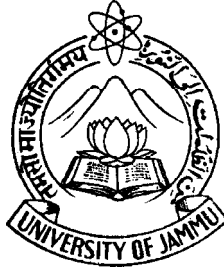


***Directorate of Distance Education***

**UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU**

**JAMMU**



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**

**M. A. ENGLISH**

**2018 Onwards**

**TITLE OF THE COURSE :-  
NON-FICTIONAL PROSE  
SEMESTER : I**

**COURSE CODE : ENG 114  
UNIT : I- VI  
LESSON NO. : 1-34**

*Course Co-ordinator*  
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*Teacher Incharge*  
**Mr. Stanzin Shakya**

*<http://www.distanceeducationju.in>*

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**M. A. English - Course Code : Eng 114**

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## WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the study of Course Code: ENG 114

This course is based on Non Fictional Prose, tracing the development of different kinds of prose style in Unit I. Unit II to VI deal with the different essayists and their works. The endeavour in this course is to acquaint learners with the streak and trend of prose writings of essayists starting from Bacon to Carlyle. You are requested to read the texts of the essays/writings prescribed in your syllabus and also visit the library to consult books for further reference.

Besides, as learners of English literature you must improve your vocabulary: the best way is to read an English newspaper, especially a national daily; also keep with you as your prized possession **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary**, and look for the meaning and form/use of words as you read the newspaper, texts and books; further try to use the new learnt words in your conversation. Do upload the CD which you get with the **Dictionary** on your laptop/ computer to hear and learn the British/ American accent and practice speaking the same way.

Wish you good luck and success!

Dr. Anupama Vohra

## SYLLABUS

**COURSE CODE: ENG 114**

**Duration of Examination : 3 hrs.**

**Title of the Course : Non-Fictional Prose**

**Total Marks : 100**

**Credits : 6**

**(a) Semester Examination : 80**

**(b) Sessional Assessment : 20**

**Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in Dec. 2018, 2019 & 2020.**

**Objective :-** The objective of this course will be to acquaint the students with different kinds of prose style such as Curt, Senecan, Ciceronian Satirical, Romantic and Philosophical. The students will also study the aphoristic, mock-epic, autobiographical and philosophical form of the English Essay.

**Text Prescribed (For Detailed Study) :**

### **Unit-I**

1. Development of British Non-Fictional Prose

### **Unit-II**

2. Francis Bacon : *Of Atheism*  
*Of Great Place*  
*Of Marriage and Single Life*  
*Of Adversity*

### **Unit-III**

3. John Milton : *Areopagitica*

### **Unit-IV**

4. Jonathan Swift : *The Battle of Books*

**Unit-V**

5. J. S. Mill : *The Subjection of Women: Chapter 4*

**Unit-VI**

6. John Ruskin : *Unto This Last: The Roots of Honour  
The Veins of Wealth*

Thomas Carlyle : *Heroes and Hero Worship : The Hero as Poet.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**MODE OF EXAMINATION :**

**The paper will be divided into sections A, B and C.**

**M.M. = 80**

**SECTION : A                      Multiple Choice Questions**

**Q. No. 1** will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be of one mark.

**(10×1 = 10)**

**SECTION : B                      Short Answer Questions**

Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set, and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks.

**(5×2=10)**

**SECTION : C                      Long Answer Questions**

Section C comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus.. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in 300-350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks.

**(5×12=60)**

**SUGGESTED READING**

1. Morris William Croll : *Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm: Essays.*
2. Brain Vickers : *Francis Bacon and the Renaissance Prose.*
3. Hugh Walker : *The English Essay and Essayist.*
4. Hugh Walker : *Satire and Satirist.*
5. Boris Ford : *From Black to Byron and Dickens to Hardy.*
6. John Middleton Murray : *The Problem of Style.*

7. Herbert Read : *English Prose Style.*
8. Allen Warner : *A Short Guide to English Style.*
9. Ian Alistair Gordon : *The Movement of English Prose.*
10. Bonamy Dobree : *Modern Prose Style.*
11. Marjorie Boulton : *The Anatomy of Prose.*
12. Lord Macaulay : *Critical and Historical Eassys.*
13. Thomas Carlyle : *Heroes and Hero - Worship.*
14. Sir Thomas More : *Utopia.*
15. Robert Burton : *The Anatomy of Melancholy.*
16. Richard Hooker : *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Books I-IV  
- Primary Source Edition.*

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## LIST OF CONTENTS

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**COURSE CODE:- ENG 114**

**NON FICTIONAL PROSE**

**UNIT-I DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH NON FICTIONAL PROSE** **Page No. 1-37**

Lesson No. (1-4)

*Dr. Madhu Sharma*

**UNIT-II FRANCIS BACON** **Page No. 38-83**

Lesson No. (5-7)

*Prof. Rita Mendonsa Saldanha*

Lesson No. (8-9)

*Dr. Anupama Vohra*

**UNIT-III JOHN MILTON** **Page No. 84-139**

Lesson No. (10-14)

*Prof. Bhim S. Dahiya*

**UNIT-IV JONATHAN SWIFT** **Page No. 140-186**

Lesson No. (15-19)

*Prof. Bhim S. Dahiya*



**UNIT-V J. S. MILL**

**Page No. 187-282**

Lesson No. (20-24)

*Dr. Shubra Jamwal*

**UNIT-VI JOHN RUSKIN**

**Page No. 283-383**

Lesson No. (25-31)

*Dr. Manisha Gangahar*

**THOMAS CARLYLE**

Lesson No. (32-34)

*Dr. Manisha Gangahar*

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**DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH NON-FICTIONAL PROSE**

- 1.1 Introduction**
- 1.2 Objective**
- 1.3 Defining Non-Fictional Prose**
- 1.4 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up**
- 1.6 Suggested Reading**

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson introduces the learner to the concept of non-fictional prose. Usually, non-fictional prose relates stories that really happened, but in a way that draws you in just like fiction does. It is about real people, places, events and social issues. It presents factual information while offering a viewpoint along with it. The lesson not only provides a comprehensive definition of non-fictional prose but also discusses its different aspects in detail.

**1.2 OBJECTIVE**

The aim of the lesson is to explain the learner what is non-fictional prose and discuss its various facets. The lesson intends to equip learner with familiarity of this literary term to enable them to distinguish other forms of writings from non-fictional prose.

**1.3 DEFINING NON-FICTIONAL PROSE**

Defining non-fictional prose literature is an immensely challenging task.

This type of literature differs from bold statements of fact, such as those recorded in an old chronicle or inserted in a business letter or in an impersonal message of mere information. As used in a broad sense, the term non-fictional prose literature here designates writing intended to instruct (but does not include highly scientific and erudite writings in which no aesthetic concern is evinced), to persuade, to convert, or to convey experience or reality through - factual or spiritual revelation. Separate articles cover biography and literary criticism.

### **1.3.1 NATURE**

Non-fictional prose genres cover an almost infinite variety of themes, and they assume many shapes. In quantitative terms, if such could ever be valid in such non measurable matters, they probably include more than half of all that has been written in countries having a literature of their own. Non-fictional prose genres have flourished in nearly all countries with advanced literatures. The genres include political and polemical writings, biographical and autobiographical literature, and philosophical and moral or religious writings.

After the Renaissance, from the 16th century onward in Europe, a personal manner of writing evolved as a significant change. The author strove for more or less disguised self-revelation and introspective analysis, often in the form of letters, private diaries, and confessions. Also of increasing importance were aphorisms after the style of the ancient Roman philosophers Seneca and Epictetus, imaginary dialogues, and historical narratives, and later, journalistic articles and extremely diverse essays. From the 19th century, writers in Romance and Slavic languages, especially and to a far lesser extent British and American writers, developed the attitude that a literature is most truly modern when it acquires a marked degree of self-awareness and obstinately reflects on its purpose and technique. Such writers were not content with imaginative creation alone: they also explained their work and defined their method in prefaces, reflections, essays, self-portraits, and critical articles. The 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire asserted that no great poet could ever

quite resist the temptation to also become a critic: a critic of others and of himself. Indeed, most modern writers, in lands other than the United States, whether they be poets, novelists, or dramatists, have composed more non-fictional prose than poetry, fiction, or drama. In the instances of such monumental figures of 20th-century literature as the poets Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and William Butler Yeats, or the novelists Thomas Mann and Andre' Gide, that part of their output may well be considered by posterity to be equal in importance to their more imaginative writing.

It is virtually impossible to attempt a unitary characterization of non-fictional prose. The concern that any definition is a limitation, and perhaps an exclusion of the essential, is nowhere more apposite than to this inordinately vast and variegated literature. Ever since the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers devised literary genres, some critics have found it convenient to arrange literary production into kinds or to refer it to modes.

### **1.3.2. ELEMENTS**

Obviously, a realm as boundless and diverse as non-fictional prose literature cannot be characterized as having any unity of intent, of technique, or of style. It can be defined, very loosely, only by what it is not. Many exceptions, in such a mass of writings, can always be brought up to contradict any rule or generalization. No prescriptive treatment is acceptable for the writing of essays, of aphorisms, of literary journalism, of polemical controversy, of travel literature, of memoirs and intimate diaries. No norms are recognized to determine whether a dialogue, a confession, a piece of religious or of scientific writing, is excellent, mediocre, or outright bad, and each author has to be relished, and appraised, chiefly in his own right. The only technique, the English critic F.R. Leavis wrote in 1957, is that which compels words to express an intensively personal way of feeling. Intensity is probably useful as a standard; yet it is a variable, and often elusive quality, possessed by polemicists and by ardent essayists to a greater extent than by others

who are equally great. Loving, and taking the liberties of a lover was Virginia Woolf's characterization of the 19th-century critic William Hazlitt's style: it instilled passion into his critical essays. But other equally significant English essayists of the same century, such as Charles Lamb or Walter Pater, or the French critic Hippolyte Taine, under an impassive mask, loved too, but differently. Still other non-fictional writers have been detached, seemingly aloof, or, like the 17th century French epigrammatist La Rochefoucauld, sarcastic. Their intensity is of another sort.

Prose that is non-fictional is generally supposed to cling to reality more closely than that which invents stories, or frames imaginary plots. Calling it realistic, however, would be a gross distortion. Since non-fictional prose does not stress inventiveness of themes and of characters independent of the author's self, it appears in the eyes of some moderns to be inferior to works of imagination. In the middle of the 20th century an immensely high evaluation was placed on the imagination, and the adjective imaginative became a grossly abused cliché. Many modern novels and plays, however, were woefully deficient in imaginative force, and the word may have been bandied about so much out of a desire for what was least possessed. Many readers are engrossed by travel books, by descriptions of exotic animal life, by essays on the psychology of other nations, by Rilke's notebooks or by Samuel Pepys's diary far more than by poetry or by novels that fail to impose any suspension of disbelief. There is much truth in Oscar Wilde's remark that the highest criticism is more creative than creation and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not. A good deal of imagination has gone not only into criticism but also into the writing of history, of essays, of travel books, and even of the biographies or the confessions that purport to be true to life as it really happened, as it was really experienced.

The imagination at work in non-fictional prose, however, would hardly deserve the august name of primary imagination reserved by the 19th century English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge to creators who come

close to possessing semi divine powers. Rather, imagination is displayed in non-fictional prose in the fanciful invention of decorative details, in digressions practiced as an art and assuming a character of pleasant nonchalance, in establishing a familiar contact with the reader through wit and humour. The variety of themes that may be touched upon in that prose is almost infinite. The treatment of issues may be ponderously didactic and still belong within the literary domain. For centuries, in many nations, in Asiatic languages, in medieval Latin, in the writings of the humanists of the Renaissance, and in those of the Enlightenment, a considerable part of literature has been didactic. The concept of art for art's sake is a late and rather artificial development in the history of culture, and it did not reign supreme even in the few countries in which it was expounded in the 19th century. The ease with which digressions may be inserted in that type of prose affords non-fictional literature a freedom denied to writing falling within other genres. The drawback of such a nondescript literature lies in judging it against any standard of perfection, since perfection implies some conformity with implicit rules and the presence, however vague, of standards such as have been formulated for comedy, tragedy, the ode, the short story and even (in this case, more honoured in the breach than the observance) the novel. The compensating grace is that in much non-fictional literature that repudiates or ignores structure the reader is often delighted with an air of ease and of *nonchalance*, a feeling of calmness and with that rarest of all virtues in the art of writing: naturalness.

### 1.3.3 STYLE

The writing of non-fictional prose should not entail the tension, the monotony, and the self-conscious craft of fiction writing. The search for *le mot juste* (the precise word) so fanatically pursued by admirers of Flaubert and Maupassant is far less important in non-fictional prose than in the novel and the short story. The English author G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), who was himself more successful in his rambling volumes of reflections and of religious apologetics than in his novels, defined

literature as that rare, almost miraculous use of language by which a man really says what he means. In essays, letters, reporting, and narratives of travels, the author's aim is often not to overpower his readers by giving them the impression that he knows exactly where he is leading them, as a dramatist or a detective-story writer does. Some rambling casualness, apparently irrelevant anecdotes, and suggestions of the conclusions that the author wishes his readers to infer are often more effective than extreme terseness.

There is also another manner of writing that is more attentive to the periodic cadences and elegance of prose, in the style of the ancient Roman orator Cicero. The 19th-century English essayist William Hazlitt praised the felicities of style and the refinements of the prose of the British statesman Edmund Burke (1729-97) as that which went the nearest to the verge of poetry and yet never fell over. A number of English writers have been fond of that harmonious, and rhetorical prose, the taste for which may well have been fostered not only by the familiarity with Cicero but also by the profound influence of the authorized version of the Bible (1611). Martin Luther's translation of the *New Testament* (1522) and of the *Old Testament* (1534) likewise molded much of German prose and German sensibility for centuries.

In the 20th century that type of prose lost favour with American and British readers, who ceased to cherish Latin orators and Biblical prose as their models. In German literature, however, in which harmonious balance and eloquence were more likely to be admired, and in other languages more directly derived from Latin, a musical style, akin to a prolonged poem in prose, was cultivated more assiduously, as exemplified in Italian writings of Gabriele D'Annunzio, in French in those by Andre' Gide, and in German in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*) by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Such an elaborate style appears to be more easily tolerated by the readers in non-fictional writing, with its lack of cumulative continuity and,

generally speaking, its more restricted size, than in novels such as *Pater's Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and occasionally in Thomas Mann's fiction, in which such a style tends to pall on the reader. Similarly, it is easier for the non-fictional prose writer to weave into his style faint suggestions of irony, archaisms, alliterations, and even interventions of the author that might prove catastrophic to credibility in fiction. Critics have argued that too close attention to style was harmful to the sweep necessary to fiction: they have contended that many of the greatest novelists, such as Dickens, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and Zola at times wrote badly; assuredly, they treated language carelessly more than once. Essayists, historians, orators, and divines often affect a happy-go-lucky ease so as to put them on the same footing with the common reader, but they realize that language and style are vital. They must know what resources they can draw from vivid sensations, brilliant similes, balanced sentences, or sudden epigrammatic effects of surprise.

#### **1.3.4. AUTHOR PRESENCE**

The one feature common to most authors of non-fictional prose (a few staid historians and even fewer philosophers excepted) is the marked degree of the author's presence in all they write. That is to be expected in epistolary literature and, although less inevitably, in the essay, the travel book, journalistic reporting, and polemical or hortatory prose. Although the 17th century French religious philosopher Pascal hinted that the ego is hateful, the author's presence is still strongly felt. This presence endows their works with a personal and haunting force that challenges, converts, or repels, but hardly ever leaves the reader indifferent. Saint Paul's epistles owe their impact-perhaps second to none in the history of the Western world-to the self that vehemently expresses itself in them, showing no concern whatsoever for the niceties of Attic prose. In the treatises, discourses, and philosophical argumentation of the great writers of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau,



they frequently resort to the first person singular, which results in a vivid concreteness in the treatment of the ideas. To think the abstract concretely, a precept reminiscent of the 18th-century philosophers, was also the aim of the 20th century philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty when they naturalized Existentialist thought in France. The growth of personal literature in its myriad shapes is one of the striking features of modern literary evolution.

### **1.3.5 APPROACHES**

In terms of approach, that is, the attitude of the writer as it can be inferred from the writing, the distinguishing features of non-fictional prose writings are the degree of presence of the ego and of the use of a subjective, familiar tone. Such devices are also used, of course, by authors of fiction, but to a lesser extent. Similarly, the basic modes of writing—the descriptive, the narrative, the expository, and the argumentative—are found in both non-fictional literature and in fiction, but in different degrees. In non-fictional prose, essayists, moralists, naturalists, and others regularly evoked nature scenes. The most sumptuous masters of prose composed landscapes as elaborately as landscape painters. The French writer and statesman Chateaubriand (1768-1848), for example, who was not outstandingly successful in inventing plots or in creating characters independent from his own self, was a master of description; his writings influenced the French Romantic poets, who set the impassive splendour of outward nature in contrast to the inner anguish of mortals. The 19th-century English art critic John Ruskin had a more precise gift of observation, as revealed in his descriptions of Alpine mountains and of the humblest flowers or mosses, but his ornate and sonorous prose was the climax of a high-flown manner of writing that later read like the majestic relic of another era. American non-fictional writers of the same period such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau scrupulously described the lessons of organization, of unity, and of moral beauty to be deciphered from the vicissitudes of nature. Russian essayists vied with novelists in their minute

yet rapturous descriptions of the thaw releasing the torrents of spring or the implacable force of the long Northern winters. Writers more inclined to the observation of social life, in satirical sketches of the mechanically polite and artificial habitue's of salons, helped the novel of social life come into existence in several Western countries. The narrative element is less conspicuous in writing that does not purport to relate a story than in fictional works, but there is a role for narrative in letters, diaries, autobiographies, and historical writing. Most often, an incident is graphically related by a witness, as in letters or memoirs; an anecdote may serve to illustrate a moral advice in an essay; or an entertaining encounter may be inserted into an essay or a travel sketch. Digression here represents the utmost in art; it provides a relief from the persistent attention required when the author is pursuing his purpose more seriously. Similarly, such writing provides a pleasant contrast to the rigid structure of the majority of novels since the late 19th century. In historical writing, however, simplicity and clarity of narrative are required, though it may be interspersed with speeches, with portraits, or with moral and polemical allusions. In other forms of non-fictional prose, the meandering fancy of the author may well produce an impression of freedom and of truth to life unattainable by the more carefully wrought novel. Many writers have confessed to feeling relieved when they ceased to create novels and shifted to impromptu sketches or desultory essays. The surrealist essayists of the 20th century poured their scorn on detective fiction as the most fiercely logical form of writing. In contrast, the author of essays or other non-fictional prose may blend dreams and facts, ventures into the illogical, and delightful eccentricities.

#### **1.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1.4.1 Write short notes on the following:

a) nature of non-fictional prose

b) style of non-fictional prose

1.4.2. What do you understand by author's approach in reference to non-fictional prose?

1.4.3. Discuss the elements of non-fictional prose

## **1.5 LET US SUM UP**

The lesson defines non-fictional prose. Furthermore, it discusses its nature and elements of non-fictional prose while touching upon its various genres. The lesson also talks about the distinguishing features of non-fictional prose writings regarding the degree of presence of the ego and of the use of a subjective, familiar tone.

## **1.6 SUGGESTED READING**

\* Boulton, Marjorie. *The Anatomy of Prose*. Taylor & Francis, 1954.

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**BRITISH NON-FICTIONAL PROSE**

- 2.1 Introduction**
- 2.2 Objective**
- 2.3 Early Years of Prose**
- 2.4 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 2.5 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 2.6 Answer Key**
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up**
- 2.8 Suggested Reading**

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the development of prose in the medieval age and discusses the basic characteristics of prose during this period. It highlights the fact that while Latin had a strong influence on the literature, religion remained an elemental concern of the works.

**2.2 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson aims at providing an overview of the development of prose during the Middle Ages. The objective is to make the learner trace different stages of non-fictional prose while becoming familiar with the names of writers that contributed to its development.

**2.3 EARLY YEARS OF PROSE**

The Anglo-Saxon prose, much of which is contemporaneous with the

heroic poetry, is generally derivative and Latin in spirit, repeating and adapting ideas that are very far removed from simplicity. The work for which prose was needed first of all was mainly that of instruction; and of the early didactic prose a great part is translation or adaptation. From the time of Ulfilas to the time of Wycliffe and the time of Caxton, and since, there has been ceaseless activity of the workers who have had to quarry into, and break up, and make portable and useful, the great mass left by the older civilisations for the Goths and their successors to do their best with. The purpose for which prose was needed first of all was mainly for instruction; and of the early didactic prose a great part is translation or adaptation.

The early English literature is strong in translations. Translations were the books most necessary for people who wanted to know about things, and who knew that the most important questions had already been answered by the Latin authors, so that it was a waste of time for the English or other simple folk to try to find out things for themselves. The quarry of Latin learning was worked zealously, and the evidences left by that activity are more than respectable. The Anglo-Saxon Bible versions, and Alfred's library of textbooks-Orosius, Boetius, Gregory, and the translation of Bede's history-are works which in point of style have attained the virtues of plain narration or exposition, and even something more; and the matter of them is such as was not antiquated for many centuries after Alfred. It was long before the other nations were as well provided in their own languages with useful hand-books of instruction. Besides the translations, there were other didactic works in different departments. There is a considerable stock of sermons-some of them imaginative and strong in narrative, like the one on the Harrowing of Hell in the *Blickling Homilies*, and others, like the *Sermones Catholici* of Ælfric, more soft and gentle in their tone, more finished in their rhetoric. These may not appeal to every reader; but the same might be said of the works of many later divines than Ælfric.

The old English educational literature-handbooks and homilies-had merits that were of lasting importance. The history of English prose cannot afford to ignore the books which, whatever may have been their shortcomings,

established good habits of composition, made it fairly easy, for those who would, to put English words together into sentences, and gave more than one good pattern of sentence for students to copy. The rhetorical value of the didactic prose will be rated high by anyone who values a sound convention or tradition of ordinary prose style for ordinary useful purposes. There are higher kinds of literature than the useful; but it is something to have different kinds of useful prose at one's command, and this in the tenth century was singular and exceptional among the vernacular tongues of the North and West. In so far as the intellectual problem for the early English prose writers was the reproduction of Latin learning, they took the right way to solve it, and were more than fortunate in the machinery they invented, and used to adapt and work up the old Latin materials.

The difficulty of the problem may easily be underestimated. There were many things to hinder the adoption of a decent prose convention. There as on the one hand the danger of a close and slavish imitation of the foreign models. One is reminded by a clumsy participle absolute here and there that the temptation which was too much for Ulfilas also beset the Anglo-Saxons, who for the most part resisted successfully the temptations of foreign grammatical constructions, comparing well in this respect not only with the Grecisms of Ulfilas, but with the distracted participles of the Wycliffite Bible. The Latinism of the Anglo-Saxon prose is to be found mainly in the use of conditional clauses and a closer bracing of the parts of the sentence than comes naturally in primitive essays.

There was another danger besides that of helpless and slavish admiration of Latin syntax, a danger perhaps greater, which was not so well evaded, the tendency, namely, to get beyond the tones of prose altogether into something half poetical. Prose is more difficult than verse in some stages of literature, and where a good deal of prose was made to be read or recited, where the homilist was the rival of the poet or the story-teller, there is small wonder that often the sermons fell into a chanting tone, and took over from the poets their alliteration and other ornaments. This propensity to recitative of different sorts is common

to the whole of medieval prose, and is worth considering later. Meantime there is matter for congratulation in the fact that so much of the Anglo-Saxon didactic literature should have escaped the two perils of concessions to Latin syntax on the one hand and to the popular taste for poetical decoration on the other.

The edifying and educational derivative prose is what bulks largest, but it is not the only prose written in Anglo-Saxon times. There is another sort, and a higher, though the amount of it is woefully small. If one is justified in discriminating what may be called the primitive or native element from the Latin or adventitious element in the old literature and the old civilization, then one may put certain Anglo-Saxon prose works along with the remains of the heroic poetry, along with the lays of *Finnesburh* and *Maldon*, as showing what could be done without the aid of Southern learning in dealing with lively matters of experience, and the lives and adventures of kings and chieftains. If there were nothing to take account of except the translations and the sermons, there would still be room for satisfaction at the literary skill and promise shown in them; but it would be impossible to claim for the Anglo-Saxon prose more than the merit of being a vehicle for the common ideas of Christendom. But there is more than that; there are, besides the borrowed views and ideas, a set of notes taken at first hand from the living world, which have a different value from the homilies. The best of Ælfric's homilies are as good as the best of their kind anywhere. But that kind is the expository literature which sets forth ideas, not the author's own, for the benefit of listeners on a lower level than the author—his sheep, his pupils. That is not the highest kind, and there is a higher to be found in the Chronicles, and in the narratives of the northern voyages brought in by King Alfred as an original contribution to his Orosius. The record of the Danish Wars, the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan, are literature of a more difficult kind than Ælfric's homilies, and literature in a sense that could never be applicable to any translation.

Of no old English prose can it be said that it is wholly free from Latin influence; but in some of the varying styles employed in the Chronicles, and in the narratives of the voyages, one comes as near as one may in early English to

natural prose, of the sort that might have been written by men who had nothing but natural English syntax, no Latin models of composition, to guide them. Prose such as one gets there, is of the rarest, near the beginnings of a literature. The last thing people think of is to put down in writing the sort of things they talk about, and in a talking style. These particular passages, especially the navigators' stories, are good talk about interesting things, and about new things. They are full of life and strength; there is nothing in them to suggest the school or the pulpit; the people who composed them were, for the time, emancipated from the Latin authority, out of sight of land, the old land of traditional ideas and inherited learning. Here is to be seen, what they could do, when left to themselves; here is the true beginning of independent explorations, and discoveries in literature. There is one sense in which it might be no paradox to say that these passages, as compared with Ælfric for instance, are modern literature; being plain and clear accounts of real things, in which there are no great corrections to be made on account of any disturbing prejudices. The region of Ælfric's homilies is distant and unfamiliar, but no one feels any sense of strangeness in listening to Ohthere. There is a clear northern light on his reindeer and walruses, and the northern moors and lakes; the air is free from all the Idols of the Forum and the Theatre. It was a happy inspiration that gave Ohthere and Wulfstan their place in Hakluyt's collection; and indeed many of Hakluyt's men are more old-fashioned in their style, and carry more rhetorical top-hamper than Ohthere.

There were great opportunities for prose of this sort written in the tone of the speaking voice, and describing the visible world and the things going on in it. It is idle to inquire why there is so little of such writing. One might have expected more, perhaps; for the literary talent of the Teutonic nations, as far as one may judge from their poetry, was all in the direction of clear and realistic narrative, with no more superstitious accidents than were convenient in the lives of epic heroes, and no Celtic vagueness or airiness, but a sense of solidity and matter of fact about the very witches and warlocks, as well as the hero and champion, their enemy. It may have been that in England, where the old epic style survived with wonderfully little modification to a late date, there was



the less need felt for any epic prose. The poem on the *Battle of Maldon* (A.D. 991) has all the strong virtues of a dramatic prose history, and its poetic graces are consistent with prose sobriety. Perhaps if this close-knit and masterly style, old simple epic tradition had not maintained itself, and if the English war poetry had been dissolved, like its kindred in Norway and Iceland, into pure formalism and periphrasis, then perhaps the history of the Battle of Maldon, and the fall of Byrhtnoth might have survived as a prose history, with all its epic details and all its various individual personages. Byrhtnoth's adversary and conqueror, Olaf Tryggvason, had his life written in that way, and the prose story of his last battle has more likeness to the methods of epic poetry than to such unimaginative history as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. But not much is to be gained by theorising in this direction, and the unrealised possibilities may be left to dispose of themselves. Only, in illustration of the prose genius latent in the old English poetry, one passage of the Chronicle may be remembered—the episode of Cyneheard and Cynewulf given under the date 755. It is rude and harsh in its phrasing, but dramatic, with its dialogue admirably calculated and its sequence of events well managed: this passage is probably a prose rendering of some ballad. The situation is one that occurs again and again in heroic poetry and prose; it is the story of kings fighting for their lives against their beleaguering enemies, the story that never fails of an audience, whether the hero be named Cynewulf, Cyneheard, Byrhtnoth, or Roland. There is a great resemblance in general outline to the history of Maldon; there is the same loyalty and self-devotion of the companions after their lord is killed. What is remarkable about this entry in the Chronicle, if it is really based on a poem, is that it has got rid of every vestige of poetical style which would have been discordant, and has kept only those poetical qualities, qualities of passion or sentiment, which are as well fitted for prose as for verse, or better.

There is little of such prose as this, but there is enough to take hold of. Together with such poetry as the poem of Maldon it forms the strongest part of the pre-Norman literature—"the stalk of carl-hemp" in it, compared with which the rhetorical excellences of Ælfric are light and unsubstantial. Contumely sometimes falls on the unreason the vapidity, the garrulity of medieval discourses,

and it is sometimes merited. At least it is difficult to refute the critic who says that he is bored by the conventional homilies and saints' lives. But for some things a strong defence may be made; for all the old literature that "shows the thing right as it was," and gives adventures like those of Alfred and his men in the great match played against Hæsten, or natural history like that of the Finns and Esthonians. Medieval literature is not all monotonous recitative of traditional phrases; some of it is fresh, strong, natural, and sane, and speaks in a tone of plain good sense. This has sometimes been forgotten or ignored, both by those who have an affection for medieval literature, and by others. So many things in the Middle Ages are quaint and exaggerated and overstrained, and therefore interesting, that the sober reason and plain sense of those same times are in a fair way to be forgotten. There is more fascination at first in medieval romance than in medieval rationality; the romance is beyond question, the rationality is sometimes doubtful. It is worth while to look out for places, like those already cited, where there is no trace of what is usually associated with the term medieval, no strained or feverish sentiment, no effusive and tautologous phrasing. And strong protest should be made against all attempts to overlay, in translations or criticisms or otherwise, any of the colours of romance upon the simple fabric of plain stories. There is enough and to spare of romance; true histories are not so common in the Middle Ages. They ought, whether in translations or merely in the reader's impression of them as he reads, to be purged of all unnecessary quaintness, where such quaintness as they possess is due merely to the old language, and not, as in much of medieval literature, to a real element of fancifulness in the author. The two classes of early English prose, the derivative educational and the original narrative literature, are alike in this, that at their best they keep clear of all unnatural intonations, and at less than their best fall into chanting or recitative of one kind or other. In the edifying literature there are, as examples of the false style, the alliterative Saints' Lives of Ælfric; while in the other kind of prose the Chronicles themselves give a striking example of the change of tone.

In fact, there is so much good prose in Europe between the time of Alfred and the time of Elizabeth that one may easily forget the enormous

difficulties that stood in the way of it. Long after Alfred there still remained, as a disturbing force, the natural antipathy of the natural man to listen to any continuous story except in verse. The dismal multitude of versified encyclopedias, the rhyming text-books of science, history, and morality, are there to witness of the reluctance with which prose was accepted to do the ordinary prose drudgery. The half-poetical prose of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* is to be explained as a concession to the sort of popular taste which, later, gave a hearing to prodigies like the *Cursor Mundi*, or, to take the last of the rhyming encyclopedias, written by a man who ought to have known better, *The Monarchy of Sir David Lyndesay*. The audience expected something finer than spoken language, and the taste that accepted the alliterative homilies may be compared with that which preserves the gaudy poetical patches in the Celtic traditional fairy stories, or that which requires from Welsh preachers that half of each sermon should be sung.

Besides the popular disrelish for plain prose, there were other distracting and degrading influences. The Latin models were not always as good as Boetius or Bede. Even Orosius, guiltless as he is of any brilliant extravagance, has his tirades of complaint, helping to spread the sentimental contagion; and even Boetius, by providing pieces of verse for King Alfred to turn into prose, encouraged an over-poetical manner of phrasing. The Latin Bible also, by its prose versions of poetical books, its parallelism of construction, its solemn rhythms, its profusion of metaphor, did much, unfortunately, to embolden the rhetoricians of the Church. The secular Latin literature, though it showed marvelous powers of recovering its decorum, yet was always prone to fall back into the wantonness that attacked it after the close of the Augustan age, when the poetical treasury was profaned and ransacked by magnificent prodigals like Apuleius.

## 2.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### Fill in the Blanks:

2.4.1 The early English literature is strong in \_\_\_\_\_.

2.4.2 The old English educational literature, which included hand-books

and \_\_\_\_\_, had merits that were of lasting importance.

2.4.3 The work for which prose was needed first of all was mainly that of \_\_\_\_\_.

2.4.4 The two classes of early English prose were the \_\_\_\_\_ and the original narrative literature.

## **2.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

2.5.1 Discuss how translations formed an important part of medieval literature.

2.5.2 Comment on development of prose in the medieval period.

## **2.6 ANSWER KEY**

### **Fill in the Blanks :**

Translations; homilies; instruction; derivative educational

## **2.7 LET US SUM UP**

The lesson discusses the Anglo-Saxon prose, which generally is derivative and Latin in spirit. It is characteristically repetitive and adaptive of ideas that are very far removed from simplicity. Translations form an important part of literature during the Anglo-Saxon period. In fact, there is so much good prose in Europe between the time of Alfred and the time of Elizabeth that one may easily forget the enormous difficulties that stood in the way of it.

## **2.8 SUGGESTED READING**

\* Davis, William H. *English Essayists: A Reader's Handbook*. Boston: Badger, 1996.

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**BRITISH NON-FICTIONAL PROSE**

- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 Objective**
- 3.3 The 15th Century Prose**
- 3.4 Elizabethan Prose**
- 3.5 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 3.6 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 3.7 Answer Key**
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up**
- 3.9 Suggested Reading**

**3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the development of prose during the 15th century and the Elizabethan age. It discusses the basic characteristics of prose during these periods and how it reflected the times.

**3.2 OBJECTIVE**

The aim of the lesson is not only to inform the learner about the development of prose during a particular period but also highlight the works that became milestones in literature.

**3.3 THE 15TH CENTURY PROSE**

The 15th Century is comparatively barren and non productive in the

field of English literature. During this time, while little poetry of quality was written, the prose literature of this age recorded considerable progress. Unlike the poetry of this age, the prose suffered from no retrogression. There was a perceptible increase in skill due to increased practice. There was a growing perception of the beauties of rhythm and cadence and there was the development of various prose styles including the ornate and the plain. The English prose certainly moved forward during the 15th century to a richness that was unknown to the preceding age. During the 15th century, prose made some remarkable progress because the English men shaped the rough material of their native tongue to form a literature for providing instruction and entertainment. But still English prose of the 15th century amounts for little originality and artistic value. The slow progress of prose on national lines was due to the influence that Latin exercised on the minds of the prose writers of this age. They were fascinated by Latin constructions. They were also contented to be the translators of French works of repute. Prose in the century was developed much on trial and error basis.

The promising prose writers of the century sought to impart directness, vigour, and simplicity. It was due to their efforts that the prose of the age developed and various kinds of prose works were written. It is interesting to observe that English prose writers attempted different kinds of prose during this period. Fisher and Cranmer (1489-1556) popularized theological writings and historical prose was presented in *The Chronicle of England* by Capgrave (1393-1464) who wrote in a business like fashion. Philosophical prose appeared in *The Governace of England* by Fortescue (1394-1476). Elyot (1490-1546) popularised educational prose and prepared the way for medical prose in the *Castle of Health*. William Tyndale's translation of the Bible is highly praiseworthy.

### **3.3.1 The English Prose of the 15th century was cultivated and promoted by the following writers:**

Reginald Peacock (1392-1461) is one of the important prose writers of the 15th century. Peacock's prose, often rugged and obscure, is marked by his preference for English words over Latin. His two works

were *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (c. 1445) and *The Book of Faith*. His books were among the earliest of English controversial works and they mark a victory over the once all important Latin.

Sir John Fortescue (1394-1476) was an important prose writer who made some contributions in the development of 15th century English prose. In contrast to Peacock, he stands for clarity of ideas. Fortescue avoids Peacock's pattern of long complicated sentences. H. S. Bennet in his *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* writes "in common with other 15th century writers Fortescue is not capable of writing a highly complex prose but what straight forwardness, simplicity and clear thinking could accomplish may be seen in almost every page of *The Governance of England*".

William Caxton (1422-1490) the English printer was also a remarkable prose writer of the 15th century. It would be difficult to overestimate the debt of Caxton to English literature. He printed almost every English work of real quality known in his days including Chaucer and Malory. In addition Caxton made and printed twenty four translations from French, Dutch and Latin texts, of which the most remarkable were the two earliest, the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* (1471) and *The Game and Playe of Chesse* (1475). At first he wanted to employ the elegant and ornate style but soon he became conscious of his limitations and switched to a simpler style. He decided to write in "Englysshe not ouer rude, ne curious, but in suche termes as shall be vnderstanden by goddys grace." To make himself more certain of being understood he sometimes placed the French word beside the English word. This practise was especially cultivated by Caxton. He avoided rustic terms and became intelligible to all his readers. The best of his prose can be found in his explanatory prefaces.

John Fisher (1459-1535), a religious divine and the Bishop of Rochester, opposed Henry VIII during Reformation, was imprisoned and finally beheaded. He wrote much in Latin and in English and he is

represented by a small collection of tracts and sermons and a longer treatise on the Psalms. Though they are of no great quantity, his prose works are in the nature of much importance. They are the first of the rhetorical religious books that for several centuries were to be an outstanding feature of English prose. In addition they mark a distinctive step ahead in the evolution of English prose style. They are written in the style of an orator: the searching after the appropriate word, the frequent use of rhetorical figures of speech, and a rapid and flowing rhythm. In the style of Fisher we can observe the beginning of an ornate style. Fisher proved to be the direct ancestor of the prose style of the great 17th century prose writer Jeremy Taylor.

Hugh Latimer (1485-1555) is another prose writer of the 15th century who was punished by Henry VIII because of his resistance against some of his reforms. Latimer's prose work consists of two volumes of sermons published in 1549. These works are remarkable for their plain and dogmatic exposition, their graphical power, and their homely appeal. He is first among the writers of plain style.

As we look back at the prose of the 15th century we see a variety of very developed and condensed prose.

### **3.4 ELIZABETHAN PROSE**

The Elizabethan Age was also referred to as the "young age" for it was full of vigour, intellectual earnestness, and soaring imagination. These elements were quite apparent in the poetry of the age, but when it came to breaking the confinements it was prose that ran amuck. However, remarkable development of prose did take place, which was variously written with great stylistic and linguistic excellence. During the 15th century, Latin was the medium of expression and almost all the important prose works were written in that language. It was in the 16th century that the English language took form.

#### **3.4.1 The Early Renaissance**

The period saw production of prose that majorly consisted of translations. The writers of this period were educationists and reformers



rather than creative writers.

Sir Thomas More: An important writer was Sir Thomas More, one of the early humanists and the first prose writer of great literary significance. His famous work *Utopia* was written in Latin, but it was translated into English in 1551 by Ralph Robinson. It is regarded as the true prologue of Renaissance and has been referred to as the first monument of modern socialism. Thomas More eulogizes democratic communism - people's state, elected government, equal distribution of wealth, and nine hours' work a day. It is here that the foundation of civilized society - the three great words Liberty, Equality and Fraternity - has been laid down. Thomas More is remembered more for his originality of ideas rather than his contribution to style. Then there was Roger Ascham, a great educationist. His first work *The School of Shooting* was written in English where he comments on the state of English language. His second work, *The School Master*, contains intellectual instructions for the young. Ascham's prose style is known for economy and precision. He is considered to be the first English stylist. Sir John Cheke was a teacher of Greek art at Cambridge. His actual composition was in Latin. He wrote *The Heart of Seditio* which shows the influence of classicism and antiquity. To him both form and matter were equally important. His prose is vigorous, argumentative, eloquent and humorous.

Sir Thomas Elyot: He is the author of *The Governace of England* (1531). The book is a fine specimen of a perfect combination between matter and manner. Elyot's style is classical and he is rather too much given to long sentences. He lacks the deliberate classical plainness of his younger contemporary Ascham.

George Cavendish: He wrote the biography of Cardinal Wolsey. Cavendish wrote in a rhetorical style and with no simplicity. Sir Thomas Wilson's main work is *Art of Rhetoric* (1553), in which he recommends purity and simplicity of the language. He lays emphasis on the necessity of writing English for Englishmen.

