PGEG SI 04

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 4: NONFICTIONAL PROSE

BLOCK 1: ESSAYS

CONTENTS:

Unit 1: Montaigne: "Of Solitude"

Unit 2: Francis Bacon: "Of Truth"& "Of Studies"

Unit 3: Charles Lamb: "My Relations"

Unit 4: Virginia Woolf: "Modern Fiction"

Unit 5: George Orwell: "Shooting an Elephant"

REFERENCES : For All Units

Subject Experts

Prof. Pona Mahanta, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University

Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinator : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Assistant Professor, Department of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

Units	Contributors
1,2 & 5	Pallavi Gogoi, Assistant Professor, Department of English KKHSOU
3	Nitusmita Bhattacharyya, Research Scholar, Department of English, Gauhati University
4	Dr. Prasenjit Das

Editorial Team

Content:	Prof. Robin Goswami, Former Head, Department of English Cotton College (Units 3, 4, 5) In house Editing (Units 1, 2)

Structure, Format and Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das

May, 2017

ISBN : 978-81-934003-3-3

This Self Learning Material (SLM) of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State University is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike4.0 License (International) : http.//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Headquarters: Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017
City Office: Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006; Web: www.kkhsou.in

The University acknowledges with strength the financial support provided by the Distance Education Bureau, UGC for preparation of this material.

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 3: NONFICTIONAL PROSE

BLOCK 1: ESSAYS

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 1 : Montaigne: "Of Solitude" **Page : 9 - 33**

Montaigne: Life and Works, Explanation of the Text: List of Important References in the Text, Glossary of the Text, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception

Unit 2 : Francis Bacon: "Of Truth" & "Of Studies" **Page : 34 - 55**

Francis Bacon: Life and Works, Explanation of the Essays: Explanation of the Essay "Of Truth", Explanation of the Essay "Of Studies", Glossary, Major Themes, Style and Language, Critical Reception

Unit 3 : Charles Lamb: "My Relations" **Page : 56 - 75**

Charles Lamb: Life and Works, Reading the Text: Major Themes, Lamb's Prose Style, Critical Reception

Unit 4 : Virginia Woolf: "Modern Fiction" **Page : 76 - 98**

Virginia Woolf: Life and Works, Woolf's Idea of the Essay as a Literary Form, Reading the Text: Major Themes, Woolf's Prose Style, Critical Reception

Unit 5 : George Orwell: "Shooting an Elephant" **Page : 99 - 118**

George Orwell: Life and Works, Reading the Text: Major Themes, Orwell's Prose Style, Critical Reception

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Course 4 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 example, 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 you to the different forms of non-fictional prose writing. In this course, you will be taken through different genres such as essays, biography, autobiography, letters and travel writing that emerged from diverse historical and cultural contexts. It is expected that you will engage yourselves 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 you 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 your convenience, this Course is 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

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, the 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. You 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).

Block 1: Essays comprises five units, which are as the following:

Unit 1: Montaigne: "Of Solitude" deals with Montaigne'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 learners to 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. You 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.

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.

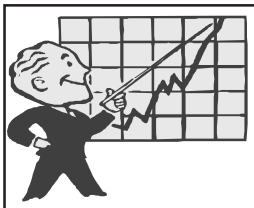
1.3 MONTAIGNE: THE ESSAYIST

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

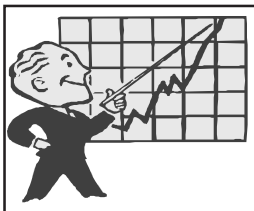
Transgress: to go beyond limits (of all that is morally, socially or legally acceptable)

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

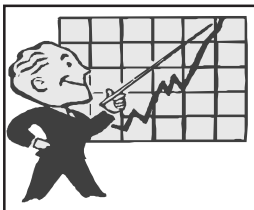
Make a list of some of the thoughts and advices recommended by Michel de Montaigne in his essay "Of Solitude." Also, you may note down some of the best thoughts and ideas that come across your mind in your own hour of solitude.

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

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

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)

Answer to Q No 1: Montaigne was a French essayist of the 16th century.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 12: The characteristics of Ambition and Bias is personified as 'He' while Fortune, Soul and Pleasure is personified as 'She'.

Answer to Q No 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

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer 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

Q1. Describe the life and works of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne. Assess Montaigne's contributions to the genre of the Essay.

Q2. Give a detailed explanation of the essay "On Solitude."

Q3. What makes 'solitude' an essential part of human life as discussed in the essay "Of Solitude"?

Q4. How does Montaigne distinguish one's own self-concern from that of one's spouse, children and worldly belongings?

