PG EG S1 04 (DSE)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER - I

NON FICTIONAL PROSE

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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DSE 1: NON FICTIONAL PROSE

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Discipline Specific Elective (DSE) Course 1 of the MA English Programme deals with Nonfictional Prose. The term Nonfictional prose, as explained in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, refers to any literary work that is supposed to be based mainly on facts, even though it may contain fictional elements. For instance, essay and biography may be called nonfictional prose. Nonfictional prose covers a variety of themes, and they assume many shapes. Nonfictional prose writing has flourished in nearly all countries with advancement of literatures. The learners should note that the genres include political and polemical writings, biographical and autobiographical literature, religious writings, philosophical and moral writings etc. Prose, that is nonfictional, is generally supposed to cling to reality more closely than that which invents stories, or frames imaginary plots. To call it "realistic," however, would be a gross distortion. Since nonfictional prose does not stress inventiveness of themes and of characters independent of the author's self, it appears in the eyes of some critics to be inferior to works of imagination. The learners must note that one common feature of most authors of nonfictional prose is the marked degree of the author's presence in whatever they write. That is to be clearly seen in epistolary literature, and, although less inevitably in the essay, the travel book, journalistic reporting, and polemical or hortatory prose.

This Course introduces the learners to the different forms of non-fictional prose writing. In this course, they will be taken through different genres such as Essay, Biography, Autobiography, Letters, Diaries and Travel writing that emerged from diverse historical and cultural contexts. It is expected that they will engage with the study of the prescribed texts and learn the range of concerns important to non-fictional prose writing in English. These texts, we hope, will help them to explore the strategies by which a writer makes a clear distinction between the categories of the fictional and the non-fictional prose writings in English.

For the convenience of reading, this Course is thematically divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with Essays. **Block 2** shall exclusively deal with Life Writing, and it shall comprise units on autobiography, biography and Diary. **Block 3** shall deal with Letters and Travel Writing.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 1 of DSE Course 1deals with Essays. An essay is any short composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or simply entertain. An essay consists of a discussion of a topic from an author's personal point of view, best exemplified by works by the English authors—Francis Bacon, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt and others. The term Essay in English is derived from the French 'essai', meaning 'attempt'. Thus, one can find open ended, inconclusive and even provocative essays. The term essay was first applied to the self-reflective musings of Michel de Montaigne, and even today, he has the extraordinary reputation of being the pioneer of this literary form. The other subgenres related to the essay include Memoir (telling the story of an author's life from the author's personal viewpoint), Epistle (usually a formal, didactic and elegant letter) and Blog (an informal and short opinion about a particular topic).

According to A. C. Benson, an essay is '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 is often addressed to a general rather than a specialized audience. Consequently, an essay discusses its subject in a non-technical fashion, employing devices like references, illustrations and humour. You should know that there is a distinction between a formal and an informal essay. The formal essay is impersonal as the author who is the authority writes in an orderly manner. While the informal essay is personal as the writer expresses his/her familiarity with ordinary matters rather than with issues of serious public importance. A feature of the personal essay as reflected in its great exponent Charles Lamb is the abundant use of humour, elegant style and the lack of ornamentation.

M. H. Abrams in his *Glossary* locates the origin of the form in the Greeks like Theophrastus and Plutarch and the Roman such as Cicero and Seneca who wrote essays much before it reached a standardized form. However, following Montaigne's great French *Essais* in 1580, subsequent writers began to exploit the form to the greatest possible extent. Francis Bacon in the 16th century, inaugurated the use of Essays in the English literary field by presenting contents in the form of short commentaries on topic like 'Truth', 'Adversity', 'Marriage and the Single life' etc. The learners should carefully note that the development of the English essay in the 17th century 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) are some examples of formal essays. Even a poet like Alexander Pope used the term in *Essays on Criticism* (1711) and the *Essay on Man* (1733), but it was not until the 18th century, that the essay assumed its modern form with Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele. They wrote essays in concise, less formal and satirical manner. The periodicals like*Tatler* and the *Spectator* paved the way for numerous other imitations like *Guardian,* the *Female Tatler* and the *Rambler*.

It is not difficult to understand that after the 18th century the essay declined as a literary form. However, in the Romantic age, there could be seen a renewed interest in the form of the essay. In the early 19th century, the emergence of the magazines like-*Blackwood's Magazine* (1817) and *London Magazine* (1820) gave another impetus to essay writing. This was the famous literary period of William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Lamb who incorporated new resources to the world of the personal essay. Other major essayists of the period include the American essayists like Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell and Mark Twain. Later significant contribution to essay writing in England was made by T. S. Eliot, 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).

This Block comprises five units, i.e. Units 1-5.

Unit 1: Montaigne: "Of Solitude" deals withMontaigne's essay "Of Solitude". The common view is that the 'essay' as a literary form is often considered to have developed in the hands of Montaigne. Montaigne is also widely considered the 'father of modern essay' in the history of English Literature. Through a study of this essay, the learners are expected to discuss some of the important concerns of Montaigne as an essayist.

Unit 2: Francis Bacon: "Of Truth" & "Of Studies" introduces the learnersto yet another important English essayist, whose name is Sir Francis Bacon. Bacon is often considered one of the significant prose writers of the 17th century. This unit shall help the learners to explore the issues raised by Bacon in the two selected essays.

Unit 3 Charles Lamb: "My Relations" deals with the idea of Personal Essay through Charles Lamb's essay entitled "My Relation". Our attempt in this unit shall be to tell the learners, how in a Personal Essay, the essayist uses first person mode of writing in order to create an intimate relation with the readers. The learners will find it interesting to note that Lamb in the essay ''My Relation'' speaks through the person of Elia, and informs the readers about two of Elia's closest relatives in a purely personal tone of conversation.

Unit 4 Virginia Woolf: "Modern Fiction" deals with one of the most important critical essays of the modern period written by Virginia Woolf. Woolf appealed to her contemporaries for an inward kind of action in her 'experimental' novel. The learners will finally understand that Woolf's experiments on a new style of writing rendered great influence on the emergence of literary modernism in England in the early part of the 20th century.

Unit 5 George Orwell: "Shooting an Elephant" deals with George Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" which is based on Orwell's own experience as a colonial officer in Burma during the third

decade of the 20th century. The learners will understand that this essay, rather than being a straight forward polemic against British Imperialism, is also a meditation on the disturbing experiences of Orwell's narrator, a sub-divisional White Police officer, facing a moral dilemma and getting compelled by forces outside his 'self' to shoot a rogue elephant.

Block 2 introduces the learners to some of the examples of Life writing. Life writing appears to be a wide area of literary studies, which is rather complex owing to its broad horizon that encompasses several other sub forms such as biography, autobiography, memoir and diary writing. In modern literary practices, life writing occupies a significant place as critics and readers attempt to discern a relationship between fiction and auto/biography while reading authors and it is within such a context that diary writing perhaps emerges as a relevant field of study–an area that would perhaps add to the reader's understanding of the author and his/her creative output. Although there have been several instances of life writing since the past, an interest towards critical study of the form may be said to have developed towards the end of the 20th century while readers and critics engaged with "different ways of telling a life-story—memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical fiction" as viewed by Hermione Lee noticing in each the art of telling a life.

This block comprises five units, i.e. Units 6-10

Unit 6: Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Confessions* deals withthe autobiographical journey of Rousseau consisting of 13 books. It is hoped, that after going through the various sections of this unit, the learners will be able to appreciate the *Confessions* as an important breakthrough in autobiography writing, and how this book contributed to the genre of autobiography in later times.

Unit 7: Samuel Johnson: "Life of Milton" deals withSamuel Johnson's biographical piece "Life of Milton" taken from his*Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. In his "Life of Milton", Johnson provides a comprehensive account of Milton's life by incorporating every possible detail of his life. However, by the end of this unit, the learners will not only be able to reflect on the life of Milton as seen through the eyes of Dr. Johnson, but will also be able to gain some ideas on the art of writing biography.

Unit 8: "Florence Nightingale" deals withthe biographical account of Florence Nightingale written by Lytton Strachey in his book *Eminent Victorians* which is a collection of four biographies. The learners will note that the socio-political upheavals of the Victorian age got reflected in the literatures of this period. The indomitable desire on the part of the authors to understand the world brought about noticeable changes in the field of prose writing like history and biography as reflected in Lytton Strachey's book.

Unit 9: Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Chapters I & II) deals withtwo chapters from Bertrand Russell's famous *Autobiography.* It is to be noted that the contexts of the two chapters namely "Childhood" and "Adolescence" of the *Autobiography* are derived from Russell's peculiar interest in recollecting the history of his family, and from his attempt at rediscovering and relocating the past, which has been lost. In this unit, the learners will also be acquainted with many of the characteristics of a 'modern' autobiography.

Unit 10: Diary of Virginia Woolf: (Select Entries), which is thelast unit of the Block, deals with a discussion of a few diary entries written by the modern novelist Virginia Woolf. A personal diary of an author may include a person's experiences, and/or thoughts or feelings, including comments on current events outside the writer's direct experience. Someone who keeps a diary is known as a diarist. That way, Virginia Woolf is also a diarist because she regularly kept diaries from which we get to learn a lot about her writerly self.

Block 3 : Letters and Travel Writing is the last Block of DSE Course 1. In this Block, the learners shall get an opportunity to read about Letters and Travel Writing. The primary function of **Letters** is to communicate. However, other than this, a letter often contains the writer's views and ideas about certain

issues that form a common interest for both the writer and the reader. A letter can also throw useful focus on the writer's self and can help in understanding the work. John Keats, who has been prescribed in this programme, is one of those important writers whose letters to his friends and relatives contain his valuable meditations on various issues and concerns of his contemporary period including his views on poetry. Regarding the subject matter, a letter can be written on any subject. However, a well-written letter can be a useful tool to inform, direct or persuade. Although letters are not always regarded as a part of Nonfiction, a personal letter can sometimes throw very useful light on the character of the writer as well as on some issues of common interests. You have perhaps heard about the name of the book *Mahatma and The Poet* which is a collection of letters exchanged by two of the legendary figures of India—Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore on certain social and political issues before India's independence.

As J. A. Cuddon writes in his *Dictionary* letter writing has a long history. For example, the Latin rhetoricians made convenient distinction between the private letter (personalis) and the letter of affairs (negotialis). The third type of letter is the open or general letter addressed to an individual or a newspaper editor. Some manuals of letters survive from Classical times. In the middle Ages, there were a large number of manuals on the subject. Consequently, many medieval treatises on rhetoric can be seen as the 'guides' to letter writing. If you have read English Literature comprehensively, you must have encountered the name of Paston whose famous collection of Letters under the title *The Paston Letters* (1422 - 1509), deals with the correspondence of three generations of a Norfolk family. Other well-known collections of letters are those written by Mozart, Keats, Flaubert and Horace Walpole.

The letter, which is now discussed more as part of Life Writing, has been adapted and exploited in various ways as a form of writing since the 17th century. Significant examples from this period include Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* (1656-57), Montesquieu's *Letters Persanes* (1721), Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734), better known as *Lettres Anglaises*, Madame de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Peruvienne* (1747) and Lady Mary Wortley Montague' *Turkish Letters* (1763) which gave an account of her travels in the Near East. In the 18th century, there could be seen such writers as Richardson and Smollett who in their Epistolary novels like *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-48) and *Humphry Clinker* (1771), exploited the use of letter form in the novels. However, in the same 18th century, letters served other purposes. Examples are: Bolingbroke's *Letter to Sir William Wyndham* (1717), a political polemic; Rousseau's Lettre a D'Alernbert sur les spectacles (1758), a controversial treatise on the morality of drama; the *Letters of Junius*, a pseudonymous invective against individuals, and Edmund Burke's *A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), a political address.

Travel Writing, on the other hand, has emerged as a key area of research in the humanities and social sciences. If you like to travel a lot, you will readily agree that travel broadens the mind and perspectives, and the knowledge of distant places and people often confers on you a different status. Very often travellers sometimes return as changed human being or do not come back to his place of origin at all. Richard Hakluyt, the English editor of early travel writings, mainly discussed the history of travel in terms of eyewitness accounts of the travellers. However, it was gradually recognised that the real power of travel writing lay in its independence of perspective. The claim to have been there and to have seen with one's own eyes could enrich the written account. The academic disciplines as literature, history, geography and anthropology all have taken travel writing seriously and have produced a body of interdisciplinary criticism to appreciate the historical complexity of the genre. Let us have a quick look at the history of travel writing for a better understanding of the genre.

Travel writing has played an important role in recent years in the creation of an international literary field. You should note that writing and travel have always been intimately connected. The traveller's tale is as old as fiction itself. In the classical traditions, Homer's *Odysseus* that offers a blueprint for the romance, indirection, and danger of travel as well as the joy of homecoming, is an excellent example of travel narrative. Therefore, the ambiguous figure of Odysseus – adventurous, powerful, unreliable – is perhaps the appropriate archetype for any traveller and for the travel writer as well. It is interesting to find in the English Christian

tradition that life itself is symbolised as an eternal journey. For example, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), produce much medieval travel writing. Thus in England, we find traces of travel writing since the 14th century. In many respects, pilgrims are the ancestors of modern day tourists. However, many of the themes and problems associated with modern travel writing can be traced in two medieval texts which still provoke fascination and controversy: one is Marco Polo's travel to Cathay (China) and the other is John Mandeville's *Travels,* which mark the beginnings of a new impulse in the late Middle Ages, which would transform the interest from traditional paradigms of pilgrimage to observed experience and curiosity towards other life ways. Although Christopher Columbus's first voyage to America in 1492 is usually seen as a new beginning for travel writing, you should note that Columbus was, as a writer, deeply influenced by both Mandeville and Marco Polo.

During the 16th century, writing became an essential part of travelling. Keeping important documents became an integral aspect of the activity. Moreover, the interest aroused by stories of faraway places was an important way of attracting investment. Rivalry between European nation-states meant that thepublication of travel accounts was often a semi-official business in which the beginnings of imperial histories were actually constructed. The greatest impact of the discovery of a new world like America on English writing in the early 16th century is seen in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), in which the fictional traveller, Raphael Hythloday, is said to have journeyed with Amerigo Vespucci to the New World. *Utopia* then became a model for subsequent travel writing like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which is more than anything else is a journey made to Belgium Congo. Similarly, for Francis Bacon, the travellers of the Renaissance had discovered a 'new continent' of truth, based on experience and observation which finally helped in the transmission of the new information which laid the foundations for the scientific and philosophical revolutions of the 17th century.

So, you have found that elements of travel writing are found in various texts of the bygone eras. We can also say that prose fictional writings in its modern form, has built its house on the motif of travel. For example, early modern European novels are full of traveller-protagonists such as Jack of Newberry, Lazarillo de Tormes, Don Quixote, and Robinson Crusoe. Daniel Defoe the author of *Robinson Crusoe* was skilled at exploiting the uncertain boundary between travel writing and the fiction. Travel writing and the novel, especially in its first-person form; have often shared a focus on the centrality of the individual, a concern with empirical details, and a movement through time and place, which is simply sequential. Interestingly, Defoe's own travel writing *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1726) offers a picture of the British kingdom, and influences modern tours such as Jonathan Raban's *Coasting* (1987) and Paul Theroux's *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1983).

The famous English biographer Samuel Johnson accompanied Boswell on a trip to the Scottish Highlands and Islands in the 1770s, with living memory of the final defeat of the Stuart rebellion at the Battle of Culloden. However, like many other travellers, Johnson and Boswell concluded that they had arrived too late, that change and decline were already advanced: 'A longer journey than to the Highlands must be taken by him whose curiosity pants for savage virtues and barbarous grandeur.' Modern tourist sites were being defined at this time, but travel was still for the rich and the hardy: it took ten days by coach from London to Edinburgh and a further week to get into the Highlands.

Peter Hulme, one of the editors of the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*,tells that the last significant shift in travel writing can be dated to the late 1970s and associated with a book like Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1977). *In Patagonia* appeared just a year before Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), usually seen as the beginning text for postcolonial studies (about which you will study in Semester IV). *Orientalism* was the first work of contemporary criticism to take travel writing as a major part of its corpus, taking it as a body of work which offered particular insight into the operation of colonial discourses. Scholars influenced by this book have begun to scrutinise relationships of culture and power found in the settings, encounters, and representations of travel texts. Another interesting insight travel writing the principles developed in

women's literary studies more generally, scholars have both rescued some women travel writers from obscurity and investigated the reasons for the popularity of others, mainly their male counterparts. The relationship between women as 'observers' and as 'observed' has come under serious scrutiny that is informed by critiques of ethnographic narratives, and the position of women travellers vis- a-vis colonialism is vigorously debated. Of late, you should see that Translation Studies has brought another dimension to travel, giving attention not only to translation between languages but also to translation between cultures. Perhaps, because of its surface resemblances to travel writing, most of the 20th century anthropologists emphasized its seriousness of purpose, its professional ethos, and its scientific method. However, anthropology's theoretical turn in the 1980s opened it towards other disciplines, with the idea of travel being central to that dialogue, especially in the work of James Clifford, whose book *Routes* takes a short travel account by Amitav Ghosh who is world famous for his travel book *In An Antique Land*. At the same time, anthropology discovered a more reflective and personal mode, which brought it closer to travel writing and thereby made an integral connection between Anthropology and Travel Writing.

The discussion on Letters and Travel Writing made above should make it clear that both Letters and travel writing has occupied a place of importance in the genre of non-fictional prose. All these forms together have made nonfictional prose a very popular form of writing vying for importance with fictional prose like novels and short stories.

This Block comprises four units, i.e. Units 11-14.

Unit 11: Keats' Letters deals with the form of letter writing through two letters written by John Keats – one to Benjamin Bailey, and the other, to John Hamilton Reynolds. The letters, which Keats wrote to his friends and family members, bear historical and literary significance, because it is through these letters that he formulated his ideas about the nature of Romantic art and imagination and aesthetic sensibilities.

Unit 12 and 13 introduce the learners to an exciting travel narrative by Eric Newby—*A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*. The learners will perhaps agree that travel is really a very exciting experience. While introducing the learners to the history of travel in general, this unit shall help the learners to read and contextualise the significance of Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in The Hindu Kush* in that history of travel. A study of the two chapters from the book namely "Pera Palace" and "The Dying Nomad" deal with an uncomfortable road journey of the narrator as well the other multifarious experience that the narrator and his mates encountered during their travel.

Unit 14: V.S. Naipaul: *An Area of Darkness* (Section I, Chapter I) deals with V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* the first section of the first chapter of which has been prescribed for study. We hope that from this unit, the learners will have a refreshing experience of Travel writing through the study of Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness.*

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: MONTAIGNE: “OF SOLITUDE”

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Montaigne: The Essayist

1.3.1 His Life

1.3.2 His Works

1.4 Explanation of the Text

1.4.1 List of Important References in the Text

1.4.2 Glossary of the Text

1.5 Major Themes

1.6 Style and Language

1.7 Critical Reception

1.8 Let us Sum up

1.9 Further Reading

1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.11 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gain idea on the life and works of Michel de Montaigne
- provide a detailed explanation of the essay titled “Of Solitude”
- discuss the major themes that are reflected in the essay
- analyse the style and language of the essayist
- explain the critical reception of Montaigne’s writing.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Course, and it deals with the essay *“Of Solitude”* written by Montaigne. The common view is that the ‘essay’ as a literary form is often considered to have developed in the hands of Montaigne. Thus, Montaigne is also widely considered the ‘father of modern essay’.

Another important writer associated with the essay form is Francis Bacon, the English essayist. In the following sections, we shall take up Montaigne's essay titled "Of Solitude" for our study, and look into the various aspects of the text.

1.3 MONTAIGNE: THE ESSAYIST

The essays of Montaigne were written for a considerably long period starting from 1572 to 1579, and were published in 1580. The prescribed essay "On Solitude" discusses the essence of solitude and its importance in our day-to-day lives, while also highlighting the healthy benefits of spending some leisurely time with oneself instead of being compulsively caught in the web of worldly engagements. Before we explore the essay, you should gain a brief insight into the life and works of Michel de Montaigne.

1.3.1 His Life

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was born to Pierre Eyquem and Antoinette Lopez de Villanueva in Southwestern France. Although, Montaigne belonged to a noble and a well-to-do family, early in life, he was given the exposure of living with a peasant family for three years, in the hope that he would grow up to understand the struggles and the life of the poor. His father had decided that he would receive his early education at home before he would be enrolled at a boarding school in Bordeaux to be tutored under the tutelage of George Buchanan, a Scottish historian and humanist scholar of the time. Later, Montaigne studied law at the University of Toulouse and pursued a career in law. During the course of his career, Montaigne was conferred with the highest honour of French nobility. He was appointed as the counsellor in the Bordeaux Parliament after having worked in the same designation at the tax court of Perigeaux and had also served as a courtier at the court of Charles IX. For a brief period, he had also served as the elected Mayor of Bordeaux from 1581 to 1585.

He had developed a close friendship with Estienne de La Boetie also known as Etienne La Boetie, who was his colleague at the Bordeaux Parliament. It was his friend's premature death in the year 1563 that Montaigne became reserved and took to pouring his thoughts in the form of reflective writings. Eventually, these began to take the shape of 'essays' thus, becoming one of the first formal practices of the literary form. Montaigne wedded Francoise de la Cassaigne in 1565. It was tragic that only one of his six daughters named Leonore had survived death. After having his two volumes of essays in 1580, Montaigne had toured France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, which had also provided him with a better insight into both life and philosophy as reflected in his works. Montaigne had a sharp intellect, a philosophical bent of mind and spirituality although he was a Roman Catholic by religion. Montaigne was not only a good administrator but also received as a widely read author during his lifetime. He spent much of his later years of his life at his chateaux (castle) and his estate. He breathed his last on September 13, 1592.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: In which century can we situate the French essayist Michel de Montaigne?

Q2: Why was Montaigne provided with the early exposure of living with a peasant family?

Q3: Which tragic event saw Montaigne pour his thoughts into reflective writings?

1.3.2 His Works

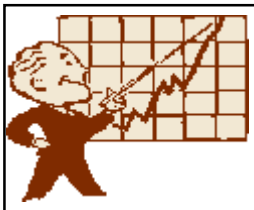
One of the early works to have been translated by Montaigne from Spanish to French was the work titled *Teholgia Naturalis* or *Natural Theology* written by the theologist, Raymond of Sabunde which was published in 1569. After his father's demise in 1571, he decided to devote his time writing in private instead of continuing

his public service. Thus, having inherited his father's estate and gaining solitude, he began pouring his thoughts into reflective writings. These were later compiled as two volumes of essays titled *Essais* in the year 1580. You will be amazed to know, that he was also fortunate enough to have a private library in his castle (also known as Tour de Montaigne) which gave him a space to develop his literary interests through a decade.

Montaigne through the course of his leisurely writings had to look after the welfare of the estate too. In addition, his travels inspired his personal travel accounts titled *Travel Journal* at the time of publication recording after a long period in 1774. The journal recorded his experiences in both French and Italian on various travel and cultural experiences, including his memorable visit to the Vatican City. He also continued working on another volume of essays, all of which contained varied subjects of discussion. The volumes of his essays are widely read owing to the depths of his reflections, width of his knowledge, miniscule observations, philosophical insights, wisdom, altruism and truth. Montaigne developed his essays over a long period, revising his early writings and adding new passages. He was greatly inspired by the ancient philosophers and was well versed with their classical works. Moreover, he is known to have inspired many philosophers namely Rene Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche and writers such as William Hazlitt and William Shakespeare.

All his essays represent a range of aspects associated with human life, conduct, morals and virtues. Some of the titles of his essays are: "Of Sadness", "Of Idleness", "Of Liars", "Of Constancy", "Of Fear", "Of Imagination", "Of Friendship", "Of Moderation", "Of Names", "Of Ancient Customs", "Of Repentance", "Of Diversion", "Of Vanity", "Of Experience", "Of Age", "Of Conscience", "Of Glory", "Of Virtue", "Of Anger", "Tomorrow's a New Day", "Uses Makes Perfect", "That Our Mind Hinders Itself", "All Things Have Their Season" and "That We Taste Nothing Pure" among several others.

Montaigne's essays contain an intellectual element, which appeals to his wide readership even today. His *Essays* are worth a good reading for the reason that the essays that were carefully written over years with the additions of minute observations of practical life, as well as, multiple reflections on the human mind could inspire our virtues, actions and experiences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Which was one of the earliest works to have been translated by Montaigne?

Q 5: What was one of the interesting aspects of Montaigne's castle?

Q 6: Why are Montaigne's essay volumes widely read?

1.4 EXPLANATION OF THE ESSAY

Of Solitude: Chapter XXXVIII

The essay "Of Solitude" begins with Montaigne's comparison of both an active and a solitary life, and he writes that we are surrounded by family and society from the day we are born and that no one is really born into solitude in this world. Yet, solitude plays an important factor in our well being as we grow into matured individuals. Thus, at the opening of the essay Montaigne goes straight to the heart of the topic of 'solitude'. He challenges all those in power to lay their hands on their hearts and honestly confess their ambitions of 'glory' and 'high offices' that they would want to gain even at the cost of people's welfare. Through these words, he directs our attention to the corrupt practices of such officers who have ill motives and indulge in immoral (even illegal) practices in the society. It is sheer 'ambition' that tends to lead people away from solitude. Here, he quotes the words of Juvenal" "[g]ood men forsooth are scarce: there are hardly, as many as there are gates of Thebes or mouths of the rich Nile", meaning that the number of good men will always be scarce.

It is the effect of "contagion" that leads us all into following the crowd or rather following the ways of the society that surrounds us in our day-to-

day life. A person ends up either following in the path of the wretched and cruel or completely avoids heading in that direction. Again, there is also a danger in both imitating such vicious people as there are many and in hating such a crowd on the very grounds that our good natures are different from theirs. Here, Montaigne provides the example of merchants at sea who are right in being cautious of those who embark on the same sea-journey, as some in the crew or otherwise, generally tend to have over-indulgent natures and be blasphemous (swearing against God). In such an instance, merchants have the only choice of distancing themselves from such "unfortunate" company. Further, he cites the example of Albuquerque who was the Viceroy in the West Indies for Emmanuel, the King of Portugal. The Viceroy once took a young boy on his shoulders during a shipwreck for the reason that in their time of crisis, of being surrounded by only the "society of common danger", his innocence and act of good deed might save him and that he might receive divine favour thereby being spared of their peril at sea. Similarly, we must surrender ourselves in the hands of God when we are all by ourselves in solitude.

A wise person may not necessarily be content to live everywhere. If such a wise person were given a choice, he or she would like to be left alone in his or her own space even though he or she may be act tolerant when placed in the midst of a crowd. Moreover, if a wise man has to contend with the vices of others, he or she would be guilty of committing vice himself or herself. Montaigne opines that a person is 'unsociable' owing to his or her vices and 'sociable' owing to his or her nature. At the same time, he warns us of being too engaged in society or the larger public life. He quotes the example of Charondas who is supposed to have killed himself for the reason that he had entered a 'public' ceremony wearing a 'sword'. Charondas happened to be the lawgiver of his followers whom he even punished for bad company or immoral influences yet it was the limitations of his own prescribed social laws that took his own life.

Nevertheless, once while scolding Antisthenes for being present in bad company, Charondas gave the example of 'physicians' who are responsible for healing the sick and at the same time their own health, for

physicians to be in the constant presence of the sick also meant negligence of their own health. Thus, Montaigne opines that it was extremely important for people to have a space for themselves to enjoy a sound health and content life. Thus, with regard to solitude, he writes that it is very important to live with 'leisure' and at one's 'ease'. The mind is often steeped in anxiety and has its own share of troubles. Moreover, even as domestic engagements may seem less important, it does not make them any less troublesome. This is the reason that makes it easier to manage a small family (rather than govern a large society) and to govern just 'oneself'.

At the same time, he writes that a person must not depend on their family or anyone else for their sense of self and share of happiness. Here Montaigne quotes Horace saying, "[r]eason and prudence, not a place with a commanding view of the great ocean, banish care." Sometimes, taking leave from the troubles of life does not rid us of "ambition", "avarice", "irresolution", "fear" and "inordinate desires". As the saying goes, "[b]lack care sits behind the horse man", these never leave us and our ways of looking at life and conducting ourselves in this world.

Again in the words of Horace, "[w]hy do we seek climates coarmed by another sun? Who is the man that by fleeing from his country can also flee from himself?" These words imply that if a man does not do away with an oppressive mental burden, it will press upon his or her mental peace thereby creating a constant feeling of heaviness. This is similar to the loading of cargo on a ship, which is much less a burden when fastened and loaded in a fixed position. Montaigne gives the example of a sick man whose health worsens when he is removed from one place to another (as the disease is worsened by motion) just as a strong wooden or metal post sinks deeper into the earth when it jerked in its own position. In the same way, it does not suffice to move away from the society or larger public as well. Therefore, it is always wiser to maintain a balance between the self, the family and the society.

Again, Montaigne also quotes Persius who wrote thus, "[y]ou say perhaps, you have broken your chains: the dog that after long effort has broken his chain, still in his flight drags a heavy position of it after him." This

is to imply that even as we break the chains of our 'social conditioning', there will always be a tendency to carry it all with ourselves, wherever we go. Hence, he writes that, "[w]e still carry our fetters along with us" and are never really free from our burdens or all that we have left behind us. Our mind continues to be occupied with all that we have left behind "even our past. Thus, the mind must be purified and our passions governed as these are the only ways of refining our souls as it is said: "[b]ut unless the mind is purified, what internal combats and dangers must we incur in spite of all our efforts."

Lucretius had said: "What destruction befalls us from pride, lust, petulant, anger!" These words reflect the importance of maintaining a fine balance in the nature of a person because the excess of any human qualities whether good or bad can be an obstruction in our day-to-day lives. Moreover, the life of extreme 'luxury' and 'idleness' has a tendency to worsen human nature as the saying goes, "an empty mind is a devil's workshop." Therefore, it is only with wisdom that one realises the importance of balance in one's persona, actions and one's life.

Then, Montaigne goes on to give the example of Demetrius (the son of Antigonus I) who in the Battle of Salamis (306 BC) had taken over the town of Megara. Stilpo, the Greek philosopher had escaped from the burning of this town and had lost his wife, children and all possessions during this capture. When Demetrius found Stilpo in his hour of crisis, the great philosopher seemed "undisturbed". Moreover, when he questioned him regarding his loss, his reply was simply, "nothing was lost" (as written by Seneca). And this is what the Greek philosopher Antisthenes meant when he said that "men should furnish themselves with such things as would float, and might with the owner escape the storm" (as also recorded by the biographer Diogenes Laertius). Thus, Montaigne writes that a wise man has nothing to lose except his own self.

Again, when the city of Nola was ruined by the barbarians, Paulinas of Nola, a Roman poet and senator who had lost almost everything had prayed: "O Lord, defend me from being sensible of this loss; for Thou knowest they have yet touched nothing of that which is mine" (as recorded by St. Augustine in *De Civit*). Through these words, Paulinas in his hour of

crisis expressed his conviction that even as everything else was lost, nothing could touch or even take away his soul. If a person is rich, it is simply by the virtue and goodness of his soul. The treasures of the soul are safe from any form of violence, something that cannot be reached by anyone, when shielded with utmost care.

On this note, Montaigne opines that one's spouse, children and worldly belongings are important but one must not be wholly dependent on them for their happiness. It is necessary to "reserve a back shop" or rather, a space for ourselves that is "wholly our own and entirely free", a space to retreat and experience the significance of solitude. We must "entertain ourselves with ourselves" or rather be self-content, in a private or personal space where no "exotic knowledge or communication" can filter through. Sometimes, our mind itself can be our best company over which we can exercise good control. It is important not to be under the shadow of fear or even experience the sense of emptiness in our hours of solitude, as Tibullus says "[i]n solitude, be company for thyself." Another quotation that implies the same is that "[v]irtue is satisfied with herself, without discipline, without words, without effects."

In general, most of our actions are less to do with ourselves and are easily influenced by others in some way or the other. Often we end up being more bothered about the activities of others rather than being concerned about our own work. According to Montaigne, we torment our own selves when we become more concerned with the concerns of others for an instance, our worries regarding the loss of our near and dear ones, rather than our own lives. We are often less terrified concerning our own lives which must not be the case according to Montaigne. In this regard, he quotes Terence who wrote thus, "Ah! Can any man conceive in his mind or realise what is dearer than he is to himself?"

Solitude is often preferred by those who have engaged their most active years in public service, as also seen in the example of Thales, the Greek philosopher, mathematician and astronomer. When one has rendered a life of excellent public service and has lived sufficiently enough for others, one owes it to themselves to at least live a portion of it solely for

their own. This does not necessarily mean a retreat or retirement from the public or society as such, but all the same, it is very essential to spend quality time in solitude and serenity. The purpose of leisure is to spend some time on our own and keep a little away from company in order to "disentangle ourselves from violent importunities" (demands) that engage our minds and "separate us from ourselves" or in other words take away our sense of self. For this reason, we must break the habit of being engaged in our obligations all the time and at all times, we must have faith in "nothing but ourselves". When our forces tend to fail us, we must call upon them and harness them for the sake of ourselves.

Undoubtedly, after having set aside a personal space of one's own, we have the liberty to decide on whether we may or may not 'prioritise' (or give utmost importance to) the needs of others or their company. At the same time, we must take our age and health into consideration that may require our attention first. We must never neglect or over-look our own health in order to reach out to the needs of others. Thus, we must exercise both 'reason' and 'conscience', so we are always in the right track. As Quintilian says, "[f]or 'tis rarely seen that men have respect and reverence enough for themselves," we must first be self-concerned for our own good. The great philosopher Socrates had said that young boys must be well instructed in these lessons of life, young men must exercise good work and old men must restore from all sorts of unnecessary employment and obligations. This implies that there is a time for everything and that each phase of human life has its own set of obligations that we must not jumble. One is free from all obligations when he or she retires from the compulsions of duties and the rush of daily life. This happens when one is at ease with himself or herself both "by natural conditions and by reflection" unlike those who foolishly engage in everything and rather "give themselves up to every occasion".

We must not place our expectations on the aspect of our fortunes and deny ourselves the conveniences to which we are entitled, out of a sheer sense of devotion (as many tend to do) as also seen in the case of philosophers who sacrifice much through practical reasoning. To be enslaved within ourselves, to avert our eyes from the world around us, to

give up our good fortunes, to languish in grief, to cause self-suffering (in the hope of gaining salvation in another life) and being over cautious to avoid any mistakes are the signs of "excessive virtue." Just as one makes a mental preparation to fight a war in the most peaceful of hours, one must be able to mentally prepare for one's destiny and the worst of fortunes that may happen as well. Montaigne cites the example of the Greek philosopher Arcesilaus, who was no less virtuous for having made the best use of his fortunes. Instead, he would have considered it unjustified for any person let alone Arcesilaus to ignore the grace of good fortunes.

Montaigne notes that when a poor man arrives at his door for alms and yet looks cheerful; light hearted and healthier than himself, he feels like placing himself in the shoes of such a jolly person. Further, he confesses that even his imagination is not free from the dreadful thoughts of death, poverty, contempt and sickness even as he tries hard not to be scared or frightened. And knowing well that disturbing thoughts are only momentous, he never forgets to pray to Almighty God, so that he is blessed with the self-content. In another example, he writes that young and joyous men often keep 'medicines' ready for any sort of sickness as a ready-remedy, that also speaks of the inherent sense of fear in their minds. Although, 'fear' is a natural element in human psyche, we must not be overcome by the fear or the suffering of any kind of sickness or ailments. In fact, Montaigne opines that we must be mentally strong to subdue and "numb" any form of fear that crops us or suffering that afflicts our beings.

Montaigne again reiterates the fact that a person who retires into his personal space must avoid any laborious or unpleasant work otherwise it does not serve the purpose of solitude or retirement. In addition, a person's personal well-being depends on his or her personal liking and sense of humour. Thus, in the words of Horace, one must "endeavour" in his or her efforts to take control of circumstances instead of allowing them to take control over oneself. In this regard, Montaigne mentions 'husbandry' as also suggested by Sallust, the Roman historian and politician who opined that husbandry tends to be a very laborious employment excepting just a few of the activities categorised under it such as gardening.

In this regard, our minds are directed to the significant advice of Pliny the Younger (a Roman lawyer and author) to his friend Caninius Rufus on the aspect of solitude saying, "I advice thee, in the full and plentiful retirement wherein thou art, to leave to thy hinds the care of thy husbandry, and to addict thyself to the study of letters, to extract from thence something that may be entirely and absolutely thine own." These words of advice meant that a personal retirement made it necessary for a person to leave behind any laborious work such as 'husbandry' (to cite one such example) and 'replace' it with something nobler like the study of books which are best enjoyed in solitude. Further, Persius was one more step in having written that reading was meaningless if one was unable to share in some form or the other. Thus, writing and writing in solitude could be one of the ways to create a larger pool of knowledge.

Being pre-occupied with too much of writing (as referred by Montaigne as "book employment") or being too absorbed in the pleasure of it can also be as laborious as any other engagements and as self-destructive as pleasures that destroy the "thrifty, greedy, lusty and the ambitious." Montaigne himself cares to read books that are "pleasant", "easy", "amusing" that comforts and provides instructions on how to conduct one's life and death. He writes that the pre-occupation with books is a pleasant activity but being "over-studious" or being too engrossed may cause much harm to our health and good disposition. Therefore, once again the most important way of dealing with all engagements of life is to maintain a fine balance in every aspect of a person's life.

Montaigne opines that those who desire the quest of solitude through spiritual path or devotion, preparing themselves for the "divine promises" in the life to come are "rationally founded". In this way, they commit themselves to the hands of God, to an infinite source of "goodness and power." Their souls seek eternal salvation through "afflictions and sufferings" which provide them with "eternal health and joy." Although, regular practice and experience makes all self-restrictions bearable and brings physical desires under control, the practice of gaining a happy "immortal" life in the next also requires one to forego the "pleasures" or "conveniences" of this life. Yet, a person who

is constantly able to fuel his soul with utmost zeal and faith of a true believer also builds a life of solitude that is "more delicious than any other ways of living." At the same time, both the means and end of such a life of self-discipline and control does not entirely please Montaigne, as it runs the risk of bringing about another share of troubles i.e., too much of restrictions and limitations may also suffocate our own beings often leading to a double share of trouble or the condition of 'falling from the frying pan into the fire' as the proverb goes.

The wise sages have cautioned us to be careful of the deceptive nature of our desires and the necessity of differentiating "between true and entire pleasures" from "mixed and complicated with greater pain". The reason for this is that most of our pleasures grip our minds to cause us much suffering. For an instance, if a person suffers from headache even before he or she is drunk, such a person ought to be careful of drinking too much, although it is 'pleasure' that tends to deceive and take hold of their senses. Even the best of health gives itself up to the pleasures of life. Montaigne opines that no matter what the pleasure is, it can never compensate the loss of one's sound health. Those who suffer due to ill health become completely dependent on restrictions and medications. Thus, he writes that both our mental and physical health should be our primary concerns. Therefore, a person who "retires" tired and dissatisfied with the general ways of living must shape a new way of living with the "rules of reason" which makes him or her thoughtful and far-sighted.

In all activities or work such as husbandry, study, hunting etc., men must go ahead to the utmost limits of pleasure but must not over indulge in it because that is where the trouble starts. We must work only as much is necessary to keep us active and as much is necessary to avoid the extremes of "a dull and stupid laziness". We must also be wary that sometimes our desire to over-work ourselves stems from our 'passions' that may end up spoiling the balance of our body and soul. According to Pliny and Cicero, "[a]mbition is of all others the most contrary humour to solitude" because ambition tends to be drawn towards 'glory', while solitude calls for 'repose' and the two cannot exist together. Montaigne cites the example of two philosophers belonging to two different sects who wrote to

Idomeneus (a Cretan, in Greek mythology) and the other to Lucilius, "to retire into solitude from worldly humours and affairs" and to break free "from all concerns of name and glory". Also, one's former glory will always have a tendency of creeping into one's personal space or "private retreat". Thus, the advice that follows is that one must "[q]uit on the pleasures that proceeds from the approbation" and never lose self-confidence in the depth of knowledge and good convictions that one carries. These will not be wasted if one takes better care of him or herself.

Montaigne in an example writes that when a person was asked why he took so much pain to acquire the skills of a particular art, if it would be ultimately known or appreciated by just a handful of people, he simply replied "a few are enough for me". This implies that self-contentment is more important than public glory or approbation (approval or praise). As Seneca had said, "I have enough with one; I have enough with never a one" meaning that it is best to be self-content with oneself. A person must not be too concerned with the opinion of others but rather hold a good opinion of oneself as a balanced personality. It is nothing but an act of folly to trust oneself if a person is unable to "govern" him or herself of all things. Cicero said thus, "[l]et honest things be ever present to the mind", all in order to have a sense of respect for ourselves and to avoid stumbling in the journey of life.

At the end of the essay, Montaigne writes that philosophers like Cato, Phocian and Aristides will always be a source of guidance, to be content with oneself, to be independent, to "stay and fix your soul" within a personal; limit of thoughts, so that the soul may "please herself" and so that the soul understands the "true and real goods" which men enjoy even more when they understand their true value or worth.

1.4.1 List of Important References in the Text:

The provided list of references made by Montaigne will supplement the learner's reading of the text and enable you to easily grasp the provided explanation in the present subsection. The sources of Bacon's references are as mentioned below:

Lucan: a Roman poet Marcus Annaeus Lucarus

Cato: Cato the Elder also known as 'Cato the Wise' or 'Cato the Ancient' was the first to have written history in Latin

Juvenal: a Roman poet

Diogenes Laertius: a biographer of the Greek philosophers who wrote the work titled *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* is a principal source of the history of Greek philosophy

Horace: Quintus Horatio Flaccus was the leading Roman lyric poet who practiced iambic poetry also wrote Latin lyrics, odes and satires

Antisthenes: a Greek philosopher and a pupil of Socrates

Charondas: a lawgiver of Catonian society and a pupil of Pythagoras

Virgil: Publius Vergilius Maro was a Roman poet who famously wrote the epic *Aeneid*

Persius: also known as Aulus Persius Flaccus was a Roman poet and satirist

Lucretius: Titus Lucretius Carus was a Roman poet and philosopher

Stilpo: Stilpon was a Greek philosopher

Demetrius Poliorcetes: a Macedonian Greek military leader and King of Macedon

Paulinas: Paulinas of Nola was a Roman poet, scriptor and senator

Tibullus: Albius Tibullus was a Latin poet

Terence: also known as Publius Terentius Afer, a Roman playwright

Quintillian: a Roman rhetorician also known as Marcus Fabius Quintilianus

Socrates: a classical Greek philosopher whose students were Plato and Xenophon

Arcesilaus: a Greek philosopher

Sallust: a Roman historian and politician

Xenophon: 'Xenophon of Athens' was an ancient Greek philosopher and historian

Cyrus: 'Cyrus the Great' or also known as 'Cyrus the Elder' by the Greeks was the founding emperor of the Achaemenid Empire

Pliny the Elder: a Roman author, naturalist and philosopher

Pliny the Younger: a Roman author and lawyer

John Florio: Italian linguist and lexicographer

Gaius Lucilius: a Roman commander, satirist

Seneca: a Roman philosopher

Phocian: an Athenian statesman and politician

Aristides: an Athenian statesman who was also called "the Just"

1.4.2 Glossary

The glossary of some of the difficult words is provided in the present subsection to help the learner with an easy reading of the text of the essay "Of Solitude".

Pretermit: omit to do or mention

Avarice: extreme greed for wealth or material gain

Palliate: disguise seriousness of an offense

Eulogium: another term used for eulogy or a formal expression of words for someone who has died

Tumult: a loud confused noise, especially one caused by a large mass of people

Contagion: something that can easily spread

Vicious: deliberately cruel or violent

Dissolute: lacking control or something that is immoral

Blasphemous: anything that is against God or sacred things

Peril: danger

Reproached: express one's disapproval

Inordinate: excessive or too large

Lading: the action of loading

Encumbrance: any form of liability or burden

Sequester: isolate or hide away

Languish: to be forced to remain in an unpleasant place or situation

Vacuity: lack of thought or intelligence

Harquebuss: also spelt as harquebus referring to a muzzle or gun

Espouse: adopt or support

Importunate: insistent or persisting too much

Seclusion: to be left all by oneself or being away from other people

Jocund: cheerful and lighthearted

Affrighted: frighten someone

Stupefy: astonish or shock someone

Husbandry: the care, cultivation and breeding of crops and animals

Wherewithal: the money or other means required for a particular purpose

Satiate: to satisfy

Acquisition: to acquire or gain

Asperity: harshness of tone or manner

Carnal: referring to physical or bodily pleasures

Voluptuous: curvaceous body

Wheedle: to influence a person with flattery

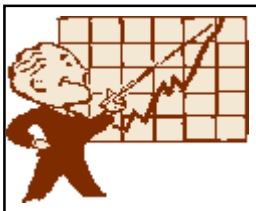
Transgress: to go beyond limits (of all that is morally, socially or legally acceptable)

Tranquility: peaceful or serene

Brisker: active and energetic or fast paced

Counterpoise: have an opposing and balancing effect

Prating: talk foolishly



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Whom does Montaigne challenge in the opening of the essay?

Q 8: What is the effect of extreme luxury and idleness in human nature?

Q 9: What does Montaigne write about fear?

Q 10: What does Pliny the Younger advice his friend Caninus Rufus regarding solitude?

1.5 MAJOR THEMES

A completed reading of the text of the essay supplemented with the detailed explanation will enable you to grasp some of the central themes of the essay as described below:

Solitude:

Solitude must be given its due share of importance because it enriches the quality of one's life experiences. Often, in the humdrum and rush of everyday life, we experience the necessity of creating a retreat where we can be at ease with ourselves and rekindle that spark we have in our souls. Thus, Montaigne writes "'tis not enough to shift the soil only; a man must flee from the popular conditions that have taken possessions of his soul, he must isolate or shut oneself and regain his sense of self." Further, he talks of that special "back shop" that we can call ours alone, that which allows us to be alone in peace and serenity.

Although, we are haunted with numerous fears and insecurities, burdened with laborious engagements and anxieties, which confine us in many ways, yet we must transcend the barriers of our conditioned responses and anxieties in order to find the essence of "true solitude." Solitude is that special space we must create for ourselves as a fort of strength in our everyday struggle of life. We might in our self-occupied moments of our own "ease and repose" call the best of our thoughts and reflections. In the process of seeking solitude, we may sometimes be guilty of partially being detached or leaving our relations and worldly engagements aside but it is nonetheless essential for our souls to "live alone in good earnest." Even the strongest and the strong-willed natures can make something "exemplary" out of their "seclusion" or solitude.

Thus, Montaigne writes that "[t]he greatest thing in the world is for a man to know that he is his own" and that we must not "lay our principal foundation" in the engagement with others, rather it should be with ourselves. We must not be 'enslaved' under anyone else's power and certainly not at the cost of our own contentment. Thus, in the words of Horace we must find ourselves, "[s]ilently meditating in the healthy groves, whatever is worthy of a wise and good man."

Moderation or a balanced way of life:

The essence of a true balanced personality is the balance between social and personal life, work engagements and ease at leisure, good health and limited pleasures, sound mind and practiced moderation in all aspects

of life. Although, some of the aspects may seem practically difficult, Montaigne prescribes the best possible balance and combination for a person to lead a fulfilling life. Our habitual attachments to all our practical obligations turns into a fixed way of life, in the absence of which we tend to feel worthless or even "devastated". This condition is owing to the way we condition our minds and the way our life is shaped around our work. However, the sooner we realise that we owe it to ourselves to create to live a life of peace and inner happiness, the better our lives become. We alone are responsible for the way we choose to live our lives and because we live it once, we might as well live it to the best. Thus, the key of enjoying a wonderful life is also to find that ideal balance in our own nature and all our engagements.



LET US KNOW

Make a list of some of the thoughts and advices recommended by Michel de Montaigne in his essay "Of Solitude." Also, you may note down some of the best thoughts and ideas that come across your mind in your own hour of solitude.

1.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

It is evident from the text of the essay that Michel Montaigne was well versed in the literatures and philosophies of some of the ancient classical thinkers and philosophers. While reading the text, we come across phrases loaded with meaning, quotations and cross references that draw much inspiration from the reflections of ancient philosophers. The words of great classicists such as Cato, Juvenal, Lucan, Diogenes Laertius, Antisthenes, Charondas, Horace, Virgil, Persius, Lucretius, Stilpo, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Paulinas, Tibillus, Terence Aleph, Quintillian, Socrates, Arcesilaus, Sallust, Xenophon, Cyrus, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, John Flovio and Seneca are referred in the essay. Much early in his life, Montaigne had developed a love for Latin, having learnt it even before he learnt French. His writings reflect his natural flair for Latin and French, and his essays are woven with his wide readings of the classical masters.

