying to be witty when in practicality; he was simply strained to give expression to his poor thoughts. Such is the image that Lamb projects in this essay and the self-denigration proceeds from his modesty.

Thomas Talfourd, long-time associate, biographer and collector of Lamb's letters, describes Lamb in the following manner:

"Methinks I see him before me now, as he appeared then, and as he continued, with scarcely any perceptible alteration to me, during the twenty years of intimacy which followed, and were closed by his death. A light frame, so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it, clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His

black hair curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expressions, though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose slightly curved, and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders, and gave importance and even dignity to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance -- catch its quivering sweetness -- and fix it for ever in words? There are none, alas! to answer the vain desire of friendship. Deep thought, striving with humour; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweetness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterised by what he himself says in one of his letters to Manning of Braham. -- 'a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.'

4.3 The Context

The essay can be read as a confession to his readers replete with the variety of experience of Lamb, the bibliophile, the rambler through London, the sentimentalist the connoisseur of old personalities and in short the man in love with life and past memories. This essay is contextualized in a kind of experience conjuring up with humour and sometimes with pathos, old acquaintances, recollection from childhood and matured life and indulgence of the author's sense of playfulness and fancy.

4.4 The Essay as a Literary Form

A.C. Benson defines the essay as 'a thing which someone does himself: and the point is not the subject, for any subject will suffice, but the charm of the personality.' It differs from a "treatise" or a "dissertation" in that it is not a systematic and complete exposition, and is addressed to a general rather than a specialized audience. Consequently, an essay discusses its subject in a non-technical fashion, employing devices like anecdote, illustrations, and humour to augment its appeal.

A distinction is often made between a formal essay and an informal one. The formal essay is impersonal; the author writes with authority and in an orderly manner. In the informal essay or the personal essay (of which Lamb is an exponent) there is a tone of intimacy and the subject is taken from mundane matters rather than issues of grave public importance. The writer writes in a relaxed and sometimes whimsical fashion. A feature of the personal essay is the abundance of humour, elegant style, an innovative use of incidents and the lack of ornamentation.

M.H. Abrams traces the origin of the essay to the Greeks Theophrastus and Plutarch and the Romans Cicero and Seneca who wrote essays much before it assumed its standard form and nomenclature with Montaigne's great French *Essais* in 1580. The influence of Montaigne on subsequent writers was far-reaching. It was Francis Bacon who in the sixteenth century inaugurated the English use of the term in his own *Essays*, the content of which were in the nature of short commentaries on subjects like "Truth", "Adversity", "Marriage and the Single life" etc. The first edition, which became immensely popular, was subsequently enlarged to include more personal pieces with more illustrations. In the seventeenth century, the development of the English essay was not purely literary although Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1688) and Locke's *Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) were examples of argumentative formal essays. In *Essays on Criticism* (1711) and the *Essay on Man* (1733), Alexander Pope used the term, but it was not until the early eighteenth century, with Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator*, that the essay assumed its modern form - the literary periodical. The periodicals were different from the earlier mode in that it was concise, less formal with a good measure of humour and satire. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator* gave rise to numerous imitations - *Guardian*, the *Female Tatler* and the *Rambler*. After this period, curiously, the essay declined as a literary form. It is in the Romantic age that it found a new outlet. In the early nineteenth century, the growth and proliferation of new types of magazines like *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817), *London Magazine* (1820) gave an impetus to essay writing. This was the age when William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, and Charles Lamb brought the English essay, especially the personal essay, to a level that has not been surpassed in the history of English literature. Other major American essayists of the period include Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell, and Mark Twain. English exponents of the personal essay include Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, E.M. Forster, James Thurber and E.B. White. The formal essay, on the other hand, developed significantly with the critical magazines like *Edinburgh Review* (1802), *Quarterly Review* (1809), and *The Westminster Review* (1824).

Check Your Progress

1. What differentiates a formal essay from an informal one?
2. How is an essay different from a treatise or a dissertation?

3. Name some important exponents of both the forms with their chief works.

4.5 Reading the text: 'My Relations'

Lamb begins "My Relations" by stating that he had 'arrived' at that point of his life when the survival of the parents was a matter of great fortune. He was, however, not so fortunate. Among his relations Lamb had an aunt, 'a dear and good one', who never married and consequently was by nature bitter about people in general. She was, however, very fond of Charles Lamb. This is a reference to his aunt Hetty whose influence he had acknowledged elsewhere.

In a letter to Coleridge dated May 12, 1800, Lamb wrote: *I don't know why I write except from the propensity misery has to tell her griefs. - Hetty died on Friday night, about 11 o' clock, after 8 days of illness. Mary in consequence of fatigue and anxiety is fallen ill again, and I was obliged to remove her yesterday - I am left alone in a house with nothing but Hetty's dead body to keep me company... Tomorrow I bury her, and then I shall be quite alone, with nothing but a cat, to remind me that the house has been full of living beings like myself. - My heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief...*

She liked to read and was especially fond of religious books like *Imitation of Christ* and a Roman Catholic Prayer Book. Lamb then proceeds to inform the reader that he had no uncle, nor any brother or sister. He did have a sister, Elizabeth, who died in her infancy. If she had lived, she would have been a source of comfort to him. He had two cousins - James Elia and Bridget who were older to him by twelve and ten years respectively. Lamb wishes them a long life.

Stop to Consider

They were not his cousins in reality. The reference here is to John Lamb, his brother and Mary. This is a means to fictionalize his personal life. The pseudonym 'Elia' was derived by Lamb from an Italian clerk who worked with him in the South Sea House.

Would you agree here that 'fact' is fictionalized for the sake of the 'literary' ?

James Elia, to Lamb, was of a confusing and contradictory nature combining impulsiveness with caution and composure of mind with an

excitable disposition. To quote Lamb:

James is an inexplicable cousin. Nature hath her unities, which not every critic can penetrate; or, if we feel, we cannot explain them. The pen of Yorick, and of none since his, could have drawn J.E. entire - those fine Shandean lights and shades, which make up his story. I must limp after in my poor antithetical manner, as the fates have given me grace and talent.

Note the irony in Lamb's comment as also the subtle use of exaggeration in the sketch of James.

He came forward with new ventures but was at the same time critical of new experiments. His theories were diametrically opposed to his constitution. Quick at inventing an argument and detecting a flaw, he yet denied that man had the faculty of reason- "*Very quick at inventing an argument, or detecting a sophistry, he is incapable of attending you in any chain of arguing.*" He was opposed to laughter, but his laughter was as loud as the crowing of a cock:

He has some speculative notions about laughter, and will maintain that laughing is not a natural thing to him - when peradventure the next moment his lungs shall crow like chanticleer. He says some of the best things in the world, and declareth that wit is his aversion.

The study of 'style'

In pointing out the inconsistencies and contradictions of James, Lamb adopts an antithetical style of writing. Some illustrations:

1. "The genuine child of an impulse, the frigid philosopher of prudence-the phlegm of my cousin's doctrine is invariably at war with his temperament, which is sanguine".
2. "With always some fire-new project in his brain, James Elia is the systematic opponent of innovation and crier-down of everything that has not stood the test of age and experiment".
3. "With a hundred fine notions chasing one another hourly in his fancy, e is startled at the least approach to the romantic in others".
4. "He says some of the best things in the world - and declareth that wit is his aversion".

James Elia's youth was fiery and Lamb admires him for being able to preserve his youthful glow even in his old age. He was a passionate lover of paintings, but he discourages others from developing such a taste. He would go into raptures over a painting when he bought it, but gradually his enthusiasm would wane to such an extent that he would consign it to the lumber-room:

The above lines illustrate a good deal of Lamb as an essayist - his wonderful use of language, simple, informal and fluent. Also it illustrates his ability to sketch almost life-like figures with deft touches of humour, exaggeration and irony.

Besides these amusing contradictions, Lamb also points out certain other humorous qualities of James. For instance, he advised Lamb to take walks in a locality where Lamb had already been doing so for twenty years: "*He advertised me but the other day of some pleasant green lanes which he had found out for me, knowing me to be a great walker, in my own immediate vicinity - who have haunted the identical spot any time these twenty years!*" Moreover, his constitutional sympathy for animals made him an adorable character. He could not bear the sight of a wounded horse or an over-loaded ass. The sight of a lobster boiled robbed him of his sleep and appetite for days.

He is affected by the sight, or the bare supposition, of a creature in pain, to a degree which I have never witnessed out of womankind. A constitutional acuteness to this class of sufferings may in part account for this. He animal tribe in particular he taketh under his especial protection. A broken-winded or spur-galled horse is sure to find an advocate in him. An over-loaded ass is his client for ever. He is the apostle to the brute kind - the never-failing friend of those who have none to care for them.

He felt he had done his bit for the welfare of the Negroes and animals, but was evidently failed in the implementation of the projects for their welfare. The consequence was that he lost the support of other members of the Relief Societies. However, Charles Lamb loves his cousin James Elia, in spite of all his inconsistencies.

Do I mention these seeming inconsistencies to smile at, or upbraid, my unique cousin? Marry, heaven, an all good manners, and the understanding that should be between kinsfolk, forbid! - With all the strange nesses of this strangest of the Elias - I would not have him in one jot or tittle other than he is; neither would

I barter or exchange my wild kinsman for the most exact, regular, and every way consistent kinsman breathing.

SAQ

Would you connect 'style' with the biographical details of an author's life ? (50 words)

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4.6 Style of Lamb's Essay

Charles Lamb perceived the English essay to be flexible enough to be used for various purposes. Hence the wide range and themes of his essays. What strikes a reader who comes to Lamb for the first time is the revelatory nature of his prose. Taking the reader into confidence, he talks without any hesitation, about his likes and dislikes, his preferences and aversions, his meditations and reflections. This constant preoccupation may be termed as egotistic, but it is this which lends to his essays a rare charm. his chief skill as an essayist is his ability to visualize memories - a vanished face, a hushed voice, recollected gesture, the memory of some treasured joy. The essays in which this feature of Lamb's essays comes out clearly are *Oxford in the Vacation*, *New Year's Eve*, *My Relations*, *Dream Children* and *A Dissertation Upon Roast pig*. An example of this aspect of Lamb's essay from *My Relations*:

His(James Elia) youth was fiery, glowing, tempestuous - and in age he discovereth no sympathy of cooling. This is that which I admire in him. I hate people who meet Time half way. I am for no compromise with that inevitable spoiler. While he lives, J.E. will take his swing - it does me good, as I walk towards the street of my daily avocation, on some fine May morning, to meet him marching in a quite opposite direction, with a jolly handsome presence, and shining sanguine face.

An important aspect of Lamb's prose is his humour and wit. It is this which in fact saves his essays from degenerating into mundane personal recollections and gives it its appeal and charm. *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig* is replete with humour which arises from the description of the origin of the art of roasting a pig. Similarly one is amused by the way in which he describes the chimney sweepers in *In Praise of Chimney-Sweepers* - "dim specked", "poor blots", "innocent black nesses", "young Africans of our growth". Allied to this is the pathos in his writing. He refused to be overwhelmed by melancholy induced by the morbid taint in his mind. He laughed to save himself from melancholy, but there are essays in which the note of sadness inevitable enters his composition. *Dream Children* is one such essay where Lamb concretizes a deeply felt paternal longing in the form of two imaginary children - Alice and John - in an imaginary marriage with Ann Simmons whom he had loved as a young man only to realize at the end of the essay that the whole thing was a dream, a reverie:

"and while I stood gazing, both the children grew gradually fainter to my view; receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the utmost distance, which without speech, strangely impressed upon me the the effects of speech: "We are not Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name" - and immediately awakening, I found myself quite seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep".

A striking feature of Lamb's essays is his ability to sketch humorous characters, most of them almost caricatures of people who were dear to him or his acquaintance. "My Relations" is replete with such portrayals. Some examples of character-sketches from "My Relations".

a. *I had an aunt, a dear and good one. She was one whom single blessedness had soured to the world. She often used to say, that I was the only thing in it which she loved; and, when she thought I was quitting it, she grieved over me with mother's tears.*

b. *James is an inexplicable cousin..... The genuine child of impulse, the frigid philosopher of prudence - the phlegm of my cousin's doctrine is invariably at war with his temperament, which is high sanguine. With always some fire-new project in his brain, J.E. is the systematic opponent of innovation, and crier down of everything that has stood the test of age and experiment.*

With regard to style, Lamb cannot be said to be truly modern. He was more aligned to the prose style of the seventeenth century, particularly Browne, Burton and Fuller incorporating into his style their quaintness. This explains why his style is so immediately unique and effective. His style moreover depends largely on his moods, sometimes it is of reflexive ness, at other times it could be one of pensiveness, or melancholy, or even of merriment. He was fond of coining words, loved to be alliterative, and enjoyed puns.

Richard Haven appropriately sums up Lamb's style:

The value of the essays does not lie only in their reflection of an interesting and appealing personality, in their charm of style, or in their pleasant and erudite eccentricities. Lamb was doing in prose something akin to what others, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, were doing in poetry, and his essays at their best exhibit an equally careful and artful poetic structure.

4.7 Critical Reception

Lamb's essays have, indeed, been universally extolled by reviewers since their initial appearance. While some scholars have considered Lamb's style imitative of earlier English writers, the majority now accept that quality as one of his distinctive hallmarks, along with his fondness for the obscure and other idiosyncrasies. In addition to the elegant prose of his essays, works that have delighted generations of readers, Lamb's critical writings testify to his versatility and insight, although some commentators have faulted his unsystematic critical method. During the nineteenth century, Lamb's collected writings tended to elicit highly polarized critical reactions. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Lamb's status as one of England's most beloved writers was affirmed, and today he is remembered as a perceptive critic and the finest practitioner of the familiar essay form in English. The "Elia" essays maintained their popularity until the 1930s, when Lamb's reputation suffered a near total reversal as critic, F. R. Leavis and his disciples reappraised the Elian style. The Leavisite critique echoed throughout academia, and Lamb's works ceased to be studied seriously by British scholars for several decades. By the mid 1960s, however, critics such as George Barnett and later Gerald Monsman undertook the process of rehabilitating Lamb's standing by producing detailed studies of his essays. The Charles Lamb Society and its quarterly publication, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, the main source of contemporary Lamb criticism, have assisted in this renewed interest and study of Lamb's works, covering such topics as Lamb's theories of drama, his poetry, and especially his "Elia" essays, whose

enduring humor and spontaneity continue to capture the imaginations of modern readers.

Check Your Progress

1. Enumerate the distinctive features Charles Lamb's 'Elia' use of language.
2. Point out the chief elements of Lamb's prose style.
3. Comment on the 'modern' elements of Lamb's character-sketches.

4.8 Glossary

Thomas a Kempis: The famous author of a Latin work called *De Imitatione Christi*, or *Imitation of Christ*. He was a German theologian.

Papistical tendency: A tendency to influence the reader in the direction of Roman Catholicism.

Sabbath: Day of rest and holiness for Jews from sunset on Friday to nightfall of the following day.

Chapel in Essex Street: Reference to the Unitarian Church opened in 1773.

Asperities in her constitution: Temperamental harshness.

Male aunts: A humorous phrase for uncles.

James and Bridget Elia: Names used for Lamb's brother John and sister Mary.

Primogenitur: First born child.

The pen of Yorick: The pen of Laurence Sterne (1713-1763), the author of the famous novel *Tristram Shandy*. He is also known for the novel *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

Dominichino: An Italian painter. Renowned as a leading practitioner of Baroque classicism in Rome and Bologna.

Quaker: Member of a Christian group which emphasizes the guidance of the Holy Spirit, rejects rites, and works for peace.

Cham of Tartary: A ruthless dictator. Allusion to Genghis Khan (1162-1227), leader of a combined force of Mongols and Turks.

collectively called Tartars.

A Claude or a Hobbima: A painting by Claude or by Hobbima. Claude was a French landscape painter, and Hobbima was a Dutch landscape painter of the seventeenth century.

Christie's and Phillip's: The names of two London auctioneers in London.

Pall-Mall: The name of a London street.

Madonna: Term used for the depiction of the Virgin Mary in the devotional and non-historical context.

Raphael: Master painter and architect of the Italian High Renaissance. Best known for his Madonnas and for his large figure compositions in the Vatican in Rome.

Lucca Giodano, Carlo Maratti: Names of inferior Italian painters of the seventeenth century.

Hallowmass: Another name for All Saints' Day, which commemorates all the saints of the church on November 1.

Thomas Clarkson: A philanthropist (1760-1846) who worked for the abolition of the Negro slave-trade.

4.9 Suggested Reading :

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2 Tave, Stuart. *The English Romantic Poets and Essayists: A Review of Research and Criticism*, ed. Carolyn Washburn Houtchens and Lawrence Huston Houtchens. New York: MLA, 1957.

3. Courtney, Winifred F. "Charles Lamb," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. vol 93 of *British Romantic Poets 1789-1832*, First Series. ed. John R. Greenfield. Detroit, New York, London: Gale, 1990.

4. Courtney, Winifred F. "Charles Lamb," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. vol 107 of *British Romantic Poets 1789-1832*, First Series. ed. John R. Greenfield. Detroit, New York, London: Gale, 1991. (On Lamb's later work)

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1. Haven, Richard. "The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb" *ELH* Vol 30. No.1 (March 1963).
2. Reiman, Donald H. "Thematic Unity in Lamb's Familiar Essays." *JEGP* 64 (1965): 470- 78. (the most important article on Lamb)
3. Tillotson, Geoffrey "The Historical Importance of Certain Essays of Elia." in *Some British Romantics*. ed. By James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye. Ohio State UP 1966. pp. 89-116.
4. Mulcahy, Daniel J. "Charles Lamb: The Antithetical Manner and the Two Planes." *SEL* 3 (Autumn 1963): 517-42. (A groundbreaking study)

Books:

1. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*,(Prism Books, Bangalore, 1993).
2. Benson,A.C. "The Art of the Essayist" in C.H. Lockett (ed) *The Art of the Essayist* (Harlow: Longman, 1949).
3. Barnett, George Leonard. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. Indiana UP 1964.
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Unit 5

Matthew Arnold

Contents :

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Author
- 5.3 The Context
- 5.4 Form of the Essay
- 5.5 Reading the Text
- 5.6 Critical Reception
- 5.7 Style of the Essay
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

This unit will help in introducing you to the Victorian non-fictional prose writing. Mathew Arnold's Preface to Poems (1853), reveals his mastery of prose and also his acute critical faculty. By the end of this unit you should be able to

- *read* Arnold's *Preface* with reference to his critical ideas
- *understand* the context of Arnold's writing
- *conceptualise* the influences of the industrial revolution and the loss of ideals and cultural values in Victorian literature and criticism
- *identify* the role of criticism in literature.

5.2 Introducing the Author

Mathew Arnold was born at Laleham in Middlesex in 1822. He was the son of Thomas Arnold, a noted Victorian and a man of letters. He was educated at *Winchester*, *Rugby* and *Balliol College* and finally

at *Oxford*. There he won the *Newdigate Prize* for poetry with "Cromwell". In 1845, he became a fellow of *Oriel College*. Soon he left the university and became the private secretary of Lord Lansdowne. In 1840, he traveled abroad. During that period he met Marguerite the Swiss girl who perhaps, features in most of his early lyrics. In 1851, he became an inspector of school. This post of honour gave him financial security. He married Frances Lucy Wightman in 1851. In 1858, Arnold became a professor of poetry at *Oxford*. Arnold is known for his poetry, prose and criticism. Above all he is famous as an advocate of culture. He died in 1888.

Arnold started his career as a poet with *The Strayed Reveller and other Poems* (1849) and ended with the publication of *New Poems* in 1867. Between these years he published *Empedocles on Etna, and other poems* (1852), *Poems* (1853), *Poems II Series* (1855) and *Merope*, a tragedy in verse (1858). In these volumes, he tried various poetic expressions like lyrics (*Dover Beach*), Poetic Drama (*Empedocles on Etna*), Narrative poem (*Sohrab and Rustum*), Elegy (*The Scholar Gipsy*) etc. Although Arnold derives much from classical literature, his poetry is frequently informed by *alienation, stoicism, despair and spiritual emptiness*.

Stop to Consider

Arnold's "*Dover Beach*" is often read as a vital document of the Victorian age reflecting the *Victorian rift* between faith and science. While it is considered to reflect his concerns for the lost world of values as a consequence of the industrial revolution, it also shows his 'classicism' and what can be called a sense of modern *angst*.

After joining *Oxford* as a Professor of Poetry in 1858, he started writing literary criticism. Arnold sought to deal with the problems of his age through a series of literary, political, religious and educational writings. As an Inspector of the schools, Arnold expressed the British and Continental pedagogical tendencies through a series of reports on differing educational problems. His writings were clear and marked by a strong sense of discipline. His educational writings put the case for a national instruction rising above local and political interests.

Arnold's educational writings are related to "the Rise of English". Arnold often suggested the establishment of an English Academy on the model of the French to regulate literary taste where education would be imparted in terms of the writings of the English writers. The great literary heritage of the English writers

was used as the model for 'Culture' while Arnold addressed the issue of 'Englishness'.

His first series *Essays in Criticisms* was published in 1865 and the second series was published posthumously in 1888. His *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) was a great work of prose. With *Saint Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875) and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877), Arnold participated in the theological controversies of the age.

There was thus a loss of ideals and cultural values and critics like Matthew Arnold, pondered over the role of literary criticism in the age. He felt that against the romantic criticism of the previous generation, criticism of his time must be drawn closer to life and make life nobler and better. Arnold believed literary criticism to be worthwhile, must serve the ends of life and promote a better understanding of cultural values and this brings about social regeneration.

Values in Criticism

The Victorians' search in literary criticism was a search for compromise. And in this, they were helped by certain foreign influences. The materialistic philosophy of Saint Simon and Auguste Comte, with their stress on facts and reality of the physical world reinforced the teaching of essence and undermined the Romantic and idealistic forces. This trend of socialism and matter-of-factness, which we witness in Victorian criticism was further supported and strengthened by the critical methods of the two French critics - Teins and Sainte Beuve. Both these critics emphasized the importance of the historical and biographical context for asserting a work of art. This method appealed to Arnold and other Victorian critics, for it was a sort of compromise between romantic license and neo-classical rigidity.