Roger Ascham is regarded as the representative figure of the earliest school of Elizabethan prose. Born at Yorkshire and educated at St. John College, Cambridge, Ascham became a teacher of Greek in 1540. He participated in the literary and religious controversies of his time but managed a firm position on the shifting grounds of politics. He was appointed tutor to Young Elizabeth (1548) and secretary to Queen Mary. He is among the pioneers of English prose and the most popular educationist of his times. His two chief works are *Toxophilus* (1545) and *The School Master*. The first is a treatise, in dialogue form, on archery, and the next is an educational work containing some ideas that were fairly fresh and entertaining. He was a man of moderate literary talent, of great industry, and of boundless enthusiasm for learning. Though he was strongly influenced by classical models, he has all the strong Elizabethan sense of nationality. In *Toxophilus* he declares his intention of writing the English matter in English speech for the Englishmen.

All through the period there was a flood of short tracts on religion, politics, and literature. In its buoyancy and vigour, its quaint mixture of truculence and petulance, Elizabethan pamphleteering is refreshingly boyish and alive. It is usually keenly satirical, and in style it is unformed and uncouth. The most notable among the pamphleteers were Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), Robert Greene (1560-92), and Thomas Lodge (1558-1625). These pamphleteers cultivated a journalistic style characterized by vigour, force, and raciness.

Sermon writings rose to a level of literary importance in this period. Donne was the most notable and his sermons contain his finest prose work. Numbered 160, Donne's sermons show his unflinching faith in God and Christianity, and his oratorical skill. Donne's sermons, of which the finest is probably *Death's Duell* (1630), contain many of the features of his poetry. The other prominent sermon writers are James Ussher and Joseph Hall. James Ussher (1581-1656), born and educated at Dublin, descended from a protestant family. He rose to be the bishop of Meath and the Archbishop of Armagh. In 1640 he came to England and remained

there throughout his life due to disturbances in Ireland. His sermons, discourses, and tracts show learning, adroit argument, and a plain and easy style. Joseph Hall (1574-1656) was educated at Cambridge, took orders, and became a prominent of the puritans, among whom was Milton. He was appointed bishop of Exeter and Norwich. Hall's opinions brought him to disgrace during the Puritan rule. Hall's devotional and theological works were numerous and include tracts, sermons, and treatises. Though he is often shallow and voluble, he writes with literary grace. He is the most literary of the theologians of the time.

The zeal for learning and spirit of adventure, which were prominent features of the early Elizabethan age, were strongly apparent in the frequent translations. The translators cared little for verbal accuracy, and sometimes were content to translate from a translation, say from a French version of a Latin text. They worked in many varied fields. Of the classics, Virgil was translated by Phaer (1558) and Stanyhurst (1562); Plutarch's *Lives* by North (1579); *Ovid* by Golding (1565 & 1567), Turberville (1567), and Chapman (1595); Homer by Chapman (1598). All Seneca was translated into English by 1581, and Suetonius, Pliny, and Plutarch's *Morals* were translated by Holland. Among the translations of Italian works were Machiavelli's *Arte of Warre* (1560) and Castiglione's *The Courtyer* translated by Hoby (1561); the *Palace of Pleasure* by Painter (1566); *Ariosto's Orlando Furioso* by Harrington (1591). From France were drawn John Florio's translation of the *Essays of Montaigne* (1603) and Dannett's *Commynes* (1596), while Spain provided North with *The Diall of Princes* (1557).

The birth of literary criticism during this period indicates the growing stature of the national literature and the realisation of the need to establish the principles of writing. The critics turned to the classics for their guides and models. They were chiefly concerned with three topics: the status and value of poetry, the importance of classical models, the merits and demerits of rhyme. Stephen Gosson attacked

poetry as immoral in his Puritanical treatise *The School of Abuse* (1579) and Sidney replied in his epoch making *The Apologie for Poetrie* (1582). William Webbe, in *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), attempted the first historical survey of poets and poetry, and Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589) is the first systematic consideration of poetry as an art. Intermittent discussion on the merits and demerits of rhyme culminated in the debate between Campion and Daniel. In reply to Campion's condemnation of rhyme in his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602), Daniel's famous *A Defence of Rhyme* (1602) asserted the right of every literature to its own customs and traditions.

Beginning in the pamphlets, character sketches, and other miscellaneous writings English essay developed in the works of Bacon. The English essay has its roots in the Elizabethan period, in the miscellaneous work of Lodge, Lyly, and Greene, and other literary free lancers. Sidney's *A pologie for Poetrie* attains a rudimentary essay form. But the first real English essayist was Bacon who published a short series of essays in 1597. In him we have the miscellany of theme, and the brevity and the musings of the philosopher.

### **3.4.2 The Later Renaissance**

Richard Hooker: The greatest of the non-fictional prose works of the Elizabethan age is Richard Hooker's masterly work *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy*. It was the first book to use English for serious philosophical discussion. Hooker, who was a protestant, combined the piety of a saint with the simplicity of a child in his writings. He follows the model of Cicero as far as the style is concerned. Though his diction is simple, but syntax highly Latinized.

Francis Bacon: Entirely opposite to Hooker was the prose style of Francis Bacon. Though much of what Bacon wrote appeared in the age of James I, but the first edition of his *Essays* appeared in 1597, that is within the age of Elizabeth. It was from French writer Montaigne (whose

*Essais* appeared in 1580) that Bacon borrowed the term and conception of the essay. While the term essay has been variously defined, it is commonly understood as a short composition more or less incomplete, it is like lyric in poetry. It may be written on any subject under the sun. It is the year 1597, when Bacon published his ten essays, that marks the beginning of essay writing in English literature. Sir Francis Bacon occupies a dominant place in English prose. Bacon began the trend of essay writing in English. His essays introduced a new form of literature into English literature. He wrote varied type of prose. He is philosophical in *The Advancement of Learning*, historical in the *History of Henry VII*, and speculative in "New Atlantis". Bacon occupies a permanent place in English prose due to his *Essays*, ten in number, which appeared in 1597. The second edition and the third edition raised the number to 38 and 58, respectively. These essays are on familiar subjects and they represent the musings of a trained and a learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear, and aphoristic style. Bacon was the first English writer who employed a style that is known for lucidity, clarity, economy, precision, directness, masculinity, and mathematical plainness. His images and figures of speech are simple and clearly illustrate the ideas that he wishes to communicate.

Ben Jonson: Another landmark name in this genre is Ben Jonson who wrote aphoristic essays, which are compiled in *The Timber of Discoveries* which was published posthumously about 1641. While the theme of his essays is moral and critical, his style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness, and strength. He treats a subject in a simple and plain manner.

### **3.5. SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- 3.5.1 Sir Thomas More's famous work is called \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.5.2 \_\_\_\_\_ is remembered more for his originality of his ideas rather than his contribution to style.
- 3.5.3 \_\_\_\_\_ masterly work *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical*

*Policy* is the greatest of the non-fictional prose works of the Elizabethan age.

3.5.4 Fisher and Cranmer popularized \_\_\_\_\_ writings.

3.5.5 In the style of \_\_\_\_\_ we can observe the beginning of an ornate style

### **3.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

3.6.1 Write a short essay on Elizabethan prose.

3.6.2 Briefly discuss the prose writers during the Elizabethan age.

3.6.3 Write a note on the 15th Century Prose while mentioning its prominent writers.

### **3.7 ANSWER KEY**

#### **Fill in the Blanks**

Utopia; Thomas More; Richard Hooker's; theological; John Fisher

### **3.8 LET US SUM UP**

During the 15th century, the prose literature recorded considerable progress. With writers like Reginald Peacock, Sir John Fortescue, William Caxton, John Fisher dominating the scene, the prose of this period sought to impart directness, vigour, and simplicity. Moving on, it was in the 16th century, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, that English language took its form. The prose of this period broke the confinements, and adopted stylistic and linguistic excellence.

### **3.9 SUGGESTED READING**

\* Gordon, Ian. *Movement of English Prose*. London: Longman, 1966.

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**BRITISH NON-FICTIONAL PROSE**

- 4.1 Introduction**
- 4.2 Objective**
- 4.3 The 17th Century Prose**
- 4.4 The 18th Century Prose**
- 4.5 The 19th Century Prose**
- 4.6 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 4.7 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 4.8 Answer Key**
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up**
- 4.10 Suggested Reading**

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson offers an overview of the development of prose during post-Elizabethan period. It discusses the basic characteristics of prose during these periods and how it reflected the times.

**4.2 OBJECTIVE**

The aim of the lesson is to inform the learner about the development of prose from 17th century to 18th century and then touching upon 18th century. It also highlights the works that became milestones in literature.

### 4.3. THE 17TH CENTURY PROSE

Francis Bacon formed the bridge between Elizabethan age, and 17th century or the Jacobean age. It is often felt by the critics that Bacon's prose occupies a position somewhere between the plentiful irregular vitality of the Elizabethans and the late-17th century barer styles. Through the prose of his *Essays*, Bacon set new standards of simplicity and precision which were later to be accepted as the hallmarks of good prose. His importance in the history of English prose is due to his naturalization of a new genre in English.

#### 4.3.1 Character Writers

The 17th century witnessed the origin and development of another kind of essay, known as character writing. The character writers were influenced by Theophrastus and Seneca and also by Bacon who provided a pattern of style - concise, pointed, and sententious. The intention of the character writer is generally reformatory, and his instruments are satire and wit. Sir Thomas Overbury, who was an important 17th century character writer, defined it as a picture, real or personal, quaintly drawn in various colours. His is a collection of numerous well-portrayed characters, usually packed to some trade or occupation. It is from this occupation that the character draws its virtues and vices, thus taking on a particular colour. However, his style is artificial and he subordinates substance to form. Overbury's characters are not too lengthy and are not portrayed from an abstract or moral position. Instead of being reformatory, Overbury is interested in presentation of the contemporary types. Though Overbury did not make stark divisions between virtue and vice through his witty satires but this is not to say that he was completely blind to moral considerations. It is Joseph Hall who is credited with the naturalization of the new prose form of the character in English literature. His work entitled *Characters of Virtues and Vices* came out in 1608. He was endowed with the qualities required for character writing, and satire distinguishes his character sketches. Hall has been known for his packed and rhetorical expression. His characters are rich in a peculiar



kind of wit which is entirely his own. John Earle is superior to both Hall and Overbury as a character writer. *His Microcosmography* is his collection of well-portrayed characters. It is written in a delightful and witty style. His manner is easy, vigorous, and fluent. In fact, some critics feel his style is epigrammatic. With a greater variety of material, Earle initiated the treatment of inanimate objects among his characters. George Herbert differs from all other character writers of his time. His famous work *A Priest in the Temple* or *A Country Parson* is not a collection of unconnected sketches, but a short treatise in thirty-seven chapters. Each of the characters delineates a phase of parson's life - his knowledge, his praying, his preaching, his comforting, etc. He aims at imparting reality to his character. His aim is to recommend religion by the portrayal of a charming and saintly life. There was Thomas Fuller who belonged to a school of his own. What distinguishes Fuller is his boundless humanity which is visible in every page of his writings. He mixes his character sketches with interesting stories, while giving a personal touch to his essays. His characters of virtues and vices are not merely fanciful exercises but they are real and concrete. His style is condensed and discursive.

#### **4.3.2 Religious Prose**

During this period religious controversy was in vogue. It gave rise to fine English prose and it also contributed to the evolution of English prose style. Among the religious prose writers was Sir John Tyndale, who is remembered for the Translation of the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*. This translation formed the basis for *The Authorized Version of the Bible* (1611). It is written in traditional prose, purged from, ornateness and triviality. Its style is remarkable for simplicity, clarity, lucidity, and directness because Tyndale's aim was to make the Bible readable even to peasants. Also, Richard Hooker wrote *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which is an outstanding contribution in the field of theology and prose style. Hooker's style is highly Latinized but it is free from pedantry and vulgarity.

It is logical and convincing, musical and cadenced, clear and vigorous.

### **4.3.3 Prose in Age of Milton (1625-1660)**

The age of Milton was an age of singular activity in the field of English prose. The political struggles had a hampering as well as encouraging influence on the prose writers of the age. A good amount of writings came in support and to promote either of the two conflicting sides - the Puritans and Cavaliers. Also, this age saw some extraordinary production of eloquent and compelling sermons. As regards the prose style, the writers showed a curious, retrogressive tendency, cultivating a kind of baroque style. One of the writers was Sir Thomas Browne, who blended the medieval and the modern.

## **4.4 THE 18TH CENTURY PROSE**

The 18th century was a great period for English prose and hence Matthew Arnold called it an "age of prose and reason", with prose dominating the literary realm. In this century there was a notable propagation of practical interests which could best be expressed in a new kind of prose-pliant and capable of rising to every occasion. This prose was simple and modern, having nothing of the baroque or Ciceronian colour of the prose of the 17th century writers. Practicality and reason ruled supreme in prose and determined its style. It is really strange that in this period the language of prose was becoming simpler and more easily comprehensible. Much of the 18th century prose is taken up by topical journalistic issues, as indeed is the prose of any other age. However, in the 18th century we come across, for the firsttime in the history of English literature, a really huge mass of pamphlets, journals, booklets, and magazines. The whole activity of life of the eighteenth century is embodied in the works of literary critics, economists, "letter-writers," essayists, politicians, public speakers, divines, philosophers, historians, scientists, biographers, and public projectors.

### **4.4.1 The 18th Century Periodical Essay**

In the 18th century British periodical literature underwent significant developments in terms of form, content, and audience. Several factors contributed to these changes. Prior to 1700 the English popular press was in its infancy. The first British newspaper, *The Oxford Gazette*, was introduced in 1645. Two years later the Licensing Act of 1647 established government control of the press by granting the *Gazette* a strictly enforced monopoly on printed news. As a result, other late 17th century periodicals, including *The Observer* (1681) and *The Athenian Gazette* (1691), either supplemented the news with varied content, such as political commentary, reviews, and literary works, or provided specialized material targeting a specific readership. During this time, printing press technology was improving. Newer presses were so simple to use that individuals could produce printed material themselves. British society was in transition as well. The burgeoning commercial class created an audience with the means, education, and leisure time to engage in reading. When the Licensing Act expired in 1694, publications sprang up, not just in London, but all across England and its colonies.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele are generally regarded as the most significant figures in the development of the 18th century periodical. Together they produced three publications: *The Tatler* (1709-11), *The Spectator* (1711-12), and *The Guardian* (1713). In addition, Addison published *The Free-Holder* (1715-16), and Steele, who had been the editor of *The London Gazette* (the former *Oxford Gazette*) from 1707 to 1710, produced a number of other periodicals, including *The Englishman* (1713-14), *Town-Talk* (1715-16), and *The Plebeian* (1719). The three periodicals Addison and Steele produced together were great success; none ceased publication because of poor sales or other financial reasons, but by the choice of their editors. Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing to the present day, there has been debate among critics and scholars over the contributions of Addison and Steele to their joint enterprises. Addison has been generally seen as

the more eloquent writer, while Steele has been regarded as the better editor and organizer.

Periodicals in the 18th century included social and moral commentary, and literary and dramatic criticism, as well as short literary works. They also saw the advent of serialized stories, which Charles Dickens, among others, would later perfect. One of the most important outgrowths of the eighteenth-century periodical, however, was the topical, or periodical, essay. Although novelist Daniel Defoe made some contributions to its evolution with his *Review of the Affairs of France* (1704-13), Addison and Steele are credited with bringing the periodical essay to maturity. Appealing to an educated audience, the periodical essay as developed by Addison and Steele was not scholarly, but casual in tone, concise, and adaptable to a number of subjects, including daily life, ethics, religion, science, economics, and social and political issues.

Another innovation brought about by the periodical was the publication of letters to the editor, which permitted an unprecedented degree of interaction between author and audience. Initially, correspondence to periodicals was presented in a limited, question-and-answer form of exchange. As used by Steele, letters to the editor brought new points of view into the periodical and created a sense of intimacy with the reader. The feature evolved into a forum for readers to express themselves, engage in a discussion on an important event or question, conduct a political debate, or ask advice on a personal situation. Steele even introduced an “advice to the lovelorn column” to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Addison and Steele as well as the other editors of the eighteenth century saw their publications as performing an important social function, and viewed themselves as moral instructors and arbiters of taste. In part these moralizing and didactic purposes were accomplished through the creation of an editorial voice or persona, such as Isaac Bickerstaff in *The Tatler*, Nestor Ironside in *The Guardian*, and, most importantly, Mr. Spectator in *The Spectator*. Through witty, sometimes satirical

observations of the contemporary scene, these fictional stand-ins for the editors attempted to castigate vice and promote virtue. They taught lessons to encourage certain behaviors in their readers, especially self-discipline. Morals were a primary concern, especially for men in business. Women, too, formed a part of the readership of periodicals, and they were instructed in what was expected of them, what kind of ideals they should aspire to, and what limits should be on their concerns and interests.

The impact of periodicals was both immediate and ongoing. Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond there were many imitators of Addison and Steele's publications. These successors, which arose not just in England, but in countries throughout Europe and in the United States as well, modeled their style, content, and editorial policies on those of *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and *The Guardian*. Some imitators, such as *The Female Spectator* (1744), were targeted specifically at women. Addison and Steele's periodicals achieved a broader influence when they were translated and reprinted in collected editions for use throughout the century. The epistolary exchanges, short fiction, and serialized stories included in the periodicals had an important influence on the development of the novel. In addition, celebrated figures from Benjamin Franklin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Mark Twain have acknowledged the impact of the eighteenth-century periodical, particularly *The Spectator*, on their development as writers and thinkers.

#### **4.5 THE 19TH CENTURY PROSE**

The early 19th century saw in England the emergence of the romantic spirit both in verse and prose. The romantic essayists like Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, De Quincey, and Charles Lamb had many common characteristics, for instance their tendency of self-revelation, their subjective approach, their button holding familiarity, their congenial and tolerant humour, their occasional pathos and their visionary and somewhat extravagant nature. Lamb has been called the prince of the English essayists.

#### **4.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- 4.6.1 Francis Bacon began the trend of \_\_\_\_\_ writing in English.
- 4.6.2 Matthew Arnold called \_\_\_\_\_ an "age of prose and reason".
- 4.6.3 Sir Thomas Overbury was an important \_\_\_\_ century character writer.
- 4.6.4 During the Age of Milton, a good amount of prose writings came about in support and to promote either of the two conflicting sides \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **4.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- 4.7.1 Trace Bacon's contribution in the development of English prose.
- 4.7.2 Comment on the character-writers of the 17th century.
- 4.7.3 Write a note on the 18th century periodical essay.

#### **4.8 ANSWER KEY**

Fill in the Blanks:-

essay; 18th century; 17th; the Puritans, the Cavaliers

#### **4.9 LET US SUM UP**

It was during the 17th century that character writing originated and developed as another kind of essay. The 18th century was a great period for English prose which was simple and modern. Practicality and reason ruled supreme in prose and determined its style. Moreover, British periodical literature underwent significant developments in terms of form, content, and audience.

#### **4.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Lanham, Richard. *Analyzing Prose*. Continuum, 2003.
- \* Lodge, David. *Modes of Modern Writing*. Cornell University Press, 1977.

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## **FRANCIS BACON**

- 5.1 Objective**
- 5.2 The Age of Elizabeth**
- 5.3 Her Religious Settlements : A Glorious Achievement**
- 5.4 Defeat of Spain made England a Great Power**
- 5.5 Elizabeth gave Economic Prosperity to Britain**
- 5.6 Literary Trends of Elizabethan Age**
- 5.7 Francis Bacon and His Works**
- 5.8 Contemporaries of Bacon**
  - 5.8.1 Richard Hooker (1554 - 1600)**
  - 5.8.2 Sidney and Raleigh**
  - 5.8.3 John Foxe (1516 - 1587)**
  - 5.8.4 Camden and Knox**
  - 5.8.5 Hakluyt and Purchas**
  - 5.8.6 Thomas North**
- 5.9 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 5.10 Suggested Reading**

### **5.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the

social history of Elizabethan period, literary trends of the age, and life history of Francis Bacon.

## **SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE PERIOD**

### **5.2 THE AGE OF ELIZABETH**

The Elizabethan period deserves a special notice. Most of the credit of the glory of this period goes to Queen Elizabeth. When Elizabeth ascended the throne in November 1558, the condition of England was hopeless. The Catholics and the Legalists were concocting plans to install Mary, Queen of Scots, on the throne. The Counter-Reformation movement was gaining ground, and the Pope and his 'Soldiers of Christ' i.e. the Jesuits were making every possible effort to win back the Protestant England to the old faith. France and Spain both were looking at the Island with covetous eyes. The financial position and the Military of the country were also at the lowest ebb, and owing to the Spanish sea power, the English sea men were very inactive. It was a hard task for the Queen to surmount all these difficulties. The Queen rose to the occasion with the help of her most trusted counsellor, Sir William Cecil, she raised England from a very low position to great heights.

### **5.3 HER RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENTS**

*A glorious achievement.* She moved very logically. First, she tackled the religious question which had baffled all her Tudor predecessors. She had to face many difficulties in solving this question. The people had seen enough of the extreme Catholicism of Mary and were not going to accept it as their national religion. On the other hand, the Pope of Rome and Spain would not let England have the Protestant faith. Elizabeth applied the policy of 'Ecclesiastical Compromise' and won the favour of her subjects. She revised the *Prayer Book* and removed those passages which were obnoxious to the Catholics. She also reduced forty-two *Articles of Faith* to thirty-nine. She took the moderate title of 'Supreme Governor' and not 'Supreme Head'. From 1559 A. D., the Queen safeguarded her



religious settlement both from the internal malcontents and foreign aggressors. She safeguarded her settlement from the Court of High Commission.

#### **5.4 DEFEAT OF SPAIN MADE ENGLAND A GREAT POWER**

Spain was a great power of Europe. It had a stronger navy and more extensive kingdom than those of England. Spain was Catholic and was against the religious policy of Elizabeth. Moreover, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots had greatly estranged the relations of England and Spain. In 1588, there broke out a war. Elizabeth gave a crushing defeat to the “Invincible Spanish Armada”. “This defeat of Armada made England a great power in Europe. She became the mistress of High Seas”.

#### **5.5 ELIZABETH GAVE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TO BRITAIN**

The fame of Elizabeth does not only rest on her vigorous foreign policy nor only on her Ecclesiastical settlement but also on her economic dealings with her subjects. She took keen interest in the economic welfare of her people. First she abandoned her father’s policy of spending too much on display and court ceremonies. She spent a major portion of money on the development of industries. She was assisted by Lord Burghley (William Cecil). Monopolies and Patent Rights were granted to those, who showed a little enterprise. These efforts resulted in the foundation of several new industries such as glass, alum, and salt. Thus, her reign marks the beginning of Industrial England. Queen chartered many new companies, which led to an enormous increase in the foreign trade. Elizabeth put a stop to the policy of enclosures, which was greatly harmful for the agriculture of England. Elizabeth passed the famous Corn Law (1600) and Enclosure Act (1580). She abandoned the old policy of debasing the coins and instead issued inferior coins (1560).

The chief popularity of Elizabeth consisted in her taking up the problems of poverty and unemployment. When she came to the throne, she found that vagabondage, poverty and indolence were prevailing in an epidemic form. Elizabeth passed a number of Poor Laws (1572, 1576, 1596), which culminated in the famous Poor Law 1601. By virtue of

these laws, every parish was required to provide 'work' to the able-bodied poor and the gentry in the parish were taxed to defray the expenses of maintaining the disabled, who were incapable of work. The charge of supervision of administration of the Poor Laws was entrusted to the Justice of Peace, the favourite local agent of the Tudor King. These economic dealings of the Queen made her very popular. The people felt so much obliged to Elizabeth for her taking too much interest in their 'bread and butter' question that they, out of gratitude, styled her reign as a glorious period in English History.

## **5.6 LITERARY TRENDS OF ELIZABETHAN AGE**

Queen Elizabeth was an accomplished woman and well-versed in most of the continental languages such as Greek, Latin, and Italian. The Queen liberally patronised a large number of scholars. The age produced a large number of poets, whose works rank with the most renowned pieces of English literature. Spenser, Chapman, Drayton were some of the outstanding poets of that period.

Elizabethan literature was highly influenced by Renaissance. Towards the end of the 15th century, some English scholars visited Italy—the very home and centre of Renaissance—and on their return to England founded at Oxford the teaching of humanism on sound lines. All the great works were translated, the printing press helped, and these translations opened for the English people a window on the enchanted world of classical antiquity, which appeared with all the freshness of a new discovery. They brought their readers into contact with the life and thought of contemporary Europe and specially of Renaissance Italy.

In this way, the audience started understanding and appreciating allusions to mythology with which Renaissance drama is heavily overloaded. Classical drama gave to English drama its division into Scenes and Acts and unities of time, place and action, its rules of artistic composition. These translations provided the dramatists with different themes. Plutarch's *Lives* were translated by Thomas North, Montaigne's *Essays* were translated

by Florio, and Chapman's *Homer* made a considerable influence on Elizabethan writers. The language was enriched with new words and translators learnt the art of using new words with dignity. English style and prosody were formed by innumerable translations.

English scholars wanted to learn more and more about ancient literature and this aesthetic urge inspired them to visit Italy for the second time. The wholesale assimilation of Italian manners and vices was deplored by scholars and educationists such as Roger Ascham and Sir John Cheke and Thomas Wilson. These Italianate gentlemen became the chief part of the stock-in-trade of the satirists and moralists of the day. Satirical references to extravagance are frequent in the plays of Shakespeare. The literature of England was enriched by an immense looting of Italian treasures, but the faults of Italy could not spoil the English life to any great extent.

The Renaissance had a profound impact on the ideals of life. The zest for life found its expression in songs. England was transformed into a veritable nest of singing birds. Men craved for entertainment and in response to this demand, there came the drama and the novella-stories of love, bloodshed, and violence, often licentious. Consequently, the lyric, the drama, and the short story are the characteristic modes of expression in the Elizabethan era.

Energetic men of action were admired and not the ascetic or the poet leading retired, secluded life. Spenser's *Fairie Queene* is the aim to fashion a gentleman of all accomplishment. The noted Elizabethan writers were energetic men of action. They were not only well-versed in the classics but also accomplished courtiers, soldiers, and statesmen. Sir Philip Sidney was the best representative of the Renaissance ideal of a perfect gentleman.

One of the most popular works during the Renaissance was *The Prince* of the Italian writer Machiavelli. He taught an opportunistic utilitarian philosophy of worldly success and ruthless self-aggrandisement. His views are reflected in the philosophy of Bacon's *Essays*. The *Essays* are compendiums of worldly wisdom necessary for youngmen seeking worldly advancement.

The Renaissance also fostered the spirit of questioning. Inspired by this spirit, Bacon developed the inductive method of research : the spirit of free inquiry is at the very root of his major works. Literary criticism is also an expression of this very spirit. The influence of Plato on the writers was very much there. The Platonic doctrine that poets are divinely inspired was well-known to everyone. The writers of the period aimed at producing literature of high quality. Everybody tried to be a poet, poetry no longer remained the privilege of the few.

The study of logic was replaced by the study of rhetoric and it coloured all literature. The rhetoricians encouraged their pupils to embellish their language. These literary affectations gave rise to *Euphuism* associated with the name of John Lyly. This owes its inspiration to Cicero and other ancient rhetoricians. Words were handled and freely tossed about with delight. The long exclamatory speeches were directly modelled on Seneca. Latinism became a passion and ran through the less intelligent kind of writing in wild expression. The foreign words were used, scholars like Cheke, Ascham, and Wilson were compelled to raise a warning finger against the dangers of excessive use of what was then called “inkhorn terms.” Their voice was not generally heeded, and the English language continued to be enriched in this way.

Attempt was made by a group of youngmen, called Aeropagus to transplant classical metres in English verse. The only imported metres, which flourished in England, were the sonnet and the blank verse— the two measures associated with the names of Wyatt and Surrey. The great sonnet— sequences of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare were well-known and blank verse made great drama possible.

The influence of the spirit of discovery and adventure ran through all the literature of Elizabethan age. The voyagers themselves wrote down the accounts of their adventures and two of these accounts proved very popular—that of Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries and of Purchas, His Pilgrimage*. These accounts exercised a very healthy influence on

the development of English prose style. The writers were not men of letters, they had no knowledge of literary artifices, and hence, were the pioneers in the field of writing of the plain, unadorned English prose, and the plain and direct telling of a stirring story. Shakespeare's works are full of references and allusions to traveller's tales in Elizabethan literature.

In drama, the spirit of romance, magic, and enchantment got its full play. As Raleigh puts it, "without the voyagers Marlowe is inconceivable".

### **5.7 FRANCIS BACON AND HIS WORKS**

Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561 in London. His mother Anne was second wife to Sir Nicholas Bacon and bore him two sons, Anthony the elder by two years, and Francis the second. The mother was famous for her scholarship and when Francis was three years old, appeared her translation into English of Bishop John Jewel's Latin *Apologia*, the then famous : *Defence of the English Church*.

She was a fervent protestant and greatly influenced Bacon. When still a boy, his father took him to court and he became favourite of Queen Elizabeth. At the age of thirteen, he entered *Trinity College Cambridge*. Youngmen went early to college those days but his home environment had fostered an early maturity. It was here at sixteen, that he first fell into dislike of the philosophy of Aristotle. Not for the worthlessness of the author, to whom he would ever ascribe all high attributes, but for the unfruitfulness of the way, being a philosophy only strong for disputations and contentions but barren of the production of works for the benefit of the life of man.

The remarkable thing is not the fact that he earlier took a dislike for Aristotle, but because the Aristotelian philosophy was practically useless. Young though he was, he came to the university with the idea that the serious thing in life was to increase mastery over nature, with a view to the improvement of human life. When he went to college, the logic and metaphysic of Aristotle, and the theology offered him disillusionment. Industrial

revolution was at hand, men wanted to extract minerals from the earth, and adopt them to different uses. Here the old logic could not give any help. The philosophy of works had an irresistible appeal for Bacon and he reacted violently against the philosophy of words.

On leaving the university Bacon betook himself to the study of law. He was admitted to Gray's Inn on June 27, 1575. Before he completed his studies, however, came his first and last opportunity for foreign travel. He was sent to France in the suite of the English Ambassador, Sir Amias Paulet and passed the next two and a half years in Paris. From Paris, Bacon was summoned in haste in February, 1579 by word of his father's death. The news was a blow not only to his affections to his prospects in life, his father had failed to make provision for his youngest son and Francis was left poor. He borrowed money in order to complete his studies and after this, he was never out of debt. In order to fulfil his dreams, he wanted a public post, and though he succeeded at the bar and became a member of Parliament, no preferment came to him. In 1586, he published a philosophical essay. *The Greatest Birth of Time*. In 1597, he published first edition of his essays. These were ten in number. In 1612, second edition was published and thirty-eight essays were included in it. In 1625, enlarged and revised third edition was published. In 1605, was published *The Advancement of Learning*.

Francis Bacon was the adviser to Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's favourite. Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, was Bacon's junior by six years. Graduating at Cambridge in 1581, he appeared at Court in 1584, and succeeded the Earl of Leicester as the favourite of the Queen. Bacon enjoyed material favours from Essex including gift of valuable property. He repaid the favours with advice which, as long as it was intended to save Essex from disaster. In the end, Essex drifted into treasonable crimes, was arrested, condemned, and executed. Bacon, by his position as a learned counsel to the Queen, was involved in the prosecution of his friend. Bacon's conduct has been called treacherous. Pope called him the "wisest, brightest, and meanest of mankind."

But when one reads his *Defence*, which he published in 1604, he says that his conduct was based on the principle, “he like every honest man, that hath his heart well planted, will forsake his king rather than forsake God, and forsake his friend rather than forsake the king and yet will forsake any earthly commodity, even his own life—rather forsake the friend.” Essex was executed in 1601–1603. Till Queen's death, he was never completely in favour of the Queen. James the VI of Scotland ascended to the throne of England with James' accession however, his prospects improved. In 1617, he acquired his father's office of Keeper of the Great Seal, and in 1618, he became Lord Chancellor, but after he held this great position for only two years, he was prosecuted for accepting bribes. Bacon admitted the truth of the pleading only that presents never influenced his decision. He was condemned to a fine of £ 40,000, to imprisonment in the Tower during the king's pleasure, to perpetual banishment from Court because of his inability to hold office. This sentence was only very partially executed. He was not forced to pay the fine and kept to the Tower for only four days. But he was compelled to abandon public life and to spend the rest of his days writing important books.

Bacon was always interested in science and his attempt at the invention of refrigeration resulted in his death. The problem of heat and cold always fascinated him both theoretically and for its practical applications. The effect of cold in delaying was on the list of his problems to be investigated. On a cold day, towards the end of March 1626, he drove over snow covered ground, purchased a hen from a cottage woman and personally helped her stuff it with snow. Here, he caught Bronchitis and died on Easter Sunday morning, April 9, 1626.

## **5.8 CONTEMPORARIES OF BACON**

**5.8.1 Richard Hooker (1554-1600)** – In strong contrast with Bacon is Richard Hooker, one of the greatest prose writers of the Elizabethan Age. Hooker, took a single theme, the law and practice of the English Church, and so handled it that no scholar would dream of superseding it. His great work is *The Laws of Ecclesiastical*

*Polity*, a theological and argumentative book; but, entirely apart from its subject.

**5.8.2 Sidney and Raleigh** :- Among the prose writers of this wonderful literary age are Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), who has been considered as a poet, is known for his prose works *Arcadia*, a pastoral romance, and the *Defense of Poesie*. Sidney, whom Shelley eulogized, represented the whole romantic tendency of his age. Sir Walter Raleigh's (1552–1618) life was an almost incomprehensible mixture of the poet, scholar, and adventurer; his life in itself was a volume far more interesting than anything he wrote. He was the restless spirit of the Elizabethan Age personified. His chief prose works are *Discoverie of Guiana*, a work which would certainly have been interesting enough had he told simply what he saw, but which was filled with colonization schemes and visions of an El Dorado; and the *History of the World* was written to occupy his prison hours. The history deals with untrustworthy account of events from creation to the downfall of the Macedonian Empire. It is interesting for its style, which is simple and dignified, and for the flashes of wit and poetry that break into combination of miracles, traditions, hearsay, and state records, which he called history.

**5.8.3 John Foxe (1516–1587)** :- He will be remembered for his famous *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe had been driven out of England by the Marian persecutions, and in a wandering but diligent life on the continent, he conceived the idea of writing a history of the persecutions of the church from the earliest days to its own. The part relating to England and Scotland was published, in Latin, in 1559, under a title as sonorous and impressive as the Roman offices for the dead, —*Rerum in Ecclesia Gestarum Maximarumque per Europam Persecutionum Commentarii* - Foxe translated this work, calling it the *Acts and Monuments*; but it soon became as the *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe's own bitter experiences caused him to write with more heat and indignation.



**5.8.4 Camden and Knox** :- Camden's *Britannia* (1586) is the monumental work, which marked the beginning of true antiquarian research in the field of history; and his *Annals of Queen Elizabeth* is worthy of a far higher place. John Knox, the reformer, in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, has some very vivid portraits of his helpers and enemies. The personal and aggressive elements enter strongly for a work of history, but the autobiographical parts lack literary power.

**5.8.5 Hakluyt and Purchas** :- Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616) and Samuel Purchas (1575–1626) Richard Hakluyt was a clergyman, who in the midst of his little parish, set himself to achieve two great patriotic ends, —to promote the wealth and commerce of his country, and to preserve the memory of all his countrymen, who added to the glory of the realm by their travels and explorations. He was concerned deeply with the commercial interests of the East India Company, with Raleigh's colonizing plans in Virginia, and with a translation of De Soto's travels in America. He made himself familiar with books of voyages in all foreign languages and with the brief reports of explorations of his own countrymen. His *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, in three volumes, appeared first in 1589 and second edition in 1598-1600. The first volume tells of voyages to the north; the second to India and the East; the third, which is as large as the other two, to the New World.

**Samuel Purchas** :- Purchas was also a clergyman, he continued the work of Hakluyt, using many of the latter's unpublished manuscripts and condensing the records of numerous other voyages. His famous book, *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* appeared in 1613, and was followed by *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimages* in 1625. The very name inclines one to open the book with pleasure, and when one follows his inclination—which is, after all one of the

best guides in literature — he is rarely disappointed. Though it falls far below the standard of Hakluyt, both in accuracy and literary finish.

**5.8.6 Thomas North** :- Among the translators of the Elizabethan Age, Sir Thomas North (1535–1601) is most deserving of notice due to his version of *Plutarch's Lives* (1579) from which Shakespeare took the characters and many of the incidents for three great Roman plays. North's *Plutarch* shows how Shakespeare was dependent upon his obscure contemporary. North's translation was probably made not from Plutarch but from Amyot's excellent French translation. Nevertheless, he reproduces the spirit of the original, and notwithstanding our modern and more accurate translations, he remains the most inspiring interpreter of the great biographer, whom Emerson calls 'the historian of heroism.'

## **5.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Write a note on the social and literary background of the age of Francis Bacon.
- Q.2 Write a short note on contemporaries of Francis Bacon.

## **5.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Long, J. William. *English Literature* : Its History and its significance." Kalyani, 1997.

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## **FRANCIS BACON**

- 6.1 Objective**
- 6.2 The Structure of Bacon's Essays**
- 6.3 Style**
- 6.4 Conclusion**
- 6.5 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 6.6 Suggested Reading**

### **6.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the structure and style of Bacon's essays.

### **6.2 THE STRUCTURE OF BACON'S ESSAYS**

What is an essay? The most prevalent notion is, that it is a composition comparatively short, and secondly, that it is something incomplete and unsystematic. Dr. Johnson defined an essay to be "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, indigested piece, not a regular and orderly performance." The Oxford English Dictionary combines the two conceptions. The definition runs thus : 'A composition of moderate length on any particular subject, or branch of a subject, originally implying want of finish an irregular indigested piece.'

Bacon took the essay in its literal sense that it is a “mere attempt.” He called them “dispersed meditations” or “loose sally of thoughts” or “marginal notes.” Thus, his essays are inconclusive. Bacon always presupposes the fundamental knowledge of a subject to be an essential thing on the part of the reader and hence, plunges straight into the subject matter. Normally, a good part of the essay is devoted to the imposition and there is no such thing as the exposition. Therefore, he presupposes a certain degree of intellectual standard in his readership.

He is very pithy and concise in his expansion and often quotes briefly some examples to illustrate his point from various resources. But, we find even if he gives us a familiar example he always invests it with a new meaning. He will never allow his original point of view to be overshadowed by such examples. Infact, the charm of Bacon’s essays lies in the originality of his vision. He brings into display a very powerful imagination in discovering the new aspects of a thing, either known or unknown. This display of imagination sometimes gives a poetic grandeur to his style, but it is not consistent, it ranges from a plain and letting statement of a fact to a colourful poetic utterance.

His sparing and stingy use of words makes his essays laconic. Many times, he uses archaic words. There is an artistic unity in his essays, because the pivot is one, there is one central force which binds together the various qualities of the subject. The percept that “studies teach not their own use, but that is a wisdom without them and above them won by observation,” characterized all the literary output of its author. Miscellaneous though their subject are, they do not unfairly represent the true genius of their author, which was to be philosopher in the popular sense – not of a man who has elaborated a new view of the universe, but of one who is wiser than other man in his judgements on men and affairs. They have been accused of Machiavellism and it is true, Bacon approved the wisdom of the serpent equally with the innocence of the dove, but they are shown thick with beauty, dignity and sweetness. These

qualities are yet so unaffected that they mix naturally with the homeliest wisdom and the raciest expression. So striking are individual sentences that one is perpetually tempted to quote, yet so close is the texture of writing that the jewel seems less fair when removed from its setting.’

It is impossible to admire the structure of Bacon’s works. Outlines are clear and easily grasped, the argument proceeds firmly through each section, and each topic is covered with thoroughness and precision. There is in all the finished work and even in some of the fragments, a strong sense of unity – the organic unity of a tree and its branches which Coleridge perceived and attributed partly to ‘the perpetual growth and evolution of the thoughts, one generating, one explaining and justifying, the place of another’. But in addition to this intellectual unity, this tough but relaxed control of the thoughts into an essentially positive onward movement, there is to be felt throughout Bacon’s work an effective organisation of the larger units of argument. The method he uses to achieve this tight structure is seen most clearly in *Advancement of Learning*, and seems to be deceptively simple, one of dividing up the topic into its main heads. Subdividing within these and then following the argument along its respective branches. This technique practised in the Renaissance was an influence of Plato. Bacon praised Plato, “he is to be held as a God who knows well how to define and divide.”