Q5. Discuss some of the references borrowed from the Classical thinkers that Montaigne uses to elucidate his perspective on solitude.

Q6. Why does Montaigne write that a wise man has nothing to lose except his own self? Explain briefly.

Q7. What is the purpose of leisure and ease according to Montaigne?

Q8. Discuss the major themes that emerge from the essay "On Solitude"

Q9. Analyse the style and language employed by the essayist Michel de Montaigne.

Q10. Provide a critical reception of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne.

*** ***** ***

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

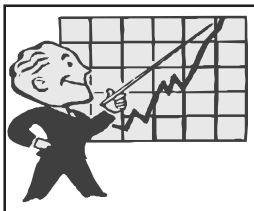
Bacon believed in the spirit of the new Renaissance humanism and true to the spirit of enquiry, he was a 'skeptic' in his

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

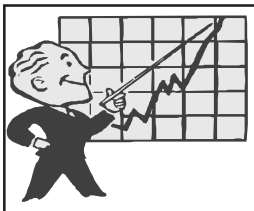
with representations of truth in their poetry for the purpose of "pleasure" and merchants for the purpose of "advantage" or monetary gain but Bacon questions the tendency of people in general with regard to lying just for the sake of it.

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.

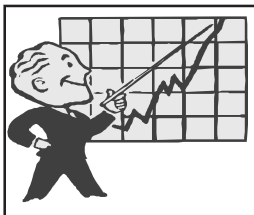
The world of knowledge is best captured within the pages of books alone and it is no wonder that books are considered as man's best companion. It is the most essential source of all our knowledge and learning. Further, it is through years of learning that a person gains a world of knowledge and understanding. 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.

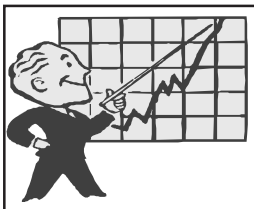
The learner may also note the old archaic words in English such as the following: "imposeth" (impose), "doth" (does), "examineth" (examines), "showeth"(shows), "filleth" (fills), "passeth" (passes), sinketh" (sinks), "settleth" (settles), "spake" (spoke), "teacheth" (teaches), "breatheth" (breathes), "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

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

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

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

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

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

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



2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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).

Answer to Q No 7: It opens with the question, "what is truth?" which were the words uttered by Pontius Pilate.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 10: Bacon compares falsehood to the mixture of alloy in coins of gold or silver, which debases or reduces its genuine quality.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 16: Bacon frequently cites or quotes from the classical poets and philosophers and also makes several allusions to the Bible.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

Answer to Q No 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.

*** ***** ***

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

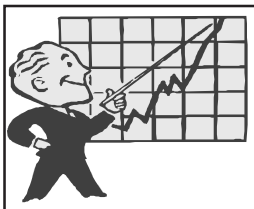
appreciated the classic English literature of Elizabethan and Jacobean times. He wrote many essays on them as well. One such essay is "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare". But it is with his *Essays of Elia* that he gained a real rapport with the contemporary readers. He gained an enviable reputation as 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

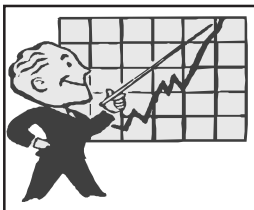
contributed three stories. These collections proved to be delightful body of literature meant for the young readers. They also brought out collections like "Poetry for Children".

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."

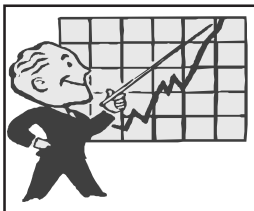
Elia then goes on to describe James. James is an unusual creation of nature according to Elia. He is cheerful, optimistic and always tries to be sensible. He prefers the old and the experienced to the new and the innovative. He does not support new or fresh things, which haven't stood the test of time. 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

Albert, Edward. (2005). *History of English Literature.* London: Oxford University Press.

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

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

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.)

Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia.*

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

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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 9: For the answer please read the section 1.4.1 again.

Ans to Q No 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 No 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.

*** ***** ***

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 and issues raised and the techniques practised by Virginia Woolf while writing her own fictional works. Along with T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and Ezra Pound's 'A Retrospect', this essay is one of the main manifestos of literary modernism. It is also an important source for readers seeking to understand Woolf's own writing style.

4.3 VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE ESSAYIST

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



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

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

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.