Arnold's criticism may conveniently be divided into- literary criticism and socio-ethical criticism. His literary criticism may further be divided into two categories-(1) Theoretical criticism and (2) practical criticism. His theoretical criticism is discussed largely in his *preface To the poems* (1853), *The Function of criticism at present Time; Essays in criticism and The study of poetry*. Both the series of *Essays in criticism* contain the essence of Arnold's literary criticism. The first series is a direct attack on what Arnold saw as the narrowness and provincialism of English speaking world and the English literary criticism in particular. Criticism, according to him, is not merely, 'judgment in literature'. He defines criticism as "a disinterested

Endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world and thus it establishes a current of fresh and true ideas". In the second series, Arnold underlines the nature and function of poetry. He tries to establish the importance of poetry in modern culture considering the fact that religion had failed because of its emphasis on its theological dogma. Arnold believed that poetry would displace religion since it exerts ethical pressures.

SAQ

How would you describe Arnold's values as literary critic? (50 words)

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5.3 The Context

The emergence of the "Spasmodics", (a term coined by Charles Kingsley) the group of poets which included P. J. Bailey, Sydney Dobell, and Alexander Smith resulted in the production of a kind of poetry which held poetry to be the expression of "the state of one's own mind in striking language. Leading to utter dissatisfaction on the part of Arnold this newly emergent poetry gave birth to an extravagance of thought emotion on the one hand, and to an excess of ornamentations on the other. In other words, it could be said that they simply expressed the 'doubts, disputes, distractions (and) fears' of their age in a bombastic language. It was in the context of combating this Spasmodic tendency, to which Arnold himself had fallen a victim, that he had felt the necessity of writing this Preface. Although widely read, the poem *Empedocles on Aetna* (1852) was omitted from his next edition of poems in 1853. And in the Preface Arnold informs his readers why he had done that. According to Arnold, the hero Empedocles in the poem, who ends his life by jumping into the volcano Aetna, "*does nothing but suffer; and suffering that finds no vent in action is not a fit subject for poetry: for all art is dedicated to joy*" and to Arnold, the joy that poetry imparts is dependent on its

subject. The Spasmodics believed that the classical subjects had little validity in the modern age and they need to be replaced by modern subjects and concerns. However Arnold thought otherwise. He believed that "*the business of the poets is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure they are capable of feeling.*" Perhaps, that is why he expresses his indebtedness to the classical writers including Shakespeare.

SAQ

How would you understand the significance of Arnold's concerns against the Spasmodic tendencies of his time? (60 words)

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5.4 Form of the Essay

Although Arnold is known more for his poetic writings his essays too divert the attention of the critics and readers. At a time when he was losing faith on the function of literature in his contemporary time he found an adequate vehicle to discuss the contemporary issues in terms of his essays. By Arnold's time, the form of the essay underwent tremendous modifications. It became more argumentative, more critical and more illustrative. Recent developments in science and democracy brought contemporary writers closer to men giving them a chance to ponder over the condition of the society and its inhabitants. Arnold found the essay to be the most influential means to talk about his concerns on literature and society.

5.5 Reading the Text

In his *Preface* to the 1853 edition of poems Arnold tries to justify his move to exclude the poem "*Empedocles on Etna*" from it. The choice

of the 'subject' in the poems remain the chief focus of the *Preface*. He remains prescriptive in his *Advertisement to the Second Edition of Poems* in 1854. However, he expresses his doubt, whether these criteria can be applied to lyric poems too. Instead of romantic fancifulness and fascination he advocates a poetry that emphasizes 'action'. It is this idea of 'action' that adds to our knowledge. No 'action' means no knowledge. It is because of this reason that he excludes the poem "*Empedocles on Etna*". Arnold puts forward a number of arguments bringing the great names of the classical world to justify his move.

"Empedocles on Etna"

In the poem "*Empedocles on Etna*" there are three major characters. Empedocles, the philosopher poet afflicted by the feelings of exile; Callicles, a young poet and their physician friend Pausanias. At the opening of the poem we found Empedocles moving to the top of Mount Etna and restraints of his friend Pausanias prove to be a failure. Callicles is singing and trying to specify Etna with his tale but in vain., then starts the discussion on the gradual decline of the society and civilization. Empedocles, on finding that the route of his feeling of estrangement lies deep within himself, he jumps into the volcano from the top of Etna. At the end of the poem Callicles, descends the mountain, singing of Apollo.

Arnold's admiration for the world of classical literature is intricately related with his ideas of poetic creation, choice of subject and the nature of expression. He starts the essay by citing the reasons necessary for the exclusion of the poem *Empedocles on Etna* from his present collection and he clarifies the point that the antiquity of the subject is not responsible for its exclusion nor his failure to delineate the feelings of the great philosopher. The absence of action which fails to add to our knowledge and where "suffering finds no vent in action" and the depiction of the state of endless endurance, are the reasons behind the removal of these poem. Lamenting over the loss of the poetic ideals of the Greek masters, Arnold launched his arguments favouring "the calm, the cheerfulness and the disinterested objectivity" of the ancient masters. His ideas are comparative in nature as the classical and the modern world coalesce to formulate his principles. The fragmentation of the modern world fails to capture the sense of wholeness and the uniformity aimed and achieved in classical literature.

The 'modern' element

The idea of the modern: The word 'modern' carries for Arnold the meaning of any period in history in which the critical and creative intelligence is capable of truly interpreting the past and the present.

Following Aristotle, Arnold discusses the idea of poetic pleasure which every representations or imitation appealing "mankind at large" must aim to achieve. Every representation must "add to our knowledge of any kind" and possesses the necessary qualities to have a pleasurable experience and inspire and rejoice the reader. Imitation can 'infuse delight' only when it is 'particular, precise and firm' and poets are the harbingers of happiness. So, happiness is the highest enjoyment and Arnold opines " the more tragic the situation , the deeper becomes the enjoyment". Empedocles on Etna fails to fulfill the above mentioned aims and it is therefore excluded from Arnold's collection. The hallmark of great art is the ability to increase men's happiness and enrich our understanding of life. Arnold protests against the categorization of the classical masters as the inhabitants of an 'exhausted past' and tries to establish their position in terms of the exploration of the elementary feelings existing independent of time and place. To explain 'human actions, possessing an inherent interest in themselves' are the 'eternal objects of poetry' and the task of the poet is to communicate the elementary passion common to the human race to the reader in an effective manner. So, the medium of communication and the poet together try to achieve the wholeness characterizing great poetry. Arnold concentrates on the training of the poets as a good soul can only create eternal poetry. The first duty of the poet is to select an excellent action depicting 'primary human affections' and here Arnold cites the examples of Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido to justify his point. In comparison to Hermann and Dorothea , Child Harold, Jocelyn, "The Excursion", the books of Illiad, the episodes of Dido are replete with greater actions and nobler personages and more intense situation. Though he critiqued the modern writers, Arnold recognizes the difficulty of achieving the past experience completely and offers a solution. The business of the modern poets is to deal with the inward man.

Emphasizing 'action' rather than passive suffering Arnold distinguishes the ancients from the moderns in terms of the idea of total impressions. He rightly argues that the time factor is not important to judge the merit of the work and the proper co-ordination between the matter and the expression yield the expected results. The idea of 'Wholeness' is an important part of Arnold's classicism and he opines " *They regarded the whole; we regard the parts. With them, the action*

predominated over the expression of it; with us, the expression predominates over the action". This is the reason behind their selection of a limited range of subjects as the classical writers aimed to move the permanent elements of human nature.

Stop to Consider

Grand style: In his book *On Translating Homer*, Arnold tried to offer a remedy for an evil creeping into English life and poetry which he termed Americanism. This signified a meanness of spirit. According to Arnold, Homer's writing was just the need of the day. He was the master of Grand style. The Grand Style arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject. This indirectly indicated at the sublimity in poetry. Arnold finds only three masters of the Grand style-Homer, Milton and Dante. Arnold advises English readers who does not know Greek and Latin, to form an idea of the style of Homer and other poets of antiquity from the poetry of Milton, who has acquired the power and charm of the writings of the great classical masters.

Touchstone Method: A stone used to determine the worth of a metal. The word was introduced into literary criticism by Arnold in *"The Study of Poetry (1830)"* to refer to short and distinctive passages, selected from the writings of the greatest poets which he used to determine the excellence of passages or poems which are compared to them.

"Occasional bursts of fine writing" and the "shower of isolated thoughts and images" characterize the modern age whereas the Greek playwrights prefer the idea of an organic whole in their composition. Citing the examples from the world of classical literature, Arnold shows how the great masters distinguish between the subject matters of comedy and tragedy. Tragedy was viewed as the highest artistic form. Presenting contemporary ideas from a detached perspective, they selected the grand, serious, self-sufficient subjects for tragedy and reserve the rest for the comic writers. This kind of categorization is only possible when the entire action is imprinted on one's mind and here lies the difference between two eras: The theory and practice of poetic ideals coalesce in classical criticism but the modern critic aims at "False aims" and "False practice" as he departs from the notion of intrinsic permanence. Classical criticism helped to prepare the ground for the continuation of the literature while the modern age is lagging behind in this regard as the writers are just producing fragments. Citing Sidney Dobell's dictum "*A true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history; the poet is told, is perhaps the highest thing that one can attempt in the way of poetry*". Arnold pronounces the idea of the romantic mode of self-expression and laments for the lack of proper guidance available to the modern writers

tormented by the multiplicity of voices aiming to formulate and reformulate the nature of the poetic self "The confusion of the present times is great, the multitude of voices counseling different things bewildering, the number of existing works capable of attracting a young writers attention and of becoming his models, immense: what he wants is a hand to guide him through the confusion." The necessity of having a model is highlighted by Arnold, as only the model can help to essentialise the merit of the work. The fragmentary nature of the contemporary age can be reduced with the help of the classical writers and the aim of the contemporary writers is to achieve this sense of excellence. Arnold laments the absence of a proper model to act as a shaping spirit for the English writers in terms of their intellectual endeavour and select Shakespeare as the guide. But Shakespeare's greatness is tinged with the risk of being carried away and producing a mere fragmented imitation. Expression should be made subordinated to action and the prioritization of action coupled with the idea of architectonice ie. "The power of execution which creates forms, and constitute.." contributes to the desired effect. Blind imitation involves a danger and Arnold chooses the example of Keats's *Isabella*, or the *Pot of Basil* to justify his argument. Though the poet here tries to depict an excellent action, the incoherent construction makes it "a perfect treasure-house of graceful and felicitous words and images". Arnold here warns against the dangers involved in the process of blind representation and the idea of wholeness informs his theorization as the imitators of Shakespeare appreciate his talent partially neglecting his other excellence. The fragmentary nature of Keats's work results from his failure to unite the constituents into an uniform whole and Empedocles on Etna also fails to capture the sense of wholeness. Selection of an appropriate subject with the proper sense of structuring, leads to the desired effect and deviation from these ideas result in failure. Arnold takes the example of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the effect the blind imitation of his expression on the generation of readers. The language of *King Lear* is "so artificial, so curiously tortured, and so difficult" that meaning cannot be comprehended from the expression. So, Arnold claims that the ancients are the better guides than Shakespeare.

5.6 Critical Reception

Rene Wellek views Arnold as a historical critic working with a historical scheme in his mind. He is right when he says that Arnold "almost single handedly pulled English criticism out of the doldrums into which it had fallen after the great Romantic Age." Critics often try to find out the inconsistency between the terms 'learn' and 'propagate' in his definition of criticism and its practice, on the ground that the

missionary endeavour involves a betrayal of "disinterestedness" (Douglas Bush). While critics like Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and their followers used Arnolds Hellenism, his plea for disinterestedness, antipathy for Philistinism as the sanction to withdraw from the practical world to a world of aesthetic sensibility .T.S Eliot biased view of Arnold and the views of I.A Richards, F.R Leavis and Lionel Trilling add to the critical receptions surrounding Arnold. According to Douglas Bush. "Eliot, who combined qualified respect for Arnold with a particularly religious hostility, had a partly similar classical and European outlook, a similar comparative method and similar felicity in the persuasive use of quotations, a similar urbanity of style and tone; his more specific criticism has more subtlety than Arnold's and also more dogmas."

The relationship with Arnold resulted in Leavis's great emphasis on the moral force of literature and I.A. Richards also responded to Arnold's doctrines of psychological criticism. Lionel Trilling carried on Arnold's moral social concerns to the modern context.

Arnold's desire to represent an ideal of cultural and literacy humanism coupled with the 'institutionalization' of literacy criticism in the academy make him "virtually the founding father of modern criticism in the English speaking world". (Lionel Trilling) Arnolds excellence as a poet and critic invites various reactions from the critics and literary theorists. For example, Joseph Carroll finds the term "disinterestedness" to be the most violently disputed word in the Arnoldian lexicon and other theorists from the 1970s question Arnold's idea of the critics role and the procedures applied. For example, Terry Eagleton the marxist critic tries to launch the idea of Arnold's alignment with the establishment i.e. state power and the privileged classes in his stress on 'timeless truths' Stanley Fish's reader response criticism, on the other hand "denies the possibility of disinterested" objective perceptions. For Arnold , culture is a study of perfection selective harmonious and valuable in the context of the working of the society. Unlike the critics (Antonio Gramsci Stuart Hall, Edward Said). Arnold does refuses to visualize culture as the instrument of social and political control. His emphasis on the "free plain of mind defined radically by the later post-structuralist thinkers like Derrida.

5.7 Style of the Essay

R.A. Scott James proclaimed, "*Arnold's position in English was comparable with that of Aristotle in respect of the wide influence he exercised, the mark he impressed upon criticism, and the blind faith with which he was trusted by his Votaries*". What were the

causes of Arnold's success? First of all, Arnold had a manner and a style completely alien to England and which could be perfectly adapted to the art of criticism. It was a style that kept the writer and the reader at a sufficient distance from each other to allow room for the object for thoughtful considerations. Arnold's prose was sinuous and highly modulated, permitting every modification that exactness required.

5.8 Glossary

Mr. Hallam: Historian Henry Hallam (1779-1859) who wrote *Introduction To The Literature of Europe*.

King Lear: One of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare. First performed in 1605-06. depicts the tragic end of king Lear and his three daughters, Cordelia, Goneril and Regan.

Antigone: A tragedy by Sophocles. Antigone was the daughter of Oedipus the king of Thebes. The play deals with the conflicting obligations of the civic and the personal loyalties and religious mores.

Pittacus: One of the seven wise men of the ancient Greece. He is known to the world for his courage and wisdom.

Niebuhr: A German historian (1776-1831). He started a new era of historical studies by his method of source criticism. His *History of Rome* is a very important document of Roman culture and society. Though he contributed largely to the value of social and agrarian problems some of his theories were extravagant and misleading.

Persae: A Greek tragedy by Aechylus produced in 472BC. It is about the Greek victory over the Persian invaders.

Polybius: A Roman historian and statesman. He wrote how with their advantageous fortune the Romans come to be known as one of the prominent civilizations of the world.

Menander: Master of Greek new comedy. He wrote more than 100 plays but only 8 were successful in Athenian Drama Festival.

Fairie Queene: *Faerie Queene* Spenser's masterpiece published in 1590-1609. the plan was for twelve volumes but he could complete only six dealing with six different virtues surrounding the life of

5.10 Suggested Readings:

Romeo and Juliets: A play by William Shakespeare published in 1594-95, one of the famous love stories of the world between Romeo, the hero and Juliet the heroine.

Othello: A play by Shakespeare published in 1604-05. it is about the courage, intelligence and honour of the Moorish General Othello.

Architectonice: Goethe expressed this view in the Essay Concerning The So-called Dilettantism (1799).

Isabella:- Keats's poem in ottava rima published in 1820. the story is drawn from Bocassio's *Decameron*. It is about the fatal love affair of Isabella and Lorenzo.

Endymion: A poetic Romance by Keats published in 1818. it is divided into four 1000 lines sections, and its verse is composed in loose rhymed couplets. It deals with Diana's love for Endymion.



Unit 6

Virginia Woolf

Contents :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introducing the Author
- 6.3 The Context
- 6.4 Form of the Essay
- 6.5. Reading the Text
- 6.6 Style of Woolf's Essay
- 6.7 Critical Reception
- 6.8 Glossary
- 6.9 Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives

In this unit, you will be introduced to the essay *How It Strikes A Contemporary* by Virginia Woolf. Here you will get an overview of the English literary and social scene during the end of the 19th and the first half the 20th century. Moreover, this unit will help you

- *appreciate* the intellectual climate of the time.
- *understand* the various aspects of modernist art and literature.
- *asses* Woolf's literary and artistic achievements.
- *appreciate* Woolf as a pioneering prose writer of English literature
- *understand* Woolf's idea of art and artistic creation.

6.2 Introducing the Author



Virginia Woolf was born into a highly cultured and educated family of London on January 26, 1882. Her father Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-1904) was a renowned scholar. Woolf grew up in an atmosphere that stimulated various intellectual pursuits that encouraged debate. She was one of the six sisters but she had close attachment with her sister Vanessa and her brother Toby. Her mother died when she was just thirteen. Toby's premature death at the age of twenty-five had a profound effect on her works. Virginia could not attend regular school because of her indifferent health and was taught at home mainly by her father. The influence of her father on her life was remarkable. He was already an established scholar with his books like *History of English Thought in Eighteenth Century and Science of Ethics*. It was mainly from her father that she derived her love and enthusiasm for literature. It was obvious that in such an intellectually stimulating environment she naturally developed the craft of writing.

Virginia's father encouraged her to develop the habit of walking through the streets, parks and squares of London. This habit helped to stimulate her creativity. The experience she had during her long walks probably gave impetus to the dominant image of London that crowds most of her novels.

Virginia's family had the freedom of forming an independent perception or point of view of life. This had an important shaping influence on her writings. She wrote in her memoirs about her father's lessons regarding reading and writing. She said that her father taught her the art of reading and the aim was "to read what one liked because one liked it, never to pretend to admire what one did not". Similarly, Stephen's lesson in the art of writing was "to write in the fewest possible words, as clearly as possible, exactly what one meant".

After the death of her father in 1904, she shifted to a rented house in the Bloomsbury district of London with Vanessa, Toby and Adrian. This house became the centre of the "Bloomsbury Group" of intellectuals. Her popularity was centered on her position as a key figure in the Bloomsbury Group. Truly speaking, Virginia Woolf came from the intellectual and elite class of the 20th century. The members of the Bloomsbury Group were mostly scholars from Cambridge.

Stop to Consider

You should also know about important scholars from this group to obtain some ideas of Virginia Woolf's literary counterparts. Lytton Strachey, famous for the

biography. *Eminent Victorians*, and J.M. Keynes, a famous economist, played an important role in developing Woolf's views. Interaction with these scholars stimulated both her creative and critical faculty.

After the death of Toby in 1906 and the marriage of Vanessa with Clive Bell in 1907, Virginia and Adrian moved to 29 Fitzroy Square. She married Leonard Woolf, a Bloomsbury socialist thinker who went to Ceylon to take up a post in the Civil Service in 1904. Virginia announced her engagement with him in 1912, not long after his return. Books, the sea and the city, fascinated Virginia Woolf. Just two years after her marriage in the World War I broke out in 1914. The war had a devastating impact on human life. The sense of security was lost forever after the war. The overwhelming and unexpected effect of the War affected the sensitive mind of Virginia. She began to suffer from constant fits of depression and could never recover from this mental breakdown.

Leonard and Virginia Woolf were more interested in printing than publishing which led them to the establishment of the Hogarth Press in 1917. They lived at Hogarth House, Richmond near Lewes in Sussex. With her growing reputation as a writer and her pleasant holidays in London, her married life seemed to be a happy one. But it was a pity that she found it impossible to continue living in this world. The World War II destroyed her will to live. She suffered from mental instability. In a state of extreme mental instability she committed suicide by drowning herself in the river Ouse, near her residence on March 28th, 1941.

Woolf's reputation as a writer is subject to controversy. She was one of the chief exponents of the modernist movement and she rejected the principle of conventional realism in her writing. She began her writing career in 1905 by writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, and she continued to write novels, essays and criticism for the rest of her life. *The Voyage Out*, published in 1920, was her first novel. *Night and Day* was published in 1919. These two were conventional novels that dealt with family relationships in a straightforward way. In her next four novels - *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), she became increasingly experimental and innovative. Her fiction turned away from charting external actions of the characters to registering their private thoughts and feelings. She captured the flow of experience from a subjective viewpoint. She is considered to be a pioneer of the 'stream of consciousness' technique, which she perfected in her novels.

The last two of the four experimental novels mentioned above are usually considered to be her most successful achievements. *To the*

Light House, The Years (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1928) were more traditional, though she still used symbolism to bring out the little incidents of human life with a literary value. *Orlando* (1928) was a composite work - partly critical. The more formal literary criticism was published in two Volumes - *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Common Reader, 2nd series* (1932). In these essays she expressed her philosophy of creative writing.

SAQ

You should be able to see how the writer's life affected her writing and her prose-style. What was the effect on her choice of subjects? (40 words)

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How would you judge the technical innovations she was concerned with? (40 words)

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Virginia Woolf's talent as an essayist is now being recognized and her role as one of the founders of feminist literary criticism is being acknowledged. She was concerned with the rights of women and especially the women writers. This is clearly enunciated in *A Room Of One's Own* (1931). *Flesh* (1933), which dealt with the life of

Elizabeth Barret Browning, was another experiment in the field of fictional biography. Her other Volumes of Essays and criticism came under the titles- *Three Guineas* (1938), *The Death of the Moth* (1950), *The Captain's Death Bed* (1950), *Granite and Rainbow etc.* Virginia Woolf discussed the position of the women writers and other related issues in her essay "*Women and Fiction*". Her *Collected Essays* was published in 1966. Her "*Letters*" was published between 1975 and 1980. These letters help us to understand her personal relationships with some of the people around her. The diary of Virginia Woolf was published between 1977 and 1984. It faithfully records her experiences, feelings, thoughts and her philosophy of life. *Moment of Being* (1976), was a piece of autobiographical writing. Her stories were collected in *A Haunted House* (1943).

