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KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 4: NONFICTIONAL PROSE

BLOCK 2: LIFE WRITING

CONTENTS

Unit 6: Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Confessions*

Unit 7: Samuel Johnson: "Life of Milton"

Unit 8: "Florence Nightingale" [from Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*]

Unit 9: Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Chapters: I & II)

Unit 10: Diary of Virginia Woolf: (Select Entries)

REFERENCES : For All Units

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SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 3: NONFICTIONAL PROSE

BLOCK 2: LIFE WRITING

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 6 : Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Confessions* **Page : 127 - 137**

A Brief History of Autobiography, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Life and Works, Reading about *The Confessions*, Rousseau's Prose Style, Critical Reception

Unit 7 : Samuel Johnson: "Life of Milton" **Page : 138 - 154**

A Brief History of Biography, Samuel Johnson: Life and Works, Reading the Text, Johnson's Prose Style, Critical Reception

Unit 8 : "Florence Nightingale" [from Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*] **Page : 155 - 175**

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

Unit 9 : Russell's *Autobiography* (Chapters: I & II) **Page : 176 - 195**

Bertrand Russell: Life and Works, Reading Russell's *Autobiography,* Reading Chapter I: "Childhood", Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence", Russell's Prose Style, Critical Reception

Unit 10 : Diary of Virginia Woolf: (Select Entries) **Page : 196 - 213**

What is Life Writing?, Virginia Woolf as a Diarist, Reading the Diary Entries, Important Themes, Style and Language

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This Block introduces the learners to some of the examples of Life writing. Life writing appears to be a wide area of literary studies, which is rather complex owing to its broad horizon that encompasses several other sub forms such as biography, autobiography, memoir and diary writing. In modern literary practices, life writing occupies a significant place as critics and readers attempt to discern a relationship between fiction and auto/biography while reading authors and it is within such a context that diary writing perhaps emerges as a relevant field of study–an area that would perhaps add to the reader's understanding of the author and his/her creative output. Although there have been several instances of life writing since the past, an interest towards critical study of the form may be said to have developed towards the end of the 20th century while readers and critics engaged with "different ways of telling a life-story—memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical ûction" (Hermione Lee, 10) – noticing in each the art of telling a life.

Block 2: Life Writing comprises five units, which are as the following:

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

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

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

Unit 9: Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Chapters I & II) deals with two chapters from Bertrand Russell's famous *Autobiography.* It is to be noted that the contexts of the two chapters namely "Childhood" and "Adolescence" of the *Autobiography* are derived from Russell's peculiar interest in

recollecting the history of his family, and from his attempt at rediscovering and relocating the past, which has been lost. In this unit, the learners will also be acquainted with many of the characteristics of a 'modern' autobiography.

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

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 6: JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: *CONFESSIONS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 A Brief History of Autobiography

6.4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Life and Works

6.5 Reading about *The Confessions*

6.6 Critical Reception

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

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

6.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

6.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography usually means an account of a person's life by himself or herself. The term appears to have been first used by Robert Southey in 1809. In Dr. Johnson's opinion, no man is better qualified to write his life than himself. However, it is up to you whether you accept it or not. It is because, if you want to write an autobiography, you must rely on your memory. However, very few of you can recall clear details of your early life and therefore have to depend on other people's impressions. At the same time, you will remember selectively. You may not incorporate disagreeable facts and may even repress and distort truth for the sake of convenience or harmony. Hence, our analysis of an autobiography begins with an inherent complexity of what is to be included and what is excluded.

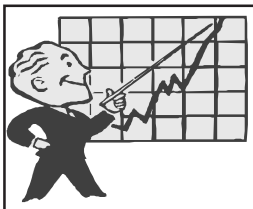
In the Classical period, history and autobiography were considered almost similar. This can be seen from the *Histories of Herodotus,* Xenophon's *Anabasis* and Caesar's *Commentaries.* The relatively recent examples of 'autobiography' can be traced to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius of 2nd century AD, and St. Augustine's *Confessions* of 4th century. A deep psychological self-analysis found in such writings influenced the modern writers. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (673-735) provides yet another example of an account of one's own life. However, it was not until the 16th century, that autobiographies started to become a kind of literary practice. Subsequently, Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) constituted the first significant instance of autobiographical self-revelation and Montaigne's emphasis on subjectivity was bound to produce autobiography as a major non-fictional form in later periods. From early 17th century, it became almost customary to maintain a 'diary' or a journal and to write 'memoirs', and the 'straight' autobiographical narrative technique became commonplace.

Notable instances are Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life* (1656); John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1656) and Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). During the same period, Evelyn Hugh and Samuel Pepys also earned fame with their famous 'diaries'. *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* is yet another important example of autobiography covering the first fifty-three years of Rousseau's life, up to 1765. It was completed in 1769, but not published until 1782, four years after Rousseau's death.

During the 18th century, you will find some connections between autobiography and the then relatively new form of the novel. For example, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crussoe* (1719) and Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) are taken to be 'autobiographical fictions', or 'fictionalised autobiographies'. Very occasionally, too, the long poem had been used for autobiography. The classic example of this is Wordsworth's *The Prelude* completed in 1805 but published posthumously. A good deal of fiction has also been thinly disguised autobiography, and owing to the developments of stream of Consciousness techniques, fictions like James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) or Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) have proliferated. You should not be surprised to know that after World War II; almost anyone achieving distinction in life, especially novelists, politicians, statesmen, and high-ranking members of various services have started to write autobiographies.

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* is an excellent example of a modern day autobiography. It was published in three volumes just preceding his death in 1970. A reading of the various chapters in his *Autobiography* raises questions of appropriation and acceptance as to how far it is possible to consider this account as simply a recollection of his childhood and not a fictionalisation of that period of his life. This obviously raises questions about the form of the autobiography itself. Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* is a work that leaves one perplexed by its unconventional nature. It is not simply a book, but an attempt to bring together a rather random collection of letters with a sketchy account of the author's life which though sometimes alarmingly frank, omits much and hurries the reader on from one cursorily

described event to another. Another important example which all of you may have already read or have heard about is M. K. Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

6.4 JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: LIFE AND WORKS

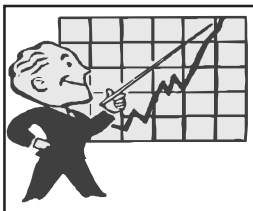


Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

6.5 READING ABOUT *THE CONFESSIONS*

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

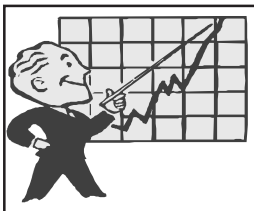
He begins his story by describing his family, including his mother's death at his birth. He ruminates on his earliest memories, beginning at a tender age of five, and his learning to read. He discusses his childhood in the years before his father left him, and his own decision to run away to see the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

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

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

6.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

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

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

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



6.7 LET US SUM UP

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



6.8 FURTHER READING

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

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

Web Resources:

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

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

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

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: On one can recall clearly the details of one's early life… …one remembers selectively… …one may not incorporate disagreeable facts and may even repress and distort truth… … complexity arises regarding what to be included and what to be excluded.

Ans to Q No 2: *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius… …St. Augustine's *Confessions*… …Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*… …Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life… …*John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*… …Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae*… …*The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* etc.

Ans to Q No 3: Russell's *Autobiography* raises questions of appropriation and acceptance as to how far it is possible to consider this account as simply a recollection of his childhood and not a fictionalisation of that period of his life.

Ans to Q No 4: Rousseau's emotional nature, his tempestuous personal relations, extreme sensitivity, penchant for controversy etc. fill his career with striking and dramatic episodes. While his critical and enquiring intellect, his lifelong interest in music and excursions into opera and drama, important and influential contributions to social and political philosophy, the novel, autobiography, moral theology, educational theory etc. mark him out as one of the dominant writers and thinkers of the age.

Ans to Q No 5: In that essay, Rousseau preferred the natural man to his civilised counterpart, and argued that the development and spread of knowledge and culture, far from improving human behaviour, had corrupted it by promoting inequality, idleness, and luxury.