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato formulated his concept of *diacresis*, the division of a genus into its species, a division used as a stage towards a greater philosophical goal for by separating the one from the many, we may ultimately discover the true essence. The method as Plato expounds it is one of division in the service of definition: it is a mapping out of the subject, but that is only incidental, its real function being a progressive, sharpening of distinctions, an elimination of inessentials in order to arrive at the irreducible, the essence, the truth.

### **6.3 STYLE**

Like so much else in his life, Bacon’s essays derive from his feeling

that it was his mission to help his fellowmen. In his dedication to the first edition (1597), he declares that his volume is “medicinal,” having nothing in it repugnant to religion or manners. For Bacon medicinal meant useful, and useful meant containing honest and realistic instruction on what men are and do in this world.

The style, in which the truth about the facts of life is conveyed, is not accidental. Thoroughly grounded in problems of communication, Bacon believed that usefulness in knowledge was best realized through what he called, in the *De Augmentis Scientiarum* the Initiative method as opposed to the Magistral. “The Magistral method teaches; the initiative intimates. The Magistral requires that what is told should be believed, the initiative that it should be examined. Much the same distinction is drawn between the *methodical* and *aphoristic delivery of knowledge*. Methods pretend to completeness, aim to win consent, and in “carrying the show of a total, make men careless as if they were already at the end”. Aphorisms, however which challenge the writer to avoid being ridiculous or shallow aim at quite the opposite. He further says that the writer must always have common places ready at hand, “in which the question is argued and handled on either side and such material should be contracted into aphorisms or “acute and concise sentences,” ready for use as needed.

This practice of presenting both sides of a question in curt, aphoristic form has often been misunderstood by readers of the essays. The aim of initiating examination called for provocative technique. Hence, it was not meanness that led Bacon to avoid committing himself on ethical issues in the *Essays*, but rather the intent to reveal to the reader, in a challenging way, the objective truth about such issues. Dealing with such universal matters as truth, death, revenge, adversity, friendship, ambition and the vicissitudes of things, his “brief notes” were supposed to be medicinal for all civilized men. The aphorisms are not only “argued and handled on either side,” but it is also wittily and often unfairly “exaggerated both ways” and rarely an attempt is made to reach a conclusion. As the essays were re-issued, Bacon “enlarged them” — illustrations, figures

and proverbs were added, the style made more concrete; and the organisation received more care.

#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

The impressive achievement of the essays, however, is more of following rhetorical principles. Certainly, Bacon was master of the techniques he recommended, but he brought to these a knowledge of the world, an understanding of the ways of men, a profound and richly furnished mind and a feeling for the rhythms and nuances of language without which the techniques would have remained barren. Derived from a unique experience and wisdom Bacon's "dispersed meditations" are often disturbing, always stimulating. The noblest sentiments jostle the most mundane shortly after this penetrating statement, "Truth may perhaps come varied lights," comes this one." "Clear and round dealings of man's nature." Similarly, "He that hath wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity." Such great sentences, with their subtle rhythms, evocative images, and stinging diction, although eminently memorable and quotable are often beyond analysis whether one always agrees with their sentiments or not, Bacon's *Essays* cannot be denied greatness. Their thought is still fresh, their phraseology still alive, truly they give body to Ezra Pound's dictum that literature is news that stays news.

#### **6.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss in detail the structure of the essays of Francis Bacon.
- Q2. Bacon calls his essay "dispersed meditations." Elaborate this statement.
- Q3. What accounts for the general appeal of Bacon's essays?

#### **6.6 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*, Vol. IV, Allied Publishers, 2002.

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## **FRANCIS BACON**

- 7.1 Objective**
- 7.2 Bacon as an Essayist**
- 7.3 Bacon's Theory on the Communication of Knowledge**
- 7.4 Bacon as a Philosopher**
- 7.5 Bacon as Philosopher of Industrial Science**
- 7.6 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 7.7 Suggested Reading**

### **7.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the philosophy of Bacon's essays.

### **7.2 BACON AS AN ESSAYIST**

Essay in England was introduced by Francis Bacon. Before him of course, England had prose writings but not the 'essay.' The age of Elizabeth was a time of literary experiment. Drama became an obsession and varied experiments in poetic forms were made, but new ventures in prose, too, were attempted at, the difference being that in verse there was a tradition, which was valuable for guidance, but in prose, except for Malory's



*Le Morte d' Arthur*, Robinson's translation of *Utopia* and Berner's *Froissart* there was none. The prose works of Lodge, Lyly and Greene are relevant to the history of the novel rather than to that of the essay. The beginnings of the essay can be traced along different lines—(a) the line which leads to the character writers of the 17th century (b) the line of criticism and (c) the line of polemics.

- a) The English character writers were all disciples, more or less close, of Theophrastus. Theophrastus, a devoted follower of Aristotle and the later successor was head of the Peripatetic school in Athens. *The thirty* characters of his which have come down to us were composed about 319 B.C. Each is a short self-contained sketch, setting forth concretely and with almost complete objectivity, a representative human type. All the types thus portrayed, illustrate unfavourable qualities. Theophrastus' purpose was a moral one to expose the vices of mankind. As a writer of characters Theophrastus has no immediate imitators, but the genre came to be again in the 17th century England, where in the course of a few decades it flourished as never before.

The translation of Theophrastus' characters into Latin by Isaac Casauton in 1592 and 1599 was an important preliminary step in this revival and with the appearance of Joseph Halls' *Characters of Virtues and Vices* in 1608, the English prose character made its first appearance. Halls' indebtedness to Theophrastus is obvious, but there were many lines of influence which contributed to the ready acceptance on the part of both writers and the reading public.

Of the 24 portraits originally comprising *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, fifteen are vicious, nineteen of virtuous. Halls has been called "English Seneca." His prose style, a typical example of the "curt" style as practised at this period is likewise senecan. The "baroque" characteristics of style and manner, thus conferred on the English prose character, came to be modified in the course of

time, but something of the wit and abruptness of phrasing remained.

In composing his “characters,” Hall worked from a clear cut pattern consisting of an opening generalization, the cultural development and a striking conclusion; besides Hall, there were other writers, Thomas Harman’s *Caveat or Warning for Common Cursetors*, vulgarly called *Vagabonds* which appeared in 1566. But this art was not popular till the reign of King James, for the character writers needed a style, concise, pointed, and lucid and nobody knew the secret till Shakespeare and Bacon taught it.

- b) Criticism had made a feeble beginning before the Elizabethan age, and Caxton’s prefaces may be regarded as early essays in the art. In the later days, critical writings became both voluminous and of greater intrinsic importance than those of scanty anticipations of the school of *Theophrastus*. Much of it relates to the controversy about metres classical and non-classical. It is only in the attack on poetry as an art and the defence of it that we meet with work which is still deserving of praise as literature, and, that only from the pen of Sidney.

Stephen Gosson (1554-1624) wrote *School of Abuse*, dedicating with authority to Sir Philip Sidney. In this work, he violently attacks poets—“He that goes to sea, must smell of the ship and that sails into ports with savour of pitch.” This probably provoked Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) to write “*An Apology for Poetry*,” which appeared in 1595, and the most effective defence is, to carry the war into the enemy’s territory, far from pleading that it is excusable. Sidney asserts its pre-eminence. It is superior alike to Philosophy and History and to all science. But the style is uncertain and informed. The next important writer in the history of the ‘essay’ was Thomas Nash (1556-1601) who wrote *Have With You to Saffron Walden* a dialogue in the view of wit which though somewhat heavy is effective. *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) is close to the essay style, and *A Wonderful, Strange and*

*Miraculous Astrological Prognostication of the Year of Our Lord God (1591)*, in which the form is lacking but in the theme and treatment, these pieces give a faint of the periodical essays of the 18th century.

Beacon's first essay, "*Of Studies*," is only 250 words in length. It ought to be read and pondered by all, who wish to understand Bacon. There we learn that "studies teach not their own use, but that is a wisdom without them and about them, won by observation." There further we learn that—Histories make men wise, poets witty; mathematics subtle, natural philosophy deep; moral grave, logic and rhetoric able to contend. The precept that "studies teach not by observation" characterizes all the literary output of its author, not least the *Essays*, which remain the best liked portion of his work. Miscellaneous though their subjects are, they not unfairly represent the true genius of their author which was to be a philosopher in the popular sense—not of a man, who has elaborated a new view of the universe, but of one who, is wiser than other men in his judgements on men and affairs. They have been accused of Machiavellism and it is true that Bacon approved the wisdom of serpent and innocence of dove.

He felt that studies could not be either end or wisdom in themselves and that knowledge applied in action was a pale academic vanity. He observed: "to spend too much in studies is sloth...". Crafty men condemn studies...". Here is a new note which marks the end of scholasticism i.e. the divorce of knowledge from use and observation, and placement of emphasise on experience and results, which distinguishes English philosophy and culminates in pragmatism.

His finest literary product, the *Essays*, shows him still torn between two loves, for politics and for philosophy. In the essay "Of Honour and Reputation," he gives all the degrees of honour to

political and military achievements, none to literary and the philosophical. But in the essay '*Of Truth*,' he writes "The inquiry of which is the love making or wooing of it; the knowledge of truth... of human natures". In books, "we converse with the wise, as in action with fools." That is, if we know how to select our books. "Some books are to be tasted" reads a famous passage in "Of Studies," "others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested; all these groups forming, no doubt, an infinitesimal portion of the oceans and cataracts of ink in which the world is daily bathed and poisoned and drowned."

Surely, the essays must be numbered among the few books that deserve to be chewed and digested. Rarely shall you find so much meat, so admirably dressed and flavoured, in so small a dish. Bacon abhors padding and disdains to waste a word; he offers us infinite riches in little phrases, each of these essays gives in a page or two the distilled subtlety of a master mind on a major issue(s) of life. It is difficult to say whether the matter or the manner excels more; for here is language as supreme in prose as Shakespeare's is in verse. It is a style like Sturdy Tacitus compact yet polished and indeed some of its conciseness is due to the skillful adaptation of Latin idiom and phrase. But its wealth of metaphor is characteristically Elizabethan and reflects the exuberance of the Renaissance; no man in English literature is so fertile in pregnant and pity comparisons. Their lavish array is the one defect of Bacon's style, the endless metaphors, allegories and allusions fall like whips upon our nerves and tire us out at last. The essays are like rich and heavy food, which cannot be digested in large quantities at once; but taken four or five at a time they are the finest intellectual nourishment in English.

The moral philosophy of the *Essays* smacks rather of Machiavelli than of Christianity to which, Bacon made so many astute obeisances. "We are beholder to Machiavel and writers of

that kind, who openly unmasked declare, what men do in fact and not; what they ought to do; for it is impossible to join the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove, without a previous knowledge of the nature of evil; as without this, virtue lies exposed and unguarded.” (*Adv. of Learning*)

“The Italians have an ungracious proverb... so good that he is good for nothing.” Bacon accords his preaching with his practice and advises a judicious mixture of dissimulation with honesty, like an alloy that will make the purer but softer metal capable of longer life. He wants a full and varied career, giving acquaintance with everything that can broaden, deepen, strengthen or sharpen the mind. He does not admire the merely contemplative life, like Goethe he scorns knowledge that does not lead to action. “Men ought to know that in the theatre of human life, it is only for Gods and angels to be spectators.” (*Adv. of Learning*)

His religion is patriotically like the kings. Though he was more than once accused of atheism and the whole kind of his philosophy is secular and rationalistic, he makes eloquent and apparently sincere disclaims of unbelief. “I had rather believe all the fables in the legend... mind.” “A little philosophy inclineth... Providence and Duty.” “(Of Atheism).”

Religious indifference is due to multiplicity of factions. “The causes of atheism are, diversions in religion, ...atheism.” “And lastly... to religion.” “(Of Atheism).”

But Bacon’s value lies less in theology and ethics than in psychology. He is an undecivable analyst of human nature and sends his shaft cold every heart. On the stalest subject in the world he is refreshingly original. “It is often bad husbands have good wives.” “A single life doth well with churchment, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.” “He

that hath wife... mischief.” “(Of Marriage and Single Life).”

Bacon seems to have worked too hard to have had time for love, and perhaps he never quite felt it to its depth. “It is a strange thing to note the excess of this passion.” There was never proud man though so absurdly well of himself as the lover doth of the poor beloved.” You may observe that this weak passion “(Of Love).”

He values friendship more than love, though of friendship, too, he can be sceptical. “There is little friendship in the world and least of all between equals... other.” “A principal fruit... do cause and induce...” A friend is an ear. Those that want friends to open themselves... own hearts.” “Whoever hath his mind fraught with many thoughts, his wits... than by a days meditation.” “(Of Friendship).”

The politics of the essays preach a conservatism natural in one who aspired to rule. Bacon wants a strong central power. Monarchy is the best form of government and usually the efficiency of a state varies with the concentration of power. He is an outspoken militarist. He deplores the growth of industry as unfitting men for war, and bewails long peace as the warrior in man. Nevertheless, he recognises the importance of raw materials. Like Aristotle, he had some advice on avoiding revolutions. The essay “Of Seditious and Troubles” is full of cryptic messages in order to avoid sedition. A better recipe for the avoidance of revolutions is an equitable distribution of wealth. “Money is like much, not good values it be spread : “(Of Seditious and Troubles).” But this does not mean socialism or democracy. Bacon distrusts the people, who were in his days quite without access to education.

### **7.3 BACON’S THEORY ON THE COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

Bacon’s theory of communication of knowledge is not vital to his

criticism of style, and revolves about the questions of methods in the communication of knowledge, it can be regarded under two heads :—

a) Method as related to the use of knowledge.

b) Method as related to the knowledge or the delivery of knowledge as it (i) may be best believed (the magistral way), and (ii) as it be examined (the way of probation).

Since in the Ciceronian style, knowledge is delivered as it may be best believed, not as it may be best examined, “there is a kind of contract of error between the deliverer and the receiver,” because in this same anticipated and prevented knowledge no man know how he came to the knowledge, which he had obtained. This is the way of the rhetoric and oratorical style. The way of the essay style (Senecan style) is quite different, for “knowledge that is delivered as a thread to be spun on, ought to be delivered and intimated in the same method where it was invented and so it is possible of knowledge ‘induced’. Here, we have philosophy which underlies the organic method of the ‘loose’ period found in the way of probation, in the Magistral way, which merely announces the results of inquiry, one cannot see the thought grow.

This brings us to the problem of the delivery of knowledge (i) in Aphorism and (ii) in Methods. Here, Methods mean methods as related to the use of knowledge and progress of knowledge minus the Magistral way, plus the way of probation.

Bacon condemns the practice of skimming a few axioms of observations into a solemn and formal art. But writing in Aphorisms has many excellent virtues, where to writings in Method cannot approach. (i) For first writing in aphorism is a trial or test of the capability of the writer, whether it is superficial or solid, because aphorisms are made out of the pith and heart of sciences. In writing aphorisms, the author deletes, elaborates arguements, gives examples and connection and order of the discourse.

What he fills in aphorisms is some good quality of observation. For this reason only, a man of deep observation, and sound knowledge and manners can attempt to write aphorisms. On the other hand, in Methods :

1. The arrangement and connection and joining of the parts play very important roles.
2. Methods are more fit to win consent or belief, but less fit to carry a kind of demonstration in orb or circle, one part illuminating another and, therefore, satisfy but particular, being dispersed do best agree with dispersed directions.
3. Lastly, Aphorisms represent a knowledge that is newly discovered, so they invite men to inquire further. Whereas, methods carry the show of a total, and they let feel men as if they have gone the furthest, so their sense of curiosity is lost.

In addition to this, aphorisms are filled in with some good quantity of observation and they belong to the method of inducing knowledge. Aphorisms are part and parcel of Senecan style. So, a Senecan style represents a knowledge broken (or newly discovered) and, therefore, avoids the contract of error between the deliverer and receiver.

According to Bacon, Methods present knowledge, as it may be best believed, and Aphorism as it may be best examined with further inquiry. There are different styles for different purposes, and so Bacon used them. But the method of probation is not the same as methods of persuasion rather, it belongs with Aphorism, and Induction and Senecan style.

#### **7.4 BACON AS A PHILOSOPHER**

Francis Bacon, the exponent of a new philosophy, was born into a new world. England had detached herself from feudal Europe and was becoming a nation state with national church. Henry VIII's distribution of the monastic lands was part of an antipapal, anti-clerical reform. Carried



out by the lay power of parliament, it transferred a great part of property in land, from clerical to lay control. This increase in the power of the laity at the expense of the above churchment reflected in the administration. The great officers of state were taken out of the hands of churchment and given to a new class of lay statesmen. Nicholas Bacon (1510-79), the father of Francis Bacon, was one of these new lay ministers of state. A few years before Francis Bacon was born, Sir Nicholas had become Lord keeper of the Great seal of England.

### **7.5 BACON AS A PHILOSOPHER OF INDUSTRIAL SCIENCE**

Bacon says in one of his letters, “To write at leisure what is to be read at leisure does not interest me. My concern is with life and human affairs and all their troubles and difficulties. It is these I wish to improve by true and wholesome thoughts.” What he says, here, is truthfully practised in his essays. His concern is with “life and human affairs” and their improvement. This is the reason why the subject matter of his essays is so vast, because affairs of life are a vast phenomenon. This myriad mindedness of Bacon makes his essays perpetually interesting.

The prose style is the style of a man of scientific temper. It is curt aphoristic, epigrammatic, antithetical and balanced. The sub-heading of his collection of essays he gave was “counsels civil or moral.” Counsels they are indeed, but the counsels are of a worldly man who wants the other men to progress and improve and transform the conditions of life.

Francis Bacon is called the “Philosopher in Industrial Science.” He wanted man to learn science from nature and not from books. He wanted man to use his senses of observation, as he himself had done in the essays. He was in favour of the inductive method of science (particular to general.)

The story of Francis Bacon is that of a life devoted to a great idea. The idea is that knowledge ought to bear fruit in works, that science ought to be applicable to industry, that men ought to organize themselves as a sacred duty to improve and transform the conditions of life. This is his philosophy of work. His special concern was with the place of science

in human life.

His ambition was to systematize and organize the development and application of natural knowledge on a scale never imagined before. In challenging men with such earnestness, to win power over nature in order to improve the conditions of human life, he kindled a new conscience in mankind.

Philosophy before Bacon was a school of resignation, for neither ancient Greek philosopher nor medieval schoolmen had in mind the possibility of a drastic improvement in the conditions of human life. He stirred a fresh hope and made himself the advocate of a new conception of man's place in nature. Bacon's ambition was to reconstitute man's knowledge of nature in order to apply it to the relief of man's estate. He was struck by the influence of mechanical inventions and in *Novuum Organum*, he says "it is well to observe", the force and effect, and consequences of discoveries. These are to be seen nowhere, more conspicuously than in those three, which were unknown to the ancients, and of which the origin, though recent, is obscure ; namely printing, gunpowder, and the magnet. For these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world ; the first in literature, the second in warfare, third in navigation whence have followed innumerable changes in so much that no empire, no sect, no star seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical inventions."

Bacon wanted man to build an empire over all things—such an empire over things could be won only by means of revolution in man's concept of knowledge. He pleaded for the restoration of what he called "the commerce of the mind with things." He was convinced that men must learn science from nature and not from books.

## **7.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Bacon as an essayist.
2. Discuss the style and techniques employed by Bacon in his

essays.

3. Discuss Bacon as a philosopher of the industrial science.
4. Explain Bacon's theory on the communication of knowledge.
5. Discuss Renaissance features in essays of Bacon.

#### **7.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Hugh, Walker. *The English Essay and Essayists*. J. M.Dent & Sons Ltd., 1915.
- \* Macaulay, *Essay on Bacon*. Longman, Green, 1904.

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## **FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)**

- 8.1 Introduction**
- 8.2 Objective**
- 8.3 Summary of the Essay "Of Adversity"**
- 8.4 Glossary**
- 8.5 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 8.6 Short Answer Questions**
- 8.7 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 8.8 Let Us Sum Up**
- 8.9 Answer Key**
- 8.10 Suggested Reading**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the earlier chapters you have been familiarized with Francis Bacon's life, the period to which he belonged and the textual and descriptive questions related to his essays and style of writing. This lesson shall introduce you to a detailed study of his essay "Of Adversity." However brief Bacon's essays may be they always have a complex variety of matter. His fascination of words chosen to make complex matter of essays interesting is unique. The wisdom of his essays will never be exhausted:

**The virtue of prosperity is temperance; the virtue of adversity is fortitude; which in morals is the more heroic virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New; which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favour. Yet even in the Old Testament, if you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Saloman. Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. . . . Certainly virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed: for prosperity doth best discover vice; but adversity doth best discover virtue.**

## **8.2 OBJECTIVE**

Our objective in this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the essay "Of Adversity" so that you come to identify the contents of the essay, which shall help you to appreciate the nuance of his style of writing and to prepare well for the semester end examination.

## **8.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY "OF ADVERSITY"**

This essay was first printed in the edition of 1625. This essay is the outcome of the experience of Bacon at the height of prosperity as Lord Chancellor and the depth of adversity in his deprivation and fall.

Bacon begins the essay with Seneca that "the good things, which belong to prosperity, are to be wished; but the good things, which belong to adversity, are to be admired. *Bona rerum secundarum optabilia; adversarum mirabilia.*" This means that prosperity is easy to handle whereas adversity is hard. So anyone who can manage to live through adversity is to be admired.

Bacon clarifies his point through faith that is religion "Certainly if miracles be the command over nature, they appear most in adversity. It is yet a higher speech of his, than the other (much too high for a heathen). It is true greatness, to have in one the frailty of a man, and the security of a God. *Vere magnum habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem Dei.*" Everyone knows that miracles

happen but the people who have firm faith in God do not question it, while the non believers question it because they don't believe that miracles have a command over nature but it is adversity that makes miracles happen, that is when something wrong is happening God sets it right through a miracle. Hence, adversity is somewhat positive because it leads to miracles.

Bacon compares Hercules, who sailed in a strong vessel to free Prometheus from his chains, to the Christian "that sailed in the frail bark of the flesh, through the waves of the world." In other words, Hercules was sailing in relative prosperity, which made his voyage easy; the Christian, on the other hand, faces the world in a frail body. In a Christian context, according to Bacon, prosperity leads to comfort and therefore to vices, but adversity, because it requires moral strength, leads to the creation of virtue. Bacon points out that even Bible describes the hardships of Job and not much of the felicities of Solomon "the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath labored more in describing the afflictions of Job, than the felicities of Solomon."

In the end Bacon gives two examples one of a tapestry "We see in needle-works and embroideries, it is more pleasing to have a lively work, upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work, upon a lightsome ground: judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart, by the pleasure of the eye," and the other of a flower. The tapestry has lighter colors in background and darker colors in foreground; it symbolizes human life where the major part of life consists of hardships. On the other hand the dark colors in the foreground symbolize the happiness in life because they are lesser in quantity. The example of flower tells that if one wants to make one's life worthy, then one has to face hardships because a flower's fragrance can be felt only if it is crushed, to conclude that "virtue is like precious odors, most fragrant when they are . . . crushed," by which he means that virtues become stronger when they are "crushed" by adversity.

#### **8.4 GLOSSARY**

- ◆ high- the word connotes presumptuousness or exaggeration
- ◆ the Stoics- Zeno, born about 340, was the founder of the Stoic school.

The Stoics held that the end of man's life is virtue. As a result they inculcated indifference to all external objects which came into competition with virtue

- ◆ miracles-suggested by the phrase 'to be admired' (mirabilia)
- ◆ security- freedom from care
- ◆ transcendences-exaggerations
- ◆ mystery- a hidden meaning
- ◆ lively- stately
- ◆ to speak in a mean- to come down from grandiloquent to moderate language
- ◆ prosperity- opulence. The Old Testament constantly promises worldly prosperity as the reward of obedience to God's law. In the New Testament, which supplements the Old (carrieth the clearer revelation of God's favour), and promises greater blessings, (its blessing carrieth the greater benediction) the disciples of Christ are constantly told that it will be one of their privileges to suffer for the sake of their religion
- ◆ David's harp- the Psalms(a collection of hymns forming one of the books of the Bible)
- ◆ the pencil of the Holy Ghost- referring to the doctrine that the writers of the sacred books were directly inspired by God
- ◆ distasted- annoyances. The sadness of unfortunate is relieved by the brightness of hope and consolation, while fears and distaste poison the pleasures of the prosperous
- ◆ precious odours-as the scent of spices becomes stronger as we crush them, so the inherent strength of a man manifests itself the more as he is pressed by adversity
- ◆ incensed- burned
- ◆ discover- bring to light

## **8.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. "Of Adversity" was published in .....
2. ....are a part of our life.
3. "Of Adversity" begins with a quote from .....
4. Francis Bacon died in .....
5. Poesy means .....

## **8.6 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

1. Explain briefly how Francis Bacon supports adversity.
2. Comment on the lines "The virtue of prosperity, is temperance; the virtue of adversity, is fortitude."
3. What was Francis Bacon famous for?

## **8.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

### **1. Explain Francis Bacon's main arguments in his essay "Of Adversity."**

Francis Bacon wrote a little more than a hundred essays between 1597 and 1625. A lot of these essays discuss how man should handle himself in difficult situations-especially in "Of Adversity" how one should view adversity and how one should act in the face of adversity.

Bacon quotes the Roman philosopher Seneca: "The good things, that belong to prosperity, are to be wished; but the good things, that belong to adversity, are to be admired." This means that prosperity is easy to handle, but because adversity is hard, anyone who can manage to live through adversity is to be admired. Bacon refers to another statement of Seneca's: "true greatness in a human being is to have all the weaknesses of the human, but the fortitude (strength, certitude) of God."

Bacon, throughout the essay, contrasts prosperity, which leads to easy decisions about how to live one's life, and adversity, which requires strength of moral character that prosperity does not. For example, he compares Hercules, who sailed in a strong vessel to free Prometheus from his chains, to the Christian



"that sailed in the frail bark of the flesh, through the waves of the world." In other words, Hercules was sailing in relative prosperity, which made his voyage easy; the Christian, on the other hand, faces the world in a frail body. In Bacon's analysis, the Christian has more fortitude 'strength and bravery' because he must take on the world with the adversity created by his frail body.

In a Christian context, according to Bacon, prosperity leads to comfort and therefore to vices, but adversity, because it requires moral strength, leads to the creation of virtue. Bacon goes on to say "virtue is like precious odors, most fragrant when they are . . . crushed," by which he means that virtues become stronger when they are "crushed" by adversity.

## **2. Justify the arguments of Francis Bacon's in "Of Adversity."**

Francis Bacon had a unique writing style which was quite different from the contemporary writers. It was not his style to present the case to the readers as it stands. Whenever he wrote an essay he always made the readers see both the sides of the picture. He talked about the advantages and disadvantages. He argued as well as gave justifications and left the readers to make decisions. This style of his has sustained readers' interest in his essays. This essay quotes the sacred canon together with poets.

Bacon begins the essay with reference of a Roman philosopher named Seneca: "The good things that belong to prosperity are to be wished; but the good things that belong to adversity are to be admired."

Prosperity is something that is directly related to happiness, joy and relief so it appears that it will have all the positive things, but adversity being the opposite of prosperity, if it affects our personality in a positive way then it must be appreciated. Hence this point gives us an insight into Bacon's mind that he wants the readers to think about adversity in a positive way.

Bacon clarifies his point through "faith". Everyone knows that miracles happen but the people who have firm faith in God do not question it, while the non believers question it because they don't believe that miracles have a command over nature but it is Adversity that makes miracles happen, that is

when something wrong is happening God sets it right through a miracle. Hence Adversity is somewhat positive because it leads to miracles. A miracle makes us think that there is someone who controls human beings as well as the world; therefore, we offer our thanks to Him for his benevolence and submit before him.

Calamities are a part of our life and life does not allow escape from them. However, imagination is something that takes us away from the hard realities of life to develop the quality of endurance through imagination. Adversity makes one's imagination strong and active.

Poets use the medium of poetry to express their imagination and motivate others. Bacon refers to Hercules and Prometheus and uses the metaphor of "sea" to clarify how adversity teaches us the skill to sail and endure the hardships of life.

Temperance means moderation and prosperity teaches temperance. When a person is blessed with prosperity he will spend his resources mindfully because he knows that he is going through a good time. On the other hand fortitude means patience and adversity teaches us fortitude. It gives strength to bear the hardships of life. Both are good but adversity is more of a heroic virtue because it helps to lead life smoothly.

Bacon refers to religion: "And the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath labored more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon."

He goes on to narrate that even the Bible describes the hardships of Job and not much of the felicities of Solomon. It clearly indicates that if a Holy person like Job faced adversity then who are ordinary human beings (mixture of vice and virtue) cry and grieve on difficulties that they face in their lives.

In the end Bacon gives two examples to support adversity, one of a tapestry (needle work and embroideries) and the other of a flower. The tapestry has lighter colors in the background and darker colors in the foreground; it symbolizes human life where the major part of life consists of hardships. On the other hand the dark colors in the foreground symbolize the happiness in life because they are lesser in quantity. The example of a flower tells that if one wants to make one's life worthy then one has to face hardships because a flower's fragrance can be felt only if it is crushed.

The example of tapestry and flower are inspiring. Tapestry is a common piece of art but in which the ratio of dark and light colors depict the percentage of adversity and prosperity in life. The other example of flower, when crushed emits fragrance, motivates to bear depression and hardships of life because they make a worthy person.

Hence Bacon takes the side of adversity and proves it to be a positive virtue. Bacon's essay "Of Adversity" highlights that even bad things can be looked and perceived as positive ones and even adversity affects human life in a positive way.

### **8.8 LET US SUM UP**

In Francis Bacon, we see great brilliance of intellect. He was a man most knowledgeable in the arts of human power. Bacon in "Of Adversity" through various examples and references gives the reader ample food for thought. Adversity describes a state of hardship and misfortune but it has a positive impact on human personality. One may not admire a person who remains happy during his prosperous days, but a person who remains happy during adversity is the one who needs to be admired.

### **8.9 ANSWER KEY**

Self-Assessment Questions

1. 1625
2. Calamities
3. Seneca
4. 1626
5. Poetry

### **8.10 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Bacon, Francis. *Essays*, Michael J. Hawkins, J. M. Dent, 1973.
2. Bacon, Francis. *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* edited by Brian Vivkers, Oxford University Press, 1999.

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### ESSAYS OF FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objective
- 9.3 Outline of “Of Marriage and Single Life”
- 9.4 Outline of “Of Great Place”
- 9.5 Comments on Bacon's Style
- 9.6 Self -Assessment Questions
- 9.7 Short Answer Questions
- 9.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 9.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.10 Answer Key
- 9.11 Suggested Reading

#### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

In Lesson 8 you have read Francis Bacon's essay “Of Adversity” in detail. Francis Bacon holds a distinguished position as an essayist in English literature and as a modern philosopher. His essays trace the influence of Bible, Greek and Roman history, mythology and literature. In his essays Bacon constantly quotes from the *Vulgate*, or the Latin version of the Bible to show his point of view. His essays loaded with meaning are “the fruits of his observation of life. They reflect his experience of men and the world.”

## 9.2 OBJECTIVE

Our objective in this lesson is to acquaint the learner with an outline of the essays- “Of Marriage and Single Life” and “Of Great Place” prescribed in your syllabus to further familiarize you with the contents and style of his writing. This would help you to substantiate from essays while writing your Internal Assessment Assignments and semester end examination.

## 9.3 OUTLINE OF “OF MARRIAGE AND SINGLE LIFE”

**He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; Certainly, the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. A single life doth well with churchmen; for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.... and single men, though they may be many times more charitable, because their means are less exhaust, yet, on the other side, they are more cruel and hard-hearted (good to make severe inquisitors), because their tenderness is not so oft called upon....**

This essay exhibits Bacon’s love of allusions, quotations, and Latin phrases, and is remarkable for lofty expressions, brevity, and aptness: “Wives are young men’s mistresses; companions for middle age; and old men’s nurses,” an example of Bacon’s short and succinct statements.

This essay is a vivid example of Bacon’s use of aphorism- a statement made in a way that it asserts a general truth or makes a keen, or sharp, observation. In “Of Marriage and Single Life” Bacon argues about the various pros and cons concerning marriage. An example of an aphorism can be seen in the very opening lines of the essay: “He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief.” He means to say that men with wives and children are limiting themselves with respect to what they can do, such as conducting “great enterprises,” or doing great deeds. However, he further argues throughout the rest of the essay that impediment is not necessarily a bad thing, and it can certainly be a virtue for both the wife and the children, and even for the men.

He advises those who have children to devote themselves more to future welfare because their children will grow up and live in the future: "...those that have children should have greatest care of future times; unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges"

But a man without family may devote himself mainly to the present. He then goes on to give a few reasons why some people wish to remain single: "The most ordinary cause of a single life is liberty; especially in certain self-pleasing and humorous minds, which are so sensible of every restraint, as they will go near to think their girdles and garter to be bonds and shackles." He acknowledges that "Unmarried men are best friends, best masters, best servants." However, they are "not always best subjects; for they are light to run away." He also talks about which type of life - married or single- is suited to different types of people.

He further describes a wife and children as a humanizing influence on a man: "Wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity," and abruptly makes a different observation that grave natures are commonly loving husbands; and remarks that chaste women are proud of their chastity. Bad husbands have good wives and if a woman has married a man of her choice despite opposition she will continue to be good and happy to hide her mistake, and justify her choice.

#### **9.4 OUTLINE OF "OUTLINE OF GREAT PLACE"**

- ◆ The rising onto place is laborious and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base, and by indignities men come to dignities.
- ◆ Death falls heavy upon him who dies too well known to others, but unknown to himself.
- ◆ It is a strange desire to seek power and lose liberty; or to seek power over others and to lose power over a man's self.
- ◆ Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state; servants of fame, and servants of business.

"Of Great Place" deals with public affairs and politics. Through this essay Bacon shows the ways of attaining a position of high authority, and also advises

how to behave after attaining the chair besides identifying some disadvantages of occupying power “Men in great place are thrice servants.” Firstly, in their persons, they are servants to the sovereigns of State; secondly in their actions, for their reputation brings everything they do under public criticism; and lastly, in respect of their time, every moment of which is fully engrossed by business. He again says that coming up to great place is a difficult work. Great labour and tireless struggle are required to occupy higher position. A man who achieves this desired great place has to adopt undignified means sometimes to maintain his dignity and position. A person who occupies the great place often stands on a slippery ground and there are chances that he may be frightened to recede into nonexistence or suffer downfall. After pointing out these difficulties Bacon moves on to advise what should be done after occupying power. In the first place man occupying great place should study examples, both good and evil. They should set before themselves the best examples of those who have gained greatness and fame. They must not also ignore the causes of the dishonour and downfall of the previous persons. A man in great place should try to create good instance: “Seek to make thy course regular, that man may know beforehand what they may expect.” Bacon further warns the man in great place against four vices: delay, corruption, roughness and facility. The suggestion is great and sensible. Bacon writes about the pains and discomforts of high-ranking people “it is good to side a man’s self whilst he is in the rising, and to balance himself when he is placed.” The essay exhibits practical wisdom through a persuasive, thorough, and accurate argument.

## **9.5 COMMENTS ON BACON'S STYLE**

Francis Bacon’s style of writing is unmatched. The power of words in Bacon’s hands demonstrates his dominance of seventeenth-century thought, the almost hypnotic way in which his view of the world and of the function of learning within it helped to mould English life, to an extent which no writer had achieved before and very few able to come up to his level since.

Bacon’s contemporaries were full of appreciation for his writing. James Howell called him “the eloquentest that was born in this Isle,” a “Flexanious and Golden Tongued Orator”; Henry Peacham placed him among those who had

used “the best and purest English,” while Walter Harleton gave him credit for the “refinement of English.” In 1653 Samuel Sheppard valued his style for being ‘so succinct, elaborate, and sententious’.

## **9.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **Fill in the blanks**

1. A person who occupies the great place often stands on a..... ground.
2. Men in great places are .....servants.
3. He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to .....
4. Bacon constantly quotes from the .....
5. .... valued his style for being “so succinct, elaborate, and sententious”.

## **9.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Comment on Francis Bacon’s aphoristic style with reference to his essay “Of Marriage and Single Life.”

Read the text, lesson and supplementary material and then write the answer.

- Q2. What was Bacon’s idealism like? Illustrate with examples from “Of Great Place.”

Bacon’s idealism may be realized from his intellectual productions. A contemporary of Galileo and Descartes, Bacon was a severe critic of the intellectual milieu that pervaded his times. Descartes and Galileo were exceptions the latter was, in fact, a victim of the church because of his scientific knowledge. Bacon discarded old science of the alchemists, and kept on pushing and pursuing the scientific method

“Of Great Places” refines Bacon's ideas about personal and professional idealism. Overflowing with terse literary sentences, reflecting Baconian style; this essay attracts readers' attention through brevity. The very first sentence of the essay - “Men in great places are thrice servants” - would be a very good example. He had a sense of balance. The essay is written in cryptic and elegant



sentences: “It is a strange desire, to seek power and to lose liberty: or to seek power over others, and to lose power over a man's self.”

Bacon tries to convey with this style and with his subject matter that triumphing in public life is in itself a “science.” It is not a matter of hot-eyed humanistic idealism. “Rising to high places is laborious.” But it is important to rise to these places in order to do public good.

## **9.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

### **Q1. Give a critical analysis “Of Great Place” written by Francis Bacon.**

The essay “Of Great Place” written by Francis Bacon, a famous English philosopher and scientist whose aphorism “*scientia potentia est*” is known to everyone in the world, represents a lot of interesting philosophical ideas. These ideas can be easily related to the present day principles and concepts. The philosophy of Francis Bacon is concluded in the fact that the major goal of scientific knowledge lies in providing benefit to the humanity. (Anderson, 1992, p.124)

The main idea of the essay is to show the readers the position of men in great places. Francis Bacon discusses the life, duties and behavior of those people who occupy high position in the society. He writes that all the people who live in great places are “thrice servants.” They are servants of the sovereign or state, fame, and business. Moreover, they have no freedom although they enjoy power. It is a very interesting idea that powerful people have no liberty. But its true. They have power over other people who occupy a lower position in the society but they “lose power” over themselves.

Francis Bacon argues that it is very difficult “to raise into place.” People should be strong and self-confident to take a high position in the society. He writes that “by indignities men come to dignities.” Moreover, they can easily lose their position that is why they should be uncompromising in their goals and desires. Even in the old age great men should not change their manners.

Bacon also dwells upon the problem of other people’s opinion concerning “great men.” He writes that great persons should “borrow other men's opinion”

because they can get a lot of interesting and important things for them. The great men cannot judge themselves. They should learn what other people think of them in order to remain on the top of the ladder.

Bacon expresses a very interesting thought when he writes that the great men are “the first to find their own grief’s, though they be the last to find their own faults.” He is sure that it is very difficult for those people who have money and power to find their own faults. They do not see their faults. It seems to them that they have no faults while they have a lot of them. Francis Bacon calls these people “strangers to themselves.” The great men are fully involved in their business that they “have no time to tend their health,” their body, and their mind. The only things they are thinking about are power and money. Sometimes they simply forget about their health. And only when they get problems with health they come down to earth and realize that they are merely human beings.

Bacon also touches upon the theme of good and evil in his essay. He argues “in place, there is a license to do good and evil.” Evil is curse. Only those people who do good will be able to have rest. Good thoughts are better than good dreams because the men have an opportunity to bring their good thought to life. Bacon writes that “merit and good works is the end of man's motion”. Any men should learn to do good in his life in order to get award from God at the end of “the motion.” Any man can be “a partaker of God’s theater” but he should deserve it.

Further Bacon touches upon the theme of law: “to preserve the right of thy place, but stir no questions of jurisdiction.” He also wants everyone to preserve the rights of other places.

Bacon argues that there are four major vices of authority. They are corruption, delays, roughness and facility. In order to overcome delay, the great people should be punctual. Bacon writes: “give easy access, keep time appointed.”

Special attention is paid to corruption. Bacon writes that the great people should be sincere to avoid corruption. In order to avoid roughness, it is necessary to be kinder.

Francis Bacon argues that the great men should respect other people

even if they are not so powerful as they are. He writes: “If you have colleagues, respect them”. To conclude, an intellectual man as Francis Bacon, could not only show the strengths and the weaknesses of the great men of the society, but could also give them some suggestions concerning their way of life, their behavior, and their principles. He was interested in investigation of the human nature. His natural philosophy was greatly appreciated because he represented absolutely new philosophical ideas concerning the essence of life.