6.3 The Context

How It Strikes a Contemporary was first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1923. The essay was written as a part of a discussion of the merits of literary appreciation which indirectly also dealt with the issue of scholarship and intellectual engagements. Moreover, this essay can also be contextualized in a kind of questioning of the various prevalent methods of critical judgment employed by some of her contemporaries. In her introduction to *The Common Reader: First series*, Woolf makes it clear that it is the job of the critic and the literary historian to enlighten the 'common reader'. But when the critic fails to come forward with a clear verdict about the nature of the literary work it may create two possible problems. (a) the reader has to face uncertainty about the critical acumen of the reviewer and (b) the writer too is unsure about the justness of the reception. It is in this context that Woolf also comments

"It is equally disconcerting to the reader who wishes to take his bearings in chaos of contemporary literature and to the writer who has a natural desire to know whether his work, produced with infinite pains, is likely to burn forever among the fixed luminaries of English letters or, on the contrary, to put out the fire."

"Bloomsbury"

'Bloomsbury' represented a style, a passion for intelligence, a taste for beauty and truth. Members were considered narcissistic yet independent elite. It represented the post-Victorian, cosmopolitan, experimental modern writers and thinkers. Their interest was confined not just to right and printing, but in philosophy, politics, economics, interior design and sex.

6.4 Form of the Essay

Twentieth-century essay was more akin to conversation or letter writing than to the treatise of the earlier age. Thus, expression of the personality of the author was the most important factor. "Interrogation" seemed to be the dominant spirit of 20th century. This spirit was not limited to the sphere of interrogating the older certainties but also expanded to the realm of the art of expression. Essay in this century became a vehicle of expressing the writer's personal observations, contours of their individuality and changes of their experiences. Subjectivity turned out to be an important element. There was less restraint and more freedom as artlessness was practiced with the result that the modern essay had much wider variety of subjects and was more entertaining than the counterpart in the past. The triumph of modern English prose consisted in the skillful use of short sentences. Instead of elaborate expressions loaded with rhetoric, simplicity of word and phrase was the idea. The increase in the numbers of 'Daily' papers, weekly and monthly periodicals in 20th century afforded almost unlimited scope for the essayists. Moreover, it became more difficult to draw a line between essays on less ephemeral topic, more literary in style and that of a more personal nature.

In the realm of non-fictional prose, Virginia Woolf readdressed the issue of the genre by suggesting that external structuring of events was not adequate to justify the complexities of modern experience. For this purpose, she found the Victorian mode of narration insufficient and moved to organize her own narrative and stylistic framework. It was a common thought that the primary end of an essay was persuasion. Virginia Woolf, as a writer of the non-fictional prose belonged to that category of writers who had points to make and who could really lead the readers to thoughtful contemplation.

SAQ

What are the chief characteristics of the modern essay? (50 words)

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How do 'modern' complexities shape the essay (in terms of structure, presentation, or style)? (50 words)

What kind of form, do you think, is advocated by Woolf? (40 words)

6.5 Reading the Text

Woolf begins her essay by highlighting the hypocritical attitude of the contemporary critics who consider modern writing as mere wasting of time. In this thought provoking essay Virginia Woolf deals with the contemporary reading and writing habits of the public. She analyses some of the difficulties faced by the common reader to appreciate and understand recent literature. In her attempt to reflect on the changing trends of criticism and in search of the perfect critic, Woolf throws sufficient light on contemporary literature and makes an unprecedented assessment of the tendencies and aesthetic parameters of the culture of the time.

Woolf is very much conscious about the fact that the past world of writers like Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold is no longer available now. And one of the basic tenets of the first part of the essay is that the critic's activity must be socially reliable and fulfill the purpose of literary appreciation. But she also expresses her sympathy for the dismayed and often disconcerted reader whose assessments contradict the judgments passed by well-known critics on the same piece of

writing. Referring to the readers about the great critics of the past - Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold, who could judge their contemporary works in the true sense of the term, she argues that although they had committed errors in their critical practices, they could easily adhere to the standards and principles of literary judgments by which they were able leave their mark of authority on their reviews. Woolf's reservation on the contemporary critics of art is summed up in one particular statement: "*Reviewers we have, but no critics*".

Woolf does not mention anything about the destitution of art in the present time in so far as the literary output is concerned and declares that the modern age "*is an age of fragments. A few stanzas, a few page, a chapters, here and there, the beginning of the Novel, the end of that, are equal to the best of any age or author*". In her discussions of the 'contemporary' Woolf is seen to move from the critic to the text. Compared to the preceding centuries the twentieth is a 'fragmented' age and classics of the bygone ages are almost not possible today. But does it simply conceptualize a fall of quality or does it refer to another 'reading' of history that retells the fact that classics in the conventional sense is not possible? The modern age, as Woolf elaborates in her essay is one where the various technological advancement was changing the patterns of life drastically. The influence of modernity on contemporary life and literature also brought in transformations in human being's outlook towards cultural activity itself. The change in the areas of interests and the willingness of the writers to experiment at the cost of their own popularity leaves Woolf accepting the challenge that confronted the literary artists. So, when Woolf describes her 'contemporary' age as one that is rich because its writers have attempted to nullify the influence of the 'canonical', she is also acknowledging the fact that the modern period was one of intense experimentation. Becomes clear when we read that

"No age can have been more rich than ours in writers determined to give expressions to the differences which separate them from the past and not to the resemblances which connect them with it."

Woolf, despite her dismal predicament is not a defeatist in her attitude and with typical Edwardian mellowness admits that "*life is not all together lacking in colour*". She reminds the reader that life has its own romance and a zest for living. Woolf believes that modern literature "*With all its imperfectness*" has a curiously fascinating hold over the reader. She points out that the remoteness of the past is one of the main forces behind the creation of new literature. This is precisely the reason why the twentieth century has to break new grounds and articulate a different language for its artistic and literary sensibilities.

Innovation carries the risk of producing what Woolf chooses to call "*transitory splendours*" and she warns the reader of the mistaken action of genius and mastery. The dilemma that Woolf investigates was that -

"They cannot make a world because they are not free of other human beings. They cannot tell stories because they do not believe that stories are true. They cannot generalize".

Woolf began writing professionally in 1905, initially for the *Times Literary Supplement* with a journalistic piece about Haworth, home of the Bronte family. In 1912 she married Leonard Woolf, a writer, civil servant and political theorist. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915 by her half-brother's imprint, Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd. Much of her work was self-published through the Hogarth press which she and Leonard founded in 1917. She has been hailed as one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century and one of the foremost *Modernist*, though she disdained some artists in this category. Woolf is considered one of the greatest innovators in the English language. In her works she experimented with **stream-of-consciousness**, the underlying psychological as well as emotional motives of characters, and the various possibilities of fractured narrative and chronology. In the words of E.M. Forster she pushed the English language "*a little further against the dark*," and her literary achievements and creativity are influential even today.

This artistic crisis results in new artistic growth and consequently, new flux of experience demands a new vision of consciousness which is unlike that of our predecessors and perhaps that is why the contemporary literature is quite unlike anything in the past. A central figure of the Bloomsbury group and the harbinger of literary modernism, Woolf takes stock of experimentation with the narrative method and suggests that caution is necessary. Quoting Arnold's famous criticism of the contemporary in his celebrated essay "*The Study of Poetry*", she warns of the passionate involvement of the critics with their own literature and declares quite explicitly that the contemporary writers have a long way to go before they are able to create such masterpieces like the "*Illiad*" and "*Odyssey*". She does not deny that the present is significant in that it stimulates better works as she sums up - "*It is from the note books of the present that the masterpieces of the future are made*". Finally, Woolf confesses that criticism is a difficult task and therefore she appeals to critics to generously encourage new promising authors as they must not be "sparing of those wreath and coronets". *How it Strikes a Contemporary* is an honest revelation of the present day reality of the writer's world, and it carves out parameters of healthy criticism. In an appealingly fresh manner Woolf transcends the vulgar limitations and simplicities of realism to

make way for a nobler, higher awareness more true to the fact of life and the order of modern consciousness.

Check Your Progress

1. "Reviewers we have but no critic; a million competent and incorruptible policemen but no judge." - Discuss the validity of the statement in the context of the essay.
2. Discuss Woolf as a critic of art and literature of her time in the light of the essay.
3. What characteristics of the modern essay do you find in this prose-piece?

6.6 The Style of Woolf's Essay

Although known more for her fictions, Virginia Woolf also gathered reputation as a major essayist in the early part of the 20th century. Most of the time, her essays are overtly critical because of their provocative and argumentative nature. However, this does not mean that these essays are highly obscure. In the essay called "The Modern Essay", Woolf herself lays down her style and principle of essay-writing by saying,

"the principle which controls the essay is simply that it should give pleasure; the desire which impels us when we take it from the shelf is simply to receive pleasure. Everything in an essay must be subdued to that end. It should lay us under a spell with its first word, and we should only wake, refreshed with its last."

But apart from pleasure the revelation of the subject matter to be discussed in its proper context is also the main concern for Woolf. Hence, her essays are marked by a sense of interaction between the writer and the reader and self reflexivity.

6.7 Critical Reception

Virginia Woolf is an important name in the history of modern criticism and critics, throughout the ages have tried to find out the sources of her creative inspiration. Her sexuality, class position, madness, desire to present the economic details of women's lives add to the controversial reputation she has as a modern writer. The criticism

of Woolf reflects the important changes in the realm of twentieth century critical practices. Her inclusion in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) confirms Woolf's canonization as a modernist and the early feminist criticism often dismisses her ideas of femininity. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) is an example of this approach. Jane Marcus's edited collection *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (1981) and *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant* (1983) restored the lost position of Woolf and Toril Moi's *Textual/ Sexual Politics* (1985) established her reputation. Contrasting Anglo-American feminisms' craving for realism with French feminism's interest in textuality she offered a re-reading of Woolf's style. The recent *Gay and Lesbian Studies* aims to focus new attention to the relationship between Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, a fellow writer which resulted in a period of great productivity and creativity in Woolf's writings. Other significant studies in the area of Woolf's reception include Elizabeth Abel's *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (1989) and Pamela Coughie's *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism* (1991).

6.8 Glossary

Robert Elsmere: A novel by Mary Arnold (1851-1920) published in 1888 and known for its didactic tone. It was a popular novel of her time.

Stephen Phillips: (1864-1915) A minor playwright who wrote a number of blank-verse plays with a little popular appeal. 'Herod', 'Ulysses', 'Nero' is a few of his plays.

Flaubert: Gustav Flaubert (1821-1880) A well known French novelist. Flaubert is famous for his realistic and convincing narrative style.

Conrad: Joseph Conrad was a Poland born English novelist. His novels, often sets in sea, place human beings in a testing situation. 'Heart of Darkness' and 'Lord Jim' are two among his noteworthy novels.

Waverly: A novel by Sir Walter Scott published in 1814

The Excursion: A poem by William Wordsworth published in 1814. Originally this poem was written as a part of a longer poem 'The Recluse' which was never completed.

Don Juan: A long and satirical poem of Lord Byron published during 1819-24.

Pride and Prejudice: First novel by Jane Austen published in 1813.

Proetheus Unbound: A lyric drama by Shelly published in 1820.

Mr. Davies: William Henry Davies (1871-1940), was a Welsh poet. His poems are famous for simple description of Nature.

Walter De La Mare: Walter De La Mare (1873-1956), was an English author. He is well known for his fantasies and children verse.

Mr. Beerbohm: (1872-1956) An English caricaturist. He is known as a critic of theatre. His only novel 'Zuleika' (1911) is a fantasy set in Oxford.

Far away and Long ago: An autobiography of Henry Hudson published in 1918.

Somnolence: sleepiness.

Lady Hester Stanhope: Daughter of Charles Stanhope. She settled in Lebanon and gained reputation as prophetess with the local tribesmen.

6.9 Suggested Reading

1. Marsh, Nicholas; 'Virginia Woolf. The Novels', Macmillan, London, 1988.
2. Das, S.N.(ed.); 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' in 'Selection of English Essays', Bina Library, Guwahati, 1999.
3. Bradbury, Malcom and McFarlane, James; '*Modernism: A guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*', Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991.
4. Bradbury, Malcom; 'The Atlas of Literature', London, De Agostini Edition, 1996.
5. Ousby, Ian (edt.); *Companion to Literature in English*, Wordsworth reference, Great Britain, 1988-94.
6. Trevelyan, G.M.; 'English Social History', Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986.



Unit 7

Rabindranath Tagore

Contents :

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introducing the author
- 7.3 The Context
 - 7.3.1 Brief history of Nationalism
 - 7.3.2 Nationalism and the Indian Context
- 7.4 Form of the Essay
- 7.5 Reading the Text
- 7.6 Critical Reception
- 7.7 Style of the Essay
- 7.8 Glossary
- 7.9 Suggested Readings

7.1 Objectives

In this unit, you will be introduced to an essay written by Rabindranath Tagore. You will also get an overview of the Indian writing in English during the first half the 20th century along with an idea of the social and intellectual climate of the period. This unit is designed to make you understand the origin, ramifications and adaptations of the term 'nationalism'. After the end of the unit you will be able to-

- *appreciate* the intellectual climate of Tagore's time.
- *understand* the various manifestations of the idea of nationalism.
- *recognize* the value of Rabindranath Tagore as a major Indian prose writer..
- *comprehend* Tagore's idea of nationalism.
- *read* the prescribed text in the light of these new perspectives.

7.2 Introducing the Author



Rabindranath Tagore
(A portrait)

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a poet, a novelist, a playwright, a composer, and a spiritual leader is best known as the winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature and as one of India's greatest modern poets. He also embodied many of the deepest religious and political tensions of colonial India. His friend E. J. Thompson said that Tagore had a kind of dual soul, torn between his love of solitude, contemplation, and art and his commitment to social action.

Tagore was born in Kolkata to a wealthy Bengali Brahmin family. He was the son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader in the influential Hindu reform movement known as the *Brahmo Samaj* and a key figure of the "Bengal Renaissance" of the nineteenth century. Although, later he became critical of the movement, the universalistic and humanistic ideals of the *Brahmo Samaj* had a lasting impact on Rabindranath Tagore's thought. His mother Sarada Devi died when Tagore was very young. Tagore's grandfather had established a huge financial empire for himself. Tagore felt that there should be wider opportunities for education across the country (especially in rural areas where schools were few). He believed that the schools themselves should be more lively and enjoyable. He himself had dropped out of school early, largely out of boredom and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He wrote extensively on how schools should be made more attractive to boys and girls and thus more productive. His own co-educational school at Santiniketan had many progressive features. The emphasis here was on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence.

Tagore had inborn poetic gifts and composed his first piece at the age of eight. He was not, however, a spirit to be restrained by conventional educational institutions, and he left school at fourteen to study at home. Though a lover of the great Sanskrit poets like

Kalidasa and his devotional lyrics, Tagore was also deeply influenced by nineteenth-century English poets, especially by the English Romantics like John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose reverence for nature and the creative artist can be seen throughout Tagore's work.

In 1883, Tagore married Mrinalini Devi Raichaudhuri with whom he had two sons and three daughters. In 1890, Tagore moved to East Bengal (now Bangladesh) where he collected local legends and folklore. Between 1893 and 1900, he wrote seven volumes of poetry including 'Sonartari' (The Golden Boat). In 1890, Tagore took charge of the family estates in Shelidah (modern Bangladesh), where he came to admire the simple daily life, natural beauty and folk culture of rural Bengal. Here, he came into contact with the Bauls, a group of wandering spiritual "madmen" who rejected the outward trappings of institutional religion and instead sought the indwelling "man of the heart" and the elusive presence of the divine that dwells within every human body. The Bauls' iconoclastic "religion of man" (manusher dharma) had a lasting influence on Tagore's spiritual ideals. Called by some as the "greatest of the Bauls," Tagore was a key figure in the popularization of Baul music and spirituality as an icon of Bengali folk culture.

In 1901, Tagore founded a school outside Calcutta, Visva-Bharati, which was dedicated to the emerging Western and Indian philosophy and education. It became a university in 1921. He produced poems, novels, stories, a history of India, textbooks, and treatises on pedagogy. Tagore's wife died in 1902, the next year one of his daughters died, and in 1907 Tagore lost his younger son. In England, Tagore started to compose the poem '*Bhagna Hridaj*' (*A Broken Heart*). Tagore was the first Indian to bring an element of psychological realism to his novels. His early major prose works includes '*Chokher Bali*' (1903, *Eyesore*) and '*Nashtanir*' (1901, *The Broken Nest*), published serially when it first came out. Between 1891 and 1895, he published forty-four short stories in Bengali periodicals, most of them in the monthly journal '*Sadhana*'.

Tagore's reputation as a writer was established in the United States and in England after the publication of '*Gitanjali: Song Offering*' which dealt with divine and human love. The poems were translated into English by the author himself. In the introduction to the 1912 edition of *Gitanjali* W.B. Yeats wrote: "*These lyrics - which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention - display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long*". Tagore's poems were also praised by Ezra Pound, and drew the attention of the Nobel Prize committee which praised Tagore as

There is in him the stillness of nature. The poems do not seem to

have been produced by storm or by ignition, but seem to show the normal habit of his mind. He is at one with nature, and finds no contradictions. And this is in sharp contrast with the Western mode, where man must be shown attempting to master nature if we are to have "great drama.

However, Tagore also experimented with poetic forms but they have lost much of their charm in translations into other languages.

Tagore wrote his most important works in Bengali, but he often translated his poems into English. At the age of 70, Tagore took up painting. He was also a composer, setting hundreds of poems to music. Many of his poems are actually songs and inseparable from their music. Tagore's 'Our Golden Bengal' became the national anthem of Bangladesh. Only hours before he died on August 7, in 1941, Tagore dictated his last poem. His written works, still not completely collected, fills nearly 30 substantial volumes. Tagore remained a well-known and popular author in the West until the end of the 1920s

SAQ

Describe the circumstances leading up to the Bengal "Renaissance"?
In what sense was it a 'renaissance' ? (30 + 30 words)

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2. How did the "Bauls" influence Tagore? (40 words)

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Tagore's influence remains noteworthy not only in his homeland, Bengal, where he is a cultural icon, but throughout the whole country and beyond. The composer of the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh, he is also one of the most widely published authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Tagore described his own spiritual vision as a "religion of the artist". Rejecting the rigidity and superficiality of institutional religions, including that of the Brahmo Samaj, he based his "poet's religion" on a vision of the creative unity between God, humanity, and nature. Just as the One Divine Creator manifests himself in the infinite forms and beauty of nature, so too the individual artist reflects that diversity and returns it to divine unity through poetry, music, and art. Tagore tried to combine traditional Indian culture with Western ideas: He contributed significantly to Bengali literature and culture.

Much of Tagore's ideology comes from the teaching of the *Upanishads* and from his own beliefs that God can be found through personal purity and service to others. He stressed the need for new world order based on transnational values and ideas, the "unity consciousness." "The soil, in return for her service, keeps the tree tied to her; the sky asks nothing and leaves it free." Politically active in India, Tagore was a supporter of Gandhi, but warned of the dangers of nationalistic thought. Unable to gain ideological support for his views, he retired into relative solitude:

Tagore saw Japanese militarism as illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great achievement and promise. In 1938, Yone Noguchi, the distinguished poet and friend of Tagore (as well as of Yeats and Pound), wrote to Tagore, pleading with him to change his mind about Japan. Rabindranath's reply, written on September 12, 1938, was altogether uncompromising:

"It seems to me that it is futile for either of us to try to convince the other, since your faith in the infallible right of Japan to bully other Asiatic nations into line with your Government's policy is not shared by me. Believe me, it is sorrow and shame, not anger, that prompts me to write to you. I suffer intensely not only because the reports of Chinese suffering batter against my heart, but because I can no longer point out with pride the example of a great Japan".

7.3 The Context

Tagore was a poet and artist of International repute. Other aspects of his life and work have received less attention and it is often forgotten that he was, in his early life, deeply involved in nationalist politics. As an active participant in the **Swadeshi Movement**, he played an important role in the struggle for independence from British rule in the years up to 1907. However, he grew disillusioned with the elitism and increasing violence of the movement and gradually he retreated from the political sphere into the inner domain of poetry, art, and spirituality.

Stop to Consider

This profound disillusionment with the violence of the nationalist movement and the retreat into an inner realm of spirituality is poignantly expressed in his novel *The Home and the World*. One of Tagore's darkest works, it centers on the violence of 1907 and the ultimate failure of violent revolt as a means to independence. At the same time it also expresses Tagore's own ambivalent status, torn between home and world, between the inner realm of art and spirituality and the outward realm of public action.

Even after his withdrawal from politics, Tagore continued to speak on social and political issues. In 1917, shocked by the horrors of World War I, Tagore also delivered a series of lectures in Japan and the United States that leveled a scathing attack on the "**madness of nationalism**". A monstrous and dehumanising force spreading through the globe, nationalism in Tagore's eyes, had only succeeded in stripping human beings of their individuality and sending them to violent self-destruction. Perhaps, his most lasting relevance lies in his encounters with religious violence and terrorism in colonial India. His reflections on the "**madness of nationalism**" are no less relevant in the twenty-first century, as religious violence has grown more intense and destructive.

Nationalism and Patriotism

Tagore's criticism of patriotism is a persistent theme in his writings. As early as 1908, he put his position succinctly in a letter. Replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose Tagore said that "*Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live.*"

Most theories of nationalism pay little attention to nationalism as a world order. This is surprising, since nationalists themselves so often treat it like that. Some definitions of nationalism are entirely individualistic: Elwert says that nationalists only want a nation for themselves, and not for others. This however, is not true. The classic example is Mazzini, who founded or inspired not only Young Italy, but Young Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Bohemia and Argentina among others. Mazzini's vision was global: he saw the people as nothing less than the units of humanity's army. But Tagore's stance regarding nationalism is altogether different. He is against any form of militarism. For him, a world of the nation states, is a world of the states built to maintain past ideals, a world structured against 'change for the sake of change'.