Ans to Q No 6: *Emile* lays down the principles for a new scheme of education in which the child is to be allowed full scope for individual development in natural surroundings, shielded from the harmful influences of civilization… …*Du contrat social* provides Rousseau's theory of politics where he advocated universal justice through equality before the law, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Ans to Q No 7: Rousseau begins his *Confessions* by claiming that he is about to embark on an enterprise never before attempted: to present a self-portrait that is "in every way true to nature" and that hides nothing: "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator." He cited two reasons for that. First, Rousseau might have claimed honesty by stating that he will be 'true to nature.' Second, he might want to make himself different from other people.

Ans to Q No 8: St. Augustine's *Confessions* sought to convey an inspirational story of religious virtuosity… …as opposed to that Rousseau's *Confessions* sought to bare the entire life of its author's subject, detailing all his imperfections, virtues, individual neuroses, and formative childhood experiences as means of explaining and justifying the views and personality of his adult self.



6.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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UNIT 7: SAMUEL JOHNSON: "LIFE OF MILTON"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 A Brief History of Biography

7.4 Samuel Johnson: Life and Works

7.5 Reading the Text : "Life of Milton"

7.6 Johnson's Prose Style

7.7 Critical Reception

7.8 Let us Sum up

7.9 Further Reading

7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.11 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *define* the term 'biography' on the basis of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*
- *trace* the growth of Johnson as a major prose writer of English literature
- *read* Johnson's *Lives* in the context of the biographical writings of the 18th century
- *summarise* the basic arguments and criticism of the "Lives of Milton"

7.2 INTRODUCTION

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

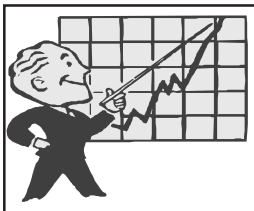
Thomas Gray. Johnson's original work was, however, supposed to comprise the first ten volumes of a sixty-volume work. Johnson's volumes were originally titled *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical to the Works of the English Poets*. After Volumes I–IV were published in 1779, and Volumes V-X in 1781, the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

7.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIOGRAPHY

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

he juxtaposes a criticism of the life and works of his subject with the biographical description. He takes pains to record every detail of the person whose life he is writing. This was followed by James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), which turned out to be a model for many biographers in the subsequent periods.

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

7.4 SAMUEL JOHNSON: LIFE AND WORKS



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Dr. Samuel Johnson, often referred to as Dr. Johnson, was one of the prominent literary figures of the 18th century. He was also a key figure of the neoclassical tradition and was famous for his great wit and prose style as exemplified by his *Lives of the English Poets*. With this book, Johnson became one of the most influential critics in the history of English literature. Johnson, the son of a bookseller, was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire on September 18, 1709. He attended Lichfield Grammar School. However, his education depended largely on the perusal of the volumes in his father's bookshop. He entered Pembroke College, Oxford on October 31, 1728, a few weeks after he turned nineteen, and remained there only for one year to discontinue his education due to financial difficulty. Although he was a formidable student, poverty caused by the early death of his father, forced him to leave Oxford without taking a degree. He attempted to work as a teacher and schoolmaster, but these ventures were not successful. He was an intense and voracious reader and the economist Adam Smith recalled, "Johnson knew more books than any man alive." At the age of twenty-five, he married Elizabeth "Tetty" Porter, a widow twenty-one years older and the mother of three children. He shifted to London along with his wife, opened a school taking money from her, began his literary enterprise by working on his historical tragedy *Irene,* and started writing for the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

The first years in London were hard, and Johnson wasted his efforts on hack writing for magazines. It was only in 1745, after the publication of his pamphlet on *Macbeth* namely— *Miscellaneous observations on the tragedy of Macbeth,* that he was recognised in the literary world of London. For the next three decades, Johnson concentrated on writing biographies, poetry, essays, pamphlets, parliamentary reports and so on. The poem "London" (1738) and the *Life of Savage* (1745), a biography of Johnson's

poet-friend and fellow-writer Richard Savage, who stood by Johnson during the days of his poverty, are important works of this period. During the same period, his tragedy *Irene* was staged in London. One of his major satirical works *The Vanity of Human Wishes* was also published in the same period.

Johnson began to work on *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1747, and completed it in two volumes in 1755. It took nine years and consisted of 40,000 defined words and 14,000 quotations to illustrate the meaning. The *Dictionary* was widely praised and enormously influential but Johnson did not profit from it financially. While working on his dictionary, Johnson was also writing a series of periodical essays under the title *The Rambler*. These essays, often on moral and religious topics, tended to be graver than the title of the series would suggest. *The Rambler* was not published until 1752. Although not originally popular, the essays found a large audience once they were collected in a volume. Johnson's wife died shortly after the final essay appeared. Johnson also contributed essays to the periodical *The Adventurer*. But, from 1758-60, Johnson began another series of essays titled *The Idler.* The *Idler* essays were shorter and lighter than *The Rambler* essays. In 1759, Johnson published his satirical novel *Rasselas, or The Prince of Abyssinia* which is said to have been written in two weeks to pay for his mother's funeral.

In 1762, Johnson was awarded a government pension of three hundred pounds a year, from King George III, largely through the efforts of Thomas Sheridan and the Earl of Bute. Johnson met the Scotsman James Boswell, his future biographer, in 1763. Around the same time, Johnson formed "The Club", a social group that included his friends Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, David Garrick and Oliver Goldsmith. By now, Johnson was a celebrated figure. He received an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin in 1765. His eight volume edition of Shakespeare was published in October 1765. Although he ignored the sonnets and poems, he treats the plays not as works to be enacted but to be read. He celebrates Shakespeare's gifts in portraying characters and revealing truths about human nature and most importantly defends the playwright against charges of violating rules of dramatic unities and mixing the genres of comedy and tragedy.

In 1765, Johnson met Henry Thrale, a wealthy brewer and Member of Parliament and stayed with him for fifteen years until Henry's death in 1781. In 1773, ten years after he met Boswell, the two set out on a journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and two years later Johnson's account of their travels was published under the title *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (Boswell's *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* was published in 1786). Johnson spent considerable time in Edinburgh in the 1770s, where he enjoyed an ultimate relationship with Boswell and Lord Monboddo, and conducted extensive correspondence and mutual literary reviews.

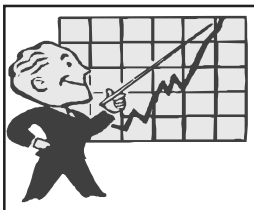
Johnson's final major and the most ambitious project, was the *Lives of the English Poets* (1783), commissioned by a group of London booksellers. *The Lives*, which were critical as well as biographical studies, appeared as prefaces to selections of poet and their work. Johnson died on December 13, 1784 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Lives of the English Poets:

Dr. Johnson is one of the chief exponents of the form of biography and his fame as a biographer rests mainly on the *Lives of the English Poets.* Johnson's curiosity about people was related to his views of the function of literature as the rendering of universal human experience. For Johnson biography stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history. He was uncompromising in his belief that truth was the objective of biography and that is why, "he refused to let sympathy for his subject cloud his judgment." The unrivalled knowledge that he commanded over his subject led to the success of Johnson as a biographer. His shrewdness, powerful intellect and common sense made his remarks interesting and penetrating. One remarkable aspect of Johnson's biographical writing is that he juxtaposes a criticism of the life and works of his subject with the biographical description. He takes pains to record every detail of the person whose life he was writing. His description of Milton's clothes is a remarkable example in this context. He does not attempt to idealise the men whose lives he is narrating. He does not conceal their failings or their follies. His *Lives of the English Poets* has a colloquial ease, which was missing, in most of his formal writings.

Lives of the English Poets appeared from 1779 as *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. For him, to be interested in the man's work was to be interested in his character. The biographies have two distinct parts – biographical information of the poet and a criticism of his works. However, the characteristic method of the text is to provide first a narrative of the poet's life, then a presentation of his character and an account of the quality of his mind, and then a critical assessment of his main poems. Apart from Johnson's mastery of the language, the prefaces are remarkable for their details and shrewd judgments. However, Johnson is not free from accusations; as he is often castigated for his idiosyncrasies and his adherence to a particular ideology and a neoclassicism that colour his assessments of all the poets and their works.