**Q2. Analyze Bacon's style of writing with reference to the essays prescribed in your syllabus.**

**Q3. Comment on Bacon's contribution to the development of English prose.**

## **9.9 LET US SUM UP**

Francis Bacon holds a distinguished position as an essayist in English literature and as a modern Philosopher in the western world. His aphoristic style in writing essays was at that time a new dimension in literature. His is an eloquent voice of the Renaissance. The range of his interests is vast. No single English intellectual symbolizes more the idea of the Renaissance man than Bacon. He wrote on different aspects of law, science, history, government, politics, ethics, religion and colonialism, as well as on gardens, parents, children, and health. His essays are personal, practical, and worldly.

In the essay “Of Marriage and Single Life” Bacon admits that a married man hesitates to take risk because he has the responsibility of wife and children. He juxtaposes the merits, liabilities, and freedom of married and single life to further highlight that “Wives are young men's mistresses; companions for middle age; and old men's nurses.”

In the essay “Of Great Place” Bacon explains that men are servants of the state, their desires for fame, and time restriction. Man should follow the good examples set in the past. There are faults of men in great place such as delays, corruption etc. We should refuse bribes. One may while rising to a position use crooked methods and join sides but after reaching a position, one should

become neutral.

## **9.10 ANSWER KEY**

### **Fill in the blanks**

slippery, thrice, fortune, *Vulgate*, Samuel Sheppard

## **9.11 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Kiernan, Michael, editor. *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* Clarendon Press, 1985.
2. Pitcher, John, editor. *The Essays*. Penguin, 1985.

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**JOHN MILTON'S POETRY AREOPAGATICA**

- 10.1 Objective**
- 10.2 John Milton: Early Life & Education**
  - 10.2.1 Significant Happenings**
- 10.3 War of Pamphlets ; Civil War**
- 10.4 Withdrawal from Politics**
- 10.5 Paradise Lost and Other Works**
- 10.6 Some Influences on Milton**
- 10.7 His New Outlook on Education**
- 10.8 His Views on Marriage**
- 10.9 Influence of Civil War**
- 10.10 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 10.11 Suggested Reading**

**10.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss the development of John Milton as a prose writer. John Milton's ideology and his biography discussed in the lesson will give you an overview of Milton as a writer.

**10.2 JOHN MILTON: EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION**

John Milton was born in an apartment called Spread Eagle in a house

called the White Bear in Bread Street, London, on 9 December 1608. His father was a lawyer, money-lender, accountant and investor. He was born at a time when the great writers of the English Renaissance like Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Donne were at the height of their careers. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* were published in 1609; Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* was staged in 1614; Donne's *Anatomy of the World* was published in 1611. In this very eventful year of 1611 came out the authorized version of the Bible and Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy*. Raleigh's *History of the World* was published in 1614. Milton entered St. Paul's School in 1620. Before entering school, he was privately tutored in 1618 by Thomas Young. Meanwhile, he was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1625. This was the year when Charles I became the king of England, after the death of James I. The same year Milton wrote "Death of Fair Infant" a poem in memory of his niece Anne Phillips. In 1626, Milton wrote the memorable poems on Richard Diodati and Thomas Young, respectively, his school friend and tutor.

When Milton was still at Cambridge, turbulent years began for England. Buckingham, Laud Bishop of London, was murdered in 1628; Charles I began ruling England the same year without parliament, which arrangement continued until 1640. Meanwhile, in 1629, Milton received his B.A. degree, and wrote two more elegies as well as his famous "Nativity Ode." In 1630, Milton wrote his poem "On Shakespeare" and "Arcades." The next year came out his famous sonnet with the often-quoted opening lines:

*How soon hath time the subtle thief of youth  
Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!*

### **10.2.1 Significant Happenings**

It was in 1630 that Charles II was born; John Donne died the next year (1631); John Dryden was born the same year. And the same year Milton wrote his famous pastoral poems, namely, *L'allegro* and *Il'penseroso*. Milton received his M.A. degree in 1632. The same year

his father retired to settle in Hammersmith, London. Milton, too, joined his parents for programme of study. The second folio of Shakespeare's plays also came out that year along with Milton's epitaph in memory of the great English dramatist. In 1634, came out Milton's famous masque, *Comus*, which was performed at Ludlow Castle on 29th September. Milton's dear friend, Edward King, a fellow student at Cambridge, died by drowning in 1637, in whose memory he wrote his famous pastoral elegy, *Lycidas*. The same year Ben Jonson died. "*Comus*", too, was published in 1637.

In 1638, began Milton's tour of Europe. First, he went to France, where in Paris he met Grotius, a famous personality of his time. Milton next went to Italy, where he was well received in Florentine academies; in the same year died Diodati, on whom Milton had written a poem in 1626. He also met the famous Galileo, who told the world that earth moves round the sun. He visited Rome and Naples and met Manso. *Lycidas*, too, was published in 1638. Milton decided to return to England in 1639, visiting enroute Rome, Florence, Geneva, France. Trouble started brewing in England and Scotland around this time. First, Bishops war against Scotland war fought over the issue of church government during March-June, 1639. It was followed by the second Bishops war from June to September, 1640. In England came about in April the Short Parliament, followed by the Scots' invasion of England. In November, began the Long Parliament; Strafford and Laud were impeached. In this very year (1640), Milton took lodgings in London, started teaching the sons of gentry, and began the study of Christian doctrine. J. Hall, published his *Episcopacy by Divine Right*, the same year.

### **10.3 WAR OF PAMPHLETS; CIVIL WAR**

In 1641, began the war of pamphlets about bishops; J. Hall and Smectymnus wrote several tracts taking contradictory positions against each other. The troubles brewed to the boiling point in 1642. Although in

personal life it was a happy year for Milton; he married Mary Powell the summer of that year. But the nation plunged into the Civil War in August the same year. The King and the Commons fell out over the control of militia. The Royal headquarters were shifted from London to Oxford. Theatres were closed in London. Milton published his famous prose tract, *Reason of Church Government*. In 1643, came out Milton's other famous tract, *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. The same year, the parliament issued ordinance for licensing press. The next year proved all the more productive for Milton. The second edition of *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was published followed by *Of Education*, *Judgment of Martin Bucer* and *Areopagatica*. His divorce tract was attacked; and he began to notice the failure of sight. On the political front, the Scottish army entered England. In 1645, Milton's wife, who had gone back to live with her mother soon after their marriage, returned. They moved to larger house in Barbican to accommodate pupils. *Book of Common Prayer* was abolished; the same year Laud was executed. Milton published the next year his *Poems* (1645), and was blessed with his first daughter, Anne. In the civil war, Charles went over to Scots, Oxford surrendered, and the first civil war ended. Bishops were finally abolished, and Charles was handed over by Scots to Parliament. After the death of his father in 1647, Milton moved his family to a smaller house in Holborn. About that very time he started working on *History of Britain and Samsons Agonistes*, and started reading theology. In 1648, began the second Civil War with Fairfax defeating the royalists, and Cromwell defeating the Scots. The same year took place what is called Pride's Purge, whereby, Presbyterians were excluded from Parliament. Milton responded to the war by writing his sonnet "To Fairfax". He also wrote *Character of Long Parliament*, and translated a few more *Psalms*, and was blessed with his second daughter, Mary.

The bloodiest turn to civil war came about in 1649 when Charles I was put on trial and beheaded. This terrible event in January was followed by abolition of both Monarchy and House of Lords. England now had



government by Council and Rump of Long Parliament. The Lovellers' agitation, which had started in 1647, was crushed. Cromwell took up campaign in Ireland, which continued until 1650. Westminster assembly ceased to function. With Cromwell as head of the government Milton was appointed secretary for foreign tongues to council of state in March 1649, with his official lodgings in Whitehall. Strongly committed to the Republican cause now Milton wrote several prose pieces attracting the Royalists and supporting the Commonwealth and all that it stood for. He published, in reply to Charles's *Eikon Basilike* (ghosted by John Gauden); *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, *Observations on the Articles of Peace*, etc. The next year was not good for Milton. He found himself in ill-health and almost blind. Cromwell continued to grow stronger. He defeated the Scots at Dunham; Scots gave recognition to Charles II that year as King. They crowned him next year (1651), but when defeated at Worcester, he escaped to France. The same year Milton wrote his *Defensio Prima Pro Populo Anglicano*, which was widely read in Holland and Sweden, but strongly condemned and burned in France. On his family side, his only son was born in March 1651, and the family moved from Whitehall to Westminster.

The year 1652 was the saddest year of Milton's life. Although his third daughter Dehborah was born in May, he lost his wife the same month and his only son the next month. Besides, he became totally blind, which made him write the famous sonnets, "On His Blindness" and "When I Consider How my Light is Spent." He also wrote the same year his sonnets "To Cromwell" and "To Vane." On the political front, Parliament appointed a committee to consider the State Church, but it led to serious disagreement between army leaders and the Parliament. The year also witnessed a war with Denmark. That year Milton helped Davenaut to get release from prison and recommended Marvell for employment the next year (1653). Cromwell dissolved Rump, imposed military rule, and created what is called Barebones Parliament. He got himself appointed Protector under Instrument of Government. Thus, Cromwell became the supreme

ruler of England, working with a protectorate parliament created in 1654.

#### **10.4 WITHDRAWAL FROM POLITICS**

From 1655 onward, Milton got drawn more and more to his work of writing, and gradually withdrew from the world of politics. The trouble continued in politics. Rule of major generals was imposed on the countries. Fifth monarchist agitation was also launched in that same year, followed by Royalist risings. Also took place in the year, the Piedmontese massacre, the year ending with war with Spain. Meanwhile, Milton concentrated on his work. He continued work on his *History of Britain*, *Latin Dictionary*, and *Christian Doctrine*. He also wrote several sonnets, including the one "On Massacre in Piedmont" and "Sonnets to Cyriack Skinner." Milton married next year (1656) Katherine Woodcock, his second wife. Like Caesar, Cromwell was asked to take crown by Parliament, but he had to refuse because of army's opposition. He did, of course, get the power to nominate his successor. The upper house was also created in the year 1657. Cromwell died the next year in September, and was succeeded by his son Richard. It is important to note that Milton began working on *Paradise Lost*, the greatest epic written in English language, for which Milton is known all over the world, and is considered next only to Shakespeare. It is not merely the loss of Cromwell which the great poem reflects, but also the loss of his second wife and the daughter he had by her. These losses get blended with the loss of Paradise. Decidedly, Milton, with eyes gone, Cromwell gone, wife gone, daughter gone, had lost all that constituted happiness in his life.

The events of 1659 indicate an imminent end of the Commonwealth. Richard could not retain the seat of power and abdicated, leaving the control of the government in the hands of the army and the Rump. The year saw another Royalist rising, creating uncertainty about the future of the government. The year 1660 saw the end of the reign of Puritans, also described as the "reign of terror." Restoration of King was voted by Convention Parliament making Charles II the King of England. Since Milton's fortune was linked with that of Cromwell and the Puritans, he too, was

adversely affected by the fall of his benefactor. He was dismissed from secretaryship, and lost all his income, and went into hiding on the restoration of the King. Parliament was moved to get his *1<sup>st</sup> Defence* and *Eikonoklastes* burned and Milton was arrested, and his books were burned. The royal proclamation was made against the books. He and his books were not excluded from the Act of Indemnity. He was later released, and Marvell protested in Parliament against the jail fees charged from him (Milton). Milton was also bitterly attacked in the books that followed the Restoration, prominent of which include *The Censure of Rota* and *The Dignity of Kingship*. Cavalier Parliament was constituted in 1661, which continued until 1679. Charles II was coronated the same year. Milton moved to Jewin Street and began teaching Thomas Ellwood the next year (1662). The Act of Uniformity and several more acts were passed against nonconformists in early 1660's. As a result, a lot of clergy lost their livings. In 1663, Milton married the third time, and once again changed his residence, this time to Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields. But after the plague of 1665, Milton once again returned to London the next year. The same year there was the Fire of London. John Bunyan, of course, published his *Grace Abounding* that very next year.

### **10.5 “PARADISE LOST” AND OTHER WORKS**

At long last, after having worked for about a decade, Milton published *Paradise Lost* in 1667. The same year also saw the publication of Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* and Sprat's *History of Royal Society*. After several years of hard work *Milton's History of Britain* was also published in 1670. The next year saw the publication of his *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Milton published in 1672 his *Art of Logic*. The same year was made Declaration of Independence, permitting freedom of worship for Catholics and non-confirming Protestants. The year ended with another war with Denmark. In 1673, Dryden visited Milton intending to turn *Paradise Lost* into opera. The same year Milton published two more prose works, namely *Of True Religion* and *Of*

*Education.* He also published that year the second edition of his *Poems*. In 1674, came out the second edition of *Paradise Lost* with twelve books; the earlier edition of 1667 had only ten books. He also published that year his *Familiar Letters* and *Prolusions*. Milton died of gout in Bunhill, London, on 9 November 1674, and was buried in St. Giles, Cripplegate.

## **10.6 SOME INFLUENCES ON MILTON**

A few things from Milton's life and times need to be given greater attention than what could be covered in the brief account rendered above. One of these is Milton's education, which he continued even after his studentship at Cambridge. On leaving Cambridge, he did not enter the church as expected, nor did he take up any other profession. Rather, he spent the years from 1632 to 1638 pursuing his education in private. It was during this very period that Milton wrote the best of his shorter poems. One of the important influences on him during his formative period, was his private tutor Thomas Young, a Presbyterian. Another important influence on him was his school friend Charles Diodati, who died in 1638. Milton wrote Latin letters and poems to both of them. Like other famous contemporaries Milton was also critical of the universities. His objections were directed against the narrowness of the curriculum. His own study ranged far beyond the prescribed reading at the university.

## **10.7 HIS NEW OUTLOOK ON EDUCATION**

Another significant aspect of Milton's life is tour of Europe he undertook during the years 1638-39. During this tour, he made extended stays in Florence and Rome, where he was warmly received by scholars and academicians, patrons of the art, and princes of the church. The notable men, he met on this tour included the lawyer and writer Grotius, the scientist Galileo, and the patron Manso. He maintained his contacts with the European scholars, printed their commendations in front of his poems, and wrote several things in Latin for the European audiences. On return from continent, Milton set up house in London and began to make

his living by teaching his nephews and sons of friends. The intensive and ambitious training he provided was meant to be in complete contrast to his own experience at Cambridge. This significant experience gave Milton a new outlook on education. He wrote in 1644, a small tract *Of Education* for the educational reformer Samuel Hartlib. Whereas much criticism of universities in the seventeenth century was politically oriented, Milton's tract was entirely non-political. Though he criticized the university curriculum and advocated a practical and ethical rather than a logical and metaphysical training, he made it clear that he was out of sympathy with the democratic and utilitarian programme of the contemporary Bohemian reformer Comenius. He was, obviously, influenced by Bacon's plea for an extension of the fields and methods of study in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). Milton's imaginary academy (comprising both school and university) is for the gentry. Here, the pupils are expected to proceed quickly from the learning of language to practical sciences and then to ethics, politics, history etc., finally reaching logic and poetics. Music and military exercise are essential. Milton restated his aristocratic view of education in a later political work, the *Ready and Easy Way* in 1660. A blot on Milton's record is his treatment of his daughters, who received only a rudimentary education, though he ensured that they learned trades.

### **10.8 HIS VIEWS ON MARRIAGE**

Not less significant aspect of Milton's personality is his attitudes to marriage and divorce. Although Milton married thrice, it was his first wife, who made him write on the subject of marriage and divorce, she left him soon after marriage and did not return to him for three years. After trying unsuccessfully to get her back, he published four tracts between 1643 and 1645: *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *The Judgment of Martin Bucer*, *Tetrachordon*, and *Colasterion*. Before his marriage Milton had idealized chastity, but now he viewed marriage as a spiritual as well as physical union which depended for its validity on mutual love and respect, and which could be dissolved by mutual

consent. His views on divorce shocked his contemporaries. In spite of his idealization of marriage, he shared the contemporary view that a woman was a man's intellectual inferior, which made Samuel Johnson remark that Milton had "something like a Turkish contempt for females."

### 10.9 INFLUENCE OF CIVIL WAR

More than any other factor in Milton's life and times, it was the Civil War which had a decisive influence on his poetic interests. The historical events influenced also the general course of literature in the seventeenth century. The last court masque by Davenant was performed in 1640. With the break of the court soon after, the whole Jonsonian tradition of poetry, social, aristocratic, depending on a particular relation between poet and patron, suddenly ceased to exist. Similarly, the overthrow of the Anglican Church meant that there was no longer any institutional support for the tradition of devotional poetry, though poets like Vaughan and Traherne continued the tradition in retirement. We can see various new interests reflected in poetry during the 1650s. The new epics, Davenant's *Gondibert* and Cowley's *Davideis*, though making use to a large extent of the old epic conventions, are also part of a movement to a more general, philosophical poetry of ideas. Although with the Restoration of Charles II, the court once more became a focus for poetry. The tone of such poetry, and the audience it was designed for, differed greatly from that of the earlier court prior to the Commonwealth or the Civil War. The difference between Jonson and Dryden is partly explicable in terms of the experience of the Civil War or the Interregnum. Instead of an aristocratic and court-centered poetry, we find now a tendency to a more journalistic and specifically political kind of public poetry. There was, for example, no ready-made language for describing the achievement of Cromwell; a new set of terms had to be found. That is what Marvell attempted in the *First-Anniversary*:

*Hence oft I think, if in some happy hour*

*High grace should meet in one with highest power,  
And then a reasonable people still  
Should bend to his, as he to heavens will,  
What we might hope, what wonderful effect,  
From such wished conjuncture might reflect.*

At the Restoration, Marvell turned his sharpened political awareness against the court, and established the techniques and the standard for the political satire, which was to become the dominant poetic form of the period. Dryden, while inheriting many of the traditional assumptions about the social role of the poet, on which Milton was brought up, strengthened his vague ambitions and magnificent symbols with the political sophistications brought about by years of social upheaval.

The idiosyncrasy of Milton's political and religious views meant that his idea of the kind of poet he was able to become diverged sharply from the path pursued by his contemporaries. The poetic world that Milton knew as a young man implied different views of the role of the poet, as socially responsible teacher or as gentleman amateur, and different social positions for him, as courtier, as semi-professional dependent on patronage, or as a priest. Milton did draw in his early poetry on the poetic traditions of his day in his search for his own voice. He did discover in the process his own unique voice and created a style of his own, heavy footed, but nicely loaded, making an impact unprecedented in English poetry.

#### **10.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q. 1** Trace the influence of Civil war on Milton's poetry.  
**Q. 2** Discuss Milton's attitude to marriage and divorce.

#### **10.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* The life of John Milton: A Critical Biography by Barbara K. Lewalski.

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**JOHN MILTON : *AREOPAGITICA***

- 11.1 Objective**
- 11.2 Early Verses**
- 11.3 Devotional Poetry**
- 11.4 Early Period of Experiments in Poetic Forms**
- 11.5 *Lycidas***
- 11.6 *Paradise Lost***
- 11.7 *Paradise Regained***
- 11.8 Other Poems**
- 11.9 Milton's Sonnets**
- 11.10 *Lycidas***
- 11.11 *Comus***
- 11.12 Conclusion**
- 11.13 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 11.14 Suggested Reading**

**11.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the poetic works of John Milton so as to acquaint the learners with his poetic art.



## 11.2 EARLY VERSES

In the early stage of his search for a poetic identity, Milton did not draw on English tradition. Apart from his youthful paraphrases of the *Psalms* the majority of the poems he wrote as a student are in Latin. It was Ovid, the Latin poet he had known best at school, who provided the tone and the style of these poems. In *Elegies* V and VII, belonging to the late 1620's, he tries his hand at heavily embroidered nature and love poetry, gives scope through its licensed artificiality for an effusion of personal feeling. But Milton soon found that the irresponsibility of the elegiac writers did not suit his conception of the poet. Though he wrote his major Latin poetry in the 1630's after leaving Cambridge (partly in order to reach the European audience), he relied much less heavily on Ovid here than in the earlier poems. In the *Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton tells us how he abandoned his youthful passion for the elegiac poets and turned to Dante and Petrarch, as the celebrators respectively of Beatrice and Laura. These Italian poets wrote only in honour of them to whom they devoted their verse, "displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression." In a series of Italian poems, which probably belong to his Cambridge days, Milton adopted the role of the Petrarchan lover.

## 11.3 DEVOTIONAL POETRY

But for some reason, when Milton decided to write in English, he abandoned also the role of the poetic lover. It was during the Cambridge period itself that he began to experiment with the traditions of English poetry. In the *Vacation Exercise* of 1628, he expresses his preference for "new fangled toys" and "late fantastic." In the early 1630's we find him experimenting with a variety of contemporary traditions, and even "strong lines." With his famous *Nativity Ode* of 1629, Milton turned his hand to the rich tradition of devotional poetry, although he was perhaps not acquainted with the work of his contemporary practitioners. Following his success with the *Nativity Ode*, Milton clearly intended to write a sequence of poems on the events of Christ's life, but he only provided the unfinished poems on *The Passion* and *The Circumcision*.

#### 11.4 EARLY PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTS IN POETIC FORMS

It was during this early period of experiments, when he had left Cambridge and decided not to become a priest, that Milton turned to the poetic forms and attitude that Jonson had adopted. The writing of poems like *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* or the masque *Arcades* and *Comus* seems to imply that Milton was following both Jonson's social position, in trying to establish a circle of patrons, and his moral concerns, in using these patrons as symbols of moral worth and examples to society. At this stage of his poetic career, he was attempting to see how far the existing definition of the social role of the poet fitted his own developing conception. His use of Jonsonian attitude correspondingly entailed the Jonsonian metrical simplicity, precision of expression, and definition of public moral themes that we find in *L'allegro* and *Il penseroso*. But Milton could not confine himself within the Jonsonian mould. It implied the poet as teacher, as craftsman, as public figure, but not as prophet or as priest. It was towards this conception that Milton was moving. His major poems in 1630's are poems of self-definition. He constantly searches for a form or a convention which will fit him, but constantly finds himself breaking out of it because he does not yet know what he is looking for. The subject of these poems is the writing of poetry, the making of choices, the process of testing oneself, the adoption of an appropriate language and style of life for a particular role.

**Comus:-** Thus, *Comus* veers away from the masque tradition, which, as Jonson had developed it, though moral in tradition, was essentially aristocratic, courtly, and social. Through his emphasis on chastity, on the Spenserian idea of the moral test, Milton's idea of virtue appears much more Platonic and personal than the social idea of worth that Johnson tried to include. For a time Milton was obsessed with the idea of chastity, which was derived partly from Arthurian romance, partly from Plato, and partly from St. Paul, so that to the humanist idea of the poet as teacher and orator, Milton added the Christian Knight, whose life was to be an active quest. Different definitions of the poet are tested in various poems. Thus in

the *Latin Elegy VI*, addressed to his close friend Charles Diodati and written at about the same time as *Nativity Ode*, Milton compares the licentious life of the elegiac poet with the dedicated life of the epic poet who is vates and sacerdos, seer and priest :

*In addition the youth of such a poet must be chaste and free from crime, his conduct strict and his hand unstained. He must be like you, priest, when, shining in your sacred role and washed with holy waters, you rise to go to face the angry gods ..... for the poet is sacred to the gods; both his secret heart and his mouth tell of Jove.*

Milton goes to tell Diodati of his work on the *Nativity Ode*, the connection between the idealized poet and himself is thus made explicit. Similarly, in *L'allegro* and *Il penseroso*, he weighs the choice between two different ways of life, two different kinds of poetry. The happy man chooses masque, comedy, and elegiac verse, while the thoughtful man prefers allegorical epic and tragedy. In *Ad pattern* he elaborates the lonely, retired, but elevated view of the poet of *Il penseroso*. In *Lycidas*, he tries to resolve the problem of the relation of immaturity to self dedication, of amputation to self seeking and glory, of the career of priest to that of poet.

### **11.5 LYCIDAS**

Milton wrote, *Lycidas* not long before undertaking his continental tour. His successful reception in Italy helped him to clarify his ideas as to the kind of poet he wished to become and the subject matter for his poetry. His patriotic feelings were aroused, and he began to be convinced that his poem was to be a British epic. In *The Reason of Church Government*, he describes how he moved towards this decision:

*For ... I knew it would be hard to arrive to the second rank among the Latins, I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bamboo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to*

*the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toilsome vanity, but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among my own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect.*

There are various reasons why this characteristic renaissance ambition remained only a dream. At the beginning of the 1640s, Milton, somehow, turned his attention away from patriotic epic and towards sacred drama. He came to see, eventually, that in the pamphleteering and propagandizing activities that he carried on in the 1640s and 1650s, he had fulfilled his patriotic aim. In his Latin defence of the English people, Milton believed that he had produced a work of epic stature. He saw in his involvement in political propaganda a resolution of the problem that had plagued him earlier, the demands of an active public life compared with the apparently passive and retired life of the poet. The confused events of the last year of the Interregnum confirmed Milton's pessimistic view that men were found waiting to complete the work. After the Restoration, therefore, Milton abstained almost entirely from interference in political events. But in spite of political disillusionment, he was able to define a new role for himself.

### **11.6 PARADISE LOST**

The crucial blindness that Milton suffered in the early 1650s in the course of his public activity came to assume a symbolic importance for him. In answer to the royalists, who saw it as a divine infliction on the defender of regicides, Milton saw it as a sign of inner light, a mark that he was chosen. He found himself set apart from the rest of mankind in the company of blind hands and wise men like Homer and Tiresias. In his political activity, he fulfilled his view of the poet as orator and statesman; the poet of *Paradise Lost* is seer and prophet. Milton began the writing of epic about two years before the king came in, that is a religious romance, not altogether unlike *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with which through many generations it shared the affection of the humbly pious. On another plane, it is a philosophy of religion,

asserting man's freedom of will and ultimate responsibility for his acts. The long poem of Milton integrates elements from the mystical Jewish *Cabbala* into a remarkably bold and consistent exposition of Christian materialism. The first two books of the poem, are the part that most delights the modern reader. They are the most dramatically conceived, as if the poet, having long weighed the subject as a play, only slowly adopted the narrator's attitude. These books are also the richest part of the literary sense. Milton's heaven seems to us unfurnished. It is like an echoing gallery of pure theological reason. It could hardly be otherwise, in the work of a poet, who held God, the Father to be wholly unknowable and indescribable. The cool delight of the earthy paradise is largely veritable. It is merely a matter of plants and flowers and charming landscapes. But in Milton's hell, the human spirit is at home. There, by skillful use of simile and allusion, Milton undid his barbs of worldwide learning. These passages are the peculiar glories of *Paradise Lost*. By identifying the fallen fellows of Satan with the divinities of pagan mythology, Milton found other means of vitalizing the first two books of the poem. In the most dramatic scene of all, the great council in Pandemonium, he seems to be drawing, not on learning, but on living experience. The authentic tone of real men, arguing a question of interest actuality, are heard in the wonderfully constructed speeches of Moloch, Belial and Mammon.

The superlative exquisiteness of rhythm and rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* comes from his own keen ear, made more so by his blindness. Light and dark are the warp and woof, of which the long poem is woven. Here, Milton's blindness helped him. References to light are innumerable and always exciting, from the "bright effluence of bright essence increate," which is God, to "the darkness visible" of hell. The poem develops the series of great ocular prospects, marvellously selective and exact, it sounds like the work of a mind which has hoarded and furbished up all its visual contours of the long wave like sentences, the vivid marquetry of the Latinisms let into the English style to brighten or to strengthen, and in the perfect matching of the figurative allusions. This is what makes *Paradise Lost* the greatest English classic,

which comes from the enforced patience of the blind man, rolling each twenty lines or so over the buffers of his most exigent taste till they acquired the polish of pebbles by the seashore. To date, Milton's epic remains the greatest poem in the English language.

### **11.7 PARADISE REGAINED**

Milton also wrote a sequel to his great epic, *Paradise Regained*, first printed in 1671, four years after *Paradise Lost*. The second poem has always remained overshadowed by the greatness of the first one. The second poem is, of course, not an epic, being merely a semi-dramatic account, in four short books. It is about the commencement of Christ's ministry. Instead of opening like *Paradise Lost* in a blaze of glory, it begins on a low key, and reserves most of his magnificence for the last book. It contains many of the quietest lines that Milton wrote, and few of which are unmusical; but when it soars, it reaches heights that have not often been equalled. The style is more Homeric than that of *Paradise Lost*. The poem is essentially a debate between Christ and Satan, neither of whom is similar to the corresponding figure in *Paradise Lost*. Here, Satan is shown having come to terms with God. He has been accepted by God also as the allowed leaders of the divine opposition. The young Christ of *Paradise Regained*, though somewhat ungenial towards the Fiend, is the most charming figure in the poem. His divinity is not greatly stressed. But his heroic humanity, ardors, and courage make him the perfect example of that ideal of magnanimity through renunciation of the world.

### **11.8 OTHER POEMS**

*Samson Agonistes* was published, along with *Paradise Regained* in the same volume in 1671. Between *Paradise Lost*, a great epic, and *Samson Agonistes*, a great tragedy, *Paradise Regained* makes a transitional piece, providing the poet an opportunity to come out of the long narrative into the intense drama. *Samson Agonistes* is Milton's most flawless single work of art, in which he openly challenges comparison with Aeschylus, Sophocles,

and Euripedes, "the three tragic poets **unequaled** yet by any." As in the slighter but similar case of Milton's adoption of the Italian sonnet, criticism has seldom done justice to *Samson Agonistes*. Structurally, Milton's play reproduces with extraordinary precision the form of a Greek tragedy as Aristotle conceived it. There is a close parallel between Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, and yet the former cannot be called an imitation of the latter. Milton's mind was too permeated with Hellenic drama to be explainable as imitation of any specific play. His spiritual affinity is the closest with Aeschylus, the strictest and serenest of the Athenian playwrights. Like Aeschylus, he greatly magnifies the importance of the hero and of the chorus, who between them speaks two thirds of the lines. Also like Aeschylus, Milton limits the speaking characters to two in a scene. The unity and gravity of the play are also Aeschylean, but the play, as the whole, is not Aeschylean. It is Greek.

### 11.9 MILTON'S SONNETS

Besides these great narrative and dramatic poems, Milton produced a set of memorable sonnets. His nineteen English sonnets, supplemented by five others, have an importance out of all proportion to their number, scattered thinly over thirty years of his life. They give the most consecutive records of his feeling, from the fragile love-longing of the first one, "*To the Nightingale*" (1630), to the august vision of his deceased wife in 1658. If his sonnets are to be compared with any earlier ones in English, it must be with Sidney's; although the connection is not very close. The movement Sidney started had faded out, and Milton kindled the lamp afresh at Italian fires. It may be reasonably believed that his school friend, Charles Diodate, was the cause of his special Italian interests, and probably the means of his acquaintance with the Italian girl, a certain Emilia, to whom he wrote the six poems in her own tongue that exhibit a remarkable ease and correctness. They develop very pleasantly the amorous note of the "nightingale" sonnet and probably followed it closely in date.

The sonnet on his three-and-twentieth year introduces a sober note, which, thereafter, is never absent. Those to the "captain, or colonel, or

knight-in-arms" and to the unknown young lady, who had chosen "the better part with Mary and with Ruth"; the friendly ones to the lady Margaret Ley, Harry Lawes, Edward Lawrence, and Cyriac Skinner and the obituary on another old friend, Mrs. Katherine Thompson show Milton in more genial moods than anything else that he wrote after Diodati's death. But there is deep gravity in all these, for Milton did not lightly turn to sonneting. All his sonnets are strictly Italian in form, more in the sixteenth-century style of Tasso and Giovanni *Della Casa* than in the earlier style of Petrarch. In only one of the English sonnets, that addressed to Cromwell, does the sestet conclude with a couplet, though three of the Italian ones have this ending. In just half, the sense is carried on vigorously from octave to sestet without appreciable pause, and this includes the four most famous examples: "Cromwell, our chief of men," "Avenge, O lord," "When I consider how my light is spent," and "Methought I saw my late espoused saint." This feature, though not according to the Petrarchan plan, is neither an innovation nor a blemish. Milton would have been less Milton, if he had not seen the value of such *entombments*. The nineteen sonnets are like a hoard of ancient coins, few and precious. They are deeply, but frugally, incised, heavy with significance and intrinsic worth.

### **11.10 LYCIDAS**

Besides these sonnets, Milton also left for posterity the best pastoral elegy ever written in English. In his early poems, Milton was a perfectionist beyond almost any other English writer except Gray. When called upon for a contribution to the memorial volume in honour of his college friends, Edward King, who had been drowned in the Irish Sea in August 1637, he still thought of himself, though near the end of his twenty-ninth year as an uncouth (untaught) swain, "Warbling his Doric Lay," a phrase, which means much the same as the "nature woodnotes wild" that he imputed to Shakespeare. The incomparable *Lycidas*, "probably the most perfect and pure literature in existence," opens with an apology for the poet's immaturity, which is as sincerely humble as it is obviously unnecessary:



*Yet once more, O ye laurels ...  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forc'd fingers rude  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.*

*Lycidas* almost eludes criticism. It was possible for Dr. Johnson to miss its beauties altogether, and it is very common for its beauties to drive commentators into wholly uncritical ecstasies. Milton's own appraisal is sound, though phrased too self deprecatingly:

*He touch'd the tender stops of various quills;*

that is, he handled in a tentative manner, a number of styles. The voice of St. Peter, thundering against King's self-indulgent fellow-clerics, is very different from that of the Sicilian Muse, piping the purest pagan pastoralism; and both are unlike the voice, in which Milton questions his own destiny, or the other voice, by no means too conventional or too restrained, in which at the opening and the close, he testifies to his friendship with King and to the pathos of the latter's premature end.

Though an astonishingly short poem to hold all the electric charges that it contains (it has 193 lines) *Lycidas* was over by long in comparison with the other contributions to the anthology for which it was written. Milton has expressed his feeling in four or five movements, not, as he recognized himself, very logically connected. They are, however, fundamentally connected by the underlying theme. King's untimely death forces angry questions from him, conceiving

*The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne;  
Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquering.  
The "blind mouths" at which St. Peter rails  
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold,*

and are content; while the unrecovered loans of King, who had shared Milton's ascetic discipline, are the plaything of life's accidents, hurled beyond the stormy Hebrides or otherwise into nullity. "Alas, what boots

it?" He asks of his own life. The elegy here is the outcry of one spurred by Fame, which he can call by no better title than "that last infirmity of noble mind," and can hope for nowhere but, in heaven.

Nothing would satisfy Milton but to be a Spenser, and nothing that his age created seemed to be above the stature of Marvell. This is the heart breaking truth of *Lycidas*. The Spenserian trumpet is at last in his hand, perfect in every varied cadence and learned grace - the soul-animating strains await his call - and life has given him no will to blow it.

### 11.11 *COMUS*

Another work of Milton that has remained of interest through the age, is *Comus*, which was presented on 29 September, 1634. The occasion was the marriage of the Earl of Bridgewater to the counter of Derby's daughter. While Milton supplied the words for *Comus*, Henry Lawes supplied the music. Lawes also played the part of the Attendant Spirit, while the two brothers and the lady in the piece were acted by the three youthful children of the Earl. *Comus* is Milton's first poem in blank verse. It is, indeed the only thing of any importance that the poet wrote in that form before *Paradise Lost*, but his mystery is apparent in the very first sentence,

*Before the starry threshold of Jove's court  
My mansion is*

which in eleven lines sweeps the listener from heaven to earth and back again. Virtue is indeed, the theme of *Comus*; not chastity merely, but the dynamic Virtue which, in Milton's words:

*Could see to do what Virtue would,  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk.*

*Comus* is a true enough masque. It combines in pleasing balance the usual

element of personal complement, classic story, and opulent song; it provides for the "measure" or main dance and for elaborate scenic spectacle, and has moments of dramatic tension.

### **11.12 CONCLUSION**

Milton's position as poet has been unassailable in the history of English literature. His reputation has risen and declined, but it has never quite lost the aura of that unique acclaim. Although his poetry has been constantly a point of reference for English literature, it is a point of reference that has itself shifted and changed. Terms like "influence" or "reputation" do not cover the kind of pressure Milton has exerted not only on poetry, but on the novel; not only on literature, but on painting, sculpture and architecture. Often when artists claimed to be seeing merely what was there, they were using a Miltonic perspective; or when they projected the shape of the future it curiously was like the Miltonic past. Both, explicitly (in critical comment) and implicitly (in subliminal echoes and unexamined assumptions) Milton has subliminal and sustained conflicting strands in the development of English literature. He has played many different roles in history, some conservative, some revolutionary. In fact, one could say that his only constant and unchanging function has been to generate divergence from the norms of the moment, and that is how his literary reputation has grown, making him a founder of the tradition rival to that founded by Shakespeare. Subsequent writers have been under stress to choose between the two.

### **11.13 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q.1** Discuss salient features of Milton's poetry.

**Q.2** Comment on Milton as a poet.

### **11.14 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* The Prose works of John Milton; With a life of the author, interspersed with translations and critical remarks by C. Symmons.
- \* John Milton (Longman Critical Readers) by Annabel Patterson.

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**JOHN MILTON: AREOPAGITICA**

- 12.1 Objective**
- 12.2 A Classical Humanist**
- 12.3 Prose Pamphlets**
- 12.4 Other Pamphlets in English**
- 12.5 Milton's Style**
- 12.6 Rhetorical Structure**
- 12.7 Pedantic Style**
- 12.8 Simile and Allusion**
- 12.9 Conclusion**
- 12.10 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 12.11 Suggested Reading**

**12.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss the prose writings of John Milton along with his style of writing and use of technique.

**12.2 A CLASSICAL HUMANIST**

Compared to the amount of verse the great English poets, such as Shakespeare, Spenser, Chaucer, Wordsworth, etc., left behind, Milton's volume is rather small. But no great poet, except the German poet Goethe, has left

behind so much or such important prose. Milton's prose is both in Latin and English. It touches all the themes and emotions, which moved him deeply. There is no light prose in Milton. It is the prose of classical humanist, and the question it raises for the modern readers, is the question of decorum. It ranges constantly from earth to heaven, from violent and vulgar invective to passage of truly poetical loftiness. It is continually passing above or below the narrow scope of our polite writers, but to call it rude, or allege that in Milton "a useful art had not learned to be also fine," is to apply irrelevant standards. Prose was never in low esteem with the Renaissance scholars in whose tradition Milton wrote. They were apt to set Cicero and Demos themes not far below Virgil and Homer as artists, and world seldom admits that poetry was necessarily verse-writing. *The Bible* which was the book of books, offered a vast gradation of styles. Milton used them all in his prose, and perhaps extended the lower reaches. But in nearly all his English pamphlets, and most frequently in *Areopagatica* (1644), he would soar, when fit emotion wanted him, into starry symphonies, which an admirer of literary art would no more wish to be expressed in verse than he would wish *Paradise lost* written in the nature of *Lycidas*.

In a famous autobiographical digression, in one of his earliest controversial prose works, Milton admits that in such a work he has "the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand." He speaks of himself as "sitting here below in the cool element of prose." His left hand did, of course, quickly acquire remarkable skills of contemporary contentious writing. In fact, his prose was seldom cool. The famous last paragraph of another early tract or pamphlet shows how easily Milton can combine sinuous majesty of style and real exaltation of spirit with sentiments rather inappropriate. Here in the sample:

... after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them) shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell.

So Dante might have written, but preceding the sentence quoted above there is a sentence that suggests Sir Walter Raleigh:

*That we may still remember in our solemn thanksgivings,  
how for us the northern ocean, even to the frozen Thule,  
was scattered with the proud shipwrecks of the Spanish  
Armada, and the very maw of hell ransacked, and made  
to give up her concealed destination, ere she could vent  
it in that horrible and damned blast.*

### 12.3 PROSE PAMPHLETS

As Milton's early feelings are best known to us through his Latin poems, so his mature personality is best expressed through his prose pamphlets. The four tracts on divorce (1643-1645), though occasioned by his own unhappy experience with his first wife, Mary Powell, are brilliantly argued. They contain some of his most sympathetic writing. There is, for sure, something pitiful in the ardor with which, he pleads for more than physical basis of matrimony and a more liberal interpretation of ecclesiastical law;

*Was our Savior so mild and so favourable to the weakness  
of a single man, and is he turned on the sudden so  
rigorous and inexorable to the distresses and extremities  
of an ill-wedded man? Did he so graciously give leave  
to change the better single life for the worse married  
life? Did he open so to us his hazardous and accidental  
door of marriage to shut upon us like the gate of death,  
without retracting or returning...?*

The divorce pamphlets and the great *Areopagitica*, "for the liberty of unlicensed printing," of the same period made Milton a marked man with many calumniators. But, it had little effect upon the opinions of the Parliamentarians to whom, they were addressed. Milton replied to his detractors in his three last dignified sonnets, accepted the submission

of his wife, and during three or four years devoted himself to the intense studies that resulted in his imposing *History of Britain* and his enormous Latin treatise on *Christian Doctrine*. The arraignment of Charles I brought him once more before the public with one of his best argued and quietest, though boldest pamphlets, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. In this he develops, from the proposition that "All men were naturally born free." The principle of the social contract and the corollary that subjects are justified in putting an unworthy king to death. He closes his argument with an attack upon the Presbyterians, who, after warring against Charles I and imprisoning him, were now opposing his trial by Parliament.