Stop to Consider

How to view Japan's position in the Second World War was an important issue in India. After the war, when Japanese political leaders were tried for war crimes, the sole dissenting voice among the judges came from the Indian judge, Radhabinod Pal, a distinguished jurist. Pal dissented on various grounds, among them that no fair trial was possible in view of the asymmetry of power between the victor and the defeated. Ambivalent feelings in India toward the Japanese military aggression, given the unacceptable nature of British imperialism, possibly had a part in predisposing Pal to consider a perspective different from that of the other judges.

SAQ

What was Tagore's compromise on nationalism ? (50 words)

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How did Tagore view politics? (50 words)

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Do you think that 'cultural difference' can be said to colour his writings? (50 words)

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7.3.1 Brief history of Nationalism

Nationalism has been the central force in the political, cultural and economic life of Western Europe and the Western hemisphere since

the late eighteenth century. In 1848, it spread to central Europe; in the late nineteenth century to Eastern Europe and Asia; and finally in the mid-twentieth century to Africa. Thus, it came to be regarded as the first universal and motivating force organizing all peoples into nation-states. In each of these states, nationalism provided the foremost and predominantly emotional incentive for the integration of various traditions, religions, and classes into a single entity, to which man could give his supreme loyalty. In this sense, we can speak of the twentieth century as the age of pan-nationalism. It has become one of the dominant pivotal ideas of the modern age.

Many historians would agree that Nationalism, as an ideology and discourse, became prevalent in North America and Western Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The periods that are often singled out as signaling the advent of nationalism include 1775 (the first partition of Poland), 1776 (the American Declaration of Independence), 1789 and 1792 (the commencement and second phase of the French Revolution). This early ideological phase was permeated by neo-classicism, the conscious return in letters, politics and the arts, to classical antiquity. The influence of patriotism, of heroic virtues and solidarity of Sparta, Athens and republican Rome became the models of the public. This early emphasis on classicism was succeeded by the role of intellectuals and artists, humanity's yearning for the infinite, the centrality of human emotion and self-expression, the need to find one's own identity through a return to authentic experience, the importance of discovering one's own roots and true nature and of discovering their pristine origins and golden ages.

Nationalism

Nationalism, as an ideological movement, did not emerge without antecedents. For some, Christianity prepared the way; for others, the printing presses specially the newspapers. It is also possible to trace some key nationalist motifs in classical humanism of some Northern Italian cities, notably fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Florence, from Bruno Latini to Machiavelli. Certainly, a strong and consciously classical emphasis on civic virtue and solidarity became an important component of later civic nationalism, duly transposed to larger territories and populations.

The standard nationalist thought says more about nationalism than the immediate goals of any one nationalist group. For both of these things - world view and activism - the word 'nationalism' is used. This may be confusing, but it is also misleading to split nationalism into 'international relations' and 'internal politics', and then include secessionism in the second category. Basque separatists in Northern Spain and South-western France want a nation state, and are labeled nationalists: the governments of France and Spain, who

have already got a nation state, are not. There is undeniably secessionist nationalism, with claims against a larger state, such as those of the ETA. However, the definition at the start of this article is intended to emphasize the global effect of such movements, and their historical equivalence to the founders of the states they oppose. The term nationalism is used here, deliberately, to describe both aspects of the phenomenon.

Generally, the rise of nationalism has gone hand-in-hand with the rise of general participation of all members of the nation (citizens) in the affairs of the state and their activation as subjects. The people cease to be mere passive objects of history. Thus, nationalism is closely linked with the self-determination of the life of the group, with the introduction of modern science and technology in the service of the nation, with the exaltation of the national language and traditions above the formerly frequent use of universal languages (in Europe, Latin and later French) and universal traditions (Christianity or Islam). Thus, Nationalism has "democratised" culture and through general education, has aspired to endow the nations with a common background. It dissipated the cultural unity pre-dominant in Europe in the middle Ages and in the Enlightenment, in favor of the distinctive national cultures and languages of each ethnic nation. It was on the strength of this "cultural" nationalism, that in the nineteenth century, "chairs" of "national" literature and history were for the first time established in European universities.

It is true that the awakening of Nationalism in the eighteenth century was influenced by the revival of classicism. Jean Jacques Rousseau, wished to restore the exclusive togetherness of the Greek city-state. In the age of reason, Nationalism demanded a rational organization, unknown in the antiquity of tribe or polis. The eighteenth century also witnessed the new phenomenon of widespread alienation of the intellectuals from society and politics; in Germany Schiller made an eloquent complaint against the artificiality of society and politics of the bureaucrats. Such disenchantment was the product of both urban life and absolutism. The absolutist state, in early modern Europe, created a centralizing structure or form into which Nationalism entered as the integrating and vivifying force, drawing all classes of the population into a commonwealth and politico-cultural partnership.

However, between 1840s-1890s, the notion of Nationalism underwent tremendous changes. Nationalism ceased to be regarded as a democratic-revolutionary movement of the people; it had become a predominantly conservative or reactionary movement, frequently representing the upper classes against the people, and it was strongly opposed to internationalism. Its ideal was to establish, by the end of the century, an exclusive, self-centered, closed society.

That was generally not the case before 1848. The nationalists of that period, like Michelet in France, Mazzini in Italy, or Adam Mickiewicz in Poland, saw Nationalism as a ubiquitous movement. Nationalism and the modern nation-state presupposed, for their actualization, certain social and technological conditions which hardly existed even in Western Europe (with the exception of England) before the French Revolution. The same eighteenth century which emphasized on an Internationalist consciousness--also witnessed among the educated classes--the first expressions of modern Nationalism. Yet, the later antagonism between Nationalism and Internationalism was widely unknown. They formed two aspects of the same movement; both manifesting the great moral and intellectual crisis through which the Western world passed during the second half of the eighteenth century, a crisis which represented a search for regeneration, for better foundations of social life, for new concepts of public and private morality. The French Revolution was the focal point of a general movement which can be broadly called "Nationalism" or "Democracy," implying a struggle against the existing traditional, and obsolete forms of government and hierarchical social order.

The new nation-state preserved at its beginning the cosmopolitan pathos of the Enlightenment. This early French nationalism found hardly an echo among other peoples on the European continent. Some intellectuals sympathized with it while the common masses remained indifferent or hostile. Only the campaigns of the French armies over two decades carried the seed of the new Nationalism abroad and stirred other peoples and the educated classes into a progressive mood. But it was no longer the cosmopolitan Nationalism incorporated into its constitution, the promise "never to use force against the liberty of any people." Nationalism became militant. In all probability, it represents, to a varying degree, an amalgam of all these trends. Today Nationalism is not a movement of the elites but has become "people-based."

Read the idea of "Nationalism" in terms of Benedict Anderson's essay on "*Imagined Communities*" where he has raised a few questions fundamental to the history of the idea. Here, he has shown us how capitalist practices and print technology affected the diversity of human language and consequently created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which set the stage for the emergence of modern nation. While presenting his argument, Anderson has referred to the esotericisation of Latin, and the Reformation led by Martin Luther, dethronement of Latin and the erosion of the sacred community of Christendom. Thus, he has made the idea of an "imagined community" material by analysing the interaction between a system of production and production relations (capitalism), a technology of communication (print), and of human linguistic diversity. Anderson's view is important as it helps looking at the ideas "Nation" and "Nationalism" as evolving through constructs.

What role does geography and the culture of a land play in determining its national identity?

What are the various types of nationalism?

SAQ

Would you agree with the argument that 'nationalism' comes as an answer to the presence of the 'outsider' ? (50 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. Which factors would you include as having shaped nationalist ideas in the countries of Asia and Africa?
2. Can nationalism be seen as a political positioning of a race? To what extent does Tagore express this realization ?
3. Is a nation "real" or "imagined"? Does Tagore address this problem?

7.3.2 Nationalism and the Indian Context

Indian nationalism refers to the consciousness and expression of political, social, religious and ethnic influences that help to mould Indian national consciousness. Indian nationalism describes the

underlying forces that moulded the Indian independence movement, and strongly continues to influence the politics of India. It should be noted that Indian nationalism often imbibes the consciousness of the Indians prior to 1947. In Indian-English writing the term "Nationalism" does not have any negative connotation as is the case with North America and other European countries.

It is difficult to trace a straightforward course of development of the idea of 'nationalism' in India as a number of trends exist simultaneously. The period of Royalist reaction from 1815 to 1848 brought the ethnic character of various Nationalisms into focus. It placed the "organic" Eastern form of Nationalism in contrast to the civic and rational "Western" version of Nationalism. State-based Nationalisms were not confined to the official ideologies of the empire. In India there is a fusion of the civic, territorial, anti-colonial nationalism on the one hand and various ethnic and pan-cultural movements like 'Hindu' nationalism on the other. Indian nationalism can best be understood in the context of the distinctive cultures of the Hindu and the Muslim religion. Religious identity exerted tremendous influence on shaping the idea of 'nation' in the Indian context.

Because of political and social backwardness, the rise of nationalism outside the Western world found its first expression in the cultural field. Nationalism in the East grew in protest against and in conflict with the existing state-pattern - not primarily to transform it into a people's state, but to re-identify the political boundaries in conformity with the ethnographic demands. In Asia, religion remained a dominant social bond. Indian 'Nationalisms' were steeped in Hindu and Muslim traditions, and in the responses of Indian intellectuals to disruptive European ideas and colonial institutions. A new generation of Western-educated Indians sought to put an end to practices and traditions that were responsible for India's economic backwardness, social depravation and political disunity, as they thought.

The new national spirit has found apt vehicles for expressing itself in the current religious rites and formulations of the people. It can be explained by analysing the adaptation of the word "swaraj". The word "swaraj" is today commonly taken to mean political self-government and is inseparably associated with the struggle of the Congress party to overthrow the British rule. This word was originally a term of Hindu philosophy and meant the state of self-ruled or self-control in which a man abstains from action and escapes from the painful and evil cycle of perpetual reincarnation. It is an instance of the politicization of an originally religious idea. It is quite interesting to see how these educated

political leaders who were exposed to the western current of thought, brought traditional ideas and toned them down to serve a common purpose.

"India", the idea

Tagore would have strongly resisted defining India in specifically Hindu terms, rather than as a "confluence" of many cultures. Even after the partition of 1947, India is still the third- largest Muslim country in the world, with more Muslims than in Bangladesh, and nearly as many as in Pakistan. Only Indonesia has substantially more followers of Islam. Indeed, by pointing to the immense heterogeneousness of India's cultural background and its richly diverse history, Tagore had argued that the "idea of India" itself militated against a culturally separatist view against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others

The idea of "Indian Nationalism" is synonymous with 'Hindu Nationalism'. It is an entirely modern, rationalist, and historicist idea. Like other modern ideologies, it allows for a central role of the state in the modernisation of society and strongly defends the state's unity and sovereignty. Its appeal is not political but religious. In fact the notion of 'Hindu-ness' does not need to be defined by any religious criteria at all. There are no specific beliefs or practices that characterises this 'Hindu', and the various doctrinal and sectarian differences among Hindus are irrelevant to its meaning.

7.4 Form of the Essay

The form of a literary essay is shaped by the particular personality through which it is conveyed. And when we have responded appropriately to the form of an essay, we can authentically experience its meaning. Irony is an important characteristic of Tagore's prose. But what is more important is that his irony never misses the warmth of wider humanity. In this essay, we found its best example in Tagore's analysis of the Western civilizations and their governments. He says that as a race he has respect for the British, but as a 'nation' he dislikes them. Nation is a human 'construct' and as a rule it should be controlled by human beings but ironically, the 'Nation' rules us and enslaves even as our own creation.

Nationalism in the West is an essay found in Tagore's book *Nationalism*. Written with the experience of his visit to Japan, this

essay is profoundly persuasive. With the help of allusions, Tagore succeeds in infusing a strongly poetic element into it. At some point, poetic expression can be said to even exceed the force of his arguments. For example, we can take his comparison of Nation with a harmful and ever-expanding machine. What is interesting is his association of the functioning of a scientific machine with that of a government ruled by the ideology of a Nation. In order to make his arguments more authentic Tagore has brought in continuous references to the glorious past of Indian history. There is no doubt that he tries to look at 'history' through the eyes of a humanist. It might be one cause of his vague idealization of Indian past. But he also says that "Through all the fights and intrigues and deceptions of her earlier history, India had remained aloof".

On Tagore

Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, among others, first led the chorus of adoration in the Western appreciation of Tagore, and then soon moved to neglect and even shrill criticism. This contrast between Yeats's praise of his work in 1912 ("*These lyrics...display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long.*" , "*the work of a supreme culture*") and his denunciation in 1935 ("*Damn Tagore*") arose partly from the inability of Tagore's many-sided writings to fit into the narrow box in which Yeats wanted to place-and keep-him. Yeats has faced the difficulty of fitting Tagore's later writings into the image Yeats had presented to the West. Tagore, he had said, was the product of "a whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us," and yet "we have met our own image,...or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream." Yeats had some favourable things to say about Tagore's prose writings.

7.5 Reading the Text

Rabindranath Tagore's essay *Nationalism in the West* is important as far as contextualization of ideas like "Nationalism" in India is concerned. A number of different views and accordingly a number of different historiographies are found, each trying to locate the origin of such an idea at different historical moments. Here, in this essay Tagore has shown how the origin, growth and consequence of the idea of Nationalism in India differ from that of the West. This essay is important not only because it was written during the British rule in India but also in its supposition of the 'constructs' like 'East' and 'West'. Acceptance of the binaries like 'East' and 'West', however, does not narrow down his vision. In a sense, Tagore has been able to achieve a universal

appeal. This is evident when he says, "*Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history.*"

Reviewing Abdul Karim's history of Muslim rule in India, Rabindranath remarks on the reluctance of Hindus to aspire to an achievement of power and glory which would lead them to intervene in the lives of people and on their inability to cope with those who do. The political history of Islam and more recently, the history of the European conquest in the rest of the world show, he says, that people who have world conquering ambitions hide under the edifice of civilized life a secret dungeon of ferocious beastliness and unbridled greed.

He begins his essay with a very interesting observation that human history is shaped by the difficulties faced by it - "*Man's history is being shaped according to the difficulties it encounters*". Thus, the history of India is also shaped by the problems that it encountered. He has pointed out the 'Racial' difference as the main force behind its emergence as a strong nation. Tagore says that India has been trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences and the spiritual recognition of the unity amongst the people. The rigid boundaries of class distinction have given birth to complexities in the minds of the upcoming generations. Thus, the history of our nation is not the rise and fall of the Empires but of a perpetual struggle for the attainment of a life of spiritual fulfilment by crossing the hurdles of race and "Jati". Here, at this point Tagore has made a distinction between the Western value- system based on a mechanical and consumerist ideology and the Indian value system based on the idea of spiritual attainment.

" Take it in whatever spirit you like, here is India, of about fifty centuries at least, who tried to live peacefully and think deeply, the India devoid of all politics, the India of no nations, whose one ambition has been to know this world as of soul, to live here every moment of her life in the meek spirit of adoration, in the glad consciousness of an eternal and personal relationship with it. It was upon this remote portion of humanity, child like in its manner, with the wisdom of the old that the Nation of the West burst in".

In a tone of self-glorification, Tagore has eulogized the past of India. India, according to him, has a glorious and peaceful past characterised

by an environment of congenial living for various races and communities. After the British rule there occurred a great change in this harmonious aura of our country. The "Nation of the West" brought with it the idea of treachery. They turned the age-old unity of Indian people into the pages of story books. Now, Tagore has launched his attack on the Western idea of a nation. Bringing the reference of the Moghals and Pathans he says that they had invaded our country but their identity remained only as a race and not as a nation. They had their own custom, likings and dislikings. But it must be mentioned that we had equal share in the construction of the Empire. Tagore here, is actually suggesting that these races never existed as nations.

At this point, Tagore is trying to formulate a definition of a nation. According to him "*A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose*". Society is somewhat different from nation in the sense that it has no such ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. Society is that form of ideal human relationship which is based on co-operation and mutual understanding. Politics is but a means of self-preservation. With the growth of science and technology grew the selfishness which put rigid boundaries among various societies. As a result, the greed for power became its ruling force. Thus, unlike the humane bond of society, nation is a mechanical organisation. It is the result of unwanted human desire of power.

A society, according to Tagore, is the result of the natural regulation of human relationships. Now-a-days, this natural bonding is breaking up and in its place mechanical organisations are growing up. Instead of humanity and self-surrendering attitude, our psychology is dominated by primitive fighting. He has pointed out "power" in its abstract form as responsible for the dissolution of humanity. The perpetual economic struggle generated by the capitalist system has given birth to such a self-centeredness in our mind that the final spirit of reconciliation could never be attained. Tagore is skeptical about the rise of the 'nation'. According to him, it is a product of the political system and the capitalistic economic system. He has compared nation with a machine whose chief aim is to achieve perfect result. But human beings cannot be like machines and unlike human society, the nation is not a concrete entity. It lacks the vitality of human spirit and hence cannot be materialized.

Tagore seems to be frustrated when he says "*The abstract being, Nation, is ruling India*". Finally, it is the evil of Nationalism which dominated the Indian people. We are governed by such people who have no connection with our soil. They do not know our language and culture. It is through their policies that they are dominating us. Those policymakers have no connection to our culture and hence, they are unable to understand the humane side of it. The whole process becomes inhuman as they try to fix them in some shapeless policies. According to him, it is a shame that we are ruled by a nation. Thus, the issue is centered in the notion of domination by a nation that is "least human and least spiritual". The author's denial of a nation becomes apparent when he called it the "organized self-interest of the people".

In the East-West binary, power seems to be centred in the latter. Thus, the whole system became imbalanced. East is complementary to the West. But due to the unwanted deposition of power the system had lost its equilibrium. They constitute two great worlds and their reconciliation can only save the whole humanity. Therefore, we must assimilate in our life whatever is permanent in their culture.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that Rabindranath took pride in India's own heritage, and often spoke about it. He lectured at Oxford on the importance of India's religious ideas, quoting both from ancient texts and from popular poetry (such as the verses of the sixteenth-century Muslim poet Kabir). In 1940, when he was given an honorary doctorate by Oxford University, in a ceremony arranged at his own educational establishment in Santiniketan to the predictable "volley of Latin", Tagore responded "by a volley of Sanskrit," as Marjorie Sykes, a friend of Rabindranath, reports. His welcoming attitude to Western civilization was reinforced by this confidence: he did not see India's culture as fragile and in need of "protection" from Western influence.

Different races of people had contributed to the building of our nation. The Dravidians, the Aryans, the Greeks, the Persians, the Mohammedans all contributed to the construction of our identity. Thus, Nation has its relation with the history of human beings and not with a geographical territory or political map. He admired the British race which had produced great personalities. But when they tried to assert themselves as a nation, problems began. Whether we are governed by the Dutch, or the French, our destiny would have remained the same. In this context, the author has made a very interesting observation. He says that before the Britishers, we were governed by a number of foreign governments. But there is a difference between them and the

British government. He has brought the allusion of weaving machine to elucidate his point. He says that the product of the hand-loom machine has the touch of the human fingers but the cloth produced in the machine lacked that human touch. Thus, he compares the government with the lifeless machine products. The earlier governments taught us lessons necessary for the stability of human civilization.

"But this desire for a common bond of comradeship among the different races of India has been the work of the spirit of the West, not that of Nation of the West".

Bringing the reference of Japan and China he says that Japan is successful in resisting the effects of Western Nations. He seems to be very frank in admitting that the Japanese people have certain qualities that we lack. It's interesting when he says that we have an inherent incapacity to receive the positives of the Western civilization. In order to make ourselves equal with British rulers we must be ready to accept their naval outlook towards life but something hinders us from accepting such an outlook freely. This inherent suspicion causes a conflict between the Western spirit and Western nation.

Ours is a country with no-nation and the Western nation is slowly and gradually using its name as a means of exploitation. Focusing on the education system, he says that the government is providing dry education to our students. Similarly with the sanitation system, law and order, military organization, the magisterial offices and so on. The impact of such a system, according to Tagore, is negative as it leaves no scope for the freedom and development of the individuals.

However, he admits that our former governments also had certain disadvantages but, since "*those were not governments by the nation, their texture was loosely woven, leaving big gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs*". Unearthing the paradox of the British 'National' government, he says that while it calls for freedom it itself produces the unbreakable chain for the history of human beings. People intoxicated by the delusion of nationalism thought that they are free. But in actuality, they are continuously sacrificing their freedom. Such a government uses every possible measure to "manufacture" the feelings of the subjects.

Stop to Consider

Read Tagore's idea of the 'constructedness' of human ideology in connection with Althusser's theory of "*ideological state apparatus*". Relate it to the process of human cognition. The Marxist critic Louis Althusser has discussed the idea of "*ideological state apparatuses*" by saying that Government by

Nation uses such apparatus which includes the education system, religion, law and administration, etc. Tagore believes that such a government produces and propagates their ideology.

Tagore, in order to make his arguments more authentic, brings in the reference to the history of human civilization. For this purpose, he compares two different phases of the development of human civilization- the medieval age and the age of the 'enlightenment'. The medieval age is marked by the conflict of physics and the soul, the body and the mind, the eternal and the ephemeral. This conflict had its inevitable influence in shaping the moral being. 'Enlightenment' gave more and more emphasis on human intellect. Human intellect appeared to them as the ultimate tool in solving all human problems. But the consequence seemed to be very dangerous as it produced a kind of utilitarian philosophy. Ironically, intellect provided human beings with a power which had only limited usefulness. Tagore has shown great concern regarding the dangers of material prosperity.