Out of the fifty-two lives, more than thirty deal with the obscure and minor poets in whom no one is interested today. But, the lives of Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Addition, Pope and Gray also gave Johnson an opportunity to develop and illustrate his own views on poetry. For this, he had to undergo a lifetime of research. Johnson adopted a particular method in his *Lives* not because he failed to conceptualise a relationship between a poet's life and his works, but because he did not think that a good poet was necessarily a good man. This method enabled him to recognise the fact that 'a manifest and striking contrariety between the life of an author and his writings' can very well exist and to assign different purposes to his analysis of his subjects' lives and their writings.



Check Your Progress

Q 3: For which works Samuel Johnson is famous?

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

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

7.5 Reading the Text: "Life of Milton"

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

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

Johnson's Critical Standards

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

But, the importance of the *Life of Milton* is seen in his shrewd judgment of the works. However, it is also a fact that most of his criticism abounds in many literary, personal and political prejudices. Johnson criticises Milton's Republicanism like this: "Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid,

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

Johnson also denounced *Lycidas*. With his neo-classical tendencies, Johnson was always against the pastoral form. He felt that the pastoral form of *Lycidas* was easy, vulgar and therefore disgusting. He failed to appreciate the melody of *Lycidas* and he maintained that it was a poem *of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and numbers unpleasing.* The passion of the poem, according to Johnson, was also artificial. Johnson says, "what beauty there is we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion,; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions." Johnson is against the use of blank verse and regards Milton's use of blank verse in *Lycidas* as a fault of the poem. Johnson may be right in warning against the misuse of the pastoral form but one cannot agree with him when he says that the form is artificial and unnatural. The grossest fault, according to Johnson, is the mingling of heathen mythologies with Christian saints and sacred truth. Criticism of *Lycidas* is vitiated by classical dogma, insensibility to imagination and extra-literary prejudices. For Johnson, the

Masque of Comus is the best of Milton's juvenile writing. He found the language, power of description and the vigour of sentiment of *Comus* remarkable. According to Johnson, the masque was truly poetical with its allusions, images and descriptive epithets. However, he found it deficient as drama. The action of the play for him is unconvincing and unreasonable. He found fault with the prologue, because it was contrary to the spirit of the drama. The soliloquies of Comus and the Lady are considered by Johnson to be elegant but tedious. The characters are bold but the language is too luxuriant for dialogues. Johnson concludes by saying that *Comus* as drama is "inelegantly splendid and tediously instructive."

The criticism of *Paradise Lost* is relatively free from Johnson's prejudices. Johnson appreciates the characters, the sentiments and the grandeur of the epic as the best and the most mature of Milton's writings. The expression of the moral in *Paradise Lost* is attractive and surprising. According to Johnson, an epic should have a great subject and Milton has chosen the best possible subject. His purpose "is to vindicate the ways of God to men." Johnson distinguishes two parts in an epic- the probable and the marvellous. In Milton, he observes that these two are merged into one. While talking about *Paradise Lost* he says that here "the probable has been made marvellous and the marvellous probable." Johnson points out two main episodes in the epic, Raphael's reference to the war in heaven, and Michael's prophecy of the changes about to happen in the world. Both episodes have been incorporated into the main action of the epic, thereby conforming to the unity of action with a definite beginning, middle and end. Johnson does not agree with Dryden's view that Adam could not be the hero of the epic because he is crushed and debased. Johnson argues that Adam's deceiver is crushed in the end, and he is restored to the favour of God. The sentiments of the epic, according to Johnson, are just and proper. As a poet, Milton can please when pleasure is required, but his peculiar power is to astonish. The whole poem is characterised by sublimity in different forms.

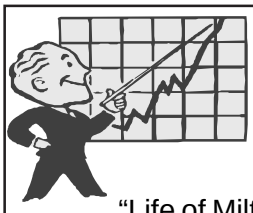
However, Johnson is not blind towards the faults of the epic and this is what makes him recognised as a biographer. He identifies three central defects in the epic, "the lack of human interest, the faulty personification of

Sin and Death, and the inconsistent presentation of the spiritual beings." The epic, according to Johnson, "comprises neither human action nor human manners." The allegory of Sin and Death also shows the lack of the poet's skill. The presentation of the spiritual beings is also confusing; there is no clear distinction between spirit and matter. Apart from these, Johnson is also critical about the language and versification of *Paradise Lost*. As a neoclassicist, Johnson judged everything from a classical point of view and had denounced everything that had not conformed to Aristotelian principles. Regarding *Paradise Regained,* Johnson pointed out that though it had many elegant passages and was always instructive it was deficient in dialogues and action. The poem, in the long run, according to Johnson, was dull and tedious and failed to please. *Samson Agonistes wa*s for him a failure as drama. It had some beautiful passages and single lines, but its plot was loose, construction faulty and the characters lacked unity.

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

in the texture of his plot, and the immense variety of dialogues and incidents. Although he is not free from Homeric influences, he shows originality in every page of his best works. He wrote according to his own light, fearless, confident and undeterred by difficulties.

Comments on the personality and character of Milton are scattered throughout the pages of *Life of Milton.* Like the criticism of Milton's works, the evaluation of his character is also not free from prejudices. Johnson points out that as a young man Milton was active and vigorous and his domestic habits were those of a devoted scholar. Although he was a disciplinarian in his daily routines, he was not much of an expert in financial matters and ended his days in near poverty. Johnson felt that Milton was not interested in the established forms of religion. Milton's political views were Republican and the expression of his views was usually violent. While appreciating Milton's independent mind at a time when there was strong domination of sectarianism, Johnson condemns it by saying that it is not development but changing one's principles according to one's convenience. Johnson had doubts regarding Milton's political beliefs. Johnson writes, "he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than to establish, and he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority." However, Johnson praises Milton for his strong determination and capability to work in adverse circumstances. Johnson did not attempt to idealise the character of Milton. He does not hesitate to ridicule Milton at certain times and maintains the poet was unnecessarily fond of controversies and an opportunist at times. The minute details of Milton's habits and character makes the work more interesting and realistic at the same time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

7.6 JOHNSON'S PROSE STYLE

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

Johnson's criticism is perhaps the most interesting part of his writings. Although some have criticised him as a 'literary dictator', he rejected this role for himself as he always endeavoured to speak for truthfulness of representation and morality. Many have praised Johnson for his common sense, but the flexibility and coherence of his response to literary activities were even more important. The elements in the literary mind of Johnson were more supple, balanced and sometimes contradictory. Looking at his performance as a writer, the use of language, the turns and tones of his subtle and complex sentences, we can really claim him to be an accomplished writer. The final two paragraphs of the *Life of Cowley*, in which Johnson sums up the literary achievements of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century, illustrate his quality and flexibility of the mind. For today's readers, Johnson's style and viewpoints may need some more response.

7.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

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

While a modern scholarly biography seeks to provide a more accurate and comprehensive account of its subject's life, Johnson's work in the 18th century is of enduring value. *The Lives of the English Poets* (1783) cannot be regarded as a great work of personalised canon making. While Johnson proposed several additions, the choices generally were not his own. Johnson, of course, believed in maintaining an English literary cannon surpassing the literature of the other nations but that cannon was not supposed to be determined by any single critic. Unlike modern critics like T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Harold Bloom who believed in a certain kind of reordering of the English tradition, Johnson did something else in deciding to write on the lives of 'his' chosen poets. It intermixes extended passages of literary criticism, biographical information, and a limited delineation of cultural context. The authority with which Johnson expresses himself actually reveals his ability to observe.