The Parliament was grateful to Milton for his justification, which happened to appear in print just after the King's execution (February 1649). The very next month of the King's execution, Milton was appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues in the Council of States. This gave him charge of the government's foreign correspondence and made him the official apologist of the Commonwealth regime. In *Eikonoklastes* ("Image Breaker") he fell upon with fury upon the *Eikon Basilike* ("King's Image"), allegedly the pious work of the beheaded king, which was gaining undue popularity owing to sentimental reaction when the cause of the killed King and his exiled son found advocates abroad, Milton turned to Latin and without repining sacrificed the sight of his over strained eyes in preparing his laborious and violent *Defence of The English People* (1651) against the learned and abusive Salmasius. His *Second Defence* (1654) is also of similar nature. The excellence of its Latin gilded the argument and herbed the personalities it contained. It also contains the justification of Milton's own career and a laudation of Cromwell and his supporters that would be resplended in any language.

#### **12.4 OTHER PAMPHLETS IN ENGLISH**

Milton's other pamphlets in English were summoned by the political uncertainties that followed Cromwell's death in 1658. The last and most

impressive of these was issued in the spring of 1660, when the return of Stuarts was becoming more and more inevitable. Its title was a challenge: *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish Free Commonwealth, and the Excellence There of Compared with the Inconveniencies and Danger of Readmitting Kingship in this Nation*. Milton knew how the nation was turning. He spoke bold words against "this anxious humour of turning to bondage," justifying the treatment Charles I had received. He begged his countrymen not to be less steadfast for liberty than the Dutch. If they allow King and bishops to return, he says:

*We may be forced perhaps to fight over again all that we have fought, and spend over again all that we have spent, lust are never like to attain thus for as we are now advanced to recovery of our freedom, never to have it in possession as we now have it, never to be vouchsafed hereafter and like mercies and signal assistances from Heaven in our cause, if by our in grateful backsliding we make these fruitless.*

"Now is the opportunity," he cried in desperate appeal, "now the very season, wherein we may obtain a Free Commonwealth, and establish it forever in the land without difficulty or much delay." Yet the ink was hardly dry on the last issue of the pamphlet, when Charles II was brought back with uproarious plaudits. Milton, obviously, became a hunted man. He was, for sure, the most conspicuous surviving enemy of the Restoration. Of course, he did not suffer the fate of the other "traitors" and "regicides." It was because of his loyal friends like Marvell, who interceded for him. Besides, he had a name "of which all Europe talked from side to side." It was perhaps a consideration of importance of Charles II's government. At any rate, fourteen more years of unobstructed life were granted to him. Neither friends nor enemies nor Milton himself could have forecast the value of those years, which saw the publication of *Paradise Lost* and other great poems.



## 12.5 MILTON'S STYLE

Milton's style, both in poetry and prose, is "lofty" in the sense in which Aristotle uses the terms in his *Poetics*. Explaining what he means by loftiness, Aristotle says:

*That diction, on the other hand, is lofty and raised above the commonplace which employs unusual words. By unusual, I mean strange (or rare) words, metaphysical, lengthened-anything in short that differs from the normal idiom .... For by deviating in exceptional cases from the normal idiom the language will gain distinction....*

Milton does, of course, forsake the common English speech and hardens into a remote grandeur. In this sense, his style is completely unusual, and even artificial. No wonder that Dr. Johnson described Milton's diction "a Babylonish dialect," which is formed on the "perverse and pedantic principle of using English words with a foreign idiom." But even Dr. Johnson was unable to resist the grandeur of Milton's style. He delighted in its rhetorical grandeur, exclaiming "criticism sinks in admiration!" Joseph Addison, also opined that Milton had to deviate from "the common forms and ordinary phrases of speech" to achieve sublimity - a colloquial sublimity being for him a contradiction in terms. The norm behind Milton lies in the uncommon tongue, in the learned body of formal prose, theological, philosophical, forensic, descending from medieval and classic literary tradition. Milton, both, as cloistered scholar and as public servant, was thoroughly familiar, with this tradition. Even his *Paradise Lost* displays the virtues of great prose.

Wordsworth was the first to notice the prose element in Milton's poetry. In a famous passage in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth insists on the essential identity of the language of prose and the language of material composition. In this context, he makes a reference to Milton saying, "some of the most interesting parts of the best poems

will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when the prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all of the poetical writings, even of Milton himself." A few years later, Hazlitt made a similar point: "That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose, which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, and, which is chiefly to be met with in these bitter invectives, is one of its greatest excellence." The various aspects of this style are the clarity of the verbal linkages, *the direct registering of the events, the severe suppression of figure, which make the art of poetry measure up to the norms of prose*. In such a style, we are not far away from the objective language of the laboratory report. The phrases lock together with clarity and make an irreversible word order for the irreversible moral action.

## 12.6 RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

Another distinguished feature of Milton's style is its eloquence achieved through highly rhetorical structuring of the sentence, both in prose as well as in verse. The skills of near pedantry are required to read such a style with enjoyment and understanding, which are unlikely to come from one's experience with the common tongue, or even from general English poetic tradition. There is always in Milton a careful interior structuring of the passage, with the managed series of subordinations. It conforms to a tradition of trained prosaic eloquence, in which the art of effectively disposing the members of a complex sentence among its main rhetorical elements has attained a high level of accomplishments. It is important to remember that before Milton began to compose *Paradise Lost* in 1658, he had spent most of the preceding twenty years or so composing documents of state and other tracts, and philosophic or polemical treatises, many of them in Latin. He wrote an immense amount of prose during that long period, all of it notable for clarity, passion, and strength, some of it as accomplished as any that has ever been written in English. But the rhetorical and substantial connections between that prose and his later verse are so

close that we are, undoubtedly justified in discovering the stylistic model of *Paradise Lost* in the "tradition" of Milton's own prose writing rather than in any foreign epics, or classical precedents such as Virgil's *Aeneid*.

The distance between the poetical style of *Lycidas* and that of *Paradise Lost* is "measured" by the intervening twenty years' discipline of prose. Virgil- that is to say, pastoral sweetness of tone, choice dignity of epithet and phrase, lyric ornateness generally - died for Milton with -the shepherd poet of *Lycidas*. Infact, with that poet also died the poet's youthful Italianate music; the poem can be read as a kind of self epitaph. What followed were the years of the public prose during which, the epic style was gradually prepared and cast. Note, for instance, the following paragraph from *The Reason of Church Government*.

*... For not to speak of that knowledge that rests in the contemplator of natural causes and dimensions, which must need he a lower wisdom, as the object is low, certain it is that he who hath obtained in more than the scantiest measure to know anything distinctly of God, and of his true worship; and what is infallibly good and happy in the state of man's life, what is itself evil and miserable, though vulgarly not so esteemed; he that hath obtained to know this, the only high valuable wisdom indeed, remembering also that God, even to a strictness, requires the improvement of these his interested gifts, cannot but sustain a sorer burden of mind, and more pressing, than any supportable toil or weight which the body can labour under, how and in what manner he shall dispose and employ those sums of knowledge and illumination, which God hath him into this world to trade with.*

This wonderful piece displays Milton's skills as a writer of prose, and suggests its relation to the dynamics of his later verse. It possess great formal elegance. Each of the half a dozen eddying qualifications helps to produce and distribute the thought, keeping it fittingly complex yet everywhere articulate and sharp; "breathe" with the progress of argument. The whole paragraph is a dignified discourse, the individual phrases, weighty taken singly, by a miracle of handling, dance their way into the reader's mind. It is now a vanished art. Its last poetical practice went into the making of Milton's Latin style.

Milton's prose books like *The Christian Doctrine*, *The Reasons of Church Government*, *Areopagatica*, though probably never so intended by Milton, when read alongside *Paradise Lost*, resemble exercises in philosophic definition, theological exegesis, historical and political critique and, in short, appear as stylistic *rehearsals* for the performance of a poem he had not yet written. And as one look at them from his point of view, it is impossible not to be impressed by Milton's encyclopedic preparation for *Paradise Lost*, by the orderliness of his thoughts and of his vision of the world, and by the beauty of that order; or without coming to realize how closely he had examined and defined main points of philosophy, science, and Christian Doctrine. Classic eloquence serves Milton's prose as well as verse in two main ways. First, it provides a continuous rhetorical device of *alienation*, imparting an aloofness to the whole action, so that the reader is at no time in any dander of ignoring the decisive *distance* between his natural, daily self, and those splendid events and persons. Second, it assures Milton maximum precision of utterance. The ancient eloquence tolerated no busy Elizabethan blurring of syntax, image, and idea. Milton seceded in making a prosodic engine, or, better, a measure, of unparalleled sweetness and austerity, formal and remote, but full of grace, an instrument, by which the composition's complex cosmology, theology, history, and myth, always shading off into each other best, is manipulated with continuous and fastidious precision.

Precision in the use of the key terms is, in fact, what ultimately gives the prose and poetry of Milton their characteristic lucidity and force. Prosaic virtues of clarity, order, strict definition, working from line to line, adjusting clause to clause, word to word, are the real source of that classic "finish," a clear hardness of texture, which everywhere distinguishes the Miltonic lines and sentence from any other. This quality has scarcely been seen again in English poetry except, though with a difference, in the work of Alexander Pope. A good deal, therefore, of what might look like stiffness or schoolmasterly pedantry in Milton is actually a relentless, nuclear certainty, penetrating from the philosophic to the rhetorical to the grammatical details of the text. His positive stylistic influence can be seen in the prose tradition, not in poetry. The true inheritors of his eloquence have been the prose writers like Blake, Gibbon, Newman, and Arnold.

### **12.7 PEDANTIC STYLE**

Milton's style has also the quality of "sonority," reputation for which has haunted him all these years. Some admirers of Milton have dismissed it outrightly. Their contention is whether the charm of Milton's style, especially in verse, comes from any real or imagined sonority of language. Milton, they say, makes no attempt to speak through the images, or incorporate them into some philosophy, as by contrast. Wordsworth does with natural objects. We are charmed by Milton's images not because of their resonance, but because of their exquisite pedantry. This is a quality that directly derives from the literary traditions of formal classic prose. When Dr. Johnson called the style of *Paradise Lost* "pedantic," he was not being complementary. But for his admirers, "pedantic" is not a pejorative word; for them, it sums up the poem's *studied elegance*.

### **12.8 SIMILE AND ALLUSION**

One form that Milton's "pedantry" takes, is an abundant use of ornate classical simile and allusion. A good deal has been written about these rhetorical features of his work, but mostly by way of explication. Not much has actually been said about the stylistic operation about the allusion and

similes in his poetry and prose. The popular view has been that they are "happy digressions," charming ornaments that provide Milton "with a welcome means of pouring forth the treasure of his mind." The key to this habit of Milton is his passion for scholarly completeness. When Milton alludes to something in Ovid or in Virgil he does so with Chapter-and-verse exactness. The effect of this "habit" is obviously to limit connotation and increase the clarity of image or idea. However, if we examine Milton's similes and allusions more closely, it soon becomes clear that some other principle is also at work than mere "scholarly completeness," which gives them that heads-on-a-string look exhibited throughout the composition. For one thing, the component parts of the similes and allusions invariably come from, not the order of nature, but the order of art - from myth, legend, romance, technical arts, and from other literatures. Even the famous comparison of Satan's shield to the disc of the full moon as seen in Galileo's telescope is properly not an exception to this. Actually, the astronomical moon in 1670 was still the most "romantic" object, a place of fabulous conjecture, not a physical cinder as it is for us today. Dryden, no wonder, accused Milton of seeing "nature through the spectacle of books," the charge was also endorsed by Dr. Johnson.

Dryden's observation is, no doubt, brilliant. Milton did see the world through the spectacles of books, the world of *Paradise Lost* at any rate. But there is also more to be said about it. Any act of comparison affords dual perspectives on an object. Such doubling is not merely aesthetic, or descriptive. It is ultimately ontological. A comparison involves another level of being as well as of fact. The reality, then, which Milton invokes by employing images, similes, and allusions carefully drawn from literature rather than "life" is not that of the raw and random order of nature but that of the ideal and definitive order of art. Milton's purpose of strewing his compositions in prose and verse with classical similes and allusions was not merely to furnish himself with opportunities to pour forth the treasure of his mind in an access of scholarly self-indulgence. On the contrary, the effect of all that elegant scholarship was rather to seal his composition off in imaginative literature, to insulate it against "life" in the intransmuted "natural" and

historical sense. Through this technique, Milton enclosed at all points thought and image with the protective lacquer of "art," and by so doing increased the sheer indestructibility of his work by increasing the element of pure artifice in it. Again and again, allusion to a choice incident or moment in past literature or art communicates an esoteric brilliance to the context of the work, and endows it with a reflected and nostalgic grace.

## **12.9 CONCLUSION**

In all such instance of allusion and similes, there is an intentness, or obsessiveness, with which Milton touches in materials of classical antiquity. There is surely more than a tinge of self consciousness at these points, as if some feat were being accomplished against odds. Milton knew that he was writing in *Paradise Lost* the last poem in England to employ Greek and Roman antiquity passionately, that is, soberly, without irony, sentimentality, or false notes. Hence Milton's slight overemphasis at these points, his tendency to care too much exhibits, at some level of his imagination, he must have been aware that the classical world was already irretrievably lost and gone. And yet, his fondness for the allusion to this world underlines his strong belief that it was in this antiquity alone that a writer in England or elsewhere in Europe could look for a rich heritage of great literature as well as of great period of history. Thus, his erudition adds depth as well as vastness to his prose as well as poetry. Reading Milton's work in prose or verse is to enter the entire world of European thought secular as well as theological, and anyone having the ability to enter that world does not return the same person.

## **12.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q.1** Comment in detail on Milton's prose and poetic style.

**Q.2** Elaborate on the pedantic style of Milton.

## **12.11 SUGGESTED READING**

\* New Memoirs of the Life And Political Works of Mr. John Milton by Francis Deck.

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**JOHN MILTON:AREOPAGITICA****13.1 Objective****13.2 Title****13.3 Occasion****13..4 Argument****13.5 Milton's Suggestion to the Parliament about the Licensing Order****13.6 Plea for the Freedom of Press****13.7 Arguments from Theology****13.8 Conclusion****13.9 Examination Oriented Questions****13.10 Suggested Reading****13.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with the main subject of Areopagatica.

**13.2 TITLE**

The title is derived from the Areopagus or high court of Athens, implicitly compared by Milton with Parliament, and, in particular, from an oration addressed to it by Isocrates called *Logos Areopagiticos*. Since Milton also addresses the Parliament, the law-making authority in England, he calls his tract by the title *Areopagitica*. In his address also, he makes a reference to the high court of Athens :



*In Athens where books and wits were ever busier than in any other part of Greece, I find that only two sorts of writings which the magistrate cared to take notice of; those either blasphemous and atheistical or libelous. Thus the books of Protagoras were by the judges of Areopagus commanded to be burnt and himself banished the territory for a discourse begun with his confessing not to know whether these were gods, or whether not.*

Here, Milton cites Areopagus as an example of proper censoring, where only the blasphemous and libellous books were to be banned, and no other. There was full freedom in respect of all other kinds of writing: "of other sects and opinions, though tending to voluptuousness, and the denying of divine Providence, they took no heed." Milton always looked up to the classic Graeco-Roman periods of highest literary and other creations, for norms and standards, in both life and letters. It is no wonder, therefore, that for his address to the Parliament of England on the subject of the Freedom of Press, he goes back to the ancient Greek civilization, where in fifth century B.C. Athens, both art and culture attained the highest level known to the western world. Thus, Milton finds in the Athens court an apt parallel to the Parliament of England. The comparison is, of course, double-edge, while on the other hand, it is meant to elevate the status of the Parliament headed by Cromwell, on the other, it is meant to show the difference that how, even after two thousand years of civilization, his country is still not as advanced as was Athens in ancient Greece.

### **13.3 OCCASION**

The immediate occasion of *Areopagitica* was an order for the supervision of printing passed by Parliament in 1643, some clauses of which Milton quotes. From the Parliamentary point of view this order legalized censorship, which under Charles I had deepened only on a Star

Chamber directive. The Parliamentary order retained the general form and the machinery for enforcement, which was inspection by the Company of Stationers, adopted by its predecessor. Milton feels pained to note that the Commonwealth headed by Cromwell, which stood for freedom of citizens, should not only retain a law introduced by a monarch but also make it more stringent, curbing the very freedom for which it stood. Hence the prose pamphlet, or the tract, as such a writing was called in those days. The tone and tenor of Milton's address, unlike the neo-classical epistles of Pope or Johnson, is in the form of a parliamentary speech, highly rhetorical and elegant; it uses all effective devices of rhetoric to make the argument highly impassioned and persuasive. Milton has written the address as an insider, considering himself as a part of the establishment, reminding his friends and colleagues of those promises and professions, and inspiring them to adopt the highest standards of morality in the interest of the ideal state they wish to set up in the chosen land of their bond.

#### **13. 4 ARGUMENT**

The very epigraph to *Areopagatica*, drawn from the ancient Greek dramatist Euripedes, is an argument in itself. It defines in detail the meaning of human liberty, which is the subject of Milton's address to the Parliament. The epigraph is as under :

*This is true liberty, when free-born men,  
Having to advise the public, may speak free,  
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;  
Who neither can, nor will, may hold his peace:  
What can be juster in a state than this?*

Milton makes it very clear at the very outset that he is not asking for heaven; that is, for an ideal state where there is no authority: "For this is not the liberty we can hope that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth - that let no man in this world expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered and speedily reformed, then is the

almost bound of civil liberty attained that wise men look for." Clearly, Milton is asking for a sensitive and responsive government which should be freely available to the people for a speedy redressal of their grievances. Here, it is the negative side of liberty, where the responsiveness of the government is to the deprivation of individual liberty in any form. In this sense, it means doing justice to the subject of the state. As an example of such an open government Milton cites the case of the Parliament of Athens, which on the basis of the discourse of a private person felt persuaded "to change the form of democracy which was then established." Milton cites the example of Dion Prusaesus, "a stranger and a private orator," how honour was done to men who professed "the study of wisdom and eloquence." Obviously, the example is meant to define the nature of freedom the state should allow for individual expression, and should value an idea. Indirectly, Milton is stressing that censoring the press would mean disrespect to new ideas and curb on the freedom of expression.

On the Athenian analogy Milton wants the Parliament of England to show similar character by repealing the Licensing Act passed in 1643: "Lords and commons, there can no greater testimony appear, than when your prudent spirit acknowledges and obeys the voice of masses from what quarter so ever it be heard speaking and renders ye as willing to appeal any Act of your own setting forth, as any set forth by your predecessors." Milton's focus is on the members of Parliament whose conscience, sense of justice, and love of liberty he wishes to arouse. He makes fervent and passionate appeal to them to value the voice of reason, wherever, it may come from. Following this strategy of landing his Puritan colleagues, flattering them for their love of liberty, which made them rise against and overthrow the King, Milton reminds them of all that they stand for, all that they have been professing, to corner them in to commitment to a conduct of consistency, failing which they will not only be contradicting themselves but also believing the faith they had professed to the public. He exhorts them:

*to show that love of truth which ye eminently profess*

*and that uprightness of your judgement which is not wont to be partial to yourselves; by judging over again and that Order which ye have ordained to regulate printing:- that no book, pamphlet, or paper shall be henceforth printed, unless the same be first approved and licensed by such, or at least one of such, as shall be thereto appointed.*

### **13.5 MILTON'S SUGGESTION TO THE PARLIAMENT ABOUT THE LICENSING ORDER**

Milton then takes up the grounds on the basis of which the Licensing Act should be repealed. First of all, he reminds the Commonwealth members that the inventors of the order were their predecessors, Charles I and his supporters, "whom ye will be loath to own." Milton sees it as reason enough for its rejection. Rather than adopt a measure taken by the enemy of the Commonwealth, they should have outright repealed it. Secondly, Milton raises the question of the status of reading: "What is to be thought is general of reading, whatever sort the book be." He elaborates his views on the value of reading to every individual, showing how it is through reading that new ideas are born and the ideas are circulated among people for the growth and refinement of the individual mind as well as collective culture. Next, Milton points out certain loopholes in the order. He shows how "this order avails nothing to the suppressing of scandalous, seditious, and libellous books, which were mainly intended to be suppressed." What Milton is objecting here is the blanket ban on printing without permission of the state authority. His point is why should the noble and creative minds be subjected to the humiliation of censoring? In other words, the law, as was the case in ancient Athens, should be specific about blasphemous and libellous books. No other book should invite scrutiny of censoring authority. Milton's last ground is "that it will be primarily to the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of truth, not only by disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already, but by hindering and cropping the

discovery that might be yet further made both in religious and civil wisdom."

Highlighting the importance of books, which are expressions of new ideas, Milton warns the authorities of the dangers such a blind blanket censor may cause a country. Of course, when he speaks of books, it is the books by great minds that he has in mind. And the great minds would be known if only their expressed ideas in books are allowed to see the light of day. Milton argues, "who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God ... and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse." As for the discussion for judging the motive of a book, Milton is for leaving the judgement to the individual. In support of his contraction, he cites examples from the *Bible*. He says, "God uses not to captivate under a perpetual childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser.... Solomon informs us that much reading is a weariness to the flesh; but neither he nor other inspired author tells us that such reading is unlawful". Carrying the argument further, Milton contends that it is rather impossible to separate good from evil, the two being so intractably woven into life and human nature. Infact, we can know good, says Milton, only through evil, and vice-versa. As he argues, "Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and is so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned.... It was from out the mind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as the twins cleaving together, leaped into the world." In Milton's view, quite as in Blake's, innocence is vulnerable, as it proved in the case of Adam and Eve. In their view, it is only through the experience of evil that one can regain innocence which will not be vulnerable. That is why we have in Milton idea of "Paradise Regained".

### **Reference to Holy Books**

Reminding the Puritans of their own holy text, the *Bible*, showing

how the story of Adam and Eve bears it out, Milton tries to bring home to them the perils of the Licensing Act, underlining its not being based on the malities of life and human nature, nor borne out by the experience of the ages. As he puts forth :

*Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is just a youngling... is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness. Which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmar through the cave of Mammon and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain. Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of errors to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.*

Thus, Milton takes recourse to the ultimate truth the Christians, especially the Puritans, take as faith, the truth enumerated in *The Bible*. He also corroborates it by invoking the facts of human life and common experience. His reasoned arguments are irrefutable, meant to carry you along on the crest of rhetoric.

### **13.6 PLEA FOR THE FREEDOM OF PRESS**

Milton makes a strong plea for the freedom of press also on the

ground that, after all, it is only for those, who have the capacity to comprehend truth that the books are meant, and to whom "bad" books cannot do any harm. Also, those who do not have the capacity to comprehend truth would neither gain anything by a good book, nor lose anything by the bad. As Milton puts it, " if it be true that a wise man, like a good refiner, can gather gold out of the drossiest volume, and that a fool will be a fool with the best book, yea or without book; there is no reason that we should deprive wise man of any advantage to his wisdom, while we seek to restrain from a fool, that which being restrained will be no hindrance to his folly." As is clear from his reasoning, Milton, even though he takes recourse to religion also, remains primarily a humanist whose sole strength is reason and whose chief concern is humanity. It is as a man of letters, above all, that Milton puts forth his argument for the freedom of press. It is chiefly in the interest of the men of letters that he is out to protect against the narrow puritanical outlook on life.

Milton views the Licensing Act as inimical, primarily, to the interest of literature, which he views as a means of pleasure, carrying purpose no other than moral. It is because of this very reason that he puts forth the following argument :

*If we think to regulate printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulate all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to man. No music must be heard, no song must be set or sung, but what is grave and Doric. There must be licensing dancers, that no gesture, motion and deportment be taught our youth but what by their allowance shall be thought honest; for such Plato was provided of.*

One can see here Milton's irony and humour, but also his tempered anger and deep concern, with the life of imagination which he considers precious for the spiritual progress of art, society or civilization. He considers the Licensing Act the "greatest discouragement and affront that can be

offered to learning and learned men."

In Milton's view, such measures as the Licensing Act, which challenge the honesty and integrity of writers, which undermine the freedom and dignity of the sensitive citizens, which take away the fundamental right of every man to know and judge for himself whatever he chooses to read, must be resisted by all the enlightened people :

*Yet if these things be not resisted seriously and timely by them who have the remedy in their power, but that such iron moulds as these shall have authority to grow out the choicest periods of exquisite books and to commit such a treacherous fraud against the orphan remainders of worthiest men after death, the more sorrow will belong to that hopeless race of men, whose misfortune it is to have understanding. Henceforth, let no man care to learn, or care to be more than worldly-wise; for certainly in higher matters to be ignorant and slothful, to be a common steadfast dunce, will be the only pleasant life, and only in request.*

Thus, with all the eloquence at his command, and with all the power of rhetorical devices, Milton as a man of letters, hits, with irony and satire, the hard-hearted fanatical among the puritans, the hawk or the hard-liners, who want to starve the society of all that is pleasurable and amicable. This is not merely passion in the plea that he makes but also the punch, punch of irony and satire.

In order to sting the puritans, who have professed to be different from their predecessors, from the monarchists, but who are practising the same authoritarian rule, Milton obliquely, hence more effectively, reminds his colleagues of their promises to be different from those they deposed. When the Commonwealth regime came, it was expected that while bishops were to be baited down, then all presses might be open." It was the people's right, says



Milton, and privilege in time of Parliament, it was the breaking forth the light:

*But now the bishops abrogated and voided out of the Church, as if our reformation sought no more but to make room for others into their seats under another name, the Episcopal arts begin to bud again, the cruse of truth must run no more oil, liberty of printing must be enthralled again under prelatical commission of twenty, the privilege of the people nullified, and, which is worse, the freedom of learning must groan again, and to her old fetters: all this the Parliament yet sitting.*

Nothing could be stronger than this from a man who was a part of the establishment of the Commonwealth, who defended and promoted eminently the interests of Parliament against the fierce attack on it by the Royalists. His unusual irony here, not natural to him, only underlines the deep hurt he has received at the draconian measure of the Censoring Act, which put restrictions on the freedom of press.

### **13.7 ARGUMENTS FROM THEOLOGY**

Invoking another argument at his command, this time from theology, Milton argues that faith and knowledge thrive by exercise, just on our limbs and completion. Citing the *Bible*, he emphasizes:

*Truth is compared in the Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her water flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in truth; and if he believe things only because his pastors says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.*

Thus, free press can alone keep the fountain of learning flowing, without any accumulation of mud. It is only through the free press that interaction of minds can take place, and the progress of knowledge can

take place. As Milton argues, "where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; opinions in good man is lust knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism we wrong the earnest and thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city."

### **13.8 CONCLUSION**

Milton's most powerful moment of eloquence comes near the close of the address, when he uses the highly rhetorical mode of prayer to the Puritan Parliamentarians : "you can not make now less capable, less knowing, less eagerly pursuing of the truth, unless ye first make yourselves, that made us so, less the lovers. Less the founders of our true liberty. We can grow ignorant again, brutish, formal and slavish as ye found us; but you then must first become that which ye cannot be, oppressive, unliterary and tyrannous, as they were from whom ye had freed us." The fervent appeal culminates in the famous statement. "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties." Speaking in his soaring exhortation, Milton places truth above everything, superior to all, like the Sun: "for who knows not that truth is strong, next to the Almighty? She needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensing to make her victorious; those are the shifts and defences that errors uses against her power." Thus, Milton concludes his long and imaginative discourse on the necessity of freedom of press, without which neither an individual nor a nation can be called free.

### **13.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q. 1** Discuss the theme and significance of *Areopagitica*.
- Q. 2** "Milton constantly reveals himself in his Prose". Discuss with special reference to *Areopagitica*.
- Q. 3.** Discuss the main argument in *Areopagitica*.

### **13.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* John Milton (Longman Critical Readers) by Annable Patterson.

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**JOHN MILTON : AREOPAGITICA**

- 14.1 Objective
- 14.2 In the form of Addressal
- 14.3 Aim of the Book
- 14.4 Poetic Method
- 14.5 Style of Areopagitica
- 14.6 Grand Style
- 14.7 Allusions
- 14.8 Rhetorical Style
- 14.9 Conclusion
- 14.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.11 Suggested Reading

**14.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to highlight the art of *Areopagitica* alongwith all the techniques and stylistic devices used by the author John Milton.

**14.2 IN THE FORM OF ADDRESSAL**

Although written in the form of an address to Parliament, very much like a speech, Milton's *Areopagitica* is very consciously and deliberately

designed as a piece of literature in poetic prose. The great example of a similar address before Milton was of Dion Chrysostom, a Greek orator, who persuaded the Rhodians not to allow their rulers to put their names on ancient monuments. Milton holds ancient Greece as a model of "elegant humanity", which he esteems fit to imitate. He goes on, "I could name him who from his private house wrote that discourse to the Parliament of Athens, that persuades them to change the form of democracy which was then established." He puts before his own countrymen the Greek example as a model of a civilized society, where writers are honored as sane voices, even those hailing from foreign lands and tongues. Emphasizing the point, Milton says, "Such honour was done in those days to men who professed the study of wisdom and eloquence, not only in their own country, but in other lands that cities and signiories heard them gladly, and with great respect, if they had aught in public to admonish the state. Thus, did Dion Prusaicus, a stranger and a private orator, counsel the Rhodians against a former edict."

### **14.3 AIM OF THE BOOK**

Thus, with the ambition in mind to emulate the Greek orator in elegance and eloquence, in literary establishments, Milton wrote his *Areopagitica* in the grand style, very much a prose counterpart of his grand style in *Paradise Lost*. Poetry is marked by its formal elements of metre and rhythm, which have the power to throw the reader into a state of heightened susceptibility to emotional influence. It makes us amenable to suggestion of emotion and thought which, on the plane of prose, could only pierce our consciousness if they had the weight of much relevant circumstances behind them. The writer of prose has to take us by slow degrees into an imaginary world where his suggestions can work as powerfully upon us. The method of poetry is the instrument of a greater and more rapid concentration. It can take advantage of our condition of susceptibility and act more swiftly. But a different degree of rapidity in action is not really a different kind of action.

#### 14.4 POETIC METHOD

There is a great deal of prose which, consciously or unconsciously, adopts the poetic method. Milton's *Areopagitica* has been consciously written as a piece of literature by adopting the poetic method. Here, the poet-orator has taken recourse to the poetic devices of metaphor and image, allusion and symbol, irony and satire, to design a powerful piece of imaginative prose. Using all the devices of rhetoric and eloquence, he has structured the piece to effect an influence of persuasion on the staunch and severe puritans. Milton chose to write his address in poetic prose, in which it is much more difficult than in poetry to make the rhythmical variations really perceptible. His *Areopagitica* is a singular instance, and a singular triumph, of poetic prose. The condition of emotional susceptibility in which we are plunged by it is extraordinary. In the process of making it poetic, Milton seems to go much beyond his immediate task of defending the freedom of press. Just as Shakespeare goes far beyond the revenge theme in *Hamlet*, or the comic model in the character of Falstaff, Milton, too, travels far beyond the boundaries of an ordinary address to parliament. His *Areopagitica* reads much rather a poem on the immortality of soul. Note, for instance the following :

*For this is not the liberty, which we can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth, that let no man in the World expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained, that wise men look for. To which if I now manifest by the very sound of this which I shall utter, that we are already in good part arrived, and from such a step disadvantage of tyranny and superstition grounded into our principles as was beyond the manhood of a Roman recovery, it will be attributed first as is most due, to the strong assistance of God our deliverer, next to your faithful guidance and undaunted wisdom, Lords and Commons of England.*

Here, Milton's superb music is quite dominant. The only debate that could really be conducted to such an accomplishment, is a debate of archangels. And that is what *Areopagitica* really is. One weeps tears of joy at the sheer beauty of the orchestration. But that is not the mood to appreciate a piece of political pleading

The distinction we can make between prose and poetry, is reduced to this : that poetry makes use of metre and rhythm as a primary means of bringing us to a condition of susceptibility to emotion and thought. The employment of this means has an influence on the methods used to communicate emotion and thought, because it presupposes a swiftness of response which the writer of prose cannot assume. A poet may crowd image upon image in a way that will be illegitimate in prose, where if the working on the reader's mind is slower it is also more thorough. But the difference between the two is not an essential difference; it is difference of tempo rather than structure, except, perhaps, in the case of that prose which asks us to compare and to judge. Here, in Milton's *Areopagitica*, the difference between poetry and prose is only to the extent that Milton's piece is not written in metre. Except the use of metre, it makes use of all those devices of poetry Milton does in *Paradise Lost*.

#### **14.5 STYLE OF *AREOPAGITICA***

The style of *Areopagitica* can be called "the grand style," for which Milton has been known as the best example both in poetry and prose written in the English language. This style is marked by not merely an uncommon language, nor an uncommon syntax, but by an above-the-average eloquence of thought and emotion, diction and rhetoric, tone and tenor. The grand style can be considered a technical (poetic) device for a particular end, and is not really an equivalent of the peculiar usage of classical poetry, which draws upon a different vocabulary from that of prose. The vocabulary of English poetry does not differ widely from that of English prose. The poets keep a good many words alive that have passed out of common speech, and there a few definitely

poetic words, and a few un-poetic words. However, the distinction is not as marked as in the classical languages like Greek and Latin. In the golden age of English literature, the Elizabethan, no particular distinction was made between the vocabularies of prose and poetry. The difference between the two was merely of tempo. Of course, there was that peculiar Elizabethan rhetoric which was natural to Marlowe, and which the rest of them could turn on when they liked. But that was a rhetoric of exaggeration. If they wished to suggest that someone in misery might as well kill herself, this is how they said it :

*When thy poor heart beats with outrageous beating  
Thou cant strike it thus to make it still.  
Wound it with sighing, girl, kill it with groans;  
Or get some little knife between thy teeth,  
And just against thy heart make thou a hole:  
That all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall  
May run into that sink, and, soaking in,  
Drown the lamenting pool in sea-salt tears.*

But the Elizabethan rhetoric has nothing to do with the "grand style." That is the deliberate invention of Milton alone. He did it first for the special purpose of his celestial argument. But he also was drawn to it because he felt the necessity of reacting against the influence of Shakespeare and Marlowe. It is much simpler, and more useful, to regard the grand style in English as the style of Milton.

#### **14.6 GRAND STYLE**

Milton's grand style is a true and a great style. It is the perfect medium of expression for a mode of thought and feeling which are absolutely individual. It is as different from the style of Dante as it is from the style of Donne. It is absolutely different from the styles of contemporaries like Dryden and Marvell. Milton works his grand style through an elevation of diction and syntax, matter and manner. Very much in the mould of what

Longinus called "sublime" Milton works his prose as well as verse at a level, which never looks down. Take, for instance, the following :

*If ye be thus resolved, as it were injury to think ye were not, I know not what should withhold me from presenting ye with a fit instance wherein to show both that love of truth which ye eminently profess, and that uprightness of your judgment which is not wont be practical to yourself; by judging over again that order which ye have ordained to regulate printing:... that no book, pamphlet, or paper shall be henceforth printed, unless the same be first approved and licensed by much, or at least one of such, as shall be thereto appointed.*

Here, we can notice the elegance through elevation, rhythm through parallelism, persuasion through pleading, and pleading through persuasion, carried from clause to clause into a long, but balanced periodic sentence, leaving an impact of sobriety and seduction difficult to resist by any listener.

#### **14.7 ALLUSIONS**

Also, as in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's prose is marked by a continuous reference to classical myth and history, art and literature, life and philosophy to draw comparison as well as contrast to the life and thought of his own time, which he is trying to reform and to elevate. Read, for instance the following:

*Therefore we do not read that either Epicurus, or the libertine school of Cyrene, or Cynic impudence uttered, was ever questioned by the laws. Neither is it recorded that the writings of those old comedians were suppressed, through the acting of them were forbid; and the Plato commended the Reading of Aristophanes, the loosest of them all, to his royal scholar, Dionysus, is commonly known,*



*and may be excused, if holy Chrysostom, as is reported, nightly studied so much the same author and had the art to cleanse a scurrilous vehemence into the style of rousing sermon.*

Here, the argument, working through narration (of an anecdotal type), is woven into an account measuring an experience in imagination, carrying the force of reason, but effected through emotion. That is how poetry works, and that is how Milton's prose in *Areopagitica* works the grand style functions here, even as it does in *Paradise Lost*, as noble and deeply as do the Biblical stories of saints and their miracles.

#### **14.8 RHETORICAL STYLE**

Equally powerful is Milton's rhetoric through which he projects the vision of England being a great nation chosen by God to be graced for becoming the leading light among the nations of the world. A similar strategy Walt Whitman, the American poet, later uses in his prose and verse, projecting America as the nation chosen by God for leading other nations. See how Milton builds up his vision through a steady but soaring march of rhetoric :

*Lords and Commons of England: consider what nation it is where ye are and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinew to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to...*

*Yet that which is above all this, the favour and love of Heaven, we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending towards us. Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion, should the proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of reformation to all Europe?*

Although, there is, in these wordings, a delicate modulation of word as well as tactful handling of tone, which works to manipulate the minds of the audience in a definite direction; the elegance and sobriety of the prose is never permitted to make any compromise with their innate integrity. The more Milton rides the crest of rhetoric, the taller he becomes as a voice, commanding voluntary obedience of his listeners. The hypnotic effect of both the rhetoric as well as the rhythm of his prose is so powerful that emotion is made to gain command of reason.

All the same, reason and argument in Milton are not there to act as impediments in the hypnotic drive of his rhetoric and rhythm. Infact, reason and argument in Milton support rhetoric and rhythm, making a powerful blend of emotion and reason, carrying the companionship of the otherwise opposing tendencies to such a level that nothing discordant is left dangling at any level of the operation. Here is a passage of the type, which illustrates Milton's mastery of the grand style :

*And how can a man teach with authority, which is the life of teaching; how can he be a doctor in his book as he ought to be, or else had better be silent, when as all he teaches, all he delivers, is but under the tuition, under the correction of his patriarchal licenser to blot or after what precisely accords not with the hidebound humour which he calls his judgment? When every acute reader, upon the first sight of a pedantic licence, will be ready with these like words to ding the book a quoit's distance from him: I hate a pupil teacher, I endure not an instructor that comes to me under the wardship of an overseeing fist.*

Here there is a clear argument, reasoned through rhetoric, and yet made rhythmical through phrases and clauses carefully arranged to contrive an emotional effect on the reader. Oratorical skills, too, are not spared by Milton in making his poetic prose a powerful literary instrument of political persuasion.

Milton's *Areopagitica* is designed as a piece of powerful oration. Hence, the strategies of addressing his audience, reminding them over and over again, that they are being implored, placing them on a high pedestal, as a part of the strategy to soften them towards the Doctrine of their own doing, making them believe what Milton believes. They are actually not, carrying them unaware on the wings of his painful creation of a world after his, and also their heart's desire. Note, for instance, the following :

*Behold now this vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not there move anvils and hammers making, to fashion onto the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth then there he pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement, what could a man require more from a nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge?*

#### **14.9 CONCLUSION**

Thus creates Milton a world and vision of London in his grand style that even the sulking severe protestants find it hard to resist residing in the dream world. The flattering image of both, these governors and the nation they govern, is used by Milton to disarm armory, there might be with the makers of the Doctrine of Licence. He succeeds through his powerful oration soaring on the strong wings of both rhetoric and rhythm. The special grand purpose required the special grand style, which Milton forged and forcefully used to achieve effects of heroic poetry in equally heroic prose. No subsequent writer has been able to achieve these effects in poetry or prose in English literature.