Although, the references made in the essay are not easily comprehensible and not as conversational in terms of style and presentation, yet Montaigne draws from everyday examples that may be related easily by all. The essay is presented in a didactic form or as in the form of moral instructions that does not digress from the central theme of 'solitude'. The significance of the essay lies in the practical wisdom that is supplemented with the philosophies and reflections of the "wise sages". While reading the essay, we come across words such as: thou (you), seest (to see), ofttimes (often), forasmuch (since), affrighted (scared), thence (henceforth), thine (yours), wherewithal (ready money), soever (to any extent) etc. which are old archaic English words. Again, we may note that in several instances and examples, Montaigne uses personification (a figure of speech) which is a literary style of assigning human qualities to something that is abstract for an instance, the characteristics of Ambition and Bias is personified as He while Fortune, Soul and Pleasure is personified as 'She'.

The eclectic compilation of his writings reflects the range of his interest, insight and readings on philosophy and various other aspects of human life. The essay "On Solitude" is interesting owing to the everyday examples of human life that he adds to the examples quoted from the ancient thinkers. The essays are replete with striking examples that give the readers much food for thought in terms of everyday practices, moral reflection and worldly wisdom. As a thinker, Montaigne had a wide knowledge of all the philosophical schools right from the classical thinkers to the contemporary philosophers although he did not necessarily support any particular school of thought. Although, the essays are not free from Montaigne's 'idealism' yet they are significant in terms of their in-depth analyses of human life, written with remarkable expression and his masterly style.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Mention some of the classicists as referred to by Montaigne in the essay.

Q 12: Give examples of Montaigne's use of personification in the essay

1.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Michel de Montaigne was one of the most important humanists of the 16th century who was well-versed in the classics of Virgil, Ovid and Horace. The period in which Montaigne lived was politically turbulent and there was a "moral" degeneration in the French society of his time. The European Renaissance that had spread across Europe had brought about a socio-cultural and intellectual awakening in the consciousness of people throughout the 14th and 17th century, during which the Humanist movement took shape as well. The Humanist world-view brought about a major shift in the focus of 'divine faith' to 'human reason' and in fact the balance of both which had also led to the expansion of knowledge through 'humanist education' that specially focused on the subjects of poetry, grammar, history, moral philosophy and rhetoric. Montaigne was himself a humanist who discovered and studied the classical masters and their works and treatises as is evident in his works. In most of his writings, he quotes extensively from great thinkers and philosophers, poets and historians, jurists and statesmen to support his discourses and to justify his points of view.

In his preface to the Essays titled 'The Author to the Reader', Montaigne takes the reader into confidence with the words that the volume of essays is a "well-meaning" book that portrays him in which he is "the ground worke" (ground-work) of his essays. These essays are presented in a conversational style, yet they are also didactic in nature. These deliberations are an outcome of his wide reading and self-reflection but they also tend to reveal Montaigne's idealised conceptions of himself. Nevertheless, it does not take away from his credibility as an essayist who makes an exceptional attempt of writing on a range of aspects of human life. Ralph W. Truerlood in "Montaigne: The Average Man" writes thus on Montaigne's essays,

"The *Essays* of Montaigne presents the somewhat unique spectacle of an author who has undertaken the task of laying before his readers the dissection of himself; who, with the high standard of literal and intelligent accuracy ever before him, he's set himself to discover, with impartial hand

and unsparing judgement, the entirety of his personality, to its smallest detail, and from as many different viewpoints as a life of considerable variety enabled him to assume."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q13: What was the significance of the Humanist worldview?

Q14: What does Montaigne write in the Preface titled 'The Author to the Reader'?

Q15: Name some of the other essays by Michel de Montaigne.



1.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you should be familiar to the life and literary works of the essayist Michel Montaigne. A thorough reading of the text of the prescribed essay "Of Solitude" is recommended with the help of the provided glossary in the unit. Also, the explanation of the essay must have provided you with a better idea on the content and the major themes of the essay. Montaigne's literary style and language as also reflected in the present essay and the volume of his essay has been discussed together with the critical reception of the widely read essayist. Thus, a detailed study of the essay "Of Solitude" will encourage the learner to further explore the other interesting areas and topics that were taken up by Montaigne.



1.9 FURTHER READING

1) Screech, M.A. (ed). (1993). *The Essays by Michael de Montaigne*. Penguin Classics.

2) Truerlood, Ralph. W. "Montaigne: The Average Man" 21.1 (1906) 215-225 *Modern Language Association* [www.jstor.org/stable/456593]

Web Resources:

Websites: http://palto.stratford.edu/entries/montaigne



1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Montaigne was a French essayist of the 16th century.

Ans to Q 2: Although, Montaigne belonged to a noble and a well-to-do family, early in life, he was given the exposure of living with a peasant family for three years, with the hope that he would grow up to understand the struggles and the life of the poor.

Ans to Q 3: It was his friend La Boetie's untimely death in the year 1563 that Montaigne became reserved in nature and took to pouring his thoughts in the form of reflective writings. Eventually, these began to take the shape of 'essays' thus, forming one of the first practices of the literary form.

Ans to Q 4: One of the early works to have been translated by Montaigne from Spanish to French was the work titled *Teholgia Naturalis* or *Natural Theology* written by the theologist, Raymond of Sabunde which was published in 1569.

Ans to Q 5: One of the interesting aspects was that Montaigne was fortunate enough to have a private library in his castle (also known as Tour de Montaigne) which gave him a space to develop his literary interests through a decade.

Ans to Q 6: The volumes of his essays are widely read owing to the depths of his reflections, width of his knowledge, miniscule observations, philosophical insights, wisdom, altruism and truth.

Ans to Q 7: He challenges all those in power to lay their hands on their hearts and honestly confess their ambitions of 'glory' and 'high offices' that they would want to gain even at the cost of people's welfare. Through these words, he directs our attention to the corrupt practices of such officers who have ill motives and indulge in immoral (even illegal) practices in the society.

Ans to Q 8: The life of extreme 'luxury' and 'idleness' has a tendency to worsen human nature as the saying goes, "an empty mind is a devil's

workshop." Therefore, it is only with wisdom that one realises the importance of balance in one's persona, actions and one's life.

Ans to Q 9: Fear is a natural element in human psyche but Montaigne opines that we must not be overcome by the any form of fear especially the fear of suffering of all sorts of sickness or ailments. In fact, Montaigne opines that we must be mentally strong to subdue and "numb" any form of fear that crops us or suffering that afflicts our beings.

Ans to Q 10: The words of advice by Pliny the Younger meant that a personal retirement made it necessary for a person to leave behind any laborious work such as 'husbandry' (to cite one such example) and 'replace' it with something nobler like the study of books which are best enjoyed in solitude.

Ans to Q 11: Montaigne refers to some of great classicists such as Cato, Juvenal, Lucan, Diogenes Laertius, Antisthenes, Charondas, Horace, Virgil, Persius, Lucretius, Stilpo, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Paulinas, Tibillus, Terence Aleph, Quintillian, Socrates, Arcesilaus, Sallust, Xenophon, Cyrus, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, John Flovio and Seneca in the essay.

Ans to Q 12: The characteristics of Ambition and Bias is personified as 'He' while Fortune, Soul and Pleasure is personified as 'She'.

Ans to Q 13: The Humanist world-view brought about a major shift in the focus of 'divine faith' to 'human reason' or even the balance of both

Ans to Q 14: In his preface to the Essays titled 'The Author to the Reader', Montaigne takes the reader into confidence with the words that the volume of essays is a "well-meaning" book that portrays him in which he is "the groundworke" (ground-work) of his essays.

Ans to Q 15: Some of the titles of his essays are: "Of Sadness", "Of Idleness", "Of Liars", "Of Constancy", "Of Fear", "Of Imagination", "Of Friendship", "Of Moderation", "Of Names", "Of Ancient Customs", "Of Repentance", "Of Diversion", "Of Vanity", "Of Experience", "Of Age", "Of Conscience", "Of Glory" and "Of Virtue" among others.



1.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. Describe the life and works of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne. Assess Montaigne's contributions to the genre of the Essay.

Q 2. Give a detailed explanation of the essay "On Solitude."

Q 3. What makes 'solitude' an essential part of human life as discussed in the essay "Of Solitude"?

Q 4. How does Montaigne distinguish one's own self-concern from that of one's spouse, children and worldly belongings?

Q 5. Discuss some of the references borrowed from the Classical thinkers that Montaigne uses to elucidate his perspective on solitude.

Q 6. Why does Montaigne write that a wise man has nothing to lose except his own self? Explain briefly.

Q 7. What is the purpose of leisure and ease according to Montaigne?

Q 8. Discuss the major themes that emerge from the essay "On Solitude"

Q 9. Analyse the style and language employed by the essayist Michel de Montaigne.

Q 10. Provide a critical reception of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne.

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UNIT 2: FRANCIS BACON: "OF TRUTH", "OF STUDIES"

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Francis Bacon: The Essayist

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Works

2.4 Explanation of the Essays

2.4.1 Explanation of the Essay "Of Truth"

2.4.2 Explanation of the Essay "Of Studies"

2.4.3 Glossary

2.5 Major Themes

2.6 Style and Language

2.7 Critical Reception

2.8 Let us Sum up

2.9 Further Reading

2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.11 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gain a brief idea on the life and works of the English essayist, Francis Bacon
- provide a detailed explanation of the essays titled "Of Truth" and "Of Studies"
- highlight the important themes in both the essays
- analyse the style and language employed by Bacon
- provide a critical reception of the essays.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to yet another important English essayists, whose name is Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon, as an

English essayist, philosopher, scientist, statesman and jurist, is considered to be one of the significant prose writers of the 17th century. The present unit shall explore two selected essays titled "Of Truth" and "Of Studies" by the essayist. Bacon has been a pioneer of the literary form that we know as 'essay' or 'essay-writing' owing to his contributions to the form. The *Essays* seem to have stemmed from Bacon's likely interest in collecting commonplace books, which was also a common Renaissance practice and the habit of note taking from various references, particularly books. Through the wide-ranging themes found in the volume of essays, Bacon succeeds at providing a deep insight into his philosophical and moral reflections presented in a concise manner with his acute observations and lively examples. Moreover, his essays cover interesting aspects of human life and human nature to which we can easily relate to and from which we may be inspired to broaden our perspectives.

2.3 FRANCIS BACON: THE ESSAYIST

Francis Bacon was truly a Renaissance figure in terms of his contributions to various fields such as literature, philosophy, science, law, politics and the diplomatic services. His literary volume titled *Essays* remains an all time classic and we shall gain a glimpse of his mastery at handling prose in the essays "Of Truth" and "Of Studies." Before we explore the content of the prescribed essays together with its various other aspects for our detailed study, let us first familiarise ourselves to the life and works of Francis Bacon in the following subsections.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

2.3.1 His Life

Francis Bacon was born in the year 1561 as the youngest son to the Lord Keeper of the Seal for Elizabeth I, Sir Nicholas Bacon and Lady Anne (Cooke) Bacon who belonged to a noble aristocratic family of England. Lady Anne Bacon, a scholar in her own right was

the daughter of the humanist, Sir Anthony Cooke. Bacon's mother was well versed in various literature and languages that had a positive influence on Bacon's early childhood. He also had an elder brother named Anthony Bacon. Much of his early education began at home and he had also developed a flair for Latin as he was tutored at home in this rich language. At the tender age of 'twelve', he received the fine opportunity of studying at the Trinity College, Cambridge and later, he pursued law at the University of Poitiers, joining the Gray's Inn in 1576. Bacon had a sharp intellect and was greatly influenced by some of the ancient philosophers namely Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and Cicero which found a reflection in most of his reflective writings to a great extent.

As a young man, Bacon had the opportunity of travelling to various places like Poitiers, Italy and Spain, which had greatly enriched his learning experiences. During this time, he had joined as an Assistant to Amias Paulet, the British Ambassador of France which provided him with a wide working-knowledge of the diplomatic services. However, in the year 1579, when Bacon received the news of his father's demise, he had to return home to his family. Bacon did not inherit much in terms of paternal property or wealth. Further, owing to financial restraints, he decided to take up work at the Gray's Inn where he had worked for three years. He was eventually promoted as a barrister and he continued his work at the Gray's Inn while also searching for better employment opportunities.

In 1582, Bacon earned a law degree and soon joined the Parliament after his election as a representative in the year 1584. This was a milestone in Bacon's political career and his political career prospered through a span of thirty-six years starting from 1584 to 1617. Moreover, after King James I had come into power, Bacon's career prospects rose further and he went on to receive the knighthood in 1603. He held high offices of the Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England during his time in the Parliament. Although, his career as the Lord Chancellor of England (as appointed by the King) suffered a setback, due to legal charges of corruption,

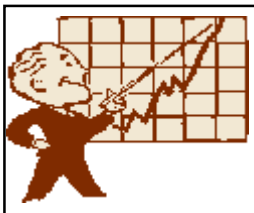
Bacon pleaded innocent on the grounds that he received gifts like any other person without much thought and yet maintained his sense of personal integrity at all times.

After a brief courtship with a young widow named Elizabeth Hatton, Bacon courted and married a young girl named Alice Barnham in the year 1606 at the age of forty-five. They had a difficult married life due to the pressing legal charges against Bacon and the financial difficulties in the family. Although, Alice Barnham like her mother Dorothy Barnham was driven by power and riches, yet she was left without any inheritance from her husband. Bacon suffered from severe pneumonia and passed away on 9 April 1626 at Highgate, London after a long successful literary and public career. In fact, Bacon is best remembered for his literary essays that shaped up a new genre of literature in itself. In the subsection that follows, you will receive a brief idea on the literary works by Francis Bacon.



LET US KNOW

The philosophical and scientific ideas of Bacon were held in great regard during the 1630s, which had also earned him the title "Father of Empiricism". He is also considered to have brought about a change in creating a modern scientific approach towards Nature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1. When was Bacon born? Who were the parents of Francis Bacon?

Q 2. Write a few lines on Bacon's education.

Q 3. Comment on Bacon's political career.

2.3.2 His Works

Bacon believed in the spirit of the new Renaissance humanism and true to the spirit of enquiry, he was a 'skeptic' in his

thought or we could say that he was an individual who doubted or questioned accepted opinions. His 'empirical' or 'inductive' method of knowledge, which emphasised on the relevance of experience, proof and physical observation led to the development of the scientific method and modern sciences. In order to discover and verify nature's truth, the 'empirical' method also known as the 'Baconian method', encouraged experimentation, systematic analysis and physical observation.

Bacon was optimistic that the empirical school of thought would replace the older schools of thought and usher in the spirit of Renaissance Humanism. Thus, it is not surprising that great thinkers of the Renaissance period such as Voltaire and Diderot considered Bacon as the 'Father of Modern Science'. In fact, his concern as a philosopher of science had led to his well-known work *Novum Organum* (1620) published in Latin, which had opened up a newer perspective towards the scientific way of acquiring knowledge. He had also forwarded the idea on the 'duality of truth', which held that" truth to the idealist, and the common people were different. Even after his demise in 1626, Bacon's influence had brought about a major scientific reform, which came to be embodied in the principles of the Royal Society of London.

The most important works of literary merit by Bacon are his *Essays* (1597-1625), the first edition was published in 1597 containing ten essays and the second publication came out in 1612 with thirty-eight essays followed by a final compilation published in 1625 that contained fifty-eight essays. Some of his other philosophical, scientific, religious and historical works include *On the Wisdom of the Ancients*, based on ancient mythology, *Colours of Good and Evil* (1597), *Sacred Meditations* (1597), *The Advancement and Proficience of Learning Divine and Human* (1605), *Novum Organum Scientarium* (1620), *The History of Henry VII* (1622), *The New Atlantis* (1624) and *Apothegms* (1624). These reflect his efforts at covering a wide range of knowledge in his works.

Also, Bacon was known to have practiced taking notes from commonplace books recording interesting observations, proverbs, reflections, quotations, Latin phrases etc. It is this interest in writing notes that perhaps gave shape to his essays that enquired of multiple aspects of human life much like his French counterpart Michel de Montaigne from whom he drew was he inspired. The first biography of Bacon was written by his private chaplain William Rawley in the year 1657 after his demise.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How was the spirit of enquiry reflected in the works of Francis Bacon?

Q 5: What does the Baconian method encourage? What was the contribution of Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620)?

Q 6: Name some of the important works by Francis Bacon.

2.4 EXPLANATION OF THE ESSAYS

The volume of essays by Bacon took shape over a long period of time during which he read, re-read and revised his writing drafts several times to provide his succinct observations and significant reflections on various aspects of human lives. The first edition of *Essays* comprising ten essays was dedicated to his brother Anthony and was published in 1597, which was followed by another publication comprising thirty-eight essays, published in 1612. A second edition of *Essays* comprising fifty-eight essays and collectively titled *Essays or Counsels, Civil or Moral* was published in 1625.

An exploration of his essay volume shall provide you a wider perspective on the reflections and meditations of the essayist that are both universal and relevant to our own lives. The following subsections shall take up two of the selected essays of Bacon titled "Of Truth" and "Of Studies" in details.

2.4.1 Explanation on the Essay “Of Truth”

The opening words of the essay take us straight to the central theme of the essay that is the concept of ‘truth’. It opens with the question, “what is truth?” which were the words uttered by Pontius Pilate who had served as the prefect of Judaea, a province that was once a part of the larger Roman Empire. Pilate is known to have had a role in the trial of Jesus Christ. The narratives of the Bible mention that Pilate had found no valid grounds to punish Jesus and suggested his people to spare the life of this innocent man. However, he had to ultimately relent to the cries of the bloodthirsty crowds and send Jesus Christ to his ‘crucifixion’ or in other words to be nailed on the cross.

If one refers to the Gospel of John chapter 18, verse 37, Jesus had talked about his one purpose on earth saying, “I came into the world….to bear witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.” However, Pontius Pilate ignored the truth of these words and took them too lightly. Thus, Bacon makes a subtle comparison between Pontius Pilate as the man who had ignored the truth and Jesus Christ as the one who had died as the truthful one on the cross. Nevertheless, the truth of Jesus Christ prevailed, as truth can never be defeated and eventually stands established.

Bacon then mentions some of the contemporary philosophers who tried to grapple and fix ideas on the discourses of truth that posed as a challenging task in itself. He opined that in this regard they were no match for the ‘ancient philosophers’ who were highly engaged in the philosophical discourses on the very existence of truth. He states that there were challenges involved in discovering the essence of truth and also in the task of establishing or convincing people with the truth. It is also true that human beings have always had a natural tendency of veiling truth with lies. One of the later or progressive Grecian schools of philosophy examined this aspect of human tendency towards lying and explored the ‘reasons’ that made people lie even when it was unnecessary. The poets took liberties

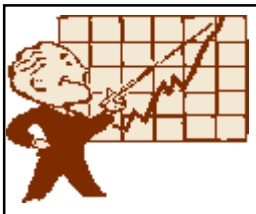
with representations of truth in their poetry for the purpose of "pleasure" and merchants for the purpose of "advantage" or monetary gain but Bacon questions the tendency of people in general with regard to lying just for the sake of it.

Generally, truth is considered objective and singular, but there are also 'multiple' ways of looking at truth as well, especially when it depends on certain contexts or circumstances. Bacon admits that there is a certain pleasure in mixing truth with lies for the sake of it. Further, he also feels that if all sorts of "vain opinions", "flattering hopes", "false valuations", "imaginations" were all erased from the human mind, we would also suffer from a grave sense of depression and sadness. Bacon in defence of poetry or any other form of poetical verses such as the 'parables' from the Bible, writes that although 'poetry' contains gems of truth which are partially veiled to the readers, yet it cannot be considered as a "devils' wine" by any means. He writes that it is rather the sinking of lies into our sub-consciousness that may prove to be harmful for us and corrupt our judgments. The prevalence of truth leads us to fair judgments, to search or pursue the light of truth, to gain in the knowledge and faith, which is the supreme, or "sovereign good of human nature."

Here again, Bacon refers to the Bible according to which God first removed or dispelled darkness by creating light on the face of the earth, followed by the face of man and the face of His chosen few. In this regard, he quotes the poet Lucretius who wrote thus, "[i]t is a pleasure to stand in the window of a castle and to see a battle and the adventures thereof below: but no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth… and to see the errors and wanderings and mists and tempests in the vale below." By this, he means that the wisdom of truth should enable us to have a better perspective on the struggles and journeys of life, with a sense of humility and understanding instead of pride or arrogance. Being truthful is compared to "heaven upon earth" and it is truth that illuminates the human spirit.

Moving away from the religious or philosophical truth, Bacon refers to the truth of "civil business" or our 'everyday lives' in which transparent deals are never to be dishonoured. Falsehood is compared to the mixture of alloy in coins of gold or silver, which debases or reduces its genuine quality. Again, there is another comparison of truth with the price of a pearl, the quality of which is best determined in day light. The price of a diamond may be higher owing to its appealing quality, which is determined in multiple lights that it reflects, but it cannot be compared to the purity of the pearl, which simply stands genuine in natural light.

In addition, the "crooked" or "winding courses" taken in falsehood are compared to the crawling of serpents or snakes. It is considered shameful for a man to be found false, dishonest and deceitful. And in this regard he quotes Michel Montaigne who had said thus, "[i]f it be well weighed, to say that a man lieth, is as much to say, as that he is brave towards God and a coward towards men." By this, Montaigne means that lying to fellow men is an act of cowardice and also a defiance of God's teachings. Finally, the essay concludes with a reference to the Judgment Day (as mentioned in the Bible), a day when God shall make the final call for the judgment of humankind. According to the prophecy in the Bible, the sea of unfaithful followers on earth will be revealed on the Judgement Day.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does the essay "Of Truth" open to the reader?

Q 8: Who was Pontius Pilate?

Q 9: Which school of philosophy had examined the aspect of human tendency towards lying?

Q 10: What does Bacon compare falsehood compared to?

Q 11: How does the essay "Of Truth" conclude?

2.4.2 Explanation on the Essay "Of Studies"

The essay "Of Studies" begins by highlighting the role, purpose and significance of studies, "[s]tudies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability." It is through years of rigorous studies that a student or a learner is prepared to carve a niche or an identity for himself or herself in the world. The key words that Bacon uses to define studies are 'delight', 'ornament' and 'ability' as he opines that studies are delightful owing to the opportunity that it provides to think or reflect individually; it enables one to debate and exchange ideas from the depth of knowledge; and enables one to be strong-willed, decisive and to conduct oneself in the professional world.

At the same time, to be engaged only in bookish knowledge would be considered as a sign of passivity because practical application of knowledge is very essential in our day-to-day lives. Also, to be 'boastful' or to simply make a display of one's knowledge is nothing but sheer pretence and such a display is never appreciated by the learned. Then again, to stick to rules or be extremely rigid while making decisions would be ridiculous because knowledge must expand the horizons of our mind and our perspectives. This implies that there should be an ideal balance in what one imbibes and learns from years of learning and experience. Just as natural plants require regular pruning and nourishment, similarly, natural abilities are shaped by experience over time and this scope is broadened only through studies and its practical application in life.

Bacon opines that those who are cunning and devious tend to disregard studies; those who are simple by nature tend to admire studies; and those who are truly wise apply their knowledge and learning in practical life. Here again, Bacon points at the necessity of developing or cultivating one's own sense of judgement and wisdom through one's 'learning' and 'knowledge'. This is precisely why he writes that the best of learning enables one to be judicious, wise and knowledgeable, the ability "to weigh and consider". Studies

should not be aimed at opposing or contesting others and nor should it be ‘blindly’ influenced by others. Moreover, studies should not be aimed at building up discourses alone rather it should be aimed at broadening and developing one’s independent thinking and cognitive abilities.

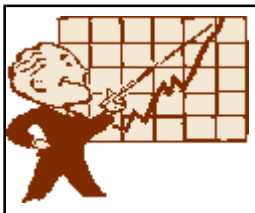
The world of knowledge is best captured within the pages of books alone and it is no wonder that books are considered as man’s best companion. It is the most essential source of all our knowledge and learning. Further, it is through years of learning that a person gains a world of knowledge and understanding. In this regard, Bacon makes an interesting observation that there are some books, which may be read by people of high stature, and general readers that may not necessarily be much resourceful. Such books that do not serve the purpose of knowledge or learning are compared to ‘distilled water’ that has a sparkling quality but lacks in taste. Thus, ‘good reading’ is very essential for the holistic development of a person, ‘discussions’ are essential as they reflect the knowledge of a widely-read person and ‘writing’ is equally essential as it reflects the true ability of understanding and expression. Thus, if a person does not exercise his or her writing skills, such a person will require extensive memory to make a mental note of things because it is a natural tendency to easily forget all that is learnt. If an individual only has little knowledge to share, such a person will require a presence of mind in order to hide his or her lack, in terms of knowledge. Again, if a person is not well read, he or she will have to be cunning enough to present a limited knowledge to people and pretend that he or she is widely read.

Bacon makes the statement that, “[h]istories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtitle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend.” In other words, Bacon cites the role of history or rather histories in developing worldly wisdom in men, enriching poetry, natural philosophy, ethics, logic and rhetoric, all of which are essential in the development of human

intellect and wisdom. Bacon's phrase '*Abeunt studia in mores*' implies that studies develop into manners or in other words, studies develop a person's frame of mind and moulds his or her personality.

Further, Bacon suggests that just as the practice of bowling is good for kidneys; shooting for lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; and riding for the head, similarly the practice of Mathematics, for an instance, is recommended for an easily distracted person because the subject demands a presence of mind in the absence of which errors can easily crop up in mathematical calculations. Then again, if a person gets easily confused and entangled, being unable to get to the bottom of calculations or if the person is unable to methodically prove his or her calculations, such a person, according to Bacon, requires training in 'Legal Studies'.

The discipline of Legal Studies provides one the ability to think 'logically', to establish proof of legal cases. Bacon thus opines that the mind can be trained through the studies of multiple disciplines because each discipline has something to offer to our pool of knowledge and learning. Moreover, Bacon states that the secret of enriching one's mind is to enhance and strengthen one's knowledge potential, working on areas or disciplines in which one requires special training (through study) and enlightening one's mind through studying the choicest of books.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: What are the keywords that Bacon uses to define studies?

Q 13: Why is it considered a sign of passivity to only engage in bookish knowledge?

Q 14: What happens if a person is not in the habit of exercising his or her writing skills?

Q 15: What is the secret of enriching one's mind according to Bacon?

2.4.3 Glossary

The glossary provided below shall help you in the reading of the text of essay "Of Truth".

"Of Truth"

Jesting: to speak in a joking way

Sects: reference to philosophical 'groups'

Mummeries: ridiculous ceremonial procedures

Carbuncle: a bright red gem

Vain: producing no result or effect

Flattering: full of praises and compliments

Valuations: estimation

Melancholy: sadness or grief

Indisposition: lack of enthusiasm

Depraved: morally corrupt or wicked

Sabbath: Sunday

Providence: the protective care of God or of nature as a spiritual power

Perfidious: deceitful or untrustworthy

Breach: an act of breaking or failing to observe a law or code of conduct

Peal: a loud ringing or call

The glossary provided below shall help you in the reading of the text of essay "Of Studies".

"Of Studies"

Glossary:

Discourse: written or spoken communication or debate

Marshalling: assemble and arrange in order

Pronying: trim (to prune or pruning)

Contradict: deny the truth

Confute: prove a person to be wrong

Diligence: careful and persistent work or effect

Distilled: purify or extract

Impediment: a hindrance or obstruction in doing something

Bowling: the game of bowls as a sport or recreation

Defect: a shortcoming, imperfection or lack

Receipt: the action of receiving or the fact of its being received



LET US KNOW

The universal truth is that it is so much easier to state the truth than utter a set of lies that stretch for a longer time than one can imagine. Yet the scientific working of the human mind is such that, we are naturally wired in a way that makes us self-defensive at all times and frequently dependent on little fragments or even complete set of lies. An article by Olivia Goldhill titled, "The Science of Why We Lie" published on 15 November 2014 in the Telegraph UK, wrote that on an average (excluding compulsive liars), people speak or utter lies "ten times a week"! People do not like to admit the truth regarding the tendency to lie but the fact remains that the human mind does have its own set of calculations, which determines the factors of truth and falsity.

2.5 MAJOR THEMES

Truth:

In his meditations on 'truth', Bacon explains the necessity of being true at all times while also admitting that it is often challenging to speak the truth in certain situations or contexts. The Grecian philosophers had well examined the nature of 'truth' and found that it could be challenging both to arrive at a singular definition of truth, as well as, to establish truth among people. Another factor is that truth also has multiple angles, which make it difficult to define or determine it at times.

You may have come across the phrase 'truth is stranger than fiction', which was a famous statement made by the writer Mark Twain. Also, you may have read about the famous literary character created by Carlo Collodi popularly known as 'Pinocchio', the wooden marionette with a long pointed nose that grew every time he would lie. In real life situations, it is our lies that keep stretching and growing with time, which is why it is necessary to combat the tendency of lying to save difficult situations. At the same time, we also know well from our experiences that uttering 'white lies', or lies that does not harm anyone does save our day at times. Do you find yourself making lame excuses or may be cooking up some stories and telling lies in

various situations of your day-to-day life? Although, our minds are programmed in the same way and we are naturally inclined towards the pleasure of mixing truth with fragments of lies, we must not lie in the first place; even if we do for some reason, we must not end up believing our lies and most importantly, we must avoid being habituated to lying. Thus, Bacon examines the natural human tendency of lying and opines that truth leads us to fair judgements and good actions.

Further, he compares the nature of falsehood with mixture of alloys with gold or silver that tampers its purity and truth with the price of precious pearl. Any deceitful means brings dishonour to a person and reflects his or her sense of cowardice. Moreover, falsehood is considered a defiance of God’s teachings and it must be rectified or corrected for one’s own good. Therefore, both the qualities of honesty and integrity are necessary in a person. A person who is honest at all times walks in the light of truth as it is the light of the human spirit. Thus, we will always find strength and courage in the virtue and purity of truth.

Endeavour towards learning:

Studies open the pores of our minds and enable us to grow up as wise and learned individuals. In the essay “Of Studies”, Bacon highlights the enlightenment of the mind and the essence of knowledge that inspires us to be refined individuals. The means of systematic learning in any field of knowledge equips us with intelligence, discipline, all-round development, personality development and life skills. And in this way, we grow into good individuals, as well as, good citizens. Studies must be also have practical applications in life and enrich our practical knowledge as well. We must not be stuck to only theoretical knowledge, rote learning and learning simply for the sake of learning rather; we must enjoy learning in a holistic manner.

Books are a storehouse of knowledge and cultivating good reading habits is essential for our self-development. Again, reading must be accompanied by discussions and the practice of writing as well. Instead of being confined to one particular field of knowledge, we must open ourselves to multiple disciplines. Studies not only prepare us for life, it also equips us with the best of skills that are necessary to establish ourselves as learned

and wise individuals. Being humble in one's knowledge is again another quality of a life-long learner unlike the characteristic of being boastful of one's knowledge. A person with knowledge is compared to natural plants that are firmly rooted and have a healthy growth. Good knowledge and wisdom gained through years of disciplined study will always stand us in good stead and make us judicious in all our decisions in life.

2.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The essay titled "Of Truth" is a reflection of Bacon's moral philosophy, which he presents, in a clear and crisp style of writing. The Latin translation of the essay was first published in the year 1838. The text of the essay that we read is an English translation from the Latin version in which it had been written. These essays are somewhat reminiscent of the moralistic or reflective essays written by other famous essayists like Montaigne or Plutarch. Bacon was himself a voracious reader of the classical masters who had inspired his individual style of writing. It is interesting to note that Bacon cultivated a habit of jotting down proverbs and sayings as he had a great interest in rhetoric and stylistics of language. His essays are filled with plenty of quotations cited from his own personal readings along with a range of historical, mythological and religious allusions. While reading the text of the prescribed essays, the learner will find that Bacon frequently cites or quotes from the classical poets and philosophers and also makes several allusions to the Bible.

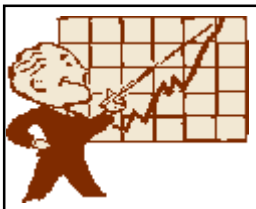
The learner may also note the old archaic words in English such as the following: "imposeth" (impose), "doth" (does), "examineth" (examines), "showeth"(shows), "filleth" (fills), "passeth" (passes), sinketh" (sinks), "settleth" (settles), "spake" (spoke), "teacheth" (teaches), "breatheth" (breathes), "inspireth" (inspires), "saith" (say), "embaseth" (embases), "goeth" (goes), "lieth" (lies) or "maketh" (make). Some of his words almost read like good old sayings and are popularly referred to as proverbs for example: "For a lie faces God and shrinks from man", "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man; and writing an exact man" or "Histories make men wise; poets witty…". We also find some of the widely quoted words in the essay "Of Studies" that reads thus, "[s]ome books are to be

tasted, others to be swallowed, and some to be chewed and digested that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."

The essays are written in an aphoristic and conversational style, which relatively makes them reader-friendly. They are replete with aphorisms (general truth or principles), moral truisms and practical suggestions on various aspects such as human nature and philosophy, virtues and vices, society and state, reality and practices. The English writer and critic, Ben Jonson who was a friend and contemporary of Bacon appreciated his stylistic presentation of thoughts. Similarly, even the 19th century writers like William Hazlitt and the Romantics regarded the works of Bacon with much enthusiasm. His *Essays* had firmly established his literary credit that also finds an apt description in the introduction to *Francis Bacon: The Major Works* (1996) in the words,

"Bacon's writings have long enjoyed affirm place in English literature. The qualities that continue to attract readers" a powerful intellectual grasp, analytical penetration, a mastery of the expressive resources of language, the ability to adapt style to subject-matter and purpose" (xx).

Another notable figure, Thomas Sprat who wrote the *History of the Royal Society of London* (1667) appreciated Bacon's precise and powerful literary style thus, "[h]e [Bacon] was a Man of strong, clear and powerful Imaginations: his Genius was searching and inimitable: and of this: I need give no other proof, then his Style itself" (236) as also mentioned in B. Vicker's *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (1968).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 16: Who or what are the sources from which Bacon cites frequently in his essays?

Q 17: Briefly write a few words on the style and language of Bacon in his essays.

2.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

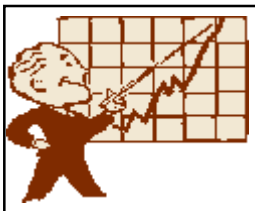
Bacon's essay "Of Truth" is centered on the philosophical reflections and psychological aspects of truth while the essay "Of Studies" highlights the practical necessity and significance of studies. In the introduction to *The Essays of Francis Bacon* (1908), Mary Augusta Scott writes thus, "[i]n the *Essayes or Counsells, Civill and Morall*, the method is ever to reduce reflection to its lowest terms, to try discover the fundamental principle of conduct that influence the actions of men", thereby highlighting the significance of the essays written by Bacon. The volume contains fifty-eight essays of which the essay "Of Truth" is the first essay in the table of contents and "Of Studies" is the sixth essay in the volume.

The introduction to the work titled Bacon's *Essays: A Selection* (1977) discusses how Bacon's work differs from that of Montaigne in the sense that although both the writers developed their notes from commonplace books, the former did not prefer to infuse a personal element in his essays while the latter did. Elsewhere, it also notes the wide-ranging aspects or rather wide-variety of matter contained in the precise format of his essays. In the introduction to the work *Francis Bacon* (1996), the essayist and his works are reviewed thus,

"Bacon's place in English imaginative literature, we can argue, has been earned by his unceasing experimentation with so many different genres, from aphorisms and apothegms to dialogues and speeches, essays and treatises, fables and masques. But it also derives from his excellence as a writer within these often hybrid works" (xxx)

The volume of essays contain interesting areas of discussion as the title of essays suggest such as: "Of Great Place", "Of Friendship", "Of Parents and Children", "Of Love", "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature", "Of Travel", "Of Riches", "Of Ambition", "Of Gardens", "Of Nature in Men", "Of Youth and Age", "Of Death", "Of Unity in Religion", "Of Adversity", "Of Great Peace", "Of Boldness" to mention a few. In the introduction to *Francis Bacon: The Major Works* (1996), the discussion on Bacon's literary works also points to the contribution of R.S. Crane in highlighting his *Essays* "as

a contribution to the study of human life from what we would describe as a psychological and sociological viewpoint" (xxi).



CHECK YOUR OWN PROGRESS

Q 18: How does Bacon's work differ from Montaigne?

Q 19: What are some of the interesting areas of discussion as suggested by the titles of Bacon's essays?



2.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, I am sure; you have gained a better insight into the life and works of the English essayist Francis Bacon. The provided glossary and explanation of the essays titled "Of Truth" and "Of Studies" have enabled you to describe the content of the text in details and also highlight the important themes in the two essays. The style and language employed by Francis Bacon in his works together with a critical reception of his writings have enabled you to gain a complete idea of the essayist. Further, the study of this unit must have stirred your interest and curiosity to explore the other important writings by Francis Bacon.



2.9 FURTHER READING

1) Bacon, Francis. (1985). *The Essays.* Penguin Classics.

2) Chaudhuri, Sukanta. (ed.) (2006). *Bacon's Essays: A Selection*. Oxford University Press: New York.

3) Nandwani, Aditya. (ed.) (2009) *Bacon's Essays*. Anmol Publications. New Delhi.

4) Scott, Mary Augusta (1908) *The Essays of Francis Bacon*. C. Scribner and Sons, Harvard University Collections

5) Vickers, Brian. (ed.) (1968) *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose*. Cambridge University Press

6) Vickers, Brian. (ed.) (1996) *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*. Oxford University Press: New York.

2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Francis Bacon was born in the year 1561 as the youngest son to the Lord Keeper of the Seal for Elizabeth I, Sir Nicholas Bacon and Lady Anne (Cooke) Bacon who belonged to a noble aristocratic family of England.

Ans to Q 2: Much of his early education began at home and he also had developed a flair for Latin, as he was home tutored in Latin. At the tender age of 'twelve', he received the fine opportunity of studying at the Trinity College, Cambridge and later, he pursued law at the University of Poitiers, joining the Gray's Inn in 1576.

Ans to Q 3: In 1582, Bacon earned a law degree and soon joined the Parliament as a representative in the year 1584… …this was a milestone in Bacon's political career… …his career prospered through a span of thirty-six years starting from 1584 to 1617.

Ans to Q 4: Bacon believed in the spirit of the new Renaissance humanism and true to the spirit of enquiry he was a 'skeptic' in his thought or we could say that he was an individual who doubted or questioned accepted opinions.

Ans to Q 5: Baconian method encourages experimentation, systematic analysis and physical observation. *Novum Organum* (1620) had opened up a newer perspective to the scientific way of acquiring knowledge.

Ans to Q 6: Among the most important works of literary merit written by Bacon are his *Essays* (1597-1625), while some of his other works include, *On the Wisdom of the Ancients*, based on ancient mythology, *The Advancement and Proficience of Learning Divine and Human* (1605), *Novum Organum Scientarium* (1620), *The History of Henry VII* (1622), *The New Atlantis* (1624) and *Apothegms* (1624).

Ans to Q 7: It opens with the question, "what is truth?" which were the words uttered by Pontius Pilate.

Ans to Q 8: Pontius Pilate had served as the prefect of Judaea, a province that was once a part of the larger Roman Empire. Pilate is known to have had a role in the trial of Jesus Christ.

Ans to Q 9: One of the later or progressive Grecian schools of philosophy examined the aspect of human tendency towards lying and explored the 'reasons' that made people lie even when it was unnecessary.

Ans to Q 10: Bacon compares falsehood to the mixture of alloy in coins of gold or silver, which debases or reduces its genuine quality.

Ans to Q 11: The essay concludes with a reference to the Judgment Day (as mentioned in the Bible), a day when God shall make the final call for the judgment of mankind. According to the prophecy in the Bible, the sea of unfaithful followers on earth will be revealed on the Judgement Day.

Ans to Q 12: The key words that Bacon uses to define studies are 'delight', 'ornament' and 'ability' as he opines that studies are delightful owing to the opportunity that it provides to think or reflect individually; it enables one to debate and exchange ideas from the depth of knowledge; and enables one to be strong-willed, decisive and to conduct oneself in the professional world.

Ans to Q 13: To be engaged only in bookish knowledge would be considered as a sign of passivity because practical application of knowledge is very essential in our day-to-day lives.

Ans to Q 14: If a person does not exercise his or her writing skills, such a person will require extensive memory to make a mental note of things because it is a natural tendency to easily forget all that is learnt.

Ans to Q 15: Bacon states that the secret of enriching one's mind is to enhance and strengthen one's knowledge potential, working on areas or disciplines in which one requires special training (through study) and enlightening one's mind through studying the choicest of books.

Ans to Q 16: Bacon frequently cites or quotes from the classical poets and philosophers and also makes several allusions to the Bible.

Ans to Q 17: The essays are written in an aphoristic and conversational style which relatively makes them reader-friendly. They are replete with aphorisms (general truth or principles), moral truisms and practical suggestions on various aspects such as human nature and philosophy, virtues and vices, society and state, reality and practices.

Ans to Q 18: Bacon's work differs from that of Montaigne in the sense that although both the writers developed their notes from commonplace books, the former did not prefer to infuse a personal element in his essays while the latter did.

Ans to Q 19: The volume of essays contain interesting areas of discussion as the title of essays suggest such as: "Of Great Place", "Of Friendship", "Of Parents and Children", "Of Love", "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature", "Of Travel", "Of Riches", "Of Ambition", "Of Gardens", "Of Nature in Men", "Of Youth and Age", "Of Death", "Of Unity in Religion", "Of Adversity", "Of Great Peace", "Of Boldness" to mention a few.



2.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. Discuss the life and works of the English essayist Francis Bacon.

Q 2. Give a detailed explanation of the essay titled "Of Truth" by Francis Bacon.

Q 3. Provide an analysis of the essay titled "Of Studies" by Francis Bacon with reference to its different aspects.

Q 4. Describe the major themes highlighted in the essays "Of Truth" and "Of Studies" in your own words.

Q 5. Explain the features of style and language employed in the essays of Francis Bacon

Q 6. Discuss the critical reception of the essays "Of Truth" and "Of Studies" by Francis Bacon.

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UNIT 3: CHARLES LAMB: "MY RELATIONS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Charles Lamb: The Essayist

- 3.3.1 His Life
- 3.3.2 His Works

3.4 Reading the Text

- 3.4.1 Major Themes
- 3.4.2 Lamb's Prose Style

3.5 Critical Reception

3.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.9 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss "My Relations" as a significant 19th century essay
- discuss the genre of 'persona' or familiar essay and Lamb's treatment of it
- relate the life of the writer with the work prescribed and place the text in its proper context
- understand the importance of relationships emphasised by Lamb in the 19th century world of material progress
- analyse Lamb's prose style and recognise its distinctiveness.

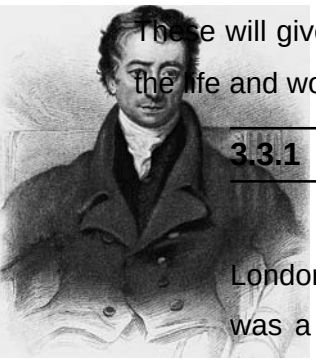
3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to the Personal Essay as a genre of prose writing that flourished during the 19th century in England. The essay "My Relation" stands as a testimony to the genius of such a prominent

writer of the century as Charles Lamb. Through this essay, the distinctive beauty and charm of Lamb's prose style and treatment of subject matter is well-revealed in the form of essay called 'Personal Essay' or 'Familiar Essay'. Personal Essay is a genre where the essayist uses first person mode of writing which creates an intimate relation with the readers and a familiar ambience. "My Relations" is a true example of this form. The spirit of fancy and imagination which is an integral element of the Romantic period is also duly found in Lamb's writings. In this unit, you will find that Lamb speaks through the person of Elia and intimates the readers with two of Elia's closest relatives in a purely personal tone of conversation. After you finish reading this unit, you will not only get an idea of Charles Lamb as a famous English essayist but will also be able to discuss and assess the contribution of Lamb to the form of the Personal Essay.

3.3 CHARLES LAMB: THE ESSAYIST

Read the two subsections carefully. These will give you fair enough idea regarding the life and works of Lamb as an essayist.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

3.3.1 His Life

Charles Lamb was born in London in 1775. His father John Lamb was a Factotum to a Bencher Christ's Hospital, where he was a fellow pupil of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. John Lamb had a family consisting of himself, his wife, an unmarried sister, Sarah Lamb, Aunt Hetty, a son John, a daughter Mary and another son Charles. The father and his employer are sketched unforgettably in Lamb's essay "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple". From his father Charles inherited his literary leanings and his humour, both heightened to an incalculable degree. Lamb's mother Elizabeth Field was the only member of the family who does not appear in his writings. However, we meet his maternal grandmother-the grandame in his verses and some of his essays.

Young Charles Lamb was sent for a time to a day school at which reading and writing were taught to the boys in the morning. For his education in subsequent periods, Lamb was sent to Christ's Hospital. In this school bloomed the everlasting friendship between Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These two names stood out most prominently amongst all the boys of this school. Lamb remained in this school from 1782 to 1789 and then he returned to his parents in the Temple. Lamb's brother John had been appointed in the South Sea House where Charles too got employed later. But, in 1792, Charles Lamb found himself appointed as a clerk in the accountant's office of the East India House. But, slowly bad fortunes overshadowed his life. Samuel Salt, the old Bencher who had been always supporting their family died in the same year. Lamb's father got his retirement and his brother John set up his bachelor home separately. In 1796, four sonnets written by Lamb appeared in a small volume of poems published by Coleridge. The earliest of the rich collection of Lamb's letters was written in the same year. However, this year was closing in a tragic gloom. His sister's mental condition was growing worse. His brother too had fallen ill and demanded his constant attention. The only solace that Lamb had found was in his friendship with Coleridge.

The pale of gloom had almost overwhelmed Lamb when his dearest sister killed their mother in a fit of insanity. But, he kept his calm and bravely took up the responsibility of his sister. He had given himself up to his family. In one of his letters to Coleridge, Lamb wrote thus: "Mention nothing of poetry; I have destroyed every vestige of part vanities of that kind. Do as you please, but if you publish, publish mine without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you…you look after your family; I have my reason and strength left to take care of mine, I charge you, don't think of coming to see me write. I will not see you if you come. God Almighty love you and all of us!" The letter reveals the pain as well as the strength of a great soul. At a very young age Lamb had to look after his mentally feeble old father and physically feeble old Aunt along with his sister.

Lamb worked at the India House and also as an epigrammatist to The Morning Post. Lamb gradually began to contribute to many magazines and journals. In collaboration with his sister Mary, he wrote books for children. Lamb also emerged as a great critic, a Neo Elizabethan who truly revealed to us the great 'dramatic planetary system' of the 16th century. In 1823 appeared a volume of Lamb's essays although it did not make a huge impression on the wider reading public. Lamb with his sister had been moving from one place to another throughout his life. In the year 1824-5, Lamb suffered from ill health and in April 1825, he got retired from the East India House with a meagre amount of pension on which he had to survive with his sister Mary. In 1820, Lamb and his sister adopted a little eleven year old girl who offered happy companionship to him. On 25th July, 1834 Lamb lost his dearest friend Coleridge which induced him to say "We die many deaths before we die". Five months later on 27th December, 1834 Lamb himself embraced the silence of death and was buried in Edmonton Churchyard. Thus, you get to know about the life of Charles Lamb which had been full of hardships and sufferings. A glimpse into his life makes it easier for you to understand the process of his development as a writer because a writer's personal life significantly influences his writings.

The *Essays of Elia* had created a revolution and established Charles Lamb as a renowned essayist, although under the pseudonym of 'Elia'. His essays gained immense popularity amongst the readers. They reached the common people and the elite as well. In 1820, Lamb was invited by the editor of the London Magazine to contribute to it regularly. He accepted the proposal and started writing under the pseudonym Elia and this route took access all the way. These essays brought admiration & applauds to him. He first published them as *The Essays of Elia* in 1823 and a second series appeared in 1833 under the title of *The Last Essays of Elia*. His essays deal with all kinds of subjects ranging from chimney sweeps to old china. They are also touched with personal opinions and recollections. As an essayist, Lamb is tearful, mirthful, pedantic and humane. Lamb greatly

appreciated the classic English literature of Elizabethan and Jacobean times. He wrote many essays on them as well. One such essay is "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare". But it is with his *Essays of Elia* that he gained a real rapport with the contemporary readers. He gained an enviable reputation as the original collections of his essays had to be reprinted a number of times. The personality of 'Elia' is same as that of Lamb. Elia too is a Londoner who takes pleasure in the London streets and institutions and is specially attached to the countryside situated at a convenient distance from the town.