His contemporary critics as well as readers had received Johnson with much acclamation. James Boswell even made him the subject of what is often called the greatest biography in English, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L. D*. (1791). Johnson was one of those writers to propose a kind of freedom from classical rules and prescriptions for literary composition. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and the other critics of the 18th century criticised Johnson's neoclassical principles and disputed his evaluations of authors, yet his support for rule-breaking innovation, in the preface to Shakespeare and elsewhere, prepared the literary and cultural ground for the Romantic revolution. His scope of writings made him what we may now call a public intellectual. In the 19th century, interest in Johnson was centred on his personality, which was also the subject matter of

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



7.8 LET US SUM UP

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



7.9 FURTHER READING

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

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

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

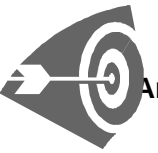
Leitch, Vincent B. (ed).*The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. London: Norton & Company 2001.

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7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: The history of biography started with "Lives of the Saints" or Hagiographies… …true biography appeared with Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More* (1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7)… …in the 17th century, Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621), Walton's *Lives* (1640-78), and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives* (1669-1693) became important… …it is with Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) that the form of biography finally established itself as a major type belonging to the genre of non-fictional prose.

Ans to Q No 2: In the 19th century, biographical writings continued to flourish through Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863)… …Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*… …'critical' biography was established by Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918).



Ans to Q No 3: His historical tragedy *Irene… …Miscellaneous observations on the tragedy of Macbeth… … The Vanity of Human Wishes… … A Dictionary of the English Language… …*periodical essays under the title *The Rambler… …the* satirical novel *Rasselas, or The Prince of Abyssinia… …*the travel narrative *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland… …Lives of the English Poets.*

Ans to Q No 4: For Johnson, biography stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history… …he refused to let sympathy for his subject cloud his judgment… …he juxtaposes a criticism of the life and works of his subject with the biographical description…. …he takes pains to record every detail of the person whose life he was writing… …he does not attempt to idealise the men whose lives he is narrating.

Ans to Q No 5: Johnson's biographies have two distinct parts – biographical information of the poet and a criticism of his works. However, the characteristic method of the text is to provide first a narrative of the

poet's life, then a presentation of his character and an account of the quality of his mind, and then a critical assessment of his main poems.

Ans to Q No 6: He defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by taking imagination to the help of reason"… …Invention is different from imagination… …the function of poetry is to please and instruct… …the imagination of the poet must be controlled by reason.

Ans to Q No 7: Johnson also denounced *Lycidas* as he was against the pastoral form because of his neo-classical tendencies… …he felt that the pastoral form of *Lycidas* was easy, vulgar and therefore disgusting… …he failed to appreciate the melody of *Lycidas* and he maintained that it was a poem 'of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and numbers unpleasing.'

Ans to Q No 8: He identifies three central defects in the epic, "the lack of human interest, the faulty personification of Sin and Death, and the inconsistent presentation of the spiritual beings." The epic, according to Johnson, "comprises neither human action nor human manners." The allegory of Sin and Death also shows the lack of the poet's skill.



7.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Lytton Strachey: The Biographer

8.3.1 His Life

8.3.2 His Works

8.4 Reading the Text

8.4.1 Major Themes

8.4.2 Strachey's Prose Style

8.5 Critical Reception

8.6 Let us Sum up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

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

8.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

8.3 LYTTON STRACHEY: THE BIOGRAPHER

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

8.3.1 His Life

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

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

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

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

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



LET US KNOW

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

8.3.2 His Works

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

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

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

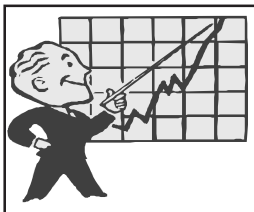
individual, and his individual freedom will be reflected in his work. He believed that life should be ruled by reason and humanity, and not by tyranny and superstition. He also believed in detachment, which can enable a biographer to give a fair account of the subject, free from any kind of prejudice.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

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



LET US KNOW

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

8.4 READING THE TEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

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

8.4.1 Major Themes

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

Strengths and Weaknesses of Nightingale's Character:

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

Florence Nightingale's Psychology:

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

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

Representation of Women:

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

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

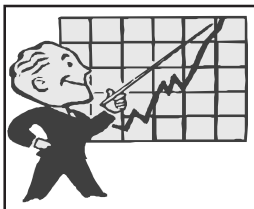
Q 9: What ideas do you derive of the representation of women in Strachey's biography on Florence Nightingale?

8.4.2 Strachey's Prose Style

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

8.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

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

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

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



8.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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



8.7 FURTHER READING

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

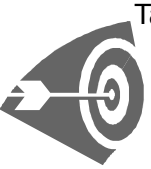
Holroyd, Michael. (1994). *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

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

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

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

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



8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Lytton Strachey in this book avoided presenting an idealised view of a person… …this went against the traditional biography in which the biographer refrained from speaking ill of the subject… …instead he introduced a more realistic and human portrait of the character by exposing his/her vices and follies.

Ans to Q No 2: In the Preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey says that the biographer should have a clear and definite point of view… … a biographer should be critical and evaluative… … a biographer must be ready to judge the complex behaviour of human beings… …most importantly, a biographer is an individual whose freedom should get reflected in his work… …detachment from the subject should be maintained with great caution.

Ans to Q No 3: "Lives of the Saints" or Hagiographies… …16th century biographies like Cardinal Norton's *Life of Richard III* (1513), Roper's *Life of More* (1535) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7)… … 17th century biographies like Francis Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621) Walton's *Lives* (1640-78) and Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives*(1669-1693)… …Samuel Johnson's18th century *Lives of the Poets* that stood between the falsehood of fiction and the useless truth of history… …19th century, biographical writings like Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837, 1838), Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863) showing a potential influence on the structure of fiction… …finally, the modern idea of 'critical' biography as established by Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

Ans to Q No 4: There are five parts… …unlike in other accounts, Strachey in this biography proceeds to make an indepth and psychological study of Florence Nightingale and expose certain habits of her character.

Ans to Q No 5: Florence Nightingale had a nurturing and caring attitude… …she would even imagine heaven as a place full of suffering people whom she would be serving there… …she became a wonderful nurse because of the perfect timing between the need for a nurse and her ability as a nurse… …her outspokenness and the ability to inspire others.

Ans to Q No 6: She was a lady who demanded attention of many other people… …she sacrificed her own family life for her profession… …she had a dominating and egoist nature even at her old age... …she was a stubborn character and emphasised too much self-righteousness.

Ans to Q No 7: He gave rise to a modern kind of biography… …reshaped biographical literature with elements of criticism… …liberated 20th century biography from respectability… …destroyed illusions… …taught how 'memory' and character can be genuinely reconstructed… … Strachey presented an iconoclastic manner of writing.

Ans to Q No 8: Strachey in his biography has laid more stress on the character of Nightingale than on her achievements… …he found that

Nightingale gains admiration and respect because of her strength, courage, morality, talent, ability, etc… …but Strachey has also revealed the flaws and defects in her character… …sometimes she was too egoistic and obsessed with work.

Ans to Q No 9: Many feminists uphold Strachey as a champion of sexual avant-gardism… … Florence Nightingale is portrayed as a woman who defied patriarchy… …but Strachey is also criticised by many as they believe that while representing the women he attacked rather than applauded the assumption of power by women.

Ans to Q No 10: He believed that biographers should employ, "selection"… … he 'selected' the details of some of the apparently trivial matters in Nightingale's life that would bring before the reader her personality… …according to Strachey, a biographer must be critical and evaluative and be ready to confront the true character of the subject considering both the virtues and vices of the subject… …hence selection is necessary.



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Bertrand Russell: The Autobiographer

9.4 Reading Russell's *Autobiography*

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

9.5 Let us Sum up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.8 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

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

9.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

9.3 BERTRAND RUSSELL: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHER

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

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

Russell entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1890 and soon proved his intellectual capacities by becoming a member of the society known as "The Apostles". Inspired by his associations with the members of the society with whom he shared lively discussions, Russell abandoned Mathematics for Philosophy and won a fellowship at Trinity for his thesis entitled *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry.* Therefore, beginning his career with Mathematics he turned to philosophy and ultimately, becoming an idealist under the influence of the Cambridge metaphysician J. M. E. McTaggart, he took a first-class degree in Moral Science in 1894.In 1896, his first political work, *German Social Democracy* appeared. Though he supported the reformist aims of the German socialist movement, he also criticised some of the inherent Marxist dogmas. From 1895 onwards, he formulated an ambitious scheme of writing two different series of books, one on the philosophy of the sciences, the other on social and political issues.