#### **14.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Comment upon Milton's prose style with special reference to *Areopagitica*.
- Q.2 Write a resume of Milton's tribute to the English nation in the *Areopagitica* and comment on the style in which it is paid.
- Q.3 Write short notes on Milton's:
- 1) Grand Style
  - 2) Allusions

#### **14.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* *The Critical Response to John Milton's Paradise Lost*. Edited by Timothy C. Miller.

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**JONATHAN SWIFT: THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS****15.1 Objective****15.2 Swift and Defoe****15.3 Swift's Brief Biographical Sketch****15.4 Genesis of his Early Prose Works****15.5 As an Arrogant Bitter Satirist****15.6 His Insanity****15.7 His Style and Diction****15.8 Conclusion****15.9 Examination Oriented Questions****15.10 Suggested Reading****15.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to enumerate on the social and literary background of Jonathan Swift.

**15.2 SWIFT AND DEFOE**

In many ways Jonathan Swift's career resembles that of Daniel Defoe. First of all, both were seriously involved in the dangerous occupation of political writing. Secondly, both of them were great supporters of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford. Their backgrounds were decidedly different. While

Defoe was a tradesman, Swift came of a little more genteel stock. But there were more significant differences between the two than that of their backgrounds. Defoe was a dissenter with a middle-class practical education. On the other hand, Swift was a churchman and a university graduate. As an independent neo-classical writer, he knew how to use brilliantly a good classical training. As a contrast to Swift, Defoe was not conscious of the classics as patterns for writing. These formal differences notwithstanding, Swift and Defoe were men of strong common sense. Both looked upon mankind with curiosity as well as suspicion. There was also a difference between their attitude to mankind. Where as Defoe possessed a wide factual knowledge of the political, social, and economic conditions of England, Swift was content to condemn the "conditions" because he found them much against his ideals. Temperamentally also, whereas Swift was rather rash, Defoe was more cool and considerate.

Going by the tone and tenor of his books, it can be said that Swift viewed the conditions of his age with contempt. It is for this very reason that, quite often, critics have called him a cynic. The label of a cynic is rather harsh for a writer like Swift. No doubt, he is, at times, found hating mankind as such, looking with contempt all that the human creature does. But if a cynic is one who denies the existence of human values, the term would certainly sound inappropriate for Swift. One cannot overlook his fine sense of values implicit in all the books he wrote. Even when he wrote contemptuously and vexatiously, he always did so for the good of mankind. Very much like Defoe, whenever he was convinced that a public measure was right, he did not hesitate to adopt even unscrupulous means for supporting that measure.

One can see even an element of the Satanic feeling of injured merit in Swift's attitude to the society of his time. More than any other man of genius, he fancied himself in the role of merit unrewarded. Although he sounds frigid on the surface, there is, always in his writings, an undercurrent of strong emotions. He also writes playfully, providing lots of fun for the reader. The fact that one can find things laughable

in life shows that he is not a cynic. Both Defoe and Swift did focus their writings on what was dark and evil in human nature, but both did in order to effect improvement in the moral constitution of mankind. Swift's satires, no doubt, carry most piercing sting in them. But the more bitter his satire becomes, the greater is the writer's concern with the moral health of the human species to which he himself belongs and in whose activities he wishes to remain a participant.

Swift's career in intellectual terms has several aspects to it, including those of ecclesiast, philosophy, and politics. One can chronologically divide it into four or five phases, all of which reflect one or another aspect of his personality. And in order that we may understand his personality, it is necessary that all these aspects are taken into consideration.

### **15.3 SWIFT'S BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Jonathan Swift was born in 1667, of English parents living in Ireland. It was in Ireland also that Swift received his education. He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin - the capital city of Ireland. He faced some difficulty in completing his education because he refused to study logic, which was one of the essential components of graduate education. He left Ireland for England at the time of the Revolution in 1688. This can be called the first phase of his career; generally, it is termed as the Irish phase. During this period, his status was that of a dependent poor relation. Rather than crush his self-esteem, poverty, built up in the young man an inordinate and overbearing pride. He knew no humility in all his life thereafter.

The second phase of Swift's career began as secretary to Sir William Temple, who was living at that time in retirement mainly at Moor Park, Surrey. While Swift languished here as a poor relation to a lord, his former schoolmate and friend, William Congreve, was winning fame in London as the leading dramatist of the Restoration period. Jealous of all this, he wanted to reach London to try his luck there. This made him highly dissatisfied with Moor Park. But his stay with Sir William Temple was not without compensation, although he did not appreciate all of them. For example, he

was able to meet distinguished people there, which included King William himself. And then, he learned from Temple a good deal about the politics of England. Swift also absorbed from Temple the latter's disbelief in the idea of progress, and his belief in cycles of change, whereby, civilization graced now in China, Peru, Greece, and Rome. It seems his duties at Moor Park were not without rewards. His duty of supervising the education of the eight-year old child, Esther Johnson, a daughter of William Temple, gave Swift an urge to improve the minds of ladies he got to know intimately. He later called this very girl by the fictitious name of Stella (after she had gone to live in Ireland), and wrote a series of letters under the title *Journal to Stella* (1784). She was his first and only "perfect" pupil. In this pupil of his, mind predominated, as Swift thought, it should, over emotions.

During this very period, from 1688 to Sir William's death in 1699, Swift read and thought much. In a way, this was the formative period of his life as a writer. Strangely, his writing began with a group of Pindaric odes, of which he decided to publish only one. This "*Ode to the Athenian Society*," printed in the *Athenian Gazette* (1692), is like the odes he did not publish. Some of the common qualities of these odes are: their turgidness, loftiness, and obscurity. These qualities are very much unlike those of Swift's prose. They can be called atypical of his genius. Dryden made an uncharitable remark on this ode: "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet." Very true! Swift never, thereafter, attempted to write poetry. An evidence to his genius not being for poetry are also the epistles Swift wrote to Congreve and to Sir William. They are, like his published odes, equally involved and artificial. They are written in rhymed couplets of rather indifferent merit. Never again was Swift to try for verses except to burlesque them. He clearly decided that thereafter, any poetry he would write, must be natural in a realistic and functionalist sense. Thus, whatever poetry he had to write later, it was to be as "unpoetical" as possible, without any ornament and without any emotional glow.

#### **15.4 GENESIS OF HIS EARLY PROSE WORKS**

It was again at Moor Park that Swift wrote, during the years 1696-



98, his first and very important prose works, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. He published these books in 1704. Very much superior to his odes and epistles, these prose works do share with those early poems their effervescence. The method adopted in these pieces is the same as in his odes: his fancy coruscates around the ideas it wishes to express or to discredit. There is no urge to forward-moving or direct structure of thought. These works had their origin in the so-called neo-classical quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. Swift's master, William Temple, too, had participated in this quarrel by writing an essay, *Of Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690). This essay triggered fiery debate on the subject. It provoked a Cambridge don, William Wotton, who answered the essay by writing his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694). The don patiently explained to Temple and the world the advances of modern science. He also exposed Temple's ignorance about both ancient learning and modern sciences. His ignorance about ancient learning was also exposed by the Oxford dons who edited the works Temple had commented on, thereby, showing by comparison Temple's misreading of the ancient works.

Swift could not resist the temptation of joining the battle going on between the admirers of ancient learning and promoters of the modern. The result was *The Battle of the Books*, which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent lessons on Swift. Meanwhile, Swift found that his position with Temple was growing unbearable. He quarrelled with his patron, took orders, and entered the Church of England. A few years later, he settled in the little church of Laracor, Ireland - a country which he disliked strongly, but had to go because perhaps there was no other "living" available to him.

While in Ireland, Swift sincerely devoted himself to his church duties. He worked hard to improve the conditions of the unhappy people around him. Never before had the poor of his parishes received the attention, Swift gave them. But Swift did not feel very happy in his church job. He grew more and more irritated by the fact that people of much less merit were advancing to high positions, even in the church, and he was not getting his due. His sense of injured merit became stronger. This added to his bitterness with life and

with mankind in general. The reason for the denial of advancement to him was Swift's own pride. He was rude and blunt in his dealings with even those who could have promoted him in the church service, or in politics. While at Laracor, he was able to finish his *A Tale of a Tub*, which is a satire on the various churches of the day; it was published in London with *The Battle of the Books* in 1704. These works brought him into public notice as the most powerful satirist of his time. This encouraged him to give up his church job and enter the battle of party politics.

### 15.5 AS AN ARROGANT BITTER SATIRIST

In the age of Swift and Pope, the Augustan age, the cheap pamphlet was then the most powerful political weapon. Since, there was no one else to match the merit of Swift as satirist, he soon emerged as a veritable dictator in the field of pamphlet writing. For a long time, especially between 1710 and 1713, he remained one of the most important figures in London. The Whigs (now called Labour Party) feared the lash of his satire. The Tories (the other major and conservative political party in England) feared him also because they did not want to lose his support. As a result, both the political parties courted, flattered, and cajoled him to win him over to their side. But the use he chose to make of the power of his pen is rather sad to contemplate. An unhearable arrogance took possession of him. Lords and ladies, statesmen and writers alike were compelled to sue his favour and to apologise for every fancied slight to his inflated egoism. It is during this period of extreme arrogance that he wrote several nasty pieces in his *Journal to Stella*. Here is a sample of those pieces :

*Mr. Secretary told me the Duke of Buckingham had been talking much about me and desired my acquaintance. I answered it could not be, for he had not yet made sufficient advances; then Shrewsbury said I could not help that, for I always expected advances in proportion to men's quality, and more a Duke than any other man.*

No man of any merit, literary or otherwise, is expected to be a

victim of such a pride and arrogance. It does not so much harm its object as it belittles its subject. The arrogant and proud man loses more than does the one who has to suffer the pride and arrogance of such a person. And, for sure, Swift did suffer in his reputation both as man and writer because of his pride and arrogance.

When Tories went out of power Swift's position became uncertain. He thought, and was perhaps promised, that he would be made a bishop in England, with a seat among the peers of the realm. But the Tories themselves had offended him because they offered him instead the place of dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. This act on the part of the Tories was galling to a man of his proud temperament. After Swift's satire, which was merciless, on religion in *A Tale of A Tub*, no such ecclesiastical position in England could be offered to its writer, be it the Tories in power, or their rival Whigs. Dublin was the best that could be offered to him. He did accept the position because he had no choice. But he became bitter with the Tories. He once again cursed his fate he had brought upon himself.

## **15.6 HIS INSANITY**

With return to Ireland, began the last act of tragedy of Swift's life. Although it sounds strange, all his work resulted from his bitterness with one or another institution, be it religion or politics. And the more bitter he became, the more powerful his satire emerged. Here in Ireland once again, with greater bitterness eating his inside than ever before, he wrote his best known literary work, *Gulliver's Travels*. Unfortunately, the bitterness of life slowly grew into insanity. Also grew with the insanity a frightful personal sorrow, of which he never spoke, which reached its climax in the death of Esther Johnson, his old pupil. Esther had grown into a beautiful young woman, who had loved Swift ever since the two had met in Temple's house-hold, and to whom he had addressed his *Journal to Stella*.

During the last years of his life, the brain disease of which the symptoms had appeared earlier tightened its terrible hold on Swift. He became by turns an idiot and a mad man. He died in 1745. When his will was opened after

his death, it was discovered that he had left all his property for founding St. Patrick's Asylum for lunatics and incurables. The structure stands today as the most suggestive monument of his peculiar genius.

### 15.7 HIS STYLE AND DICTION

That Swift remains the most original writer of his time, and one of the greatest masters of English prose, cannot be denied. The chief qualities of his prose, such as directness, vigour, simplicity, mark each page of his writings. He stands almost alone among the writers of his age so far as disdain of literary effects is concerned. He always kept his object steadily before him, and drove straight on to the target. In his prose writings, he demonstrated an unsurpassable power. Even in his most grotesque creations, the reader is never allowed to lose sense of the everyday reality of life. He makes the reader feel as if he was an eyewitness to the most impossible events. In other words, even the most improbable characters and events in his work emerge convincing and real to the reader. Defoe is credited with a similar power. But writing works like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* was a much easier task than writing *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Tale of a Tub*. For while in the case of Defoe's books, it is everyday reality itself which finds its way into his books, in the case of Swift, it is the world of pigmies, giants, and the most impossible situations which is made life-like or real.

Notwithstanding, some of these fine qualities of his prose works, however, he is not a writer, like Sterne, who could be easily accessible to the common reader. His works do not offer, what is known to be wholesome reading. The bulk of it, in any case, is rather difficult. It is highly satiric, and even destructive. The central concerns of his works remain the faults and failings of mankind and their institutions. In a way, it runs counter to the general course of English prose fiction, especially the novel, where pleasure and purpose are blended in stories of love and adventure, or mystery and miracle. Infact, hardly any body, and certainly no normal person, either today or in the eighteenth century would agree to Swift's philosophy of life (such as it is). Nor would any one consider his view of life adequate

in any sense. And yet the fable he creates, say in *Gulliver's Travels*, very much remains with us. And so does the enormous moral force of that fable.

## **15.8 CONCLUSION**

Taken as a serious positive judgment about the nature of man, Swift's opinions may not be acceptable to us. But "his sense of life, of actual reality, is so profound and passionate," as Arnold Kettle opines, "that the inadequacy of his opinions not matter." Whatever weakness there is, in his view of life, is amply made up by the power of his prose. His case is not very different from that of Sterne, for both fail as philosophers but succeed as writers. Those, who hold on to the mythical view of the Augustan society as a world of elegant refinement and rational approach are forced to carry Swift off to the psycho-analyst's consulting-room. The spirit of his prose is marked by an anger, a bitter anger at what man has made of man, which comes out, not from an abstract idea, but from a bold realism, an ability to look the facts in the face, an unflinching sense of life.

## **15.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q.1** Discuss the conditions under which Jonathan Swift developed as a writer.

**Q.2** What are the chief qualities of Swift's prose?

## **15.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Jonathan Swift: A collection of critical Essays by Claude Julien Rawson
- \* Jonathan Swift: The Critical Heritage by Kathleen Williams
- \* The Battle of Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age by Joseph M Levine
- \* The Poiesis of Non-Modern Modernity: Swift's Battle of the Books by Nathalie Zimpfer (article)
- \* Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books by Marcello Cattano (article)

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## **JONATHAN SWIFT: THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS**

- 16.1 Objective**
- 16.2 Introduction**
- 16.3 Prose Style of Swift**
- 16.4 Conclusion**
- 16.5 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 16.6 Suggested Reading**

### **16.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to throw light on the style of writing of Jonathan Swift.

### **16.2 INTRODUCTION**

Most critics have considered Swift's style of writing rather simple, which is not really the case. Herbert Read, in his book on style, draws attention to this particular virtue of simplicity in the prose writings of Swift. In Read's view, "however widely his vision might extend, however deep his insight, his mode of expression remained simple, and single, and clearly comprehensible." The critical emphasis on the simplicity of Swift's style is, of course, not unfounded. Swift himself drew attention to this very virtue in various places. For instance, in his remarks on preaching in his *Letter to a Young Gentleman*, he refers to "that simplicity, without which no human Performance can arrive to any great Perfection." The critical emphasis

has been a case of overstatement. There is, therefore, a need for an examination of the nature of this simplicity and its actual significance in the goals and purposes of Swift's prose writings. There is a still greater need to check the critical habit of considering this virtue of simplicity as the first and foremost of Swift's qualities.

Examined a little more carefully, it would be discovered that this element of simplicity in Swift's prose is rather deceptive. In most places, it is used for ironic purposes. For instance, Swift's description of Gulliver's arrival on the shore of Lilliput is cited as an example of this virtue. The fact of the matter is that the author has a special ironical motive here for cultivating the matter-of-fact narrative style of contemporary travel books. It is essential to the effectiveness of *Gulliver's Travels* that its hero should seem to be a plain man telling a plain tale. And Swift achieves this effect under the cover of that assumed manner of simplicity. In the many roles, which Swift adopted as a writer, it sometimes suits his purpose to deal plainly and straightforwardly with this subject. But quite often, he only appears to do so or does so only in part. His simplicity in syntax and diction is liable to be a camouflage for insidious intentions.

### **16.3 PROSE STYLE OF SWIFT**

One of the reasons for an overemphasis on the simplicity of Swift's prose has been the critical attempt to emphasize the differences between his art and that of the seventeenth-century writers. As a matter of fact, this attempt deflects attention from the qualities which Swift shares with the seventeenth-century writers. To arrive at a proper appreciation of his style we need to emphasize both the affinities as well as the differences between his art and that of the seventeenth-century writers. The demand for a simple prose has been historically related to the requirements of the new science and philosophy and the rejection of the old, fanciful type of speculation associated with Sir Thomas Browne. In this contrast, Swift naturally becomes representative of the new plain prose derived from Nature and Reason. Unfortunately, this binary opposition between simple and fanciful does not allow us to appreciate the richness and variety of Swift's art.

In his brilliant play with the old modes of learned speculation, his imaginative fertility in developing concretely an absurd pseudo-scientific conception, his dialectical resourcefulness and effrontery, Swift is of the world of Rabelais, Donne, and Ben Jonson. Therefore, the Augustan economy of Swift's prose is not a quality to be isolated. It must be studied in relation to the arts which he inherited from earlier periods, which it modifies and which modify it. Also, the earlier period is the greater period. By realizing his link with this period, we acquire a more generous sense of his greatness. Hence, plainness and simplicity in themselves are not sufficiently interesting qualities to be given first place in our account of such a writer as Swift. It is in the earlier works, such as *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*, that the more exuberant side of Swift's art is most apparent. There are some delectable examples in these books of his ability to play with learned ideas, exploiting them ingeniously to build up a comic conception.

One of Swift's masters in the art of playing with learned ideas was Rabelais, the English translation of whose work was completed in the 1670's, not long before Swift wrote his early satires just mentioned. In the third book of Rabelais, there is a pleasant example in Panurge's celebrated defence of his own improvidence, in which arguments are drawn from astronomy, physiology, and other branches of learning to prove that borrowing and lending are the basic principles governing the universe. A witty misapplication of learned ideas in support of an audacious conclusion was one of the arts of the metaphysical poets. Of course, it is not sufficient to say that Swift ridiculed in his writings old ideas and intellectual procedures. To make such superb comic use of them, he had to be imaginative, at home, with them. The ideas he used were his ideas, so far as his art was concerned.

One of Swift's arts, much in evidence in the early works, consists in inventing a theory based on learned or pseudo-learned ideas in order to explain the phenomenon, which is the object of his satire. One such instance is the fanaticism or "enthusiasm" of the nonconformist sects. Swift begins with a Sauv e, apparently innocuous, statement of the theory, and then



proceeds to develop a series of grotesque images showing the theory in action. What is notable in all such passages is the imaginative play between the idea and the concrete detail, the one always enhancing the other. At times, an illusion is created that the fantastic posturings embody something significant, like ritual. The absurdities take on a mysterious piquancy, and at the same time a mathematical sharpness. The ability to lend sharpness to the solid specifics of a description, to an extraordinary scheme of ideas, is one of the special qualities of Ben Jonson's art. The assimilation of image to idea is especially associated with the art of the Metaphysical poets. Swift is in their tradition.

An admirable example of the metaphysical art of "arguing through images" occurs in *The Battle of the Books*. The instance relates to the quarrel between the Bee and the Spider. Through an effective manipulation of terms, the quarrel is made an embodiment of the dispute between Ancients and Moderns. The difference between two types of intellectuals is stated by the Spider, who intends the comparison to favour himself, but achieves the opposite effect :

*Your Livelihood is a universal Plunder upon Nature: a Freebooter over Fields and Gardens; and for the sake of Stealing, will rob a Nettle as readily as a Violet. Whereas I am a domestic Animal, furnish with a Native Stock within myself. This large Castle (to show my Improvements in the Mathematics) is all built with my own Hands, and the Materials extracted altogether out of my own Person.*

If there is less play with learned ideas after this earlier period, to which *The Battle of the Books* belongs, there is no diminution but rather an intensification in his use of the arts of argument. The witty use of these techniques in literature belongs, historically, to the age when dialectic was still important in education, when the ability to dispute on either side of a case was an accepted accomplishment in schools and colleges. The English master of ratiocinative wit, of the art of developing a plausibly outrageous argument, are Donne, Dryden, and Swift, of whom the last is,

surely, the most astonishing. But dialectical dexterity declined in importance because the philosophers and scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not find any use for the traditional logic. That is why, the English writers after this period have shown much less skill in these arts.

Swift's capacity to see all the possibilities for wit in a situation is remarkable. He achieves a series of surprises as he moves from position to position exploiting each possibility. His basic strategy in a number of works is to write in the character of someone from whose standpoint the facts he is satirizing can be stated with disconcerting freedom. For instance, in *A Modest Proposal*, one of the most wonderful pamphlets ever written in English, the horror of the proposal is stated with impunity in all its shocking details. The "modest" (or outrageous?) proposal is that the children of the poor should be sold as food for the tables of the rich. But the horror that the proposal creates is commensurate with the horror actually existing and permitted by the social groups which Swift's readers represent. His technique is to develop the one by continual reference to the other, so that every statement is double-edged:

*I have already computed the Charge of nursing a Beggar's child (in which list I reckon all Cottagers, Labourers, and four fifths of the Farmers) to be about two shillings per Annum, Rags included, and I believe no Gentleman would repine to give Ten shillings for the Carcass of a good fat Child....*

The horrors are all the more effective here in that they are not presented as horrors. They are just introduced casually as part of the evidence for, or illustration of, his project. The tone of most of the pamphlet is easy and matter-of-fact. The appeal is to the reader's practical reasonableness. Any attempt to excite pity or indignation is excluded. It is only towards the end that he finds a pretext for a change of tone and an overwhelming frontal attack.

Swift's virtuosity in works like *A Modest Proposal* transcends anything that a mere textbook of rhetoric or dialectic could have taught him on the subject of "invention," the traditional name for the art of opening up a

topic and finding all there was to be said about it. The effects of Swift's maneuverings of the general strategy of his prose works depends largely on characters of fictitious persons that allow him freedom in the choice of idiom from which he is always ready to profit. *The Draper's Letters*, for instance, are written in the character of a plain-speaking citizen, who expresses his contempt in round terms, and illustrates his point with common-sense arithmetic. That is the fiction, but under the cover of his fiction Swift writes with a studied baldness and an ominous mathematical explicitness. The effect of such a writing is far from that of plain, homely exposition. The idiom appropriate to the assumed character is manipulated as an artistic medium and applied with an intense deliberateness.

We also need to remember that Swift uses more than one prose style in his writings. Each style he uses is determined by the theme and purpose he chooses to write about. For example, *The Battle of the Books*, *Directions to Servants*, *A Meditation Upon a Broomstick*, *A Modest Proposal* are written in styles very different from one another. Like Joyce in recent times, Swift was a connoisseur of the different uses of language. Among all his books, it is *Gulliver's Travels* which has been most contentious among critics as to the nature and effect of language used in it. To the readers and critics who tend to take the "Augustan" view of Swift, this book appears as a straight attack on the degradation of the human species in the name of "Nature and Reason." Further, Gulliver, who is viewed only as another name for the author, as he seems to reject humanity, is called by these critics a misanthropist. As Carl Van Doren, one of Swift's biographers, has remarked, "Jonathan Swift aimed at mankind the most venomous arrow that scorn has ever yet let loose." However, if we can forget his being a writer of the Augustan age, and see him first and foremost a wit, who is skilled in the elaboration of ideas, which do not directly represent his own beliefs, then we can certainly arrive not only at a more satisfactory interpretation of his book, but also at a more acceptable view of its author.

Swift, through his clever and subtle technique, compels us to entertain the conclusion, implied or arrived at in *Gulliver's Travels*. The conclusion is, that man is virtually a yahoo or worse. No doubt, it is an impossible

and outrageous conclusion. Clearly, Swift has practised upon us some trick to make us accept his conclusion, which we must try to understand. Where has Swift deviated from a true view of human nature to achieve this distortion? What is the relevant fact about man which he has manipulated to misrepresent or suppress? To a Christian, which Swift was, the relevant facts would be man's moral weakness owing to the Fall and the need for Christian charity in judging him. On the other hand, a modern or non-theological answer would be that man, in his development from primitive forms of life, has achieved only a limited rationality and morality, so that a measure of failure in all human beings must be expected.

Swift's strategy is to cause man to be judged by creatures that are unequipped to understand him sympathetically. The Houyhnhnms, living the placid life of reason, neither inspired nor troubled by irrational forces, know nothing of the indignity or the glory of the human state. They are on a different metaphysical level from man. But they have a sense of values which imposes itself. Swift creates these creatures only to embarrass mankind. To allow the plain-man Gulliver to be converted to these creatures' standpoint is also a part of the author's strategy. What do these creatures represent? They perhaps remind us of the impossible and inhuman standard of perfection which we people apply to our fellow-men when we are unreasonable. And it is a part of Swift's witty purpose here to be unreasonable. The Houyhnhnms, obviously, represent the Augustan positives of "Reason, Truth, and Nature." But they do not represent Swift's "positives," his values. Swift was always outraged by disorder and dirt; order and cleanliness did appeal to him. But that is not all. Swift looked far beyond these virtues for something of greater significance. We must distinguish here between the beliefs and attitudes to which the author as a responsible moral being, commits himself, and those very different, sometimes livelier, reactions which are a matter of temperament, and which often lend themselves irresistibly to artistic treatment. In Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Houyhnhnms are only an idea to play with, offering scope for the indulgence of temperamental animus. They are, for sure, not to be taken too seriously. An indication to this comes from Swift's humorous suavity with which he dwells on their solemn simplicity and innocence.

Some critics in recent times have thought that Houyhnhnms embody the self-sufficient ethics of contemporary Deist or neo-Stoic thinkers, to which Swift was hostile. To such critics, these creatures represent an inadequate and inhuman rationalism, that the negativeness of their blameless life is part of Swift's intention. This view, whether we accept it or not, is certainly valuable as a corrective to the view that these creatures represent Swift's ideal. Viewed in the light pursued here in these pages, it is revealed that in *Gulliver's Travels* as well as in early books like *The Battle of the Books*, Swift's techniques are fundamentally the same. He begins with an outrageous thesis to be proved. Then, he makes an ingenious exploitation of logic for proving that impossible or outrageous thesis. Thereafter, he translates the ideas of that thesis into concrete conceptions, which he does by arguing through images, just as Donne does. Finally, in the development of the concrete element there is a significant ordering of detail to produce a tendentious distortion of the truth.

There are critics, whose number is larger than that of others, who complain of Swift's negativeness, of his lack of positives, or of their inadequacy. An answer to this complaint is that Swift's capacity to accommodate so much negativeness within an artistic pattern, often transforming it into comedy, is the sign of a heroic encompassing. Condemned as Swift was to more than the normal share of unpleasantness in life, he had developed an attitude to digest a good deal of bitterness and negativeness. The immense freedom, which is also a consummate control, with which Swift handles his material is evidence of a liberating experience for him akin to that which it affords the reader. Perhaps we have become too reluctant to admit to the satisfaction which satirical writing provides. Dryden once said of Juvenal, "He gives me as much pleasure as I can bear. His spleen is raised and he raises mine." Swift was, in a curious way, inhibited about his positives. Perhaps he suffered from certain forms of emotional impotence. This may be regarded sympathetically as an infirmity, giving a strange aloofness, but also a certain distinction, to the very real goodness in his nature. Sometimes, he masked true benevolence beneath the cloak of curmudgeons, as in *A Letter to a Very Young Lady*.

## **16.4 CONCLUSION**

Both, as man and artist, Swift gains by being studied in relation to a tradition of wit, which provided for a free play of fictitious attitudes. Too "straight" a reading of his works has led to an exaggeration of the grimmer sides both of his works as well as his personality. Also, an emphasis on the element of frustration and tragedy in his life has deflected attention from what must have been an immense delight in successful artistic creation. Viewed dispassionately, Swift is found to belong to the Augustan age as well as to the larger tradition of wit which spreads from the time of Ben Jonson to that of Sterne, who comes after Swift in the eighteenth century.

## **16.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Discuss the prose style of Jonathan Swift.

Q.2 Comment on Swift's style of prose writing with examples from his works.

## **16.6 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Jonathan Swift: A collection of critical Essays by Claude Julien Rawson
- \* Jonathan Swift: The Critical Heritage by Kathleen Williams
- \* The Battle of Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age by Joseph M Levine
- \* The Poiesis of Non-Modern Modernity: Swift's Battle of the Books by Nathalie Zimpfer (article)
- \* Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books by Marcello Cattano (article)

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**JONATHAN SWIFT: THE STORY AND  
ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

**17.1 Introduction**

**17.2 Objective**

**17.3 *A Tale of a Tub and The Battle of The Books***

**17.4 Summary**

**17.5 Examination Oriented Questions**

**17.6 Suggested Reading**

**17.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of the Books* along with *A Tale of a Tub* and *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* belongs to the author's early phase as a satirist. These three satiric compositions are also linked together by their common themes. In the 1690's, when Swift was living as a secretary to Sir William Temple at Moor Park, these books of the first phase were written. But they could be published only in 1704, which was after the death of Sir Temple in 1699. *The Battle of the Books* was, in fact, a blow delivered in defence of Sir William Temple, whose essay *Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* had become the centre of a literary controversy then in progress during the 1690's. No doubt, these early works do not possess the ready appeal of *Gulliver's Travels*. Nevertheless, their brilliance is not easily exaggerated. They are great triumphs of the satirist's art.

## 17.2 OBJECTIVE

The lesson discusses in detail the story of *The Battle of The Books* so as to acquaint the learner with the outline story and the important episodes there in.

## 17.3 A TALE OF A TUB AND THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

*A Tale of a Tub* was published anonymously in London in May 1704, consisting of three parts, the *Tale* itself, *The Battle of the Books*, and the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. Whether his negotiations with the eventual publisher, John Nutt, were as complicated and secretive as suggested in the various notices purportedly inserted in the *Tale* by the bookseller, we may be certain that Swift took every possible care to ensure anonymity. By withholding his name - as he had likewise done three years before in the case of his powerful political pamphlet, the *Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome* - he secured a certain amount of protection against immediate hostility. He perhaps also had a further and more complex reason for maintaining anonymity. Since the Restoration, anonymity was not only part of the literary game, which the wits had been playing, it was also an all-important element, the basic stratagem, in the Swiftian comedy. In the *Tale*, he nowhere appears *in propria persona*. Instead, various people are made to address us. They are characters such as dramatist brings upon the stage. The anonymity, which Swift was officially to maintain throughout his career as a satiric writer is, in a most important sense, an aspect of his creative imagination.

After the *Tale* appears in the second place, with its own title page, *The Battle of the Books*. Described as a "full and true account," it begins as historical narrative and ends as though it were an epic in prose. It differs from the *Tale* in being very much of an occasional satire. The occasion was Sir William Temple's essay *Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690), which had been subjected to sharp criticism. In *The Battle of the Books* Swift was seeking to defend his patron by casting ridicule upon the two writers chiefly responsible for this attack. These two writers were William Wotton and Richard Bentley. Swift's immediate purpose



was supported, however, by a more general one: namely to present in an effective way the central position of the "ancients" as this had come to be defined in the course of the so-called "quarrel of the ancients and moderns." This quarrel had been going on, in one form or another, throughout the seventeenth century, though France rather than England had been the centre.

Sir William Temple, Swift's patron, had become involved in this quarrel through his essay, mentioned earlier, in which he had set out to refute those who were upholding as a matter of historical fact the superiority of modern arts and civilization. Temple himself held to a cyclic theory of history. He was thus unable to accept any form of progressivism. Wherever the arts were concerned, he was a "man of taste" with a traditional preference for classical over modern literature. All of this made Temple an "ancient," as the phrase went, and fair game for any of the "moderns" who chose to call him to account. William Wotton was the first to challenge Temple. He did so in typical "modern" manifesto, *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694). But it was the great philologist Richard Bentley, then keeper of the Royal Library at St. James's Palace, who dealt the sharpest blow.

While attempting to establish the superiority of ancient prose literature Temple had unfortunately cited Aesop's *Fables* and the *Epistles* of Phalaris. In a *Dissertation* appended in 1697 to a new edition of Wotton's *Reflections* Bentley cut the ground from under Temple's feet by showing that the *Fables* and the *Epistles* were both spurious. Though Swift did not show great interest in the specific details marking the dispute between Temple and his two opponents, he resented what all of Temple's friends had insisted, was the unmannerly behaviour of Wotton and Bentley. Swift regarded the "moderns" as such with great contempt, considering them as merely another group of enthusiasts. On the theoretical side, he refused to be drawn into debate, but his position remained clear enough. In Swift's view, excellence knows no time. He viewed history substantively, in terms of outstanding characters and achievements, just as Carlyle does later in the Victorian Age in his *Heroes and Hero worship*. Neither the progressivism of the moderns nor the cyclic theory of Temple excited in him any curiosity or interest.

Everything that we know about the composition of the three pieces included in *Tale* seems to suggest that they were mostly written in the period between 1696 and 1699. The *Tale* must have been substantially finished at the time of Temple's death in January 1699, though apparently Swift continued to retouch the manuscript right upto the day of its publication. Infact, the two preliminary sections - the *Dedication to Somers* and the book-seller's "Notice to the Reader" - were added in 1704 at the time of its publication. Also, the two events that occurred in the quarrel involving Temple and his two chief opponents help to date *The Battle of the Books*. The immediate occasion of Swift's satire was Bentley's first *Dissertation*, and this was published in June 1697, while the episode which brings the *Battle* to a close refers to an anti-Bentley pamphlet appearing in March 1698.

Why Swift waited until the spring of 1704 to publish his satire we may never know. He perhaps had good reason to withhold it while Temple was still alive, for Sir William Temple is known to have disapproved him as one of the corrupting forces in contemporary letters. But Temple's death gave him a clear field. In any event, the *Tale* (which included "*The Battle of the Books*") did not come from the press until May, 1704. Since the work was published without the author's name, it was attributed by people to Temple, to Lord Somers, to Smalridge. The latter, an eminent divine, indignantly denied that he was the author.

Before the year of the publication was out, a book had appeared expressly against it, describing it as a "Tincture of... Filthiness." Atterbury, Swift's future friend, was more perceptive. He found it well written. He was also of the opinion - referring apparently to the satire against the Dissenters - that it would do good service. But he foresaw that the "profane strokes" would be misrepresented and would work against the author's reputation and interest in the world. And in 1705, William Wotton, who had been attacked in both the *Tale* and the *Battle*, secured his revenge by publishing his *Observations upon The Tale of a Tub* (appended to his *Defence of the Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*), in which he gave it as his solemn judgement that Swift's notorious satire was "one of the Prophanest Banters upon the Religion of *Jesus Christ*, as such, that

ever yet appeared."

*The Battle of the Books* and the *Mechanical Operations of the Spirit* are not very different from each other in method. While in the former there are three characters, who address us - bookseller, author, and the historian - in the latter our old friend, the bookseller, writes a short advertisement, after which comes the *Discourse* itself, cast in the form of a letter to a friend, the author being a modern who describes himself as one, who has always calculated his writings "for universal Nature, and Mankind in General." In the former - *The Battle of the Books* - the historian assures us of his impartiality. He also gives us the account of the battle between the books in the royal library.

#### 17.4 SUMMARY

*The Battle of the Books* is a story narrated by one, who describes himself as "being possessed of all Qualifications requisite in an *Historian*" and retained by neither of the two warring parities. This claim to impartiality is perhaps, borne out by the reportial tone of many of the episodes. But the historian's true contempt for the moderns is too often reflected in his choice of words for us to be deceived as to his real feelings. Of course, *The Battle of the Books* is not so much at the mercy of its central speaker as are *A Tale of a Tub* and the *Mechanical Operations*. The reason for this lies in the fact, that it is not an ordinary historical account at all. On the contrary, it is an extended allegory in the form of an epic fragment. Its episodes and the terms, in which these episodes are dealt with are determined by the conditions of allegory and epic. Among these terms determining its character, the language and imagery, which are brought into play constitute the chief elements.

The opening passages of *The Battle of the Books* constitute an introduction. Next comes the episode of the bee, the spider, and Aesop, which presents an example of a brilliant allegory within the larger allegorical framework encompassing the whole *Battle*. This is followed by the description of Momus, who is the patron deity of the moderns. The patron's journey to the den of Criticism progresses from her native mountain in Nova Zembla to

England, where she prepares to assist her son, William Wotten. Swift describes this patron deity, the Goddess Momus, in these words:

*(She) had claws like a cat: her head and ears, and voice, resembled those of an ass; Her teeth fallen out before; her eyes turned inward, as if she look only upon herself; her diet was overflowing of her own Gall: Her spleen was so large, as to stand in the form of teats, at which a crew of ugly monsters were greedily sucking; and, what is wonderful to conceive, the bulk of spleen increased faster than the sucking could diminish it.*

Here, one forgets the presence of the speaker. One's attention is so sharply focussed on the repulsive picture of the deity drawn here that the narrator becomes automatically invisible. The allegorical mode used here thrives on an adolescent fantasy, which magnifies the object of its disliking to the monstrous proportions. But the author's purpose of striking at the character of the class of critics does not get lost in the fantasy world of the adolescent. Infact, the fantasy only helps in magnifying the ugly intent of the nasty or ill-intended criticism.

The rest of *The Battle of the Books* is all a running account of important episodes occurring as the two armies engage one another. But there is a sharp alteration in tone as we come to the last encounter to be described, which finds Wotten and Bentley paired off against Temple and Boyle. Here, the epic becomes the broadest of burlesques :

*As when two Mungrel-Curs, whom native greediness, and domestic want, provoke, and join in partnership, though fearful, nightly to invade the folds of some rich Grazier; They, with tails depressed, and lolling tongues, creep soft and slow....*

This account breaks off at a fitting moment after giving us the image of Bentley and Wotten neatly skewered on Boyle's lance like a brace of wood-cocks. The sharp images of the animal world and its activities help in depicting the animal-like activities of the humans. The satire produces

humour on the one hand, it draws home its arrow's targets on the other. The two go together and remain inseparable. The accuracy of the language in drawing images from life is astonishing. Swift's power of picturing the particulars of life is unsurpassable.

The positive elements of *The Battle of the Books* are also unmistakable. The pedantry and ill manners of Wotten and Bentley, the shortcomings of the moderns, the sweetness and light of a culture which is neither ancient nor modern, but perennial. Since the occasion of the satire was dispute over literary matter, it is appropriate enough that the Battle should be cast in the best-known of all literary forms, the epic, and that the order of its language should be that derived from epic poetry, either directly or by way of parody. Its affinity with the mock-heroic works of the neoclassical period from *Mac-Flecknoe* to *The Rape of the Lock* to *Joseph Andrews* is quite obvious. Using the same strategy of selecting a trivial or unheroic theme and using the epic elements of style and structure, Swift, like others of his age, succeeds in making the small subject look smaller in the heroic garments. His satire is stronger than that of any other Augustan writer, including Pope, because it is more daring and fanciful.

Swift's satire in *The Battle of the Books* fulfills all the requirements of Johnson's definitions concerning wit and humour. Dr Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary* of 1755, which was the first in English language, defines "wit" as both "the intellect" and "quickness of fancy". He attaches to this second definition a quotation from John Locke, which reads: "wit lying in the assemblage of ideas, and pulling there together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity thereby to make up pleasant pictures in the fancy." For Johnson, one pertinent definition of "humour" entailed "grotesque imagery, jocularly, merriment, which he illustrates with a brief reference to Sir William Temple: "In conversation humour is more than wit, easiness more than Knowledge". Swift's own distinction between "wit" and "humour" is one which is, too often, glossed over by modern readers. It was a vital enough one in the eighteenth century. He had aspired to continue in his prose satires variety and an intermixture of wit and humour, quickness of fancy and jocularly. Both *A Tale of a*

*Tub* and in the satire on the pretensions of modern literature in *The Battle of the Books* published together in 1704, Swift attempts these combinations of wit and humour, fantasy and reality, variety and particularity.