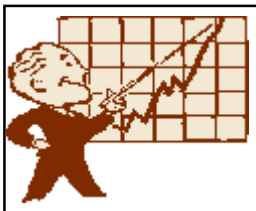
Thus, you can appreciate that Lamb had exceptional qualities and skills which stood him in good stead as an essayist in the wide world of English literature.



LET US KNOW

Lamb's long-time associate, biographer and collector of letters, Thomas Talfourd tells us about 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 forever 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."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the important qualities of Charles Lamb's Elia Essays?

Q 2: What affected most in Lamb's literary career?

3.3.2 His Works

Lamb was a versatile writer experimenting with his talents in various genres of literature. He wrote poetry, drama and critical and personal essays. But, the world today, fondly remembers him as one of the greatest essayists it has ever produced. He started his career as a poet but he could not achieve much in that role. He had to begin as a poet since he was deeply influenced by the old treasures of English literature. He explored and appreciated the rich literature of the Renaissance period. Moreover, he enjoyed the close company of the deeply poetic man Coleridge. The poetic spirit was there in him but it was not as promising as his prose writing skills. A few of his poems that can really be remembered are "The Old Familiar Faces" and "To Hester". "The Old Familiar Faces" shows the influence of the old dramatic poets. Again, "The Gipsy's Malison" is one of the sonnets he attempted to write. But reading his poems ensures the fact that he is essentially a writer of prose. And, this is a fact acknowledged by Lamb himself.

Lamb also attempted to write plays in the style of his favourite Elizabethan playwrights. In 1799, he wrote a tragedy entitled "John Woodvil". The play had some capital scenes and some beautiful passages but still it could not appeal to the readers. He wrote a few other plays namely, "The Wife's Trial", "The Pawnbroker's Daughter" etc but they could have no success on stage.

Lamb next ventured on the literary genre of stories and verses for children. "Rosamund Gray" was a classic novelette written by him. More prominent in this genre was Lamb's collection "Tales from Shakespeare" which he wrote in collaboration with his sister Mary. Another such collection was "Mrs. Leicester's School" to which he

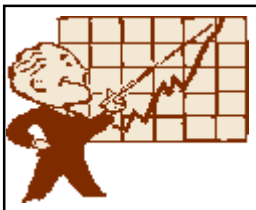
contributed three stories. These collections proved to be delightful body of literature meant for the young readers. They also brought out collections like "Poetry for Children".

Lamb was also well known for his critical writings. The substantial part of his critical work is to be found in his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare" which appeared in the year 1808. Many of the important Elizabethan dramatists like Kyd, Peele, Marlowe, Dekker, Marston, Chapman, Webster, and Jonson are known to the world today due to Lamb's efforts.

Leaving everything else aside, the world recognises Lamb as a great essayist. His first essays appeared in *The London Magazine* in 1820. His essays became immensely popular among the readers. His essays are now to be found in different posthumous collections like – *Eliana*, *Miscellaneous Prose*, *The Essays of Elia* (1823) and *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833).

Lamb was also a great letter writer. He was one of the first letter writers whose epistles (letters) found prominent place in English literature. Lamb was revealed to the readers as a great letter writer in Talfourd's *Memorials of Charles Lamb*.

Thus, you have found that in this section you have got some necessary information regarding the works of Charles Lamb, which makes it possible for you to have a better understanding of Lamb as a writer.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Mention some of the famous literary works of Charles Lamb?

3.4 READING THE TEXT

"My Relations" is one of Lamb's best works written in the form of 'Personal Essay'. It weaves imagination and reality together. Here, Lamb

speaks through his widely admired persona of 'Elia'. The essay maintains a tone of personal conversation. As we read the text it seems as if Elia is having a direct conversation with his readers. This is mainly because of his first person mode of writing. In this essay, Elia is introducing two of his relations to the readers and gives sufficient information on his relations and personal lives. Once you finish reading the original essay, you will find that Lamb presents a skilfully done character analysis.

According to Walter Jerrold, this essay is actually Lamb's veiled autobiography. In the essay, he presents to us the portrait of his cousin James Elia who, in reality, appears to be Lamb's own brother John Lamb who died in November 1821, a few months before the essay had originally appeared. Moreover, he also mentioned another of his cousin, Bridget, in the essay who, again, could be none other than his own sister Mary Lamb. However, Lamb's fertile imagination finds expression through his skilful creation of the imaginary persona of 'Elia' and a world of his own. He seems to take the reader 'by the hand' into his world and the reader unconsciously enters into it. Personal feelings and emotions were given due importance by Lamb. At the very outset, the essay seems to carry a serious tone where the author feels the absence of his parents. He longs for personal relations and appreciates the value they have in one's life. However, the serious tone is later carried over by his excellent combination of humour and irony.

In the first passage of his essay, Lamb quotes the 17th century prose writer Sir Thomas Browne. He quotes a few lines from Browne's last work *Christian Moral's*. The first passage of this essay along with the quotation indicates the lurking pain in Lamb that has found subtle expression through Elia. Lamb had a traumatic life throughout because of which he had suffered much pain. Although it is not overtly emphasised in his writings yet sometimes it gets subtly vented out. In the beginning of the essay, he emphasised the fact that man needs company. Man needs relatives. Secluded life can never be a source of pleasure. One needs people to love him, care for him and save him from sinking into oblivion. With this preliminary idea, Elia goes on to portray the characters of two of his closest relatives – his aunt and his cousin James Elia.

It may be noted that Lamb presents excellent character analysing skills. He deals with the little details of the subjects concerned and presents them in an interesting manner. It shows how well Elia studies the people around him. First, he talks about his aunt. The way he describes her reveals his love for her. It shows that he cares for her and understands her well. His aunt was a single woman and his observation makes him deduce the fact that her single status had 'soured' her to the world. He took care to see that his aunt had some pain hidden in some corner of her heart. However, he knew that the only thing, which his aunt loved most in her unpleasant world, was he himself. In this way, he also emphasises his importance in her life. His aunt was an excessively religious woman so much so that the only non-religious activity in her life seemed to be the splitting of the French beans. You can appreciate the element of humour that gets revealed by such kind of clever conclusions derived by Lamb. It seemed as if there was nothing else in her life, which could replace religion. Her religion seemed to be almost a self-imposed compulsion for her. His aunt belonged to a world where reading books like—'Adventures of an Unfortunate Young Nobleman' instead of a religious book, by a woman like her, was almost considered to be a heresy. So, it was impossible for her to think of anything other than religion. That is why Elia commented that she did not go to the chapel for the doctrines although she never missed them. The tone of irony is well presented in such comments made by Elia. However, his aunt was a strong, firm and self-confident woman who loved him above everything else in the world. Elia admired his aunt and loved her. However, Elia could also delve deeper into her and see what she had hidden within herself. She never got married and had no family of her own. Moreover, the society's attitude towards a woman like her further enhanced the pain. However, she was a strong woman with enough courage to face the world. The bitterness in her life could never overpower the good qualities in her. She remained a lovable, caring, gentle, firm and confident woman ever. The only source of pleasure in her life was Elia. All the love she had in her heart was hence bestowed upon him. Hence, without her Elia would have been deprived of the love and motherly care a woman like her could bestow upon a person.



LET US KNOW

Essay as a Literary Form:

A.C. Benson in his "The Art of the Essayist" 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 specialised audience. Therefore, the essay in general discusses its subject in a non-technical fashion, employing devices like anecdote, illustrations, and humour to augment its appeal. Then a further distinction is 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 (as practised by Charles Lamb), 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, and an innovative use of incidents and the lack of ornamentation as available in the essay "My Relations."

Elia then goes on to describe James. James is an unusual creation of nature according to Elia. He is cheerful, optimistic and always tries to be sensible. He prefers the old and the experienced to the new and the innovative. He does not support new or fresh things, which haven't stood the test of time. He sticks to the conventions and traditions. He cannot challenge something, which has been accepted by people over the ages and even prohibits others from doing so. Elia also shows the irony in his character. James shows that he is a great admirer of high art but in reality, he does it basically to throw tantrums over others. Every time he buys a new piece of art, his older pieces get replaced mercilessly. This reveals the hypocritical nature of James. He has the ability to stand in protest against the authority but he advises others to be always subservient. He teaches

others to be patient but himself becomes impatient before the dinner gets ready or on his way to a destination. He always has the tendency to jump into wild conclusions and convince the opponent whenever he finds himself in an argument. He speaks against laughter but himself laughs like 'Chanticleer' whenever opportunity is provided to him. He denies the values of wit but cannot help himself from making witty comments.

James tries to show that he cares for others by giving them some information related to their objects of interest ignoring the fact that they could possess that knowledge already. He presents himself as an indifferent person but in reality, he turns out to be the most sensitive man. He is unable to bear it when someone fails to praise a new piece of art recently purchased by him. James is but a benevolent and impulsive supporter of those who are oppressed, especially animals. He cares for them and his heart cries out for them. He definitely wants to do something for them but he turns out to be so impulsive that his determination produces no faithful results. However, in spite of these delightful contradictions, Elia admires James because James has learnt to live his life fully. In spite of all the frailties, James had enjoyed a 'fiery, tempestuous youth' and he maintained the same cheerful, passionate spirit throughout his life. Moreover, his ability to feel for the oppressed is another admirable quality in him. He thinks of something but does something else. He talks about his principles and ideologies but often fails to follow them himself. He preaches something but doesn't always live according to his own preaching. He usually tries to present himself as a very patient and sensible man but often ends up being very impulsive and impatient in his actions. Thus, this is Elia's cousin with all his queer qualities and yet his favourite. Elia loves his cousin in spite of all the queerness in him. Because Elia understands that, no two individuals in this world are similar. Every individual has his own characteristics and we must learn to accept them as they are and share our love with them.

It is to be noted that Lamb has very casually and yet interestingly portrayed his cousin and aunt. With all his qualities and frailties, James is admired by Elia. Elia portrays the inconsistencies in him but not with a view to criticising him but to show that he is dear to him under all circumstances.

This acknowledgement gives a perfect touch to the end of the essay. He further ends the essay as if he ends a conversation with the readers with the promise to meet them again. This is the most significant aspect of a personal Essay in which Lamb excels unsurpassed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why do you think "My Relations" is one of the best Personal Essays by Charles lamb?

Q 5: What does Walter Jarrold tell about the essay "My Relations"?

Q 6: What would you take to be the underlying message in the essay you are reading?

Q 7: What are the major findings about the character of the aunt?

Q 8: How does Lamb portray the character of James Elia?

3.4.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes easily noticeable in the essay "My Relations.

Human Relationship

The importance of relationships in human life is an important theme of this essay. Right at the beginning of the essay Lamb puts emphasis on the importance of people in one's life. Human being is a social animal and hence he needs the company of others. An individual has his emotional and psychological needs, which are fulfilled by the presence of other people around him. Nobody loves to live alone. One needs love and care, which only a relative can provide. Hence, relatives play an important role in one's life and this is an important message carried through the essay.

The Persona called Elia

The imaginary persona of 'Elia' is a significant aspect of Lamb's essays. Elia is actually a reflection of Lamb himself. Elia creates a world of his own and takes the readers into it. Through Elia, Lamb gives expression to his own feelings, ideas and opinions regarding his relatives and the environment. From Elia we get to

know many things about the important characters like the aunt and the brother James. Elia's aunt is an important character portrayed in the essay. Her characteristics, qualities and her relation with Elia form an important aspect of the essay. While the character of James and his relations with Elia are also a significant aspects of the essay, Elia's views on the two persons, his aunt and James, show what an important role relatives play in one's life.

Sense of Humour

The element of humour is vibrant throughout the essay. He humorously refers to his uncles as 'male aunts' and tells how he regrets their absence in his life. Maintaining this light-hearted tone, Elia goes on to intimate his readers with his cousin James Elia. James Elia has been portrayed by Lamb as a very interesting character. The inconsistent and contrasting elements in his character are excellently analysed by Elia. Elia doesn't criticise James but just lets the readers know that there can be such interesting people in the world. From Elia's observation, we come to know that James is a person with contradictory characteristics. Of the many cousins of Elia, James and Bridget are the closest to him. James is ten years older than him and always regards him as a little kid and this never annoys Elia. Rather, Elia loves to live under their shadows.

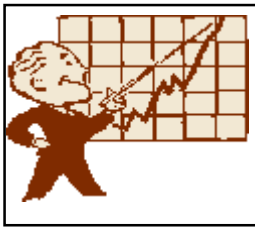
Celebration of Differences

Lamb's portrayal of the characters of Elia's aunt and cousin also shows how every individual has different characteristics and manners. In relationships, one has to be careful about these differences and to learn to love one's near ones in spite of all the differences. Throughout the essay lamb is frequently confusing antiquarian with literary values.

The Writer in Relation with the Reader

One may also find in this essay the changing relationship between the writer and society, if read from the point of view of a Personal Essay. More than anything else Lamb also presents a composite view of London, which symbolises Nature. In order to find

some solace in the midst of his present situation he resorts to a recollection of the past and hence, nostalgia plays such an important role in this essay. However, what makes the essay interesting is the way Lamb, instead of simply celebrating the two characters, also identifies oddness with greatness. This indirectly also means that he had great faith in the strength, colour, individuality and openness of literature as a mirror of life. Sometimes he plays with archaisms but he spreads his own delight in whimsy, reminiscence and digressions. The touch of the cockney use of the English language would certainly make a native readers feel homely while reading the essay.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What, according to you, are the themes of the essay "My Relations"?

3.4.2 Lamb's Prose Style

Lamb's essays are unequalled in English. His style is characterised by the use of long curious words, exclamations and parentheses. His writings bear echoes and odours from older writers. For example, consider the obsoleteness in the lines below:

"In those days were pit orders. Beshrew the uncomfortable manager who abolished them! – with one of these we went. I remember the waiting at the door – not that which is left – but between that and an inner door in shelter – O when shall I be such an expectant again! – with the cry of nonpareils, an indispensable play – house accompaniment in those days …" (This extract has been taken from his piece "My First Play").

The influence of the form and style of 17th and 18th century writers like Bacon, Browne, Walton, Addison, and Steele is apparent in Lamb's writings. His style is also characterised by his reminiscences. In his essays as the one prescribed in this unit, we find him floating in nostalgia and cherishing the beautiful memories of his past. In "My Relations", the same nostalgic mood is present

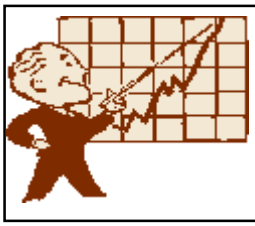
as we find him fondly remembering his aunt splitting the French beans and dropping them into a basin of clear water. In his manner of writing, we find an echo of his wide reading. In his essay, we find him referring to writers like Browne and Chaucer. Lamb very smoothly brings the element of humour into his essays, which enhances and retains the interest of the readers. He humorously refers to uncles as 'male aunts' and then gives a humorous account of the contradictory elements in his cousin's personality.

In Lamb, we find the same tendency to be allusive as available in the 16th century writers. Lamb's use of first person mode of writing helped him establish a good rapport with his readers. Lamb's style has insights. He casually describes his aunt and cousin but also reveals his deep insight into their characteristics. He could see what Elia's aunt had hidden within her heart. Dramatic characterisation is another important aspect of Lamb's style. He had assumed the persona of Elia in his essays and he also portrayed other such imaginary characters in his essays. The literary historian Artur Crompton Rickett said:

"He plays with his thoughts as the wind plays with leaves; tossing them hither and thither, circling them round in strange eddies; scattering, combining in all manner of queer ways. Dearly did he love to chew cud of a bygone vision …"

Thus, you can understand that Lamb simply expressed his spontaneous flow of thoughts before his readers in the form of a conversation. He loved to remember the past nostalgically and reconstruct the memories through the persona of Elia.

His allusions like the one made to Sir Thomas Browne's text and another made to 'Chanticleer', a character from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* show how profound a reader Lamb was. His use of antiquated words like 'Wondereth', 'Wight' in this essay reveals his taste for the old and the classic. It is thus interesting to see how Lamb strikes a conversation with the readers and portrays simple, common matters of life in an interesting and colloquial manner.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

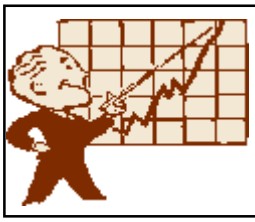
Q 10: What distinguishes Lamb's prose style in the essay "My Relations"?

3.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Charles Lamb was one of the great essayists the world has ever produced. His essays have greatly appealed to the readers for their insight and humour. Critics have appreciated his essays for their wit and ironic treatment of everyday subjects. Lamb had achieved the epitome of the familiar essay type by developing a highly personal narrative technique, according to critics. His essays were especially appreciated by the readers for their treatment of ordinary subjects in a nostalgic, fanciful way and their combination of humour, pathos and irony. M. Bingham in her book *Charles Lamb* said "…Charles Lamb, with his burdened, blighted life, was the prince of humourists. There are no letters in our language which so overflow with the keenest and richest fun as those which Lamb wrote to his friends."

Lamb's essays and letters stand as testimony to his genius. Lamb's position as one of England's most prominent writers was affirmed by the beginning of the 20th century. His popularity reached its peak until the 1930s. However, from the 1930s onwards F.R. Leaves and his disciples reappraised the Elian style, which affected Lamb's reputation negatively. British scholars ceased to study Lamb's works seriously for several decades. Many critics criticised Lamb as completely imitative of the Elizabethan writers without any originality of his own. However, later in the 1960s critics such as George Barnett and Gerald Monsman started to rehabilitate Lamb's writings by producing detailed studies of his essays. This process was further continued by the quarterly publications of 'The Charles Lamb Society' and the main source of contemporary Lamb criticism 'The Charles Lamb Bulletin'. They tried to renew the interest of readers by focusing on such topics as Lamb's theories of drama, his poetry, and especially his Elia essays which continue to capture readers' imagination even to this day.

Regarding Lamb, Talfourd, as quoted by Miss Bingham in her book, says: "He clung to the realities of life; to things nearest to him which the force of habit had made dear. The tendency of his mind to detect the beautiful and good in surrounding things, to nestle rather than to roam, was cherished by all the circumstances of his 'boyish days". Bertrand Jessup in his article "The Mind of Elia" defends Lamb by asserting the fact that Lamb or 'Elia' was not an escapist as many people regarded him for his extraordinary taste for the old. Such critics according to Jessup have a 'superficial understanding' of Lamb's taste for the old and they also love to detach themselves from the common human ardours for moral classifications and rejections. Regarding 'Elia' or Lamb, Jessup said: "Believing in life as it comes leads Elia to believe also in life as it goes. He accepts the simple tragedy of its evanescence. He is 'no two-world' man. Life is real and good and the loss of it is real and evil …" By the mid 1960s, however, critics like George Barnett and Gerald Monsman undertook the process of restoring Lamb's reputation by producing detailed studies of his essays.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What are the changes you encounter in the critical reception of Lamb in the 20th century?



3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about Charles Lamb, one of the most prominent essayists in English literature. You get an idea about Lamb, the time in which he was writing, his way of writing, his prose style and about the genre of essay writing as well. Lamb is extremely significant for the contribution he made to the field of Personal Essays. He was writing during the 19th century when the world was swept over by industrial and material progress. However, in Lamb's essays like "My Relations", we find him dealing with simple, ordinary matters of life, which were not considered quite significant at that time. However, Lamb's intelligent use of refined language,

words and phrases, skilful use of the elements of irony and humour and the use of personal tone made his texts interesting and popular. This unit should help you to be familiar with such a prominent essayist of the 19th century like Lamb whose writings still continue to stir interest in the readers for their charming style and sweetness of temper.



3.7 FURTHER READING

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2) Benson, A.C. (1949). "The Art of the Essayist" in C.H. Lockitt (ed.). *The Art of the Essayist* Harlow: Longman.

3) Jerrold, Walter. (1905). *Charles Lamb.* London, George Bell and Sons. (E-Book from www.gutenberg.org)

4) Jessup, Bertram. (1954). "The Mind of Elia" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.15,No.2 pp.246-259. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/2707770.)

5) Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia.*

6) M. Bingham, Jennie. (1863). *Charles Lamb.* New York, Phuillips and Hunt. (E-book from www.archive.org)

7) Sanders, Andrew. (2004). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.* London: Oxford University Press.

Web Resources:

www.angelfire.com

www.jstor.org



3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: They deal with varied subjects ranging from chimney sweeps to old china… …they are filled with personal opinions and recollections… …Lamb's style is tearful, mirthful, pedantic and humane.

Ans to Q 2: Bencher who had been always supporting their family met his death… …his sister killed their mother in a fit of insanity… …had to take responsibility of his sister… …had to look after his mentally feeble old father and physically feeble old Aunt along with his sister.

Ans to Q 3: Lamb was a versatile writer experimenting with different genres of literature…. …Together he wrote poetry, drama and critical and personal essays… …he wrote poems like "The Old Familiar Faces" and "To Hester"… …plays like *John Woodvil*, *The Wife's Trial*, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter… …*fictions like *Rosamund Gray, Tales from Shakespeare… …*critical works like "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets'… …and most importantly his personal essay collections like *Eliana*, *Miscellaneous Prose*, *The Essays of Elia* (1823) and *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833).

Ans to Q 4: "My Relations" blends imagination and reality together… …it maintains a tone of personal conversation… …Lamb, in this essay, adopts the persona called Elia etc.

Ans to Q 5: That the essay is actually Lamb's veiled autobiography…. … that cousin James Elia is the replica of Chales' own brother John Lamb… …that another cousin Bridget could again be be none other than his own sister Mary Lamb.

Ans to Q 6: That one needs human company… …that secluded life can never be a source of pleasure… …to cope up with his loneliness Lamb recreates the characters of two of his closest relatives – his aunt and his cousin James Elia.

Ans to Q 7: His aunt was a single woman and singleness 'soured' her to the world… …she was an overly religious woman although religiosity was almost a self imposed compulsion for her… …but she was also a strong, firm and self confident woman to face the world…. … She was lovable, caring, gentle, firm and confident as a woman.

Ans to Q 8: In Lamb's description, James was cheerful, optimistic and sensible… …he prefered the old and experienced to the new and innovative… …he was a bit hypocritical… …he spoke against laughter

but himself laughed like 'Chanticleer'… …his ability to feel for the oppressed is another admirable quality in him.

Ans to Q 9: For the answer please read the section 1.4.1 again.

Ans to Q 10: Lamb's prose style is characterised by the use of long curious words, exclamations and parentheses… …he alludes to writers from old times… …nostalgia and recollection play major role… …his sense of humour which we find in his reference to uncles as 'male aunts' etc.

Ans to Q 11: During 1930s, F.R. Leavis and his disciples reappraised the Elian style which affected Lamb's reputation negatively…. …British scholars ceased to study Lamb's works seriously for several decades…. …critics began to criticise Lamb as completely imitative of the Elizabethan writers without any originality of his own…. …But during 1960s, George Barnett and Gerald Monsman almost restored Lamb's reputation to the mainstream.



3.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the genre of Personal Essay and Lamb's treatment of it with reference to the essay "My Relations"

Q 2: How does Lamb treat everyday ordinary matters of life in his essay? Enumerate the distinctive features Charles Lamb's 'Elian' use of language.

Q 3: Discuss Lamb as a prominent essayist of the 19th century. Point out the chief qualities of Lamb's prose style.

Q 4: Analyse the significant aspects of Lamb's essays. Comment on the 'modern' elements of Lamb's character-sketches in the essay "My Relations"?

Q 5: Do you think that the descriptions of whimsies and idiosyncrasies of the characters of the cousin and the aunt add to the pleasures of reading the essay "My Relations"? Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 4: VIRGINIA WOOLF: "MODERN FICTION"

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Virginia Woolf: The Essayist

4.3.1 Her Life

4.3.2 Her Works

4.4 Woolf's Idea of the Essay as a Literary Form

4.5 Reading the Text

4.5.1 Major Themes

4.5.2 Woolf's Prose Style

4.6 Critical Reception

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- familiarise yourself with Virginia Woolf as a modern essayist and writer
- describe the significance of the title of the essay "Modern Fiction"
- explain Woolf's own ideas of the form of essay
- identify the various themes available in the text
- assess Virginia Woolf's narrative technique
- discuss the different ways in which Woolf justifies her sense of modernism through this essay.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss an important critical essay of the modern period namely "Modern Fiction" by Virginia Woolf. As you should know Woolf

rendered a shaping influence on the very idea of modern fiction in the first part of the 20th century. The essay you are reading here relates to Woolf's analysis of the nature of modern fiction, which is 'experimental'. You should note that Woolf is famous mostly for her centrality in the Bloomsbury Group and her contributions to literary modernism at the dawn of the twentieth century. Readers often get perplexed by her ideas of feminism, her troubled married life, her lesbian tendencies, and her essays on various contemporary but relevant topics, her radicalism in terms of narrative style and so on. It was to cope with her pain of loss caused by the death of her parents, her aunt, and many of her family friends at a young stage, that she sought recourse to writing at a very young age. In 1919, came out Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" in which Woolf appealed to her contemporary writers for a more inward kind of action, a kind of novel which would not conform to the norms of old conventions and chronologies and portray what can be called 'psychological realism'. It is in this context that the study of Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" makes room for exploring the various ideas



aised and the techniques practised by Virginia Woolf while wn fictional works. Along with T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the ent' and Ezra Pound's 'A Retrospect', this essay is one of the stos of literary modernism. It is also an important source for ing to understand Woolf's own writing style.

GINIA WOOLF: THE ESSAYIST

In the following subsections, you will get to read about the life and works of the great modern writer Virginia Woolf.

4.3.1 Her Life

The English author, essayist, publisher, and short story writer, Adeline Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, 1882 in London. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a notable historian, author, and critic, while her mother

Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Julia Stephen was a woman renowned for her beauty. Virginia's inclination towards a culture of learning is marked by an early interest in languages, history, and literature. It is to be mentioned that her home in Hyde Park Gate in the Kensington section of London was known for its upper-class taboos and gossips. However, the children were fully aware of their neighbours and could easily mingle with them with a sense of community feeling. After the death of their parents, however, they had to leave that place. You should note that Virginia's relationship with her family members was very important for her developments in later stages of life. Virginia was very conscious about people and human relationships that surrounded her. What she remembers most in later life was not their days spent at Hyde Park Gate but the summers spent at Talland House by the sea in Cornwall. Because, Talland House was the place that became a place of family legends where the children could remember their parents most. The house also served as an early illustration of her attachment to the idea of a place the idea she was struggling so hard to feel and understand.

However, the happiness of childhood met with an abrupt ending when her mother died on May 5, 1895. Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father, also passed away on February 22 1904. The fear of death was so haunting for Woolf that she, throughout her whole life, was not at all prepared to deal with that loss. After the demise of the mother, their half-sister Stella began to play the role of the mother by tending to the household, placating Stephen and caring for the children. However, Stella too died after one year leaving Virginia motherless once again. Then, it was the turn of Vanessa to play an important role in the life of Virginia. Between 1899 and 1904, Virginia got a chance to read voraciously. During that time, she read Macaulay, Pepys, Montaigne, Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Washington Irving, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt* and many more.

After the death of their parents, the depressed and grief-stricken children decided to move to Bloomsbury. Then Virginia exchanged several letters with her friends, Emma and Violet, whom she had met on her journey to Italy and Paris. The impression she gave of herself through those letters proved later to be of great help for her biographers. In those letters, she was desperate and confused regarding her love for her father, as she was meant to live a tragic life surrounded by death. Actually, it was the beginning of what we can call mental ill health or 'madness' following which she would try to kill herself. Once, Violet took Virginia to her house at Burnham Wood where she tried her first attempt at suicide by throwing herself out of the window. During that time, Violet introduced her to Kathleen Lyttleton, the editor of the 'Women's Supplement' of the *Guardian* and Virginia began her work as a regular reviewer and writer of articles.

The new house at Gordon Square proved to be a freedom from family constraints and the old patriarchy under which they had lived. The Bloomsbury neighbourhood provided new scope to ponder over new materials and her diaries speak much of the details of lives she liked most to describe. On Thursday evenings, these men gathered and waited for the conversation to begin. Several topics were offered and discussed. It had a life-changing effect on Virginia. It was a place where Virginia could be more intelligent, more intellectual, investigative, and open. Some of the men were openly homosexual, and others seemed asexual without any marital attractiveness. Virginia described this understanding in her "Old Bloomsbury" in these words: "It seemed incredible that any of these men should want to marry us or we should want to marry them…"

Though the situation was contrary to what Virginia wanted, and at first Virginia and Vanessa both were shy and quiet, they actively took part in the conversation about things they found intellectually exhilarating. Around 1905-07, Virginia was trying out for more intellectual opportunities. She regularly wrote and reviewed articles for a number of magazines, *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary*

Supplement, Academy, Speaker, and so on. Then she got the job of an instructor of English composition in Morley College. But, she was never a teacher in the making. Instead, she began to gather some important distinction about class from her interactions with the working class, which further found a place in her novels. Her intimate friendship with Leonard Woolf finally resulted in their marriage 1912. Virginia's health started to deteriorate rapidly. Initially they also faced monetary troubles, as Leonard did not have a stable job. He was temporarily working as a secretary for the Second postimpressionist Exhibition with Roger Fry. However, gradually Leonard strengthened his political career by working for the Women's Co-operative Guild, for the cause of British socialism, and for the Fabian Society, a socialist group responsible for the implementation of socialism in England.

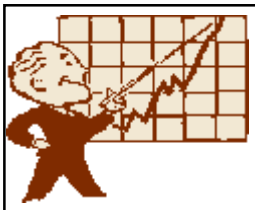
Virginia again attempted suicide by taking more than 100 grains of veronal, used as sleeping tablets. Doctors called it neurasthenia, but fortunately, she was once again saved. After recovery, Virginia again started reading and writing her diary. Then in 1915, the couple decided to buy Hogarth House and a printing press that was to play a crucial role in the times to come. However, she became deranged again. Moreover, the revelation of the doctors that she would not be able to become a mother further triggered more illness in her. Therefore, the only consolation left for her was the intellectual undertakings. Then the war, the Zeppeline attack on London, shattered most of their complacency as writers. The majority of the Bloomsbury intellectuals did not support the war for many reasons. However, the same war became a part of Virginia's aesthetic, as images of bombs and destruction began to appear in her writings. She could also understand the power she and Leonard could have with a press, which could be used for wartime censorship and propaganda. On April 24, 1917, Virginia and Leonard's dream of owning a press became a reality. As Leonard had believed, it could give her something else other than illness and writing to concentrate on.

Gradually, the situation that followed grew more intense. Writing, which was regarded as a major force in society, became obsolete and lost much of its relevance. There was little time to think about fiction. Virginia was trying a common history-book but in vain. Everywhere there was the sound of fighting and explosions during the War times, and there was no role to be played by the writers. Virginia again started to feel lost. She started to write again to make her presence felt. She made another suicidal attempt by drowning in the river Ouse, but escaped death. Finally, on March 28, 1941, Virginia left a suicide note for Vanessa and Leonard, put on her fur coat, took her walking-stick, left towards the river, added stones to her pockets and drowned herself. Leonard found the suicide note and understood that his wife was no more, although the dead body could not be found until the next month, on April 18. There are various views regarding her death. Some people suggest that Woolf's suicide resulted from an old madness, which started to show its effect, and the terrified Woolf decided to commit suicide rather than suffer the same tortures of her former experience with mental illness. Some also opine that she failed to cope with contemporary war-ridden England with its terror of bombing as a part of World War II. Others still suggest that she was not willing to further burden her husband with her madness.

Woolf is renowned English fiction writer of the modern period. Her first combined literary effort of the Stephen brothers and sisters was their *The Hyde Park Gate News*, a small serial newspaper written just to impress their parents. However, Woolf later became popular for her fiction like *Jacob's Room* (1921), where she immortalises her dead brother Thoby. By 1922, she attempted another story, partly autobiographical, fictional, *Mrs. Dalloway on Bond Street.* Her illness progressed. Then she tried to imitate her father and recreate him through her *To the Lighthouse* (1926). Then she tried to bring her friend Vita back to life as a character in *Orlando,* who leaves through five hundred years and one sex change. Vita

was both man and woman for Virginia and she finished the novel by March 1928. Following the success of the book, Woolf was invited for lectures at Cambridge University. The papers that she delivered on *Women and Fiction* later became *A Room of One's Own*, a famous feminist treatise. It was to address issues related to the position of a woman in a patriarchal society, her status in the family, her sexual life and so on. Soon, Virginia was becoming a renowned literary personality. Again, she underwent depression, which included fainting and headaches. Then, to soothe herself she turned to *The Years*. By 1938, she finished her *Three Guineas*.

The key critical nonfiction works by Woolf that readers should consult are, firstly, her longest work of literary criticism, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), a founding feminist text, and a major source of debate in literary criticism concerning gender, sexuality and feminism; and, secondly, her essays "Modern Fiction" (1919, 1925) and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924), which are standard texts in the field of modernist studies. Another highly influential book is *Three Guineas* (1938), her pacifist tract analysing correlations between patriarchy and fascism. Woolf published two volumes of essays in her lifetime (*The Common Reader*, first and second series; 1925 and1932), and there have been numerous collections published posthumously.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the major works of Virginia Woolf.

Q 2: Which, according to you, are the major incidents that influenced Virginia Woolf's life and writings?

4.4 WOOLF'S IDEA OF THE ESSAY AS A LITERARY FORM

[adapted from Elena Gualtieri's book *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past*.]

You should note that Virginia Woolf's career is marked by her reading of the history of the essay as a genre. Woolf wrote extensively on both the

form of the essay and on specific essayists throughout her career, starting in 1905 with the "Decay of Essay-writing" and up to her essay on De Quincey published in the second *Common Reader* (1932). It is however, also interesting to note that her approach to the genre was marked by an attempt to identify within what she had seen as a male tradition an alternative line of descent to which she could fit herself. This she accomplished by stressing the connection between the essay and autobiography, and by presenting the self as a conglomeration of moments of perception and reflection. In projecting, the essay as an autobiographical genre Woolf actually tried to define a form of writing that could bring together criticism and the private experience of reading.

Virginia Woolf in 1905, wrote that almost all essays 'begin with a capital I—"I think"', "I feel" and when one has said that, it is clear that one is not writing history or philosophy or biography or anything but an essay, which may be brilliant or profound, which may deal with the immortality of the soul, or the rheumatism in your left shoulder, but is primarily an expression of personal opinion. This definition of the essay represents Woolf's first attempt at marking out the boundaries of a genre she wrote in throughout her life. It occurs in "The Decay of Essay-writing", a discussion of the Edwardian essays. According to Woolf, the form of the essay was born with Montaigne, to satisfy the need for self-expression. However, with the passage of time, it has become in modern times a vehicle of vanity and exhibitionism without any food for thought. Woolf insists that the topic most suited to the form of the essay has to be grounded in a rare opportunity for exploring and bringing to light what other genres cannot or do not want to expose. She further reiterates that if men and women must write, they should 'leave the great mysteries of art and literature unassailed' and concentrate instead on 'themselves' as the subject matter most appropriate to the form of the essay.

Ignoring the contribution of Francis Bacon to the development of English prose writing, Woolf claims that the first English author to introduce the language of self-consciousness and intimacy into his writing was Sir

Thomas Browne, who wrote in the middle of the 17th century and therefore at least a generation later than Bacon. Browne succeeded in shifting the focus of English literature from 'the publicity of the stage and the perpetual presence of a second person' inward to 'that growing consciousness of one's self, that brooding in solitude over the mysteries of the soul' which had been pioneered by Montaigne in French ('The Elizabethan Lumber Room', E 4, 58). Browne had also opened up for Woolf one of the most crucial questions in the history of literature. In short, Sir Thomas Browne brings in the whole question of knowing one's own author. If we seek to know him, are we idly occupied, as when, listening to a speaker, we begin to speculate about his age, habits, family background and so on.

Woolf argues that the discovery of introspection in literature was shifted from the public character of theatrical performances to the privacy of the individual book. This more intimate kind of reading has made the modern reader accustomed to find himself in direct communication with the writer' and therefore at a loss when faced with a book that offers no foothold for establishing the same kind of relationship. Trained by the psychological novel or the biography, even a reader as gifted as Woolf must confess her inability to enter fully the world of the classics, where the focus is not on the individual self but on the universality of the human condition.

Thus, if, as we saw with Montaigne, the introduction of the self in writing opens up the dimension of privacy, it does so at the expense of shutting off any access to transcendence. Both Browne and Montaigne are seen by Woolf as developing an alternative to history, a purely subjective form of writing that in its turn initiates a completely different kind of history, allowing the reader to inhabit a continuous present, to enter into intimate contact with his/her authors in a way that is made impossible by the transcendental impersonality of the classics. As an autobiographical genre, then, the form of the essay for Woolf not only enables a more direct apprehension of the past but also helps in taking modernity, marked by a focus on subjectivity, as a new condition of art.

In her essay "The Modern Essay" (1922), she argues that as a formless form, the essay has no structural equivalent of the fictional plot or

the poetic rhyme to inform and sustain the vision expressed by its authors. According to Woolf, in the form of the essay, "there is no room for the impurities of literature… …the essay must be pure, pure like water or pure like wine, but pure from dullness, deadness, and deposits of extraneous matter." But she also laments that this restrictive definition of what constitutes 'good writing' is rooted in the controlled perfection of Addison's essays and has led to a purely imitative understanding of style. She claims that in the English tradition, style has not been taken to designate the welding of self and writing effected by Montaigne's essays, but rather indicates standard of formal perfection, which is divorced from the substance of writing.

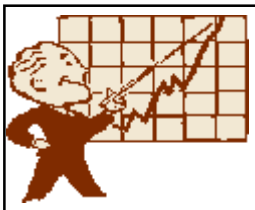
It is important to note that for Virginia Woolf Sir Thomas Browne and Thomas De Quincey symbolise a kind of writing that continuously stretched beyond its own limits. However, Woolf's attempts to rewrite the history of the essay as an essentially modern and modernist genre were also accompanied by another, far less positive view of the modernity of the essay, marked by the expansion of readership and the consequent commercialisation of literary practices. This link between the essay and modernity is visible as her analysis of the history of the genre shifts from the question of subjectivity and authorship to that of reception. Woolf most famously articulated this shift through the notion of the 'common reader', which she borrowed from Samuel Johnson's "Life of Gray". You should note that this shift also represents a resistance to resolving almost every aspect of modern life into an overarching narrative, which, at the same time, gestures towards the possibility of a common history to be shared among non-professional readers.



LET US KNOW

While discussing the form of the essay you must also try to make a survey of the Virginia Woolf's other key critical nonfiction works. One of her longest work of literary criticism, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), is a major source of debate concerning gender, sexuality and feminism. While her essays ''Modern Fiction''

(1919, 1925) and ''Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'' (1924), are often considered standard texts in the field of modernist studies. *Three Guineas* (1938), is her pacifist tract analyzing the correlations between patriarchy and fascism. Virginia Woolf wrote numerous essays, articles and reviews. She published two volumes of essays, *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932), and several collections appeared posthumously. Some of her other important essays include names like 'Romance and the Heart' (1923), 'On Not Knowing Greek'(1925), 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future' (1927), 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1927), 'Professions for Women' (1931), 'Memories of a Working Women's Guild' (1931), 'Craftsmanship' (1937), 'The Leaning Tower' (1940),and 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid' (1940).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How would you like to summarise Woolf's idea of the form of essay?

Q 5: On what ground does Woolf argue that Sir Thomas Browne is the first writer to incorporate self-consciousness into writing?

4.5 READING THE TEXT

One of the most well known and most frequently quoted essays is "Modern Fiction" which was first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in April 1919 as 'Modern Novels'. This was revised for Woolf's first collection of essays, the first *The Common Reader* (1925). We can divide the line of argument in the essay into three parts on the basis of which Woolf explores the idea of a modernist fiction. She says that the modern practice of art is somehow an improvement upon the old, and she expresses her doubts "whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature."

Firstly, in this essay Woolf makes a survey of modern fiction and distinguishes between what she calls the old-fashioned and outmoded 'materialism' of the Edwardian novelists like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy

and H. G. Wells, and the more modern, 'spiritual' and experimental form of writing of her own Georgian contemporaries, and in particular the work of James Joyce.

These three writers are materialists because "they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body" and "they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and enduring." She then argues that Arnold Bennett, whose writing is ruled by plot and characterization, is obliged "to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour". Such writing, Woolf strongly argues, for all its obsession with material detail, fails to capture 'life'. She explains this very act of capturing 'life' in a passage that is probably her most famous and most quoted passage of literary criticism:

"Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ''like this''. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions–trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel."

Woolf opines that a writer's mind is an 'ordinary' one, best understood as a blank sheet of paper. This mind of the author receives mental impressions through the data received from the outside world. She continues:

"The mind receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it."

In this model of writing, the writer has somehow to convey such mental impressions without worrying about representing external material detail as if from the outside. She uses an interesting set of images to express this:

"Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?"

In the **second part,** she refers to the works of James Joyce who is markedly notable from his preceding authors. He has made an "attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist." By saying so Woolf is suggesting that novelists must be true to this inner process in order to capture properly what life really is. It is in these lines that Woolf calls for a kind of narrative form known as 'Stream-of-Consciousness', a method that Joyce perfected. Referring to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and extracts from *Ulysses* (1922), Woolf argues that Joyce conveys moments in time as subjective experience and the reception of a flow of images, experiences and emotions. As she writes:

"In contrast with those whom we have called materialists, Mr. Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see."

This 'method', Woolf says, has the merit of bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself. Her 'luminous halo' image also echoes an image from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). But although Woolf talks about Joyce's great work, *Ulysses*, as a 'masterpiece' and admires 'its brilliancy, its sordidity, its incoherence, its sudden lightning flashes of significance', she does strike a more negative note in saying that

it 'fails to compare' with the work of Joseph Conrad or Thomas Hardy "because of the comparative poverty of the writer's mind."

In the **third part,** Woolf refers to the Russian writers, most importantly Chekhov. She says, "The most elementary remarks upon modern English fiction can hardly avoid some mention of the Russian influence." She also looks in the essay at the 'influence' of the Russian writers, and of Chekhov in particular. Sympathetic with all these approaches, she nevertheless exposes their limitations. She also sees something in the tradition of English literature that is missing from the Russian: "But perhaps we see something that escapes them, or why should this voice of protest mix itself with our gloom? The voice of protest is the voice of another and an ancient civilisation, which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand. English fiction from Sterne to Meredith bears witness to our natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, and in the splendour of the body." Here you will find Woolf actually outlining a distinctly English tradition of dissent, rationalism, humour, materialism, pleasure and sensuousness. But the essay closes by finding that 'The proper study of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss." Therefore, you would notice that Woolf does not put forward just one credo for writing fiction, but rather celebrates "the infinite possibilities of the art", to be experimented by her 'modern' counterparts.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: State briefly, what the essay "Modern Fiction" is all about?

Q 7: What is a "Stream of Consciousness" novel?

Q 8: What are the images Woolf suggests in order to describe the workings in the mind of a writer?

Q 9: What ideas of narrative techniques do you find significant in the essay "Modern fiction"?

4.5.1 Major Themes

In this essay, Virginia Woolf firstly makes a distinction between Materialist literature and Spiritual Literature and then moves on to describe her method of Stream of Consciousness Novels. You should note that by doing so Woolf was trying to give a more realistic picture of psychology that was to influence the writing of modernist novels in a big way. Let us now discuss briefly these two themes: Materialism vs Spiritualism and Stream of Consciousness as a Method.

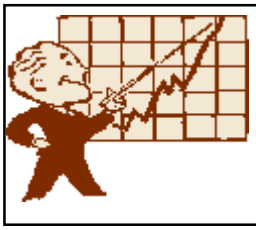
Materialism vs Spiritualism

Woolf rejects the idea of scientific progress being applied to literary history. She says "We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving." Nevertheless, she wants to mark out the difference between an older generation of writers like Bennett, Galsworthy, Wells from the new Hardy, Conrad, and most recently and importantly, James Joyce. The former are what she calls "materialists" because "they write of unimportant things…spending immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring." Nevertheless, the problem with materialists is that "life escapes." Woolf believes that this is because of an unfortunate dependence on convention both social and formal, and restricts the means by which "impressions" are converted into representational forms. Woolf insists that these conventional forms cannot do justice to Life, which is "not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Writers that are able to convey this halo are what Woolf calls "spiritual". Paradoxically, the writer achieves this by way of the ordinary and by being able to "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impression–trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms." Modern fiction, as represented most by the works of James Joyce, is spiritual. There is a problematic

conflation of the material and the spiritual, but the idea is that by disregarding convention, writes are able to get "closer to life."

Stream of Consciousness as a Method

However, to understand the works of Woolf, one must try to conceptualise the term "Stream Of Consciousness" which was originally used by the psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), to describe the chaotic, ceaseless and multileveled flow that characterises human mentality. Its manifestations in the world of fictions can be perceived by the presence of interior monologues, which help in capturing the exact nature of the flow. 'Stream-of-Consciousness' novelists, deviating from the conventional norms of realism, sought to establish in their fictions, what we can call 'psychological realism'. Hence, the story line they were working on came under its effect and consequently, any division in terms of chapters and episodes was necessarily sought to be rejected. Woolf writes in her essay: "If a writer were a free man and not a slave , if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style…Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged: but a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumcised spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." This style of writing is made much more complex by Woolf's peculiar handling of the notion of time in many novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To The Lighthouse*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Who invented the term 'Stream of Consciousness'? What does the term signify?

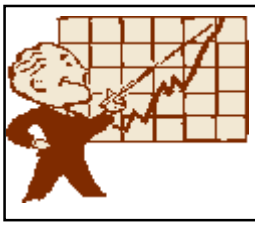
4.5.2 Woolf's Prose Style

Before discussing the style of the essay, you must first understand the fact that the entire essay entitled "Modern Fiction" is actually based on Woolf's own style of writing. Woolf maintained that the purpose of writing an essay was to give pleasure to the reader, and this could be done with witty, supple prose, apt literary and cultural references, and a wide range of subjects. Aiming to identify closely with her audience, she adopted a persona she termed "the common reader" who is an intelligent, educated a person with an willingness to be challenged by what he or she reads. When we read that "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; it is a luminous halo, envelop surrounding us", Woolf in fact in this essay indicates a radical shift from realist descriptive approach to life to a highly subjective kind of literary impressionism. In order to show this she contrasts her notion of the materialist novelists with James Joyce as a representative for the Spiritual with an interest in innermost dimensions. His novel *Ulysses* is written in a style, which is closer to life with all its incoherence and fragmentations. Woolf's criticism of the "method" reminds us here of Joyce's harsh critique of the notions of "style" as that being subjected to generally accepted norms. Woolf strongly despises a mere external analysis of the methodology applied in certain novels. However, when she acknowledges the idea of method she opines that it has to be involved with the creative process.

Virginia Woolf's eccentric style of writing, as available in most of her Stream of Consciousness novels, is what causes her writings to be distinct from those of the other authors of her time. The unique characteristics of her works such as the structure, characterization, themes, etc. are difficult to imitate and cause a strong impression in her literary pieces. Due to the level of peculiarity in Woolf's works, many consider her writings to be 'difficult' texts. This assumption is misleading; all literature must be approached with an open mind and careful deliberation. The uniqueness of Woolf's writings can be

seen when evaluating the characters in her literary pieces. In other words, the characters in Woolf's stories are not always traditional or logical in the way they behave. She uses an untraditional method of writing, in which the characters' thoughts and speech often contradict their feelings.

Virginia Woolf, as we read her essay "Modern Fiction" is to be remembered for the technical innovations she brought to the form of modernist novel. She is direct and informal and speaks like a common reader. Perhaps this is what is stylistically so important.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11. What is so specific about Virginia Woolf's prose style?