Stop to Consider

It is very interesting when Tagore calls the human intellect a "detached part of man". For him, it is the moral person who imparts his/her identity and hence should always be kept at the forefront. For him, the ideal and the moral are the Real. Does he want to say that intellect is not an essential part of the moral being? Or does he want to say that the intellect which is essentially 'scientific' does not or should not be a part of moral man? It is a debatable issue. From his argument it becomes clear that intellect, which does not contribute to the betterment of humanity, is always despicable. Don't you think that while putting forth his arguments in an indirect manner he adheres to the same utilitarian framework which he himself has been rejecting?

"Thus, man with his mental and material power far outgrowing his moral strength..."

He has made a very important observation. He has ironically compared the human being endowed with intellect, with a giraffe. According to him, a giraffe with its unwontedly long neck has made its communication with other animals impossible. That would seem to describe the case of a man vested with the power of terrible intellect who has made his communication with the other human beings almost impossible. This centralization of power is at the root of all social and economic disparity. It is none but power that makes one section of society advantageous. Power corrupts the purpose. The material fulfillment never allows the moral being to emerge. This unwanted

slavery to intellect produces moral handicaps. Tagore opines that too much desire for material success is the root of all disintegrations of the Western civilization. It is also the cause for the present disharmony of man's nature.

Tagore also describes the experience of his last visit to Japan. He strongly denounces the notion of Western nationalism in the context of Japan. He is actually warning the Japanese people of this dehumanizing tendency of Western civilisation which slowly and gradually is poisoning the whole world.. Bringing in the reference to Japan-America relationship and Japan's "*Bushido*", he says that one nation can trust the other only when their interests coalesce, or do not conflict. He strongly asserts it as the only logic by which a nation dominates the voice of the truth and goodness.

Since Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were the two leading Indian thinkers in the twentieth century, many commentators have tried to compare their ideas. On learning of Rabindranath's death, Jawaharlal Nehru, then incarcerated in a British jail in India, wrote in his prison diary for August 7, 1941, "Gandhi and Tagore. Two types entirely different from each other, and yet both of them typical of India, both in the long line of India's great men ... It is not so much because of any single virtue but because of the tout ensemble, that I felt that among the world's great men today Gandhi and Tagore were supreme as human beings. What good fortune for me to have come into close contact with them." Tagore greatly admired Gandhi but he had many disagreements with him on a variety of subjects including nationalism, patriotism, the importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development. These differences have a clear and consistent pattern, with Tagore pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.

Towards the end of his essay, Tagore moves to a deeper level where he discusses the processes of human cognition. Here he analyses the process of acquiring knowledge and the process of artistic creation. He explicates the point with the help of a minute observation of human beings. Human beings treat the killing of creatures as a sin. With this observation, he arrives at the conclusion that creation of human intellect follows the logic of inclusion and elimination and in doing that human beings always take recourse to the idea of utility. The idea of a Nation is also a 'construction'. According to the author the nation is one of the most powerful and unaesthetic 'inventions' of human mind. Tagore has shown his grave concern over the formation of the notion of a nation and has tried to find out some kind of solutions to resist the movement of the gradually

expanding nature of the 'Nation'. A nation, according to the him, is nothing but the producer of human beings who are simply war-making and money-making puppets. Once again, Tagore is idealizing the sacred history of this land. He has expressed his confidence that one day humanity will definitely resist nation to attain supremacy. The "blood-stained" steps to 'nation' will be conquered by Love and Humanity and in this case India will take the pioneering step.

7.6 Critical Reception

Tagore is a profoundly original writer and is known for his lucid poetry. However, he could exert his influence also as a writer of short stories, novels, plays, and essays. The coincidence of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence with the publication of a selection of Tagore's letters by Cambridge University Press, brought Tagore's ideas and reflections to the limelight, which made it important to examine what kind of leadership in thought and understanding he provided in the Indian subcontinent during the first half of this century. The contrast between Tagore's commanding presence in Bengali literature and culture, and his near-total eclipse in the rest of the world, is perhaps less interesting than the distinction between the view of Tagore as a deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker in Bangladesh and India, and his image in the West as a repetitive and remote spiritualist. Graham Greene had, in fact, gone on to saying that he associated Tagore "with what Chesterton calls 'the bright pebbly eyes' of the Theosophists." Certainly, an air of mysticism played some part in the "selling" of Rabindranath Tagore to the West by Yeats, Ezra Pound, and his other early champions. Even Anna Akhmatova, one of Tagore's few later admirers (who translated his poems into Russian in the mid-1960s), talks of "that mighty flow of poetry which takes its strength from Hinduism as from the Ganges." "The modern short story is Rabindranath Tagore's gift to Indian culture," observed Vishwanath S. Naravane in 1977. Many of Tagore's short stories became available in English after he had gained international acclaim as the Nobel Prize-winning poet of *Gitanjali*. Early reviewers in English received Tagore's stories with mixed appraisal; while some applauded his short fiction, others found them of negligible quality. Later critics have commented that these early reviewers were ignorant of the context of Indian culture in which the stories are set. Commentators have praised Tagore for his blending of poetic lyricism with social realism, as well as the way in which his unearthly tales maintain psychological realism

within an atmosphere of supernatural occurrences. Scholars frequently praise Tagore's short stories for the deeply human quality of the characters and relationships. Mohinder Kaur commented of Tagore, "*With an infinite sympathy and rare psychological insight, he works out the emotional possibilities of different human relations.*" For example, B. C. Chakravorty says of "The Postmaster," counted among Tagore's finest short stories, "*The story by itself is hopelessly uninteresting. But it acquires immense interest on account of the passages of lyrical grandeur which give a poetic expression to the feelings of the orphan girl and those of the postmaster.*" Harish Trivedi's *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, outlining the larger debate of "English in (and) India", offers a transactional view of English India. He seeks to examine some samples of literary, and cultural relation under two categories - Reception and Representation. Under Reception, Trivedi studies Shakespeare, Omar Khayam in Persian, English and Hindi translations, and the 'Internationalism' of Rabindra Nath Tagore. Trivedi's 'Representation' is comprised of English responses to Tagore 'an emblem of his race and nation.'

Tagore continues to be a subject of study in many Latin American universities including Costa Rica as a non-European model available to Latin American intellectuals emerging from European cultural domination.

Check Your Progress

1. Briefly highlight Western responses to Tagore's idea of nationalism.
2. Explain Tagore's concept of 'nation' in terms of his ideas of cultural transactions.
3. Explain the connections made by Tagore between freedom, human development and nation.

7.8 Glossary

Scythians - A powerful Asiatic race of around 540BCE.

Ethnology - The scientific study of a race and its culture.

- Cosmopolitan** - A broad view of the world free from national prejudices.
- Self-idolatry** - Excessive love or praise or worship of oneself.
- Numerous guests** - Tagore, here, is referring to various races who came to India and in course of time got mixed up with its life and culture,
- Upanishad** - Great book of wisdom/ Book on morality and values of ancient India.
- Self-preservation** - Preservation of the culture and identity of a race.
- Mutual jealousy** - Disagreement of one nation with the other.
- Self-surrender** - Minimising the spiritual distance between the 'self' and the 'other'.
- Professionalism** - Tagore has used the term with a derogatory reference of the human desire to accumulate wealth and power.
- Abstract** - Something that can't have material realization.
- Non-Nation** - Without the ideology of 'nationhood'.
- Soul-less organisation** - Nationalism as a mechanical system without vitality and spirituality.
- Hand-loom....** - Tagore has ironically brought the comparison between the hand-loom product and that of a machine-loom in order to show the distinction between the condition of humanity ruled by a government without nation and the same by nation.
- Iron chain** - Tagore compares humanity under nation with that of a human being shackled by iron chain without any freedom.
- Ideology....** - Constructedness of ideology. Like other material productions ideas are also produced materially.
- Intellect** - It seems that Tagore has associated this important human faculty with the progress of science. Look at the binary of 'reason' and 'emotion' that he uses to illustrate the distinction between 'society' and 'nation'.

7.9 Suggested Reading

1. Anderson, Benedict; "*Imagined Communities*", Verso, London, 1991.
2. Bhaba, Homi; Introduction from "*Nation and Narration*", Routledge, London, 1990.
3. Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony D.(edt); "*Nationalism*" (Oxford reader), Oxford University Press, New york, 1994.
4. Kohn, Hans; "*The Idea of Nationalism: A study in its origins and Background*", Macmillan: New York, 1944.
5. Tagore, Rabindranath; "Nationalism", Macmillan, New Delhi, 1976.



Block 2

Biography and Autobiography

Block Introduction:

This block is designed in such a way as to help you in getting acquainted with two definite categories of non-fictional prose, biography and autobiography. For this we have chosen two authors from two different periods to enable you to recognize the significance of a comparative analysis of both biography and autobiography in terms of their distinctive periods and histories. Once you start reading you will gradually understand the differences between the two genres and how the chosen authors best represent such differences through their writings.

Although certain distinctions are visible in between biography and autobiography, there are similarities as well so far as the question of a 'person' is involved. Biography is mostly objective while autobiography is subjective in nature. While objectivity is supposed to be the guiding principle in a biography, memory and recollections appear to be the determining criteria in an autobiography. But in both cases, there is an element of artistry which comes in with 'selection', but what is foregrounded here is the notion of the 'transcendental signified' which is 'truth' itself. Biographical writings began as a part of documenting human history. But it was only in the post-humanist era that autobiography developed. By now it has become an important ground for testing the controversies regarding issues like, "authorship", "selfhood", "representation" and the divisions between "fact" and "fiction".

In order to make you understand this we have divided the block into two units. The first will deal with two biographical accounts by Samuel Johnson; and the second will touch on two chapters of Russell's *Autobiography*. Glossaries and Suggested reading lists are provided where necessary. Use the "Check Your Progress" and "Self-Assessment Questions" to find out your progress in your understanding the contents.

Unit 1

Samuel Johnson: "Life of Milton & Life of Cowley"

Contents :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introducing the Author
- 1.3 The Context
- 1.4 Form of The Biography .
- 1.5 Introducing *Lives of The English Poets*
 - 1.5.1 Reading The Text: *Life Of Milton*
 - 1.5.2 Reading The Text: *Life of Cowley*
- 1.6 Johnson's Prose Style
- 1.7 Critical Reception
- 1.8 Suggested Readings

1.1 Objectives

The Lives of the English Poets, by Samuel Johnson is regarded as one of the best examples of biographical writing. After going through this unit you should be able to

- *define* 'biography'
- *list* the important features of a 'biography'
- *trace* the growth of Johnson as a major prose writer of English literature
- *read* Johnson's *Lives* in the context of the biographical writings of the eighteenth century
- *summarise* the basic arguments and criticism of the "Lives of Milton" and "Cowley"

1.2 Introducing the Author :

Dr. Samuel Johnson, often referred to as Dr. Johnson, was one of the prominent literary figures of the eighteenth century. He was also a key figure of the Neo-Classical tradition and was famous for his great wit and prose style as is exemplified by his *Lives of the English Poets*. He was one of the most influential critics of English literary history.

Johnson, the son of a bookseller was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire on September 18, 1709. He attended Lichfield Grammar School. But his education depended largely on the perusal of the volumes in his father's bookshop. He entered Pembroke College, Oxford on October 31, 1728, a few weeks after he turned nineteen, and remained there only for one year to discontinue his education due to financial difficulty. Although he was a formidable student, poverty caused by the early death of his father, forced him to leave Oxford without taking a degree. He attempted to work as a teacher and schoolmaster, but these ventures were not successful. He was an intense and voracious reader and the economist Adam Smith recalled, "Johnson knew more books than any man alive." At the age of twenty-five, he married Elizabeth "Tetty" Porter, a widow twenty-one years older and the mother of three children. He shifted to London along with his wife, opened a school taking money from her, began his literary enterprise by working on his historical tragedy *Irene* and started writing for the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The first years in London were hard, and Johnson wasted his efforts on hack-writing for magazines. It was only in 1745, after the publication of his pamphlet on *Macbeth*, namely, *Miscellaneous observations on the tragedy of Macbeth*, that he was recognized in the literary world of London. For the next three decades, Johnson concentrated on writing biographies, poetry, essays, pamphlets, parliamentary reports and so on. The poem "London" (1738) and the *Life of Savage* (1745), a biography of Johnson's poet-friend and fellow-writer Richard Savage, who stood by Johnson during the days of eternal poverty, and died in 1744, are important works of this period. During the same period his tragedy *Irene* was staged in London. One of his major satirical works *The Vanity of Human Wishes* was also published in the same period.

Johnson began to work on *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1747 and completed it in two volumes in 1755. It took nine years and consisted of 40,000 defined words and 14,000 quotations to illustrate the meaning. The *Dictionary* was widely praised and enormously influential but Johnson did not profit from it financially. While working on his dictionary, Johnson was also writing a series of periodical essays under the title *The Rambler*. These essays, often on moral and religious topics, tended to be graver than the title of the series would suggest. *The Rambler* was not published until 1752.

Although not originally popular, the essays found a large audience once they were collected in a volume. Johnson's wife died shortly after the final essay appeared.

Johnson and the periodicals

It will be useful to compare Johnson's *The Rambler* and Addison's *Spectator*. Both of them were periodicals of the time when the genre was still flourishing. Equally concerned with the cause of the society, both adopted a different style of presentation. While Johnson adopted a more serious style, Addison's style was easy and colloquial. Their style of presentation also reflected their views on the ideals of the society.

Johnson also contributed essays to his friends John Hawkworth's periodical essay *The Adventurer*. But from 1758-60, Johnson began another series of essays titled *The Idler*, in 1758. This weekly remained in circulation for two years and the essays were mostly published in a weekly newspaper *The Universal Chronicle*. These essays were shorter and lighter than *The Rambler* essays. In 1759, Johnson published his satirical novel *Rasselas, or The Prince of Abyssinia* which is said to have been written in two weeks to pay for his mother's funeral. In 1762, Johnson was awarded a government pension of three hundred pounds a year, from King George III, largely through the efforts of Thomas Sheridan and the Earl of Bute. Johnson met the Scotsman James Boswell, his future biographer, in 1763. Around the same time, Johnson formed "The Club", a social group that included his friends Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, David Garrick and Oliver Goldsmith. By now, Johnson was a celebrated figure. He received an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin in 1765. His eight volumes edition of Shakespeare was published in October, 1765. Although he ignored the sonnets and poems, he treats the plays not as works to be enacted but to be read. He celebrates Shakespeare's gifts in portraying characters and revealing truths about human nature and most importantly defends the playwright against charges of violating rules of dramatic unities and mixing the genres of comedy and tragedy.

In 1765, Johnson met Henry Thrale, a wealthy brewer and Member of Parliament and stayed with him for fifteen years until Henry's death in 1781. In 1773, ten years after he met Boswell, the two set out on a journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and two years later Johnson's account of their travels was published under the title *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (Boswell's *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* was published in 1786). Johnson spent

considerable time in Edinburgh in the 1770s, where he enjoyed an ultimate relationship with Boswell and Lord Monboddo and conducted extensive correspondence and mutual literary reviews.

Johnson's final major work was the *Lives of the English Poets* (1783), a project commissioned by a group of London booksellers. *The Lives*, which were critical as well as biographical studies, appeared as prefaces to selections of poet and their work.

Johnson died on December 13, 1784 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

1.3 The Context

In 1777, Johnson was approached by a group of London booksellers to contribute brief prefaces to a multivolume edition of English poets. Although the original text was supposed to be inclusive of all the reputed poets since the time of Chaucer, the survey began with the 17th century poets like Cowley. But Johnson's plan was to do much more by producing almost 400,000 words of biographical and interpretative text on the 52 poets. Each preface followed a three part plan, as the writer first refers to the author's biography, then summarize the main features of the chosen figure, and then critically examine his writings. It is in this framework that we have to locate the two prescribed texts and contextualize them in terms of his reading and understanding of the poets and their works.

Neo classicism

The rise of Neo-classicism in England was a direct result of the French culture that was introduced into the court by Charles II and his courtiers who returned from France. In the courtly culture of Restoration England, the most effective external influence was contemporary French classicism. The French Academy, which advocated rigid rules and regulations for literary creation influenced the English literary scene as well. The emergence of the scientific spirit and the new philosophy with its emphasis on rationalism, reason, clarity and simplicity in thought and expression also favoured the rise of neo-classicism. The most acclaimed precept of neo-classicism was "follow nature", which meant following the ancient masters who based their works on nature. Emphasis was laid on correctness, reason and good sense. The artist must follow the rules correctly and any exuberance of fancy or emotion must be controlled by reason or sense. The function of literature was to instruct and delight. The didactic purpose of literature was considered to be more important than the aesthetic one.

SAQ

1. What were the chief principles of neo-classicism? (40 words)

2. To what extent should we relate Johnson with neo classicism? (60 words)

1.4 Form of The Biography :

The word biography has its origins in the Greek words 'bios', meaning 'life' and 'graphy', meaning 'writing'. So, etymologically the term 'biography' means 'writing about life'. Hence, we can see that the term more or less encapsulates the nature and scope of the genre. Biography is that branch of literature, which is about the life of a human being.

In post-classical Europe the literary recording of the peoples lives begin with the "Lives of the Saints" (hagiographies) and stories of the rise and fall of the princes. Medieval historians like Geoffrey of Monmouth, Mathew Prince and others, brought a concern with human failings and strengths often overriding their objectivity. But it is not until the sixteenth century that the first recognizable biographies appeared. Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More*

(1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7) are regarded by many as the first instances of true biography.

The seventeenth century saw Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII*, Walton's *Lives* (1640-78) and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives*. It is in Aubrey that we first hear a 'real' human voice commenting with a smugness, gossipy humour and a delight in the oddity of human nature. But it is in the 18th century and with Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) that the form is finally established. This was followed by James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791).

In the nineteenth century, with Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863), biographical writings continued to flourish but showing a potential influence on the structure of fiction. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Dickens' novels along with that of the Bronte sisters, show the various ways of intimacy between experience and invention during or after the Romantic period. Finally, the modern biography was established by Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

Biography as a genre

The main claim of the modern biographies is a subjectivity towards the subject. This is directly related to the question of the selection and presentation of the material. Recently, another interest has been shown in the interchangeability of fictional and documentary techniques. The traditional distinction between biography, personal history (diary/ confessions) and novels (especially the first person narratives) are coming to be questioned. You should notice how this changing nature of biography has brought about certain necessary changes in the very genre of biography itself.

It is important to note that unlike history, biography is artistic and has a personal and psychological touch. Biography records the life of one person and this life is not necessarily of general importance. Historical narratives record the incidents of general importance and its focus is also general. But biography is concerned with the particular life and its focus also centers on the life that it attempts to narrate. Another criterion of distinguishing biography is that it is realistic but may also contain the element of fictionality. While the novel is fictional, biography is realistic. Its primary concern is the truth of life that it represents.

The autobiography, which is an account of the writer's own life, is different from biography in terms of orientation. Whereas biographies are objective, autobiographies are subjective. So, a biography is the

account of the life of a 'real' individual by which the writer tries to recreate the personality of that individual.

1.5 Introducing *Lives Of The English Poets* :

Dr. Johnson is one of the chief exponents of the form of biography and his fame as a biographer rests mainly on the *Lives of the English Poets*. Johnson was always interested in biographies. His curiosity about people was related to his views of the function of literature as the rendering of universal human experience. For Johnson biography stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history. Johnson was uncompromising in his belief that truth was the objective of biography and that is why, "he refused to let sympathy for his subject cloud his judgment." The unrivalled knowledge that he commanded over his subject led to the success of Johnson as biographer. His shrewdness, powerful intellect and common sense made his remarks interesting and penetrating. One remarkable aspect of Johnson's biographical writing is that he juxtaposes a criticism of the life and works of his subject with the biographical description. He takes pains to record every detail of the person whose life he is writing. His description of Milton's clothes is a remarkable example in this context. He makes no attempt to idealize the men whose lives he is narrating. He does not conceal their failings or their follies. His *Lives of the English Poets* has a colloquial ease which was missing in most of his formal writings.

The Lives of English Poets appeared, from 1779 as *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. Johnson provides fifty-two such prefaces, all but two of which deal with the late 17th century poets. *The Lives* was started when Johnson was 68. Presumably, Johnson was not happy with the contemporary practice in biographical writings. He expresses his distrust in the early part of his *Life of Cowley*: "Dr. Sprat has produced a funeral oration rather than history". To Johnson, to be interested in the man's work was to be interested in his character.

Out of the fifty-two lives, more than thirty deal with obscure and minor poets in whom no one is interested today. Today the worth of the book does not lie in the value of the poets that were included but in Johnson's brilliant biographical and critical prefaces. Although Johnson initially planned to finish the book by providing some dates and information to introduce the poets, the work expanded to become one of the most remarkable monuments of English biographical writing. In *Lives Of The English Poets*, Johnson provides literary criticism, biographical information, and in a limited sense, a view of the cultural

context the poet was writing in. It is noteworthy that he originally proposed to begin with Chaucer, but later resolved to start with Abraham Cowley. The lives of Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Pope and Gray also gave Johnson an opportunity of developing and illustrating his own views on poetry. For this, he had to undergo a lifetime of research.

SAQ

What is your opinions of Johnson's of poets? (60 words)

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The biographies have two distinct parts - biographical information of the poet and a criticism of his works. However, the characteristic method of the text is to provide first a narrative of the poet's life, then a presentation of his character and an account of the quality of his mind, and then a critical assessment of his main poems. Apart from Johnson's mastery of the language, the prefaces are remarkable for their details and shrewd judgments. Johnson's comments exhibit the marks of a powerful intellect and common sense. He never attempts to idealize the person whose life he is writing, nor does he elide over their follies. Yet, Johnson is not free from accusations, he is often castigated for his idiosyncrasies and his adherence to a particular ideology and a neoclassicism that colours his assessments of all the poets and their works.

Stop to Consider :

Johnson's Method

Johnson adopted a particular method in his *Lives* not because he failed to conceptualize a relationship between a poet's life and his works but because he did not think that a good poet was necessarily a good man. This method enabled him to recognize the fact that 'a manifest and striking contrariety between the life of an author and his writings' can very well exist and to assign different purposes to his analysis of his subjects' lives and their writings.