*The Battle of the Books* or, to give the allegorical squib its full title, *A Full and True Account of the Battle fought last Friday, Between the Ancient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library*, originated as a complement to Temple's defence of classical literature as opposed to its modern vernacular rival. The real "battle", fiercely fought over in the academies and salons of Europe, was once taken very seriously, not to say pompously. But Swift's allegory, *The Battle of the Books*, partly ridicules, partly supports the validity of the contention. In the midst of the dispute the animal-loving Aesop mediates between the claims of a pro-"modern" spider, who spins his dirty webs out of his own entrails, and a pro-"ancient" bee, who goes to nature in order to produce, in the now famous phrase, "the two noblest of things ...sweetness and light." Although Aesop reaches a reasoned conclusion, his arbitration simply serves to heighten animosities. The consequent tumult spills over into a farcically confused disorder in which Aristotle tries to fire an arrow at Bacon and hits Descartes by mistake. In the same turmoil, Virgil encounters his translator, Dryden, who is accoutered in a helmet nine times too large for his head. Dryden's attempts to soothe his opponent are diminished by the tenor of a voice which, "suited to the visage", sounds "weak and remote". The published text of *The Battle of the Books*, purporting to be derived from a much-damaged manuscript, is broken up by *non-sequiturs* and hiatuses and its end ends nothing, concluding as it does with an aborted new paragraph.

Although the present satire by Swift is occasional, pertaining to a particular literary debate, and is restricted to commenting upon the two groups of initiated literates involved in that debate, one cannot miss the author's inclination towards a general contempt for the human race. As he once explained to Pope, he had a "hearty hatred for individuals as against a general hatred for "that animal called man." Swift's general hatred for mankind stems from an indignation against a race which refuses to acknowledge the need for harmony, proportion, and a balance between its

rational capacity and its animal instincts. A traditional theologian would also recognize that Swift, as an Augustinian, abhors all those human defects generally included under the definition of sin as original, venial, and mortal. His picture of humankind suggests not simply the depravity inherent in the very nature of life after the Fall, but also the continuing indulgence in the consequence of the Fall unchecked by reasoned self-discipline, an altruistic morality, or divine grace. Swift's professed aim to vex the world rather than to divert it stems from a particularly demanding morality, one which is both more ancient and more excoriating than Locke's or Shaftsbury's pleasant faith in the ethics of rational sociability. Thus *The Battle of the Books*, although an early work, is representative of all the aspects of Swift's satire, his prose style, and his attitude to man and life in general.

### **17.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Throw light on the narrative style of the *The Battle of the Books*.
- Q.2 Write a critical analysis of the *The Battle of the Books*.
- Q.3 Comment on the title of *The Battle of the Books*.

### **17.6 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Jonathan Swift: A collection of critical Essays by Claude Julien Rawson
- \* Jonathan Swift: The Critical Heritage by Kathleen Williams
- \* The Battle of Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age by Joseph M Levine
- \* The Poiesis of Non-Modern Modernity: Swift's Battle of the Books by Nathalie Zimpfer (article)
- \* Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books by Marcello Cattano (article)

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**JONATHAN SWIFT : *THE BATTLE AS*  
ALLEGORICAL SATIRE**

**18.1 Objective****18.2 The Analysis of *The Battle of the Books* as Satire****18.3 Conclusion****18.4 Examination Oriented Questions****18.5 Suggested Reading****18.1 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson discusses in detail *The Battle of the Books* as an allegorical Satire.

**18.2 THE ANALYSIS OF *THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS AS SATIRE***

As already stated earlier, *The Battle of the Books*, an early work of Jonathan Swift, sprang out of the controversy concerning the comparative merits of the "ancients" and the "moderns". This controversy had initially begun in France. In England, it was ignited by Sir William Temple, Swift's patron, when he published his *An Essay Upon The Ancient and Modern Learning (1690)*. Temple emphatically rejected the members of The Royal Society on their doctrine of "progress". He upheld the claims of the "ancients" ignoring the fact that in knowledge accumulated in two thousand



years, the "moderns" naturally had an advantage. He even questioned that new inventions in science had led to practical improvements. There followed strong reactions to what Temple had asserted in his essay. Several dons from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge took exception to Temple's contentions and wrote unpleasant answers, rather ill-treating Sir William Temple.

One important answer to Temple's essay came from William Wotton who, in his ambitious treatise, *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694), lauded the "moderns" in most, though not all, branches of knowledge. Temple had showered lavish praise on *The Letters of Phalaris*, which Charles Boyle supported by bringing out a new edition of the *Letters*, showing their worth. Richard Bentley, another don who joined the "battle", in his appendix to the second edition of Wotton's *Essay* not only criticized Boyle's edition of the *Letters*, but also presented evidence, later elaborated in his *Dissertation* (1699), showing that the *Letters* were rather spurious.

Swift, though not an admirer of Temple's views, was annoyed by the ill-treatment of Temple by his detractors. In the words of the "bookseller", appended as "notice" to the publication of Swift's *The Battle of the Books*, "the town highly resented to see a person of Sir William Temple's Character and Merits, roughly used by the two Reverend Gentlemen aforesaid, and without any manner of Provocation." Swift joined the controversy, not because he wanted to defend his patron, but because Temple was a well-known gentleman of sophisticated manners, a man of "taste." What equally offended Swift was the pompous pedantry of Wotton and Bentley. He was also suspicious of several pretensions of modern science, philosophy, and scholarship. All the three factors combined to compel Swift to write his famous *The Battle of the Books*, which is a devastating satire in more ways than one.

Many critics have argued that Swift ridiculed the entire controversy, belittling both the supporters of the "ancients" as well as "moderns". He is

said to be enjoying the fun of satire, having no serious purpose in the whole exercise. Even a critic and biographer of Swift of the rank of John Middleton Murrey says:

*It is manifest that Swift's main purpose in The Battle of the Books is not to come to the rescue of Temple (who did not need it), and still less to make a contribution to the controversy (which had now become irrelevant to Temple's real thesis), but to make fun of Wotten and Bentley and Dryden and anybody else who comes into his hand not wholly excluding Homer himself. Swift wants to enjoy himself, to give full rein to the vis comica bubbling up within him.*

The fact of the matter is that, even though partly, Swift's intention of coming to Temple's rescue cannot be easily brushed aside, the personal satire against Wotten and Bentley being so vitriolic. No doubt, the satire becomes much larger than that. It does not remain an occasional piece. It does acquire an all-time relevance on the issue of the merit of literature and the critical taste or credo. At the same time, even when the piece's chief merit lies in its universal appeal, its neo-classical or Augustan character of having its prime inspiration in an occasion or event of the time remains a reality.

Underlying the topical layer of *The Battle of the Books* lies Swift's concern for good sense and taste in life, arts, and learning. The purpose is serious, indeed. He ridicules arrogant pedants like Wotten and Bentley, and even Dryden. In the backside of the satire he upholds men of taste and liberal education, Temple included, who had become almost a symbol of these virtues in public perception. He goes, on the positive side, even farther than the values embodied by Temple; he affirms a positive value and norm, both in poetry and philosophy. Even when he presents his point of view as a part of the controversy, he seems much more interested in the moral and aesthetic aspects than in the scientific and technical side of the debate or "battle". One can see

a common ground between what Swift emphasizes in *The Battle of the Books* and what Dryden does in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Pope does in *Essay on Criticism*, and Johnson does in *Lives of the Poets*. Looking at Swift's book in the context of these, one cannot miss the common neo-classical ideal that clearly emerges in these masterpieces of the age.

Since Swift does not employ any single device or form of the satire, *The Battle of the Books* does not easily accept any specific type of the satire. There are at least four types, which inform Swift's piece. He uses burlesque history, fable, mock-epic, and allegory. It starts as a burlesque of history. The author of the manuscript describes himself as "being possessed of all Qualifications requisite in an Historian, and retained by neither party". We find him cool and restrained in the opening paragraphs where he dwells upon the causes of the battle between "Ancients" and "Moderns" over the summit on the Hill Parnassus. He describes in dead coolness how the public peace of the libraries was broken by the rise of "a new species of controversial Books... instinct with more malignant spirit." Continuing with the details of the causes behind the epic battle to follow imminently, the narrator historian gives us the famous fable about the Spider and the Bee. Further, the mock-epic account of the battle follows the animal fable. In the grand epic style, there is the catalogue of heroes, their armaments, and their armies. There is also used the epic device of the supernatural machinery, which is used to elevate the status of both the heroes and their affairs. More devices of the epic, Swift uses in *The Battle of the Books* include invocation to the muses, combats between the warriors, and epic images, using the elevatory devices to belittle the triviality of the historical occasion.

*The Battle of the Books* also relies on the allegorical form, which had been one of the powerful weapons of satire from Chaucer to Pope. Although present all along the narrative in an interminant form, it is of uneven quality, having at times no one-to-one relationship between the symbol and the reference. To begin with, the very fable of the Bee and the Spider has an allegorical significance. The fable represents, allegorically, the nature of difference there is between the aesthetic positions of "Ancients"

and "Moderns." In this little allegory, there is perfect matching between the symbol and the reference. As the narrator himself shows, making Aesop, the master of fables, "swore in the loudest key, that in all his life, he had never known two cases so parallel and adapt to each other as that in the Window and this upon the Shelves". There is in the window of the library the battle between the bee and the spider, even as there is on its shelves the battle between Ancients and Moderns. The allegorical level in the narrative is unmistakable.

We may recall here that the goddess Minerva (Pallas), in Greek mythology, transforms Arachne into a spider for her faults of being presumptuous and for the impiety shown, in her competition with the goddess at weaving, by exhibiting in her web the errors and failings of the goddess. In this fable, the spider stands for barbarity and crudeness in conversation, conceited in disrespect to tradition, and overbearing in self-importance. These qualities of the Spider correspond to the qualities of the Moderns as displayed by Wotton and Bentley in their attacks on Sir William Temple. To illustrate some of these qualities, Swift makes the Spider call the Bee a "vagabond," born to no Possession of your own, but a Pair of Wings and a Drone-Pipe. Your livelihood is an universal Plunder upon Nature, ..." On the other hand, the Spider calls himself "a domestic Animal, Furnist with a Native Stock within myself. This large Castle (to show my improvements in the Mathematics) is all built with my own hands, and the Materials extracted altogether out of my own Person." To this affront of the Spider, the Bee replies that for her wings and voice she was obliged to Heaven, and that if she "plunders Nature" by taking juices from the flowers, she still causes no injury to their beauty, their smell, or their taste. The Bee gives the Spider his due by acknowledging that there is, no doubt, labour and method in the architecture of his "Castle", but the "Materials are bought." The Bee hopes that henceforth the Spider should "consider Duration and Matter, as well as Method and Art."

The masterstroke of the Bee in the battle comes when she poses the question to the Spider on the relative merits of the two in the following words :

*So that in short, the question comes all to this, whether is the nobler being of the two, that which by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an over-weening pride, which feeding and engineering on itself, turns all into excrement and venom, producing nothing at all, but flybane and a cobweb, or that, which, by an universal range, with long search, much study, true judgement, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax.*

The moral of the allegorical fable comes out clearly even without Aesop's sermon on the story of the Bee and the Spider. One of the emphases in the allegory is that while Ancients are objective, polite and productive, the Moderns are subjective, impolite and destructive. In the words of Kathleen Williams, "The spider follows the easier course of self-expression uncontrolled by reference to anything beyond himself, and so lacking in that discipline which is forced upon the bee by the effort to interpret the outside world and extract from it the honey and wax or as Aesop puts it, 'the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light'." Swift is critical of the aesthetic ideology of the Moderns, especially its aspect of their craze for novelty rather than truth. The author tells them through Aesop :

*Free your schemes with as much method and skill as you please; yet, if the materials be nothing but dirt, spun out of your entrails (the Guts of the Modern Brains) the edifice will conclude at last in a cobweb. The duration of which, like that of the Spider's webs, may be imputed to their being forgotten or neglected or hid in a corner.*

We can see here how Swift's view of nature, implied in his criticism of "Moderns" who follow quibble rather than nature, is close to that of Pope and Johnson. Also implied in his criticism of "Moderns" is his view of the function of arts, which again is close to the view held by Pope and Johnson.

Another subject of attack in the allegorical satire of *The Battle of the Books* is pedantry and pedantic criticism. As the author says it in the "Preface" of the book, "Wit, without knowledge, being a sort of *Cream*, which gathers in a night to the Top, and by a skillful Hand, may be soon whipped into Froth, but once scummed away, what appears underneath will be fit for nothing, but to be thrown to the Hogs." The "malignant Deity," Criticism, and her devotees personify in *The Battle of the Books*, bad criticism and pedantry. This kind of criticism is born out of ignorance and pride. A sister of these two is Opinion, who is "light of Foot, hoodwink, and head-strong, yet giddy and perpetually turning." It gives birth to "Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners." This deity of criticism in Swift resembles the monster Error in Spenser's allegory, *The Faerie Queene*, who is in appearance grotesque. Its other prominent aspects are claws, teeth, ass-like head. A special feature of bad criticism under attack in Swift's book is its inability to examine the object as it really is, and to spin out raillery from within :

*Her eyes turn inward, as if she look only upon herself;  
her diet was the overflowing of her own gall; Her spleen  
was so large, as to stand prominent like a dog of the  
first rate, nor wanted excrescencies in form of teats, at  
which a crew of ugly monsters were greedily sucking;  
and, what is wonderful to conceive, the bulk of spleen  
increased faster than the sucking could diminish it.*

Apparently, reminiscent of Milton's description of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*, the description here expresses Swift's utter contempt and loathing for contemporary literary criticism. In his view, bad criticism of this is, obviously, capricious, vain, opinionated, ignorant, ill-natured, and censurer of others. Conversely, good criticism, as implied in Swift's satire, would be decent and modest, candid and impartial, based upon judgement and good sense.

Another allegorical representation of a positive quality in learning, arts

and criticism is in the figure of Helicon fountain, which separates a gentleman from a pedant. The fountain is the clearest of all, we are told, and "yet there lies at bottom a thick sediment of slime and mud; for so Apollo begg'd of Jupiter, as punishment to those who durst attempt to taste it with unhallowed lips, and for a lesson to all not *to draw too deep, or far from the Spring.*" A gentleman like Temple can drink "large draughts in his Helmet," from the fountain, whereas a pedant like Wotten can draw up "nothing but Mud." Here is implied Swift's endorsement of liberal education, which was actually an ideal of the eighteenth century.

The battle between writers of two warring camps, too, is described in an allegorical fashion, using the mock-epic style. Here, poets are shown riding horses. The "Ancients" are shown on fiery horses, which they can manage. On the contrary, the "Moderns have castrated "Geldings," for they cannot bridle any other horse. Among the poets, Homer is shown riding a furious horse "with difficulty managed by the rider himself but which no other mortal durst approach." Since the eighteenth century particularly valued the force and fiery rapture of Homer's poetry, horse appropriately represents the qualities of the ancient Greek poet's greatness. Swift gives altogether a different appreciation to the poetry of Virgil, the ancient Roman poet. He appears in Swift's book in "shining armour completely fitted to his body; he was mounted on a dapple grey steed, the slowness of whose pace, was an effect of the highest mettle and vigour." We are told that there is no insincerity in Virgil, that his form is suited to content, and that there is grace and dignity in his verse as is allegorized in his appearance.

As against the ancient classics, Homer and Virgil, the modern Dryden is presented, in *The Battle of the Books*, in a poor light. His verse, it is indicated, is neither smooth nor powerful. We see him in the book on a "sorrel Gelding of a monstrous size,.... But his speed was less than his noise; for his horse, old and lean, spent the dregs of his strengths in a high trot, which though made slow advances, yet causes a loud clashing of his armour, terrible to hear." In the case of Dryden, as against the

ancients, the pompous form does not suit the thin content. He brings to bear heroic machinery on the unheroic content. This discrepancy can also be judged from his appearance : "The helmet was nine times too large for the Head, which appeared Situated far in the hinder part.... And the voice was suited to the visage, sounding weak and remote." Dryden proves his relationship, and nearness, to Virgil, and they agree to exchange their horses and armours :

*However, this glittering armour became the Modern yet worse than his own. Then they exchange horses; but when it came to the trial, Dryden was afraid and utterly unable to mount.*

What is being attempted here is a view of Dryden, whereby, it is believed that he imitated Virgil but failed.

After the critics and heroic poets, Swift comes to satirize the lyrical poets. Here again, he uses the mock-heroic strategy of comparing the high and the low. Pindar, the ancient poet of lyrical poetry, is used as the touchstone to measure the quality of the modern poets like John Oldham and Aphra Ben, who suffer in the comparison. Cowley, like Dryden, is shown as an imitator of the ancient. The mock-heroic narration says that he tries to imitate Pindar "in his dress, pace and career as well as the Vigour of his horse, and his own skill would allow." Since his imitations are tolerable, Cowley is allowed to throw a lance which misses the Ancient and falls "ineffectual to the ground."

### **18.3 CONCLUSION**

Thus, when the episodes in *The Battle of the Books* are studied in their allegorical significance, it becomes apparent that Swift has defined a true gentleman, a great poet, and a perfect critic. In the process of erecting this implied, rather than stated, ideal, he also evaluates a number of "ancient" and "modern" poets. Undoubtedly, his judgment and taste are those of the eighteenth century. The ugly images and uncouth expressions often used for



those disliked by Swift notwithstanding, his satire is great and unique in English literature.

#### **18.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Discuss *The Battle of the Books* as Satire.
- Q.2 Comment critically on the title of *The Battle of the Books*.
- Q.3 Explain the main argument in *The Battle of the Books* with examples from the text.

#### **18.5 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Jonathan Swift: A collection of critical Essays by Claude Julien Rawson
- \* Jonathan Swift: The Critical Heritage by Kathleen Williams
- \* The Battle of Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age by Joseph M Levine
- \* The Poiesis of Non-Modern Modernity: Swift's Battle of the Books by Nathalie Zimpfer (article)
- \* Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books by Marcello Cattano (article)

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**JONATHAN SWIFT: TECHNIQUE AND FORM OF  
*THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS***

**19.1 Objective****19.2 Introduction****19.3 Technique and Form****19.4 Conclusion****19.5 Examination Oriented Questions****19.6 Suggested Reading****19.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss the technique and form of *The Battle of the Books*.

**19.2 INTRODUCTION**

Most critical commentaries on Swift's *The Battle of the Books* and other prose satires have been confined to his view of man and the quality of his intuition, invariably leading to moral rather than artistic judgements. There is a need, in order to do justice to an equally important aspect of his art, to study his precise methods of narration, his technical craftsmanship. The reason why this aspect of Swift's art has been, frequently, overlooked altogether or hurriedly passed over is the common assumption among most critics that a satiric work of art is somehow not different from the satirist's broad intentions as a commentator on

the human scene. The fact of the matter is that a satire is as much a work of the literary imagination as is a poem or a play. Its total effect - as distinct from what we sometimes think of as its "purpose" - lies in its chosen language and imagery, while the point of view from which it is being delivered, the episodes themselves, the patterns in which the material has been arranged are all in a sense contrived.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the major writers of the Augustan age, including Swift, were formalists. They accepted the literary forms handed over to them. No doubt, at times they did devise new forms also, each of his own, but they always worked through some form or other, which they had sensed as such and whose possibilities they had calculated. For instance, the form of *A Tale of a Tub*, which also includes *The Battle of the Books* and *The Mechanical Operations of the Spirit*, is also an exploration of a new model. This model experiments not only with the combination of three independent yet related satires but also with the method of representation. The publication of this three-in-one book did pose a few questions to the reader. One of these is, how are the three satires related to one another? Are they entirely independent pieces which happen to have been printed together in the same volume, or do we have as it were a single satiric composition in three movements? It cannot be denied, whatever else we might say in response to these questions, that there is a certain unity of theme involved, all the three satires deriving their materials from "corruption in religion and learning." But more than the commonality of the thematic materials, it is the similarity in the method of presentation which establishes them as closely articulated members. In all the three, there is throughout the same order of invention as well as of imagery.

An important aspect related to the method of representation is the technique of narration. Who is it that is addressing us? It does not seem to be Swift in any case, except perhaps in the first fragment of all, the *Apology*, and even this written impersonally with Swift appearing merely as "the author." As for the rest of the *Tale of a Tub* proper, we discover that it is the work of several hands. Infact, at first we are not

at all sure how many narrators there are in the *Tale*. It is the bookseller who signs the "*Dedication to Somers*." Then follows "The Bookseller to the Reader." Then with the fourth section, "The Epistle Dedicatory to Prince Posterity," a quite different narrator takes over. He is an enthusiastic "modern" spokesman for the entire society of modern writers and defenders of their works against all disparaging criticism. He tells us that he is planning to vindicate his brethren at greater length in the treatise to be entitled a *Character of the present Set of Wits in this Island*. It is he who speaks in all those sections of the *Tale* concerned with the follies of the learned - for instance, in the Preface, the Introduction, and the subsequent digressions. It is again he who constantly calls to our attention the further treatises listed directly after the title-page and there they're announced as having all been written by the "same author," that is the author of the *Tale*. These treatises also include *The Battle of the Books*.

### 19.3 TECHNIQUE AND FORM

*The Battle of the Books*, as well as *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, is not greatly different in method from *A Tale of a Tub*. There are three characters or narrators who address us in *The Battle of the Books*. First, there is the bookseller. Then there is the author. And finally, there is the historian. The historian assures us of his impartiality. He gives us the account of the battle between the books in the royal library. Now, do we have in historian and modern writer two new narrators, or have we these figures from *A Tale of a Tub* making reappearance? We must ask these questions. That, indeed, is the important thing throughout. We are never allowed to settle back in the assurance that we know exactly where we are and what is scheduled to happen. The ground is always shifting under our feet and we have to work to keep our balance. The tensions created in this way, not only arouse and sustain our interest but communicate to us a sense of peculiar energy.

To become aware of the presence of these different characters is to

prepare ourselves to follow what is taking place in the narrative (or drama). Actually, the three satires in the book are like the three acts of a play. *The Battle of the Books* and *The Mechanical Operations of the Spirit* are comparatively shorter, in fact, much shorter than the very long and complicated *A Tale of a Tub*. *The Battle of the Books*, our immediate concern here, is a story narrated by one who describes himself as "being possessed of all qualifications requisite in an historian," and retained by neither of the two parties involved in the battle. This claim to impartiality is borne out by the reportorial tone of many of the episodes. But this historian narrator's true contempt for the moderns is, too often, reflected in his choice of words for us (the readers) to be deceived as to his real feelings. At the same time, *The Battle* is not so much at the mercy of its central speaker or narrator as are the two other pieces of satire. The reason for this lies in the fact that it is not an ordinary historical account at all but an extended allegory in the form of an epic fragment. Its episodes and the terms in which these episodes are dealt with, chiefly, the kind of language and imagery brought into play, are determined by the conditions of allegory and epic.

The opening passage of *The Battle of the Books* sets the tone of the entire narrative. Here, the narrator's personality comes out in clear words:

*Whoever examines, with due circumspection, into the annual records of time, will find it remarked that war is the child of pride, and pride the daughter of riches :- the grounds of which assertions may be soon granted, but one cannot so easily subscribe to the latter; for pride is nearly related to beggary and want, either by father or mother, and sometimes by both: and, to speak naturally, it very seldom happens among men to fall out when all have enough; invasions usually traveling from north to south, that is to say, from poverty to plenty. The most ancient and natural*

*grounds of quarrels are lust and avarice; which, though we may allow to be brethren, or collateral branches of pride, are certainly the issues of want. For, to speak in the phrase of writers upon politics, we may observe in the republic of dogs, which in its original seems to be an institution of the many, that the whole state is ever in the profoundest peace after a full meal; and that civil broils arise among them when it happens for one great bone to be seized on by some leading dog, who either divides it among the few, and then it falls to an oligarchy, or keeps it to himself, and then it runs up to a tyranny.*

Here, the narrator's personality is firmly rooted in the tone of his voice. One of the ways of becoming impersonal in the narrative is to keep the focus on the subject matter, keeping one's own opinions out, and keeping one's feelings out of the narrative. Whatever is generalized as an abstract or universal statement is done in the name of tradition or convention, precept or practice, not in the form of an individual opinion, much less his own as a person. The comic and satiric intent are too apparent to be missed.

The impersonality of the narrator is maintained by making the matter being narrated the solid train of words which keeps the reader engaged in the movement, never permitting any deflection elsewhere. An example of this is the description of the goddess, and her progress from her native mountain in Nova Zembla to England, where she prepares to assist her son, William Wotton. The goddess of criticism's movement is described in wonderful prose. A part of it goes as under :

*The goddess and her train, having mounted the chariot, which was drawn by tame geese, flew over infinite regions, shedding her influence in due places, till at length she arrived at her beloved island of Britain;*

*but in hovering over its metropolis, what blessings did she not let fall upon her seminaries of Gresham and Covent Garden! And how she reached the fatal plain of St. James's literary, at what time the two armies were upon the point to engage; where, entering with all her caravan unseen, and landing upon a case of shelves, now desert, but once inhabited by a colony of virtuosos, she staid a while to observe the posture of both armies.*

Here, we forget the presence of the speaker or narrator. Our attention remains focused upon the picture of the goddess and her train of followers moving from her native place to her favourite island of Britain. The rest of the *Battle* also is a running account of important episodes occurring as the two armies engage one another. A sharp alteration in tone comes about only when we come to the last encounter, in which Wotton and Bentley are paired off against Temple and Boyle. Here, the epic becomes the broadest of burlesques:

*Then Wotton grasped his lance, and, brandishing it thrice over his head, darted it with all his might; the goddess, his mother, at the same time adding strength to his arm. Away the lance went hissing, and reached even to the belt of the averted ancient, upon which lightly grazing, it fell to the ground. Temple neither felt the weapon touch him nor heard it fall: and Wotton might have escaped to his army, with the honour of having remitted his lance against so great a leader un-revenged; but Apollo, enraged that a javelin flung by the assistance of so foul a goddess should pollute his fountain, put on the shape of -, and softly came to young Boyle, who then accompanied Temple: he pointed first to the lance, then to the distant modern that flung it, and commanded the young hero to take immediate revenge.*

Here, once again, the account is all absorbing. Drawn closely on the lines of "The Battle of Troy" in Homer's *Iliad*, the description is a superb piece of mock-heroic prose, emerging as powerful, as any mock-heroic episode in Pope's *The Rape of The Lock*. The power of the prose, when the narrator effaces himself, becomes all mighty. Thus, *The Battle of the Books* has more than one narrator giving us different aspects of the mock-heroic tale of the engagement between the ancients and the moderns. The narrators change whenever the change in tone and perspective is needed to be made in the entire presentation. Here, we do not have as large a number of narrators or speakers as we have in the *Tale* (there the number of speakers is much more): but we do have different speakers addressing us as such as the bookseller, the author and the historian, each carrying his own personality.

#### 19.4 TECHNIQUE AND FORM

In the eighteenth century, it was generally agreed that a work of art was an imitation of nature, a representation of the normal in the world outside us, or in the world of our own human experience. But the unnatural, the grotesque, the humorous - that is, something squint - were, thereby, not ruled out. Swift inherited from his predecessors something in the way of a rhetorical theory regarding grotesque art and its legitimate function. Samuel Butler had recorded in his commonplace book that wit "delivers things otherwise than they are in nature," employing "those things which it borrows of falsehood to the benefit and advantage of truth." What was in a measure true of imaginative writing in general, by virtue of the fact that all such writing worked through figurative language and hence distorted actuality, held doubly true of genres embodying satire, comedy, the ridiculous, the ugly. The latter forms of literature likewise served truth, but through depicting the abnormal and by doing so in a manner that further distorted through comic exaggeration.

*The Battle of the Books*, like other satires of Swift, is not an imitation of nature. On the contrary, it is an imitation of the grotesque and the unnatural. It brings before us in a number of ways that which



contributes to an effect of superabundant energy. Both characters and events described in the book do not measure up to what we generally accept as normal. They are both marked by one or another oddity, by one or another ridiculous aspect. The distorted nature serves to create comedy. But, at the same time, what is being distorted, the original nature or normal reality, is also not lost sight of. The two remain present in our mind at one and the same time. This helps us see more sharply the distortion, the abnormalities, both in the conduct of individual characters as well as the nature of each event. One might easily say that in Swift's book there is Folly's plenty.

But the exuberance lies not only in the infinite variety of senselessness which the author's invention has provided but in the nature of the satiric drama itself. *The Battle* is really made up of a series of situations, in each of which some particular form of irrationality expends its full energy in self realization. It is as though we were being given to understand how Folly confers a special blessing upon each of the societies existing to do her honour. Each has its own distinguishing enthusiasm, its own flight of fancy, system of beliefs, and favourite projects and devices. Though truth is purely conceptual, and the life of reason is to be pursued without the aid of symbol and coloured vision, we may allow Folly's children their sport, even going so far as to encourage them in their enthusiasms and imaginative play.

The prose style, or more properly, the styles exhibited by *The Battle of the Books* are part of the grotesque world of the book. The question is whether we can anywhere detect in this *mélange* of stylistic parodies a tone and manner which is other than ironic. Such obviously is not present in a passage like the following:

*Now, whoever will please to take this scheme, and either reduce or adapt it to an intellectual state or commonwealth of learning, will soon discover the first ground of disagreement between the two great parties at this time in arms, and may form just conclusions upon the merits of*

*either cause. But the issues or events of this war are nor so easy to conjecture at; for the present quarrel is so inflated by the warm heads of either factions, and the pretensions somewhere or other so exorbitant, as not to admit the least overtures of accommodation. This quarrel first began, as I have heard it affirmed by an old dweller in the neighbourhood about a small spot of ground, lying and being upon one of the two tops of the hill Parnassus; the highest and largest of which had, it seems, been time out of mind in quiet possession of certain tenants, called the Ancients; and the other was held by the Moderns.*

Apparently, the element of parody is, by no means absent here, yet in effect the tone and the language which we have here come pretty close to being those of the person whom we have been considering as satirist. We feel here that we have proceeded beyond the irony and are close to the dead centre of the Swiftian comedy. The comedy arises both from the mock-heroic apparatus, which like the garment of the hero further reduces the stature of the dwarf, as well as from the linguistic play with words, which parodies a familiar manner of writing and yet changes it into something that sounds ridiculous.

#### **19.4 CONCLUSION**

Thus, *The Battle of the Books*, which uses the well-known writers like Homer, Aesop, Aristotle, and their respective writings for the purposes both of holding them up as models and yet parodying them for the purposes of belittling the subject, for which the style of the masters is being imitated. Similarly, Swift draws upon the writings as well as styles of Spenser and Milton, even Chaucer and Langland, for drawing parallels between the battles of books and the battles of heroic eminence they had described in their great works. As for direct parody of the recent styles, Swift does not spare Dryden, Wotton, Bentley, and the Royal Society in his great satire. Their views as well as words are ridiculed in the parodic imitations, which figure frequently in *The Battle of the*

*Books*. Hence, both in technique and form, Swift's satire is a superb piece of grotesque writing. Which is meant to instruct through entertainment. While the one is the kernel, the other is the juice; the two exist in perfect harmony.

## **19.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Throw light on the technique and form of *The Battle of the Books*.

## **19.6 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Jonathan Swift: A collection of critical Essays by Claude Julien Rawson
- \* Jonathan Swift: The Critical Heritage by Kathleen Williams
- \* The Battle of Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age by Joseph M Levine
- \* The Poiesis of Non-Modern Modernity: Swift's Battle of the Books by Nathalie Zimpfer (article)
- \* Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books by Marcello Cattano (article)

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**J. S. MILL : *THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN*: CHAPTER 4**

**20.1 Objective**

**20.2 J.S Mill and his Times**

**20.3 Mill's Brief Biographical Sketch**

**20.4 Works**

**20.4.1 A System of Logic**

**a) Names, Propositions, and the Principles of Logic and Mathematics**

**b) Other Topics of Interest**

**20.5 An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy**

**20.6 Psychological Writings**

**20.7 Utilitarianism**

**20.7.1 History of the Principle of Utility**

**20.8 Self-Assessment Questions**

**20.8.1 Fill in the blanks**

**20.8.2 Short Answer Questions**

**20.9 Let Us Sum Up**

**20.10 Answer Key**

**20.11 Suggested Reading**

## 20.1 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this lesson is to enumerate the social and literary background of John Stuart Mill. The lesson will further provide an overview of Mill's life and major works, focusing on his key arguments and their relevant historical contexts.

## 20.2 J.S MILL AND HIS TIMES

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) profoundly influenced the shape of nineteenth century British thought and political discourse. His substantial corpus of works includes texts in logic, epistemology, economics, social and political philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, religion, and current affairs. Among his most well-known and significant works are *A System of Logic*, *Principles of Political Economy*, *On Liberty*, *Utilitarianism*, *The Subjection of Women*, *Three Essays on Religion*, and his *Autobiography*. Mill's education at the hands of his imposing father, James Mill, fostered both intellectual development (Greek at the age of three, Latin at eight) and a propensity towards reform. James Mill and Jeremy Bentham led the "Philosophic Radicals," who advocated for rationalization of the law and legal institutions, universal male suffrage, the use of economic theory in political decision-making, and a politics oriented by human happiness rather than natural rights or conservatism. In his twenties, the younger Mill felt the influence of historicism, French social thought, and Romanticism, in the form of thinkers like Coleridge, the St. Simonians, Thomas Carlyle, Goethe, and Wordsworth. This led him to begin searching for a new philosophic radicalism that would be more sensitive to the limits on reform imposed by culture and history, and would emphasize the cultivation of our humanity, including the cultivation of dispositions of feeling and imagination (something he thought had been lacking in his own education).

None of Mill's major writings remain independent of his moral, political, and social agenda. Even the most abstract works, such as the *System of Logic* and his *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, serve polemical

purposes in the fight against the German, or a priori, school otherwise called "intuitionism." On Mill's view, intuitionism needed to be defeated in the realms of logic, mathematics, and philosophy of mind if its pernicious effects in social and political discourse were to be mitigated.

In his writings, Mill argues for a number of controversial principles. He defends radical empiricism in logic and mathematics, suggesting that basic principles of logic and mathematics are generalizations from experience rather than known a *priori*. The principle of utility—that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" was the centerpiece of his ethical philosophy. *On Liberty* puts forward the "harm principle" that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." In *The Subjection of Women*, he compares the legal status of women to the status of slaves and argues for equality in marriage and under the law.

### **20.3 MILL'S BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

John Stuart Mill was born on Rodney Street in the Pentonville area of London, the eldest son of the Scottish philosopher, historian and economist James Mill, and Harriet Burrow. John Stuart was educated by his father, with the advice and assistance of Jeremy Bentham and Francis Place. He was given an extremely rigorous upbringing, and was deliberately shielded from association with children of his own age other than his siblings. His father, a follower of Bentham and an adherent of associationism, had as his explicit aim to create a genius intellect that would carry on the cause of utilitarianism and its implementation after he and Bentham had died.

Mill was a notably precocious child. He describes his education in his autobiography. At the age of three he was taught Greek. By the age of eight, he had read Aesop's *Fables*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and the whole of Herodotus, and was acquainted with Lucian, Diogenes Laërtius, Isocrates and six dialogues of Plato. He had also read a great deal of history in English and had been taught arithmetic, physics, and astronomy.

At the age of eight, Mill began studying Latin, the works of Euclid, and algebra, and was appointed schoolmaster to the younger children of the family. His main reading was still history, but he went through all the commonly taught Latin and Greek authors and by the age of ten could read Plato and Demosthenes with ease. His father also thought that it was important for Mill to study and compose poetry. One of Mill's earliest poetry compositions was a continuation of the *Iliad*. In his spare time, he also enjoyed reading about natural sciences and popular novels, such as *Don Quixote* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

His father's work, *The History of British India* was published in 1818; immediately thereafter, about the age of twelve, Mill began a thorough study of the scholastic logic, at the same time reading Aristotle's logical treatises in the original language. In the following year he was introduced to political economy and studied Adam Smith and David Ricardo with his father, ultimately completing their classical economic view of factors of production. Mill's *comptes rendus* of his daily economy lessons helped his father in writing *Elements of Political Economy* in 1821, a textbook to promote the ideas of Ricardian economics; however, the book lacked popular support. Ricardo, who was a close friend of his father, used to invite the young Mill to his house for a walk in order to talk about political economy.

At the age of fourteen, Mill stayed a year in France with the family of Sir Samuel Bentham, brother of Jeremy Bentham. The mountain scenery he saw led to a lifelong taste for mountain landscapes. The lively and friendly way of life of the French also left a deep impression on him. In Montpellier, he attended the winter courses on chemistry, zoology, logic of the *Faculté des Sciences*, as well as taking a course of the higher mathematics. While coming and going from France, he stayed in Paris for a few days in the house of the renowned economist Jean-Baptiste Say, a friend of Mill's father. There he met many leaders of the Liberal party, as well as other notable Parisians, including Henri Saint-Simon.

This intensive study however had injurious effects on Mill's mental health, and state of mind. At the age of twenty he suffered a nervous breakdown. In chapter V of his *Autobiography*, he claims that this was caused by the great

physical and mental arduousness of his studies which had suppressed any feelings he might have developed normally in childhood. Nevertheless, this depression eventually began to dissipate, as he began to find solace in the *Mémoires* of Jean-François Marmontel and the poetry of William Wordsworth.

Mill had been engaged in a pen-friendship with Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism and sociology, since Mill first contacted Comte in November 1841. Comte's *sociologie* was more an early philosophy of science than we perhaps know it today, and the *positive* philosophy aided in Mill's broad rejection of Benthamism.

As a nonconformist who refused to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Mill was not eligible to study at the University of Oxford or the University of Cambridge. Instead he followed his father to work for the East India Company until 1858, and attended University College, London, to hear the lectures of John Austin, the first Professor of Jurisprudence. He was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1856.

In 1851, Mill married Harriet Taylor after 21 years of an intimate friendship. Taylor was married when they met, and their relationship was close but generally believed to be chaste during the years before her first husband died. Brilliant in her own right, Taylor was a significant influence on Mill's work and ideas during both friendship and marriage. His relationship with Harriet Taylor reinforced Mill's advocacy of women's rights. He cites her influence in his final revision of *On Liberty*, which was published shortly after her death. Taylor died in 1858 after developing severe lung congestion, after only seven years of marriage to Mill.

Between the years 1865 and 1868 Mill served as Lord Rector of the University of St. Andrews. During the same period, 1865-68, he was a Member of Parliament for City and Westminster, sitting for the Liberal Party. During his time as an MP, Mill advocated easing the burdens on Ireland. In 1866, Mill became the first person in the history of Parliament to call for women to be given the right to vote, vigorously defending this position in subsequent debate.



Mill became a strong advocate of such social reforms as labour unions and farm cooperatives. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill called for various reforms of Parliament and voting, especially proportional representation, the Single Transferable Vote, and the extension of suffrage. Mill died in 1873 of erysipelas in Avignon, France, where he was buried alongside his wife.

## **20.4 WORKS**

Mill wrote on a startling number of topics. All his major texts, however, play a role in defending his new philosophic radicalism and the intellectual, moral, political, and social agendas associated with it.

### **20.4.1 A System of Logic**

Though Mill's biography reveals his openness to intellectual exploration, his most basic philosophical commitment, to naturalism-never seriously wavers. He is committed to the idea that our best methods of explaining the world are those employed by the natural sciences. Anything that we can know about human minds and wills comes from treating them as part of the causal order investigated by the sciences, rather than as special entities that lie outside it.

By taking the methods of the natural sciences as the only route to knowledge about the world, Mill sees himself as rejecting the "German, or a *priori* view of human knowledge," (CW, I.233) or, as he also calls it, "intuitionism," which was espoused in different ways by Kant, Reid, and their followers in Britain (e.g. Whewell and Hamilton). Though there are many differences among intuitionist thinkers, one "grand doctrine" that Mill suggests they all affirm is the view that "the constitution of the mind is the key to the constitution of external nature-that the laws of the human intellect have a necessary correspondence with the objective laws of the universe, such that these may be inferred from those" (CW, XI.343). The intuitionist doctrine conceives of nature as being largely or wholly *constituted* by the mind rather than more or less imperfectly *observed* by it. One of the great dangers presented by this doctrine, from the

perspective of Mill's *posteriori* school, is that it supports the belief that one can know universal truths about the world through evidence (including intuitions or Kantian categories of the understanding) provided by the mind alone rather than by nature. If the mind constitutes the world that we experience, then we can understand the world by understanding the mind. It was this freedom from appeal to nature and the lack of independent (i.e. empirical) checks to the knowledge claims associated with it that Mill found so disturbing.