4.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Over the years after her death, the writings of Virginia Woolf have been a source of continuing power and ever-increasing influence. She has been hailed as one of the most significant of the Modernists — a fame she achieved and retained until today. Admired first in the era of New Criticism as a supreme formalist writer, Woolf has been recognised as one of the most important and influential feminist writers of the 20th century and as a writer whose works are dynamically engaged with the political, philosophical, historical and materialistic issues of her time. Thus, in recent years, Woolf scholarship has expanded to include a great variety of interests: historical and cultural studies; feminist and gender studies; postcolonial studies; language and genre studies; and studies with a multitude of other foci such as influence and intertextuality, global reception, constructions of modernism and postmodernism, to name but a few. The result is the formation of The International Virginia Woolf Society devoted to encouraging and facilitating the scholarly study of the vast realm of her works and career. The society also enables the scholars, critics, teachers, students, and the common readers to share knowledge about Virginia Woolf and popularise her works and philosophy.

One of the most recent books on the reception of Virginia Woolf is Sue Roe's and Susan Sellers's *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000). This book provides various new insights and readings of Woolf's life and works. The book contains essays entitled "Woolf and Feminism", "Woolf and Modernism", "Woolf and Psychoanalysis", "Woolf and Bloomsbury", "Woolf and Post-Impressionism", "Woolf in Sociopolitical" and so on exemplifying the different contexts in which Woolf's novels, essays and autobiographical writings are to be seen. Another very useful guide is Laura Marcus's *Writers and their Work: Virginia Woolf* (1997; 2nd edition, 2004), which begins with a discussion of Woolf 's early novels, stories and essays, and then examines Woolf 's experimentalism and her development of a new novel form, with *Jacob's Room* marking the breakthrough. Marcus then discusses Woolf's feminism in relation to *A Room of One's Own*, and her interest in representing the city in relation to *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Woolf's later novels are then analysed in terms of their experimentalism with other genres: elegy, essay, biography and drama. Marcus opens up readings of Woolf's major works with sensitivity to the main critical debates, and encourages further exploration of Woolf's writing by initiating a productive process of attentive close reading.



4.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that in her essay entitled "Modern Fiction" (1919) Virginia Woolf decries the 'materialists' for writing on 'the unimportant things' and making the transitory appear everlasting and significant. Going against the mass of facts presented by the realists, Woolf said that the interests for modernist authors "lie very likely in the dark places of psychology." As she further urges: "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all side they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms." Woolf believed that the purpose of the novel was to represent character. She also

added that with the coming of the new novelists there would be revolutionary change: "The literary convention of the time is so artificial…that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary society. Signs of this are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated, syntax disintegrated." You should note that such an understanding was supposed to change her writings drastically. After going through the previous sections and subsections you have found that to Virginia Woolf's credit goes the achievement of writing nine novels, several feminist essays, the critical books, and the biography of Roger Fry, several periodical articles, the diaries, and the letters, most of which were published posthumously. All of them seem central to her time, her intellectual world, and modern artistic ideas. A new questioning of realism, a new kind of experimentalism, and the rise of feminism have all contributed a lot to the understanding of the nature of her works and their significance at present. Although her sense of society, history and human condition was set within its chosen limits, she did not lack a sense of history and society. However, she rebelled against the role that social and historical forces were made to play in creating the seeds of modern writings. In addition, her nonfictional works including the one entitled "Modern Fiction" assert these points again and again.



4.8 FURTHER READING

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2) Briggs, Julia. (2006). *Reading Virginia Woolf.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3) Childs, Peter. (2000). *Modernism*. London: Routledge
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5) Gualtieri, Elena. (2000). *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past.* Palgrave Macmillan.

6) Lodge, David. (1991). *The Art of Fiction.* New Delhi: Penguin Books.

7) Peck, John & Martin Coyle.(2002). *Literary Terms and Criticism*. Palgrave.

8) Sellers, Susan. (ed.) (2000). *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf.* Cambridge University Press.

Web Resources

www.wikipedia.org

http://www.gale.cengage.com/free_resources/whm/bio/woolf_v.htm

http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS/



4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The Voyage Out (1915), Night and Day (1919), Jacob's Room (1922), Mrs Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse (1927), Orlando: A Biography (1928), The Waves (1931), Flush: A Biography (1933), The Years (1937), Between the Acts (1941), The Common Reader (1925), The Common Reader: Second Series (1932) etc.

Ans to Q 2: Death of her parents… …subsequent sense of loss… …her repeated attempts to commit suicide.

Ans to Q 3: This was a group formed in 1905 at the Bloomsbury house of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf…. …it had members like Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, G. E. Moore, Desmond MacCarthy, David Garnett, and Lady Ottoline Morrell and Woolf herself…. …they were all sceptical but tolerant and reacted against the artistic and social restraints of Victorian society.

Ans to Q 4: Woolf made an attempt at marking out the boundaries of a genre she wrote in throughout her life ... ... An essay is primarily an expression of personal opinion… …this idea has been best reflected in essays like "The Decay of Essay-writing"…. …Woolf further urged the essayists to concentrate on `themselves' as the subject matter most appropriate to the form of the essay.

Ans to Q 5: According to Woolf, Thomas Browne was the first to bring consciousness and intimacy into his writing in the middle of the 17th

century… …he shifted the focus of English literature from 'the publicity of the stage and the perpetual presence of a second person' inward to 'that growing consciousness of one's self, that brooding in solitude over the mysteries of the soul'… …thus Browne opened up for Woolf one of the most crucial questions in the history of literature: knowing one's own author.

Ans to Q 6: In this essay you will find Woolf distinguishing between what she calls the old-fashioned and outmoded 'materialism' of the Edwardian novelists like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and H. G. Wells, and the more modern, 'spiritual' and experimental form of writing of her own Georgian contemporaries, and in particular the work of James Joyce.

Ans to Q 7: It is a technique of writing fictions that describe be the inner process in order to capture properly what life really is... ... It is a method that James Joyce perfected... ... Referring to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and extracts from *Ulysses* (1922), Woolf argues that Joyce conveys moments in time as subjective experience and the reception of a flow of images, experiences and emotions.

Ans to Q 8: Woolf uses the image of light to describe the workings of the mind of a writer… …the image of giglamps is aptly used as a contrast to luminous halo... ... Her own words in this regard are: "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?"

Ans to Q 9: That the writers should concentrate on how the mind receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent and so on… …the writer has to be a free man and not a slave and write what he chooses, not what he must.

Ans to Q 10: It was originally used by the psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890)… …it described the chaotic, ceaseless and multileveled flow that characterises human mentality….

…'Stream-of-Consciousness' novelists deviated from the conventional norms of realism and established 'psychological realism'…. ….this style of writing is made much more complex by Woolf's peculiar handling of the notion of time in many novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To The Lighthouse.*

Ans to Q 11: Woolf writes in an eccentric style… …the unique characteristics of her works such as the structure, characterisation, themes, etc. are difficult to imitate and cause a strong impression in her literary pieces…. …she often uses an untraditional method of writing, in which the characters' thoughts and speech often contradict their feelings.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Do you consider Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" to be the manifesto of fictional modernism of the 20th century?

Q 2: On what grounds does Woolf dismiss the materialist view in favour of a spiritual view of life? Elaborate with reference to the essay "Modern Fiction"?

Q 3: What does Woolf talk about the importance of James Joyce in the context of literary modernism?

Q 4: "Life is not a series of giglamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Discuss the significance of this comment with reference to Stream of Consciousness Novels practised by both James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Q 5: Why does psychology become so important in the discussion of modern novel? Find out what Virginia Woolf has to say in this regard.

Q 6: In what ways, does Woolf make an analysis of the contextual shifts in the history of essay writing in English?

Q 7: How did Woolf's sense of loss help her to become an intense writer? Discuss.

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UNIT 5: GEORGE ORWELL: "SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 George Orwell: The Essayist

5.2.1 His Life

5.2.2 His Works

5.4 Reading the Text

5.4.1 Major Themes

5.4.2 Orwell's Prose Style

5.5 Critical Reception

5.6 Let us Sum up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the essay "Shooting an Elephant" by George Orwell, as a significant contribution to the genre of non-fictional prose.
- make connections between the essay and the context in which it is placed
- relate the text to the Manichean issues of contrast between opposites— the natives and the white values
- discuss the oppressive elements of colonialism on both the oppressor and oppressed as reflected in the essay
- have a critical insight into Orwell's position of a role-playing white man as a part of the British colonial regime.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block A. In this unit, you will study George Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" which first appeared in 1936. The story draws on Orwell's experience as a Colonial official in Burma in the

third decade of the 20th century and between the two World Wars. You should note that the span of British Imperialism in Burma lasted roughly from 1824-1948.Burma was conquered and colonised over a period of 62 years (1823-1886) during which three Anglo-Burmese wars took place. The creation of Burma as a province of British India was after the third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885. In 1897, Burma came under a Lieutenant Governor and became a major province under the British colonial rule. Orwell, who served as an assistant superintendent of police in Burma between1922-1928, wrote two essays "A Hanging" (1931) and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), and a novel *Burmese Days*– all based on his experiences of service in Burma. However, these were written well after his resignation as a colonial officer. This unit based on Orwell's famous essay "Shooting an Elephant", rather than being a straight forward polemic against British Imperialism, is a meditative prelude that dwells upon the disturbing experiences of Orwell's narrator, a sub-divisional Police officer in the town of Moulmein, while facing a moral dilemma and getting compelled by forces outside the 'self 'to shoot a rogue elephant. "Shooting an Elephant" appeared originally in the first Penguin *New Writing* where Orwell candidly analysed his own mixed feelings about Imperialism while in service. George Stuart, Orwell's colleague in Burma, recalled Orwell's response in a similar shooting incident when posted in Moulmein. By the time you finish reading the unit, you will understand how colonialism can be a double-edged sword in which, when "the white man turns tyrant, it is his own freedom that he destroys." You will also find how the narrator scrutinises his own motives and deduces their social implications.

5.3 GEORGE ORWELL: THE ESSAYIST

This section introduces you to some of the main facts about the life and works of the essayist.

5.2.1 His Life

Born as Eric Arthur Blair in 1903 in Motihari, Bihar in British India, Orwell is better known by his pen name George

Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Orwell. The son of Ida Mable Blair and Richard Walmesly Blair who worked as a British official in the opium department of the Indian Civil Service, he was brought up in a middle class family in Britain. He was educated at St. Cyprian's preparatory school and earned scholarship to Wellington and Eton College. Thereafter, he joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma as an Assistant Superintendent of Police through family connections. Orwell's grandmother lived at Moulmein in Burma and by the time, he moved there in 1926, he was disillusioned by the colonial state of which he had been in service of. However, from his joining in the service in the year 1922 until his resignation in 1927, he had several other postings at places stretching from Burma's principal hill station Maymyo to Myaungmya, a frontier outpost in the Irrawaddy delta at the beginning of 1924, and then further East in the delta to Twante, as a sub-divisional officer. At the end of 1924, when he was promoted to Assistant District Superintendent and posted to Syriam and its proximity to Rangoon, a cosmopolitan seaport had him visiting the place frequently to get away from the rigorous routine of Police life. In 1925, he was posted to Insein, the home of the largest jail in Burma, and after that, he moved to Moulmein in 1926. It was there at Katha in upper Burma that Orwell contracted dengue fever in 1927, and was granted leave to go home to recover his health. It was when he settled back in England with his family in Southwold that he decided not to return to Burma and resigned from service to become a writer.

Before he published his first book at the age of 30, he had an eventful life and gathered varied work experience ranging from a dishwasher, hop-picker, tutor and teacher to a book reviewer, pseudo Georgian poet to a tramp for a short period. He deliberately sought out experience to enrich his writing and even visited his old tutor A. S. F. Gow Fellow of Trinity College at Cambridge, for advice on becoming a writer. Gow remained a source of advice all along in his writing career. During the span of the next 12 years, he worked as a farmer, shopkeeper, book dealer, film critic, broadcaster, editor,

columnist and war correspondent to supplement his meagre income as an author.

During his service tenure in Burma, Orwell had acquired a reputation of being someone who did not fit in with other British officials, spending much of his time as a loner, and by reading and attending Churches of the ethnic Kaven group. He could speak Burmese fluently by the time he left Burma and had acquired some tattoos and had a small untidy blue circle on each knuckle, as believed by the Burmese rural folk, to protect against Bullets and snakebites. Orwell was a heavy smoker rolling his own cigarettes from strong tobacco, had an addictive love for tea. He also had a penchant for the rugged life and was equally happy in a tramping outfit, Bohemian wear or simple casuals.

He was a radical of his time, a Marxist, a believer of democratic socialism based on humane and liberal beliefs who fought on the Republican side in the Spanish wars. The injuries he suffered during the war and his slumming experiences had ruined his health. After his return to the war front Orwell was wounded in the throat by a sniper’s bullet as, he was considerably taller than the Spanish fighters, and had been warned against standing against the trench parapet. The bullet had missed his main artery by the barest of margin and his voice was audible. He received electro therapy and was declared medically unfit for service. Later on, diagnosed with tuberculosis he underwent treatment until on the early morning of 21January, 1950 an artery burst in his lungs, killing him at the age of 46.It was his request to be buried in accordance with the Anglican rite in the graveyard of the closest church to wherever he happened to die, and accordingly his wish was respected.

5.2.2 His Works

The modernist poet Stephen Spender wrote that Orwell’s work contained a maximum of lived experience and a minimum of

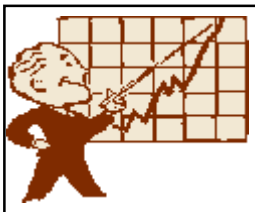
inventiveness, which was defined by, in Spender's words 'a clear sensibility and a disquieting conscience' driven by 'a certain apocalyptic fire.' This becomes clear when one reads his essays and books. You should however note that Orwell was a pre-eminent English novelist, essayist, satirist, journalist and reporter who had a prolific literary career. A socially conscious author, he published his book *Down and Out in London and Paris*(1933) which had been a non-fiction study of poverty, homelessness and unemployment. Drawn from his own experiences in Burma as a police official he wrote *Burmese Days* (1934), a fictional tale reflecting the waning days of British imperialism. *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) was based on the allusions to Anglican and provincial town life. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and *Coming Up For Air* (1939) were concerned with the impossibility of escaping the boredom and triviality of a middle class existence.

Orwell was working for a bookshop in Hampstead. The afternoons in the shop, fine mornings of writing, and his socializing in the evenings—all these formed the background of the book *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. *Coming Up for Air* was the most English of his novels portraying how capitalism and industrialism had killed the best of the idyllic old England. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) was an attempt to compensate for the failure of theoretical *socialism* to make contact with the working class. At Wigan, he took systematic notes of the living conditions of the workers; wages earned and even went down a coalmine. He spent days at the local public library, consulted public health records and reports on the working conditions in the mines and these investigations gave rise to the book. His book *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is an account of his experiences in the Spanish Civil War and a frank political book in which he attacked Stalin's Communists. This book had received much acclaim.

"Inside the Whale" and "Lion and the Unicorn" were published during the World War II. The latter with the sub-title "Socialism and

the English Genius" offered socialistic solutions to wartime problems, analysing the distinctive cultural characteristics and class structure of England and also critiquing the political system from a left-wing point of view. He received much acclaim for *Animal Farm* (1945), a political *satire* and an *allegorical fable* reflecting the degeneration in the Soviet Union after the Russian revolution and also the rise of Stalinism. And his dystopic novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) was a warning against totalitarianism in any form, capitalist or communist. The two volumes titled *The Collected Essays* and *Journalism and Letters*, which appeared during the fierce controversy, and protests regarding the war in Vietnam included several letters and a third of his occasional journalism and nearly all his major works.

As his books were critical of Governments and the society and also of the received opinion on the Right and the Left, they often created controversies and were frequently rejected, as they were difficult to publish. He received posthumously the notable Prometheus Awards for his two works *Nineteen Eighty Four* in the year 1984 and posthumously for *Animal Farm* in 2011.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How are Orwell's socio-political concerns reflected in his works?

Q 2: Why were Orwell's books rejected in different phases of his writing career?

5.4 READING THE TEXT

This section will help you to read the essay in some detail. However, it is insisted that you get hold of the text of the essay and start reading it to gain a better idea of the themes and issues raised in the text. From a cursory look, "Shooting an Elephant" shares many of the ideas available in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* in which the narrator Marlow journeys into the heart of Africa, Congo Basin. Similarly, Orwell's narrator must literally

and symbolically journey further into Burma, the unsettling space of the colonised in which it is set. Written in the first person narrative form, Orwell draws from his real life incident that he experienced himself when posted as a police officer in Moulmein, lower Burma. According to a colleague of his, named George Stuart in Burma on one Sunday morning Orwell had driven his Ford to pick up a rifle on receiving news about an elephant that had caused great damage on a semi main road and posed a danger to life and limb compelling him to shoot it.

The essay is set in the colonial landscape in the town of Moulmein and is narrated by the unnamed protagonist in the retrospective mode. To the narrator in "a roundabout way" the incident was "enlightening" in the end because, pressed to kill the elephant, he experiences a transformation in the process of disguised role-playing. His transformation occurs in the space of the other where the social situation of colonialism is reversed, in which the white man must fit the wills of the collective "watchful yellow faces behind."As a sub-divisional police officer, he feels hated by the natives who harboured an "anti-European" feeling and left no chance to sneer, hoot insults, or jeer at the Europeans. Even as the natives once had a good laugh at his cost, tripping him in the football field, it was the young Buddhist priests who were the worst to him, whom he would have loved to kill with a bayonet. However, he empathised with them, understanding the evils of imperialism in which the wretched prisoners in the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the flogging with bamboos scarring the buttocks of the men reflected the dirty side of the Empire's work. It was perplexing that even as he wanted to chuck his job that made him as much victimised to be "an absurd puppet" and wear the mask of a white Sahib, it all seemed inescapable. His "whole life", like "Every white man's life in the East" was one long struggle.

The story of "Shooting an Elephant" goes like this. On a cloudy stuffy morning, before the start of the rains, receiving a call from the sub-inspector at the police station at the other end of town, about a ravaging elephant in the bazaar, the narrator had set out on a pony with a much too small, old 44 Winchester rifle to terrify the elephant with its noise. While on the way the

local natives told him of the elephant's doings, that it was not a wild one but a tame one that was chained the previous night, as tame elephants always are when their attack of "*must"* is due. However, it had escaped, leaving its mahout, the only one who could manage it in that state, lost in a twelve-hour's journey away in a wrong direction.

The elephant suddenly reappeared in the town and had destroyed a bamboo hut, killed a cow, raided fruit stalls, devoured the stock and turned a municipal rubbish van over violently trampling it. The Burmese population had no weapons but were excited over "a bit of fun" to follow up close at the Sahib's heels who held a "magical rifle" in his hand to bring down a ravaging elephant. The crowd behind him was immense, "two thousand at the least and growing every minute" and it was to him as if their collective wills and anticipation that pressed him forward to act.

A black Dravidian coolie was trampled in the mud many minutes before he arrived at the scene. He sent an order to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle, which arrived in a few minutes with five cartridges. Meanwhile, below the hill, the elephant was a few yards away in the miry waste of a paddy field which was not ploughed but remained soggy from the first rains and was dotted with coarse grass. The elephant, eight yards from the road with his left side towards him, took not the slightest notice of the approaching crowd and remained busy tearing up bunches of grass for food so peacefully as though it was not the same ravaging elephant minutes ago. The narrator felt that probably his "attack of must" was already passing off and it would be harmless by then. In no way did he want to shoot "the great beast" that had a "preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have", as he firmly believed that, it would amount to "murder". The killing of the elephant was to him comparable to destroying a "costly piece of machinery" which when alive would be worth at least a hundred pounds, and if dead, only worth the value of his tusks. He estimated his chances of survival if he went near the elephant to confirm how it might react.

Orwell was considering options— to shoot or not to shoot. Probably, it is his self-consciousness of appearing feeble, of being emasculated and his image of the white man being not so decisive in front of the crowd that

handled him to act impulsively in a situation that was already controlled. It was as if he was an "actor", a posing "puppet" in front of a theatre thirsty crowd. With a German rifle, he pulled the trigger aiming at the "working elephant" at the sound of which rose a "devilish roar of glee". The first bullet had paralysed the elephant without knocking him down; the second shot, instead of collapsing him, made him climb desperately back to his feet, standing "weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping". It was the third shot that knocked the last remnant of strength from the elephant's legs with a final trumpet but it hung powerlessly between life and death, breathing very rhythmically and gasping without weakening for a long time. Unable to bear the agonizing crux of the situation the narrator sent for his small rifle, after having failed to put the elephant to rest with the last two shots of the German rifle. Finally pouring shot after shot into his heart and down his throat, he took the life of the elephant.

With the inability to stand this unnerving dilemma and his subsequent actions he goes away only to learn later that it took the elephant half an hour to die. The natives brought *dahs* and baskets for meat even before he had left and had stripped the body of the elephant almost to the bones by the afternoon. There were "endless discussions" about the incident. The *mahout* was furious but only helpless and legally it could be justified to kill a "mad elephant" like "a mad dog", if its owner failed to control it. The opinions among the Europeans were divided. The older men thought he was right and the younger men said it was shameful to shoot an elephant worth more than an Indian coolie.

The essay ends on the note that the narrator was glad to have found a pretext for the shooting, sufficiently in the death of the coolie. Legally, it put him in the right even as he confessed to having taken the step "solely to avoid looking a fool", in front of an anticipating, unarmed crowd. You should note that this essay, more than anything else, provides an insight into the discourse and politics inherent in the binaries of the colonialist self and the colonised other, identity and subjectivity, of free and the subjugated will. It also questions the real nature of Imperialism and the possibilities of disturbing *ambivalences*, liminalities in the ground realities of a colonial landscape.

In his essay "The Intimate Enemy", the post-colonial critic Ashis Nandy discusses at length the psychologically imbibed set of colonial ideas, which is the actual enemy within that is rooted in both the coloniser and the colonised in a "mutual bondage". Nandy refers to Orwell's insight into the political discourse on either side of the binaries of the coloniser-colonised equation and his analysis of how this interaction is influenced and shaped by the cultural and social constructs. It is the process of the "cultural stratification" in which cultural differences are constructed and the politics of "exclusivism" in which the interaction between the white man and the native is much restricted. This influences and shapes the psychology and as a result transforms the coloniser-colonised relation.

Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant", thus, delves into the pressures on the coloniser to adhere to the larger identity of the Empire and the suppression of the 'self' in the process of the role-playing white man. In Nandy's analysis, Orwell, in several of his works like *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four,* was critical of the dominance that stemmed from the ideologies of both totalitarianism and egalitarianism. The former indicates the ideology of an *authoritarian* rule as against the latter's ideology of equality and progression.

This essay, which is rooted in Orwell's personal experience, reflects the conflicts of the divided self of a colonial officer who has to disguise himself, under the mask of a white man, with a certain display of manliness and has to rise to the demands of the situation, as against his initial decision not to shoot a working elephant. It was just to save his image as a representative of the colonial forces from being dismembered. He has limited choices in his 'liminal position' as his heart and mind remain divided. He is disturbed in the understanding of the problems behind his own subjugation to colonialism, and realises the sheer emptiness of the colonial pride and prowess before the natives. The coloniser must prove his might or the colonised would consider him weak. Orwell, the representative of the British imperialism must not shame his class and for that must do what the colonised expected him to do. The problem is essentially rooted in the psychology of *internalizing* fixed *stereotypes* by both the coloniser and the colonised that determine their interaction in a colonial set up.



LET US KNOW

According to Jeffrey Meyers, Orwell felt guilty about his family's colonial background- slave-owners in Jamaica, exploiters in Burma, opium-dealers in India as well as his own too comfortable bourgeois family. Some biographers are of the opinion that the essay stems from his profound sense of guilt.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the main plot of Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant"?

Q 4: How do you see the position of Orwell's narrator while shooting the elephant?

Q 5: What does Asish Nandy say about the significance of the essay?

Q 6: How was the 'killing' of the elephant received by the people?

5.4.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the most important themes of the essay ''Shooting an Elephant".

Confrontation of Cultures:

The essay provides insights into the difference of the two clashing cultures of the European and Asian people. The East often termed as the 'orient' refers to the Countries of the Far East in relation to the European countries in the West or the 'occident'. There are certain unwritten codes of conduct for the white man in the East that he must adhere to, according to which he must live up to a certain image of the ruler. If the white man's life is one long struggle in the East, the local native finds it equally difficult in finding no justice or compensation in the colonial administrative system, like the mahout in the story. After all, it is as if the white man can get away with anything in a system that is run by them in the colony.

Perhaps, the answer to the perplexed and upset narrator at being bitterly hated with the "anti-European feeling" lies in the

dominance and injustice that the natives meet. It is of little wonder, then, that officers on duty like him are jeered even by the Buddhist monks. The anticipation and inability of the Burmese police to handle the situation of the ravaging elephant calls in the figure of the white man, the narrator, on whom the expectation to do the same rests on. He is then bound to be the typical sahib who is supposed to be firm, brave, and resolute, to know his mind in any difficult situation.

On the other hand, the Burmese folk are simply themselves and set the onus on the sahib to deal with the problem. The Buddhist priests are comfortable in being unlike themselves in their child like jeering, the natives bait chances to take liberties to trip a sahib for a little fun at his cost, they form the absorbed spectators in the incident, even rushing with dahs and baskets for the elephant's meat even before it is dead. It is not easy to generalise the natives as brutes or savages because at the end of the story, one finds that in rashly killing the elephant the narrator is no different from the natives. What may not be accepted in one culture, may find acceptance in the other. It is only in the particular confrontation of the cultures that the differences and similarities in them emerge.

Liminality:

According, to the post colonial critic Homi Bhabha liminality is the position of 'in-betweeness', of being stuck in between two positions, in the "doubling dissembling image of being in at least two places at once". It is not either the 'colonialist self' or the 'colonised other' but the disturbing distance in between both these positions that constitute the figure of colonial otherness. Bhabha says in *Location of Cultures* that colonial identities are neither perfectly achieved nor fixed. Similarly, in the essay, Orwell's narrator finds himself stuck between his position of serving the empire and his empathy for the oppressed natives. He finds that even as a British official he is "all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors" even if it's the same native people who make his work difficult. In the colonies, it is the police officials or the soldiers who are the instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of

oppression, and Orwell's narrator finds himself in this similar inescapable position. In the shooting scene in which he finds himself in a moral dilemma, stuck between his head and heart, both the elephant and the narrator are trapped in a liminal space, neither being their own choice. He is powerless to 'fix' the elephant, being neither able to give the elephant life nor disturbingly give the animal death.



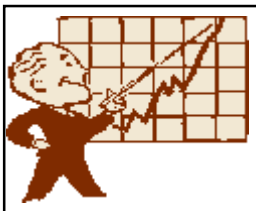
LET US KNOW

You should note that post-colonial and post-structural works call into question the concepts of identity and individuality. The idea of identity or individuality dates from the period of Renaissance that regards human beings as free intellectuals in which their thinking processes are not dependent necessarily on historical or cultural circumstances. However, in terms of subjectivity, it is just the opposite in which Orwell's narrator confronts his subjectivity, his sense of self being guided by the pressing wills of the natives as much as the empire he serves. On one hand, "a sahib…has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things" and, on the other, "do what the natives expect of him". The frustration in him results from his powerlessness in his situation and in finding no options in his position.

The Conqueror-conquered Question:

"In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters," says Orwell's narrator who saw the British Raj in Burma as 'an unbreakable tyranny'. Orwell is known to have famously quoted: "a family with the wrong members in control; that perhaps is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase." In the essay, the narrator realises that "when the white men turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys" and this illustrates the inherent problem of imperialism in which the colonial rule turns into a double-edged sword. Frantz Fanon, in his critique of colonialism declared that the 'colonial world is a Manichean world', meaning it is divided into two between the coloniser and colonised and the equation is reinforced

through various techniques and instruments of discipline of the coloniser. The narrator in "Shooting an Elephant" describes how as a police officer he was hated by a large number of the sneering Burmese natives with bitter "anti-European feeling" that had not enough courage to raise a riot. Yet, even if a European woman went to the bazaars alone she would probably be insulted by somebody spitting betel juice over her dress. The only time they were interested in him was when they crowded to witness the killing that to them was momentarily worth watching. This was probably because he understood that "feeling like these are the normal by-products of imperialism."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is the 'Manichean' relation in the world that Fanon talked of?

Q 8: What ideas can you make of 'liminality' as you find in this essay?

Q 9: What kind of conqueror-conquered equation do you find in the essay?

5.4.2 Orwell's Prose Style

Orwell was passionate over the purity of prose as its decay would affect thought and hence break down all the finer roads of communication. According to him, if people wrote and spoke clearly they were likely to think clearly and remain comparatively free. He argued that liberty was associated with the misuse of language such as the use of pompous or portmanteau phrases or such rhetoric that distorted meaning wholly by politicians and bureaucrats who tended to write and speak improperly, reflecting unclear thinking. In his essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946) he wrote about the importance of precise and clear language in which his concern was not of the grammarian or the aesthete but more of the growth of meaningless verbal refuse, in which language was not to convey but to conceal meaning. Thus, his concern was not about the maintenance of correct grammar as such but about meaning. Vague and unclear writing according to him could be used as a manipulative tool of political

propaganda as it had the power to shape the thought process of the masses. In his time, the debasement of people's language and consequent deterioration of thought was his serious concern.

Orwell provides the six rules needed to be adhered to in his essay "Politics and English Language" which discouraged the use of figures of speech or the use of a long word in place of a short one, or to use of the passive where one could use the active. He also asked never to use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon in place of an everyday English equivalent and so on. He also suggested to avoid a word wherever possible and lastly to break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous. The use of the adjective 'Orwellian' connotes an attitude and a policy of control by surveillance and propaganda and one of totalitarian or manipulative social practices. Although he hated the use of un-thought-out political catch phrases, he used words such as 'left' and 'reactionary' as though they contained precise meaning. According to him, it was the duty of the citizen, and the practicing journalists to be vigilant with concern to good language.

T. R. Fyvel praised Orwell's unmistakable style of writing since he avoided mannerism in his writing, for which he stood out among his contemporary. An important aspect of Orwell's honesty as a writer was his uncompromising refusal to adapt his style or outlook to the requirements of an editor or even the readers. He wrote in the same forthright way whether it was a novel, a political essay or a lighter weekly column. His writing was much tautened and precise, his style spare and economical along with his observation and sensibility that added to his credibility as a writer. Although his sentences were often carelessly wrought in his political and critical writing, he was at his best when describing his lived experiences in words, even as he expressed a desire to be remembered for prominent purple passages through his work of fiction.

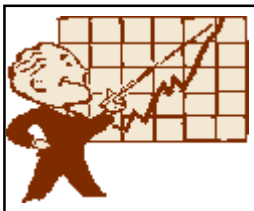
The modernist ideas of the constitution of the self are disturbed by Orwell's work with regard to who we are and who we may become through language.

5.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

"Shooting an Elephant" is a central text in modern British Literature and has generated much criticism and debates about whether Orwell apologises for or condemns imperialism. Some critics argue that Orwell's narrator was an agent of the larger Empire who analyses it from close quarters, while some left wing critics see insufficient condemnation. Raymond Williams in *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, describes Orwell as a "successful impersonation of a plain man who bumps into experience in an unmediated way and tells the truth about it."George Woodcock, who knew Orwell in the 1940s, wrote the first serious essay about him in 1946, placing Orwell in the tradition of the English radical novelists—Godwin, Dickens, Wells and making a fundamental criticism of his two main weaknesses: the superficial failure to penetrate deeply into the rooted causes of the injustices and lies against which he fights and (as Eliot observed) the lack of any really constructive vision for the future of man. Woodcock in a 1966 published book on Orwell entitled *The Crystal Spirit,* which provided the fullest biography of the man and a careful explanation of his fiction, work about his political ideas and his criticism.

In the context of the essay "Shooting an Elephant", some biographers have described this motivation as a performed sense of guilt. According to Jeffrey Meyers, Orwell felt the guilt pangs about his family's colonial background, his snobbish upbringing, his too comfortable bourgeois family with a past of slave owning in Jamaica, exploiters in Burma, opium dealers in India. Keith Aldritt argues that Orwell was concerned with providing some critical description of the psychological state within the individual, which makes the totalitarian state possible. James A. Tyner suggests that Orwell reveals a long-standing engagement with issues of humanity and subjectivity. T.R. Fyvel in appreciating the imprint of Orwell's unmistakable style wrote: "His critical experience…was his struggle to turn himself into a writer, one which led through long periods of poverty, failure and humiliation, and about which he has written almost nothing directly. The sweat and agony was less in the slum life than in the effort to turn the experience into literature." According to Ben Waltenbug, Orwell's writing pierced intellectual hypocrisy where ever he found it.

Orwell had requested that no biography of him was to be written and his wife Sonia Brownel guarded his request till her death. Later years, however, saw several significant biographies. A biography by Michael Sheldon, an American professor of literature, concerned with the literary nature of Orwell's work and Peter Davison's in *Complete Works of George Orwell* (2000) put most of the Orwell archive in the public domain. The prolific American biography writer Jeffrey Meyers investigated the darker side of Orwell and questioned the saintly image he was known to carry. Christopher Hitchens *Why Orwell Matters* (2002) and two most up to date biographies by Gordon Barker and D.J. Taylor in 2003 are some of the significant works in which Orwell and his body work are critically discussed. Orwell's exploration of the power relations between the coloniser and the colonised constitutes much of his anti-imperialist writings which caught the attention of a number of critics including Raymond Williams and Edward Said. While Williams credits Orwell's concern as writer and journalist to his views on poverty and depression, Said in his essay "Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors" believes that Orwell the writer of the fiction *Burmese Days* has much to do with his experiences of serving the Imperial Police and the personal or professional moment is inextricable from the ideological totality of his society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: What are the opinions of George Woodcock who knew Orwell closely?

Q 11: Do you agree with the opinion of some biographers who find that "Shooting an Elephant" was motivated from his sense of guilt?



5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read the essay "Shooting an Elephant" that provides interesting insights into colonialism and how it affects the thinking processes of both the coloniser and the colonised. Through the Introduction

and the subsequent sections on Orwell's life and his literary works, you have been familiarised with the author and the contexts in which he wrote. The section Reading a Text describes the content of the essay, explaining the events in the essay and the section Major Themes directs your focus on the main aspects of the text. Orwell's Prose Style gives you an idea of his distinct style of writing and his concern with the purity of style in prose. The Critical Reception discusses how Orwell has been received by noted critics as a writer down the ages. So, by now you must have realised that George Orwell occupies a significant place in the history of English prose writing, and how his essay "Shooting an Elephant" is informed by his first hand experience of the limitations of being an Imperial Police Officer in Burma, of belonging to the colonial class vested with the responsibility of carrying on the legacy. All such experiences have found an eloquent expression in this celebrated essay.



5.7 FURTHER READING

1) Bloom, Harold. (ed). (1986). *George Orwell*. New York: Chelsea
2) Hollis, C. (1956). *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and His Works London :* Hollis and Carter.
3) Joshi, Arun. (2004). *Fictional Styles of George Orwell.* New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers.
4) Meyers, Jeffrey. (ed). (1975).*George Orwell: The Critical Heritage Series*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
5) Nandy, Ashis. (2009). *The Intimate Enemy : Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism.* New Delhi : Oxford University Press.
6) Orwell, George. (1936). "Shooting an Elephant"' in *New Writing.* London: Penguin.
7) Tyner, James A. (2005). "Landscape and the mask of self in George Orwell's Shooting an Elephant", Vol.37, No. 3, Blackwell Publishing. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/20004459).

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: *Animal Farm* is a political satire… …*Nineteen Eighty Four* is a novel warning against totalitarianism… …*Down And Out in Paris* is based on poverty……*Coming Up for Air* discusses capitalism and industrialism… …*Road to Wigan Pier* comments on the failure of theoretical socialism… …*Homage to Catalonia* attacks Stalin's communists… …*Lion and the Unicorn* reflects on socialistic solutions to wartime problems.

Ans to Q 2: It was mainly because several of his books were critical of governments… …this created controversies leading to their rejection by publishers.

Ans to Q 3: The essay is set in colonial Burma… …Orwell's narrator is a police official ... ... compelled by circumstance, he shoots an elephant even as the attack of "must" on the elephant passes… …the collective will of the people presses him a lot… …the legal pretext of the killing… …the unsettling implication of the incident… …opinions of the people.

Ans to Q 4: As a European police officer, hated by the natives he understood the evils of imperialism… …secretly he is in the side of the natives… …he feels victimised and helpless by the demands of his job… …he realises the masked disguise of a white man.

Ans to Q 5: Ashis Nandy in his essay "The Intimate Enemy" discusses the psychology involved with the coloniser and the colonised… …Nandy mainly refers to the point that interactions between the colonisers and the colonised helped in shaping cultural and social relations.

Ans to Q 6: Opinions of the people were divided… …The *mahout* was furious but legally it could be justified to kill a "mad elephant" like "a mad dog" if its owner fails to control it… …the elderly white people hailed him right… …the younger said it was shameful to shoot an elephant worth more than an Indian coolie.

Ans to Q 7: In Fanon's critique of colonialism the colonial world is a Manichean world… …it is divided into two sections of people—the

coloniser and the colonised... …this world reflects on the imposing rule of oppression and the silent submission of the oppressed.

Ans to Q 8: It signifies the position of ambivalence and 'in-betweeness'… …it also means the disturbing space of the other in between the colonised and the coloniser… …Borrowed from Homi Bhabha, 'liminality' refers to unfixed colonial identities.

Ans to Q 9: The hatred of people… …anti-European feelings of the natives… …making the officials' work difficult… …natives as little beasts and so on.

Ans to Q 10: He placed Orwell in the tradition of English radical novelist… …he highlighted Orwell's failure to delve into the roots of injustice which he fights… …Orwell lacked constructive vision for the future of man.

Ans to Q 11: You may associate Orwell's real life experience with the prescribed essay.



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the role played by Orwell's narrator in this essay. Do you agree that his position is a 'liminal'?

Q 2: What is the context of the essay in which it is placed? Do you agree that colonialism is a double-edged sword?

Q 3: Discuss the major themes of the essay 'Shooting an Elephant'? How is the theme of subjectivity related to the colonial world?

Q 4: Discuss the moral dilemma of the narrator in the essay?

Q 5: What, according to you, leads the narrator into acting against his initial feelings about killing a working elephant?

Q 6: How does the social construct of the binaries of the coloniser and the colonised dissolve in the story? How is the elephant's death symbolic in the essay?

Q 7: Do you think the narrator draws the death of the coolie as a legal pretext in order to disguise his guilt?

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UNIT 6: JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: *CONFESSIONS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 A Brief History of Autobiography

6.4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Life and Works

6.5 Reading about *The Confessions*

6.6 Critical Reception

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain some insights about autobiography through Rousseau's *Confessions*
- make a survey of the life and works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- jot down the important issues touched by Rousseau in his *Confessions*
- explain Rousseau's prose style
- appreciate Rousseau's *Confessions* as one of the earliest examples of autobiographical writing.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The *Confessions* is an autobiographical journey of Rousseau consisting of 13 books. Rousseau had been a Francophone Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer of the 18th century. It is hoped that after going through the various sections of this unit, you will be able to appreciate the *Confessions* as an important breakthrough in autobiography writing. However, for this unit, we have not selected any of the 'books' as your text,

because our purpose is just to make you aware of the significance of the *Confessions* as one of the earliest examples of autobiographical writings. However, you will surely do well if you try to read the Books of *Confessions* for a better understanding of the writer's life and philosophy, and try to appreciate how this book contributed to the genre of autobiography in later times.

6.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF 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. However, it is up to you whether you accept it or not. It is because, if you want to write an autobiography, you must rely on your memory. However, very few of you can recall clear details of your early life and therefore have to depend on other people's impressions. At the same time, you will remember selectively. You may not incorporate disagreeable facts and may even repress and distort truth for the sake of convenience or harmony. Hence, our analysis of an autobiography begins with an inherent complexity of what is to be included and what is excluded.

In the Classical period, history and autobiography were considered almost similar. This can be seen from the *Histories of Herodotus,* Xenophon's *Anabasis* and Caesar's *Commentaries.* The relatively recent examples of 'autobiography' can be traced to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius of 2nd century AD, and St. Augustine's *Confessions* of 4th century. A deep psychological self-analysis found in such writings influenced the modern writers. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (673-735) provides yet another example of an account of one's own life. However, it was not until the 16th century, that autobiographies started to become a kind of literary practice. Subsequently, Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) constituted the first significant instance of autobiographical self-revelation and Montaigne's emphasis on subjectivity was bound to produce autobiography as a major non-fictional form in later periods. From early 17th century, it became almost customary to maintain 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 Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). During the same period, Evelyn Hugh and Samuel Pepys also earned fame with their famous 'diaries'. *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* is yet another important example of autobiography covering the first fifty-three years of Rousseau's life, up to 1765. It was completed in 1769, but not published until 1782, four years after Rousseau's death.

During the 18th century, you will find some connections between autobiography and the then relatively new form of the novel. For example, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crussoe* (1719) and Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) are taken to be 'autobiographical fictions', or 'fictionalised 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 also been 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) or Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) have proliferated. You should not be surprised to know that after World War II; almost anyone achieving distinction in life, especially novelists, politicians, statesmen, and high-ranking members of various services have started to write autobiographies.

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* is an excellent example of a modern day autobiography. It was published in three volumes just preceding his death in 1970. A reading of the various chapters in his *Autobiography* 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 fictionalisation of that period of his life. This obviously raises questions about the form of the autobiography itself. Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* is a work that leaves one perplexed by its unconventional nature. It is not simply a book, but an attempt to bring 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. Another important example which all of you may have already read or have heard about is M. K. Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is it that the analysis of an autobiography begins with an inherent complexity?

Q 2: Provide the names of some early examples of autobiographical writings.

Q 3: State the significance of Russell's *Autobiography*.

6.4 JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: LIFE AND WORKS

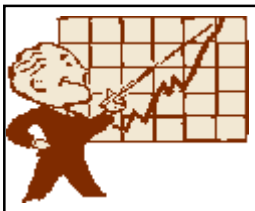


Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was born at Geneva into a Protestant artisan family. As his mother died soon after his birth, he was reared by an aunt, by his father, a watchmaker of unstable temperament, and by a maternal uncle. He was apprenticed to an engraver when, at the age of fifteen, he decided to leave his master and Geneva. Thus, began his movement which was to become habitual, and which took him to many parts of Switzerland, France, and Italy, and to England. During these movements, he owed much to the generosity of friends and patrons; and maintained a succession of clerical, secretarial, and tutorial posts. Rousseau's emotional nature, his often tempestuous personal relations, extreme sensitivity, and penchant for controversy fill his career with striking and dramatic episodes. While his critical and enquiring intellect, his lifelong interest in music and excursions into opera and drama, a voluminous correspondence, and important and influential contributions to social and political philosophy, the novel, autobiography, moral theology, and educational theory mark him out as one of the dominant writers and thinkers of the age.

When he was 38 years old, his essay entitled *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), was published. In that essay, Rousseau preferred the natural man to his civilised counterpart, and argued that the development and spread of knowledge and culture, far from improving human behaviour, had corrupted it by promoting inequality, idleness, and luxury. The *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (1755) contrasts the innocence and contentment of primitive man in a 'state of nature', his mode of existence determined by none but genuine needs. Rousseau proclaimed that the dissatisfaction and perpetual agitation of modern social man is imminent, as the majority of them are condemned to the legally sanctioned servitude necessary to preserve the institution of private property.

His book *Emile* (1762) lays down the principles for a new scheme of education in which the child is to be allowed full scope for individual development in natural surroundings, shielded from the harmful influences of civilization, in order to form an independent judgement and a stable character. The 'Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard', contained book 4 of *Emile,* sets against institutional Christianity, a form of Deism grounded in religious sentiment and guided by the divine instinct of conscience. *Du contrat social,* his theory of politics was published in 1762. In this book, he advocated universal justice through equality before the law, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and defined government as fundamentally a matter of contract providing for the exercise of power in accordance with the 'general will' and for the common good, by consent of the citizens as a whole, in whom sovereignty ultimately resides. In the novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Rousseau provides a critical account of contemporary manners and ideas interwoven with the story of the passionate love of a tutor St. Preux and his pupil Julie, their separation, Julie's marriage to a Baron, and the dutiful, virtuous life shared by all three on the Baron's country estate and so on. Rousseau completed the posthumously published autobiographical works—*Les Confessions* (1781-8) and *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) towards the end of his life. These are exercises in self-justification and self-analysis. As expressions of the complex individuality of a great personality and his sensibility, they remain landmarks in the literature of personal revelation and reminiscence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention Rousseau's unique qualities as a writer/ thinker?

Q 5: What do you find in Rousseau's *Discours?*

Q 6: Mention the significance of Rousseau's *Emile* and *Du contrat social.*

6.5 READING ABOUT *THE CONFESSIONS*

The Confessions was written in two distinct parts, each consisting of six books. Books I to VI were written between 1765 and 1767, and published in 1782, while books VII to XII were written in 1769–1770, and published in 1789. *You must note that The Confessions* was written in an effort to react to the persecutions that Rousseau suffered even at the hands of former friends. They are divided chronologically into two parts. The first, based more on his formative years as a philosopher, is the most widely studied. Rousseau begins his *Confessions* by claiming that he is about to embark on an enterprise never before attempted: to present a self-portrait that is "in every way true to nature" and that hides nothing: "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator." There are two possible reasons behind this undertaking. First, Rousseau might have claimed honesty by stating that he will be 'true to nature.' Second, he might want to make himself different from other people, following which he urged his readers to consider this difference while going through this book.

He begins his story by describing his family, including his mother's death at his birth. He ruminates on his earliest memories, beginning at a tender age of five, and his learning to read. He discusses his childhood in the years before his father left him, and his own decision to run away to see the world at the age of sixteen. He often dwells for many pages on seemingly minor events but which held great importance for him. Rousseau remembered how his father encouraged his love of reading like the following:

"Every night, after supper, we read some part of a small collection of romances [i.e., adventure stories], which had been my mother's. My father's design was only to improve me in reading, and he thought these entertaining works were calculated to give me a fondness for it; but we soon found ourselves so interested in the adventures they contained, that we alternately read whole nights together and could not bear to give over until at the conclusion of a volume. Sometimes, in the morning, on hearing the swallows at our window, my father, quite ashamed of this weakness, would cry, 'Come, come, let us go to bed; I am more a child than thou art." (*Confessions*, Book 1)

Throughout the *Confessions*, Rousseau frequently discusses the embarrassing experiences of his life. For example, in one incident, he urinated in a neighbour's cooking pot as a mischievous child. He also discusses the revelatory experience he had received at age of eleven of being beaten by an adored female nanny, and he analyses his 'desire to be beaten again' as his entry into the world of adult sexuality. Rousseau eventually reaches adulthood. The narrative then deliberates on Rousseau focusing less on places travelled and jobs held or discarded than on his personal trials, unrequited loves, and sexual frustrations. He speaks at length of his significant relations with women, including his long time companion Thérése le Vasseur and the elderly matron Madame de Warens, at whose house, he used to stay as a young man. At the end of the 12th book, Rousseau speaks about his intellectual work, his writing, and his relations to contemporary philosophers. You will note that by the time Rousseau finished the *Confessions* in 1765, all his major philosophical works had been published, but his fears of persecution were growing stronger inside him.

You will note that some notable autobiographies did exist in Europe before Rousseau published the *Confessions.* But, Rousseau's work represented an entirely new literary form. For example, works such as St. Augustine's *Confessions* had previously been widely read and celebrated. But, religious works of that sort greatly differed from that of Rousseau's, since they sought to convey an inspirational story of religious virtuosity. In contrast to St. Augustine's, Rousseau's *Confessions* sought to bare the

entire life of its author's subject, detailing all his imperfections, virtues, individual neuroses, and formative childhood experiences as means of exploring and justifying the views and personality of his adult self. Although Rousseau states that *The Confessions* should not be read as an unerring account of dates and events and admits that most likely he often gets such factual data wrong when his memory fails him, dates and exact events are not the point of the work. Rather, he tends to imply that even with all his weaknesses, he is fundamentally a good and honest being. This principle is at the heart of Rousseau's entire philosophy, and it connects *The Confessions* to the rest of his works.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does Rousseau begin his *Confessions?* What explanation does he provide for such a beginning?

Q 8: In what sense, Rousseau's *Confessions* is different from that of St. Augustine?

6.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The influence of *The Confessions* reaches well beyond philosophy. As a work of literature, it inaugurated the modern genre of autobiography and influenced modern narrative techniques in the great novels that would appear in the following centuries. Rousseau's emphasis on the effects of childhood experiences on adulthood, especially in relation to the development of sexuality, foreshadows the revolutionary works of Sigmund Freud in the field of psychology. *The Confessions* is also the work considered most responsible for Rousseau's frequent accreditation as the father of the Romantic Movement, simply on the ground that he emphasised the importance of subjective, individual, and sensory experience of the world.