1.5.1 Reading The Text: "Life Of Milton"

Johnson provides a comprehensive account of Milton's life by incorporating every possible detail of his life. John Milton was by birth a gentleman. His grand father was the keeper of the forest of Shotover who had disinherited his father for not following Roman Catholicism, the religion of the forefathers. Milton's father then took up the profession of a scrivener. His liking for music brought success and reputation and soon he grew rich and retired to an estate. He married Caston, a gentlewoman from Welsh family. John Milton, the poet was born in his father's house at the Spread Eagle in Bread-street on December 9, 1608.

Milton started his education privately under the care of Thomas Young, as his father appeared to be very solicitous about his education. Then he was sent to St. Paul's School under the care of Mr. Gill. At the age of sixteen, he left St. Paul's School and joined Christ College, Cambridge as a sizar on February 12, 1624. By this time he had composed some Latin poems and translated two Psalms but without any great success. In his eighteenth year he composed some Latin elegies.

While reading Milton's life we cannot but refer to his contemporary Abraham Cowley. Johnson refers to the extraordinary quality of Cowley's Latin poetry in which he excelled over his contemporaries including Milton. Talking of Milton's poems Johnson says, " the products of his vernal fertility have been surpassed by many, and particularly by his contemporary Cowley." So, a meaningful comparison between the two can consist of several points: their individual competencies in Latin, their stylistic differences and allegiances and so on. This may lead to an understanding of the practices of poetical writings of the period itself.

Milton entered the University with the intention of joining the church but very soon he was disillusioned because for Milton "whoever

became a clergyman must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that could retch, he must straight perjure himself." He completed his Bachelor's Degree in 1628 and Masters Degree in 1632 and left Cambridge, "with no kindness for its institution, alienated either by the injudicious severity of the governors or his own captious perverseness" to live in his father's house in Horton, near Buckinghamshire. During these five years he read most of the Greek and Latin literature and produced the *Masque of Comus* which was presented at Ludlow, the residence of the Lord President of Wales, 1634. His *Lycidas*, a pastoral elegy on the death of his friend Edward King, was written in 1637. In the same period he also produced the *Arcades* making a part of dramatic entertainment

After the death of his mother Milton traveled towards Paris and Italy which gave him a chance to study intensely. From Florence he went to Sienna and then to Rome. He got acquainted with Holstenius, the keeper of the Vatican Library who in turn introduced him to Cardinal Barberini. He stayed at Rome for two months and then moved to Naples. His experiences were expressed in certain Latin poems. He intended to visit Sicily and Greece, but hearing the growing tension between the king and the parliament in England, he returned home to take part in the cause of the people. Milton made many enemies because of his radical and somewhat 'open' remarks on issues of religion.

SAQ

Attempt a connection between the facts of Milton's life and your reading of *Paradise Lost*? (60 words)

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Milton came back to England to start his career as a schoolteacher. Johnson criticizes other biographers for not being faithful in depicting this phase of Milton's life. Milton's career as an educationist was not very successful. In 1641, Milton published a pamphlet named *Treatise on Reformation* in two books against the Established Church and began to participate actively in religious and political controversies. In his thirty fifth year, Milton married Mary Powell, the daughter of a Justice of the Peace in Oxfordshire. They divorced within a month but were subsequently reunited. In 1644, Milton published *Areopagitica, A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the liberty of unlicensed printing*, his most important prose work. About the same time he published a collection of his Latin and English poems, which included *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Then in 1645, after the Death of Charles I, he moved to Holborn and wrote a pamphlet justifying the murder of the king. After Cromwell assumed power, the Puritan authorities appointed Milton as the Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth. But he was *suspected of having interpolated the book called Icon Basilike*. Then, he published another pamphlet named *Defensio Populi*, which was answered by the renowned scholar Salmasius with *Defensio Regis*. This triggered a controversy with Salmasius and himself. Then he continued as Latin Secretary even after Cromwell dismissed the Parliament by the authority by which he had destroyed monarchy and assumed dictatorial power under the title of Protector. In this context, Johnson writes, "He had now been blind for some years; but his vigour of intellect was such that he was not disabled to discharge his office of Latin Secretary, or continue his controversies. His mind was too eager to be diverted, and too strong to be subdued." His first wife died in the meantime and within a short time he married Catherine Woodcock, "a woman doubtless educated in opinions like his own", but who too died within a year of their marriage.

Free from external disturbances, Milton now planned three great works for his future employment - an epic poem, a history of his country and a dictionary of the Latin language. After the death of Oliver Cromwell, Milton continued publishing pamphlets and his *A Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Commonwealth* was published only a week before the Restoration of 1660. When Charles II assumed power Milton was compelled to go into hiding, but the King pardoned him with the Act of Oblivion. He was, however arrested by the Sergeant of the House of Commons for the non-payment of certain dues and was released very soon. Milton now turned blind and moved to Jewin Street, near Aldersgate street. At this time, being blind but wealthy, he once again got married and this time to Elizabeth Minshul. Johnson's criticism of Milton and his notion on marriage is pertinent to discuss here, "All his wives were virgins; for he has declared that he thought it gross and indelicate to be a second husband." But this marriage turned out to be disastrous. Charles II offered Milton the

post of Latin Secretary once again but he declined. He started composing *Paradise Lost* in the face of his blindness and other obstacles. He employed his daughters and a number of other people in this project as scribes. In 1665, when plague raged in London, Milton sought shelter at Chalfont in Bucks and finished *Paradise Lost*. He returned to London in 1666 and finished *Paradise Lost*. In 1667, he published the book. After three years, in 1670, he published his *History of England*, which was followed by *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. In 1672, he published *A New Scheme of Logic According to the Method of Ramus* and wrote *A Treatise of True Religion*.

Milton died on 10th November, 1674 at the age of sixty-six and was buried in the chancel of St. Giles at Cripplegate.

Stop to consider

Johnson's portrayal of Milton's character is not free from prejudice. It is useful to study the various influences at work in this portrayal. Many critics find autobiographical instances in a number of his works. A comparison between the life and the works of the poet along with a study of the influences of the society would be profitable.

Johnson's *Life of Milton* can be regarded as one of the best sources of his views on poetry. In *Life of Milton*, he defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by taking imagination to the help of reason." Invention for him is different from imagination and produces something unexpected, surprising and delightful. For Johnson, the function of poetry is to please and instruct. As a result of his subscription to the classical ideals Johnson held that the imagination of the poet must be controlled by reason. Johnson held truth in higher esteem than beauty. That is why he denounced *Lycidas* and the allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*.

For Johnson, inspiration was unimportant for the process of poetic creation. Poetry, he believed was solely the result of art, and by art he meant - *correction, revision and constant use of the file till perfection has been attained*. For him an epic poet must have a moral outlook which must be conveyed in an elevated and dignified manner, and which would be appropriate for the expression of lofty ideal and profound sentiments. He should gather the material from history and should improve on that by means of noble art. One cannot be a poet until he has attained the whole extension of his language,

distinguished all the delicate phrases, and all the colours of words and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the varieties of metrical moderation.

Johnson's critical standards

A neo-classicist to the core, Johnson thought that the epic was the highest form of poetry, and he subscribed to the principles of Aristotle. He also advocated the purity of diction and denounced blank verse as unmusical and odd for the English language. He criticized Milton for using the English language with a foreign idiom. In Johnson's opinion the music and independence of the heroic couplet cannot be achieved by any other method.

But the importance of the *Life of Milton* is seen in his shrewd judgement of the works. But it is also a fact that most of his criticism abounds in many literary, personal and political prejudices. Johnson criticizes Milton's Republicanism like this, "Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority." Of Milton's other works, Johnson's critical attention is attracted mainly towards *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* and *Comus*. The criticism of these works is not completely free of his extra-literary prejudices and consequently most of them are subjective in nature. In *L'Allegro*, Milton talks about the cheerful, carefree man who leads his life accepting all the pleasures. *Il Penseroso*, on the other hand, is about the man in whom the tendency to reflect has paralyzed the desire or ability to act. Both poems together represent two sides of life as if they are the two sections of the same poem. Critics point out that Milton's sympathy lies with *Il Penseroso*, since it is the kind of life he was himself leading during his stay at Horton. *Il Penseroso* represents the Puritan ideals of life. Johnson's comment that "there is no mirth in his melancholy but some melancholy in his mirth" leads the reader to reflect on the poet's attitude to life. The plots of both the poems consist in a simple progression of time. Johnson appreciates the beauty and music of these poems but disapproves of their mode of versification.

Johnson also denounced *Lycidas*. With his neo-classical tendencies Johnson was always against the pastoral form. He felt that the pastoral form of *Lycidas* was easy, vulgar and therefore disgusting. He failed to appreciate the melody of *Lycidas* and he maintained that it was a poem of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and numbers unpleasing. The passion of the poem, according to Johnson, was also artificial. Johnson says, "what beauty there is we must

therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions." Johnson is against the use of blank verse and regards Milton's use of blank verse in *Lycidas* as a fault of the poem. Johnson may be right in warning against the misuse of the pastoral form but one can not agree with him when he says that the form is artificial and unnatural. The grossest fault, according to Johnson, is the mingling of heathen mythologies with Christian saints and sacred truth. Criticism of *Lycidas* is vitiated by classical dogma, insensibility to imagination and extra-literary prejudices. For Johnson, the *Masque of Comus* is the best of Milton's juvenile writing. He found the language, power of description and the vigour of sentiment of *Comus* remarkable. According to Johnson, the masque was truly poetical with its allusions, images and descriptive epithets. But he found it deficient as drama. The action of the play for him is unconvincing and unreasonable. He found fault with the prologue, because it was contrary to the spirit of the drama. The soliloquies of *Comus* and the *Lady* are considered by Johnson to be elegant but tedious. The characters are bold but the language is too luxuriant for dialogues. Johnson concludes by saying that *Comus* as drama is "inelegantly splendid and tediously instructive."

Check Your Progress:

1. Highlight Johnson's assumption by explaining his preferences? Attempt an outline of his neo-classical conceptions?
2. How does Johnson compare *Lycidas* and *Comus*? In what way does Johnson assess Milton's achievement? Support your answer textually?
3. Attempt a review of Johnson's evaluation of Milton's literary abilities?
4. Explore the neo-classical principles that shape Johnson's assessment of Milton?

The criticism of *Paradise Lost* is relatively free from Johnson's prejudices. Johnson appreciates the characters, the sentiments and the grandeur of the epic as the best and the most mature of Milton's writings. The expression of the moral in *Paradise Lost* is attractive and surprising. According to Johnson, an epic should have a great subject and Milton has chosen the best possible subject. His purpose "is to vindicate the ways of God to men." Johnson distinguishes two

parts in an epic- the probable and the marvelous. In Milton he observes that these two are merged into one. While talking about *Paradise Lost* he says that here "the probable has been made marvelous and the marvelous probable." Johnson points out two main episodes in the epic- Raphael's reference to the war in heaven and Michael's prophecy of the changes about to happen in the world. Both episodes have been incorporated into the main action of the epic, thereby conforming to the unity of action with a definite beginning, middle and end. Johnson does not agree with Dryden's view that Adam could not be the hero of the epic because he is crushed and debased. Johnson argues that Adam's deceiver is crushed in the end and he is restored to the favour of God. The sentiments of the epic, according to Johnson, are just and proper. As a poet Milton can please when pleasure is required, but his peculiar power is to astonish. The whole poem is characterized by sublimity in different forms.

But Johnson is not blind towards the faults of the epic and this is what makes him recognized as a biographer. He identifies three central defects in the epic, "the lack of human interest, the faulty personification of Sin and Death, and the inconsistent presentation of the spiritual beings." The epic, according to Johnson, "comprises neither human action nor human manners." The allegory of Sin and Death also shows the lack of the poet's skill. The presentation of the spiritual beings is also confusing; there is no clear distinction between spirit and matter. Apart from these, Johnson is also critical about the language and versification of *Paradise Lost*. As a neoclassicist Johnson judged everything from a classical point of view and had denounced everything that had not conformed to Aristotelian principles.

SAQ

How biased is Johnson's criticism of *Paradise Lost*?(50 words)

What does Johnson appreciate about *Paradise Lost*? (50 words)

Regarding *Paradise Regained* Johnson pointed out that though it had many elegant passages and was always instructive it was deficient in dialogues and action. The poem, in the long run, according to Johnson, was dull and tedious and failed to please. *Samson Agonistes* was for him a failure as drama. It had some beautiful passages and single lines, but its plot was loose, construction faulty and its characters lacked unity.

Towards the end of the *Life of Milton*, Johnson gives a balanced and judicious estimate of Milton as poet. He praises Milton as an epic poet and discusses his art of versification along with a study of the comparative merits of rhymed and blank verse. He says that Milton is not the greatest of the epic poets simply because he is not the first. Milton's language is peculiarly his own. It has no resemblance to any earlier writer or the language in common use. This peculiarity arises from his effort to use words suited to the grandeur of his subject. But Milton's language is sometimes highly Latinised. Johnson regards this as a fault and comments that Milton "writ no language but effected a Babylonish jargon." Johnson, however, felt that this defect was compensated by his extensive learning, and resulted in a 'grace in deformity'. He praises Milton's diction for its copiousness and variety. He credits Milton's use of blank verse to the influence of the Italian writers. But his blank verse has neither the ease of prose nor the melody of poetry. While admitting that rhyme is not an essential adjunct of poetry he maintains that poets in other languages might have dispensed with the rhyme, but it is essential for the English language. Johnson praises Milton's skill in handling the blank verse but warns that Milton is a poet to be admired but not imitated. Milton's genius is apparent in his art of narration, in the texture of his plot, and the immense variety of dialogues and incidents. Although he is not free from Homeric influences, he shows originality in every page of his best works. He wrote according to his own light, fearless, confident and

undeterred by difficulties

Comments on the personality and character of Milton are scattered throughout the pages of *Life of Milton*. Like the criticism of Milton's works, the evaluation of his character is also not free from prejudices. Johnson points out that as a young man Milton was active and vigorous and his domestic habits were those of a devoted scholar. Although he was a disciplinarian in his daily routines, he was not much of an expert in financial matters and ended his days in near poverty. Johnson felt that Milton was not really interested in the established forms of religion. Milton's political views were Republican and the expression of his views was almost always violent. While appreciating Milton's independent mind at a time when there was strong domination of sectarianism, Johnson condemns it by saying that it is not development but changing one's principles according to one's convenience: Johnson had doubts regarding Milton's political beliefs. Johnson writes, "he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than to establish, and he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority." However, Johnson praises Milton for his strong determination and capability to work in adverse circumstances. Johnson made no attempt to idealize the character of Milton. He does not hesitate to ridicule Milton at certain times and maintains the poet was unnecessarily fond of controversies and an opportunist at times. The minute details of Milton's habits and character makes the work more interesting and realistic at the same time.

Stop to consider:

Milton's Politics & Johnson's Assessment

From the accounts that we get of Milton's social and political life, as in the account by Stephen B. Dobranski, what we get to see of Milton's personality is the struggle waged within his consciousness between getting involved in the hurly-burly of politics and remaining aloof from it. Dobranski is of the opinion that "working for the Commonwealth gave Milton the kind of firsthand experience that complemented his studies and enabled him to produce his later masterpieces, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain'd*, and *Samson Agonistes*. These publications are not the work of an independent, reclusive poet and pedant; rather, they benefit from a combination of scholarship, inspiration, and the experiences of an author who knew both failure and compromise, and who would witness the censure and execution of many of his collaborators."

Our own question here should be, does Dr. Johnson recognize such political undertones in Milton's writings? Milton was an actively political poet and scholar so no estimation of him can be complete which leaves out this integral dimension. If Johnson does so, the reason that can be cited is that he was concerned with classical aesthetic principles and the readership which would

take up the *Lives of the Poets* finally. We also have to propose that English criticism in Johnson's age was guided by its own principles.

1.5.2 Reading The Text: *Life of Cowley*

Johnson first begins his account on Cowley by criticizing the biography on Cowley produced by Dr. sprat, " an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature: but his zeal of friendship, or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history: he has given the character , not the life of Cowley.' Other than that, it is also an instance of constructive criticism of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. This itself shows how Johnson's critical bent of mind was responsible for his attack on metaphysical poetry at large.

Abraham Cowley was born in the year 1618. His father who was a grocer by profession, died before he was born. Thus, Cowley was left to the care of his mother, who had to struggle hard to bring up her son. Then his schooling started at Westminster School. Cowley showed his talent for poetry from a very young age and in his thirteenth year a volume of his poetry was published in the name of *The Tragical history of Pyramus and Thisbe and Constansia and Philetus*. His pastoral comedy *Love's Riddle* was produced during his schooldays but it was published only when he was at Cambridge. He joined Cambridge in 1636 and wrote the greater part of his massive work *Davideis*. In 1643, he left Cambridge after completing M A and took shelter in St. John's College, Oxford. In the same year, he managed to publish his satire *The Puritan and the Papist*, which earned him much favour from the King. After Oxford was surrendered to the Parliament, Cowley followed the Queen to Paris and became secretary to the Lord Jermyn, later the Earl of St. Albans. He was employed in the prestigious service of ciphering and deciphering the letters between the King and the Queen.

In 1647, Cowley published his *Mistress* by proclaiming, "poets are scarce thought freemen of their company without paying some duties, or obliging themselves to be true to love.' His *Poems* was published in 1656, when he returned to England after staying at Paris as secretary to Lord Jermyn. In the preface to this book, he hinted for the first time of the denotations of some relaxation of his loyalty and of the change in his attitude towards the royalty. Johnson accuses other biographers of misrepresenting this aspect of Cowley's life.

Stop to Consider

Milton and Cowley lived almost at the same time, but they differed in their poetic ideals and also in their attitudes to the social and political conflicts of the time. While Milton supported the Puritans, Cowley stood with the Royalists. Moreover, in their performances in Latin poetry it was Cowley whose poetry demands more acclamation as Johnson says, "Milton is generally content to express the thoughts of the ancients in their language: Cowley, without much loss of purity or elegance, accommodates the diction of Rome to his own conceptions."

Hence, it would be very useful to compare and contrast the works of both these poets in the light of their poetical, political and social beliefs. With the establishment of the Puritan government, Cowley had to face problems but was permitted to become a physician and with this intention he went to France. He finally became a physician. With the view that botany is necessary for a physician he retired to Kent and started studying plants. But the poet prevailed over the botanist and he ended up by composing some Latin poetry on plants. After the Restoration he was expecting advancement and published a *Song of Triumph*. However, despite the promises of both Charles I and Charles II, he missed the mastership of Savoy. He got frustrated because his loyalty to the Crown did not receive any reward and he had to produce his *Guardian* (1661) under the name *Cutter of Coleman-Street*. It was treated on the stage with great severity, and was afterwards censured as a satire on the King's party or the Royalists. Then he published his pretensions and discontents in an ode called *The Complaint* which met with the same fortune of complaints and contempt.

Cowley could not long enjoy the pleasures of life nor could he suffer the uneasiness of solitude, for he died at the Porch house in Chertsey in 1667, only at the age of forty nine. He was buried near Chaucer and Spenser. Referring to what Dr. Sprat wrote Johnson writes that Cowley was "the most amiable, of mankind: and this posthumous praise may safely be credited, as it has never been contradicted by envy or by faction."

After such a remarkable biographical account of Cowley, Johnson moves towards a criticism on the poet and his work. Johnson claims that Cowley, like the common poets having narrow views and prejudices, has been at one time too much praised and too much neglected at another. In *Life of Cowley*, Johnson expressed his views on metaphysical poetry as well. He writes, "About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets, of whom, in a criticism on the works of Cowley, it is not improper to give some account." He did not consider it as

proper poetry, and found fault with its imperfect modulation. He further writes, "the metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour: but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing \poetry they only wrote verses." Subscribing to Aristotle with his neoclassical prejudices he remarked that metaphysical poets were not poets at all for "they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature for life, neither painted forms of matter, nor represented the operations of the intellect." He maintained that the metaphysical poets were unable to use wit in the true sense of the term. He felt that in metaphysical poetry "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises." And consequently, the readers, although they admire the poetry, are seldom pleased by the same.

Metaphysical Poets

It's a term used to group together some seventeenth century poets usually Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Vaughn, and Traherne. "Metaphysical" concerns refer to the common subjects of their poetry, which investigates the world by rational discussions rather than by intuitions and impressions. John Dryden was the first to apply this term when in 1693, he criticized Donne, "He affects the metaphysics.." Known for their innovations and extraordinary use of language the poetry of this school was different from the classical tradition. The poets wrote a kind of poetry which was argumentative in nature, striking in terms of the use of imagery and was filled with conceits. The new poetry did not follow the traditional rhyme scheme. Their images were drawn from the most unexpected places and things and they sought comparison between apparently dissimilar things. Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Cowley, Crashaw and so on, were its chief exponents. This school of poetry was denounced by Johnson as he decried its roughness and violation of decorum, and the deliberate mixture of different styles. But in the twentieth century, the poetry of these poets were recognized and restored to the mainstream by T S Eliot's groundbreaking analysis of the metaphysical poets in the essay *The Metaphysical Poets*.(1921)

What is implicated in the essay is Eliot's view that, " a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry." Hence, the element of the "metaphysical" can be applied to any poem in general. How will you differentiate between Johnson and Eliot in terms of their views regarding metaphysical poetry?

According to Johnson, the sentiments of the metaphysical poets were not uniform for which they could not ignite the readers to understand and feel the pains and the pleasure of other minds. They lacked concern for humanity and wrote rather as beholders of human action. Being a moralist who advocated the instructive purpose of poetry.

Johnson could not approve of this. For Johnson the metaphysical poets could never be great. They did have a quest for novelty but great thoughts are always general, which results in sublimity. The metaphysical approach was analytical and Johnson thought that it broke every image into fragments for which much of the beauty was lost. In diction he found them too hyperbolic and disapproved of their faulty versification.