You should note that after finishing the book *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry,* Russell abandoned metaphysical idealism being influenced by G. E. Moore, a fellow from the "Apostles" and again shifted to Mathematics. However, other influences on his thought at this time also came from a group of German mathematicians namely Karl Weierstrauss, Georg Cantor and Richard Dedekind, who had established mathematics with logical and rigorous foundations, an idea described by Russell as "the greatest triumph of which our age has to boast." Inspired by the works of these mathematicians, Russell conceived the idea that mathematics is nothing but logic. The philosophical case for this point of view—subsequently known as "Logicism"—was started at length in his famous *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903). After this, Russell abandoned all notions of his earlier idealism and adopted the view that analysis rather than synthesis was the surest method of philosophy and that, therefore, all the grand beliefs of the previous philosophers were misconceived. Thus, Russell came to exert a profound influence on the entire tradition of the English-speaking Analytic Philosophy.



LET US KNOW

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

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

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

he turned down the offer, preferring instead to pursue a career as a journalist and freelance writer. The War had had a profound effect on Russell's political views, causing him to abandon his inherited liberalism and to move to socialism, which he espoused in a number of books like *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916), *Roads to Freedom* (1918), and *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (1923).

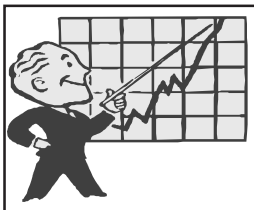
In 1921, Russell married his second wife, Dora Black, a young graduate of Girton College, Cambridge. During the interwar years, Russell and Dora became famous as the leaders of a progressive socialist movement that was anticlerical, defiant of conventional sexual morality, and dedicated to educational reform. In this period, Russell published mostly journalistic books like *On Education* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), and *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) which were sold in large numbers. This revived Russell's reputation as a philosopher addressing the most pertinent moral, political, and social issues of the day. His public lecture "Why I Am Not a Christian," delivered in 1927, became a popular "locus classicus" of atheistic rationalism.

In 1932, Russell left Dora for Patricia ("Peter") Spence, a young Oxford undergraduate. Then he returned to academic philosophy and gained a teaching post at the University of Chicago. From 1938 to 1944, he taught in the University of Chicago and in the University of California, but was prevented from taking a post at the City College of New York because of his views on sex and marriage. Then, he secured a job of teaching history of philosophy at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia just to lose it soon. It was the publication of his *History of Western Philosophy* in 1945 that proved to be a bestseller and for many years, it remained his main source of income. His return to Trinity College was occasioned by his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (1948). During this period, Russell regained his status in the form of the Order of Merit in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature came in 1950.

Most interestingly, in 1952, at the age of eighty, Russell once again married his fourth wife, Edith Finch, and finally, it is heard, Russell found lasting conjugal harmony. Russell devoted his last years to campaigning

against nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War for which, once again, he underwent imprisonment. Russell died in Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales, in 1970, more as an antiwar campaigner than as a philosopher. However, it is for his great contributions to philosophy that he will be remembered and honoured by the future generations.

You should acknowledge that in Bertrand Russell we see one of the most widely varied and influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. During his life, which covered almost three generations, Russell could manage to write more than 40 books and about 2000 articles ranging over philosophy, mathematics, science, ethics, sociology, education, history, religion, politics and polemic. The extent of his influence resulted partly from his amazing efficiency in applying his intellect and partly from the deep humanitarian feeling, that was the mainspring of his action. During his lifetime, Russell married four times, became involved in innumerable public controversies, and was honoured and hated almost equally.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* was published in three volumes just preceding his death in 1970. In the first two chapters "Childhood" and "Adolescence" that are prescribed for you, Russell is seen recollecting his growth from childhood and the various influences on his character in the formative years of his life during adolescence. A reading of these two chapters may obviously raise questions of appropriation and acceptance as to how far it is possible to consider this account as simply a recollection of his childhood and not a fictionalization of that period of his life. I hope, you

find this reading interesting enough to critically examine the form of autobiography through Russell's book. In the "Prologue" to *Autobiography*, "What I have Lived For", Russell has put forward the basic idea of writing his autobiography like this: "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a great ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair." The following subsections will give you sufficient ideas about what Russell had intended while uttering these words.

9.4.1 Chapter I: "Childhood"

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

This chapter begins with some reminiscence of his early days in Pembroke Lodge: *"My first vivid recollection is my arrival at Pembroke Lodge in February, 1876.*" However, Russell cannot remember clearly *the actual arrival at the house.* This signifies what he himself said about the difficulty while starting to write an autobiography. After his arrival at Pembroke Lodge, Russell remembers, a peculiar kind of curiosity was aroused in the minds of the servants and other people: "I was placed upon the high stool for tea, and what I remember most vividly is wondering why the

servants took so much interest in me.*"* You should note that the description of his arrival at Pembroke Lodge is just a recollection but the opening lines do have certain fictional elements so as to arouse the interest of the readers from the very outset.

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

In his description of his parents and family, Russell has to rely on the received versions of history. But, 'authenticity' is maintained by Russell by his constant verification of what he says in this manner: "I know that this recollection is genuine, because I verified it at much later time, after having kept it to myself for a number of years."In the first part of the chapter, Russell tries to trace his genealogy by meticulously describing the important events in his family-history, like the marriage of his parents in 1864 at the age of 22, the birth of his brother after nine months, and the letter of the mother to the grandmother informing her of the new born baby, Russell himself, and so on. Their concern for the education of their children made the parents appoint a 'Darwinian' private tutor D. A. Spalding.

After that, the chapter concentrates on the locale of his childhood. Referring to the aristocratic and historical significance of the Pembroke Lodge, Russell writes that it was a place where his grandparents used to live. He describes the rich natural heritage of Pembroke Lodge and its surroundings by exploring that it had eleven

acres of garden mostly allowed to run wild. Russell clearly expresses his indebtedness to Pembroke Lodge when he says: "this garden played a very large part in my life up to the age of eighteenth…I grew accustomed to wide horizons and to an unimpeded view of the sunset." Thus, the past life of Russell comes alive through the trees, summerhouses, hedges and so on in the garden and through his ideas about himself that was being formulated in the process. The garden helped him to fantasise about the persons lost and accessible only in terms of memory. Being an introvert, Russell found an alternative world of nature independent of outside pressures.

The rest of this chapter deals with the influences of the important persons on Russell's life, the chief amongst them being his grandmother. Russell says that she had been the most important person to him throughout his childhood and demanded that everything should be viewed through a mist of Victorian sentiment. Certain motives to her were laudable like—love of country, public spirit, love of one's children. However, she despised love of money, love of power and vanity as "bad motives." Sex, to her, was a selfish motive, and marriage a puzzling institution. She disliked wine, abhorred tobacco, and was always on the verge of becoming a vegetarian. If his grandmother oriented him towards the Victorian way of life, his Uncle Rollo, who stayed in the same house, inculcated in him the sense of a scientific spirit "of which he had considerable knowledge" and who stimulated his "scientific interests" resulting ultimately in his interest in mathematics. Russell remembers aunt Agatha and her unsuccessful attempts to educate the young Russell. According to him, she was victimised by the grandmother's Puritanical beliefs and to some extent, she resembled the grandmother in terms of strictness and sentimental behaviour. Thus, you will notice that the Pembroke Lodge and its inhabitants had a deep impact on the formative mind of Russell. The conversations of the grownups, which he heard, and the discussions which largely centred on politics and war stimulated his mind at a very young age.