Rousseau's *Confessions* was one of the first autobiographies in which an individual wrote of his own life mainly in terms of his worldly experiences and personal feelings, as has been in the famous opening.

His example was soon followed by many other writers such as Goethe, Wordsworth, Stendhal, and De Quincy who tried their hands in writing their own similarly styled autobiographies.



6.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have gained some ideas on Rousseau's *Confessions,* an early autobiography covering the first fifty three years of Rousseau's life, up to 1765. It was completed in 1769, but published posthumously in 1782, four years after Rousseau's death. Rousseau's *Confessions* provides a detailed account of all his imperfections, virtues, individual neuroses, and formative childhood experiences as a means of explaining and justifying the views and personality of his adult self. Here, tells the story of his life, from the formative experience of his humble childhood in Geneva, through his achievement of international fame as novelist and philosopher in Paris, to his exile, persecuted by governments away from the world of modern civilization. Rousseau analyses his past with unique insight throwing light on his elusive inner self and the variety of social identities he was compelled to adopt. The book, as you all should recognise, vividly illustrates the characteristics of a good autobiography: defiance and vulnerability, self-exploration and denial, passion, puzzlement and detachment. Such a bio-critical mode of writing has been one of the most important issues in nearly all the great autobiographies of the world. Such a reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* shall help you to read Russell's *Autobiography,* written in the 20th century.



6.8 FURTHER READING

1) Rousseau's Confessions: Notes on the Style, Francis J. Carmody, *The French Review.* Vol. 30, No. 5 (Apr, 1957), pp. 358-365.

2) Coleman, Patrick, (ed), Angela Scholar, (trans). (2000). *Confessions by Jean Jacques Rousseau.* Oxford University Press.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confessions_(Rousseau)

http://www.gradesaver.com/the-confessions-of-jean-jacques-rousseau

http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/rousseau/section4.rhtml



6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: On one can recall clearly the details of one's early life… …one remembers selectively… …one may not incorporate disagreeable facts and may even repress and distort truth… … complexity arises regarding what to be included and what to be excluded.

Ans to Q 2: *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius… …St. Augustine's *Confessions*… …Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*… …Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life… …*John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*… …Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae*… …*The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* etc.

Ans to Q 3: Russell's *Autobiography* 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 fictionalisation of that period of his life.

Ans to Q 4: Rousseau's emotional nature, his tempestuous personal relations, extreme sensitivity, penchant for controversy etc. fill his career with striking and dramatic episodes. While his critical and enquiring intellect, his lifelong interest in music and excursions into opera and drama, important and influential contributions to social and political philosophy, the novel, autobiography, moral theology, educational theory etc. mark him out as one of the dominant writers and thinkers of the age.

Ans to Q 5: In that essay, Rousseau preferred the natural man to his civilised counterpart, and argued that the development and spread of knowledge and culture, far from improving human behaviour, had

corrupted it by promoting inequality, idleness, and luxury.

Ans to Q 6: *Emile* lays down the principles for a new scheme of education in which the child is to be allowed full scope for individual development in natural surroundings, shielded from the harmful influences of civilization… …*Du contrat social* provides Rousseau's theory of politics where he advocated universal justice through equality before the law, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Ans to Q 7: Rousseau begins his *Confessions* by claiming that he is about to embark on an enterprise never before attempted: to present a self-portrait that is "in every way true to nature" and that hides nothing: "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator." He cited two reasons for that. First, Rousseau might have claimed honesty by stating that he will be 'true to nature.' Second, he might want to make himself different from other people.

Ans to Q 8: St. Augustine's *Confessions* sought to convey an inspirational story of religious virtuosity… …as opposed to that Rousseau's *Confessions* sought to bare the entire life of its author's subject, detailing all his imperfections, virtues, individual neuroses, and formative childhood experiences as means of explaining and justifying the views and personality of his adult self.



6.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Rousseau reveal his self in Book I of his *Confessions*? Discuss.

Q 2: What were the major concerns of Jean Jacques Rousseau in his books making his one of the leading reformers in the 18th century?

Q 3: Jean Jacques Rousseau almost reinvented autobiography in the tell-all tradition. How do you think, that might have shaped modern autobiographies in the 20th century?

Q 4: Which are the important characteristics of an autobiography? Discuss with reference to Rousseau's *Confessions.*

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UNIT 7: SAMUEL JOHNSON: "LIFE OF MILTON"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 A Brief History of Biography

7.4 Samuel Johnson: Life and Works

7.5 Reading the Text : "Life of Milton"

7.6 Johnson's Prose Style

7.7 Critical Reception

7.8 Let us Sum up

7.9 Further Reading

7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.11 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *define* the term 'biography' on the basis of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*
- *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 18th century
- *summarise* the basic arguments and criticism of the "Lives of Milton"

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with Samuel Johnson's biographical piece "Life of Milton" taken from his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779–81). This book comprises short biographies and critical appraisals of 52 poets, most of who lived during the 18th century. You will note that Six of the *Lives* have been singled out as the most "important", these are—John Milton, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, and

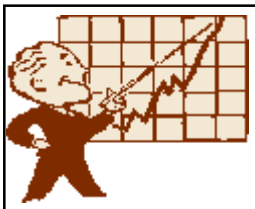
Thomas Gray. Johnson's original work was, however, supposed to comprise the first ten volumes of a sixty-volume work. Johnson's volumes were originally titled *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical to the Works of the English Poets*. After Volumes I–IV were published in 1779, and Volumes V-X in 1781, the publishers decided to reprint the biographies as *The Lives of the English Poets*, or *Lives of the Poets*, and sell them as an independent work. The new collection was finished in March 1781 and published in six volumes. In his "Life of Milton", Johnson provides a comprehensive account of Milton's life by incorporating every possible detail of his life. However, by the end of this unit, you will not only be able to reflect on the life of Milton as seen through the eyes of Dr. Johnson, but will also be able to gain some ideas on the art of writing biography.

7.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIOGRAPHY

The word 'biography' is derived from Greek 'bios', meaning 'life' and 'graphy', meaning 'writing'. So literally, the term 'biography' means 'writing about life'. However, biography is not like history or a chronicle of events of a man's life. It is more artistic and has a personal and psychological touch. The history of biography can be traced back to post-classical Europe which kept records of the lives of peoples called "Lives of the Saints" or Hagiographies. You must note that medieval historians like Geoffrey of Monmouth, Mathew Prince and others, expressed their concern over human failings and strengths. But, it is not until the 16th century that the first true biography appeared. Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More* (1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7) are often considered to be the first real examples of biographical writings. This tradition of writing biographies continued till the 17th century with Francis Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621), Walton's *Lives* (1640-78), and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives* (1669-1693). But, it is with Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) that the form of biography finally established itself as a major type belonging to the genre of non-fictional prose. For Johnson, biography stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history. 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. This was followed by James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), which turned out to be a model for many biographers in the subsequent periods.

In the 19th century, biographical writings continued to flourish through Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863), but showing a potential influence on the structure of fiction. Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, Dickens' novels like *Great Expectations* along with that of the Bronte sisters, show the intimacy between actual experience and fictional invention. Finally, the modern idea of 'critical' biography was established by Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918). In very recent times, the claim of the modern biographers is tuned towards a particular kind of subjectivity. This directly refers to the selection and presentation of the material. If you are an avid reader, you will notice that recently, another interest has been shown in the interchangeability of fictional and documentary techniques. The traditional distinction between biography, personal history, written in the form of 'diary' or 'confessions', and the first person narratives are sought to be questioned. You should notice how this changing nature of biography has brought about certain noticeable changes in the genre of biography itself as reflected in the emergence of 'Life Writings' as a major area of research.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which are the different stages in the history of biographical writing?

Q 2: Name some of the important biographies in the 19th and 20th century.

7.4 SAMUEL JOHNSON: LIFE AND WORKS



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Dr. Samuel Johnson, often referred to as Dr. Johnson, was one of the prominent literary figures of the 18th century. He was also a key figure of the neoclassical tradition and was famous for his great wit and prose style as exemplified by his *Lives of the English Poets*. With this book, Johnson became one of the most influential critics in the history of English literature. Johnson, the son of a bookseller, was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire on September 18, 1709. He attended Lichfield Grammar School. However, 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 recognised 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 his poverty, 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 also contributed essays to the periodical *The Adventurer*. But, from 1758-60, Johnson began another series of essays titled *The Idler.* The *Idler* 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 volume 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 and the most ambitious project, was the *Lives of the English Poets* (1783), 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.

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's 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. He 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 a 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 was writing. His description of Milton's clothes is a remarkable example in this context. He does not attempt to idealise 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.

Lives of the English Poets appeared from 1779 as *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. For him, to be interested in the man's work was to be interested in his character. 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. However, Johnson is not free from accusations; as he is often castigated for his idiosyncrasies and his adherence to a particular ideology and a neoclassicism that colour his assessments of all the poets and their works.

Out of the fifty-two lives, more than thirty deal with the obscure and minor poets in whom no one is interested today. But, the lives of Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Addition, Pope and Gray also gave Johnson an opportunity to develop and illustrate his own views on poetry. For this, he had to undergo a lifetime of research. Johnson adopted a particular method in his *Lives* not because he failed to conceptualise 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 recognise 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.



Check Your Progress

Q 3: For which works Samuel Johnson is famous?

Q 4: What is unique about Johnson's idea of the Biography?

Q 5: What is the scheme of Johnson's *The Lives of the English Poets*?

7.5 Reading the Text: "Life of Milton"

Johnson's *Life of Milton* can be regarded as one of the best sources of his views on poetry. Here, 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. Because 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 criticised 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 judgment of the works. However, it is also a fact that most of his criticism abounds in many literary, personal and political prejudices. Johnson criticises 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 Pensoroso,* on the other hand, is about the man in whom the tendency to reflect has paralysed 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 cannot 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. However, 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."

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 marvellous. 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 marvellous and the marvellous 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 characterised by sublimity in different forms.

However, Johnson is not blind towards the faults of the epic and this is what makes him recognised 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. 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 wa*s for him a failure as drama. It had some beautiful passages and single lines, but its plot was loose, construction faulty and the 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. However, 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' use of blank verse to the influence of the Italian writers. However, 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 interested in the established forms of religion. Milton's political views were Republican and the expression of his views was usually 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 did not attempt to idealise 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.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How does Johnson view the idea of poetry in "Life of Milton"?

Q 7: What is Johnson's criticism on Milton's Lycidas?

Q 8: What are the main objections of Johnson to Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

7.6 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 criticised 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 criticised 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 17th century, illustrate his quality and flexibility of the mind. For today's readers, Johnson's style and viewpoints may need some more response.

7.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Matthew Arnold concluded in his *Johnson's Lives* (1878) that the appropriation of Johnson in modern times can be summarised 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 18th century is of enduring value. *The Lives of the English Poets* (1783) cannot be regarded as a great work of personalised canon making. While Johnson proposed several additions, the choices generally were not his own. Johnson, of course, believed in maintaining an English literary cannon surpassing the literature of the other nations but that cannon 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.

His contemporary critics as well as readers had received Johnson with much acclamation. 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 18th century criticised 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 19th century, interest in Johnson was centred on his personality, which was also the subject matter of

Boswell's biography. However, it was only in the 20th century that his writings regained their prominence.



7.8 LET US SUM UP

As you come to the end of this unit, you have learnt that Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* marks an important development in the history of biography. Johnson's *Life of Milton* can be regarded as one of the best sources of his views on poetry. In his "Life of Milton", Johnson provides a comprehensive account of Milton's life by incorporating every possible detail of his life besides providing important criticism of his greatest works. You have also learnt that Johnson's biographies have two distinct parts–biographical information of the poet and a criticism of his works. And, this framework makes the *Lives* not only an important development in biography writing but also an important source of Milton's neoclassical criticism of the English poets.



7.9 FURTHER READING

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

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

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

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

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

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The history of biography started with "Lives of the Saints" or Hagiographies… …true biography appeared with Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More* (1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7)… …in the 17th century, Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621), Walton's *Lives* (1640-78), and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives* (1669-1693) became important… …it is with Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) that the form of biography finally established itself as a major type belonging to the genre of non-fictional prose.

Ans to Q 2: In the 19th century, biographical writings continued to flourish through Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863)… …Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*… …'critical' biography was established by Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

Ans to Q 3: His historical tragedy *Irene… …Miscellaneous observations on the tragedy of Macbeth… … The Vanity of Human Wishes… … A Dictionary of the English Language… …*periodical essays under the title *The Rambler… …the* satirical novel *Rasselas, or The Prince of Abyssinia… …*the travel narrative *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland… …Lives of the English Poets.*

Ans to Q 4: For Johnson, biography stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history… …he refused to let sympathy for his subject cloud his judgment… …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 was writing… …he does not attempt to idealise the men whose lives he is narrating.

Ans to Q 5: Johnson's 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.

Ans to Q 6: He defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by taking imagination to the help of reason"… …Invention is different from imagination… …the function of poetry is to please and instruct… …the imagination of the poet must be controlled by reason.

Ans to Q 7: Johnson also denounced *Lycidas* as he was against the pastoral form because of his neo-classical tendencies… …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.'

Ans to Q 8: 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.



7.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the important aspects of Johnson's views about Biography? Discuss Johnson's contributions to the genre of Biography?

Q 2: In what way, does Johnson assess Milton's achievements in "Life of Milton"? Discuss.

Q 3: Explore the neo-classical principles that shape Johnson's assessment of Milton?

Q 4: Elaborate on Johnson's criticism of Milton's works including *Paradise Lost* and on the basis of that criticism, try to assess Johnson as a critic.

Q 5: Johnson provides a balanced and judicious estimate of Milton as a poet. Discuss.

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UNIT 8: "FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE" [FROM LYTTON STRACHEY'S *EMINENT VICTORIANS*]

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Lytton Strachey: The Biographer

- 8.3.1 His Life
- 8.3.2 His Works

8.4 Reading the Text

- 8.4.1 Major Themes
- 8.4.2 Strachey's Prose Style

8.5 Critical Reception

8.6 Let us Sum up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- examine the shifts and changes that took place in prose writing after World War I
- analyse the main developments in biography since 1901
- appreciate Lytton Strachey as a modern biographer
- discuss Strachey's contribution to biography through his *Eminent Victorians*
- read the biography of Florence Nightingale from a new perspective.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The is yet another unit on biography in this Block. In this unit, you will be introduced to the Life of "Florence Nightingale" written by Lytton Strachey. The period of modern biography began mainly as a reaction against

the 19th Century conventions. During the Victorian Age, biography had departed from the practice of writers like James Boswell, the faithful reporter who gave a pretty complete picture of Dr. Samuel Johnson. Victorian biographers conceived it as their duty to admit nothing about the career of a person, which would keep the readers from admiring him. The 20th century biographer, on the other hand, has been influenced by the pervasive ideals of science to seek the truth. He would throw as strong a light on a person's faults and mistakes as on his virtues and achievements. He presents his subject as a human being rather than a statue on a pedestal. These changes in the field of biography are also connected to the advances in the field of psychology, and the search for new means of expression. The inventor of this type of biography is Lytton Strachey, and in this unit, you will be introduced to one such biography—the life of "Florence Nightingale" in his *Eminent Victorians*.

8.3 LYTTON STRACHEY: THE BIOGRAPHER

You must have learnt that Lytton Strachey was a founder member of the Bloomsbury Group, and is famous for his book *Eminent Victorians*. He is best known among the readers for establishing a new form of biography in which psychological insight and sympathy are combined with irreverence and wit may be for the first time. Here, in this section, we will briefly discuss the life and works of this renowned biographer.

8.3.1 His Life

Giles Lytton Strachey, born on 1 March 1880 at Stowey House, Clapham Common, London was an eminent British writer and critic. *Eminent Victorians* is his greatest work, which contains biographies of four famous personalities: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, General Gordon and Dr. Thomas Arnold. Strachey was a member of the Bloomsbury Group though he was not as prolific as his other colleagues like Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster.

Lytton Strachey was the son (eleventh child out of thirteen children) of General Sir Richard Strachey, an officer in the colonial

British armed forces and Jane Grant who took deep interest in languages, literature and politics. He went to a number of schools in his lifetime, which included a school at Parkstone, Dorset and Abbotsholme School, Rochester in Derbyshire. However, he also received a part of his education at home, as his mother actively involved him in various literary activities and introduced him to many literary figures. Later in 1894, he went to Learning ton College, then to the University of Liverpool in 1897, and after that to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1899. His friends during these years included Bertrand Russell, George Mallory, John Maynark Keynes, Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell among whom Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell were the closest. It was also during his years in Cambridge that he met and developed a strong liking for Walter Raleigh, a professor of English Literature and a well-known biographer. The Cambridge Period was the most productive period in Strachey's life when he actively involved himself in writing verse and also remained an active member of a number of groups in Cambridge like "The Midnight Society", "Conversazione Society" and "Cambridge Apostles", etc. Such interest in literary discussions ultimately led to the formation of the Bloomsbury Group and Strachey is considered the nexus of the group. Strachey also wrote reviews and critical articles for periodicals like *The Spectator*. His *Landmarks in French Literature* (1912) is considered an important work in literary criticism, which brought him some recognition. In 1916, he wrote the first three parts of his most important work *Eminent Victorians* that revolutionised the art of writing a biography. Strachey was critical of the idealised characters of a biography and in his biographies, he focused on the shortcomings and drawbacks of the otherwise idealised characters. *Eminent Victorians,* ultimately got published in 1918, and was followed by another publication—*Queen Victoria* in 1921.

A glimpse on Lytton Strachey's love life reveals that he had homosexual interests in men. He was in relationships with several men including John Maynard Keynes and Ralph Partridge. Michel

Holroyd, in his biography on Strachey entitled *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* (1971), declares Lytton Strachey's homosexuality and his attraction towards John Maynard Keynes. However, Strachey was also loved and adored by a woman named Dora Carrington who lived with him in Oxfordshire from 1917 until his death. Strachey died of stomach cancer at the age of 51.



LET US KNOW

Bloomsbury Group: It was a group formed during the 20th century, whose members included personalities like Virginia Woolf, John Meynard Keynes, E.M Forster and Lytton Strachey. Their highly influential ideas left an impact in various fields like literature, economics, criticism, and aesthetics as well as shaped modern attitudes towards feminism, sexuality, etc. The group is named after Bloomsbury in London as the group was mostly settled near Bloomsbury.

8.3.2 His Works

Lytton Strachey was not a prolific writer but his works ranges from poetry, reviews to biographies and so on. He started his career as a writer of verse in Cambridge, and later started writing reviews and articles for journals like *The Spectator*. At Cambridge, he worked on a dissertation on Warren Hastings, the controversial British Viceroy in India. Strachey hoped to win a fellowship at Trinity, Cambridge on the basis of the dissertation but it did not happen. Strachey's most prominent work is the *Eminent Victorians*, a collection of biographies on some of the most prominent Victorian personalities—namely Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold and General Gordon. With this book, he introduced a new era in the art of writing biographies. In *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey reacted against the piestic "Life and Letters" of the 19th century. The traditional biography written during the Victorian Age showed the subject of a biography as someone who is ideal and free of

vices. The biographer refrained from speaking any ill about the subject with their imperfections generally glossed over but Strachey reacted against this idea and instead preferred to give a more realistic and human portrait of character by focusing on the subject's vices and follies as well as strength.

It is to be noted here that Strachey's earlier works did not have much to do with the Victorians. His *Landmarks in French literature* had nothing to do with England and of the 125 reviews and essays; he had written before the war very few dealt with the 19th century. However, in one of his reviews on Matthew Arnold for *The New Statesman*, dated 1st August 1914, he expressed his disdain for the Victorians and Matthew Arnold himself. This disdain seemed to have aggravated overtime, and had its fullest expression in the *Eminent Victorians*, which marked a major change in biography writing. Lytton Strachey criticised the work of the Victorians on grounds that they were incoherent, pretentious and lacked detachment, which outweighed its qualities of solidity and force. Strachey's hatred for the First World War transformed his disdain for the Victorians into a much powerful emotion and inspired his desire to strip them of their pretentiousness. Strachey believed that a biographer should have a psychological insight of his character. In the Preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey says that the biographer should have a clear and definite point of view. He laid emphasis on employing "selection", "proportion" and "emphasis" by the biographer in dealing with the facts relating to his subject and in this way to achieve the perspective, which a good portrait must always have. He also held the opinion that a biographer should be critical and evaluative and be able to analyse the truth about his character- his strengths and weaknesses, his goodness and follies, his wisdom and stupidity. A biographer must be ready to judge the complex behaviour of human beings or his subject. Strachey further expresses in the Preface that the biographer should enjoy freedom of mind and spirit. To Strachey, an artist was first of all a free

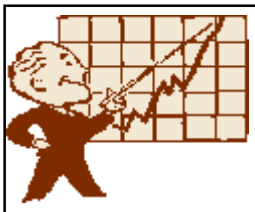
individual, and his individual freedom will be reflected in his work. He believed that life should be ruled by reason and humanity, and not by tyranny and superstition. He also believed in detachment, which can enable a biographer to give a fair account of the subject, free from any kind of prejudice. Such detachment in style is seen in his *Eminent Victorians.*

Lytton Strachey has also left behind a considerable amount of unpublished work. These unpublished pieces are great sources of pleasure to the reader and some of them even have literary merit. Most of them were experimental in nature and were therefore not published during the author's lifetime, while some of them were not intended for publication at all and was written at leisure for the pleasure of his group of friends. These unpublished pieces were essentially "private and esoteric", and reveals a different aspect of Strachey's mind. It gives us an estimate of his character, of his life style and of his circle of friends. The list of his unpublished works includes the essays written at Cambridge for the "Apostles" and other University societies or for his circle of friends in London. There were plays, some of which were acted out before private audiences; political novels; dialogues and verses some of which were erotic and romantic. Correspondence also formed an important part of Strachey's private work. Some of Strachey's private letters to Virginia Woolf and Carrington had been published and it can be seen that he had taken great care and precision in his correspondence with them. Strachey's correspondence with his brother James around the year 1916, deals with issues of war and politics. On the other hand, his shorter pieces like *Will It Come Right in the End, Art and Indecency,* and *He, She and It* deal with issues of morality in art and literature, on censorship, on role of women in society, relation between sexes, on marriage, on population, on birth control and on sexual morality and practices. Other pieces like *The Fruit of the Tree* and *An Arabian Night* deals with homosexual themes.



LET US KNOW

Eminent Victorians was first published on May 9, 1918. Soon it turned out to be a literary success as Strachey's use of witty polemic attracted the younger generation of writers. The Preface written by Strachey himself is regarded as the manifesto for modern biographers as he writes: "Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. They have a value which is independent of any temporal process—which is eternal and must be felt for its own sake"



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what ways does Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* deviate from the form of biography practiced traditionally?

Q 2: What, according to Strachey, should be the qualities of a biographer?

8.4 READING THE TEXT

"Florence Nightingale" from *Eminent Victorians* is a biography on Florence Nightingale who is reverentially considered in history as a great nurse and writer. She is also popularly known as the "Lady with the Lamp" because she used to take rounds in the relief camp at night holding a lamp in her hand. The wounded soldiers of the Crimean War in the camp greatly admired and adored her and looked upon her as an Angel of the Crimea. Lytton Strachey in his biography on Florence Nightingale abandons the usual method of stressing only the favourable and good qualities of the subject and proceeds to make an in-depth and psychological study of Florence Nightingale.

The biography on Florence Nightingale in *Eminent Victorians* is divided into five parts.

Part I probes into the innermost thoughts and feelings of Florence Nightingale and tries to find the answer to the question as to why Florence

Nightingale chose to be a nurse. Strachey tries to prove the point that Florence Nightingale was a born nurse and the snobbish and luxurious environment in which she was born failed to have any impact on her. Strachey points out that Nightingale's decision to be a nurse is not as simple as people consider it to be. He writes, "Miss Nightingale was not as facile as fancy painted her."

In his account, Strachey gives a brief introduction of Nightingale's family background and says that she belonged to a well-to-do family in Derbyshire. Nightingale could have easily led a happy life by getting married to an eligible gentleman, but why is it that Nightingale chose to be a nurse? To this question, Strachey logically tries to point out a few answers.

Firstly, he considers that Florence Nightingale always had a nurturing and caring attitude. He probes into her childhood and analyses how even as a child she had intense love for things animate and inanimate. As a child, while her sisters tore dolls to pieces, Nightingale, on the other hand, used to sew the broken parts together; she would nurse wounded dogs and indulged in the dream of turning their country house into a hospital. She would even imagine heaven as a place full of suffering people whom she would be serving there. According to Strachey, it was this feeling that Nightingale was born with that inspired her to take up nursing as her profession.

Secondly, Strachey believes that Nightingale had not taken up nursing simply because it was her fancy to nurse people, but it was a logical decision on her part, taken after much thought. Strachey brings it to the notice of the readers that the time in which Nightingale was born; much emphasis was given to society, respect and marriage. Nursing was considered a low and dirty profession, done mostly by the lower class of people. Nightingale's family was also firmly against her idea of being a nurse and it was no easy task for her to convince them all regarding her choice. Strachey mentions how, therefore, Nightingale had considered every option available during those times and only after she had been able to logically discard them all did she go out to join nursing. She considered things like travelling, reading, education, making friends, partying, socialising and even marriage, but she rejected them all considering it all to be snobbish and artificial. She rejected

marriage calling it an "added burden and a mockery." She found something substantial and valuable only in becoming a nurse, and so she became a nurse leaving everything else behind.

Strachey thus allows a new vein of thought, which sees Nightingale's activities as a nurse not only as admirable in itself, but also admirable for her decision of becoming a nurse. Nightingale's individualism and application of reason in an age of snobbery and hypocrisy makes her stand out as an admirable personality.

In **Part II** of "Florence Nightingale" in *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey tries to justify that Nightingale could become a wonderful nurse because of the perfect timing between the need for a nurse like her and her ability to come to a decision to become a nurse. It was just at the time when she could make up her mind regarding her career that the Crimean War broke out and the pitiful conditions of the hospitals at Scutari demanded attention. These conditions perfectly justified Nightingale's decision to be a nurse. Strachey writes: "there was a perfect co-ordination of events…if the war had fallen a few years earlier, she would have lacked the knowledge, perhaps even the power, for such a work; a few years later and she would, undoubt, have been fixed in the routine of some absorbing task and moreover, she would have been growing old." Thus, Strachey dismisses the common belief that Nightingale became a nurse merely because of the will of Providence and nor could she become a great nurse in spite of her decision except in the context of the war.

In **Part III** of the biography, Strachey dismisses the common myth that Nightingale's contribution is limited to her services at Scutari as the popular; "lady with the lamp" image lends her. Rather, he analyses and finds out deeper reasons for people to admire Nightingale although he claims that Nightingale's reputation would not have been affected even if she had not "worked" at all after her days at Scutari. But, Florence Nightingale continued to work even in poor health after coming back from Scutari and embarked on a project which she considered was a more serious and important affair – to bring some sanitary reform in the state of the hospitals. But, Nightingale, disadvantaged as she was as a woman, did not have the

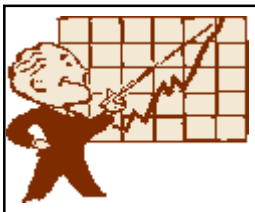
necessary power, position and the authority to bring about the changes. She faced opposition from those in power like Lord Panmure, the Secretary of State for war and Dr. Andrew Smith, the head of the Army Medical Department. The whole system was corrupt and there were people who were, "stubborn supporters of the out-of-date, the worshippers and the victims of War Office routine." However, Nightingale, facing all odds, became successful in bringing about significant reforms.

Now the question is: Can all the achievements be attributed to Nightingale alone? Strachey doubts this and points out how Nightingale got the support of a host of people – admirers, friends, well-wishers and disciples who had of course a lot to do with her earlier services at Scutari. Among the important people who supported Nightingale was Sidney Herbert, Arthur Clough and of course her aunt without whom it would have been impossible for Nightingale to even think of working. However, Strachey admires Nightingale for other things – her outspokenness, her ability to inspire others, almost forcing them to work which brings out yet another dimension of Nightingale's character, i.e the "demon" in her. Nightingale shared a life-long alliance with Sidney Herbert and imposed heavy duties and responsibilities on his shoulder, which he had to undertake until his health failed when he could take no more. Similarly, she demanded the undivided attention of many other people. For example, her aunt devoted almost her whole life at her service sacrificing her own family life. But, Strachey is also careful enough to point out that Nightingale did not even spare herself and wore herself at work and thereby brought some necessary changes in the state of hospitals. The Army Medical School was established, a sub-commission was re-organised in order to maintain the medical statistics of the Army and "finally the Army Medical Department itself was completely re-organised; an administrative code was drawn up; and the great and novel principle was established that it was as much a part and duty of the authorities to look after the soldier's health as to look after his sickness." She also got into writing and her *Notes on Hospitals* (1859) is considered an important book, which had revolutionised the theory of hospital construction and management. Thus, Nightingale is not only admirable for her services at Scutari but who for the impact she left in the field of health and hospitality.

In **Part IV** of "Florence Nightingale" in *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey discusses the final days of Florence Nightingale and throws some light on the nature of her character. Florence Nightingale was 91 when she had accomplished almost all her ambitions. By that time, she had successfully brought reforms and improved the conditions of hospitals and workhouses. She had set up a training school for nurses and extended her work to places like India. However, even at her old age and despite ill health, her enthusiasm and love for work did not die out and it was after much hesitation that she agreed to settle down in a small house in South Street. Strachey also points out her dominating and egoistic nature even at her old age. Subsequently, Nightingale had a great fan following but she never took advantage of people's love and admiration for her. In fact, even when her body failed her she plunged into work in terms of philosophy if not in terms of action. She still thought that she had a lot to do for mankind in general. Nightingale believed in the existence of God but her conception of God was not orthodox. She wanted to cure the society of some of the evils of religion, as she believed that not even Christianity was free from "defects and errors". She believed in work more than in some divine grace. She was also highly critical of society where women were discriminated and were bound up with marriage and family life. She had written a great deal in protest of such social systems. Strachey establishes Nightingale as a rational human being who believed what she saw. When Nightingale saw in Scutari that fresh air was beneficial to the sick and the wounded, she argued that the bedrooms of the patients should be well ventilated to allow in fresh air. On the other hand, she refused to believe in the existence of 'infection' as she could not see it. Nightingale was firm in her beliefs and refused to bow down under pressure. Strachey, however, is critical of this stubborn character of Nightingale as he thought that too much self-righteousness is not good. He explains this by saying that as opposed to Nightingale's beliefs, exposing patients to fresh air may not be beneficial at all times. However, as Strachey points out, Nightingale was too "positive, realistic and ultra practical and had moods of mysticism and doubt." Even in her old age, she was critical of herself and her works. She was not satisfied with the works of the nurses

and her own. She sought comfort in religious writings and kept in touch with one Mr. Jowett who tried to calm down her rebellious nature.

In **Part V** of the biography, Strachey discusses how Nightingale was gradually transformed into a more kind, humble and cheerful person which added charm to her achievements. Strachey believes it to be the plan of the providence to give Nightingale such a long life so that she actually becomes the most deserving of all the praises and admiration showered on her. At her old age, Nightingale looked back at her achievements with mixed feelings. Sometimes, she was frustrated but at other times, she was happy about her contribution to the changes that had occurred since the Crimean War. She was comforted most by the fact that more and more trained nurses were coming up and that she had played her part in bringing about this change. It was only gradually that she slowly started to regain her belief in God, and understood God's divine plan in using her for His own purposes. This realisation dawned on her with age, and she was no longer her egoistic and proud self. Instead, she learnt how to be more grateful and how to make friendships. Even her taste in writing had changed, and she no longer wrote texts like "Notes on Nursing" but spent time in composing sympathetic texts like Addresses to Probationers. She became more sensitive, senile and soft. In 1907, at the age of eighty-seven when she was offered the Order of Merit, she accepted the insignia of the Order by saying "Too kind - too kind" which shows Florence Nightingale's humility.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How many sections are there in "Life of Florence Nightingale? " What distinguishes this biography from other accounts of Nightingale?

Q 5: What are the good qualities of Florence Nightingale that are mentioned by Strachey?

Q 6: On what grounds does Strachey criticise the "Lady with the lamp?"

Q 7: From your reading of this section, what ideas do you gain of Strachey as a biographer?

8.4.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes that you might find important while reading the life of Florence Nightingale.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Nightingale's Character:

Strachey's iconoclastic manner of writing in "Florence Nightingale" has stressed more the character of Nightingale than her achievements. There was an attempt on the part of Strachey to establish new identities for those personalities who belonged to the professional class and those associated with the world of public service. In the older world, people got power, wealth and position through law, birth, marriage, etc. Strachey tries to establish how personalities like Nightingale gains admiration and respect because of their character – strength, courage, morality, talent, ability, etc. Strachey discusses how Nightingale chose not the life of luxury but the hard life of a nurse and used all her ability and talents in doing something worthwhile for the society. However, Strachey does not turn a blind eye to Nightingale's draw backs. He revealed the flaws and defects of Florence Nightingale. Nightingale who may seem to be a "perfect lady" to a casual observer does not escape the keen eyes of Strachey who perceived the "serenity of high deliberation in the scope of the capricious brow, the sign of power in the dominating curve of the thin nose, and the traces of a harsh and dangerous temper – something peevish, something mocking and yet something precise in the small delicate mouth." Thus, the social position and authority of Nightingale is entwined with the weakness of her character in terms of being too egoistic and obsessed with work, and Strachey has called attention to both her strengths and weaknesses.

Florence Nightingale's Psychology:

Strachey in his effort to bring out the character of his subject embarks on a psychological study of his subject. He stresses the trivial matters in the life of Nightingale, which would throw some

light on their inner anxieties and contradictions. Strachey discusses the insignificant details of Nightingale's life, including her childhood, and shows how even as a child she was different from the rest. As she grew up, she was dissatisfied with the conditions of the hospital and their inadequate facilities. Thus, she took the admirable responsibility in her own hands to reform the system. Her personal and professional relations with political authorities and others show her enthusiasm and dedication towards her work which later only took on a demonic status. She became so stubborn and obsessed about work that she wore herself out. She also used to stress out her colleagues, admirers and other like Sidney Herbert with work. Nightingale became impatient and almost eccentric whenever she felt that she had failed in her work. Thus, Strachey by reflecting on the day-to-day life-style and behaviour of Nightingale establishes the fact that the virtue of Nightingale was also her limitation. Her fall was in her rise. He also thereby establishes a multiple identity for Nightingale who was on the one hand admirable for her work but it was also her love for work that made her a "demon".

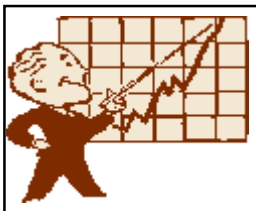
Representation of Women:

Many feminists see Strachey as a champion of strong women. "Florence Nightingale" is an example of Strachey's treatment of women. He is one of those people with "modern" ideas who upheld sexual avant-gardism. Florence Nightingale is projected by Strachey as one of those women who had defied patriarchy, as someone who had been able to triumph personal and professional insecurities. Nightingale's "rebellious nature" is emphasised. Strachey shows how Nightingale consciously avoided marriage. Strachey also shows how Nightingale managed to handle men, even at high social positions. Talking about Nightingale's friendship with Sidney Herbert, Strachey writes:

"The man who acts, decides and achieves; the woman who encourages, applauds–and from a distance–inspires: the combination is common enough; but Miss Nightingale was neither an Aspasia nor an Egeria. In her case, it is almost true to say that

the roles were reversed; the qualities of pliancy and sympathy fell to the man, those of command and initiative to the woman."

However, others believe that although Strachey was an avant-garde writer on women, in her presentation of women he attacked rather than applauded the assumption of power by women. His biographies on women are believed to tell us less about the subject than about his sexual politics. This can also stand out as a valid argument as he stresses the drawbacks of Florence Nightingale in his effort to celebrate her strength at the same time. It reveals Strachey's gender insecurities. Strachey's interpretation of Nightingale hints that all women must destroy in order to create and Nightingale destroyed herself and even others for the sake of her work. Strachey says that her love and desire for work could "scarcely be distinguished from mania."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways does Strachey discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Florence Nightingale?

Q 9: What ideas do you derive of the representation of women in Strachey's biography on Florence Nightingale?

8.4.2 Strachey's Prose Style

Lytton Strachey's prose style was very different from the typical Victorian style of writing. His style departed from the writing styles of Victorian biographers who conceived it their duty to admit nothing about the follies of the subject, which would keep the readers from admiring him. Strachey was aware of the demands of the time, its urge to seek the truth and therefore embarked on a writing style which treated the subject as a human being with the usual share of vice and follies rather than putting them on the pedestal and treating them as idols.

In his *Eminent Victorians* Strachey treated several idolised figures celebrated during the reign of Victoria. Among them was

Florence Nightingale who created the career of trained nursing for women. The Victorians popularly celebrated Nightingale as the "Lady with the Lamp". Her startling achievements in nursing the wounded soldiers during the Crimean War were justly admired, winning for her the tag of the Angel of the Crimea. However, Strachey looked "upon Nightingale with clear eyes, following her career with an amused smile at the popular misconceptions." Strachey laid stress on having a psychological insight into his subject. In the case of Florence Nightingale, also Strachey has tried to read Nightingale's inner thoughts and feelings. Although he was also careful to record the achievements of Nightingale, his main intention was to bring out Nightingale's character and temperament. Strachey declares in his preface to *Eminent Victorians* that the biographer should have a clear and definite point of view. He believed that biographers should employ, "selection", "proportion" and "emphasis" of materials, which would enable them to achieve a certain perspective on the subject. In the case of Florence Nightingale's biography, Strachey, instead of stressing so heavily on her achievements, chose to select the details of some of the apparently trivial matters in Nightingale's life that would bring before the reader her personality. Necessarily, he employed a style, which was based on selection, rather than completeness; which was satirical rather than laudatory and his biography revealed Nightingale as an arrogant, over-ambitious and egoistic lady who could only be humbled with time. His interest was in personality rather than accomplishment. According to Strachey, a biographer must be critical and evaluative and be ready to confront the true character of the subject considering both the virtues and vices of the subject. Strachey also points out in his Preface that the biographer should enjoy freedom of mind and spirit and thereby should be detached from the subject that alone would enable him to provide a fair and just account of the subject, free from any kind of prejudice. Keeping this in mind Strachey has used a style that suits his purpose of giving a comprehensive analysis of the character of his subject.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How does Lytton Strachey 'select' while describing the life of Florence Nightingale?

8.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Eminent Victorians published in May 1918, as the English art historian and author Quentin Bell observed, is Bloomsbury's most characteristic wartime offering. Strachey drew the attention of the public even during the turmoil of the war to minute matters. *Eminent Victorians,* as Bell argues, was a success mainly because it helped the people to discover that the idols they considered "household Gods" were humans after all. *Eminent Victorians* was a reaction to the writing styles of people such as Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill who gave excessive respect and reverence to heroic personages. People were, however, divided in their opinions regarding the novel approach of Strachey towards Biography writing. Some thought of him to be a 'deliverer' who had at last managed to administer a final blow to the Victorian Age and released the people from the burden of Victorian legacy of hero-worship. It was a relief for the war-weary public who were tired of the age of ideals and therefore they appreciated Strachey's pioneering work. Mourois writes: "[Strachey's book] came to them as deliverance, all the more relished as its irony was veiled with an appearance of candour, and the mischievous grouped into an exquisite form."

On the other hand, Strachey's writings also made him infamous and as Cyril Connolly says, Strachey earned the name, 'great anarch' and "was instantly regarded as a wicked, irreverent, and satirical rogue who dared to make fun in a cold, witty and heartless manner of heroism in general and of the Victorian kinds of it in particular." Critics like F.A Simpson criticised Strachey on grounds that he was morally flawed. He was considered 'vulgar' and as Noel Annan remarked, "historians never mentioned Strachey's name without a curse." But, Strachey is defended because of the fact that he was not critical simply for the sake of being critical but was so where it was due and can "see the mean, the ridiculous side even, of those characters with

whom he is most in sympathy of." As Michael Holroyd puts it, Strachey liberated 20th century biography from respectability. In the case of the biography on Florence Nightingale, Strachey offers a critique of Nightingale's ambition and he calls Nightingale to be demon-driven. However, he also admires Nightingale and he shows towards the end of the biography that Nightingale was given the Order of Merit only because she actually deserved it. Perhaps, this is the tendency to both celebrate and criticise great personalities like Nightingale that makes *Eminent Victorians* a biography in the modern sense. *Eminent Victorians* had been translated into Polish, Romanian, Spanish, Italian and Japanese even while Strachey was alive.



8.6 LET US SUM UP

After reading the unit, you must have understood how to discuss critically the contribution Lytton Strachey made to the world of biographical writings through his collection like *Eminent Victorians*. You may have also realised that the text of Strachey has to be historically contextualised. The Victorian age held a strange kind of fascination for Strachey. He said, "To the cold and youthful observer there is a strange fascination about the Age of Victoria. It has the odd attractiveness of something which is at once very near and very far off; it is like one of those queer fishes that one sees behind glass at an aquarium, before whose grotesque proportions and sombre menacing agilities one hardly knows where to laugh or to shudder; when once it has caught one's eye, one cannot tear oneself away." It was Strachey's endeavour to fight against the vices of the age that has always been hidden in the mask of virtue with the help of his wit. Strachey's interest in personality and "psychological problems" also exposes his modernity. Perhaps, this is what you find so interesting while reading the "Life of Florence Nightingale". The biography of the "Lady with the Lamp", rather than being a glorified account, turns out to be a systematic analysis and critique of Nightingale's life and character. The critical and alleviatory style in which Strachey has written the biography, simply adds more impetus to the art of writing a modern biography with all its characteristics. You will do well by

reading the other character portrayals by Lytton Strachey namely—Cardinal Manning, Dr. Arnold, and General Gordon for getting a better idea of the genre called biography, as reshaped by Strachey.



8.7 FURTHER READING

1) Annan,Noel. (1990). *Our Age: Portrait of a Generation*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

2) Holroyd, Michael. (1994). *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

3) Rawlinson, Zsuzsa. (2006). *The Sphinx of Bloomsbury: The Literary Essays and Biographies of Lytton Strachey.* Hungary: Akademia Kiado.

4) Simpson, F.A. (1943). "Max Beerbohm on Lytton Strachey" in *Cambridge Review*.

5) Strachey, Lytton. (1948). *Eminent Victorians*. Penguin Books.

6) Taddeo, Julie Anne. (2002). *Lytton Strachey and the Search for Modern Sexual Identity.* New York: Harrington Park Press.



8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Lytton Strachey in this book avoided presenting an idealised view of a person… …this went against the traditional biography in which the biographer refrained from speaking ill of the subject… …instead he introduced a more realistic and human portrait of the character by exposing his/her vices and follies.

Ans to Q 2: In the Preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey says that the biographer should have a clear and definite point of view… … a biographer should be critical and evaluative… … a biographer must be ready to judge the complex behaviour of human beings… …most importantly, a biographer is an individual whose freedom should get reflected in his work… …detachment from the subject should be maintained with great caution.

Ans to Q 3: "Lives of the Saints" or Hagiographies… …16th century biographies like Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More* (1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7)… … 17th century biographies like Francis Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621) Walton's *Lives* (1640-78) and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives*(1669-1693)… …Samuel Johnson's18th century *Lives of the Poets* that stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history… …19th century, biographical writings like Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863) showing a potential influence on the structure of fiction… …finally, the modern idea of 'critical' biography as established by Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

Ans to Q 4: There are five parts… …unlike in other accounts, Strachey in this biography proceeds to make an indepth and psychological study of Florence Nightingale and expose certain habits of her character.

Ans to Q 5: Florence Nightingale had a nurturing and caring attitude… …she would even imagine heaven as a place full of suffering people whom she would be serving there… …she became a wonderful nurse because of the perfect timing between the need for a nurse and her ability as a nurse… …her outspokenness and the ability to inspire others.

Ans to Q 6: She was a lady who demanded attention of many other people… …she sacrificed her own family life for her profession… …she had a dominating and egoist nature even at her old age... …she was a stubborn character and emphasised too much self-righteousness.

Ans to Q 7: He gave rise to a modern kind of biography… …reshaped biographical literature with elements of criticism… …liberated 20th century biography from respectability… …destroyed illusions… …taught how 'memory' and character can be genuinely reconstructed… … Strachey presented an iconoclastic manner of writing.

Ans to Q 8: Strachey in his biography has laid more stress on the character of Nightingale than on her achievements… …he found that Nightingale gains admiration and respect because of her strength, courage,

morality, talent, ability, etc… …but Strachey has also revealed the flaws and defects in her character… …sometimes she was too egoistic and obsessed with work.

Ans to Q 9: Many feminists uphold Strachey as a champion of sexual avant-gardism… … Florence Nightingale is portrayed as a woman who defied patriarchy… …but Strachey is also criticised by many as they believe that while representing the women he attacked rather than applauded the assumption of power by women.

Ans to Q 10: He believed that biographers should employ, "selection"… … he 'selected' the details of some of the apparently trivial matters in Nightingale's life that would bring before the reader her personality… …according to Strachey, a biographer must be critical and evaluative and be ready to confront the true character of the subject considering both the virtues and vices of the subject… …hence selection is necessary.



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Lytton Strachey as a biographer? What are the peculiarities of his style as a biographer?

Q 2: How does Strachey draw out the character of Florence Nightingale in his *Eminent Victorians*?

Q 3: Discuss with reference to the life of Florence Nightingale, the contribution of Lytton Strachey in the field of biographical writings.

Q 4: Do you think that Strachey's analysis of the life of Florence Nightingale is a balanced one? Give examples from the text in support of your answer.

Q 5: What seems to be the major themes discussed by Lytton Strachey in his "Life of Florence Nightingale?"

Q 6: "It is the tendency to both celebrate and criticise great personalities like Nightingale that makes *Eminent Victorians* a biography in the modern sense." Elaborate.

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UNIT 9: RUSSELL'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (CHAPTERS: I & II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Bertrand Russell: The Autobiographer

9.4 Reading Russell's *Autobiography*

- 9.4.1 Reading Chapter I: "Childhood"
- 9.4.2 Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence"
- 9.4.3 Russell's Prose Style
- 9.4.4 Critical Reception

9.5 Let us Sum up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.8 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- locate the significance of Bertrand Russell as a celebrated intellectual and writer of the 20th century
- discuss Russell's contribution to the genre of autobiography
- discuss the literary significance of Russell's autobiography
- analyse Russell's reception as a writer, although he is equally famous as an analytic philosopher.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to Bertrand Russell's famous *Autobiography*—an excellent example of a modern-day autobiography in which the author is found discussing his life history without concealing anything. Bertrand Arthur William Russell, popularly known as Bertrand Russell, is often hailed as one of the best-known English logicians and

philosophers of the twentieth century. Internationally famous for his socio-political campaigns supporting both pacifism and nuclear disarmament, Russell was one who had much to say on war and peace, sexuality and morality, education and human happiness. He was much popular as a votary of peace in a world that experienced the devastating impact of two world wars and as a humanist to the core and received in 1950s the coveted Nobel Prize for literature. The contexts of the two chapters of the *Autobiography,* that are prescribed for you, can be derived from Russell's interest in recollecting the history of his family and, most importantly, in attempting at rediscovering and relocating the past which has been lost. Thus, this unit intends to introduce you to the characteristics of a modern-day autobiography and also to help you identify the importance of Russell not only as an important writer and philosopher of the twentieth century, but also as the sane and rational voice that would profess restraint, balance and sagacity in our troubled times.

9.3 BERTRAND RUSSELL: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHER

In this section, we will discuss Bertrand Russell's life and works in some detail. I am sure, after you finish reading this section, you will be able to recognise Russell as one of the most prominent authors of modern times.

Born on May 18, 1872, at Monmouthshire, England, Russell was the second son of Viscount Amberley and Katherine. After the premature death of his parents, his grandmother, who had been a liberal-minded Puritan with strict moral attitudes, brought up Russell. Subsequently, his private education and lack of company at an early stage indirectly shaped his intense inner self full of idealistic feelings and metaphysical longings directed towards the acquisition of knowledge. From an early age, he began to develop doubts regarding religion, which, in a way, influenced his upbringing as a philosopher in later years. What Russell disliked most was perhaps the human pretension to reach at ultimate knowledge. So, one of his primary aims, as reflected in his philosophical writings, was to enquire about how much we can know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness.