But Johnson did admire the learning and thinking of the metaphysical poets. If they did not gratify imagination they could employ the powers of reflection and comparison of the reader. They were no mere imitators. Johnson writes, "Yet great labour, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth." The poetry of this race of poets aroused a sense of recollection and enquiry regarded Cowley as one of the best exponents of the metaphysical poetry. To verify his positive remarks he put forward certain examples of the metaphysical poets as a means to praise their eminent distinctions.

Then Johnson tries to consider the other works of Cowley whom he claims to be the best in the entire race. He refers to Cowley's *Miscellanies*, a collection of short compositions as an attempt at assembling diversified excellence which "no other poet has hitherto afforded." Johnson praised Cowley's *The ode on Wit* as an almost unrivalled piece of creation, particularly the passage in which he condemned the exuberance of wit. His verses to Lord Falkland are replete with striking thoughts but are not well wrought. His elegy on Sir Henry Wotton is vigorous and happy. Cowley's poem on the death of Hervey, according to Johnson, is just and studious but it failed to move the affection of the readers. Johnson appreciated Cowley's critical ability, as it was expressed in the Preface to *Davidis*. But he laments that although it is promising, it is not sufficient.

Of all Cowley's works, Johnson finds the collections of the little poems under the general name *Anacreontiques* more complete than the others. They may not be great, but they provide real mirth and Johnson praised Cowley for his ability to please if not to instruct. These poems are different from the metaphysical poems and it is for this reason that Johnson's praises them. Johnson observed that Cowley's *Mistress* fell into a different class of poetry. The same beauty and the same faults characterize all the sections of the poem. The poem exhibit the writer's exuberance of wit and plentitude of knowledge. He is in agreement with Addison, who considered the use of the conceits in the poem as the result of mixed wit. The images of the poem entertain for a moment, but being unnatural soon grows wearisome. Johnson dismissed the charges of profaneness and lasciviousness that some

critics had accused him of. Cowley attempted *The Pindaric Odes* not to show what Pindar spoke but to admire his manner of speaking. According to Johnson, the beginning of the *Olympique Ode* is above the original in brilliance but the conclusion falls much below. Johnson finds that in *The Naxean Ode* Cowley's fanciful playing with words gets exposed. He accuses Cowley of extending a thought without improving it. Cowley, according to him, like all the metaphysical poets, pursues a thought to its last ramification, thereby losing much of its grandeur.

Johnson does not regret the fact that the epic poem *Davideis* was incomplete. He observes that *Davideis* failed to attract critical attention because of its faulty choice of subject, underdeveloped and depraved characterization and faulty planning. The general characteristic of Cowley's poetry, according to Johnson is that he writes with abundant fertility but also with negligent or unskillful selection. There is much thought but little imagery; he is never pathetic and rarely sublime.

Stop to consider

Johnson regarded Cowley as one of the best amongst the metaphysical poets, who had shown his talent in various fields. He approved Cowley's little poems and the amount of learning that he had expressed in his poetry. He also admired Cowley's critical abilities but disapproved the metaphysical qualities that were present in his poetry.

For Johnson diction is an important vehicle of thought. According to him, if a poet has faulty diction he will be unable to convey his thoughts in an appropriate manner. Johnson felt that Cowley made no selection of words nor sought any neatness in phrase. Cowley's diction was in his own time censured as negligent. His epithets were few and without adaptation. To Johnson, Cowley's diction is disproportionate and incongruous and his measures uncertain and loose. However, Johnson disagreed with Dr. Sprat on the matter of irregularity of diction in the Pindaric odes. The odes, according to Johnson, lacked uniformity. Johnson criticized Cowley for his versification, which showed little care. He felt that though Cowley's poems had some noble lines it lacked musicality of thought and diction. He also thought that the combination of different measures in Cowley resulted in dissonance and unpleasantness. Nevertheless, Johnson admitted that Cowley sometimes attempted scientific versification. He regarded Cowley as the first English poet to mingle the Alexandrine meter with common heroic ten-syllabic meter. Johnson concluded by saying that Cowley's

verse cannot be kept at a great distance from his prose. Both his prose and poetry are weighty with much learning and it is difficult to understand one without the other.

It can be argued that the ability of acute observation and distinct intolerance of Dr. Johnson is quite visible in his *Life of Cowley*.

SAQ

1. Enumerate the points in Johnson's arguments regarding the versifications of Cowley? (80 words)

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2. Do you think that Abraham Cowley could surpass his fellow writers as a poet of the metaphysical trend?(60 words)

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1.6 Johnson's Prose Style :

Johnson is mostly remembered for his aphoristic style, ultimately making him the most frequently quoted of the English writers after Shakespeare. Many of them are actually recorded by James Boswell in his biography on Johnson, like -*Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel* ; *Marriage has many pains , but celibacy has no pleasures and so on*. He possessed a peculiar gift of contracting the great rules of life into short sentences. In Johnson, there is a discernible development from the formality and mannerism of his early works like *Rasselas* and the essays in *The Rambler*, *The Adventurer* and *The Idler*, to the ease, lucidity and colloquialism of his later and mature works like *Preface to Shakespeare* and *The Lives Of The English Poets*. Yet his style is remarkable for its directness, force and trenchancy. His writing expresses his depth and sincerity but he fails when he tries to indulge in the allegorical mode. He is often criticized for verbosity, but he seldom used words that does not contribute to the content. His writing is weighty in thought; it is the concentrated expression of a mind well stocked.

Johnson's criticism is perhaps the most interesting part of his writings. Although some have criticized him as a 'literary dictator', he rejected this role for himself as he always endeavoured to speak for truthfulness of representation and morality. Many have praised Johnson for his common sense, but the flexibility and coherence of his response to literary activities were even more important. The elements in the literary mind of Johnson were more supple, balanced and sometimes contradictory. Looking at his performance as a writer, the use of language, the turns and tones of his subtle and complex sentences , we can really claim him to be an accomplished writer. The final two paragraphs of the *Life of Cowley*, in which Johnson sums up the literary achievements of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, illustrate his quality and flexibility of the mind. For today's readers, Johnson's style and viewpoints may need some more response.

1.7 Critical Reception :

Mathew Arnold concluded in his *Johnson's Lives* (1878) that the appropriation of Johnson in modern times can be summarized as, "The more we study Johnson, the higher will be our esteem for the power of his mind, the width of his interests, the largeness of his knowledge , the freshness, fearlessness, and strength of his judgments."

While a modern scholarly biography seeks to provide a more accurate

and comprehensive account of its subject's life, Johnson's work in the eighteenth century is of enduring value. *The Lives of the English Poets* (1783) cannot be regarded as a great work of personalized canon making. While Johnson proposed several additions, the choices generally were not his own. Johnson, of course, believed in maintaining an English literary canon surpassing the literature of the other nations but that canon was not supposed to be determined by any single critic. Unlike modern critics like T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Harold Bloom who believed in a certain kind of reordering of the English tradition, Johnson did something else in deciding to write on the lives of 'his' chosen poets. It intermixes extended passages of literary criticism, biographical information, and a limited delineation of cultural context. The authority with which Johnson expresses himself actually reveals his ability to observe.

Johnson had been received with much acclamation by his contemporary critics as well as readers. James Boswell even made him the subject of what is often called the greatest biography in English, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L. D.* (1791). Johnson was one of those writers to propose a kind of freedom from classical rules and prescriptions for literary composition. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and the other critics of the eighteenth century criticized Johnson's neoclassical principles and disputed his evaluations of authors, yet his support for rule-breaking innovation, in the preface to Shakespeare and elsewhere, prepared the literary and cultural ground for the Romantic revolution. His scope of writings made him what we may now call a public intellectual. In the nineteenth century, interest in Johnson was centered on his personality, which was also the subject matter of Boswell's biography. But it was only in the twentieth century that his writings regained their prominence.

1.8 Suggested Readings :

Johnson, Samuel. *Lives of the English Poets: A Selection*. New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, 1997 (rpt).

Leitch, Vincent B. (Ged.). *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. London: Norton & Company 2001.

Fowler, Roger. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. London: Routledge, 1973.

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature: The Restoration to 1800*. New Delhi: Allied Publisher, 1979 (rpt.)

The New Encyclopedia Britannica, (Macropedia) Volume 22 , 15th Edition, 2005.

Unit 2

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Chapters I & II)

Contents :

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introducing the Author
- 2.3 The Context
- 2.4 The form of the Autobiography
- 2.5 Russell's *Autobiography*
 - 2.5.1 Reading Chapter I: "Childhood"
 - 2.5.2 Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence"
- 2.6 Critical Reception
- 2.7 Russell's Style
- 2.8 Glossary
- 2.9 Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* is regarded as one of the best specimens of modern autobiography. After going through this unit you should be able to

- *define* autobiography
- *enable* yourself to differentiate autobiographical writing from biographical ones
- *read* Russell's autobiography in the contexts of "Childhood" and "Adolescence"
- *summarise* the basic intellectual preoccupations of the modern age
- *trace* Russell's development as a major intellectual of the twentieth century

2.2 Introducing the Author :

Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872, at Trelleck, Monmouthshire, England. His full name was Bertrand Arthur William Russell. He was also the third earl Russell of Kingston Russell, Viscount Amberley of Amberley and of Ardsalla, English logician and philosopher and was known more for his social and political campaigns supporting both pacifism and nuclear disarmament. Russell received the Nobel prize for literature in 1950. Known mostly for his campaigning for peace he spent his life as a popular writer on social, political, philosophical and moral subjects. During his lifetime, he published more than 70 books and about 2,000 articles, married four times, became involved in innumerable public controversies, and was honoured and hated in almost equal measure throughout the world.

Russell was the grandson of the 1st earl of Russells-Lord John Russell. He was the second son of Viscount Amberley and Katherine, daughter of the 2nd Baron Stanley of Alderly. After the premature death of his parents Russell was brought up by his grandmother who was a strict and politically liberal-minded Puritan with a rigidity of conscience and standards. He was educated privately without the company of other fellows. This loneliness indirectly helped him in developing an intense inner self full of idealistic feelings and metaphysical profundities which were directed towards a certainty of knowledge. From an early age, he began to develop doubts regarding religion which in a way influenced his upbringing. Gradually, he became more and more philosophical and accepted the disillusionment of finding that logical certainty was unattainable in empirical matters. This sense of disillusionment paved the way for the emergence of the philosopher in Russell. What he disliked most was the human pretension to reach ultimate knowledge. So, one of his primary aims was to enquire about *how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness.*

Russell entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1890 and soon proved his intellectual talents and became the member of the exclusive society known as "The Apostles". Inspired by his discussions with the members of the group, Russell abandoned mathematics for philosophy and won a fellowship at Trinity on the strength of a thesis entitled *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*. Following Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), this work presented a sophisticated idealist theory that viewed geometry as a description of the structure of spatial intuition. So, beginning his career with mathematics he turned to philosophy and ultimately, becoming an idealist under the influence of the Cambridge metaphysician J. M. E. McTaggart, he took a first-class degree in moral science in 1894.

In 1896, his first political work, *German Social Democracy* appeared. Though he supported the reformist aims of the German socialist movement, he also criticized some of the Marxist dogmas. The book was written partly as the outcome of a visit to Berlin in 1895 when he formulated an ambitious scheme of writing two different series of books, one on the philosophy of the sciences, the other on social and political issues. Shortly after finishing his book on geometry, he abandoned the metaphysical idealism which provided him with the framework for this grand synthesis. What enabled Russell's abandonment of idealism was the influence of his friend and fellow Apostle, G. E. Moore. However, other influences on his thought at this time came from a group of German mathematicians namely Karl Weierstrauss, Georg Cantor and Richard Dedekind, who were presenting mathematics with a set of logically rigorous foundations. Russell described this as "the greatest triumph of which our age has to boast." Inspired by the work of these mathematicians Russell conceived the idea that mathematics is nothing but logic. The philosophical case for this point of view-subsequently known as "Logicism" was stated at length in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903). After this, Russell abandoned all notions of his earlier idealism and adopted the view that analysis rather than synthesis was the surest method of philosophy and that, therefore, all the grand beliefs of the previous philosophers were misconceived. Thus, Russell exerted a profound influence on the entire tradition of English-speaking analytic philosophy.

Russell himself described his philosophical development after *The Principles of Mathematics* as a "retreat from Pythagoras." The first step in this retreat was his discovery of a contradiction known as "Russell's Paradox". The contradiction arises from the following considerations: Some classes are members of themselves (e.g., the class of all classes), and some are not (e.g., the class of all men), so we need to construct the class of all classes that are not members of themselves. But now, if we ask of this class "Is it a member of itself?" we become enmeshed in a contradiction. If it is, then it is not, and if it is not, then it is. This is rather like defining the village barber as *the man who shaves all those who do not shave themselves* and then asking whether the barber shaves himself or not.

Logic and language:

In philosophy the greatest impact of *Principia Mathematica* has been through its so-called theory of descriptions. Originally, developed by Russell as a part of his efforts to overcome the contradictions in his theory of logic, this method of analysis has since become widely influential even among the philosophers having no specific interest in mathematics. The general idea at the root of

Russell's theory of descriptions is that the grammatical structures of ordinary language are distinct from the true "logical forms" of expressions. This has become his most enduring contribution to philosophy.

After the *Principia* was written, there came a profound change in his personal life. Russell's private life became more and more painful. In 1911, he fell passionately in love with Lady Ottoline Morrell leading him to the rejection of Alys, his first wife. Partly under Morrell's influence, he lost interest in technical philosophy and began to write in a different and more accessible style. Through his *Problems of Philosophy* (1911), Russell discovered his ability to write on difficult subjects for lay readers, and thus, he began to address the common mass of people rather than the chosen few capable of understanding *Principia Mathematica*.

Stop to Consider

Wittgenstein and 'truth'

What influenced the change in the later writings of Russell was his intimacy with Ludwig Wittgenstein, a brilliant young Austrian who arrived at Cambridge to study logic with Russell, in 1911. Fired with intense enthusiasm for philosophy and language, Wittgenstein made great progress, and within a year Russell began to look to him for the discussion of logic and philosophy. However, Wittgenstein's own work, eventually published in 1921 as *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)*, 1922, undermined the entire approach to logic that had inspired Russell's great contributions to the philosophy of mathematics. Russell was compelled to think that there were no "truths" of logic at all, and that logic consisted entirely of tautologies as the "truth" of logic was not guaranteed by any eternal facts of ideas but by the nature of language itself. This was to be the final step in Russell's retreating from Pythagoras and a further incentive for abandoning technical philosophy in favour of other pursuits.

During World War I, Russell became, for a while, a full-time political agitator; campaigning for peace and against conscription of the British Government. Found guilty, he was twice taken to court, the second time to receive a sentence of six months in prison. In 1916, Russell was dismissed from his lecturership at Trinity College for his anti-war campaigning. Later, when called back he turned down the offer, preferring instead to pursue a career as a journalist and freelance writer. The war had had a profound effect on Russell's political views, causing him to abandon his inherited liberalism and to socialism, which he espoused in a series of books including *Principles of Social*

Reconstruction (1916), *Roads to Freedom* (1918), and *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (1923). He was initially sympathetic to the 1917 Russian Revolution, but a visit to the Soviet Union in 1920 left him with a deep and abiding loathing for Soviet communism, which he expressed in *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920). In 1921, Russell married his second wife, Dora Black, a young graduate of Girton College, Cambridge. During the interwar years, Russell and Dora became famous as the leaders of a progressive socialist movement that was anticlerical, defiant of conventional sexual morality, and dedicated to educational reform.

Russell's published works during this period consist mainly of journalistic books written in support of these causes. Books like *On Education* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), and *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) were sold in large numbers which reestablished Russell in the eyes of the general public as a philosopher addressing the most pertinent moral, political, and social issues of the day. His public lecture "Why I Am Not a Christian," delivered in 1927, became a popular "locus classicus" of atheistic rationalism. In 1927, Russell and Dora set up their own school, Beacon Hill, as a pioneering experiment in primary education. To pay for it, Russell undertook a few lucrative but exhausting lecture tours of the United States. In 1932, Russell left Dora for Patricia ("Peter") Spence, a young Oxford undergraduate, followed by a divorce from Dora, which was finally granted in 1935. In the following year, he married Spence.

After such upheavals, he returned to academic philosophy, and gained a teaching post at the University of Chicago. From 1938 to 1944, Russell lived in the United States, where he taught at Chicago and in the University of California at Los Angeles, but he was prevented from taking a post at the City College of New York because of objections to his views on sex and marriage. Then he secured a job of teaching history of philosophy at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia just to lose it soon. But his *History of Western Philosophy* (1945) proved to be a best-seller and was for many years his main source of income. His return to Trinity College was occasioned by his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (1948). During this period, Russell regained his status in the form of the Order of Merit in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature came in 1950. But, in spite of having the ability to write extraordinary prose, Russell did not have a talent for writing great fiction, and his short stories only helped in puzzling and silencing the readers.

In 1952, at the age of eighty, Russell married his fourth wife, Edith Finch, and finally found lasting conjugal harmony. Russell devoted his last years to campaigning against nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War for which, once again, he underwent imprisonment. When he died

on 2nd February at Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales. in 1970. Russell was better known as an antiwar campaigner than as a philosopher. However, it is his great contributions to philosophy that he will be remembered for and honoured by the future generations.

In Bertrand Russell we see the most widely varied and persistently influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. During his life which covered almost three generations, Russell could manage to write more than 40 books ranging over philosophy, mathematics, science, ethics, sociology, education, history, religion, politics and polemic. The extent of his influence resulted partly from his amazing efficiency in applying his intellect and partly from the deep humanitarian feeling that was the mainspring of his action. This feeling expressed itself consistently at the frontier of social change through what he himself would have called a *liberal anarchistic, left-wing, and skeptical atheist temperament*.

SAQ

How did Russell's ideas affect his prose? Was this related to his rigorous training in Philosophy and mathematics? (50 + 70 words)

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Why was Russell seen as a philosopher who addressed important issues pertaining to everyday life? (60 words)

2.3 The Context

The context of the *Autobiography* can be derived from Russell's interest in recollecting the history of his family and most importantly in his attempt to rediscover his past. However, in the prologue of the autobiography Russell has put forward the basic idea of writing his autobiography. In his *Prologue to the Autobiography* Russell has given his own explanation of "what I have lived for."

"Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a great ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair."

Stop to Consider:

The twin poles of Russell's imagination:

Russell sought for love as it brought ecstasy of so great intensity that he was even ready to sacrifice his life just for a few hours of joy. He believed that the feeling of joy could replace loneliness. And he found that in the union of

love, in the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets had imagined. With equal passion he had sought knowledge and always tried to understand the hearts of men. Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led him upward towards ecstasy. But always the sense of pity brought him back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberated in his heart. His altruism, his care for Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people becoming a burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness and poverty made him suffer like anything. This has been Russell's life and it was to conceptualise these upheavals of life that Russell wrote his *Autobiography*.

2.4 The form of the Autobiography

'Autobiography' usually means an account of a person's life by himself or herself. The term appears to have been first used by Robert Southey in 1809. In Dr. Johnson's opinion no man is better qualified to write his life than himself, but this was quite debatable. Memory may be unreliable. Moreover, very few can recall clear details of their early life and most are therefore dependent on other people's impressions. At the same time, human beings remember selectively. Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed, truth may be distorted for the sake of convenience or harmony and the occlusion of time may obscure as much as reveal. Hence, the idea of an autobiography is inherently complex as it has to depend on the element of fictionality at some point of time.

In the classical era history and autobiography were almost similar as can be seen from the *Histories of Herodotus*, Xenophon's *Anabasis* and Caesar's *Commentaries*. Reports from Tacitus inform that Rutilius Rufus and Emilius Scaurus both wrote autobiographies, but the texts are not available now. The latest example we can provide of the modern notion of an 'autobiography' is the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius of second century A.D.. St Augustine's *Confessions* of fourth century can be termed as the first notable autobiography which is an intensely personal account of spiritual experience and an extraordinary example of deep psychological self analysis of a kind signifying modern examples. Then Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (673-735) provides another example of a brief account of one's own life. However, it was not until the sixteenth century that autobiographies started to become common.

Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*, published in 1580, constitute the first great instance of autobiographical self-revelation that is presented for its inherent interest, rather than for religious or didactic purposes. It is a thoughtful and analytical excursions into his own self. It is possible to find that the cult of humanism during the Renaissance period encouraged people to explore and analyze themselves in great details. Analysis of characters and personalities in plays, essays and character

sketches became frequent. Hence, much emphasis on subjectivity was bound to produce autobiography.

From early seventeenth century it became a common practice to keep a diary or a journal and to write memoirs, and the 'straight' autobiographical narrative technique became commonplace. Notable instances are Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life* (1656); John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1656) and Richard Baxters's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). During the same period Evelyn and Pepys were compiling their famous diaries.

SAQ

Is autobiography different from memoirs, diaries, journals, and letters?
(50 words)

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Several other works of great merit appeared during the eighteenth century like Colly Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colly Cibber* (1740) which can be remembered as the first 'theatrical' autobiography, David Hume's *My Own Life* (1777); and Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs* (1796). Apart from these and Boswell's copious *journals* the two most famous personal accounts of the eighteenth century were Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1766) and the secular autobiography of Rousseau's *Confessions* (1764-70). During the eighteenth century, we find some connections between autobiography and then relatively new form of the novel. For example, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) are taken to be 'autobiographical fictions', or 'fictionalized autobiographies.' Very occasionally, too, the long poem

had been used for autobiography. The classic example of this is Wordsworth's *The Prelude* completed in 1805 but published posthumously. A good deal of fiction has been fairly thinly disguised autobiography, and owing to the developments of stream of Consciousness techniques, fictions like James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) have proliferated. From early in the nineteenth century autobiography of almost every kind (factual, detached narratives, self communing narratives, 'progress of the soul' narratives) has proliferated. And After World war II, almost anyone achieving distinction in life- and many who have not has written an account of his life, especially politicians, statesmen, and high ranking members of the services.