LET US KNOW

Victorian Dilemma

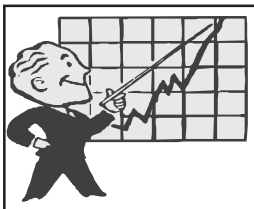
In the later Victorian age, a search for a scientific basis in everything and the rise of the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin, profoundly influenced man's attitude towards nature and religion. The scientific spirit based on methods, its growing interest in social processes and conditions of living were the major preoccupations of the Victorian world. The dilemma between scientific spirit and religious orthodoxy enormously affected and stimulated thoughts of the later Victorian world.

From an early age, his brother was of a dominating nature. In addition, Russell's parents had to face trouble because of him. However, Russell's portrait of his brother contains no sense of sibling rivalry. While referring to his brother, he writes: *''I retain through his life an attitude towards him consisting of affection mixed with fear. He passionately longed to be loved, but was such a bully that he never could keep the love of any one."* During his early stay at Pembroke Lodge, the servants enriched the storehouse of childhood experience by offering a different perspective. Russell remembers the strict and rigorous house keeper Mrs Cox, the butler Mac Alpine who used to take him on his knees, the terrifying French cook Michaud (because Russell used to steal roasted meat), the gardener Mac Robie and so on. Russell never forgets to recollect those fond memories of his with those people in various contexts.

Russell was also attracted towards the little details of early life especially his food habits: *"I was very fond of crumbling my bread into my gravy."* He used to pretend to be asleep, as he wanted to escape other people looking at him so that he could have his dinner in the nursery and not in the dining room. He also refers to an incident in which he was denied an orange because he should avoid sugar, which hurt a child's sentiment. Russell's other memories are related to certain instances of humiliations. He recalls a train journey in which he was laughed at by the adults while asking, "Which country

are we in now?" In one case, his grandmother did not allow him to read a story by Maria Edgeworth, namely, *The False Key*. However, this aroused curiosity and Russell managed to read the same without her knowledge. He writes: *"her attempts to prevent me from knowing things were seldom successful."* Then, in the later years, Russell claims to have read his grandmother's collection of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Cowper, Thomson, Jane Austen and other writers.

Throughout his early life, Russell was very conscious about his intellectual gifts: *"I liked mathematics best and next to mathematics I like history As soon as I realized that I was intelligent, I determined to achieve something of intellectual importance.*" Russell's writes: *"Throughout the greater part of my childhood the most important hours of my day were those that I spent alone in the garden, and the most vivid part of my existence was solitary."* When adolescence approached, loneliness became oppressive. Nature, books and mathematics saved him from the sense of complete despondence. Perhaps, this is how the old Russell remembers his childhood days at Pembroke Lodge. What is more striking is the assertion that, *"it would be completely misleading to suggest that my childhood was all solemnity and seriousness."* Hence, Russell's childhood, as represented in this chapter, was a good comingling of both happiness and loneliness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

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

9.4.2 Reading Chapter II: "Adolescence"

This chapter is remarkable for Russell's frankness and openness. It also deals with the changing interests of Russell due to his mental and physical growth. He writes: *"I remember a very definite change when I reached what in modern child psychology is called the 'latency period'. At this stage, I began to enjoy using slang, pretending to have no feelings, and being generally 'manly'."* In the second paragraph, Russell very pathetically claims that his adolescence turned out to be very lonely and very unhappy. Both in his emotional and intellectual life, he was obliged to preserve an impenetrable secrecy towards his people. His interests were divided between sex, religion, and mathematics. He further writes: "I find the recollection of my sexual preoccupations in adolescence unpleasant."

In this context, Russell shows his expertise in maintaining authenticity by referring to the fact that he was first introduced to sex by one of his kindergarten companions, Ernest Logan, at the age of twelve. He explained to Russell the nature of copulation and Russell used to find that interesting. But, his response to that was slightly different, as he says:

"I found what he said extremely interesting, although I had as yet no physical response. It appeared to me at the time self evident that free love was the only rational system, and that marriage was bound up with Christian superstitions." Russell also talks about the impact of his tutor on him regarding his physical changeover: "when I was fourteen my tutor mentioned to me that I should shortly undergo an important physical change. By this time I was more or less able to understand what he meant…At 15, I began to have sexual passion of almost intolerable intensity while I was seating at work, endeavouring to concentrate, I would be continuously destructed by erection, and I fell in the practice of masturbating, in which, however, I always remain moderate."

However, the most interesting and humorous thing was to discontinue doing this just because he fell in love at the age of 20. Then his experience was followed by discussions on puberty, peeping inside the rooms of the housemaids, and passionately kissing and hugging one of the maids just to be angrily refused.

Along with his sexual preoccupation, there went a great intensity of idealistic feelings:

"I become intensely interested in the beauty of the sunsets and clouds, and trees in spring and autumn, but my interest was very sentimental kind, owing to fact that it was an unconscious sublimation of sex, and an attempt to escape from reality."

This also aroused in him a tendency to read poetry of Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Tennyson and so on. Along with his interest in poetry, there was a developing interest in religion and philosophy. However, complication regarding religious belief arose because his grandfather was an Anglican, while his grandmother was a Presbyterian. Consequently, young Russell had to go to alternate churches every Sunday leading him finally to examine, at the age of 15, the validity of the fundamental religious beliefs like Christianity. It was also during the same period of religious doubt that Russell began to read voraciously. He studied Greek and Italian, he read Mill and Carlyle, Gibbon and so on. The reading habits paved the way for the emergence of the independent intellectual in him.

In his own opinion of himself, Russell was an introvert; socially, he was very shy, childlike and awkward, good-natured but he used to envy those people known for social interactions. He remembered his experiences in the Army crammer at old South Gate where his friends used to frequent prostitutes and coming back tell the bawdy stories. However, that shy Russell was intelligent enough to find an escape out of it by becoming good humoured while discussion on sex was going on: "I became very Puritanical in my views, and decided that sex without deep love is beastly. I retired to myself, and had as little to do with the others as possible." During his stay at the Army crammer, his friendship with Edward FitzGerald bore fruits in terms of literary

discussions on various topics. His affection for Caroline, the sister of Edward grew and he got a chance to travel to Paris and Switzerland with them, that too in the year of the Paris Exhibition (1889). By that time, Russell had already turned into an omnivorous reader. This was also a time when Russell began to develop an altruistic feeling. Referring to contemporary politics, he believed: "happiness of mankind should be the aim of all action, and I discover to my surprise that there were those who thought otherwise." Belief in happiness, Russell found, was the main theme of Utilitarianism.

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

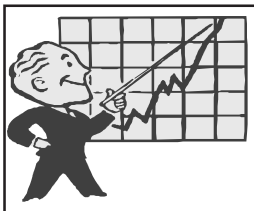
Q 12: How did Russell's adolescence experiences help in his intellectual developments in later times?

9.4.3 Russell's Prose Style

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

This autobiography is enriched by his use of witty remarks, digressions, and humorous asides. An instance of his use of humour is seen in the remark on his grandmother's honeymoon in the chapter *Childhood* in which she was missing her mother badly. Russell's use of humour is also visible in what the narrator says about D. A. Spalding. He says: *"He was a Darwinian and was engaged in studying the instincts of chickens, which to felicitate his studies were allowed to work havoc in every room of the house…and that he himself was in an advanced stage of consumption and died not very long after my father."* As the form of autobiography entails enumeration of personal details, the success of a writer in this form would largely depend on how well and how long he/she can keep the readers engrossed in the personal details that he describes. Russell's success in this aspect is largely due to this style that he employs in his *Autobiography.* Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (which was published in three volumes in the 1960s) is a work that

leaves one perplexed by its unconventional nature. It is not simply a book, bringing together a rather random collection of letters with a sketchy account of the author's life, which, though sometimes alarmingly frank, omits much and hurries the reader on from one cursorily described event to another.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

9.4.4 Critical Reception

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

Russell's *Autobiography* received little attention when it first appeared, not long before his death. Yet it raised a number of questions and doubts, which provided necessary philosophical inputs to the radicals and liberals in the United States and in Western Europe. His views regarding politics and religion, as reflected in the *Autobiography*, are still valid and contextual in the contemporary world, which also encourages us to read the book as more than just an autobiography. A great deal of philosophical discussions in

the contemporary English-speaking world can be traced back to Russell. In fact, the works of Russell founded the basis of modern logic. Although his works were concerned with the principles of mathematics and logic, its implications could be visible in the world of philosophy in general. Thus, Russell came to have an enormous influence on the 20th century thought, and as reading of his *Autobiography* validates this fact again and again.