Russell entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1890 and soon proved his intellectual capacities by becoming a member of the society known as "The Apostles". Inspired by his associations with the members of the society with whom he shared lively discussions, Russell abandoned Mathematics for Philosophy and won a fellowship at Trinity for his thesis entitled *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry.* Therefore, 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 criticised some of the inherent Marxist dogmas. From 1895 onwards, 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.

You should note that after finishing the book *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry,* Russell abandoned metaphysical idealism being influenced by G. E. Moore, a fellow from the "Apostles" and again shifted to Mathematics. However, other influences on his thought at this time also came from a group of German mathematicians namely Karl Weierstrauss, Georg Cantor and Richard Dedekind, who had established mathematics with logical and rigorous foundations, an idea described by Russell as "the greatest triumph of which our age has to boast." Inspired by the works 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 started at length in his famous *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 came to exert a profound influence on the entire tradition of the English-speaking Analytic Philosophy.



LET US KNOW

Analytic Philosophy: It is a term for a branch of philosophy that came to dominate English-speaking countries in the 20th century. In general, it refers to a broad philosophical tradition often characterised by an emphasis on clarity, argument and a reliance on the natural sciences. Bertrand Russell in his *A History of Western Philosophy* reflects on Analytic Philosophy like this:

"Modern analytical empiricism differs from that of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume by its incorporation of mathematics and its development of a powerful logical technique. It is thus able, about certain problems, to achieve definite answers, which have the quality of science rather than of philosophy. It has the advantage, as compared with the philosophies of the system-builders, of being able to tackle its problems one at a time, instead of having to invent at one stroke a block theory of the whole universe. Its methods, in this respect, resemble those of science. I have no doubt that, in so far as philosophical knowledge is possible, it is by such methods that it must be sought; I have also no doubt that, by these methods, many ancient problems are completely soluble."

The publication of *Principia Mathematica* marked by a profound change as Russell's private life became more and more painful. In 1911, he fell passionately in love with Lady Ottoline Morrel for which Alys, his first wife, rejected him. Partly under the influence of this new wife, Russell lost interest in technical philosophy. Through his *Problems of Philosophy* (1911), he discovered the ability to write on difficult subjects for common readers. However, what influenced the change in the later writings of Russell resulted from his intimacy with Ludwig Wittgenstein, a brilliant young Austrian who arrived at Cambridge to study logic with Russell, in 1911.During World War I, Russell began to speak for political rights, and campaigned for peace against conscription of the British Government. Found guilty, he was twice taken to court. In 1916, Russell was even dismissed from his lectureship at Trinity College for his anti-war campaigns. Later on, he was called back but

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 move to socialism, which he espoused in a number of books like *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916), *Roads to Freedom* (1918), and *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (1923).

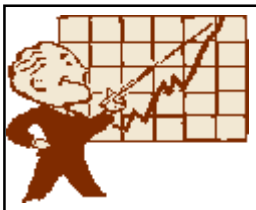
In 1921, Russell married his second wife, Dora Black, a young graduate of Girton College, Cambridge. During the interwar years, Russell and Dora became famous as the leaders of a progressive socialist movement that was anticlerical, defiant of conventional sexual morality, and dedicated to educational reform. In this period, Russell published mostly journalistic books like *On Education* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), and *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) which were sold in large numbers. This revived Russell's reputation 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 1932, Russell left Dora for Patricia ("Peter") Spence, a young Oxford undergraduate. Then he returned to academic philosophy and gained a teaching post at the University of Chicago. From 1938 to 1944, he taught in the University of Chicago and in the University of California, but was prevented from taking a post at the City College of New York because of 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. It was the publication of his *History of Western Philosophy* in 1945 that proved to be a bestseller and for many years, it remained 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.

Most interestingly, in 1952, at the age of eighty, Russell once again married his fourth wife, Edith Finch, and finally, it is heard, Russell 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. Russell died in Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales, in 1970, more as an antiwar campaigner than as a philosopher. However, it is for his great contributions to philosophy that he will be remembered and honoured by the future generations.

You should acknowledge that in Bertrand Russell we see one of the most widely varied and influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. During his life, which covered almost three generations, Russell could manage to write more than 40 books and about 2000 articles 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. During his lifetime, Russell married four times, became involved in innumerable public controversies, and was honoured and hated almost equally.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the German Mathematician who influenced Russell's ideas.

Q 2: What is 'Logicism'? What remains at the core of Russell's idea of 'Logicism'?

9.4 READING RUSSELL'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHY (CHAPTER I & II)*

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* was published in three volumes just preceding his death in 1970. In the first two chapters "Childhood" and "Adolescence" that are prescribed for you, Russell is seen recollecting his growth from childhood and the various influences on his character in the formative years of his life during adolescence. A reading of these two chapters may obviously raise 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. I hope, you

find this reading interesting enough to critically examine the form of autobiography through Russell's book. In the "Prologue" to *Autobiography*, "What I have Lived For", Russell has put forward the basic idea of writing his autobiography like this: "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." The following subsections will give you sufficient ideas about what Russell had intended while uttering these words.

9.4.1 Chapter I: "Childhood"

This is the first chapter of the book. It celebrates the importance of a moment of origin in one's life. However, Russell also ponders over the problems the autobiographer faces while finding this beginning, re-experiencing and re-presenting something, which is almost inaccessible. One can of course choose some early memories, some early experiences, but such a procedure becomes arbitrary and the writer's decision to write a personal account ends up with fictionality. However, what distinguishes this particular autobiography is the flow of information related to Russell's childhood days. While reading this chapter, you will immediately feel the sense of a fictional beginning although you should not forget that it is a part of a large autobiography.

This chapter begins with some reminiscence of his early days in Pembroke Lodge: *"My first vivid recollection is my arrival at Pembroke Lodge in February, 1876.*" However, Russell cannot remember clearly *the actual arrival at the house.* This signifies what he himself said about the difficulty while starting to write an autobiography. After his arrival at Pembroke Lodge, Russell remembers, 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.*"* You should note that the description of his arrival at Pembroke Lodge is just a recollection but the opening lines do have certain fictional elements so as to arouse the interest of the readers from the very outset.

Russell then goes on to describe his family members. Russell's parents died when he was still a child. Subsequently, he discovered his mother mostly from her diaries and letters and concluded that she was "religious, lively, witty, serious, original, and fearless", while; his father has been portrayed as "philosophical, studious, unworldly, morose, and priggish." However, both of them were known for their reformist notions for which they had to face many hurdles. For example, his father lost his seat in Parliament because of his advocacy of birth control. He further writes that his mother used to address meetings in favour of votes for women. Perhaps, the reformist zeal found in Russell was a part of the direct inheritance from his parents.

In his description of his parents and family, Russell has to rely on the received versions of history. But, 'authenticity' is maintained by Russell by his constant verification of what he says in this manner: "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 meticulously describing 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.

After that, the chapter 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. He describes the rich natural heritage of Pembroke Lodge and its surroundings by exploring 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." Thus, the past life of Russell comes alive through the trees, summerhouses, hedges and so on in the garden and through his ideas about himself that was being formulated in the process. The garden helped him to fantasise about the persons lost and accessible only in terms of memory. Being an introvert, Russell found an alternative world of nature independent of outside pressures.

The rest of this chapter deals with the influences of the important persons on Russell's life, the chief amongst them being his grandmother. Russell says that she had been the most important person to him throughout his childhood and 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. However, she despised 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. 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" and who stimulated his "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 victimised by the grandmother's Puritanical beliefs and to some extent, she resembled the grandmother in terms of strictness and sentimental behaviour. Thus, you will notice that the Pembroke Lodge and its inhabitants had a deep impact on the formative mind of Russell. The conversations of the grownups, which he heard, and the discussions which largely centred on politics and war stimulated his mind at a very young age.



LET US KNOW

Victorian Dilemma

In the later Victorian age, 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 based on methods, 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 affected and stimulated thoughts of the later Victorian world.

From an early age, his brother was of a dominating nature. In addition, Russell's parents had to face trouble because of him. However, Russell's portrait of his brother contains no sense of sibling rivalry. 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 of his with those people in various contexts.

Russell was 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 because 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?" In one case, his grandmother did not allow him to read a story by Maria Edgeworth, namely, *The False Key*. However, 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 other writers.

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."* When adolescence approached, loneliness became oppressive. 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. 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, as represented in this chapter, was a good comingling of both happiness and loneliness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How does Russell discuss the three passions of his life?

Q 7: What impact did Russell's grandmother and Uncle Rollo exert on him?

Q 8: How is Pembroke Lodge described in this chapter? What educative role did it play for young Russell?

Q 9: What ideas do you have of the term Victorian Dilemma?

9.4.2 Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence"

This chapter is remarkable for Russell's frankness and openness. It also deals with the changing interests of Russell due to his mental and physical growth. 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 his emotional and intellectual life, 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, as he says:

"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 changeover: "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, endeavouring to concentrate, I would be continuously destructed by erection, and I fell in the practice of masturbating, in which, however, I always remain moderate."

However, 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 housemaids, 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. However, complication regarding religious belief arose because his grandfather was an Anglican, while his grandmother 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 like Christianity. 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.

In his own opinion of himself, Russell was an introvert; socially, he was very shy, childlike and awkward, good-natured but he 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. However, that 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 myself, 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 had already turned into an omnivorous reader. This was also a time when Russell began to develop an altruistic feeling. Referring to contemporary politics, he believed: "happiness of mankind should be the aim of all action, and I discover to my surprise that there were those who thought otherwise." Belief in happiness, Russell found, was the main theme of Utilitarianism.

From this chapter, you should notice, Russell was developing as a leading intellectual of his time. In his later life at Cambridge, he got ample chance to carry on his intellectual activities. In the "Prologue" Russell writes: *"Love and Knowledge, so far as they are possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth; echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot and I too suffer."* This tells us many things about the human being within Bertrand Russell. Those who know Russell mostly as a logician and philosopher are sure to get a better glimpse of Russell the writer from the two chapters of this *Autobiography*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: What were the major changes Russell perceived in himself during the adolescent period?

Q 11: What, according to Russell, contributed to his sense of loneliness?

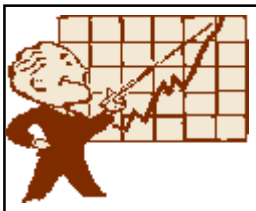
Q 12: How did Russell's adolescence experiences help in his intellectual developments in later times?

9.4.3 Russell's Prose Style

According to Russell, style cannot be accepted unless it is an intimate and almost an involuntary expression of the personality of the writer. Proper organisation of materials, use of anecdotes, and humorous use of language are some of the qualities of Russell as a prose writer. Russell possesses the ability to engage the attention of the readers, when they are engrossed in the narrative, with the help of a vivid and straightforward manner. Famous for his use of simple and short sentences, Russell's anecdotes add to a more 'informal' style and a sense of immediacy help him reconstruct the lives of his parents who died just after his birth. However, as you are already informed, 'authenticity' is presented by their verification by written documents like letters written to and by his parents. This generates believability in the representation and telling of the narrator. Russell's clarity of thought and catholicity of taste facilitates the smoothness of the narrative.

This autobiography 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. Russell's use of humour is also visible in what the narrator says about D. A. Spalding. He says: *"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."* As the form of 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.* 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.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: What is the single most quality that signifies Russell's *Autobiography*?

9.4.4 Critical Reception

Russell is often recognised as one of the founders of Analytic Philosophy. As Grayling in his discussion of the life and works of Russell discusses: "So perverse is his influence both on the matter and style of twentieth century English speaking philosophy that he is practically its wallpaper. Philosophers use techniques and ideas developed from his work without feeling the need…to mention his name, which is influence indeed. In this way, he is a far more significant contributor to philosophy than his pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein. Philosophy learned some valuable lessons from Wittgenstein, but from Russell it acquired an entire framework, constituting what is now called 'analytical philosophy'." Perhaps, no one can get a better perception on Russell than from what Grayling says.

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 provided necessary philosophical inputs to the radicals and liberals in the United States and in Western Europe. His views regarding politics and religion, as reflected in the *Autobiography*, are still valid and contextual in the contemporary world, which also encourages us to read the book as more than just an autobiography. 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 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 20th century thought, and as reading of his *Autobiography* validates this fact again and again.



9.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Russell's Autobiography is an important example of Life Writing in the context of the 20th century. However, besides knowing about the life and works of the philosopher Russell, his *Autobiography* also throws light on many important aspects as well as intellectual deliberations of the time in which Russell write this book. You have realised that Russell sought for 'true 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. However, 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. You have also seen that this autobiography starts from his early recollection of childhood, the place they lived in, the people they met; to his growth during adolescence and the experiences he underwent. As you have finished reading this unit, you must also have realised the fact that Russell's *Autobiography* is an important example of modern day autobiography in all its different aspects.



9.6 FURTHER READING

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7) Moorhead, Caroline. (1992). *Bertrand Russell: A Life*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson.
8) Russell, Bertrand. (1996). *Autobiography.* London: Routledge.
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9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Karl Weierstrauss, Georg Cantor and Richard Dedekind were the three important German mathematicians… …they established mathematics with logical and rigorous foundations… …Russell described it as "the greatest triumph of which our age has to boast."

Ans to Q 2: The idea is that mathematics is nothing but logic… …the idea of "Logicism" appeared in his famous *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903)… … analysis rather than synthesis is the surest method of philosophy… …that all the grand beliefs of the previous philosophers were misconceived… …this led to his becoming an analytic philosopher.

Ans to Q 3: No… …because every few can recall clear details of early life and so they have to depend on other people's impression on them…

…human beings often remember selectively… …they tend to repress disagreeable facts… …so, truth gets distorted for the sake of convenience or harmony.

Ans to Q 4: Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580)… …Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life*(1656)… … John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1656)… …Richard Baxters's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). … …Colly Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colly Cibber* (1740)… …Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1766)… …Rousseau's *Confessions* (1764-70)… …David Hume's *My Own Life* (1777)… …Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs* (1796) and so on.

Ans to Q 5: Autobiography became a part of narrative where the life in question forms the primary subject matter… …self-analysis of the narrator presented the dichotomy between the social and psychological self.

Ans to Q 6: In the Prologue Russell puts forward the three passions… …the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind… …these three passions have created in him both anguish and despair.

Ans to Q 7: For Russell she had been the most important person throughout childhood… …She represented the Victorian sentiment and oriented him towards the Victorian way of life… …her love of the country, public spirit, and children shaped Russell's own thought processes.

Ans to Q 8: Pembroke Lodge was a place where Russell's grandparents lived… …it had rich natural heritage… …the garden played a very large part in shaping the imagination of Russell… …the garden helped him to fantasise and memorise about the persons lost… …it provided Russell with an alternative world.

Ans to Q 9: It signifies the dilemma between scientific spirit and religious orthodoxy that affected thoughts of the later Victorian world… …also means a search for a scientific basis in everything and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution profoundly influenced man's attitude towards nature and religion.

Ans to Q 10: He began to feel an acute sense of loneliness… …began to enjoy using slang… …pretended to have no feelings… …His main interests were divided between sex, religion, and mathematics.

Ans to Q 11: 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.

Ans to Q 12: From this chapter you know that love and knowledge, the cries of pain, children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people being considered a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain that Russell experienced during his formative period helped Russell to develop intellectually.

Ans to Q 13: The form of autobiography entails numerous personal details… …But the success of this autobiography largely depends on how well and how long the autobiographer can keep the readers engrossed in the personal details… …Russell successfully manages to do this in this autobiography.



9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How do the Victorian and the Modern elements get articulated in Russell's autobiography?

Q 2: To what extent does Russell do justice to his recollections of people and events? Support your answer with textual references.

Q 3: How would you take Russell's adolescent sexual experiences in the context of his society? (60 words)

Q 4: What according to you are the characteristics of a modern autobiography? Discuss in detail the literary significance of Russell's autobiography.

Q 5: Make a critical summary of the two chapters of Russell's Autobiography, "Childhood" and "Adolescence".

Q 6: The Chapter "Childhood" refers to many important aspects and influences that shaped Russell's life and philosophy in later life. Discuss.

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UNIT 10: DIARY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF: (SELECT ENTRIES)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 What is Life Writing?

10.4 Virginia Woolf : The Diarist

10.5 Reading the Diary Entries

10.6 Important Themes

10.7 Style and Language

10.8 Let us Sum up

10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.10 Further Reading

10.11 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain what constitutes life writing
- describe the ways life writing differs from other literary forms such as fiction, poetry, drama
- discuss the significance of diary writing and women's experience in the same
- assess Virginia Woolf's significance as an important diarist.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block. In this unit, we shall discuss a few diary entries written by the modern novelist Virginia Woolf. As you know, a diary is a record (originally in handwritten format) with discrete entries arranged by date reporting on what had happened over the course of a day or other period. A personal diary may include a person's experiences, and/or thoughts or feelings, including comments on current events outside the writer's direct experience. Someone who keeps a diary is known as a diarist.

That way, Virginia Woolf is also a diarist because she regularly kept diaries from which we get to learn a lot about her writerly self. However, as a diary may provide information for a memoir, autobiography or biography, now a days, it is brought under the preview of Life Writing. The chosen diary entries of Virginia Woolf make certain interesting comments on the birth pangs of many of her fictional works, which help the readers of literature to have a better grasp of the oeuvres of Virgina Woolf.

10.3 WHAT IS LIFE WRITING?

Life writing appears to be a wide area of literary studies, which is rather complex owing to its broad horizon that encompasses several other sub forms such as biography, autobiography, memoir and diary writing. In modern literary practices, life writing occupies a significant place as critics and readers attempt to discern a relationship between fiction and auto/ biography while reading authors and it is within such a context that diary writing perhaps emerges as a relevant field of study – an area that would perhaps add to the reader's understanding of the author and his/her creative output. Although there have been several instances of life writing since the past, an interest towards critical study of the form may be said to have developed towards the end of the twentieth century while readers and critics engaged with "different ways of telling a life-story—memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical ûction" (Hermione Lee, 10) – noticing in each the art of telling a life.

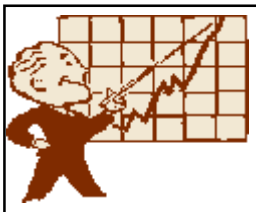
When one refers to life writing, one would generally imply a form of narrating which borders on non-fiction; an account of one's life told in a manner that would take the reader very close to facts and truths that pertain to life. Therefore, life writing which would perhaps include diary, journal entries and memoirs apart from biography and autobiography as well reveals the subject's life. However, there may be some differences in all these forms of life writing. For instance, although there is a tendency to use diary and journal entries synonymously both differ from each other in that while diary entries are strictly personal record of one's daily life and personal experiences, it appears to have a specificity in terms of the events recorded;

the journal entries may offer an inclusive general impression of the subject's life along with the external situational information. Journal entries are chronological account of events and therefore they are perhaps less personal in their revelation of the subject's life and times. Memoirs, as the name suggests, appear as the author's memory of the past – there is a 'now' and a 'then' in a memoir. It allows the narrator to select from a range of events and dwell upon a singular momentous scene from lived experience which perhaps would go on to provide a coherent unifying wholeness to the memories recorded. Besides, these basic forms of life writing, we have also mentioned about biography and autobiography, which fall into the category of life writing. Biography is a record of one's life provided by another person–in a biography the author is not the subject of narration; it is from the author's perspective that the person whom the author describes is made known to the reader's. On the other hand, an autobiography as the name suggests is the author's record of personal history oral or written, which of a general nature. These forms of life writing differ from the diary generically owing to the fact that diaries offer specific personal details of events, experiences and moments in life unlike in biography and autobiography where the specific personal aspect may be found absent.

After having understood the differences between the various forms of life writing let us now make an attempt to understand how life writing emerges as a different genre in relation to other forms of fictional writing such as drama, novel, short stories and so on. For instance, drama is primarily dialogic in nature. It employs various conventions, practices, social and cultural elements to deliver its message. The 'authorial self-reflexivity' present in almost all forms of life writing is conspicuous by its absence in dramatic compositions. A novel on the other hand, is commonly understood as a long narrative, primarily fictional in nature comprising several characters that are generally imaginary; the narrative world of a novel presents a chain of fictional events to from a sequence so as to present a coherent whole; therefore, in a novel, the readers come across what is termed plot, time sequence and other narratological devices that contribute significantly towards a sense of meaning. Such elements are absent in a diary as the

author here deals with specific details of lived life and the meaning that is generated around that experience which appears significant predominantly for the author.

Women were seen especially in the habit of keeping diaries as a means of reading the self, as a record of their private lives and because diary writing was a part of traditional practice within the family. However as Joanne Tidwell would have us believe that it was rather interesting to note that women writers often went back to their past entries, while engaging in a constant 're-reading, reviewing' and re-evaluation of their lives and their selves. It is noteworthy that the diary allows the author a scope for being confessional–such a mode appears to aid the engendering of the sense of self-identity; through a blending of extremely private experience of the individual female self with that of the larger perspective of women's experience within the lived life of the community diary entries perhaps provide "the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience" (in Tidwell, 38).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is known as Life Writing? What are the different kinds of Life Writing?

Q 2: How is diary writing different from other forms of fictional writings?

Q 3: What was significant about women writers and their act of diary writing?

10.4 VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE DIARIST

Virginia Woolf was one of the most prominent figures among the English modernist writers. She was born in the year 1882 at Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, London to Sir Leslie Stephen and Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen. Both her parents belonged to respectable families and Virginia's upbringing in the Stephen household provided her with all the necessary ambience for moulding of a young mind. Sir Leslie Stephen was a renowned historian, biographer and critic who enjoyed the company of famous people

such as Henry James and George Lowell among others. Similarly, Virginia's mother who was a nurse by profession was born in British India and belonged to a family known for its beautiful women. Julia served as a model to the pre Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones besides authoring a book on her profession. The enriched company and acquaintances of the Stephen household and the well-stocked library created for Virginia a world that nurtured her creativity and imagination from a very young stage.

The young and vivacious Virginia began writing quite young bringing out a family newspaper titled the "Hyde Park News Gate" in which she published the frivolous stories of her family. In 1895, Virginia's mother expired leading her to the first nervous breakdown, which was followed by, yet another mental setback when her half sister Stella expired two years later. Virginia Woolf was in King's College, London for a duration of four years where studied Classical literature and German. During this period, she came into contact with several feminist thinkers who left deep impression in her mind. In 1904 when Leslie Stephen died, Virginia suffered deeply; there were multiple phases in her life during which she experienced extreme bouts of depression while she kept retreating to her act of writing. After her father's death, the Woolf children including Vanessa, Adrian and Virginia sold off their Hyde Park House and shifted to a house in Bloomsbury area in London. It is here that Virginia along with other luminaries such as J.M. Keynes, E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and Roger Fry among others founded the "Bloomsbury Group" in the first half of the 20th century. The Group became famous for its views on literature, art, politics, philosophy and its radical views on sexuality. It was in the year 1900 that Virginia Woolf entered into the realm of professional writing as she began contributing regularly to *The Times Literary Supplement*. However, it was only in 1915 that first novel *The Voyage Out* was published. Virginia married Leonard Woolf in 1912 and set up the Hogarth Press in 1917, which published their works, apart from works on psychoanalysis and works of the other Bloomsbury members.

Woolf is aptly recognised as one of the foremost practitioners of modernist technique in her writing. She perhaps remains unparalleled in

her contribution towards modernism in English literature with her experimentation in language, symbolism and imagery, her engagement with what we now know as the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique, a term introduced by William James in the field of psychology. With novels such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) *Orlando* (1928) among others, Woolf established herself firmly in the world of modern fiction with her innovative use of language, experimental style and creation of a fictional world that reverberated with intense lyrical impressions achieved through highly concentrated images. Her writing also brings in the memories of her childhood summers, which use to spend in the Talland House, the Stephen summer retreat at St Ives, a beach town in southernmost part of England. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are pioneering texts in feminist writing. *Between the Acts* was published posthumously in 1941 is Woolf's last work before her death on 28th March that year.

Besides, her fiction and non-fiction works, she is equally renowned for her diary writing an activity that she began as a part of the family's tradition. The Stephen family members kept their diaries and as it was in vogue to write diaries during Virginia's time, she too began writing the dairy and continued doing so until 1941 since 1915 – a long period of 27 years which she recorded in her *Diary;* it forms the core of Virginia's life perhaps giving the readers a glimpse of her life through the events of her life, the people whom she met "and particularly of what she thought about those people , about herself, about life and about the books she was writing or hoped to write." (Preface, vii) Apparently, of course, Virginia Woolf's *Diary* may be considered to have added more to the legacy of diary writing. But, a deeper study would reveal that the intent of Woolf's *Diary* was not only to record the mundane experiences of life and times of contemporary period but more importantly, they provided Woolf with an opportunity to engage with herself as a writer and an artist. It was her tool for communicating "with herself about the books she was writing or about the future books which she intended to write."(Preface, viii) It is as if the *Diary* substitutes a human presence while she engages in monologue regarding the complexities

encountered by her in evolving a plot, the form of a proposed work, the art of characterisation – almost all aspects she encounters while conceiving or revising a novel or any other creative work.

The prescribed pieces are extracts from *A Writer's Diary*, which comprises Woolf's diary entries spread in 26 volumes of diary writing; carefully compiled by Leonard Woolf. This diary reveals according to Leonard Woolf, "practically everything which referred to her own writing" (viii). Going through the pages of the *Diary*, one would be perhaps able to assess why Woolf was writing it. The diary provided Woolf with the much-needed rehearsing ground for her craft of writing. Through it, she actually attempted to polish and refine her 'art of writing' to reach a certain stage of perfection. The diary entries also provided Woolf with an opportunity to examine the 'raw materials' of her writing. She used the diary to deliberate extensively upon the sources, scenes and people–all these elements exercised some kind of influence on her mind in one way or the other, a record of which one finds in the diary. The diary also allowed Virginia Woolf to maintain a record of the authors and books that she had been reading. It is significant to observe that Woolf's *Diary* may be seen as revealing her "intentions, objects and methods as a writer [while] giving an unusual psychological picture of artistic production from within" (ix). Besides its very obvious autobiographical import, the *Diary* provided Woolf with an opportunity to create a confidant who would be beside her in her days to come–while she kept revisiting the past through rereading of her entries, the Diary allowed her to travel to the past, contemplate on the present and venture into the future through the mind's eye.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the names of the members of the famous "Bloomsbury Group".

Q 5: How did the Diaries help Virginia Woolf to emerge as a writer?

10.5 READING THE DIARY ENTRIES

1920, Monday, January 26th:

This entry begins with a declaration of Woolf's happiness at having arrived at a new form of a novel, which she had been contemplating for quite some time in the past. Her entry reveals that on that day, a day after her 38th birthday, she seems happier as she has in her mind distinct idea of how she would approach the subject which she believes would be different that time; she is not sure of what would emerge but is confident that the core is brightly visible to her – "the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist" (22) – a condition of mind which she believes would allow her ample scope for gaiety as she would be able to move about her work at her own sweet will. Such association with the work that she had been doing reveals the intensity of her passion as a writer; her intense engagement with the act of writing which was a serious business for her and the fact that for her the primary fact of being able to write and write fruitfully meant going very near to a state of ecstasy. Another significant aspect of this entry is the fact that Woolf considers an author's egotistical self as detrimental to the act of writing as it interferes between the text, the authorial self and the reading public as well – the presence of which narrows and restricts the writings of Joyce and Richardson according to her. She perhaps believed that such egotistical writing reveals self imposed responsibility on the part of the writer not only for him/herself as the producers but also for the reader as well who is the receiver leaving very limited scope for the reader and the text to indulge in the act of evolution and enjoyment through the text.

1920, Wednesday, February 4th:

The entry of 4th February reiterates the idea that for Woolf the diary was more than a medium of recording the daily activities. It provided her an opportunity to revisit her past in a rereading of the works that had been already accomplished. Here, she reads *The Voyage Out* (1915) with an approach that is akin to a critic, and she is uneasy to find that the novel according to her contains certain patches 'simple and severe'; she is

uncertain of what the text was attempting to say and counting it as a failure on the part of the author she reveals that 'the failures are ghastly enough to make my cheeks burn' (23). However, there are moments of happiness in the reading as she comes across the strong young woman – this liking for the young woman with positive trait reflects Woolf's own belief towards feminist issues, which she carefully nurtured in her fiction. She also acknowledges that this work of hers had been more popular than *Night and Day* published in 1919 after *The Voyage Out.*

1920, Monday, October 25th:

The entries of 1920 provide the readers with an idea of Woolf's existential anguish as she records 'life is so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss…' (27). Woolf's pained self awareness, akin to 'feeling of impotence' as she sits and writes her diary in her house at Richmond. The *Diary* appears to have a therapeutic use for her as she relates that she feels relieved for having been able to express her innermost thoughts in it; she acknowledges that her melancholic state of mind gives way to subtle happiness as she takes up writing. She was engaged with different kinds of writing that comprised fiction, non-fiction, writing reviews for *The Times Literary Supplement* and her review on *The Early Life and Education of John Evelyn* was due to be published on 28th October which she refers to in this entry – 'Evelyn is due'(28). Yet, she expresses her discomfiture at the fact that she was 'failing to write well, spending too much on food, growing old [thinking] too much of whys and wherefores; too much of [herself] (28). But then she finally undergoes sensation of being able to keep herself preoccupied with her writing but the overwhelming mental state of depression looms large over her which makes her feel that her present life is 'like a strip of pavement over an abyss'

1921, Tuesday, April 12th:

It is a known fact that Virginia Woolf had a history of mental illness and displayed symptoms of severe depression, melancholy. This particular entry opens with her attempt at self-diagnosis, an acceptance of the disease that had been afflicting her throughout her life. She realises that she has been out of the severe symptoms that had almost worn her out and at

present, she had "come to the philosophic semi-depressed, indifferent" (32) stage and had taken to spending her time idly shopping. She is relieved of her semi-depressed, indifference when L. (her husband Leonard Woolf) lets her know that one of the Bloomsbury members the eminent Victorian critic Lytton Strachey and her very dear friend found *String Quartet* 'marvellous'. Woolf's seriousness regarding her craft is revealed in the manner in which she reacts to her Strachey's critical acclaim of her work; this entry also mentions Roger, (Fry) one of her close associates in the modernist philosophy and her almost frenzied apprehension of being rejected as an author which now seems needless after the positive critical response she received for her work.

1924, Monday, May 26th:

This entry refers to Virginia's life spent at London, which for her is enchanting as it provides her with ample material for her craft. After her recovery from another bout of depression and anxiety in the month of August the previous year, she feels that her illness is "reeling off" her mind, which is free now and is overwhelmingly inhabited by characters and plot and ideas for new works. The momentum of creative imagination that permeates Woolf's mind is reflected in her choice of words. Using words such as 'enchanting', 'quickly', 'freely' Woolf may be seen as symbolically describing creativity that was at its best slowly and successfully giving shape to works, which she had been planning to do as the dark and gloomy veil of illness was lifted up from her mind.

1924, Sunday, September 7th:

Woolf is unhappy as she is unable to write and whatever little she has written seems not up to the mark according to her. There is an unfolding of the closure of *Mrs Dalloway*; Clarissa, Peter, Richard, Sally- all characters from the novel seems to come alive in front of her eyes each proposing an 'end' to the novel. She appears ecstatic after having arrived at the probable close to her novel. Her world is full of internal drama carried out against an external reality in which she is expected to perform the role of a good and caring hostess to her niece and nephews. This entry may be seen as one of Woolf's expression of the overwhelming creative ideas that flood her

mind, which was perhaps at one of most fertile moments away from the bouts of depression and melancholy. She has scenes, events, and people all alive in her imagination waiting to be put down to words. Although she finds the directness of thought in children adorable, she realises that the her vision trespasses the physical into the realm of the inner life of the mind of people which in turn allows the reader an opportunity to get closer to the person as well the process of 'becoming' of an author.

1924, Saturday, November 1st:

Woolf appears to be in hurry to complete two books – *Mrs Dalloway* which was ready for revision and a collection of essays, which she intended to accomplish before her novel. In this entry, the reader would have a glimpse of the inner life of her mind in her engagement with lesbian thought, of relationships with women which for her was full of 'pleasure – the relationship so secret and private compared with relations with men'. She proposes to write about it 'truthfully' – an attitude reflective of her modernist feminist ideology, frank openness about female sexuality – a theme that was seldom explored objectively. Virginia's stand was proof enough of her critical engagement with the socio-cultural 'givens' of the life and times that was constructed along the ethos of patriarchal ideology. One significant assertion that Woolf makes in this entry is of the fact that the act of diary writing has been very beneficial to her – apart from aiding her to refine her craft it has allowed her a sense of freedom; it has allowed her to challenge, confront, question and negotiate not only aspects of her craft but also the larger framework of society and culture and the patriarchal values embedded in it; in a contemplative tone she thus acknowledges "the diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures." (67)

1925, Monday, April 20th:

Once again, Woolf's experiences an overwhelming presence of creative ideas in her mind – as much as six stories float in the inner recesses of her mind, which were trying, rush out of her pen. Although external problems persist, Woolf actually describes the act of writing itself, which is "now like the sweep of a brush" (73) to be filled up later. Her ambitiousness regarding her position as a novelist to reckon with, her aspiration to become

a novelist of renown and her accompanying doubts – such oppositional emotions reveal the complex workings of a creative genius who was obsessed with the notion of 'inner life' of the mind in relation to the passage of time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why did Woolf think that an author's egotistical self is detrimental to the act of writing?

Q 7: In what ways, did the diary prove beneficial for Woolf as she writes in her entry dated October 25, 1920?

Q 8: What did Virginia Woolf write specifically in the diary entry dated 12th April 1921?

Q 9: What ideas would you draw about the writerly self of Woolf from the entry dated September 7th 1924?

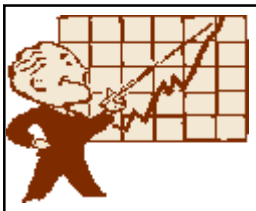
10.6 IMPORTANT THEMES

In its most general sense, Woolf's *Diary* may be seen thematically engaging with her act of writing; in most of the entries Woolf deals with her idea regarding the development of plot of her fiction, while dwelling analytically on the aesthetic aspects. She also appears to involve in a critical self-appraisal of her craft as she revisits some of her works now and then engaging in an introspective rereading.

Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as her effort to narrate a self that would engage in the task of examining and critiquing the notion of situatedness within the public and the private domain of lived experience. In writing her *Diary*, Woolf does not however unravel all of herself; there is a certain reticence that critics discern in her method. However, the truth-value of what she reveals is remarkable for its accuracy; the art of self-expression achieved through a unique sense of control lends an unparalleled beauty to the *Diary.* Woolf's persistent effort at finding out a way to narrate the 'inner life of the mind'–a narrative technique commonly known as 'stream-of-consciousness', its link with subjective reality and the act of writing –

was perhaps one of the most significant ideas that her *Diary* deals with. After reading her *Diary*, readers would perhaps be able to observe that Woolf's idea of self is reminiscent of the 'postmodern idea of self and feminist idea of splintered self' (in Tidwell, 44)

Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as exemplifying her modernist aesthetics in that she is seen to adopt quite similar formal method as those found in her fiction while writing her diary entries as well. For Woolf then, the act of keeping a diary was almost akin to that of other forms of writings that she practised. A cursory glance would perhaps make us believe that Woolf's *Diary* is found lacking in a coherent structural pattern; however, a deeper analysis would reveal that Woolf being a modernist artist, engaged with what is called 'the passage of time', one of the primary concerns of all practitioners of modernism, and her *Diary* would then emerge as a unified whole with the overarching organising principle of time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How should one considerer the diaries of Virginia Woolf?

10.7 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

As far as form is concerned, one of the most important aspects of diary writing is its intense proximity to authentic and truthful narration perhaps owing to its non-fictional nature. Therefore, a diary would perhaps be somewhat removed from embellishment of narrative structures achieved through the extensive use of figurative language. Unlike the conventional literary text, where aesthetic value is of primary significance for readers and critics alike, a diary appears important owing to its truth-value, authenticity of feeling that it engages with while communicating directly the author's lived experience. When we examine Woolf's diary we would come across a creative engagement with the notion of individual self and subjective truth, which provides the reader an opportunity to confront her aesthetic concerns as an author. Critics have been of the

opinion that the diary form offered Woolf with the most comfortable mode of writing providing her with an enhanced scope for sustained practise of her craft as it emerges as a fine instance of feminine modernist writing (Simons, 1990). Woolf's diary is valuable not only in terms of its contribution to the growth and development of the form but also because it exemplifies 'modernist artistic practice' (Simons in Tidwell, 39) in its best. Woolf's diary appears unmediated by the literary and aesthetic parameters that one applies while writing in the fictional form. It documents in a most chaste and unabridged manner Woolf's contemplations on life and art. It is significant to remember that Woolf narrates life and the lived moments in the manner in which it came to her; the reader shall not be able to discern a beginning, a middle or a climax – it coherence of the text emerges only after one is able to discern the underlying pattern and contextualise it against the external world within which she was situated. As Woolf was well versed with the diaries written by the likes of Samuel Pepys, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Vita-Sackville West, Katherine Mansfield besides those of her immediate family members, she imbibed the art almost religiously following the tradition of diary writing exemplified in the diary of Samuel Pepys, for instance which is considered one of the exemplary diaries written in English

In the Introduction to *Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations* Anna Snaith observes – [Woolf's] use of a public/private dichotomy draws attention to her own complicating of the terms. 'Public' and 'private' are terms, which recur throughout Woolf's writing, words with which she experimented, testing out their meanings, together and alone, in numerous contexts. The conceptual dichotomy between public and private spaces, spheres, languages, voices, issues and discourses was one which captured her attention, to be reworked and questioned, rather than accepted wholesale in any particular form.(1)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: How does the reading of Woolf's diary entries help the readers to understand a writer like Virginia Woolf?



10.8 LET US SUM UP

Woolf's *Diary* is an important text not only in the oeuvre of life writing but also as a gem in modernist writing practice. Through her attempt at keeping a *Diary*, Woolf in fact provides herself with an opportunity not only to polish her craft but also to engage in a discourse in relation to her views on writing, self and the idea of time. The Diary may be considered a reflection of the 'inner mind' of the artist herself at work.



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Life writing implies a form of narrating which borders on non-fiction… …it is an account of one's life told in a manner that would take the reader very close to facts and truths that pertain to life… …Life writing includes diary, journal entries, memoirs, biography and autobiography.

Ans to Q 2: Other forms of life writing differ from the diary generically owing to the fact that diaries offer specific personal details of events, experiences and moments in life unlike in biography and autobiography where the specific personal aspect may be found absent.

Ans to Q 3: women writers often go back to their past entries, while engaging in a constant re-reading, reviewing and re-evaluation of their lives and selves… …diary allows the author a scope for being confessional… …through a blending of extremely private experience of the individual female self with that of the larger perspective of women's experience within the lived life of the community, diary entries perhaps provide "the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience.

Ans to Q 4: J.M. Keynes, E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and Roger Fry… …The Group became famous for its views on literature, art, politics, philosophy and its radical views on sexuality.

Ans to Q 5: Woolf's *Diary* was not only to record the mundane experiences of life and times of contemporary period but more importantly, they provided Woolf with an opportunity to engage with herself as a writer and an artist. It was her tool for communicating "with herself about the books she was writing or about the future books which she intended to write."

Ans to Q 6: Because, it interferes between the text, the authorial self and the reading public… …she believed that such egotistical writing reveals self imposed responsibility on the part of the writer not only for him/ herself as the producers, but also for the reader who is the receiver leaving very limited scope for the reader and the text to indulge in the act of evolution and enjoyment through the text.

Ans to Q 7: The *Diary* appears to have a therapeutic use for her as she relates that she feels relieved for having been able to express her innermost thoughts in it; she acknowledges that her melancholic state of mind gives way to subtle happiness as she takes up writing.

Ans to Q 8: This particular entry opens with her attempt at self-diagnosis, an acceptance of the disease that had been afflicting her throughout her life. She realises that she has been out of the severe symptoms that had almost worn her out and at present, she had "come to the philosophic semi-depressed, indifferent."

Ans to Q 9: This entry may be seen as one of Woolf's expression of the overwhelming creative ideas that flood her mind, which was perhaps at one of most fertile moments away from the bouts of depression and melancholy. She has scenes, events, and people all alive in her imagination waiting to be put down to words.

Ans to Q 10: Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as her effort to narrate a self that would engage in the task of examining and critiquing the notion of her 'situatedness' within the public and the private domain of lived experience… … her effort at finding out a way to narrate the 'inner life of the mind'–a narrative technique commonly known as 'stream-of-consciousness' is perhaps one of the most significant ideas that her *Diary* deals with.

Ans to Q 11: When we examine Woolf's diary we would come across a creative engagement with the notion of individual self and subjective truth, which provides the reader an opportunity to confront her aesthetic concerns as an author.



10.10 FURTHER READING

1) Denning, Sharon Kay. (1984). *An Organic Shape: Growth and Continuity in the Diary of Virginia Woolf* (PhD Thesis, Texas Tech University.
2) Lee, Hermione. (1999). *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Vintage.
3) Hubbard, Robert.(2001). "Drama and Life Writing." *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms; Volume 1 A-K*. Ed Margarette Jolly. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers,. 285-287
4) Snaith, Anna. *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
5) Tidwell, Joanne. *Politics and Aesthetics in the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Routledge, 2008

Web Resources:

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/dec/30/writers-diary-virginia-woolf-review

http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk/a-writers-diary.html



10.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the different forms of life writing? How does diary writing conform to the genre of life writing?

Q 2: Discuss some of the important themes of Virginia Woolf's diary entries.

Q 3: Examine the narrative style of the prescribed entries of Virginia Woolf's *Diary*.

Q 4: Woolf's *Diary* is not only a record of being but also of becoming. Discuss Woolf's art of writing in the light of the given statement.

Q 5: Do you think Woolf's Diary provided her with the scope to practise the modernist tendencies upheld by Bloomsbury Group? Justify with instances.

Q 6: How does the Woolf's *Diary* provide an access to her aesthetic concerns as a feminist writer? Discuss.

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UNIT 11: KEATS' LETTERS: TO BENJAMIN BAILEY, 22 NOVEMBER, 1817 TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS, 3 MAY 1818

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 John Keats: The Letter Writer

11.3.1 His Life

11.3.2 His Works

11.4 Reading the Texts

11.4.1 Major Themes

11.4.2 Keats' Prose Style

11.5 Critical Reception

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss letter writing as an important component of nonfictional prose
- assess the importance Keats retains as a letter writer
- analyse Keats' prose style as exemplified in his letters
- discover Keats as a literary critic through your reading of the letters prescribed
- analyse why the letters of Keats are considered important documents for understanding the Romantic sensibility.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit intends to discuss the form of letter writing through two letters written by John Keats – one to Benjamin Bailey, and the other to John Hamilton Reynolds. John Keats needs no introduction to readers because of

his central position among the literary luminaries like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley who contributed immensely to the Romantic Movement in English. Although John Keats had a short and eventful life and had correspondence with a wide circle of friends and relations, he borrowed much from a host of literary influences (Leigh Hunt, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Spenser, Dante, Milton, Boccaccio and Shakespeare among others) in his progress towards remarkable poetic achievements as a Romantic poet. The letters, which he wrote to his friends and family members, bear historical and literary significance, because it is through these letters that he formulated his ideas about the nature of Romantic art and imagination and aesthetic sensibilities. Besides, the letters has a strong bearing on his poetry. To understand and appreciate Keats' poetry in the right spirit, therefore, entails a serious perusal of his letters provide us with the contexts in which these verses were produced. However, you should also note that unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley, Keats does not have a body of critical writing which would throw light on his poetic imagination. Keats' letters, therefore, gain tremendous significance because it is in these letters that we can see the poet's mind at work. Subsequently, letters have emerged as an important genre in non-fictional prose, although in recent times, this form has been marginalised. This unit will provide you with the resources that you will need for a contextual and critical reading of John Keats and his letters. From spring, 1817, there is a rich record of Keats' prolific and impressive skills as a letter writer. However, his letters were mostly published in between 1848 and 1878.

11.3 JOHN KEATS: THE LETTER WRITER

This section introduces you to the poet John Keats as a letter writer and brings up some of the main facts related to his life and works. The kind of man that John Keats was and the poetic life he had lived, are encased in the letters he had written during his lifetime. These letters provide the main source from which one can justly appreciate his poetry and personality. The letters



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

also form the mass of critical documents, which show the development of Keats' literary and philosophical ideas. He was writing freely and frankly to his kinsfolk and his friends, to his brothers and sister, to Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Haydon, Severn and others; and without restraint to the girl he passionately loved, Fanny Brawne. However, Keats evaded many aspects of his personal life in his letters, like his opinion about his parents. Due credit for gathering and arranging the information of Keats' correspondence goes to Harry Buxton and to Sir Sidney Colvin. Keats mixed in his letters the everyday events of his own life with a lively interest in those of his correspondents. He displayed wit and high spirits and expressed his profound thoughts on love, poetry and the nature of man. It is to be noted that through these letters Keats also revealed his personality, opinions and his mental states and so on. However, the poetic mode of thought is frequently the ruling mode in the prose fabric of these letters; and, thus, they become witness to the poetic imagination of this Romantic poet.



LET US KNOW

Form of the Personal Letter:

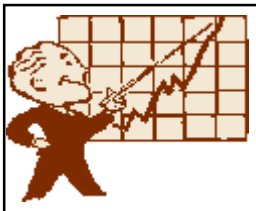
Personal letters are not usually regarded as a primary branch of literature like poetry, novel or drama. However, they can throw significant light on the theme, context and style of mainstream literary genre of a particular writer. An informal personal letter is remarkable for its authenticity and flexibility. Keats' close bonding with his family and friends had an impact on the quantity and kind of letters that he wrote. Many of his close friends were men of letters who influenced his ideas about poetry. Keats often used letters to clarify his views on poetry.

11.3.1 His Life

John Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795. His father, the manager of a livery stable in Moorfields, died when Keats was eight years old. His mother remarried, but she too died early of tuberculosis when Keats was fourteen. Keats remained deeply

attached to his brothers, George and Tom, and to his sister Fanny. He received his education at Clarke's school, Enfield, where he began a translation of the *Aeneid*. In 1810, Keats was apprenticed to an apothecary-surgeon. His first efforts at writing poetry appear to date from 1814. In 1815, Keats cancelled his fifth year of apprenticeship and became a student at Guy's Hospital. In 1816, Keats was licensed to practice as an apothecary, but in spite of precarious finances, Keats abandoned the profession for poetry. The literary world, however, did not receive Keats' poems with enough appreciation and enthusiasm. In the autumn came the first of Lockhart's harsh attacks on Keats' poems in *Blackwood's*, where he labelled Keats and his associates as members of the so-called Cockney school. These attacks disturbed Keats deeply. For the time being Keats concealed his pain and wrote to his brother, George, that in spite of the reviews he thinks that he will be among the English poets after his death. However, many of his friends believed that the wound was deep. Meanwhile, Keats' brother Tom was very ill, and during that time, Keats spent much time with him. When Tom died, Keats moved into his friend Brown's house in Hampstead, now known as Keats House. By September 1818, Keats met Fanny Brawne, with whom he fell deeply in love. During the course of the summer and autumn of 1818, his sore throats had become more persistent and more frequent. During this year, Keats was beset with financial problems, both his own and those of his friends and relations. However, Keats was intensely preoccupied with his love, Fanny, with whom he got engaged. Among other poets and writers, Wordsworth and Hazlitt had rendered much influence on Keats' thought and practice. With his friend, Charles Armitage Brown, Keats made a tour to the Lakes, spent some time in Scotland and briefly visited Northern Ireland. Although Keats had frequently travelled in southern England, he had never before seen such scenery of rugged grandeur. It moved him greatly, which found creative expression in *Hyperion*. In the winter of 1819, Keats became increasingly ill with

tuberculosis. Shelley invited Keats to Italy and after sorting out his copyrights and financial affairs, Keats set off for Italy with his friend Severn, in the vain hope for physical improvement, in September 1820. They did not visit Shelley but settled in Rome, where Keats died a few months later on 23rd February 1821 at the Piazza di Spagna. He was buried three days later in the city's English Cemetery.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think Keats' sad and troubled life is responsible for the melancholy we witness in his poetry?

Q 2: Would you consider his letters important literary documents?

Q 3: How do the Letters written by Keats help the readers to understand the poet and his poetry?