SAQ

Explore the reasons responsible for the changes in the tradition of the autobiographical writings? (80 words)

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Is autobiography an 'arranged' narrative where the life in question forms the primary subject or is it a self-analysis presenting the dichotomy between the social and psychological self?(100 words)

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2.5 Russell's *Autobiography* :

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* was published in three volumes just preceding his death in 1970. Through the first two chapters *Childhood* and *Adolescence*, Russell is seen recollecting his growth from childhood and the various influences on his character in the formative years of his life. A reading of these two chapters raises questions of appropriation and acceptance as to how far it is possible to consider this account as simply a recollection of his childhood and not a fictionalization of that period of his life. This obviously raises questions about the form of the autobiography itself.

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (which was published in three volumes in the 1960s) is a work that leaves one perplexed by its unconventional nature. It is not simply a book, bringing together a rather random collection of letters with a sketchy account of the author's life which, though sometimes alarmingly frank, omits much and hurries the reader on from one cursorily described event to another.

2.5.1 Reading Chapter I: "Childhood" :

The chapter "Childhood" furnishes a problematic way of beginning an autobiography which Russell accepts but at the same time also wants to transcend. Hence, the importance of such a moment of origin in one's life. The problem for the autobiographer, of course, is to find this beginning, to re-experience and re-present something which is almost inaccessible. One

can choose some early memories, some early experiences, but such a procedure only reminds us of the arbitrary nature of the writer's decision, thereby increasing the possibility of occurrence of elements of fictionality in what is supposed to be literally true.

What distinguishes this autobiography is its fluid flow of information related to Russell's childhood days. While reading this chapter, one will immediately feel the sense of a fictional beginning although one should not forget that it is a part of an autobiography. This chapter begins with a recollection of his early days in Pembroke Lodge, "My first vivid recollection is my arrival at Pembroke Lodge in February, 1876." But Russell cannot remember clearly *the actual arrival at the house* which signifies what he himself said about the difficulty in beginning an autobiography. After his arrival at Pembroke Lodge, Russell mentions that a peculiar kind of curiosity was aroused in the minds of the servants and other people, "I was placed upon the high stool for tea, and what I remember most vividly is wondering why the servants took so much interest in me." It is to be noted here that the description of his arrival at Pembroke Lodge is a recollection but the opening lines seem to have certain fictional elements so as to divert the attention of the readers at the very outset. It invites our attention to the element of fictionality present in autobiographical writing.

SAQ

How would you define 'fictionality'? (50 words)

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Then Russell goes on to describe his family members. Russell's parents died when he was still a child. He discovers his mother mostly from her diaries and letters and comes to the conclusion that she was,

"religious , lively, witty, serious, original, and fearless." His father was, "philosophical , studious, unworldly, morose, and priggish." But both of them were known for their reformist notions for which they had to face lots of hurdles, "My father lost his seat in parliament through advocacy of birth control." Russell's mother was also famous for her radical opinions. He further writes, "My mother used to address meetings in favour of votes for women." His father was an ardent supporter of John Stuart Mill and a free thinker". Perhaps the reformist zeal found in Russell was a part of the direct inheritance from his parents.

Stop to consider

Memory and fiction

We are talking about the problem of 'authenticity' and the element of fictionality in an autobiography. In this context, the reconstruction of Russell's mother through documents like diaries and letters invites attention towards the 'textuality' of experience and remembrance.

In his description of his parents and family, Russell has to rely on the received versions of history. But the sense of authenticity is maintained by Russell by his constant verification of what he says, "I know that this recollection is genuine , because I verified it at much later time, after having kept it to myself for a number of years." In the first part of the chapter, Russell tries to trace his genealogy by giving a meticulous description of most of the important events in his family-history, like the marriage of his parents in 1864 at the age of 22 , the birth of his brother after nine months, and the letter of the mother to the grandmother informing her of the new born baby, Russell himself, and so on. Their concern for the education of their children made the parents appoint a 'Darwinian' private tutor D. A. Spalding for his brother and for Russell. It was an important incident and Russell's sense of humour is clearly visible here when he says that, "He was a Darwinian and was engaged in studying the instincts of chickens, which to felicitate his studies were allowed to work havoc in every room of the house...and that he himself was in an advanced stage of consumption and died not very long after my father."

After that, the text concentrates on the locale of his childhood. Referring to the aristocratic and historical significance of the Pembroke Lodge, Russell writes that it was a place where his grandparents used to live, "It was a rambling house of only two storeys in Richmond Park. It was in the gift of the sovereign and derives its name from lady Pembroke to whom George III was devoted in the day of his lunacy." He describes the rich natural heritage of Pembroke Lodge and its surroundings by saying that it had eleven acres of garden mostly allowed to run wild. Russell clearly expresses his indebtedness to Pembroke Lodge when he says, "this garden played a very

large part in my life up to the age of eighteenth....I grew accustomed to wide horizons and to an unimpeded view of the sunset."

The past for Russell

"It lived in the past and I lived in the past with it." The past for Russell came alive through the trees, summer houses, hedges and so on in the garden and his ideas about himself was being formulated in the process. The garden helped him to fantasize about the persons lost and accessible only in terms of memory. Being an introvert Russell found an alternative world independent of outside pressures in the midst of nature.

The rest of this chapter deals with the influences of the important persons on Russell's life. The chief amongst them was his grandmother about whom he said, "she was the most important person to me throughout my childhood and who demanded that everything should be viewed through a mist of Victorian sentiment." Certain motives to her were laudable, like love of country, public spirit, love of one's children, while she considered love of money, love of power and vanity as "bad motives." Sex, to her, was a selfish motive, and marriage a puzzling institution, "She disliked wine, abhorred tobacco, and was always on the verge of becoming a vegetarian. Her life was austere. She ate only the plainest food, breakfasted at eight, and until she reached the age of eighty never sat in a comfortable chair until after tea." If his grandmother oriented him towards the Victorian way of life, his Uncle Rollo, who stayed in the same house, inculcated in him the sense of a scientific spirit "of which he had considerable knowledge his conversations did a great deal to stimulate my scientific interests" resulting ultimately in his interest in mathematics. Russell remembers aunt Agatha and her unsuccessful attempts to educate the young Russell. According to him, she was victimized by the grandmother's Puritanical beliefs and to some extent she resembled the grandmother in terms of strictness and sentimental behaviour. Consequently, the setting of Pembroke Lodge and its inhabitants had a deep impact on the formative mind of Russell. The conversations of the grown ups which he heard, discussions which largely centred on politics and war stimulated his mind at a very young age.

Science vs religion

In the later Victorian age, the role of skepticism, the sense of inner disturbance and dissatisfaction fostered a search for a scientific basis in everything and the rise of the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin, profoundly influenced man's attitude towards nature and religion. The scientific spirit, its basis on the methods of observation, its growing interest in social processes and conditions of living, were the major preoccupations of the Victorian world. The dilemma between scientific spirit and religious orthodoxy enormously excited and stimulated thoughts of all kinds in the later Victorian literature.

From an early age, his brother was of a dominating nature. And Russell's parents had to face trouble because of him. But Russell's portrait of his brother contains no sense of sibling rivalry. Hence, it is a balanced and compassioned account and speaks of Russell's sense of independent judgement. While referring to his brother, he writes, "I retain through his life an attitude towards him consisting of affection mixed with fear. He passionately longed to be loved, but was such a bully that he never could keep the love of any one." During his early stay at Pembroke Lodge the servants enriched the storehouse of childhood experience by offering a different perspective. Russell remembers the strict and rigorous house keeper Mrs Cox, the butler Mac Alpine who used to take him on his knees, the terrifying French cook Michaud (because Russell used to steal roasted meat), the gardener Mac Robie and so on. Russell never forgets to recollect those fond memories with those people in various contexts.

Russell is also attracted towards the little details of early life especially his food habits, "I was very fond of crumbling my bread into my gravy." He used to pretend to be asleep as he wanted to escape other people looking at him so that he could have his dinner in the nursery and not in the dining room. He also refers to an incident in which he was denied an orange on the grounds that he should avoid sugar which hurt a child's sentiment. Russell's other memories are related to certain instances of humiliations. He recalls a train journey in which he was laughed at by the adults while asking, "Which country are we in now?" But most interestingly, it was his curiosity to know which stimulated his intellectual capacity from an early age. In one case, his grandmother did not allow him to read a story by Maria Edgeworth, namely, *The False Key*. But this aroused curiosity and Russell managed to read the same without her knowledge. He writes, "her attempts to prevent me from knowing things were seldom successful." Then, in the later years, Russell claims to have read his grandmother's collection of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Cowper, Thomson, Jane Austen and others.

When adolescence approached loneliness became oppressive. Throughout his early life Russell was very conscious about his intellectual gifts, "I liked mathematics best and next to mathematics I like history. As soon as I realized that I was intelligent, I determined to achieve something of intellectual importance." Russell's writes, "Throughout the greater part of my childhood the most important hours of my day were those that I spent alone in the garden, and the most vivid part of my existence was solitary." Throughout his childhood he felt an increasing sense of loneliness, and of despair. Nature, books and mathematics saved him from the sense of complete despondence. Perhaps, this is how the old Russell remembers his childhood days at Pembroke Lodge. But what is more striking is the assertion that, "it would be completely misleading to suggest that my childhood was all solemnity and seriousness." Hence, Russell's childhood was a good commingling of both happiness and loneliness.

Check Your Progress

1. How do the Victorian and the Modern perspectives get articulated in Russell's autobiography?
2. To what extent does Russell contend with an inherited sense of austerity in his life? Support your answer with textual references.
3. What impact did of his grandmother's austere life style have on him?
4. What could have largely contributed to this sense of loneliness? (Perhaps it could have been a combination of the pangs of adolescence and the transitory nature of his age witnessing the Victorian view of life and the march of the scientific spirit)

2.5.2 Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence"

This chapter is yet another remarkable instance of Russell's frankness and openness. It also deals with the changing interests of Russell due to his age. He writes, "I remember a very definite change when I reached what in modern child psychology is called the 'latency period'. At this stage, I began to enjoy using slang, pretending to have no feelings, and being generally 'manly'." In the second paragraph Russell very pathetically claims that his adolescence turned out to be very lonely and very unhappy. Both in the life of the emotions and in the life of the intellect, he was obliged to preserve an impenetrable secrecy towards his people. His interests were divided between sex, religion, and mathematics. He further writes, "I find the recollection of my sexual preoccupations in adolescence unpleasant."

In this context Russell shows his expertise in maintaining authenticity by referring to the fact that he was first introduced to sex by one of his kindergarten companions, Ernest Logan, at the age of twelve. He explained to Russell the nature of copulation and Russell used to find that interesting. But his response to that was slightly different, "I found what he said extremely interesting, although I had as yet no physical response. It appeared to me at the time self evident that free love was the only rational system, and that marriage was bound up with Christian superstitions". Russell also talks about the impact of his tutor on him regarding his physical change-over, "when I was fourteen my tutor mentioned to me that I should shortly undergo an important physical change. By this time I was more or less able to understand what he meant.....At 15, I began to have sexual passion of almost intolerable intensity. while I was seating at work, endeavoring to concentrate, I would be continuously destructed by erection, and I fell in the practice of masturbating, in which, however, I always remain moderate." But the most interesting and humorous thing was to discontinue doing this just because he fell in love at the age of 20. Then his experience

was followed by discussions on puberty, peeping inside the rooms of the house maids and passionately kissing and hugging one of the maids just to be angrily refused.

Along with his sexual preoccupation, there went a great intensity of idealistic feelings, "I become intensely interested in the beauty of the sunsets and clouds, and trees in spring and autumn, but my interest was very sentimental kind, owing to fact that it was an unconscious sublimation of sex, and an attempt to escape from reality.' This also aroused in him a tendency to read poetry of Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Tennyson and so on. Along with his interest in poetry there was a developing interest in religion and philosophy. But complication regarding religious belief arose because his grand father was an Anglican, while his grand mother was a Presbyterian. Consequently, young Russell had to go to alternate churches every Sunday leading him finally to examine, at the age of 15, the validity of the fundamental religious beliefs. It was also during the same period of religious doubt that Russell began to read voraciously. He studied Greek and Italian, he read Mill and Carlyle, Gibbon and so on. The reading habits paved the way for the emergence of the independent intellectual in him.

Stop to Consider

Puritanism

It was a religious reform movement in the late 16th and 17th centuries which sought to 'purify' the Church of England from the shackles of Roman Catholic 'popery'. Mostly known for their moral and religious earnestness that determined their life, the Puritans wanted to reform the church. The fear of God, the fear of death and the distrust of sex were directly or indirectly related to the Victorian notion of Puritanism. The Oxford Movement, the rise of the churches in England and Scotland, the claiming of exclusive authority of Rome in terms of Christianity gave birth to a conscience which drastically changed the spiritual notion of life. A system of future reward and punishments for deeds done in the flesh gave birth to the fear of death. And it was at the same time that a reticence towards sex became a common practice. The Victorians tried to glorify love but considered sexual love as a taboo.

In his own opinion of himself he was an introvert; socially, he was very shy, childlike, awkward, well behaved, and good natured and used to envy those people known for social interactions. He remembered his experiences in the Army crammer at old South Gate where his friends used to frequent prostitutes and coming back tell the bawdy stories. But the shy Russell was intelligent enough to find an escape out of it by becoming good humoured while discussion on sex was going on, "I became very Puritanical in my views, and decided that sex without deep love is beastly. I retired to my self, and had as little to do with the others as possible." During his stay at the

Army crammer his friendship with Edward FitzGerald bore fruits in terms of literary discussions on various topics. His affection for Caroline, the sister of Edward grew and he got a chance to travel to Paris and Switzerland with them, that too in the year of the Paris Exhibition (1889). By that time Russell turned out to be an omnivorous reader.

SAQ

Would you consider Russell's adolescent sexual experiences 'normal' with regard to his society? (60 words)

This was also a time when Russell began to develop an altruistic feeling. Referring to contemporary politics he believed that, "happiness of mankind should be the aim of all action, and I discover to my surprise that there were those who thought other wise." Belief in happiness, Russell found, was the main theme of Utilitarianism.

Perhaps, this is how it is pertinent to find Russell developing as a leading intellectual of his time and in his later life at Cambridge he got ample chance to carry on his intellectual activities.

2.6 Critical Reception :

Russell is generally recognised as one of the founders of analytic philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, alongside G. E. Moore, Russell was considered responsible for the British "revolt against Idealism", a philosophy which was greatly influenced by G. W. F. Hegel and his British

apostle, F. H. Bradley. This revolt was echoed 30 years later in Vienna by the logical positivists' "revolt against metaphysics". Russell was particularly critical of a doctrine of internal relations which held that in order to know any particular thing, we must know all of its relations. Based on this, Russell attempted to show that this would make space, time, science and the concept of number not fully intelligible. Russell's logical work with Whitehead continued this project. Russell's *Autobiography* exemplifies his intuitive nature trying to reach at the core of the issues. His metaphysical idealism and scientific nature as expressed in the *Autobiography* and other writings invited critical attention.

The last volume of Bertrand Russell's autobiography received little attention when it first appeared, not long before his death. Yet it raised a number of questions and doubts which were relevant to the thinking of radicals and liberals in the United States and in Western Europe. His views regarding politics and religion are still valid and contextual in the contemporary world. A great deal of philosophical discussions in the contemporary English speaking world can be traced back to Russell. In fact, the works of Russell founded the basis of modern logic. Although his works were basically concerned with the principles of mathematics and logic, its implications could be visible in the world of philosophy in general. Thus Russell came to have an enormous influence on the twentieth century thought.

2.7 Russell's Style :

Russell himself comments that a style is not accepted unless it is an intimate and almost an involuntary expression of the personality of the writer. Russell's own prose style determines his own personality. Proper organization of materials, the use of anecdotes, humorous use of language are some of his qualities as a prose writer. Russell possesses the ability to engage the attention of the readers when they are engrossed in the narrative. Whatever he narrates is done in a vivid and straightforward manner. He likes to write in a simple and short sentences and the absence of long sentences adds to its significance in this autobiography. Russell's anecdotes add to a more 'informal' style and a sense of immediacy helps Russell in reconstructing the lives of his parents who died just after his birth. However, 'authenticity' is presented by their verification by written documents like letters written to and by his parents. This generates a believability in the representation and telling of the narrator.

Russell's clarity of thought and catholicity of taste facilitates the smoothness of the narrative. The fluency of the narrative is enriched by his use of witty remarks, digressions, and humorous asides. An instance of his use of humour is seen in the remark on his grandmother's honeymoon in the chapter

Childhood in which she was missing her mother badly. As 'autobiography' entails enumeration of personal details, the success of a writer in this form would largely depend on how well and how long he/she can keep the readers engrossed in the personal details that he describes. Russell's success in this aspect is largely due to this style that he employs in his *Autobiography*.

2.8 Glossary

Paddington: Area in the borough of Westminster, London located towards the west of St. Marylebone and north of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park.

John Stuart Mill: (1806-73) English philosopher, economist, and exponent of Utilitarianism. His major publications were *A System of Logic* (1843) and *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and *Subjection of Women* (1869).

Radical: One who desires extreme change in the social order.

Freethinker: A person who rejects dogma or authority, especially in religious belief.

The Pre-Raphaelites: Group of young British painters who were inspired by Italian art of the 14th and 15th centuries. Their adoption of the name Pre-Raphaelite expressed their admiration for what they saw as the direct and uncomplicated depiction of nature typical of Italian painting before the High Renaissance and, particularly, before the time of the famous Italian painter Raphael.

D. A. Spalding: An amateur scientist who lived with the Amberleys in Ravenscroft from July 1873 till the withdrawal of the two Russell brothers to their grandparents' home in February 1876.

George III: King of Great Britain and Ireland (1760-1820) and elector (1760-1814) and then king (1814-20) of Hanover. During this period, Britain won an empire in the Seven Years' War but lost its American colonies, and then after the struggle against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, emerged as a leading power in Europe. During the last years of his life (from 1811) he was intermittently mad.

Scotch Presbyterian: The term 'Presbyterian' refers to the church (and to any member of the same) which is governed by elders all of equal rank, especially with the reference to the national Church of Scotland. Presbyterianism is one of the major representative groups of classical

Protestantism that arose in the 16th-century Reformation. Generally speaking, the modern Presbyterian churches trace their origins to the Calvinist churches of the British Isles, the Continental counterparts of which came to be known by the more inclusive designation Reformed. The term 'Presbyterian' denotes a collegiate type of church government by pastors and lay leaders called elders, or presbyters. Strictly speaking, all Presbyterian churches are a part of the Reformed, or Calvinist, tradition, although not all Reformed churches are Presbyterian in their form of government.

Liberal: After Britain's First (electoral) Reform Act of 1832, the mainly aristocratic Whigs were joined in the House of Commons by increasing numbers of middle-class members and by a smaller number of Radicals, who, from about 1850, tended to work together in cooperation with the Peelites (anti-protectionist Tories). By 1839 Lord John Russell was referring to "the Liberal party" in his letters to Queen Victoria. Russell's administration of 1846 is sometimes regarded as the first Liberal government; others reserve the distinction for Lord Palmerston's 1855 administration. The first unequivocally Liberal government was that formed in 1868 by William E. Gladstone, under whose leadership these various elements became a cohesive parliamentary party.

Unitarian: A person who believes that God is not a Trinity but one being. Unitarians have no formal creed; originally their teaching was based on scriptural authority, but subsequently reason and conscience became their criteria for belief and practice.

Richmond: Richmond is a market town at the eastern entrance to Swaledale, North Yorkshire, England.

Alfred North Whitehead: (1861-1947) English mathematician and philosopher, who collaborated with Bertrand Russell on *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13).

Maria Edgeworth: (1767-1849) Anglo-Irish writer, known for her children's stories and for her novels of Irish life. *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Belinda* (1801) are her major works.

Cowper's Task: William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is a poem in blank verse in six books. The books are titled as 'The Sofa', 'The Time-piece', 'The Garden', 'The Winter Evening', 'The Winter Morning Walk' and 'The Winter Walk at Noon.'

Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) A poem in Spenserian stanzas by James Thomson. The first canto tells of the wizard, Indolence, and the castle into which he lures world-weary pilgrims. There they surrender to idleness in an atmosphere of ease and comfort, until they degenerate, only to be thrown into the dungeons. The second tells of the

Knight of Arts and Industry and his destruction of the castle.

Church of England: The Church of England is the English branch of the Western Christian Church, which rejects the Pope's authority and has the monarch as its titular head and nominator of its bishops and archbishops.

Unitarianism: Unitarianism is the religious movement that stresses the free use of reason in religion, holds generally that God exists only in one person, and denies the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Positivism: (in philosophy) Generally refers to any system that confines itself to the data of experience and excludes a priori or metaphysical speculations.

Euclid: (c. 300 BC) Greek mathematician. He taught at Alexandria, and is famous for his great work *Elements of Geometry*, which covered plane geometry, the theory of numbers, irrationals, and solid geometry. This was the standard work until other kinds of geometry were discovered in the 19th century.

Herbert Spencer: (1820-1903) English sociologist and philosopher, an early advocate of the theory of evolution, who achieved an influential synthesis of knowledge, advocating the pre-eminence of the individual over society and of science over religion. His magnum opus was *The Synthetic Philosophy*, a comprehensive work completed in 1896 and containing volumes on the principles of biology, psychology, morality, and sociology. In *The Man Versus the State* (1884) he wrote that England's Tories generally favour a military and Liberals an industrial social order but that the Liberals of the latter half of the 19th century, with their legislation on hours of work, liquor licensing, sanitation, education, etc., were developing a "New Toryism" and preparing the way for a "coming slavery."

Kingston Bridge: A borough of London. It lies on the south bank of the River Thames about 12 miles southwest of central London. The area became an early transportation centre. Kingston's strength as a commercial centre increased markedly with the completion of a bridge across the river by the 12th century. The present Kingston Bridge was built in 1828, and the Kingston By-Pass traverses the borough

Pythagoras: Greek philosopher credited with the attempt to combine ascetic practices and mystical beliefs with the study of mathematics. He is also influential for the discovery of the proof of the proposition that the square of the hypotenuse of a right angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.

2.9 Suggested Readings

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