9.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Russell's Autobiography is an important example of Life Writing in the context of the 20th century. However, besides knowing about the life and works of the philosopher Russell, his *Autobiography* also throws light on many important aspects as well as intellectual deliberations of the time in which Russell write this book. You have realised that Russell sought for 'true love' as it brought ecstasy of so great intensity that he was even ready to sacrifice his life just for a few hours of joy. He believed that the feeling of joy could replace loneliness. And, he found that in the union of love, in the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets had imagined. With equal passion, he had sought knowledge and always tried to understand the hearts of men. Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led him upward towards ecstasy. However, always the sense of pity brought him back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberated in his heart. His altruism, his care for Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people becoming a burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness and poverty made him suffer like anything. You have also seen that this autobiography starts from his early recollection of childhood, the place they lived in, the people they met; to his growth during adolescence and the experiences he underwent. As you have finished reading this unit, you must also have realised the fact that Russell's *Autobiography* is an important example of modern day autobiography in all its different aspects.



9.6 FURTHER READING

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9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Karl Weierstrauss, Georg Cantor and Richard Dedekind were the three important German mathematicians… …they established mathematics with logical and rigorous foundations… …Russell described it as "the greatest triumph of which our age has to boast."

Ans to Q No 2: The idea is that mathematics is nothing but logic… …the idea of "Logicism" appeared in his famous *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903)… … analysis rather than synthesis is the surest method of philosophy… …that all the grand beliefs of the previous philosophers were misconceived… …this led to his becoming an analytic philosopher.

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

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

Ans to Q No 4: Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580)… …Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations of My Birth, Breeding and Life*(1656)… … John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1656)… …Richard Baxters's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). … …Colly Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colly Cibber* (1740)… …Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1766)… …Rousseau's *Confessions* (1764-70)… …David Hume's *My Own Life* (1777)… …Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs* (1796) and so on.

Ans to Q No 5: Autobiography became a part of narrative where the life in question forms the primary subject matter… …self-analysis of the narrator presented the dichotomy between the social and psychological self.

Ans to Q No 6: In the Prologue Russell puts forward the three passions… …the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind… …these three passions have created in him both anguish and despair.

Ans to Q No 7: For Russell she had been the most important person throughout childhood… …She represented the Victorian sentiment and oriented him towards the Victorian way of life… …her love of the country, public spirit, and children shaped Russell's own thought processes.

Ans to Q No 8: Pembroke Lodge was a place where Russell's grandparents lived… …it had rich natural heritage… …the garden played a very large part in shaping the imagination of Russell… …the garden helped him to fantasise and memorise about the persons lost… …it provided Russell with an alternative world.

Ans to Q No 9: It signifies the dilemma between scientific spirit and religious orthodoxy that affected thoughts of the later Victorian world… …also means a search for a scientific basis in everything and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution profoundly influenced man's attitude towards nature and religion.

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

Ans to Q No 11: It could have been a combination of the pangs of adolescence and the transitory nature of his age witnessing the Victorian view of life and the march of the scientific spirit.

Ans to Q No 12: From this chapter you know that love and knowledge, the cries of pain, children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people being considered a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain that Russell experienced during his formative period helped Russell to develop intellectually.

Ans to Q No 13: The form of autobiography entails numerous personal details… …But the success of this autobiography largely depends on how well and how long the autobiographer can keep the readers engrossed in the personal details… …Russell successfully manages to do this in this autobiography.



9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 What is Life Writing?

10.4 Virginia Woolf : The Diarist

10.5 Reading the Diary Entries

10.6 Important Themes

10.7 Style and Language

10.8 Let us Sum up

10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.10 Further Reading

10.11 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

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

10.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

10.3 WHAT IS LIFE WRITING?

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

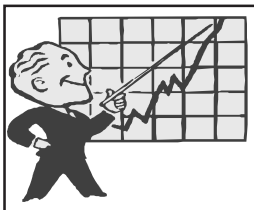
When one refers to life writing, one would generally imply a form of narrating which borders on non-fiction; an account of one's life told in a manner that would take the reader very close to facts and truths that pertain to life. Therefore, life writing which would perhaps include diary, journal entries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

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

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

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

10.4 VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE DIARIST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

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

10.5 READING THE DIARY ENTRIES

1920, Monday, January 26th:

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

1920, Wednesday, February 4th:

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

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

1920, Monday, October 25th:

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

1921, Tuesday, April 12th:

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

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

1924, Monday, May 26th:

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

1924, Sunday, September 7th:

Woolf is unhappy as she is unable to write and whatever little she has written seems not up to the mark according to her. There is an unfolding of the closure of *Mrs Dalloway*; Clarissa, Peter, Richard, Sally- all characters from the novel seems to come alive in front of her eyes each proposing an 'end' to the novel. She appears ecstatic after having arrived at the probable close to her novel. Her world is full of internal drama carried out against an external reality in which she is expected to perform the role of a good and caring hostess to her niece and nephews. This entry may be seen as one of Woolf's expression of the overwhelming creative ideas that flood her

mind, which was perhaps at one of most fertile moments away from the bouts of depression and melancholy. She has scenes, events, and people all alive in her imagination waiting to be put down to words. Although she finds the directness of thought in children adorable, she realises that the her vision trespasses the physical into the realm of the inner life of the mind of people which in turn allows the reader an opportunity to get closer to the person as well the process of 'becoming' of an author.

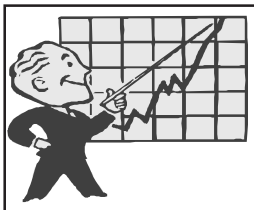
1924, Saturday, November 1st:

Woolf appears to be in hurry to complete two books – *Mrs Dalloway* which was ready for revision and a collection of essays, which she intended to accomplish before her novel. In this entry, the reader would have a glimpse of the inner life of her mind in her engagement with lesbian thought, of relationships with women which for her was full of 'pleasure – the relationship so secret and private compared with relations with men'. She proposes to write about it 'truthfully' – an attitude reflective of her modernist feminist ideology, frank openness about female sexuality – a theme that was seldom explored objectively. Virginia's stand was proof enough of her critical engagement with the socio-cultural 'givens' of the life and times that was constructed along the ethos of patriarchal ideology. One significant assertion that Woolf makes in this entry is of the fact that the act of diary writing has been very beneficial to her – apart from aiding her to refine her craft it has allowed her a sense of freedom; it has allowed her to challenge, confront, question and negotiate not only aspects of her craft but also the larger framework of society and culture and the patriarchal values embedded in it; in a contemplative tone she thus acknowledges "the diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures." (67)

1925, Monday, April 20th:

Once again, Woolf's experiences an overwhelming presence of creative ideas in her mind – as much as six stories float in the inner recesses of her mind, which were trying, rush out of her pen. Although external problems persist, Woolf actually describes the act of writing itself, which is "now like the sweep of a brush" (73) to be filled up later. Her ambitiousness regarding her position as a novelist to reckon with, her aspiration to become

a novelist of renown and her accompanying doubts – such oppositional emotions reveal the complex workings of a creative genius who was obsessed with the notion of 'inner life' of the mind in relation to the passage of time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why did Woolf think that an author's egotistical self is detrimental to the act of writing?

Q 7: In what ways, did the diary prove beneficial for Woolf as she writes in her entry dated October 25, 1920?

Q 8: What did Virginia Woolf write specifically in the diary entry dated 12th April 1921?

Q 9: What ideas would you draw about the writerly self of Woolf from the entry dated September 7th 1924?