11.3.2 His Works

Keats secured a rightful place in the line of English poets by dint of his works, within the limited time that life allotted him. In 1814, came out of Keats' pen, the "Imitation of Spenser", while "Ode to Apollo" and "Hymn to Apollo" were written in 1815. Keats' first published work is "O Solitude", which was published by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner* in 1816. In the course of a survey of young poets in the same journal, Leigh Hunt included Keats' sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". Keats met Shelley and Haydon began to plan *Endymion*. He wrote, "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill" as a first effort towards that poem. Keats' first volume of poems was published in March 1817. It included sonnets, epistles, and miscellaneous poems. *Endymion* was published in the spring of 1818, and it was dedicated to Chatterton, whom Keats greatly admired. Immediately after that appeared "Isabella, or The Pot of Basil". Bitter attacks on *Endymion* came from Lockhart in *Blackwood's* and from the *Quarterly Review*.

The period from September 1818 to September 1819, is known as the "Great year" of Keats' intense poetic creativity, as it is in this period that he began the mythological epic *Hyperion*. Consecutively, he wrote "The Eve of St Agnes", "The Eve of St Mark", the "Ode to Psyche", "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", "Ode to a Nightingale", and probably at about the same time the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode on Melancholy", "Ode on Indolence", "Lamia Part I", "Otho the Great" (in collaboration with Brown); the second version of *Hyperion*, called *The Fall of Hyperion*, "To Autumn", and "Lamia Part II". Keats' "The Cap and Bells" remained unfinished owning to his illness. Keats' second volume of poems, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems*, was published in July 1820. The volume was generally well received, gaining much praise in some quarters, and the criticism from Blackwood was now much muted; but the sales remained low and tardy. The popularity of Keats' poems grew steadily. Tennyson considered him the greatest poet of the 19th century, while Matthew Arnold commended Keats' intellectual and spiritual passion for beauty. Keats' letters, published in 1848 and 1878, received as much admiration as his poetry. Many of his letters also pose as valuable comments on his poetry. The very personal letters reveal the emotional aspect of Keats' personality.



LET US KNOW

The Romantic Movement: Perhaps you remember that the Romantic Movement was influenced by the French Revolution. Subjectivity, natural beauty, freedom, equality, brotherhood and imagination became the hallmarks of the movement. The 'self' was at the centre of the Romantic poetics. Lyricism was another important aspect of Romanticism. The Romantics were attracted by the elemental simplicity of life. Romanticism favoured mysticism and idealism; and Kant, Hegel and Rousseau became the most influential philosophers of the age. The beginning of Romanticism

is dated alternatively in 1789 (with the French Revolution) or 1798 (with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*).

Lyrical Ballads: It is a collection of poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge. The book was a landmark of English Romanticism, and marked the beginning of a new age.

The French Revolution: The French Revolution (1789-1799) was a period of radical social and political upheaval in French and European history. The ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity became the symbol of the Revolution.

11.4 READING THE TEXTS

This section will guide you to read the prescribed letters by John Keats in the right direction. However, it is insisted that you get hold of a standard text of Keats' Letters, and start reading to gain a better idea of the issues and themes raised in the text.

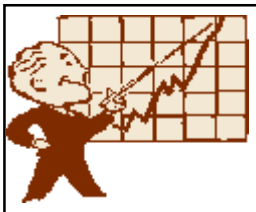
Keats' letters to Benjamin Bailey (dated 22nd November 1817) and to John Hamilton Reynolds (dated 3rd May 1818) exemplify the fact that Keats was constantly preoccupied with the thought of poetic enterprise. The letters depict Keats' largeness of heart, his unselfish and tolerant nature. The letter to Benjamin Bailey is Keats' first significant prose meditation upon the themes which set the note for many of his most important letters and much of his poetry. Here, he discusses his insights on imagination and its relation to truth and beauty, his notions regarding poetic identity, Negative Capability etc. Keats' association of poetic imagination with beauty and truth, as discussed in the letter to Benjamin Bailey, is strikingly evident in his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', where he writes:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty', - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The letter to John Hamilton Reynolds was apparently prompted by a reading of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. The letter brings to the fore Keats' forte as a critic. Here, he compares Wordsworth and Milton. Keats develops an extended simile of human life as a 'mansion of many apartments'. The first is the 'infant or thoughtless chamber', after which we encounter 'the

chamber of maiden thought' whose 'pleasant wonders' gradually convince us that 'the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and oppression'. The comparison of Milton's thoughts with those of Wordsworth does not testify to Wordsworth's mental superiority, but it testifies to what Keats labels as the 'grand march of intellect' evident in human history. This line of thought becomes the principal theme of the epic poem *Hyperion*, which Keats began in September 1818.

In the following sub sections, we shall discuss the important aspects and issues taken up by Keats in the selected letters.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the important points that Keats raises in his letter to Benjamin Bailey?

Q 5: Refer to the main issues Keats takes up in his letter to Hamilton Reynolds.

11.4.1 Major Themes

Keats' letters abound in the poet's aesthetic ideas and contain much poetical value. He formulated a number of critical and poetical ideas in the letters to his friends and relations. The major themes in the letters discussed in this unit are the relationship between beauty and truth; the power of imagination; the idea of poetic identity; the poetic genius of Wordsworth, etc. These themes are discussed in detail below:

Imagination, Beauty and Truth:

The belief that beauty is truth, as expressed in Keats' Letters, has now become the testament of Romantic aesthetics. Keats laid great emphasis on the authenticity of imagination. He asserted that he is certain of nothing but the holiness of heart's affection and the truth of imagination. Keats, in his letter to Benjamin Bailey, wrote: *"What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth". Keats illustrates the creative aspect of imagination, with the aid of Adam's dream: "he awoke and found it truth"*. 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. Keats asserts "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" Keats' idea of imagination is integrated with the idea of beauty and truth.

'Imagination' is a major concept in Romantic aesthetics. It occupied the thoughts of almost all the Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. Their views cannot be categorised under one unified formula; however, the term 'Romantic Imagination' is commonly used to describe the diverse views of these poets. However, 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 was with the Romantics that the term gained importance and popularity. According to Shelley, man is pre-eminently an imaginative being. Wordsworth and Coleridge had their differences regarding the relationship between 'fancy' and 'imagination'. According to Wordsworth, fancy was as creative as imagination; while Coleridge held that imagination was superior to fancy. The basic idea behind Keats' philosophy is the equation of imagination with truth. Keats believed that 'beauty' can be derived through the 'imagination' and this experience can be termed as 'truth'. The process of imagination can create an alternative reality for the poet, which is of the highest order. Keats is also conscious of the fruits of imagination. He talks about the mind which is "imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits – who would exist partly on sensation partly on thought – to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind". Keats commends his friend, Benjamin Bailey, for having such a mind.



LET US KNOW

Coleridge explored the idea of imagination at length. Subsequently, his theory remains the most popular theory on imagination until date. Coleridge in Chapter

XIII of *Biographia Literaria* puts forward his concept of imagination as the following:

"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…"

Poetic Identity and Human Relationship:

In his letter to Benjamin Bailey Keats contemplates on the idea of poetic identity, a concept that is later developed in his other letters. Keats also attempts to resolve the tensions between Bailey and Haydon; and he stresses on the importance of understanding human character, and discusses his own standpoint. Keats' letters often show genuine concern for others. Keats, in the letter to Bailey, then goes on to contemplate on the idea of poetic identity. According to Keats, a man of genius does not have a determined character. Keats stresses the flexibility of poetical mind that can accommodate itself to whatever structure it is put into. So, he writes: "Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect – by (but) they have not any individuality, any determined Character." In a letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October 1818), Keats termed Wordsworth's concept of the self as "egoistical sublime". Keats further develops the idea of poetic identity in his letter to George and Tom Keats (21 December 1817). Keats, in this letter, talks about the concept of 'Negative Capability'. He describes 'Negative Capability' as a state in which "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." It is the poet's capability of negating his own personality in order to enter

into a new and aesthetic self, which is constructed by his imagination and art. The concept thus **was used** to characterise the capacity of the greatest writers (like Shakespeare) to pursue a vision of artistic beauty even when it leads them into intellectual confusion and uncertainty, as opposed to a preference for philosophical certainty over artistic beauty. The term has been used by poets and philosophers to describe the ability of the individual to perceive, think, and operate beyond any presupposition of a predetermined capacity of the human being.

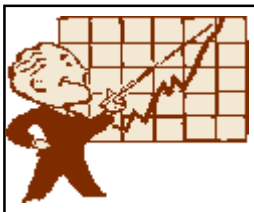
Views on Human Life:

In the letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats meditates upon human life. He formulates a simile of human life as "a mansion of many apartments". The first chamber, i.e., the infant or thoughtless chamber is the period of innocence. The mind is devoid of the complexities of the world. Gradually, one enters into the "chamber of Maiden Thought". The chamber first intoxicates us with the light and the atmosphere. The mind sees "pleasant wonders". However, the mind slowly fathoms the crudeness of things and realises that the "World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression". Sorrow and pain come with the acquisition of knowledge. From the state of innocence, one enters into the state of experience. The chamber of maiden thought becomes gradually darkened, and on all sides of it, many doors are set open, but everything is dark and misty. We feel the burden of mystery. Keats analyses that Wordsworth had come to this point when he wrote the poem "Tintern Abbey"; and Wordsworth's genius explores those dark passages.

Wordsworth and Milton in a critical light:

A reading of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" prompted Keats' letter to John Hamilton Reynolds. It is in this context that Keats starts contemplating on the issues of innocence and experience. Keats' comparison of Milton with Wordsworth reminds us of Arnold's 'Touch Stone' method. Wordsworth's genius is explorative of the dark passages in the human mind. Keats says: "Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton". Keats shows his understanding

of the progress of humanity when he makes the comparison. Keats bestows the credit for Wordsworth's depth of thought on the "general and gregarious advance of intellect" rather than on individual greatness of mind. The context in which Milton was writing makes him intelligible to his readers. For instance, Keats analyses: "who would not rest satisfied with his hinting at good and evil in the *Paradise Lost*, when just free from the inquisition and burning in Smithfield?" Keats, assuming the role of a critic, analyses that Milton did not think into the matters of the human heart as Keats had done. Milton did not try to feel deeply about humanity; and his ideas are facilitated by a change in society rather than by intense feelings. However, Milton's philosophical prowess cannot be doubted. He was as great as Wordsworth was in that. Keats made this comparison to bring forth the fact that "there is really a grand march of intellect". The significance of time and providence is evident here, which subdues the mightiest minds "to the service of the time being, whether it be in human Knowledge or Religion".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Compare Coleridge's idea of imagination with that of Keats, highlighting the significant differences.

Q 7: How is Keats' idea of imagination related to the ideas of beauty and truth?

Q 8: Why does Keats feel that a man of genius does not have a determined character? Analyse.

Q 9: How does Keats use the image of the 'mansion' to analyse the different stages of human life?

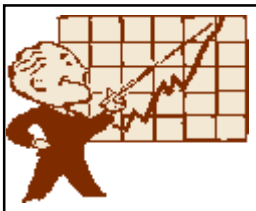
Q 10: Why did Keats think that Milton did not feel deeply about humanity? Analyse.

Q11: Do you think Keats demeaned the worth of Milton in comparing him with Wordsworth? Justify.

Q12: What is meant by the Keatsian concept of Negative Capability?

11.4.2 Keats' Prose Style

The letters of John Keats are informal in character, interspersed with lofty poetical ideas, with concerns regarding friends and comradeship. He also deals with the day-to-day worries about family and finances in an equal note with that of his critical insights. The chief appeal of Keats' letters lies in their informality. The prose style of the letters testifies that the letters were composed hastily, perhaps often under pressure and fatigue. The prose is marked by its spontaneity. Keats had a sensitive mind and he was rather easily excitable. His letters often show a movement from one subject to another without any precaution. There is a thoughtful note in Keats' mode of expression. The words and images used by Keats in his letters are vivid and poetically charged. His frequent consideration of the subject of poetry in his letters sometimes blends poetry and prose into one means of expression. The line of argument is also intense and thoughtful in Keats. It is important to note that the prose style of Keats' letters changes in relation to the recipient. While his letters to his brothers are full of interesting news, anecdotes, occasional bursts of humour and intense theorising, the letters to Benjamin Bailey, for instance, are often pacifying. His letters to Fanny Brawne on the other hand, are often outbursts of anguish of his soul. Keats' correspondences sometimes seem impulsive, where there is awareness of his own nature, and the urge to communicate that. However, his prose style glitters with humour and critical intelligence.



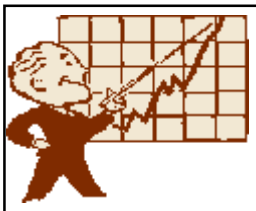
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: Describe the prose style of Keats as employed in his letters.

Q 14: What important aspects of Keats' personality get reflected through his style of correspondence?

11.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Keats' works were very roughly treated at its first appearance for apparently political as well as aesthetic reasons. Keats faced onslaughts from the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. However, Shelley in his preface to *Adonais* pays tribute to the poet, while Hazlitt sees his poetry as being characterised by an effeminacy of style. Later, certain Victorian admirers viewed Keats' works as the sublime outpourings of untutored genius. However, Matthew Arnold also emphasised that the important Keatsian writings are the product of different aspects of the poet, the intellectual and tough-minded man. Critics such as Howitt and W. M. Rossetti rejoiced in the exquisite and sensuous nature of Keats' work. Modern criticism analyses the initially negative reception of Keats and his poetry as well as the revival of reputation as a poet critic in later periods. John Jones (1969) repudiates Matthew Arnold's condemnation of the sensuous side of Keats' work and offers a detailed study of the poet's 'sensual humanism'. T. S. Eliot in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* describes Keats' letters as the most notable and most important ever written by any English poet. Anne K. Mellor (1993) sees Keats as an 'ideological cross-dresser', who was able to embrace some aspects of what she calls 'feminine Romanticism'. Again, critics such as Christopher Ricks (1974) examine the structural complexity in Keats' works and builds upon John Bayley's passing references in 'Keats and Reality' to the importance of embarrassment in Keats' work, offering a sustained account of the importance of the concept to the shape of (the poet's) imagination. During the 19th century, Keats' letters were deemed unworthy of serious attention. However, in the 20th century, his letters became as admired and studied as his poetry. Such critical reception of Keats' letter only adds to his reputation as an important Romantic poet of English literature.



Check Your Progress

Q 15: Comment on Keats' early reception and compare that with the later acceptance of Keats as one of the great Romantic poets.



11.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read how Keats' letters provide the most vital context to the study of his poetry. Through his letters, Keats gave voice to the philosophical and critical concepts that inform his poetry. Keats, in his letters to Benjamin Bailey (22nd November 1817) and to John Hamilton Reynolds (3rd May 1818), formulated important opinions on poetic identity, human relationship, human life, knowledge, the sensation and the intellect, imagination, beauty and truth, literary criticism and so on. The letters are marked by their spontaneity of expression and intensity of thought. They are also marked by the single most important concern for humanity. To talk about Keats' reception, we find that Keats was a controversial figure to his contemporaries. However, few modern critics would ever tend to dispute over Keats' status as one of the greatest English poets.



11.7 FURTHER READING

1) Arnold, Matthew. (1880). "John Keats" in T. H. Ward (ed.) *The English Poets*. London: Oxford University Press.
2) Bate, Walter Jackson. (1963). *John Keats.* Cambridge, Mass : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
3) Eliot. T. S. (2004). "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (1933), in Jewel Spears Brooker (ed.) *The Contemporary Reviews*. Florida: Cambridge University Press.
4) Ellershaw, Henry. (ed.). (1922). *Keats: Poetry and Prose*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
5) Gittings, Robert. (1970). *The Letters of John Keats: A Selection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6) Jones, John. (1969). *John Keats' Dream of Truth*. London: Chatto & Windus.

7) Mellor, Anne K. (1993). *Romanticism and Gender.* London and New York: Routledge.

8) Ricks, Christopher. (1974). *Keats and Embarrassment.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9) Ridley, M. R. (1964). *Keats' Craftsmanship*. London: Methuen.

10) Rollins, Hyder E. (1958). *Letters of John Keats.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

11) Shelley, P. B. (1821). "Preface to Adonais" in *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion*, *etc.*, Pisa: Privately Printed.

12) Strachan, John (ed.). (2004). *The Poems of John Keats: A Sourcebook.* London: Routledge.



11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: In many ways it appears so… …Keats' parents died when he was young…. …he was troubled by financial and health problems… …he was often haunted by anguish… …however, the melancholy in his poetry can also be attributed to his sensitive nature.

Ans to Q 2: Yes… …they communicate a writer's thoughts, perceptions, critical insights, and can reveal his personality… …Keats' letters become pertinent as they provide us with the contexts in which his verse was produced.

Ans to Q 3: The letter throw light on the kind of poetic life he had lived… …provide the main source from which one can justly appreciate his poetry and personality… … form the mass of critical documents which show the development of Keats' literary and philosophical ideas.

Ans to Q 4: The letter to Benjamin is Keats' first significant prose meditation upon upon his own poetic self… …he discusses his insights on imagination and its relation to beauty and truth… …refers to his notions of poetic identity, Negative Capability etc.

Ans to Q 5: The letter to Hamilton brings to the fore Keats as a critic… …he compares Wordsworth and Milton… …the comparison does not testify to Wordsworth's mental superiority, but it testifies to what Keats labels as the 'grand march of intellect' evident in human history… …this line of thought becomes the principal theme of the epic poem *Hyperion.*

Ans to Q 6: Coleridge held that imagination was superior to fancy… …He also distinguished between primary and secondary imagination, and asserts that secondary imagination is behind all poetic creativity… …while the basic idea behind Keats' philosophy is the equation of imagination with truth… …Keats believed that 'beauty' can be arrived at through the 'imagination' and this experience can be termed as the 'truth'.

Ans to Q 7: According to Keats, what the mind perceives as beauty is 'truth'… …he also held that poetic imagination can be grasped in its association with beauty and truth.

Ans to Q 8: It is mainly because the person's poetical mind is flexible and can accommodate itself to whatever structure it is put into… …this is the way Keats, in his letter to Benjamin Bailey, contemplates on the idea of poetic identity.

Ans to Q 9: In the letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats formulates a simile on human life as "a mansion of many apartments"… …The first chamber which is the infant or thoughtless chamber is the period of innocence… …the second is "chamber of Maiden Thought"… …the chamber of maiden thought becomes gradually darkened, and on all sides of it many doors are set open, but everything remains dark and misty.

Ans to Q 10: Keats analysed that Milton did not think into the matters of the human heart as Keats himself had done… ….Milton did not try to feel deeply about humanity and his ideas are facilitated by a change in society rather than by intense feelings.

Ans to Q 11: No… …Keats made this comparison only to bring forth the fact that "there is really a grand march of intellect"…. … Keats shows

his understanding of the progress of humanity when he makes the comparison… … Keats bestows the credit for Wordsworth's depth of thought on the "general and gregarious advance of intellect" rather than on individual greatness of mind.

Ans to Q 12: 'Negative Capability' is a state in which 'man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason... … it is the poet's capability of negating his own personality in order to enter into a new and aesthetic self, which is constructed by his imagination and art… …writers like Shakespeare had this capability.

Ans to Q 13: The letters of John Keats are informal in character… …he deals with the day to day worries about family and finances in an equal measure with that of his critical insights… …the use of humour is another notable characteristic.

Ans to Q 14: The personality of Keats gets reflected in his correspondences… …the letters also show Keats' movement from one subject to another without any precaution… …The thoughtful note in Keats' mode of expression shows his critical insights.

Ans to Q 15: Keats' work was very roughly treated at its first appearance… … His works were surrounded by controversy… …During the 19th century Keats' letters too were deemed unworthy of serious attention… …However, in the 20th century, his letters began to be admired and studied.



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Describe the correlation between Keats' poetry and the ideas that you find in his letters.

Q 2: Attempt a comparison of Keats' views on poetry and imagination with those of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley.

Q 3: How does Keats' perception of imagination differ from Enlightenment's emphasis on reason? Answer with reference to Keats' letters.

Q 4: Discuss briefly Keats' prose style as exemplified in his letters. Does it mark a radical break with his poetic style?

Q 5: How do Keats' letters provide a glimpse of his personality and critical insights? Discuss.

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UNIT 12: ERIC NEWBY: *A SHORT WALK IN THE HINDU KUSH* (CHAPTER IV "PERA PALACE" AND CHAPTER V "THE DYING NOMAD") [PART I]

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives
12.2 Introduction
12.3 A Short History of Travel
12.4 Eric Newby: The Travel Writer
12.5 Brief Summary of the Text
12.6 Let us Sum up
12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
12.8 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss briefly the history of travel, and its subsequent development as a literary genre
- identify the importance of Eric Newby as one of the important English travel writers
- describe the literary significance of Newby's travel narrative *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush.*

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Of late, in the literary world, travel writing or travel narrative has emerged as one of the most popular genres of non-fictional prose writing. This unit intends to introduce you to an exciting travel narrative by Eric Newby—*A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*. You all will agree that travel is really a very exciting experience. When you ask yourself as to why travel is so necessary, you find that travel not only triggers the thrill of escape from the common humdrum life, but also provides relief from the constrictions of the daily life but also acts as a great educative experience.

However, when we discuss travel writing as a literary genre, we find that travel also opens before us the unexplored world of knowledge and experience. Travel writing, while narrating the places visited and people met, also introduces us to the vast world of humanity and the specific culture and history of the peoples as well as that of the places. Moreover, while travelling, the writer, despite having a unique identity of his own, has also to assume a sense of self-hood among the strangers. Perhaps, this is where lies the literary significance of travel where the writer's individuality is questioned and narrativised in a different manner through his telling. Gustave Flaubert said: "Travelling makes one modest…You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world." He also observed how sad it is to experience a wonderful foreign place and to know that one will never return to it. This becomes an ironic experience in the mind of a travel writer although he learns how to try new places all the time. This unit will introduce you to the history of travel in general, and help you to read and contextualise the significance of Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in The Hindu Kush* in that history of travel.

12.3 A SHORT HISTORY OF TRAVEL

An avid reader is certain to get perplexed with the idea of travel, as the problem of an all-inclusive definition will always haunt him. Locating the idea of travel in the greater history of humanity, one finds that it is one of migration or movement from one place to the other. However, whether we can really call it travel in the modern sense is difficult to answer. It is because; there is nothing in antiquity that can be defined as an activity that could have generated a travel narrative. For example, the works of Herodotus, Strabo and Pausanias, like guidebooks, focus on what is to be seen and what not. However, there also lies in their works the hazards of joys, ironies and delights of observations. You should note that travel writing in the modern sense developed much later. Gradually, it began to depend on conventions of self-awareness and self-consciousness followed by an obsession with the idea of the 'personality' during the 18th century, a criterion very uncommon before the European Renaissance.

Moreover, the elements of non-utilitarian pleasure—that means the question whether one is travelling for business or pleasure, began to categorise and constitute a real travel writing.

You also might find that regardless of the method, mass movement generated great uncertainty and often became recognised as adventure. For example, you will find it interesting that in ancient times travel by sea was so hazardous that extensive sacrifices and prayers were held while boarding and departing a ship. There were not merely storms to be survived, but also the pirates and corsairs, who were attracted by the ships carrying gold. And, while a ship was facing an imminent danger of sinking, you will find it surprising to know, one might have to fasten some of the gold around the neck to persuade others who would give the dead body a decent burial. Travel by land was equally hazardous. Because, places outside the city walls, that created 'no man's land', were often ravaged by robbers, hijackers, extortionists, and pilferers that required governments to establish guard posts. Therefore, an alert person will go out only in the daytime, and during night, he would harbour in the houses of friends or in an inn.

Contrary to this sense of travel in ancient times, in more recent times, there developed something that resembled tourism and sightseeing. For example, it was nothing but the wanderlust of the people for "The Seven Wonders" of the ancient World that ascribed to them the status as 'Wonders'. A visitor travelling to Egypt in the 16th century BC would find himself scratching graffiti on the different monuments. People's wanderlust also encouraged them to traverse long distances to visit famous shrines, oracles and temples. For example, the oracle of Delphi (**Delphi** being an archaeological site and a modern town in Greece), the sanctuary of Olympia (**Olympia** being the site of the Olympic Games in classical times in Greece), the acropolises of Athens, the Museums—all these places provided people the pleasures of wonder as well as that of sightseeing.

However, towards the Renaissance age of explorations, travel does mark a crucial moment in modern thought. You must have read or heard

about Marco Polo's travel through Asia, which had rendered great help to the colonial explorations of the later times. According to Claude Levi Strauss "when…a human community which had believed itself to be complete and in its final form suddenly learned…that it was not alone, that it was part of a greater whole, and that, in order to achieve self knowledge, it must first of all contemplate its unrecognisable image in this mirror." Thus, you find that travel has enabled the knowing of the unknown and reaching the unreached since time immemorial. Because of travel, human beings suddenly became aware that there is much to learn from alien countries and their cultures.

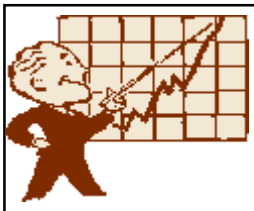
In the present situation, however, because of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, travelling has become the most common practice among the people. Many present day writers have taken the idea of travel as the source for literary explorations. Salman Rushdie, one of the most powerful writers of the present times, has aptly said: "Everywhere is now a part of everywhere else." This means that travel has finally reduced the world to a single most entity in the present context.



LET US KNOW

You should note that the word Travel is derived from *Travail* means a form of heightened experience. Homesickness and loneliness are two feelings common to all travellers. Equally common is the fear of strangers, of being embarrassed and cheated, of treats from others. If one is a sensitive traveller one will also feel an element of guilt from being alienated from ordinary people. You should also mind that tourism is not travel; so is a guidebook, which has to be frequently consulted while travelling. A travel book is seldom consulted during a trip rather it may be read by a reader who will never take a journey at all. Guidebooks are the part of journalism, while travel books belong to literature. Guidebooks are never autobiographical, but travel books are. In a travel book, you will often experience a commitment to language and to literary artifice and an insatiable impulse to write creatively.

Carl Thompson in his introduction to the book *Travel Writing* writes that the European imperial project, and the global capitalism it promoted, finally laid the foundations of our modern, globalised world. It brought about cross-cultural contact, and the relocation of individuals and peoples, on a large scale. However, it also did much to establish the enormous inequalities that currently exist between the different regions of the world and especially between the developed 'West' and the less developed 'Rest', in terms of wealth, health and technological advancement. This aspect of Travel occupies an important place in Post-Colonial Studies. Post colonialist scholars have, accordingly, sought to understand the processes of these inequalities, and have often concerned themselves more generally with questions relating to how two different cultures respond to each other. These are, however, research agendas for which travel writing is an immensely useful resource. From the 15th to the 20th century, you should understand that the genre played an integral role in European imperial expansion, and the travel writing of this period is accordingly highly revealing of the activities of European travellers abroad, and of the attitudes and ideologies that drove European expansionism. Similarly, modern travel writing can yield significant insights into the ideologies and practices that sustain the current world order.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: How, do you think the ancient idea of travel is different from the way we understand the term travel today?

Q 2: What are the various connotations of the term travel that you can think of?

Q 3: Would you like to say that travel writing is different from a tourist guidebook?

12.4 ERIC NEWBY: THE TRAVEL WRITER

In this section, we will try to discuss briefly the life and works of Eric Newby. This will help you to locate him as an important travel writer who contributed significantly to the genre of travel writing in English.

George Eric Newby, popularly known as Eric Newby, was an English travel writer. He was born in 1919 and grew up near Hammersmith Bridge, London. He received his education from St. Paul's School. After leaving school he worked for two years at The Dorland advertising agency until 1938 when he apprenticed aboard the Finnish Windjammer Moshulu and took part in what was known as the 'Grain Race' from Australia to Europe by way of Cape Horn. This voyage was subsequently described under the misleading title *The Last Grain Race* and pictorially documented in *Learning the Ropes*. In fact, two more grain races followed the 1939 race, in which Newby participated, with the last race being held in 1949. Newby's best known works include *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, *The Last Grain Race*, and *Round Ireland in Low Gear*.

He served in the Black Watch and the Special Boat Section during World War II, and was captured during an operation against the coast of Italy. He was later awarded the Military Cross for his part in the raid. From 1942 until 1945, he was held prisoner of war near Parma, Italy. During a brief escape, he was hidden by a Slovenian family, and met Wanda, who later married him and became a companion on his travels. These experiences were described in his memoir *Love and War in the Apennines*. After the war, he worked in the women's fashion business, (his father had owned a firm making ladies' mantles), before setting out to climb Mir Samir in the Nuristan Mountains of Afghanistan, an expedition later chronicled in *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* — probably his most widely-known work so far, and which included a meeting with Wilfred Thesiger. From 1963 to 1973, Newby was Travel Editor for *The Observer* newspaper.

He breathed his last on October 20, 2006. He was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award of the British Guild of Travel Writers in 2001.Newby's life and work was profiled in ITV's The South Bank Show

(director Tony Knox) in 1994. He also made notable travel films for the BBC, returning to Parma with his wife Wanda in The Travel Show (director Paul Coueslant, 1994) and visiting one of his favourite cities, Istanbul (1996).

List of Works:

The Last Grain Race (1956)

A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush (1958)

Something Wholesale (1962)

Slowly Down the Ganges (1966)

Time off in Southern Italy: The Observer Guide to Resorts and Hotels (ed.) (1966)

My Favourite Stories of Travel (ed.) (1967)

Grain Race: Pictures of Life before the Mast in a Windjammer (1968)

Wonders of Britain: A Personal Choice of 480 with Diana Petry (1968)

Wonders of Ireland: A Personal Choice of 484 with Diana Petry (1969)

Love and War in the Apennines (1971)

The Mitchell Beazley World Atlas of Exploration (1975)

Great Ascents: A Narrative History of Mountaineering (1977)

The Big Red Train Ride (1978)

A Traveller's Life (1982)

On the Shores of the Mediterranean (1984)

A Book of Travellers' Tales (ed.) (1985)

Round Ireland in Low Gear (1987)

What the Traveller Saw (1989)

A Small Place in Italy (1994)

A Merry Dance Around the World: The Best of Eric Newby (1995)

Learning the Ropes: An Apprentice in the Last of the Windjammers (1999)

Departures and Arrivals (1999)

Thus, you find that Newby had quite an interesting life history. At the age of eighteen, he signed on as an apprentice of the Finnish barque *Moshulu,* lived in the fo'c'sle as the only Englishman. His career in the

army was heroic and romantic. His love for the sea helped him in finding himself in the King's service. After the war he went into the most improbable of trades, *haute couture.* It would strain the imagination to picture this stalwart young adventurer selling women's clothes.

12.5 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Most of Newby's travel books are placed during World War II when he was acting as a Lieutenant in the British army. *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* was published in 1958. It is an autobiographical account of his adventures in the Hindu Kush, around the Nuristan Mountains of Afghanistan.

A romantic and a reasonless longing led Newby and Hugh M. Carless to journey to the heights of the Hindu Kush. In one such exchange of letters between them, Carless, a well-travelled man, wrote about his earlier climbing expedition to Nuristan, 'The Country of Light' enclosed by the main range of the Hindu Kush Mountains. No Englishman had been there since 1891 and the last Europeans to visit were a German Expedition in 1935. Until 1895, it was called Kafiristan, 'The Country of Unbelievers' after which the Kafir people converted to Islam. The narrator left his job at the fashion industry to embark on this new expedition.

They undergo training to learn the basics of rock-climbing learn the different ways of descending the face of a mountain and equip themselves according to the climatic conditions they were likely to encounter for better chances of survival. Their chance acquaintance with a member of the Alpine Club wrote to the Everest Foundation suggesting a grant towards the cost of their expedition to the Hindu Kush. Newby's wife Wanda also insists on being a part of it. They carry all necessary equipment of an expedition such as the pre-war guides, country guidebooks, large-scale maps, camera, telescope, binoculars, altimeter, prismatic-compasses, and aneroid barometer along with all the mountaineering gear, tents, sleeping bags and canned food.

Newby even researches in the London library searching for volumes on Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan they find that it is a man's country,

and, besides tribal warfare, there were other dangers there. They also understood the necessity to maintain Anglo-Afghan relations. The ground realities were much different from the rosy pictures that guidebooks provided. Armenia was a shattered country with towns without any women. In Nuristan, women were less than dust and there were no facilities for even female tourists. Kafir women were practically slaves, being, to all intents and purposes, bought and sold as household commodities. Each valley was inhabited by different tribes and spoke its own language. They come across Kafir highwayman, Kafirs who never spoke of Kafiristan which they considered an insulting epithet. They met Mongoloid featured Hazaras and crossed Darra Hazara where some 400 Hazara families used to live in a cluster. They travelled miles and miles in no-man's-land of ruined mud forts, met Semitic featured Pathans, saw the life of the nomadic people in encampments of nomad tents and caravanserai. They crossed the Tajik territory inhabited by the Tajiks who were the original Persian owners of the Afghan soil. However, the Tajiks and the Hazaras were a subject race, independent only within their own country, Hazarajat. They learn about the Gujaras, the hill shepherds, partly nomad, from the frontier, originally from Punjab and similarly take interest in the history and culture of the variety of people they knew little about.

The travellers passed through various terrains of jagged peaks, frontiers, rich lands, valleys, orchards, parallel flowing rivers, rivers of salt with forming mirages of flowing rivers, lakes, hamlets, shifting sands, oases, rocky plateaus, melting glaciers, snow-fields, snow-forests, moraine, summits and the misty mountain sides with its hard life. They took all the challenges of the journey very sportingly, learning to bridge the communication gap, to develop a love for the local food, to deal with the consistent affliction of gastric disorders, making sense of the weights and measures, the barter system of butter for salt, learning origins of people, their local customs, coming across lepers, pitching tents in hardy places, sleeping at the bottom of dried water course, being at the centre of violent storms, facing the Wind of Hundred and One Days (Bad-i-Sad-o-Bist) and suffering agonies of heat, fatigue, thirst.

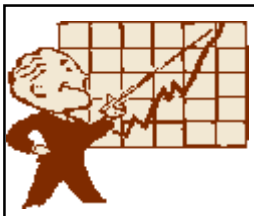
They met different people in their journey, some of whom had evil bent of mind and some others were the able-bodied guides, caravan-masters and porters who formed a good male bonding with the Newby-Carless duo. During the Climbing expedition, the duo discovered the value of immense companionship; they roped together having one another's life in each other's hands. Newby confesses homesickness and admits the value of feet in the Hindu Kush. There was no rescue service in the mountains but only had their guides like Abdul Ghiyas and the likes of Badar Khan, Abdul Rahim and Shir Muhammad. After making it to Mir Samir, an unclimbed glacial peak, at one point they even gave up the hostile journey, admitting their lack of guts. The fate of the expedition hanged in a balance despite their determination to reach the ridge and, if possible, the summit; 700 feet below the summit, they were considering whether to hold on or let go. Finally, with their morale and strength ebbing, they decide to let go almost in tears.

So, they headed towards Kabul, escorted down the heights by Abdul Motaleb, a Mullah and his grandson. And they met Wilfred Thesiger, a legendary well travelled man on this returning journey. The entire spirit of the expedition is captured in this travel narrative, in which the failure of their journey became irrelevant as the experiences in the journey became much more memorable, rendering insignificant the failure to reach the end point of destination.

Interesting Information that you find in the text of *A Short Walk in the Hindukush*

- Towards the East of Panjsher, on a low and isolated ridge is the yellow sand bank called Reg-i-Rewan (the Running Sands) which is said to have the singular property of singing or moaning when agitated by the wind or otherwise disturbed.
- The Istalif Oasis is reputed to be the producer of most beautiful pottery of a delightful blue colour.
- The Quanat is a subterranean canal in a grove of trees, a magical spot, cool and green in the middle of sun burnt fields, with water sprouting from the hills.

- Oscar Eckenstein, renowned climber at the end of the 19th century, made a principal claim to be the first man to study the technique of holds and balance on rock.
- Killing of a thousand, wild mountain goat called ibex makes a person a Mirgun. It is a custom to secretly bury the weapon with which these animals are killed because the young men seek to find it. The one who finds it is entitled to buy as with it he too has the prospects of becoming a Mirgun.
- It is a custom to put a sick or deeply wounded person in a goatskin, the heat of which draws the poison out of the body and into the skin.
- The Koreish Katir traded butter for salt with the Panjshir people. Sugar was a rare commodity and hardly used in tea.
- One of the surprising things about the country was that, while outside in the open Nuristan was a perfect hell of insect life, inside the houses there seemed to be no bugs or vermin.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What were the most obvious hurdles they might have faced during their expedition to the Hindu Kush?

Q 5: What might have encouraged Newby to undertake the journey to the Hindu Kush?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

By the time you finish reading the unit on Eric Newby's travel narrative *A Short Walk in Hindu Kush*, you would not only find yourself familiarised with the general ideas of travel and travel writing, but also be acquainted with the importance of Eric Newby as an English travel writer. You have, by now, understood that a successful travel writing traverses certain poles like 'Us' and 'Them', description of individual physical things and the larger issue of what it is 'all about', the particular and the universal. You have learnt that a tourist guidebook is not a travelogue, nor a diary on

places visited. Travel writing is a literary genre where the writer is consciously projecting his self-consciousness in his own writing. Just like the literary artist, a travel writer too often uses understatement, foreshadowing and many more techniques to make the travel narrative 'literary'. You have perhaps finally understood the fact that travel writing is particularly suited to modern conditions and situations in which travel becomes a precondition for every globalised human being.



12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Certainly different… … movement from one place to another in ancient times cannot be called travel as it could not have generated a travel narrative… …modern idea of travel began with the conventions of self awareness and self consciousness of the writer/ traveller.

Ans to Q 2: Sense of adventure… …wanderlust… …sightseeing… …tourism… …the encounter between 'us' and 'them'… …homesickness… …loneliness etc.

Ans to Q 3: Yes… …a tourist guidebook is not travel writing… …it is seldom consulted during a trip… … it may be read by a reader who may never take an actual journey at all.

Ans to Q 4: Hurdles were many… …they had to know the basics of rock climbing… …had to carry necessary equipment of an expedition… …had to traverse through terrains of jagged peaks, frontiers… …had to encounter people having evil bent of mind.

Ans to Q 5: It was not simply mountaineering that attracted him… …the journey was a part of a romantic longing lying deep in the hearts of most Englishmen… …the purpose was not to enjoy celebrated spectacles of the tourist spots but to set feet where very few civilised people have trodden.



12.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What, according to you, are the major characteristics of a travel narrative? Discuss with reference to Eric Newby's book *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush.*

Q 2: Attempt to write a brief history of travel? What are the changes that you notice in travel writing with the passage of time?

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UNIT 13: ERIC NEWBY: *A SHORT WALK IN THE HINDU KUSH* (CHAPTER IV "PERA PALACE" AND CHAPTER V "THE DYING NOMAD") [PART II]

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Reading the Text

- 13.3.1 Reading Chapter IV: "Pera Palace"
- 13.3.2 Reading Chapter V: "The Dying Nomad"
- 13.3.3 Major Themes
- 13.3.4 Newby's Prose Style

13.4 Let us Sum up

13.5 Further Reading

13.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.7 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the main issues implicit in the chapter IV called "Pera Palace"
- read Chapter V—"The Dying Nomad" in terms of its various aspects
- have some ideas on the prose style of Newby
- identify the important themes and explain them.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit follows the previous unit in which we have discussed the history of travel, and Eric Newby's significance as a travel writer with particular reference to his *A Short Walk in the Hindukush.* This unit takes you through two of the chapters in the book namely "Pera Palace" and "The Dying Nomad". Both the chapters deal with uncomfortable road journey of the narrator as well the multifarious experience that the narrator and his mates encountered during their travel. However, the constantly shifting locations and the reference to the map help a reader like us to trace the

journey easily. Newby's literary style was inspired by the comic portrait of the Englishman abroad and you will that some of his important themes in this travel narrative include–The Theme of Exploration, Homesickness, Emerging Self The Problem of 'Us' and 'Them'

13.3 READING THE TEXT

Evelyn Hugh in his Preface to the Penguin edition of the book writes—*"Dear reader, if you have any softness left for the idiosyncrasies of our rough island race, fall to and enjoy this characteristic artefact."* Such an address foreshadows what a reader is going to find in Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush,* a travel narrative occasioned by an expedition to northern Afghanistan. In 1956, after well ending his London career in fashion, Newby decided to travel to a remote corner of Afghanistan where no European had ventured for more than 50 years. He sent a telegraph to the diplomat Hugh Carless, then First Secretary in Tehran, requesting his company on an expedition to northern Afghanistan. Although they were ill prepared and had little experience of the region, they decided to climb Mir Samir, an unclimbed glacial peak in the Hindu Kush of about 20,000 feet high. Evelyn Hugh in his Preface also writes that readers are relieved of the difficulty by his own deliciously funny description, which immediately captivates the reader of the opening chapters of *A Short Walk.* One can only use the absurdly trite phrase 'the call of the wild' to describe the peculiar impetus which carried Mr. Newby from Mayfair to the wild mountains of Afghanistan. He was not a sailor when he embarked in the *Moshulu*; nor was he a mountaineer when he decided to climb the Hindu Kush. A few days climbing on the rocks in Wales, was his only preparation. The two chapters "Pera Palace" and "The Dying Nomad" have been selected from this work for your reading.

13.3.1 Reading Chapter IV: "Pera Palace"

The chapter *Pera Palace* in continuation with the preceding chapters, begins after an uncomfortable journey on the road. The narrator, along with his wife Wanda, arrives at Istanbul just as the sun is setting. Istanbul is the largest city located in the North-west of Turkey; it lies on the Bosphorous Strait and encloses the natural

harbour known as the Golden Horn. The narrator describes the green and wind-swept Sea of Marmara. They wish to enter the city by the Golden Gate on the seaward side, forgetting that for several hundred years, the gate was sealed up.

Having left the car in the courtyard of the old Embassy and changing currency with the gatekeeper, they ask him for a place to stay and are told about “Star Oteli” (hotel) fifty yards away. They are driven to the hotel in a taxi, directed by a sinister-looking pair who claims to be brothers. On reaching the place, their hearts sink as they are led into an almost empty hotel having nearly vertical flight of steps, seeing through the open doors strange men lying on their beds. They come across an obnoxious smell that has filled the corridors and the rooms alike. The bedroom for two that they are shown in to is a “nightmare room” that is illuminated by a forty-watt bulb highlighting a black mouldy wall, with an almost perfectly concave bed. The room offers a sense of almost being occupied, with a pair of boots underneath the bed, a long strand of red hair in the washbasin and with the clear impress of a human form on the bed sheets.

After the discomforts on the road, this becomes too much to bear and they get into the same taxi with the grinning driver, to be taken to another hotel called the Pera Palace, and as the title itself suggests this is central to the chapter. They settle at the Pera Palace and take a large room which probably may have had a splendid view of the Golden Horn before but was blocked by a high rise building in between. Early on the next morning their friend arrives at their door, who was to accompany them on the expedition to Nuristan, a land bordered by the Hindu Kush ranges. This friend is Hugh M. Carless who is the son of a retired Indian Civil Servant and himself posted as the foreign secretary to the Embassy at Kabul. He had arrived by air and, like an epitome of a young explorer, he appeared fit and clean, armed with maps and lists, and with all gusto to embark on the journey ahead. The fatigued couple not wanting to travel right-away try to excuse themselves, saying their wagonwas to undergo

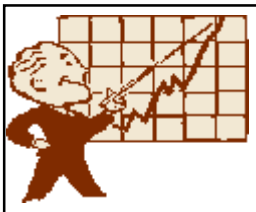
servicing, but much to their surprise, Hugh has already arranged for it to be ready by the afternoon.

The couple tell Hugh about their hardships they have encountered in their journey so far, of being stripped by the big-built customs officials on the Yugoslav frontier, the obstacles such as the floods, landslips, mosquitoes and all the mishaps of their "spine-shattering" journey. However, it makes no difference to him and they fail to gather his understanding. Only when Wanda voices the couple's serious wish to explore the locales of Istanbul for three days it is then agreed to by Hugh.

They have grown fond of the Pera Palace and have imaginary speculations of the unknown number of times that their room may have been occupied, like a comical setting, by the likes of some bearded minister pursuing a woman to bed. They find that their bathroom had an interesting unusual bath that is filled up on its own without the use of taps, by way of the waste pipe, which was actually meant to drain water. It is Wanda who resolves the mystery, jamming her ear to the bathroom wall to find that the water is the contribution of the man next door who just finishes bathing and drains it out of his bath. It is the same used water that finds its way into the bath of the couple, through the inter-connected drainpipes! This adds to the element of humour in the chapter. The working staff of the Pera Palace was mostly too old and appeared very sad. Apart from the man next door, they have seen no one around and the similar atmosphere of dead-silence prevails even in the restaurant in which they eat meals.

After three days' stay, they are ready to leave Istanbul and Hugh arrives from his modern up-hill hotel, ready to take to the road. There is a long wait for the ferry that is to take them across to Scutari, on which their wagon is embarked. Suddenly, due to an urgent need to visit the toilet the narrator is shown to the quarters by the ferry master, returning from which he finds to his utter surprise, the ferry boat disappearing towards the Asian shore along with his wagon and his ticket. In addition, right after that, before he can register his

loss, he is pick-pocketed by one of the three fine-looking porters in the crowd. Again, the ferry master escorts him, on to the next boat. By the end of the chapter one finds the narrator being duped and in a state of complete loss, when he realises that for the second time in his life he has to leave Europe penniless.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is Pera Palace? Narrate the experiences of the narrator in Pera Palace.

Q 2: Mention the names of the places that the travellers reach in the chapter “Pera Palace”?

13.3.2 Reading Chapter V: “The Dying Nomad”

The next chapter *The Dying Nomad*, continues with the narrator’s road journey beyond the Istanbul borders to the Persian frontier and he accounts the series of misadventures in Armenia, a mountainous country bordered by Turkey to the west, in the south Caucasus region, located at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe (Eurasia). It is very important for you to understand the constantly shifting locations with reference to the map, so that you can trace the journey easily.

This is an interesting chapter of misadventures in the journey, caused by a confused sense of direction. Hugh instead of turning right to Agri and the Persian frontier drives straight on, without realizing that it is the wrong direction! They are in a small one-street town called Horason, beside the Aras river, the road through which there is a long climb, followed by a descent on curvy bends into a canyon of red, silver and green cliffs and a castle on top and villages down below. As they are tired and dirty they stop to bathe in the open, in a deep pool of cold water and only then, it appears to them that it is probably not the Aras but some other river because unlike the Aras it seemed to flow in the direction of east to the west.

They drive the night across a half-ruined village, through a ravine, into the pine forests with Hugh’s radio blaring louder and

louder, until they realise that what they are listening to is a Russian radio station. Only after switching the lights on and huddling over the map, does it strike them that they are about sixty kilometres away from Kars and that they have already left behind the route to the Persian frontier towards which they were to go. That they are in another place, had clicked Wanda's mind, right when they were discussing the opposite flow of the river they had bathed in but she thought they were aware of it.

This makes Hugh really serious as he finds himself in a tight situation, for being an answerable Secretary of the Foreign Service and to add to it, not possessing a diplomatic visa for Turkey. They had the permission to cross Anatolia by the shortest possible route but if they took the Turkish side of the road they had every chance to be shot and with the dozen of daggers they carried, it could be easily made into an encounter-episode; moreover, Wanda was British only by virtue of marriage. The couple still do not understand the gravity of the situation and indifferent to their humour, Hugh drives to the next town Sarikamis. They are by then, ninety kilometres from Horasan town and decide to return the same way the next day.

But the following day brings unseen disaster and tragedy. By evening, they return to a fortress town on the Persian frontier called Bayazid. Even though the ancient guide to Turkey had made it sound romantic like most guides do, the actual reality gave a different picture. Instead of the beauty of the Caravan road, they find Bayazid, a sad shanty town, having survived several earthquakes and countless massacres, patrolled by soldiers. Even as night was approaching, determined to sleep in the Persian town, they speed towards the east, through the deserted road that ran through an arid plain bordered by low mountains.

Close under these ranges are the black tents of the nomad people and they had seen them in bands on the move in Ararat. Each family travelled with their flock of goats, herds of sheep, donkeys, bullocks that carried tent poles and big tribal cooking pots, small children sitting on lean horses and the traditionally-dressed

men and women-folk on foot, walking through the dust. The travellers are unable to reach the Customs House on the Turkish side because they do not know what awaits them in the twilight hour. Something dark looms on the road in front of them and before they realise, a sudden braking causes the speeding wheels to lock and, in effect, they skid to the front, with the luggage falling on them, pressing them to the windscreen. The horn blares with the weight until it came to a standstill, a few feet from whatever it is on the road.