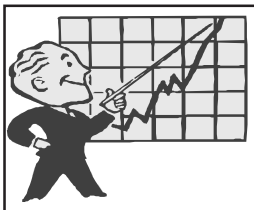
It is important to note that for Virginia Woolf Sir Thomas Browne and Thomas De Quincey symbolise a kind of writing that continuously stretched beyond its own limits. However, Woolf's attempts to rewrite the history of the essay as an essentially modern and modernist genre were also accompanied by another, 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?"

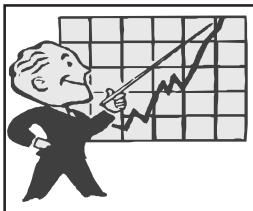
In the **second part,** she refers to the works of James Joyce who is markedly notable from his preceding authors. He has made an "attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which 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

Bloom, Harold. (ed.).(2005). *Bloom's Bio Critiques Virginia Woolf*. US: Chelsea House Publishers.

Briggs, Julia. (2006). *Reading Virginia Woolf.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Childs, Peter. (2000). *Modernism*. London: Routledge

Goldman, Jane. (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf.* Cambridge University Press.

Gualtieri, Elena. (2000). *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past.* Palgrave Macmillan.

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

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

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 No 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 No 2: Death of her parents… …subsequent sense of loss… …her repeated attempts to commit suicide.

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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.

*** ***** ***

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.

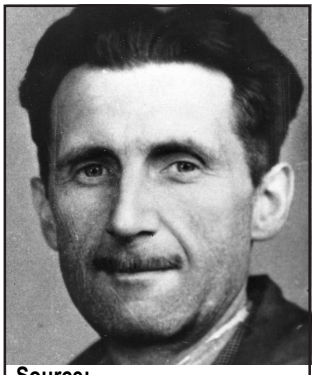
5.2 INTRODUCTION

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.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

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

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.

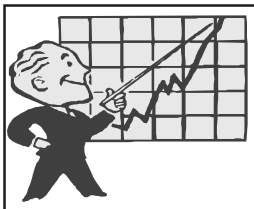
Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant", thus, delves into the pressures on the coloniser to adhere to the larger identity of the Empire and the suppression of the 'self' in the process of the role-playing white man. In Nandy's analysis, Orwell, in several of his works like *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty 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.

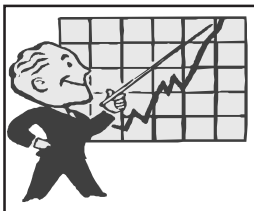
The modernist ideas of the constitution of the self are disturbed by Orwell's work with regard to who we are and who we may become through language.

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

Bloom, Harold. (ed). (1986). *George Orwell*. New York: Chelsea

Hollis, C. (1956). *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and His Works London :* Hollis and Carter.

Joshi, Arun. (2004). *Fictional Styles of George Orwell.* New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers.

Meyers, Jeffrey. (ed). (1975).*George Orwell: The Critical Heritage Series*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Nandy, Ashis. (2009). *The Intimate Enemy : Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism.* New Delhi : Oxford University Press.

Orwell, George. (1936). “Shooting an Elephant”’ in *New Writing.* London: Penguin

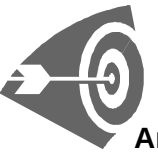
Tyner, James A. (2005). “Landscape and the mask of self in George Orwell’s Shooting an Elephant”, Vol.37, No. 3, Blackwell Publishing. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/20004459)

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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?

*** ***** ***



REFERENCES (FOR ALL UNITS)

Books:

Albert, Edward. (2005). *History of English Literature.* London: Oxford University Press.

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

Bloom, Harold. (ed). (1986). *George Orwell*. New York: Chelsea

Bloom, Harold. (ed.).(2005). *Bloom's Bio Critiques Virginia Woolf*. US: Chelsea House Publishers.

Briggs, Julia. (2006). *Reading Virginia Woolf.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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

Childs, Peter. (2000). *Modernism*. London: Routledge

Goldman, Jane. (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf.* Cambridge University Press.

Gualtieri, Elena. (2000). *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Hollis, C. (1956). *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and His Works London :* Hollis and Carter.

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.)

Joshi, Arun. (2004). *Fictional Styles of George Orwell.* New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers.

Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia.*

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

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

Meyers, Jeffrey. (ed). (1975).*George Orwell: The Critical Heritage Series*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

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

Nandy, Ashis. (2009). *The Intimate Enemy : Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism.* New Delhi : Oxford University Press.

Orwell, George. (1936). "Shooting an Elephant"' in *New Writing.* London: Penguin

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

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

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

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

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

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)

Web Resources:

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

Bacon, Francis. (1985). *The Essays.* Penguin Classics. http://www.gale.cengage.com/free_resources/whm/bio/woolf_v.htm

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