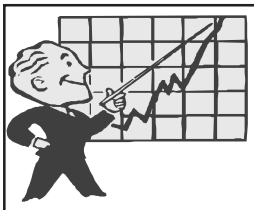
10.6 IMPORTANT THEMES

In its most general sense, Woolf's *Diary* may be seen thematically engaging with her act of writing; in most of the entries Woolf deals with her idea regarding the development of plot of her fiction, while dwelling analytically on the aesthetic aspects. She also appears to involve in a critical self-appraisal of her craft as she revisits some of her works now and then engaging in an introspective rereading.

Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as her effort to narrate a self that would engage in the task of examining and critiquing the notion of situatedness within the public and the private domain of lived experience. In writing her *Diary*, Woolf does not however unravel all of herself; there is a certain reticence that critics discern in her method. However, the truth-value of what she reveals is remarkable for its accuracy; the art of self-expression achieved through a unique sense of control lends an unparalleled beauty to the *Diary.* Woolf's persistent effort at finding out a way to narrate the 'inner life of the mind'–a narrative technique commonly known as 'stream-of-consciousness', its link with subjective reality and the act of writing –

was perhaps one of the most significant ideas that her *Diary* deals with. After reading her *Diary*, readers would perhaps be able to observe that Woolf's idea of self is reminiscent of the 'postmodern idea of self and feminist idea of splintered self' (in Tidwell, 44)

Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as exemplifying her modernist aesthetics in that she is seen to adopt quite similar formal method as those found in her fiction while writing her diary entries as well. For Woolf then, the act of keeping a diary was almost akin to that of other forms of writings that she practised. A cursory glance would perhaps make us believe that Woolf's *Diary* is found lacking in a coherent structural pattern; however, a deeper analysis would reveal that Woolf being a modernist artist, engaged with what is called 'the passage of time', one of the primary concerns of all practitioners of modernism, and her *Diary* would then emerge as a unified whole with the overarching organising principle of time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

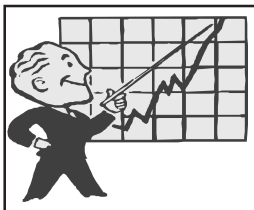
Q 10: How should one considerer the diaries of Virginia Woolf?

10.7 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

As far as form is concerned, one of the most important aspects of diary writing is its intense proximity to authentic and truthful narration perhaps owing to its non-fictional nature. Therefore, a diary would perhaps be somewhat removed from embellishment of narrative structures achieved through the extensive use of figurative language. Unlike the conventional literary text, where aesthetic value is of primary significance for readers and critics alike, a diary appears important owing to its truth-value, authenticity of feeling that it engages with while communicating directly the author's lived experience. When we examine Woolf's diary we would come across a creative engagement with the notion of individual self and subjective truth, which provides the reader an opportunity to confront her aesthetic concerns as an author. Critics have been of the opinion that the diary form offered Woolf with the most comfortable mode of writing providing her with

an enhanced scope for sustained practise of her craft as it emerges as a fine instance of feminine modernist writing (Simons, 1990). Woolf's diary is valuable not only in terms of its contribution to the growth and development of the form but also because it exemplifies 'modernist artistic practice' (Simons in Tidwell, 39) in its best. Woolf's diary appears unmediated by the literary and aesthetic parameters that one applies while writing in the fictional form. It documents in a most chaste and unabridged manner Woolf's contemplations on life and art. It is significant to remember that Woolf narrates life and the lived moments in the manner in which it came to her; the reader shall not be able to discern a beginning, a middle or a climax – it coherence of the text emerges only after one is able to discern the underlying pattern and contextualise it against the external world within which she was situated. As Woolf was well versed with the diaries written by the likes of Samuel Pepys, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Vita-Sackville West, Katherine Mansfield besides those of her immediate family members, she imbibed the art almost religiously following the tradition of diary writing exemplified in the diary of Samuel Pepys, for instance which is considered one of the exemplary diaries written in English

In the Introduction to *Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations* Anna Snaith observes – [Woolf's] use of a public/private dichotomy draws attention to her own complicating of the terms. 'Public' and 'private' are terms, which recur throughout Woolf's writing, words with which she experimented, testing out their meanings, together and alone, in numerous contexts. The conceptual dichotomy between public and private spaces, spheres, languages, voices, issues and discourses was one which captured her attention, to be reworked and questioned, rather than accepted wholesale in any particular form.(1)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: How does the reading of Woolf's diary entries help the readers to understand a writer like Virginia Woolf?



10.8 LET US SUM UP

Woolf's *Diary* is an important text not only in the oeuvre of life writing but also as a gem in modernist writing practice. Through her attempt at keeping a *Diary*, Woolf in fact provides herself with an opportunity not only to polish her craft but also to engage in a discourse in relation to her views on writing, self and the idea of time. The Diary may be considered as a reflection of the 'inner mind' of the artist herself at work.



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Life writing implies a form of narrating which borders on non-fiction… …it is an account of one's life told in a manner that would take the reader very close to facts and truths that pertain to life… …Life writing includes diary, journal entries, memoirs, biography and autobiography.

Ans to Q No 2: Other forms of life writing differ from the diary generically owing to the fact that diaries offer specific personal details of events, experiences and moments in life unlike in biography and autobiography where the specific personal aspect may be found absent.

Ans to Q No 3: women writers often go back to their past entries, while engaging in a constant re-reading, reviewing and re-evaluation of their lives and selves… …diary allows the author a scope for being confessional… …through a blending of extremely private experience of the individual female self with that of the larger perspective of women's experience within the lived life of the community, diary entries perhaps provide "the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience.

Ans to Q No 4: J.M. Keynes, E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and Roger Fry… …The Group became famous for its views on literature, art, politics, philosophy and its radical views on sexuality.

Ans to Q No 5: Woolf's *Diary* was not only to record the mundane experiences of life and times of contemporary period but more importantly, they provided Woolf with an opportunity to engage with herself as a writer and an artist. It was her tool for communicating "with herself about the books she was writing or about the future books which she intended to write."

Ans to Q No 6: Because, it interferes between the text, the authorial self and the reading public… …she believed that such egotistical writing reveals self imposed responsibility on the part of the writer not only for him/herself as the producers, but also for the reader who is the receiver leaving very limited scope for the reader and the text to indulge in the act of evolution and enjoyment through the text.

Ans to Q No 7: The *Diary* appears to have a therapeutic use for her as she relates that she feels relieved for having been able to express her innermost thoughts in it; she acknowledges that her melancholic state of mind gives way to subtle happiness as she takes up writing.

Ans to Q No 8: This particular entry opens with her attempt at self-diagnosis, an acceptance of the disease that had been afflicting her throughout her life. She realises that she has been out of the severe symptoms that had almost worn her out and at present, she had "come to the philosophic semi-depressed, indifferent."

Ans to Q No 9: This entry may be seen as one of Woolf's expression of the overwhelming creative ideas that flood her mind, which was perhaps at one of most fertile moments away from the bouts of depression and melancholy. She has scenes, events, and people all alive in her imagination waiting to be put down to words.

Ans to Q No 10: Woolf's *Diary* may also be seen as her effort to narrate a self that would engage in the task of examining and critiquing the notion of her 'situatedness' within the public and the private domain of lived experience… … her effort at finding out a way to narrate the 'inner life of the mind'–a narrative technique commonly known as 'stream-of-consciousness' is perhaps one of the most significant ideas that her *Diary* deals with.

Ans to Q No 11: When we examine Woolf's diary we would come across a creative engagement with the notion of individual self and subjective truth, which provides the reader an opportunity to confront her aesthetic concerns as an author.



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10.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1: What are the different forms of life writing? How does diary writing conform to the genre of life writing?

Q.2: Discuss some of the important themes of Virginia Woolf's diary entries.

Q.3: Examine the narrative style of the prescribed entries of Virginia Woolf's *Diary*.

Q.4: Woolf's *Diary* is not only a record of being but also of becoming. Discuss Woolf's art of writing in the light of the given statement.

Q.5: Do you think Woolf's Diary provided her with the scope to practise the modernist tendencies upheld by Bloomsbury Group? Justify with instances.

Q.6: How does the Woolf's *Diary* provide an access to her aesthetic concerns as a feminist writer? Discuss.

*** ***** ***

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