This shapeless form turns out to be a dying nomad and as the title suggests, the chapter is centred on this figure. This man appears to be of seventy years, badly tanned by the sun, with terrible injuries on him and a nose almost completely torn off, probably being run down by something from behind, well before their wagon even appears. The nomad is still conscious and breathing and they wrap him in a blanket and dress the deep wound on the nose, without moving him off the road as they have hardly any idea of the internal injuries the man may have suffered from.

At that moment the tribesmen, followed by the women and then the children come running, forming a half-circle in the light of the lamps. Suddenly, the man's wife, a black-haired woman of about thirty with jangling gold ornament, flings herself down on the dust, wailing for her husband. Then arrives a jeep, full of soldiers and miraculously one amongst them happens to be a doctor who speaks English, who on seeing the man's growing and swelling wound, suggests taking him to the nearest military camp. When they tell the doctor that they are headed towards Persia, he warns them saying, "You cannot kill man and go away. There will be inquiry." Even as they are in no way responsible for the man's dying condition, they find themselves implicated in this. Nevertheless, the doctor assures them not to worry, as the man is only a nomad, as if indicating that in reality a nomad's life had little value in their land.

The men help them to place the dying man in the backseat of the wagon, so that he can be taken to the camp. However, on

reaching there they find no doctor or any person who could speak an understandable language. So, they drive fifteen miles to Bayazid town taking the groaning man and his wailing wife to a military hospital. But despite these efforts, early in the next morning the man dies “horribly” on a canvas stretcher. In his last hour, just before he dies, he is surrounded by judges, prosecutors and interpreters screaming at him, to answer what had run him down. However, without answering, he dies and this opens up the doors for the proceedings of an inquiry and thus, the nightmare of the day begins.

In a convoy of the vehicles, they return to the site of the incident for an inquiry headed by a hostile judge, a young prosecutor, a hardy colonel and an indifferent captain along with a misleading interpreter. While the young prosecutor seems to offer a ray of hope, the interpreter is bent on destroying their chances. The interrogation continues throughout the baking noontime until evening and half a dozen times, they are made to re-enact the incident, with their statements recorded, in the absence of witness. However, the tribesmen do commit the offence of perjury by lying about the incident and offering flowers to the judge as if to appease him.

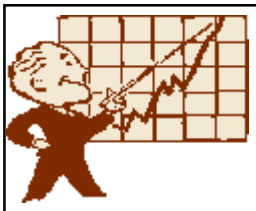
The prosecutor does not wish to be taken into their confidence and demands the truth from the lying men. The couple request Hugh to send a cable to Ankara; he was more bothered of what his Ambassador would think if he happened to arrive in Persia after such a fix. The narrator notices that there are endless troupes of policemen and when they are about to be taken for the night’s custody as a protective measure from the tribesmen, a defiant Hugh insists on being trusted with his word not to runaway. Thus, arrangements are made for them to stay at an inn, that turns out to be inconvenient and loathsome. While dining hungrily they meet a medical officer in a battledress who runs the fate of Armenia, a dead country to him, with no presence of women and full of milling soldiers becoming mad with no objective in that land.

The doctor then discusses the next day's proceedings regarding the decision for a trial and mentions a similar incident in which a German lorry driver from Tehran was retained for having cut off a child's foot with the lorry. At nine in the morning, they present themselves in the Courthouse and are led into a simple, whitewashed room with half a dozen chairs and a desk for the prosecutor. For two hours, the argument goes on, with Wanda taking up the arguments stretching unnecessarily from diplomatic immunity, children suffering in Europe without their mother, to ships or planes missed in time, the absence of witnesses and ruined expeditions. Hugh proposes the proceedings to be stay-ordered for a week, so that in the meantime he can consult the authorities in Ankara. Hugh's Diplomatic Visa applied only for Iran and had it applied for Turkey it would have been difficult to detain him.

Then like a knight in shining armour, Niki the doctor arrives in an hour's time, in his jeep and the interpreter's role is banished as Niki begins to translate sentence by sentence, English to Turkish, Turkish to English. When Hugh shows a renewed interest to send a telegram, he learns that there is no facility for direct communication and he will have to send it to Ezerum from which it will be relayed and so he writes a telegram which reads, "Detained Bayazid en route Tehran awaiting formulation of charge killing civilian stop Diplomatic visa applicable Iran only."

Niki translates it into Turkish and holding the message the prosecutor leaves the room abruptly, only to return with a clerk dictating a long document that gives an entire account of the affair and expresses Hugh's complete innocence! It was as if a drama ends with the final affixation of the official stamp and the prosecutor clapping his hands, treats them to coffee. The surprise element is in the unknown factor that suddenly reverses the court's opinion and their sudden change of mind. Niki is asked by the prosecutor to tell them that it is all due to Hugh's and the couple's "gentlemanly" ways in the whole matter, due to which the prosecutor decides not to proceed with the matter. The ironical twist to the whole incident in

the chapter is in the very twist of circumstances. The statement uttered by first medical officer of the convoy, that there was no need to worry about the accident, as the person in question was only a dying nomad, rings true in the end.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Why is the chapter "The Dying Nomad" is so interesting?

Q 4: What ideas do you have of the Nomads from the chapter "The Dying Nomad"?

Q 5: In what ways, were the travellers implicated in something for which they were in no way responsible?

13.3.3 Major Themes

The following are some of the possible themes that you will find interesting to locate in the chapters you have already read in the previous section.

The Theme of Exploration:

It was not mountaineering that attracted Newby and the Alps abound in opportunities for every exertion of that kind. It was the romantic, irrational longing, which lies deep in the hearts of most Englishmen, to shun the celebrated spectacles of the tourist and without any concern with science or politics or commerce, simply to set their feet where few civilised feet have trod. But, along with this it is also about the journey within, to know oneself better by stepping out of one's comfort zone and search for one's unknown strengths, measured against the way one reciprocates to unseen obstacles and challenges. A journey transforms an individual if he takes it in the right spirit and this becomes obvious following a sense of adventure and wanderlust that Newby embarks on this journey, with just the basic preparation of four-day' training in mountaineering, to survive in hostile terrains. Moreover, even as Newby and Hugh are headed towards a climbing-expedition, on the way the couple Newby and Wanda do not miss the opportunity to stay back for

three days in Istanbul, just to relax and enjoy the locales of the country. Instead, of an objective-oriented outlook, it reflects their subjective interest to soak in the experiences of a new place. And the fear of the unknown simply adds more to the theme of exploration.

Homesickness:

There is an old proverb, which reads “Home is where the heart is” and this is true for every traveller, who steps to explore the world outside, only with a longing to return home, seated in one’s heart. In one of the chapters titled ‘Going down’, the narrator cannot help expressing his longing for home and he says, “With some monks in the foreground fishing for carp it would have been an illustration in a pictorial history of England. For a moment I felt homesick.” Up in the mountains of Arayu, one of the loneliest places on earth, with all the winds of Asia sweeping over it, he misses his wife and children. In the two chapters, you have read this theme is hardly available simply because Wanda, Newby’s wife is always with him helping him to enjoy each moment together.

The Emerging Self:

The book is a well-blended travel narrative with elements of both fact and fiction. There is an autobiographical impulse in Newby’s work as it shapes from his own real-life experience of such an expedition. Eric Newby is enriched by his travel experience and soon he discovers immense companionship and emotional attachments to the memories of this journey that he pens down. The narrator’s lighter vein or his funnier side makes the difficulties of the journey endurable and enjoyable. It is as if an element of humour rubs on to the rest following which he gets encouraged to take all the hardships, mishaps, misadventures, challenges in the right spirit. The two chapters are full of such incidents which they take on sportingly, be it the strange reception they receive in the hands of the sinister looking brothers, the comical description of the despicable hotel and hotel rooms, the discovery of the logic behind the self-filling bath at Pera Palace, their lost sense of direction on the way to the Persian frontier, the irony in the absence of a qualifying Visa, the wailing wife of the

dying nomad, their handling of the undeserving proceedings, or the incident of being pick-pocketed and left behind by a ferryboat.

The Problem of 'Us' and 'Them':

The character of Newby offers a fresh perspective on the dissolving differences of the 'us' and 'them' by rendering defunct the stereotypes of an Englishman. Newby is passionate enough to leave the comforts of a secured job, to set out to explore and scale heights in an unexplored place. He is comfortable to be led by Hugh and the local guides on this expedition without any issues of ego. In the two chapters, the travellers are caught unaware with the sense of mistrust and suspicion of the local people like the two brothers, the ferrymen, the opportunistic pickpockets, the exaggerating tribesmen, the evil interpreter or the suspicious authority who implicate them in the accident. He even confesses his handicap in the sense of direction, the lack of guts to complete the climbing-expedition and the tears for being unable to do so. Yet, nowhere in the book does one find Newby agitated or tormented, despite the unexpected situations and discomforts of the journey. He leaves all his inhibitions behind on this trek, bonds with the local guides, endures all the hardships, finds pleasure in sharing the joys of his binocular with the local people and even confesses lack of guts and tears of emotion at being unable to complete the intended journey. Instead of being a domineering figure, he becomes like an equal of the natives, which transforms and brings out the best in him. This is what is so significant about Newby as a travel writer.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is the thematic significance of the chapters you have read from the book *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*?

Q 7: Do you feel that the problem of 'us' and 'them' is a common problem that the travellers have faced in these two chapters?

13.3.4 Newby's Prose Style

It can be easily assumed that Newby's literary style was inspired by the comic portrait of the Englishman abroad presented in the writings of writers like Alexander Kinglake, Robert Byron and Evelyn Waugh. In a preface to the book Waugh identified the central elements of this humorous tradition: "its quintessentially the English spirit of amateurism and its tone of ironic understatement." Evelyn Waugh considers the importance of Eric Newby as a travel writer by specifying "the understatement, the self ridicule, the delight in the foreignness of foreigners, the complete denial of any attempt to enlist the sympathies of his readers in the hardships he has capriciously invited" as typical British qualities. For Newby, a large part of the joy of travelling is filled by the comic misunderstanding occasioned by an attempt to fathom the world of foreign countries. And, he enjoyed it in the fullest sense. He never gets annoyed or astounded by the problems he faces on the way. He, instead, takes them to be very normal to a traveller.

Newby's travel narrative *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* adopts many of the devices of fictions. This is not a travel diary with very dull and uninteresting sequential entries of events and incidents that fill the traveller's experience in the itinerary. Instead, Newby very tactfully creates suspense and generates irony by devices of concealment and foreshadowing. Newby has very artistically presented the narrator as a liar to retain the interest of the reader with the spirit and techniques of fictions. It resembles the literary form of a romance by containing sufficient amount of wonders, surprises and incredibility. However, he is seen to be very careful while locating their wonders within an actual, verifiable, easily identifiable geographical and topographical location. The spirit of authenticity is maintained by maps and lists carried by the narrator in order to fix locations for himself and for the readers.

Newby was born at the transitional period of the Victorian and Edwardian era, when Englishmen explored the world with a certain

purpose and tangible interest in mind rather than for frivolous pleasure, enduring a lot of hardships and imponderables. However, it is intensely English, despite the fact that most of its action takes place in wildly foreign places and that it is written in an idiomatic, uncalculated manner. It delights the heart of fellow Englishmen, and should at least enlighten those who have any curiosity about the odd character of the Kingdom. It exemplifies the essential traditional amateurism of the English. However, Newby is also praised for his understatement, the self-ridicule, and the delight in the foreignness of foreigners, and above all the complete denial of any attempt to enlist the sympathies of his readers in the hardships he has capriciously invited.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What would you consider the most significant aspect of Newby's prose style?



13.4 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the chapter "Pera Palace" informs about Newby's unique experiences in hotels in Istanbul, and how he needed to make adjustments with a lot of things. The second chapter, on the other hand, discusses how often foreigners get implicated in unwanted circumstance. However, in both cases, the joy of travel remains in taking the adventures just as they are with the sole motto of knowing the unknown and reaching the unreached.



13.5 FURTHER READING

1) Edwards, Justin D. & Rune Graulund. (eds). (2011). *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan

2) Fussell, Paul. (ed). (1987). *The Norton Book of Travel.* Norton and Co Inc

3) Newby, Eric. (1968). *A Short Walk in The Hindu Kush.* Great Britain: Penguin Books

4) Thompson, Carl. (2011). *Travel Writing.* London: Routledge.

Web Resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Short_Walk_in_the_Hindu_Kush

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Newby

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1532127/Eric-Newby.html

http://theopencritic.com/?p=12

http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2006/oct/23/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries.



13.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Pear Palace is the name of the hotel… …it is markedly different from another hotel called "Star Oteli" which is very dirty and mouldy… …the narrator started speculating the unknown number of times that their room might have been occupied,or some bearded minister pursuing a woman to bed… …besides, he had the humorous experience of 'used' waters coming to their bathroom… …takes note of the old and gloomy working staff of the hotel etc.

Ans to Q 2: They first reach "Star Oteli"… …then another 'good' hotel called the Pera Palace… …after three days they start the journey towards Scutari.

Ans to Q 3: The chapter is interesting because of the misadventures associated with the journey, confused sense of direction and the fear of the unknown on the part of the narrator.

Ans to Q 4: Nomads are wandering people… …each nomad family travelled with their flock of goats, herds of sheep, donkeys, bullocks etc…. …they were wearing traditional dresses;… … men, women, children all walked on foot… …a nomad's life had little value.

Ans to Q 5: They are mistakenly held responsible for the condition of the dying nomad… …enquiry commission is set up… …they have to face unwanted situations… …but finally they get free from a supposed 'trial' just because of their 'gentlemanly' nature.

Ans to Q 6: The prescribed chapters help one to understand that exploration is the one of the main motives of any travel… …the problem of homesickness torments the travellers if they have to spend a long period away from home… …the emergent problem of 'Us' and 'Them'… …the emerging self of the writer.

Ans to Q 7: Yes… …because the travellers have to constantly adjust themselves with the emerging situations in a new country… …they have to suffer from the fear of the unknown… …no trust can easily be built between 'us' and 'them' etc.

Ans to Q 8: The comic portrait of an Englishman abroad… …the use of understatement… … self-ridicule and the delight in the foreignness of foreigners… … the complete denial of any attempt to enlist the sympathies of his readers in the hardships he himself has invited.



13.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Do you think that the constantly changing locations in the two chapters prescribed adds to the pleasures of reading the book, A Short Walk in the Hindukush? Discuss.

Q 2: Critically analyse the major themes of *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* with special reference to the chapters prescribed for you.

Q 3: How does Newby represent the problem of 'us' and 'them' in the two chapters "Pera Palace" and "The Dying Nomad"?

Q 4: Do you think that 'the fear of the unknown' is common to every travel writer? Give a reasoned answer based on your reading the two chapters prescribed?

Q 5: How do the experiences of travel help in constructing the self of the travel writer? Does Newby's narrator succeed in adjusting himself with the people and places he encounters?

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UNIT 14: V.S. NAIPAUL: *AN AREA OF DARKNESS* (SECTION I, CHAPTER I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 A Brief Account of Travel Writing

14.4 V.S. Naipaul: Life and Works

14.5 Reading the Chapter

14.6 Important Themes

14.7 Style and Language

14.8 Let us Sum up

14.9 Further Reading

14.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.11 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss what a travel writing is
- explain how travel writing has come to occupy a place of importance in the realm of contemporary literature
- discuss the significance of V. S. Naipaul as an author
- describe Naipaul's contribution to travel writing.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, you have already read about travel writing, and I am sure, you must have gained some ideas on travel writing as an important genre in contemporary narratives. This unit also deal with a travel narrative—that is V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* the first section of the first chapter of which has been prescribed for your study. We hope that from this unit, you will have a refreshing experience of Travel writing through the study of Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness.*

4.3 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF TRAVEL WRITING

In this section, we shall try to understand what travel writing or travel literature is all about, which texts may be identified as instances of travel writing, and since when, such writing made expression in the larger field of literary world. Owing to the different kinds of books, which deal with travel in varied approaches, it becomes a rather difficult task to arrive at a singular coherent definition of travel writing. At the outset, it would be of importance to keep in mind that literature of travel and written records of travel are not synonymous. In the former, the author is generally a person who displays literary taste through which his narration of travel attains the quality of literature. The author's literary capability and personal qualification as an author bestows a literary quotient to the narration of the account of travel accomplished by such persons. On the hand, written records of travel generally are records of travel which read more like informative report writing such as guide books on travel and tourism brochures that are intended to give details of a certain journey and discoveries made the author and as such it tends to be more scientific and less imaginative than that of the works that may be counted as examples of travel literature. However, one may discern the following traits generally found in the literature of travel:

i. The author of travel literature is one in whom the desire to travel is inherent
ii. The author's treatment of travel in terms of narration should be such that the author's passion and spirit is reflected in a similar vein to that of any other form of literary writing of the author

Unlike the written record of travel, literature of travel does not intend to produce the effect of accuracy deliberately except if required by the nature of the text. In books of discovery where travel forms the unifying strand, accuracy in terms of history and scientific knowledge is imperative owing to the nature of narration and intention of narration. Having said so, it would be pertinent to remember that the travel writing that we encounter in modern times may be traced back to ancient roots such as "the factual

record as well as the mythical, the legendary and the ancient epics…" (Youngs, 19).

Early examples of travel writing comprise several books written by Arab travellers such as Ibn Batutta, Petrarch's *Mount Ventoux* (1336); *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoueries of the English Nation* (1589) by Richard Haklyut is generally considered one of the finest examples of early travel writing – a book that was developed primarily on the basis of eye witness accounts of Haklyut's expeditions and voyages. In the year 1634, Sir Thomas Herbert presented his account of experiences in his *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa and Asia the Great that had achieved considerable success owing to his spontaneous and light hearted narration. In the 18th century when England witnessed a splurge of maritime activities several maritime diaries such as those of Captain James Cook's, published in 1784, were in vogue. These accounts were devoid of the imaginary element and evocativeness which one may encounter in the literature of travel, a distinctive body of writing that came be recognised as having literary value as other genres of literature.* For example, Charles Darwin's famous book *Voyage of the Beagle* published in 1839 is a book of expedition in which the very nature of the subject matter necessitated that the author made truthful record of facts and figures where the scope for imagination was almost absent or very limited.

By the middle of the 20th century travel writing, especially Western travel writing came to be considered an exercise in Imperialism whereby the West viewed the rest of the world – the Non-west and engaged in a discursive representation of the 'Other. Recent approaches to travel writing however, attempt to examine travel literature as politically motivated owing to the fact that it is an outsider's representation as the native seldom finds any need to travel and represent the local landscape within which he or she is situated. In this perspective, then travel literature may provide the reader with an opportunity to analyse the discursive construction of the spatiality seen through the knowledge/power lens. This happens because the eye of the narrator who is most of the times an 'outsider', engages in the act of imposing identity on and meaning about the native and the society and culture thereof while

'silencing' the native. This stand towards travel literature is also quite identical to the feminist approach which looks at how literature had been engaging in 'silencing' the voice of the woman as the other – both the native and the woman needs to be represented, they cannot 'write' themselves.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How is travel writing different from written records of travel?

Q 2: Mention the two qualifying traits of travel writing.

Q 3: Give some instances of early travel literature.

Q 4: How does the travel narrative help in the discursive construction of spatiality?

The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing opines that travel writing is one "the most socially important of all literary genres. It records our temporal and spatial progress" while discussing travel writing as a socially significant genre informed with spatial and temporal aspects. It is a genre that allows the production of a sense of difference and affinity in relation to the viewer and the viewed – the traveller and the subject creating an idea of place, people and culture that comprises of the social, economic, psychological and cultural realms that includes both individual and national perspectives.

There has been an abundance of travel narratives throughout the ages as travel in various forms–personal and social, religious and secular has existed as a part human activity since the past. Critics have agreed upon the difficulties involved in defining the term (Holland and Huggan, 1998; Kowaleski, 1992;Thompson, 2011) as the form appears to accommodate other forms such diary, journalistic writing, memoirs, letters, guidebooks and fiction as well which lends a distinctive sense of heterogeneity to the narrative in itself. Commonly understood as factual first person narrative, travel writings then tend move between various forms, as there is an absence of well-demarcated boundary. If we examine Swift's *Gulliver's Travel* or Melville's *Typee* for instance, we shall realise that travel informs the

underlying design of both narratives but they do not fall into the genre of travel writing owing to their fictional character. However, in both cases, the narrative may be said to have been influenced by the structural form of travel writing. There are also instances where a travel narrative rests on techniques that belong to the world of fiction; the narrator adheres to elements of fiction such as "plot, characterisation and dialogue…manipulation and invention of detail." (Youngs).

William Sherman identifies several forms of writing in early modern England in which one may trace the genesis of English travel writing, as we now know it. He feels that one would be able to trace the origin of modern English travel writing in the written records of people belonging to various walks of life including pilgrims, errant knights, merchants, explorers, colonisers, captives and castaways, ambassadors, pirates and scientists and ones who edited others' record of travel which displayed a varied style, method and tone thereby making it rather difficult for categorisation into a distinctive generic form. However, modern definition of travel writing would prefer to adhere to authenticity while emphasising actual travel undertaken by the actual narrator. Since the 16th century, when documentation occupied a place of prominence within the physical act of travel, the written accounts of the travellers, merchants, ambassadors among others who were involved in the act of travelling for various purposes, began to be counted as important owing to the representation of faraway landscapes, people and culture which had apparently tremendous entrepreneurial potential.

By the 18th century, English fiction witnessed an almost overwhelming outpour of narratives, which had a 'travelling hero' and 'journey plots' creating an ambience in which the authors were perhaps undertaking real journeys or engaging in fictitious journeys. By the 19th century, the imperial exploits and colonial expansion had established Britain as one of the strongest powers as it defeated its contenders from Portugal, Spain and Holland. Victorian England appeared rather confident about its colonies, expansion, explorations and discovery of new worlds, which came to be represented through contemporary travel writing. Towards

the final decades of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, English travel writing appeared to reveal affinity towards the imperial ideology of the crown–a tendency which however, diffused eventually as there were growing doubts, anxieties and dissent regarding imperial practices which was led to incoherence and fragmentation in social, cultural and political beliefs of the people. Subsequently, travel writing of this period lacks 'homogeneity'.

It has been observed that travel writing has become a subjective form of writing by 20th century and has come to occupy the place of 'alternative writing' for the writers of fiction. In travel narratives then the reader now came across an impressionistic representation "with the interest focussed as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels". It is noteworthy that although there were changes in the formal structure of travel writing over the years, the thematic concerns of the genre generally appeared unaffected. The attempt of the travellers to 'know and see' an alien land and culture through the lens of their 'known' world–the 'double sphere of reference' became a discernible feature in the writing that emerged during this period. The political atmosphere of World War and growing ideological dissent intensified a sense of anxiety and doubt regarding Western civilising morale which created an atmosphere in which "even the most jingoist of travellers' tales could not always gloss over the conûicts at the heart of the white civilising mission." (Carr, 75). *In the Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Helen Carr observes:

It is possible to see three stages of travel writing within this period. From 1880 to 1900, the long, 'realist' (not of course synonymous with reliable), instructive tale of heroic adventure remained dominant. In the years from 1900 to the First World War, the 'realist' texts have not disappeared, but much travel writing becomes less didactic, more subjective, and more literary. By the inter-war years, which saw a surge in the popularity of travel and travel writing, the literary travel book had become the dominant form: many of the best-known examples of the genre were written by writers equally or better known for their fiction or poetry. (75)

Owing to increased mobility and growth of communication and transport, the first half of the 20th century witnessed a production of travel writing that appeared 'aware of globalisation' – the phrase implying a situation wherein cultures and people met and mingled; a time when writers became increasingly aware of the need to rethink and analyse the 'condition and value' of modern civilisation represented by the West. Thus, one may argue, like Mary Louise Pratt that during the 18th and 19th century travel writing 'produced "the rest of the world" for Europeans' (in Carr, 81). However, since the 19th century onwards, travel writing displays a growing apprehension that the exclusive otherness of Non-Western parts of the globe seems progressively diminishing – an effect of the homogenising narrative produced by the hegemonic discourse of the West. According to the Postcolonial approach, travel writing like other forms of writing, appears to disseminate 'difference' while the hegemonic practices of imperial culture served the agenda of legitimising and justifying the discriminatory norms of the empire. Critics and researchers in postcolonial studies are of the opinion that travel literature produced by the West intended to proliferate Western rhetoric of empire thereby contributing considerably towards the construction of the notions of identity and culture. One may then argue that postcolonial reception of travel writing as a generic form aims to challenge the Eurocentric approach to the form whereby the dominant culture's production of truth and knowledge is critiqued.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Marie Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) may be considered to have ushered in a new approach to travel writing studies while observing that there is a need to review the way in which West has been 'mapping and describing' the world that primarily was the non-West. Generally speaking, postcolonial travel writing in its narrow sense implies to those narratives of travel that have been authored by writers who belong to the former British colonies such as India, Pakistan, Africa and the West Indies. It is also necessary to keep in mind that although writers of Western origin may also belong to the postcolonial school, it is however, the writers without Western lineage and narratives that engage with issues related to race and ethnicity that are

understood as postcolonial. It is against such a background that postcolonial travel narrative may be said to embrace travel from the margin to the centre where the former would mean the colony and the latter would imply the Europe or West. Instances of travel narratives that may be understood as representing a journey from the periphery to the centre are Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and Caryl Phillips' *The European Tribe* (1987); other form of postcolonial travel writing may include a narration of travel from centre to the margin as for instance *An Area of Darkness* (1964) or even travel writing such as that of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1993) that engages with the representation of travel from one periphery to another.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 5: What kind of travel writings are to be found in the 18th and 19th century English fiction?

Q 6: What changes occurred in the field of travel writing in the context of the 20th century?

Q 7: Which are the three stages in modern-day travel writings?

Q 8: In what ways, Edward Said and Marie Louise Pratt are considered to have ushered in a new approach to travel writing?

14.4 V S NAIPAUL: LIFE AND WORKS

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad, popularly known as V.S. Naipaul, was the son of Seepersad Naipaul and Droapatie Capildeo, and was born on 17th August, 1932 in Chaguanas, Trinidad. His forefathers had migrated to the Caribbean as indentured labourers to work in the sugar plantations towards the final decades of the 19th century. Naipaul's father became a journalist in *Trinidad Guardian* contributing English articles to the paper, and by 1932, he became a staff reporter from Chaguanas. Belonging to the farming community in Trinidad, Naipaul's father had a great respect for writers and their profession which perhaps motivated Naipaul to aspire to become a writer himself. Although Naipaul's descendents belonged to the Hindu Brahmin community, the Naipaul family was not very radical in terms of rituals and practices while they began adapting themselves to the new

socio-cultural environment and eventually gave up communicating in Indian languages even at home. V. S. Naipaul began his school life in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and went on to win a scholarship after his graduation, which enabled him to study further at Oxford. By 1960s, after the completion of his education, he began travelling to the countries that were once colonies–he began observing these post imperial societies in South America, India, West Indies among others with an approach that was akin to the 'English tradition' quite unlike other contemporary postcolonial travel writers. It is perhaps for this attitude that Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* appears as the work of an author inhabiting the centre while 'beholding India in the periphery'.

Naipaul began his career working in the BBC for a brief period; his initial foray into the world of writing was initiated with *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Alvira* (1958) and *Miguel Street* (1959) – the plots of these three works of fiction, the last being a collection of short stories, were set in Trinidad and remarkable for their comic portrayal of character and events. The much-acclaimed novel *A House for Mr Biswas,* published in 1961, draws from the life of Naipaul's father. Published in 1963, *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* is Naipaul's first novel set in England. His later novels appear more politically informed as they engage with the colonial and postcolonial socio-cultural setting; issues related to decolonisation that prevail in such societies. Instances of such novels are *The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975) and *A Bend in the River* (1979). Naipaul's autobiographical account of his life in England is narrated in *The Enigma of Arrival* published in 1987, which interestingly, appears to comprise elements of both fact and fiction. Such blend of fiction and non-fiction recurs once again in his experimental narrative dealing with a historical portraiture of the Caribbean titled *A Way in the World* (1994). India is the subject of study in three of Naipaul's non-fiction works – *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilisation* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990); other non-fiction works by Naipaul include *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981), *A Turn in the South* (1989) *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions* (1998), *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies - British, French and*

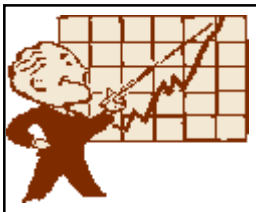
Dutch in the West Indies and South America (1962) and *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (1969), *The Return of Eva Peron* (1980), *The Writer and the World* (2002), *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (2007). He was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

Naipaul is known for his rather uninhibited observations of culture and people, which has generated worldwide debate and discussion regarding his works. As an author comfortable with both fiction and non-fiction, his travelogues has presented him with worldwide recognition for his engagement with complex cultural processes, cultural difference while imagining the "strangeness of people in different places and times" (*Introduction*, Barnouw) From among the non-fiction works, *The Middle Passage*, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilisation*, *Among the Believers*, *A Million Mutinies* and *A Turn in the South* are the books that are those that belong to the category of travelogues. These books represent Naipaul's concern about the notions of difference and divisiveness in societies embedded with a sense of cultural plurality; his critical stance regarding the socially, culturally and politically 'givens' in relation to a specific people within a specific territory; the discerning of a radical conventionalism set against an apparently threatening globalised economy, culture and politics that afflict these territories – Naipaul's works may be seen contemplating on these very relevant contemporary issues.

Owing to his somewhat obviously prejudiced understanding of 'development' which adheres to the Eurocentric model, and his reading of the postcolonial societies seen as 'lacking' in development, Naipaul has received harsh criticism from readers and critics alike. Critics are of the opinion that Naipaul while critiquing the postcolonial societies for their absence of progress and mediocrity of imagination seems to speak through the lens of 'English middle class' values which are again, in the real sense of the term seen as restrictive to comprehensive growth and development. This strange affinity towards the superior British culture may be attributed to Naipaul's childhood spent in 'little England'–the British colony of Trinidad where Naipaul and others like him imbibed the cultural values of the West. Thereafter, when he went to England for higher studies, he felt more close to the English than

his own Indian community or even the West Indians – this feature of his life is perhaps responsible in making him 'see' the world as he does; he seems to be less close to his 'own people' than that of the English.

In the Preface to *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul writes: "The travel for *An Area of Darkness* followed immediately on the writing of *The Middle Passage*…[t]he idea of the other form, non-fiction began to seem like a liberation…".Naipaul divides his non-fictional account of India into three parts and each part comprises several chapters. Reading *An Area of Darkness* would perhaps not be an easy task as it acquaints the reader with the complex traveller Naipaul whose idea of travel comprising the 'inside/outside' dichotomy is put to critical deliberations quite unlike other travelogues where one generally reads the account of the traveller's experience of coming from the familiar zone of 'home' and reaching the unfamiliar 'land' of strange culture and people. In Naipaul, the idea of familiarity associated with the image of 'home' and the notion of 'a sense of belonging' to one's place/race of origin is critically explored which unsettles the readers' embedded notions of the home and place of belonging.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 9: Name the books in which Naipaul takes India as his subject?

Q 10: How does the book *An Area of Darkness* provide Naipaul's ideas of travel?

14.5 READING THE CHAPTER I, SECTION I

The first section of *An Area of Darkness* comprises four chapters, which are as follows: A Resting-Place for the Imagination, Degree, The Colonial, Romancers. In this section, we shall try to read Chapter I of Section I

You will note that this book of Naipaul is the account of his 'discovery' of India, the first of his trilogies on India; he came to India in 1962 for the first time; the land of his ancestors spawned complex emotions in him as a result of which the book does not read like any other travel book–it reveals Naipaul's rather challenging association with his idea of 'home'–the home

that had been handed down to him through his ancestors. Until then, Naipaul had been growing up with an idea of India that had been conjured in his imagination woven through the memory of his forefathers handed down to him since his childhood. His physical encounter with India for the first time in the 1960s in relation to the emotive and ambiguous image of India that he had inherited from his forefathers as he grew up in Trinidad made him realise the discrepancies and gaps of the imagination and memory–it is perhaps such a realisation that makes Naipaul feel that he is a part of the native Indian crowd and apart from them as well.

The first chapter opens with Naipaul's vivid memory of the house he grew up in Trinidad where he remembered having seen 'India lay about […] in things: in a string bed or two, grimy, tattered, no longer serving any function…" (23). This image of India is almost similar to the image of India, which inhabits the consciousness of the author. After his travel to India of his forefathers, he could visualise "how a complete transference had been made from eastern Uttar Pradesh to Trinidad" (24). Naipaul provides the reader with an in-depth account of his ancestors' long journey to an alien land many years ago narrating how his "grandfather had made a difficult and courageous journey…several hundred miles from his village…he carried his village with him. A few reassuring relationships, a strip of land, and he could satisfyingly re-create an eastern Uttar Pradesh village in central Trinidad as if in the vastness of India" (25). The multicultural society in which the author was brought up appeared natural to him although he could see 'difference' in an around him in people and their lives and the way in which his family responded to such differences. Naipaul remembers "[t]he house we lived in was distinctive…we ate certain food, performed certain ceremonies and had certain taboos…permeated with a sense of difference…[though] race was never discussed; but at an early age I understood that Muslims were somewhat different than others…[e]very thing beyond our family had this quality of difference (26). Naipaul was invested with the image of India perhaps also through the rituals his grandmother performed – he recalls how the family had to make provisions for special permission to satisfy his grandmother's desire to

have a 'kattha' which was held under a pipal tree in the Botanical Gardens – he remembers the moment – 'it was a scene of pure pastoral'(27). Being the descendents of Hindu Brahmins, Naipaul's home was aplenty with pundits and they professed orthodox worldview. However, Naipaul asserts that he was born 'an unbeliever' and the ritual ceremonies could not incite Naipaul's interest as he "did not understand the language… the images did not interest [him]"(27) – eventually although growing in the midst of devout Hindus the author could not relate to the customs and beliefs of Hinduism; he 'remained totally ignorant of Hinduism'. However, for Naipaul his 'horror of the unclean' is the only trace of Hinduism that one may find in him. This horror of the unclean was especially in relation to his association with food and he recalls how prejudiced he was when it came to food. His experience in New York was miserable when he first landed there: "The day of my swift transportation to New York was a day of misery. I spent a frightened, hungry day in that city; and on the ship to Southampton I ate mainly the sweets…" (28)

Naipaul observes that caste system in Trinidad was not as brutal and unpleasant as it is in India. He appears to be sarcastic of the ritual of 'janaywa' or the thread ceremony, stating that it was no more than a 'piece of theatre'. In accounts such as these the picture that emerges of the author is that of an individual who appears to look down upon the ancestral traditions, only too eager to discern negative aspects of the community and blissfully happy about his disbelief and nonconformity with whatever his forefathers possessively held on to. However, Naipaul's memory of a certain day in a science class is significant as it makes the reader realise that the author also harboured a sense of loss–a sense of loss subtly permeated the lives of his people perhaps for being displaced from their 'roots'. Naipaul realises that this sense of loss in him particularly is his own doing and it is later in London that he realises that the sense of loss that he and his people had been experiencing was "the result of history and environment"(30). The family life, which apparently tried to hold on to the past, left behind in India gradually 'dissolved' and 'ceased to exist' by the time, the author was fourteen. His contact with India now enabled him to see the incongruities of both the India

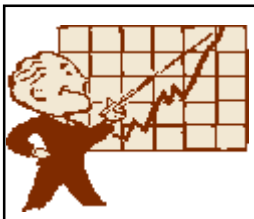
of his imagination fed with the memories of his forefathers and the physical reality called India – this incongruity he believes is reflective of the truth that is inherent his critical attitude to the idea of 'home' associated with India.

Yet he is also disturbed by the fact that here in India, the land of a people apparently very possessive of their age old traditions appears to be gradually giving up their distinctive culture a reflection of which he finds in the replacing of the earthen lamps lit during Diwali with electric bulbs and candles. This sense of loss is perhaps due to the discrepancy that Naipaul finds between the India in his memory/imagination and the real India. The author is seen having fond memories of his association with Ramon a Hindu whom he befriends in London. The portrayal of Naipaul's relationship with Ramon reveals the complex emotions that individuals have while growing in a multiracial, multicultural society being displaced from their roots as it were – both the author and Ramon were leading similar lives in their search for a 'home' in world demarcated with differences. Naipaul acknowledges that the India that formed the backdrop of his childhood was the India that belonged to 'the imagination'. The real India, according to Naipaul consisted of several things that agitated him – Indian films, religion as it is practised here and the Indian people. In addition, having grown up in the somewhat candid environment of Trinidad, educated in London and living there for a substantial period now, the real act of facing the real India was rather frightening for him. In an overwhelming moment of his first trip to India, he realises that he becomes a part of the crowd – this experience of merging and being invisible in the social sphere was unique and first of its kind experience for the author. He describes this sensation thus:

And, for the first time in my life I was one of the crowd. There was nothing in my appearance or dress to distinguish me from the crowd…In Trinidad to be an Indian was distinctive. To be anything there was distinctive; difference was each man's attribute. To be an Indian in England was distinctive; in Egypt, it was more so. Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality. Again and again I was caught. I was faceless. I might sink without a trace into that Indian

crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I felt the need to impose myself, and did not know how. (39)

This passage perhaps best illustrates how Naipaul emerges as a distinct traveller from the conventional type; his difference lies in his approach to the land and its people; while asserting his own difference which he feels others ought to recognise, he appears to fail in that very quality as he too fails to recognise the different approach Indians have about people and life around them.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What was Naipual's experience following his first encounter with India in 1960s?

Q 12: What things about India agitated Naipaul?

14.6 IMPORTANT THEMES

Some of the important themes that are notable in *An Area of Darkness* are discussed below:

Use of Memory:

Memory plays an important role in *As Area of Darkness*. The prescribed chapter reveals how Naipaul takes recourse to memory to work on his idea of India. He narrates extensively how the India of his imagination was conjured in him through memory not only his but significantly, of his ancestors' who had migrated to Trinidad years ago. It is in their memory that India survived and was handed down to the author. However, this India was one that existed in vacuum as he remembers that everything associated with India was hazy for him and 'dark'–darkness being metaphor for a kind of vagueness that surrounds the image of India, something that is unknown or unknowable. His idea of India emerges from his memory of the practices, customs, rituals and beliefs that his ancestors had adhered to in their life in Trinidad. This image is in contrast to what Naipaul finds when he comes to physical contact with the landscape. Memory plays an important role in all postcolonial writing of

which Diaspora forms an integral part. The postcolonial imagination attempts to retrieve the self-lost in the process of colonial representation. Displacement and the journey to find the 'home' from which displaced works with memory as in case of Naipaul where the act of physical journey is narrated simultaneously with his memory of the idea of 'home'.

Issue of Otherness:

Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* engages with the 'other' and the generic form of travel writing allows him the best possible scope to narrate his experience of encountering the 'Other'. However, a critic observes while reflecting upon otherness in Naipaul's narrative that here "the roles of self-Other are reversed in that it is the other who travels and describes a culture (Leon, 41). It is perhaps Naipaul's familiarity with displacement that 'home' becomes an important entity for him but his encounter with home does not seem to provide him with contentment – it is the otherness of his home that creates a sense of unease; the otherness is one reason why it becomes rather complicated for him to represent India as his 'home'. The otherness that Naipaul attempts to contemplate upon is one that creates a complex sense of self-definition as well – India is everything that Naipaul does not want to be. The author as the 'Other' here seems strangely to deny the Self its due place while making an attempt to define his multiracial, multicultural identity of which India forms a very integral part. In this context, one may refer to Carl Thompson's observation: "The 'others' that travellers use to discuss their difference, and implicitly their superiority, may also be drawn from their own culture. Even in the context of 'home travels', the traveller is by dentition a more mobile ûgure than many of the 'locals' he or she encounters, and on the basis of that fundamental difference travel writers often claim for themselves a greater breadth of knowledge, or a greater degree of sophistication, open-mindedness and/or modernity.(144)

Idea of the Third World:

Brought up in the British colony of 'little England' in Trinidad and having lived in England in his later life, Naipaul had very little affinity towards societies that were primarily non-Western. His unorthodox life at home,

absence of institutionalised religion in his life, his dislike of rituals and especially his acculturation among people in a multicultural social setup perhaps produced in him a unique sensibility which created a sense of disdain for societies where ethnicity, religion, socio-political identity were seen at problematic to the constitution of an individual's own sense of identity and belonging. Naipaul's journeys comprise his travels to the Third World countries such as India, Pakistan, Iran among others – the narration of his experience of 'coming back' to these societies and people does not seem very happy and satisfying. He feels that societies like those in India are ones where the individual leads a restricted life, impoverished in all sense of the term; experiencing an assault on individual rights while living a life of indignity. Critics are of the opinion that Naipaul's own upbringing in the English culture displaced from his 'home' makes him appear an 'outsider'; his reading of these societies thus seem prejudiced and at times very trivial as he fails to take note of the deep rooted philosophy of life that informs the Indian way of life.

14.7 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Naipaul's prose is known for its straightforwardness – an aspect that one would not perhaps miss in his travelogue *An Area of Darkness*. The narrative style of the author appears truthful and radical; he does not seem to be careful about being politically correct in his making his statements. Although the idea of 'home' informs his writing, he is seldom 'at home' in his experience of India, which to him is 'an area of darkness'. Naipaul's vision is that of an outsider, prejudiced and ambiguous – he is unhappy with the way things work in India; his coming to India with the intention to 'seeing and knowing' it meets with disappointment in the very beginning as he finds himself lost in the faceless crowd. This disappointment with everything that concerns India is evident in his narration – the indignation and tedium that overpowers him throughout his travel and stay here is amply exemplified at his unease in the Churchgate Station at Bombay where is stands in utter disgust. His desire to 'impose himself' upon this land and the people reveals rather harsh attitude towards the land of his forefathers.

It is not very clear what provokes Naipaul to such a defiant denunciation of India and her people.

Naipaul's affinity towards Western life is reflected in his narration of his experience of London: "I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost…it was a good place for getting lost in, a city no one ever knew…(38) The compassionate association with London where the author loses himself is in stark contrast to that of his experience at the Churchgate Station where too he was almost lost in the crowd. But, when he speaks of London he appears to be in awe of the place – a symbol of West's power, progress and status whereas Churchgate Station could only remind him of the eternal problems that afflict the people in India – the relentlessly hurrying crowds remind him of the struggle that these Third worldians face every day to make their both ends meet. The romantic idyllic vision of leisure and affluence that London brings to the mind is something that the author appears to be fascinated with; the more he comes closer to the Indian soil he is haunted by his memory of London, his 'fear' of India that colours his thought even before he could confront the 'real' India. In a voyeuristic manner, Naipaul represents India while he appears rather afraid to embrace it. It is needless to say that Naipaul is stunning in his use of words, his description of the travel and the accompanying emotions which appear flawless except for his subjective opinion about India and her people, would perhaps make the reader experience the feel of reading fiction.



14.8 LET US SUM UP

Travel writing is an old practice, which was a familiar form of writing in the diaries and journals of explorers, scientists, religious preachers etc. Travel writing as a genre came to gain a concrete shape during the 16th century when the act of documentation came to gain momentum and every kind of travel and associated activity undertaken for varied purposes came to documented. The dominance of the West through the expansion of colonial rule also led to an increase in the act of physical travel. Recent approaches

to travel writing consider travel as the West's attempt to look at the now-Western cultures through the hegemony of empire whereby a discursive construction of the latter occurs. Such representation of the non-West is motivated politically as it projects the non-West as the 'other'—a marginal entity. V.S. Naipaul, who is known for both his fiction and non-fiction, discusses his first 'encounter' of India in his travelogue. India ought to have a special place in his mind owing to the fact that it is the land of his ancestors. However, as one goes through the book, it would emerge that the author appears rather disappointed with India, her people and their culture. Many critics read his attitude towards the land of his origin as a mark of his Eurocentric temperament. Despite its apparent shortcomings, Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* would remain a significant contribution to the wealth of travel literature.



14.9 FURTHER READING

1) Barnouw, Dagmar. (2003). *Naipaul's Strangers*. USA: Indiana University Press.
2) Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan. (1998). *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
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https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/v-s-naipaul

14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: In travel writing, the author is generally a person who displays literary taste through which his narration of travel attains the quality of literature…. …in written records of travel, the writer keeps records of travel which read more like informative report writing such as guide books on travel and tourism brochures.

Ans to Q 2: The author of travel literature is one in whom the desire to travel is inherent… …the author's treatment of travel in terms of narration should be such that his passion and spirit is reflected in a similar vein to that of any other form of literary writing of the author.

Ans to Q 3: Books written by the Arab traveller Ibn Batutta… …Petrarch's *Mount Ventoux*… … Richard Haklyut's *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoueries of the English Nation… …*Sir Thomas Herbert's *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa and Asia the Great… ...Captain James Cook's maritime accounts… …*Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* and so on.

Ans to Q 4: Travel narratives help because the eye of the narrator who is most of the times an 'outsider', engages in the act of imposing identity on and meaning about the native and the society and culture thereof while 'silencing' the native. This stand towards travel literature is also quite identical to the feminist approach which looks at how literature had been engaging in 'silencing' the voice of the woman as the other – both the native and the woman needs to be represented, they cannot 'write' themselves.

Ans to Q 5: The 18th century English fiction witnessed an outpour of narratives having a 'travelling hero' and 'journey plots'… … the journey might be real or fictitious… …by the 19th century, the imperial exploits

and colonial expansion made English travel writing appear to reveal affinity towards the imperial ideology of the crown.

Ans to Q 6: Travel writing by 20th century occupied the place of 'alternative writing' for the writers of fiction… …In travel narratives then the reader now came across an impressionistic representation "with the interest focussed as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels".

Ans to Q 7: The three stages of travel writing are: The long, 'realist' instructive tale of heroic adventure… …Following the World War I, much travel writing becomes less didactic, more subjective, more literary… …by the inter-war years, the literary travel book had become the dominant form, as many of the best known travel narratives were written by writers equally good for their fictional or poetic works.

Ans to Q 8: Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Marie Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) ushered in a new approach to travel writing… …Postcolonial travel writing, to which they refereed, implies to those narratives of travel that have been authored by writers who belonged to the former British colonies such as India, Pakistan, Africa and the West Indies… …instances are Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and Caryl Phillips' *The European Tribe.*

Ans to Q 9: India is the subject of study in three of Naipaul's non-fiction works – *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilisation* (1977), and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990).

Ans to Q 10: Naipaul in this book reflects on the idea of travel comprising the 'inside/outside' dichotomy quite unlike in other travelogues that provides an account of the traveller's experience of coming from the familiar zone of 'home' and reaching the unfamiliar 'land' of strange culture and people… …Naipaul, critically explores the image of 'home' and the notion of 'a sense of belonging' to one's place/race of origin.

Ans to Q 11: His first encounter to the emotive and ambiguous image of India that he had inherited from his forefathers as he grew up in Trinidad, made him realise the discrepancies and gaps of the

imagination and memory… …such a realisation makes Naipaul feel that he is a part of the native Indian crowd and also apart from them in many ways.

Ans to Q 12: The real India, according to Naipaul consisted of several things that agitated him–Indian films, religion as it is practised here, and the Indian people. And, having grown up in the somewhat candid environment of Trinidad, educated in London, and living there for a substantial period now, the real act of facing the real India was rather frightening for him. He realises that he becomes a part of the crowd–this experience of merging and being invisible in the social sphere was unique and first of its kind experience for the author.



14.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Trace the growth and development of travel writing as a distinct genre of non-fiction writing.

Q 2: Assess V S Naipaul's contribution to travel writing.

Q 3: Naipaul presents an outsider's view to India. Discuss *An Area of Darkness* (prescribed chapter) in terms of the given statement.

Q 4: Write a note on the history of travel writing. Account for the subjective turn in travel writing by the 20th century.

Q 5: Examine V. S. Naipaul's prose style as reflected in his travel writing *An Area of Darkness.*

Q 6: Analyse some important themes in Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness.*

Q 7: How does travel writing produce a sense of 'difference and affinity'?

Q 8: Why according to critics, is it difficult to arrive at a singular coherent definition of travel writing?

Q 9: What are the other forms of writing that may be accommodated within travel narratives?

Q 10: Where according to Naipaul, did his idea of India originate ? Discuss with reference to the text prescribed.

*** ***** ***



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