For Mill, the problems with intuitionism extend far beyond the metaphysical and epistemological to the moral and political. As Mill says in his *Autobiography* when discussing his important treatise of 1843, *A System of Logic*:

The notion that truths external to the mind may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observation and experience, is, I am persuaded, in these times, the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory, every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification. There never was such an instrument devised for consecrating all deep-seated prejudices. And the chief strength of this false philosophy in morals, politics, and religion, lies in the appeal which it is accustomed to make to the evidence of mathematics and of the cognate branches of physical science. To expel it from these, is to drive it from its stronghold. (CW, I.233)

This charge against intuitionism, that it frees one from the obligation of justifying one's beliefs, has strong roots in philosophic radicalism. We find Bentham, in his 1789 *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, attacking non-utilitarian moral systems for just this reason: "They consist all of them in so many contrivances for avoiding the obligation of appealing to any external standard, and for prevailing upon the reader to accept of the author's sentiment or opinion as a reason

and that a sufficient one for itself" (IPML, II.14). Mill thus saw his own commitment to the naturalism and empiricism of the "a posteriori school" of thought as part of a broader social and political agenda that advocated for reform and also undercut traditional foundations of conservatism.

Intuitionism, however, is often taken to be on much firmer ground than empiricism when it comes to accounting for our knowledge of mathematics and logic. This is especially true if one rejects the idea, found in people like Hobbes and Hume, that mathematical propositions like  $2 + 3 = 5$  are true merely because of the meaning of the constituents of the proposition, or, as Hume puts it, because of the proposition's "relations of ideas." Mill agrees with those (including Kant) who maintain that logical and mathematical truths are not merely linguistic—that they contain substantive, non-linguistic information. But this leaves Mill with the problem of accounting for the apparent *necessity* of such truths—a necessity which seems to rule out their origin in experience. To successfully attack intuitionism in "its stronghold," the *System of Logic* needs to provide alternative grounds for basic principles of logic and mathematics (e.g. the principle of non-contradiction). In particular, Mill needs to show how "that peculiar character of what are called necessary truths" may be explained from experience and association alone.

The object of logic "is to ascertain how we come by that portion of our knowledge (much the greatest portion) which is not intuitive: and by what criterion we can, in matters not self-evident, distinguish between things proved and things not proved, between what is worthy and what is unworthy of belief" (*A System of Logic [System]*, I.i.1). It should be noted that logic goes beyond formal logic for Mill and into the conditions of truth more generally.

The text has the following basic structure. Book I addresses names and propositions. Books II and III examine deduction and induction, respectively. Book IV discusses a variety of operations of the mind, including observation, abstraction, and naming, which are presupposed

in all induction or instrumental to more complicated forms of induction. Book V reveals fallacies of reasoning. Finally, in Book VI, Mill treats the "moral sciences" and argues for the fundamental similarity of the methods of the natural and human sciences. In fact, the human sciences can be understood as themselves natural sciences with human objects of study.

#### **20.4.1 a) Names, Propositions, and the Principles of Logic and Mathematics**

Mill's argument that the principles of mathematics and logic are justified by appeal to experience depends upon his distinction between *verbal* and *real* propositions, that is, between propositions that *do not* convey new information to the person who understands the meaning of the proposition's terms and those propositions that do convey new information. The point of the distinction between verbal and real propositions is, first, to stress that all real propositions are a *posteriori*. Second, the distinction emphasizes that verbal propositions are empty of content; they tell us about language (i.e. what words mean) rather than about the world. In Kantian terms, Mill wants to deny the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions, while contending that we can still make sense of our knowledge of subjects like logic and mathematics.

This distinction between verbal and real propositions depends, in turn, upon Mill's analysis of the meaning of propositions, i.e. how the meanings of constituents of propositions determine the meaning of the whole. A proposition, in which something is affirmed or denied of something, is formed by putting together two "names" or terms (subject and predicate) and a copula. The subject is the name "denoting the person or thing which something is affirmed or denied of" (System, I.i.2). The predicate is "the name denoting that which is affirmed or denied." The copula is "the sign denoting that there is an affirmation or denial," which thereby enables "the hearer or reader to distinguish a proposition from any other kind of discourse." In the proposition 'gold is yellow' for example, the copula 'is' shows that the quality yellow is being affirmed of the substance gold.

Mill divides names into general and singular names. All names, except proper names (e.g. Ringo, Buckley, etc) and names that signify an attribute only (e.g. whiteness, length), have a connotation and a denotation. That is, they both connote or imply some attribute(s) and denote or pick out individuals that fall under that description. The general name "man," for example, denotes Socrates, Picasso, Plutarch, and an indefinite number of other individuals, and it does so because they all share some attribute(s) (e.g. rational animal, featherless biped, etc.) connoted by man. The name "white" denotes all white things and implies or connotes the attribute whiteness. The word "whiteness," by contrast, denotes or signifies an attribute but does *not* connote an attribute. Instead, it operates like a proper name in that its meaning derives entirely from what it denotes.

The meaning of a typical proposition is that the thing(s) denoted by the subject has the attribute(s) connoted by the predicate. In sentences like "Eleanor is tired" and "All men are mortal," though the subjects pick out their objects differently (through a proper name and through an attribute, respectively), Mill's basic story about the meaning of propositions holds.

Things become much more difficult with identity statements like "Hesperus is Phosphorus." In this case, we have two proper names that pick out the same object (the planet Venus). Under Mill's view, these proper names should have the same meaning because they denote the same object. But this appears untenable because the statement seems informative. It doesn't seem plausible that the proposition merely states that an object is identical with itself, which would be the proposition's meaning if Mill's views on the meaning of proper names were correct. (See Frege and Russell's attack on Mill's account of the meaning of proper names; but see Kripke's sophisticated defense of Mill on this in *Naming and Necessity*).

This discussion of the nature of names or terms enables us to understand Mill's treatment of verbal and real propositions. Verbal propositions assert something about the meaning of names rather

than about matters of fact. This means that, "(s)ince names and their signification are entirely arbitrary, such propositions are not, strictly speaking, susceptible of truth or falsity, but only of conformity or disconformity to usage or convention" (*System*, I.vi.1). This kind of proposition simply "asserts of a thing under a particular name, only what is asserted of it in the fact of calling it by that name; and which, therefore, either gives no information, or gives it respecting the name, not the thing" (I.vi.4). As such, verbal propositions are empty of content and they are the only things we know a priori, independently of checking the correspondence of the proposition to the world.

Real propositions, in contrast, "predicate of a thing some fact not involved in the signification of the name by which the proposition speaks of it; some attribute not connoted by that name" (I.vi.4). Such propositions convey information that is not already included in the names or terms employed, and their truth or falsity depends on whether or not they correspond to relevant features of the world. Thus, "George is on the soccer team" predicates something of the subject George that is not included in its meaning (in this case, the denotation of the individual person) and its being true or not depends upon whether George is, in fact, on the team.

Mill's great contention in the *System of Logic* is that logic and mathematics contain real, rather than merely verbal, propositions. He claims, for example, that the law of contradiction (i.e. the same proposition cannot at the same time be false and true) and the law of excluded middle (i.e. either a proposition is true or it is false) are both real propositions. They are, like the axioms of geometry, *experimental truths*, not truths known a priori. They represent *generalizations or inductions* from observation-very well-justified inductions, to be sure, but inductions nonetheless. This leads Mill to say that the necessity typically ascribed to the truths of mathematics and logic by his intuitionist opponents is an illusion, thereby undermining intuitionist argumentative fortifications at their strongest point.

*A System of Logic* thus represents the most thorough attempt to argue for empiricism in epistemology, logic, and mathematics before the twentieth century (for the best discussion of this point, see Skorupski 1989). Though revolutionary advances in logic and philosophy of language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have rendered many of Mill's technical points about semantics and logic obsolete, the basic philosophical vision that Mill defends is very much a live option (see, for example, the work of Quine).

**b) Other Topics of Interest**

There are some other topics covered in the *System of Logic* that are of interest. First is Mill's treatment of deduction (in the form of the syllogism). His discussion is driven by one basic concern: Why wouldn't a deduction simply tell us what we already know? How can it be informative? Mill discounts two common views about the syllogism, namely, that it is useless (because it tells us what we already know) and that it is the correct analysis of what the mind actually does when it discovers truths. To understand why Mill discounts these ways of thinking about deduction, we need to understand his views on inference.

The key point here is that all inference is from *particular to particular*. When we infer that the Duke of Wellington is mortal from "All men are mortal," what we are really doing is inferring the Duke's mortality from the mortality of the individual people with whose mortality we are familiar. What the mind does in making a deductive inference is not to move from a universal truth to a particular one. Rather, it moves from truths about a number of particulars to a smaller number (or one). The general statement that "All men are mortal" only allows us to more easily register what we know-it reflects neither the true inference being made nor the warrant or evidence we have for making the inference. Though general propositions are not necessary for reasoning, they are heuristically useful (as are the syllogisms that employ them). They aid us in memory and comprehension.

Mill's famous treatment of induction reveals the *a posteriori* grounds for belief. He focuses on four different methods of experimental inquiry that attempt to single out from the circumstances that precede or follow a phenomenon the ones that are linked to the phenomenon by an invariable law (*System*, III.viii.1). That is, we test to see if a purported causal connection exists by observing the relevant phenomena under an assortment of situations. If we wish, for example, to know whether a virus causes a disease, how can we prove it? What counts as good evidence for such a belief? The four methods of induction or experimental inquiry—the methods of agreement, of difference, of residues, and of concomitant variation—provide answers to these questions by showing what we need to demonstrate in order to claim that a causal law holds. Can we show, using the method of difference, that when the virus is not present the disease is also absent? If so, then we have some grounds for believing that the virus causes the disease.

Another issue addressed in *A System of Logic* that is of abiding interest is Mill's handling of free will. Mill's commitment to naturalism includes treating the human will as a potential object of scientific study: "Our will causes our bodily actions in the same sense, and in no other, in which cold causes ice, or a spark causes an explosion of gunpowder. The volition, a state of our mind, is the antecedent; the motion of our limbs in conformity to the volition, is the consequent" (*System*, III.v.11). The questions that readily arise are how, under this view, can one take the will to be free and how can we preserve responsibility and feelings of choice?

In his *Autobiography*, Mill recounts his own youthful, melancholy acceptance of the doctrine of "Philosophical Necessity" (advocated by, among others, Robert Owen and his followers): "I felt as if I was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances; as if my character and that of all others had been formed for us by agencies beyond our control, and was wholly out of our own power" (CW, I.175-7). But it is precisely the idea that our character is formed *for us*, not by



us, that Mill thinks is a "grand error" (System, VI.ii.3). We have the power to alter our own character. Though our own character is formed by circumstances, among those circumstances are our own desires. We cannot directly will our characters to be one way rather than another, but we can will actions that shape those characters.

Mill addresses an obvious objection: what leads us to will to change our character? Isn't that determined? Mill agrees. Our desire to change our character is determined largely by our experience of painful and pleasant consequences associated with our character. For Mill, however, the important point is that, even if we don't control the desire to change our character, we are still left with the feeling of moral freedom, which is the feeling of being able to modify our own character "*if we wish*" (System, VI.ii.3). What Mill wants to save in the doctrine of free will is simply the feeling that we have "real power over the formation of our own character" (CW, I.177). If we have the desire to change our character, we find that we can. If we lack that desire it is "of no consequence what we think forms our character," because we don't care about altering it. For Mill, this is a thick enough notion of freedom to avoid fatalism.

One of the basic problems for this kind of naturalistic picture of human beings and wills is that it clashes with our first-person image of ourselves as reasoners and agents. As Kant understood, and as the later hermeneutic tradition emphasizes, we think of ourselves as autonomous followers of objectively given rules (Skorupski 1989, 279). It seems extremely difficult to provide a convincing naturalistic account of, for example, making a choice (without explaining away as illusory our first-person experience of making choices).

The desire to treat the will as an object, like ice or gunpowder, open to natural scientific study falls within Mill's broader claim that the moral sciences, which include economics, history, and psychology among others, are fundamentally similar to the natural sciences. Though we may have difficulty running experiments in the human realm, that realm

and its objects are, in principle, just as open to the causal explanations we find in physics or biology.

Perhaps the most interesting element of his analysis of the moral sciences is his commitment to what has been called "methodological individualism," or the view that social and political phenomena are explicable by appeal to the behavior of individuals. In other words, social facts are reducible to facts about individuals: "The laws of the phenomena of society are, and can be, nothing but the laws of the actions and passions of human beings united together in the social state. Men, however, in a state of society, are still men; their actions and passions are obedient to the laws of individual human nature. Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance with different properties" (*System*, VI.vii.1).

This position puts Mill in opposition to Auguste Comte, a founding figure in social theory (he coined the term "sociology") and an important influence on, and correspondent with, Mill. Comte takes sociology rather than psychology to be the most basic of human sciences and takes individuals and their conduct to be best understood through the lens of social analysis. To put it simplistically, for Comte, the individual is an abstraction from the whole-its beliefs and conduct are determined by history and society. We understand the individual best, on this view, when we see the individual as an expression of its social institutions and setting. This naturally leads to a kind of historicism. Though Mill recognized the important influences of social institutions and history on individuals, for him society is nevertheless only able to shape individuals through affecting their experiences-experiences structured by universal principles of human psychology that operate in all times and places (*See* Mandelbaum 1971, 167ff).

## **20.5 AN EXAMINATION OF SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON'S PHILOSOPHY**

Mill's attacks on intuitionism continued throughout his life. One notable example is his 1865 *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's*

*Philosophy*, which revisits much of the same ground as *A System of Logic* in the guise of a thorough-going criticism of Hamilton, a thinker influenced by Reid and Kant whom Mill took as representing "the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country" (CW, I.270). The rather hefty volume explores "some of the disputed questions in the domain of psychology and metaphysics" (CW, I.271).

Among the doctrines given most attention is that of the "relativity of knowledge," something to which Mill takes Hamilton as insufficiently committed. It is the idea that we have no access to "things-in-themselves" (thus, the relativity versus absoluteness of knowledge) and that we are limited to analyzing the phenomena of consciousness. Mill, who accepts this basic principle, counts himself as a Berkeleian phenomenalist and famously defines matter in the *Examination* as "a Permanent Possibility of Sensation" (CW, IX.183), thinks that Hamilton accepts this doctrine in a confused manner. "He affirms without reservation, that certain attributes (extension, figures, etc.) are known to us as they really exist out of ourselves; and also that all our knowledge of them is relative to us. And these two assertions are only reconcilable, if relativity to us is understood in the altogether trivial sense, that we know them only so far as our faculties permit" (CW, IX.22). Hamilton therefore seems to want to have his cake and eat it too when it comes to knowledge of the external world. On the one hand, he wants to declare that we have access to things as they are, thereby aligning himself with Reid's project of avoiding the fall into (Humean) skepticism—a fall prompted by the Lockean "way of ideas." On the other hand, he wants to follow Kant in limiting our knowledge of things-in-themselves, thereby reigning in the pretensions of metaphysical speculation. Mill avoids this dilemma by rejecting Hamilton's position that we know things outside as they really are.

One point of historical interest about the *Examination* is the impact that it had on the way that the history of philosophy is taught. Mill's demolition of Hamilton's reputation led to the removal of Reid and the school of Scottish "common sense" philosophy from the curriculum in Britain and America. As Kuklick puts it, the success of Mill's *Examination* "is the crucial event in

understanding the development of the contemporary view of Modern Philosophy in America." By destroying "the credibility of the entire Scottish reply to Hume," Mill's *Examination* led Anglo-American philosophers to turn to Kant in the later part of the nineteenth century in order to find more satisfactory response to Humean skepticism (Kuklick 1984, 128). Thus, the standard course in Modern Philosophy that includes all or some of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant, is partly an unintended consequence of the publication of Mill's attack on Hamilton and on intuitionism more broadly.

## 20.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL WRITINGS

As noted in the discussion of *A System of Logic*, Mill's commitment to "methodological individualism" makes psychology the foundational moral science. Though he never wrote a work of his own on psychology, he edited and contributed notes to an 1869 re-issue of his father's 1829 work in psychology, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, and reviewed the work of his friend and correspondent, Alexander Bain. All three were proponents of the associationist school of psychology, whose roots go back to Hobbes and especially Locke, and whose members included Gay, Hartley, and Priestly in the eighteenth century, and Mills, Bain, and Herbert Spencer in the nineteenth century.

Mill distinguishes between the *a posteriori* and *a priori* schools of psychology. The former "resolves the whole contents of the mind into experience" (CW, XI.341). The latter emphasizes that "in every act of thought, down to the most elementary, there is an ingredient which is not given to the mind, but contributed by the mind in virtue of its inherent powers" (CW, XI.344). In the *a priori* or intuitionist school, experience "instead of being the source and prototype of our ideas, is itself a product of the mind's own forces working on the impressions we receive from without, and has always a mental as well as an external element" (CW, XI.344).

The associationist version of a *a posteriori* psychology has two basic doctrines: "first, that the more recondite phenomena of the mind are formed out of the more simple and elementary; and, secondly, that the mental law, by means of which this formation takes place, is the Law of Association

" (CW, XI.345). The associationist psychologists, then, would attempt to explain mental phenomena by showing them to be the ultimate product of simpler components of experience (e.g. color, sound, smell, pleasure, pain) connected to each other through associations. These associations take two basic forms: resemblance and contiguity in space and/or time. Thus, these psychologists attempt to explain our idea of an orange or our feelings of greed as the product of simpler ideas connected by association.

Part of the impulse for this account of psychology is its apparent scientific character and beauty. Associationism attempts to explain a large variety of mental phenomena on the basis of experience plus very few mental laws of association. It therefore appeals to those who are particularly drawn to simplicity in their scientific theories.

Another attraction of associationist psychology, however, is its implications for views on moral education and social reform. If the contents of our minds, including beliefs and moral feelings, are products of experiences that we undergo connected according to very simple laws, then this raises the possibility that human beings are capable of being radically re-shaped—that our natures, rather than being fixed, are open to major alteration. In other words, if our minds are cobbled together by laws of association working on the materials of experience, then this suggests that if our experiences were to change, so would our minds. This doctrine tends to place much greater emphasis on social and political institutions like the family, the workplace, and the state, than does the doctrine that the nature of the mind offers strong resistance to being shaped by experience (i.e. that the mind molds experience rather than being molded by it). Associationism thereby fits nicely into an agenda of reform, because it suggests that many of the problems of individuals are explained by their situations (and the associations that these situations promote) rather than by some intrinsic feature of the mind. As Mill puts it in the *Autobiography* in discussing the conflict between the intuitionist and a *posteriori* schools:

The practical reformer has continually to demand that changes be made in things which are supported by powerful and widely spread feelings, or to question the apparent necessity and indefeasibleness of established facts;

and it is often an indispensable part of his argument to shew, how these powerful feelings had their origin, and how those facts came to seem necessary and indefeasible. There is therefore a natural hostility between him and a philosophy which discourages the explanation of feelings and moral facts by circumstances and association, and prefers to treat them as ultimate elements of human nature...I have long felt that the prevailing tendency to regard all the marked distinctions of human character as innate, and in the main indelible, and to ignore the irresistible proofs that by far the greater part of those differences, whether between individuals, races, or sexes, are such as not only might but naturally would be produced by differences in circumstances, is one of the chief hindrances to the rational treatment of great social questions, and one of the greatest stumbling blocks to human improvement. (CW, I.269-70).

## **20.7 UTILITARIANISM**

Another maneuver in his battle with intuitionism came when Mill published *Utilitarianism* (1861) in installments in *Fraser's Magazine* (it was later brought out in book form in 1863). It offers a candidate for a first principle of morality, a principle that provides us with a criterion distinguishing right and wrong. The utilitarian candidate is the principle of utility, which holds that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" (CW, X.210).

### **20.7.1 History of the Principle of Utility**

By Mill's time, the principle of utility possessed a long history stretching back to the 1730's (with roots going further back to Hobbes, Locke, and even to Epicurus). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it had been explicitly invoked by three British intellectual factions. Though all may have agreed that an action's consequences for the general happiness were to dictate its rightness or wrongness, the reasons behind the acceptance of that principle and the uses to which the principle was put varied greatly.

The earliest supporters of the principle of utility were the religious utilitarians represented by, among others, John Gay, John Brown, Soame Jenyns, and, most famously, William Paley, whose 1785 *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* was one of the most frequently reprinted and well read books of moral thought of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (to Mill's dismay, Bentham's utilitarianism was often conflated with Paley's). Religious utilitarianism was very popular among the educated classes and dominated in the universities until the 1830's. These thinkers were all deeply influenced by Locke's empiricism and psychological hedonism and often stood opposed to the competing moral doctrines of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Clarke, and Wollaston.

The religious utilitarians looked to the Christian God to address a basic problem, namely how to harmonize the interests of individuals, who are motivated by their own happiness, with the interests of the society as a whole. Once we understand that what we must do is what God wills (because of God's power of eternal sanction) and that God wills the happiness of his creatures, morality and our own self-interest will be seen to overlap. God guarantees that an individual's self-interest lies in virtue, in furthering the happiness of others. Without God and his sanctions of eternal punishment and reward, it would be hard to find motives that "are likely to be found sufficient to withhold men from the gratification of lust, revenge, envy, ambition, avarice" (Paley 2002 [1785], 39). As we shall see in a moment, another possible motivation for caring about the general happiness-this one non-religious-is canvassed by Mill in Chapter Three of *Utilitarianism*.

In contrast to religious utilitarianism, which had few aspirations to be a moral theory that revises ordinary moral attitudes, the two late-eighteenth century secular versions of utilitarianism grew out of various movements for reform. The principle of utility-and the correlated commitments to happiness as the only intrinsically desirable end and to the moral equivalency of the happiness of different individuals-was itself taken to be an instrument of reform.

One version of secular utilitarianism was represented by William Godwin (husband of Mary Wollstonecraft and father of Mary Shelley), who achieved great notoriety with the publication of his *Political Justice* of 1793. Though his fame (or infamy) was relatively short-lived, Godwin's use of the principle of utility for the cause of radical political and social critique began the identification of utilitarianism with anti-religiosity and with dangerous democratic values.

The second version of secular utilitarianism, and the one that inspired Mill, arose from the work of Jeremy Bentham. Bentham, who was much more successful than Godwin at building a movement around his ideas, employed the principle of utility as a device of political, social, and legal criticism. It is important to note, however, that Bentham's interest in the principle of utility did not arise from concern about ethical theory as much as from concern about legislative and legal reform.

This history enables us to understand Mill's invocation of the principle of utility in its polemical context—Mill's support of that principle should not be taken as mere intellectual exercise. In the realm of politics, the principle of utility served to bludgeon opponents of reform. First and foremost, reform meant extension of the vote. But it also meant legal reform, including overhaul of the common law system and of legal institutions, and varieties of social reform, especially of institutions that tended to favor aristocratic and moneyed interests. Though Bentham and Godwin intended it to have this function in the late eighteenth century, utilitarianism became influential only when tied with the political machinery of the Radical party, which had particular prominence on the English scene in the 1830's.

In the realm of ethical debate, Mill took his opponents to be the "intuitionists" led by Sedgwick and Whewell, both Cambridge men. They were the contemporary representatives of an ethical tradition that understood its history as tied to Butler, Reid, Coleridge, and turn of the century German thought (especially that of Kant). Though



intuitionists and members of Mill's *a posteriori* or "inductive" school recognize "to a great extent, the same moral laws," they differ "as to their evidence and the source from which they derive their authority. According to the one opinion, the principles of morals are evident a priori, requiring nothing to command assent except that the meaning of the terms be understood. According to the other doctrine, right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood, are questions of observation and experience." (*CW*, X.206).

The chief danger represented by the proponents of intuitionism was not from the ethical content of their theories per se, which defended honesty, justice, benevolence, etc., but from the kinds of justifications offered for their precepts and the support such a view lent to the social and political status quo. As we saw in the discussion of the *System of Logic* and with reference to Mill's statements in his *Autobiography*, he takes intuitionism to be dangerous because it allegedly enables people to ratify their own prejudices as moral principles-in intuitionism, there is no "external standard" by which to adjudicate differing moral claims (for example, Mill understood Kant's categorical imperative as getting any moral force it possesses either from considerations of utility or from mere prejudice hidden by hand-waving). The principle of utility, alternatively, evaluates moral claims by appealing to the external standard of pain and pleasure. It presented each individual for moral consideration as someone capable of suffering and enjoyment.

## **20.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **20.8.1 Fill in the blanks**

1. J. S. Mill was born in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Mill married \_\_\_\_\_ in 1851.
3. He worked for \_\_\_\_\_ company.
4. The essay on liberty was published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Mill had a pen friendship with \_\_\_\_\_.

6. Harriet Taylor reinforced Mill's advocacy of \_\_\_\_\_ rights.
7. Mill is renowned for his \_\_\_\_\_ principles.
8. Mill was \_\_\_\_\_ century writer.
9. Besides English Mill knew \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ languages.
10. Mill died in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

### **20.8.2 Short Answer Questions**

1. Briefly examine Mill's opinion on women and marriage.
2. Briefly describe the concept of utilitarianism as given by J. S. Mill.

### **20.9. LET US SUM UP**

Mill's intellect engaged with the world rather than fled from it. His was not an ivory tower philosophy, even when dealing with the most abstract of philosophical topics. His work is of enduring interest because it reflects how a fine mind struggled with and attempted to synthesize important intellectual and cultural movements. He stands at the intersections of conflicts between enlightenment and romanticism, liberalism and conservatism, and historicism and rationalism. In each case, as someone interested in conversation rather than pronouncement, he makes sincere efforts to move beyond polemic into sustained and thoughtful analysis. That analysis produced challenging answers to problems that still remain. Whether or not one agrees with his answers, Mill serves as a model for thinking about human problems in a serious and civilized way.

### **20.10 ANSWER KEY**

1. 1806
2. Harriet Hardy
3. East India
4. 1859
5. Auguste Comte

6. Women's
7. Utilitarian
8. 19th
9. Greek and Latin
10. 1873

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**J. S. MILL :**  
***THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN: CHAPTER 4***

**21.1 Objective**

**21.2 Context**

**21.3 Themes, Arguments, and Ideas**

- a) **Logic as Induction**
- b) **The Subject of Experience**
- c) **Experience as the Ground of Knowledge**
- d) **Ethics vs. Behavior**
- e) **Government as a Force for Moral Education**
- f) **The Individual as a Product of Society**

**21.4 A System of Logic: Raciocinative and Inductive**

**21.5 Principles of Political Economy**

**21.6 On Liberty**

**21.7 Suggested Reading**

**21.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to discuss J.S. Mill and his important works in detail.



## 21.2 CONTEXT

One of the most important thinkers and writers of the Victorian era, John Stuart Mill was also a political activist, involved in struggles for social reform throughout his life. Born in 1806 in London, Mill was the son of the prominent philosopher and historian James Mill. James Mill believed that the mind of a child is a blank slate that requires a strict regimen to be properly trained and educated. Accordingly, young John was isolated from boys of his own age and kept under the austere eye of his father, who saw to it that his son was learning Greek by the age of three and had mastered Latin by the age of eight. Mill's day was filled with intellectual work, and he was allowed only one hour of recreation, which consisted of a walk with his father—who used the opportunity to conduct oral exams. By the age of fourteen, he had read deeply in history, logic, mathematics, and economic theory. When he was fifteen, he began studying the radical English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the founder of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the theory that laws and actions should be judged as good or bad based on their utility, meaning the results they produce. For a utilitarian, the best actions or laws are those that produce the greatest good for the most people, and the greatest good over the least amount of pain. The influence of utilitarianism launched Mill on a lifelong pursuit of social reform.

Mill visited France in 1820 and was thoroughly enchanted by the country and its culture, history, and literature. This enchantment would last his entire life. When he was seventeen, Mill's father secured for him a position in the East India Company, where he worked until he retired in 1858.

Mill began publishing in 1822 and in 1823, he helped form the Utilitarian Society, which met at Jeremy Bentham's house. He took regular part in the London Debating Society, and by this time had adopted the views of Thomas Malthus, who had argued that the human population would eventually outgrow its food supply, leading to a dire catastrophe. Consequently, in 1824, Mill was arrested for distributing birth control literature to the London poor. In 1826, he suffered a severe bout of depression, which he attributed to the emotionally

restricted life he had led as a child. He recovered and began an active intellectual life, but with a changed outlook. He now made room for a human dimension in his thought that offset the starkness of utilitarianism, stressing an intellectual approach to life at the expense of emotions.

In 1830, at the age of twenty-four, Mill met the woman he would love for the rest of his life. This woman, Harriet Taylor, was already married to a wealthy London merchant. The two waited patiently until the death of Taylor's husband in 1849, finally marrying two years later, in 1851. Harriet was Mill's constant companion from the time they met, and she took an active interest in his writing. The couple's years of happiness were brief, for Harriet died in 1858. Thereafter, Harriet's daughter from her first marriage, Helen, was Mill's companion. He remained a committed social reformer all his life, and in 1865 was elected to Parliament, where he actively campaigned for women's rights and suffrage. He spent his last years in Avignon, France, with Helen, and died there in 1873. He was buried beside his wife.

Mill's philosophy is based on an empiricist approach to the world. Mill sees experience as the only true foundation of knowledge, and thus his philosophy allows no place for traditional or received ideas of right and wrong. As an empiricist, Mill continually privileges observation and experiment over theorizing, and his thought tends to be inductive (drawing general conclusions from particular instances) rather than deductive (drawing conclusions by extrapolating from general principles).

Although Mill was influenced by utilitarianism, a theory that directs people to work for the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, Mill nevertheless worked to protect the rights of individuals, particularly women. Mill's interest in social reform stemmed from his belief that the majority often denies liberty to individuals, either through laws or through moral and social judgments.

The theme of individual liberty recurs throughout Mill's writings. Mill believed that an individual may do anything he or she wishes, as long

as that individual's actions do not harm others. He maintained that governments have no right to meddle in an individual's affairs, even when they enact laws that are designed for the good of the individual. In fact, the only viable reason for any government to exist in the first place is to protect the individual so that he or she experiences safety in peacetime, defense in times of war, and security from fraud and cheating.

Mill's thoughts on individual liberty led him to discover the power of emotion in human life and thought. Through the tutelage of his father, his mind had been trained to think in a rigid and mechanical manner, leaving no room for emotion. Following his mental breakdown, Mill came to feel that his father's stress on the contemplative life over the physical was wrong and that emotion allows us to connect in a real and valid way with nature and with our natural self. Moreover, emotions bind individuals in a unique bond, and Mill's relationship with Mrs. Taylor provided him the opportunity to reflect on this idea. This transformation in Mill's thinking led to his humanizing the inherent severity of utilitarianism, as practiced by his father and Jeremy Bentham, which sought only to lay bare the principles of pleasure and pain, as they became evident through the negative and positive associations of punishment and praise. Consequently, Mill was a strong activist of socialist views, women's rights, political reforms, labor unions, and farm cooperatives.

### **21.3. THEMES, ARGUMENTS AND IDEAS**

#### **a) Logic as Induction**

Before Mill wrote his *System of Logic*, the system of logic outlined by Aristotle in his *Organon* (see chapter 2, Aristotle) had been accepted as authoritative. Aristotle's logic is a system of rules for creating syllogisms, arguments that start with a general premise and reach a conclusion about a particular instance, such as "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal." Mill, however, was an empiricist and believed that all knowledge comes to us through our senses and that we only come to believe in any general principles by experiencing many particular instances that bear them out. Although other empiricist

philosophers, such as Locke, had argued that experience is the only basis of knowledge, no one before Mill had attempted to write a system of rules, comparable to Aristotle's, for how we arrive at general principles by starting with particulars. Mill established a distinction between *deductive* logic, in which we extrapolate from general principles, and *inductive logic*, in which we draw conclusions from specific cases. Mill maintained that inductive logic is the true basis of knowledge.

Although Mill defines many different types of induction, the basic principles of his system are fairly straightforward. The inductive method is based on the idea of causation; the goal of induction is to determine what causes something. Mill considers various kinds of evidence and proof, but the essential method for establishing a cause is elimination. If an event happens in one set of circumstances but does not happen in other circumstances that are the same except for one thing, that one thing must be the cause of the event. Complicated phenomena involving a number of causes may be explained using a more elaborate inductive method in which separate causes are identified through deduction, and then their combination is identified through deduction. For example, to explain what causes heart disease, we would use empirical evidence from experiments (i.e., induction) to establish many specific laws governing how diet, genetics, exercise, age, and other factors affect the heart, following which we would use deduction to arrive at a hypothesis for how these laws might work together. Finally, we would verify these hypotheses through induction (more experimentation and examination of empirical evidence).

Although Mill considered induction to be the basis of logic, today induction is not considered part of logic at all. The methods of evidence and proof that Mill wrote about are now considered part of the scientific method, whereas logic proper is limited to deduction.

## **b) The Subject of Experience**

Mill sees experience as the exclusive and sole source of knowledge. He rejects the idea of what he calls intuitive knowledge,

which could apply to any kind of knowledge that the mind grasps immediately and with certainty rather than verifying through observation over a period of time. Intuitive knowledge would include such things as Plato's Forms or Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." However, if the mind cannot intuitively perceive itself as a self, the question arises, what does the self consist of? Mill imagines the body as a permanent potentiality of sensations and the mind as a series of actual and possible states of being. In other words, neither the brain nor the body can be said to be a "person," in the sense we normally use that word, meaning a stable, consistent, identifiable self. Mill grapples with the problem of how a series of different states or impressions can be aware of itself. Mill observes that a bond seems to exist between the various parts of a series (such as the different states of mind through which a person goes), which allows us to say that these parts are the feelings of a person, who is the same person throughout. This bond constitutes the ego. However, Mill's argument here seems to depend on the existence of a faculty of perception very much like intuition-our minds apparently intuit the bond between elements in a series.

**c) Experience as the Ground of Knowledge**

Experience for Mill is that which can be checked, tested, and proven by careful observation and analysis. Experience must be used to test the inferences we make from experience. Mill observes that the fundamental laws of mathematics and logic, which the supporters of intuitive knowledge had long pointed to as proof that there are some things we know that require no experience, are in fact no more than generalizations from experience. He argues that the law of contradiction, another supposedly innate idea which holds that nothing can be both true and not true, is purely a summary of the inherent incongruity of belief and nonbelief. He maintains that any accuracy of knowledge is only hypothetical, and thus fictitious. He views the law of causation (the

fact that every event has a cause) as very important to his inductive system, as a generalization from the experience of an invariable and unconditional sequence. Further, Mill acknowledges only one kind of inference-that which occurs from particulars to particulars-and he uses inference to interpret the record of particular experiences, since they alone provide evidence on which any kind of conclusion can rest.

**d) Ethics vs. Behavior**

Mill considered the problem of what human beings do from two different perspectives. First, he observed that certain motives correspond to certain actions in very consistent, even invariable sequences. This fact means that human actions are predictable and that a scientific study of human behavior is possible-from this insight, made by Mill and some of his contemporaries. In particular, Mill observed that human beings always act to maximize their own pleasure. Since this observation is essentially a behavioral law, it would be useless to expect human beings to do otherwise, or to argue with them that they should do otherwise.

However, Mill also examined human actions from an ethical standpoint. On the surface, this second perspective would seem to conflict with the first. Ethics concerns what human beings ought to do and assumes freedom of choice, while the study of human behavior focuses on what human beings actually do and what makes them do it. Mill was able to combine these two perspectives because he believed that the pursuit of pleasure that actually motivates human beings does not necessarily conflict with acting for the general good of society, the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Different kinds of pleasures exist, and we can learn to eschew the baser in favor of the higher. Moreover, Mill saw the study of human behavior as being at the service of ethics. By scientifically studying the effects of human actions, we may discover those actions that most advance the happiness of all. Mill rejects the idea that we know right from wrong intuitively, arguing instead that we must judge our actions by their consequences.

**e) Government as a Force for Moral Education**

For Mill, government does not exist merely to promote and produce the maximum amount of pleasure, which its citizens like to have. Rather, government must continually seek to educate its citizens so that they pursue the higher, mental pleasures over the lower ones. In fact, it is the government's responsibility, as well as an individual responsibility, to undertake moral education so that the result may be a good society. This moral education must be implemented with the recognition that people are not merely hedonistic pleasure seekers but that they are progressive by their very nature and desire higher pleasures. Thus, a good government is one that encourages an active participation by all its citizens. A bad government is one that forces its citizens to be passively obedient to the wishes and whims of a ruling elite, no matter how sensible these wishes and whims may in fact be.

**f) The Individual as a Product of Society**

Like many of the philosophers who preceded him in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mill saw the individual as sacred and as taking precedence over the state, in the sense that the state exists for the sake of individuals rather than the other way around. However, unlike Hobbes and Rousseau, Mill's interest in the individual was not as the individual might exist in a state of nature, before entering into society. Instead, Mill imagined the value of the individual as he or she would become with the proper education in a well-structured society. He sees the individual as filled with various potentials, and it is only in conjunction with society that an individual may develop these potentials so that he or she may benefit the community that he or she inhabits. Mill advocates the active life so that individuals may use their various gifts and talents to promote happiness for the greatest number. He sees the active life for the individual as morally superior to a passive one.

#### 21.4. A SYSTEM OF LOGIC: RACIOCINATIVE AND INDUCTIVE

*A System of Logic* was first published in 1843 and immediately enjoyed a wide circulation, going through numerous editions. Mill himself made substantial changes in the third edition, published in 1850, and the eighth edition, published in 1872, a year before his death. This book is Mill's most comprehensive and systematic philosophical work, elaborating his inductive method, which helped to free the empirical sciences from the rigidity of analysis by way of syllogisms.

Syllogisms are arguments grounded in general principles, in which two premises are used to deduce a third premise, or conclusion. In *A System of Logic*, Mill breaks away from this age-old practice and instead proposes the use of a form of logic derived from the principles of the natural sciences. He uses his method to address questions of language and logic, induction, the relativity of knowledge, the structure of the scientific method, the structure of arithmetic and geometry, and the principles of the moral sciences. In effect, Mill provides a solid, scientific methodology for reasoning and for philosophy, derived from science and mathematics.

The introduction discusses the role and purpose of logic in human understanding. Logic is the art and science of reasoning, a means for the pursuit of truth. However, logic is only concerned with making inferences from observed phenomena, not with intuitive truths. Logic does not produce new evidence, but it can determine whether something offered as evidence is valid. Logic judges but does not observe, invent, or discover. Logic serves a purpose in some larger project of inquiry that gives it meaning. Fundamentally, logic is a method of evaluating evidence.

Book I defines logic as a method of proof. Proof always involves an assertion or proposition that must be proven. A proposition is a discourse that either affirms or denies something about some other thing. Thus, a proposition is a belief that depends on the ability to attach a name to something. When two names are joined together by a copula ("the sun is bright"), they form the proposition. Mill proceeds to examine the nature of predicates, which



are properties that can be said to be possessed by substances. Predicates include such things as joy, fear, sound, smell, taste, pain, pleasure, thought, judgment, and conception. Mill suggests that feelings or states of consciousness are realities; that is, they are neither substances nor attributes. Mill proceeds to examine volition and action, substance and attribute, body, mind, quality, relation, resemblance, quantity, states of consciousness, and attributes of mind.

Book II discusses the place of logic within the field of knowledge, specifically denying that logic is related to metaphysics and stating that preconceived notions and speculative thought are foreign to the workings of logic, since they suggest that logic be reduced to consistency rather than truth. In book II, Mill opens up logic to include the various fields of science and knowledge, and denies logic any kind of restrictive structure.

Book III introduces Mill's inductive method. An inductive inquiry begins with the analysis of things according to their elements. The first step in induction is the separation of a thing into its various elements through a process of experimentation and observation. Mill proceeds to examine the relationship between cause and effect, and concludes that one effect may have several causes. Mill distinguishes between complex and compound effects, which brings him to examine the nature of generalizations and probable evidence, operations which, he says, are more useful in life than in science.

Book IV discusses the need for a philosophical language that would further the practice of induction by helping us to accurately observe, record, and communicate. Such a language must have a steady and determinate meaning for every general name, since names often have unclear connotations. Book V deals with various fallacies that must be resolved before logic can be firmly grounded. These include the fallacies of confusion; of ambiguous words; and the *petitio principii*, which states that the premise either appears to be the same as the conclusion or is proved from the conclusion. Mill concludes that this argument is a fallacy because it is nothing more than a circular argument, since the attempt is to prove two propositions reciprocally from one another leads nowhere.

Book VI argues that the "moral sciences," meaning the study of ethics and human nature, require the same logical structure as the physical sciences. A discussion of the concepts of liberty, causation, and necessity as they apply to human affairs leads Mill to conclude that human nature is governed by scientific principles that logic can lay bare and that can be used to promote happiness. Mill argues that human psychology and behavior are governed by universal laws, as is the formation of each person's ethical character. However, these laws cannot be studied directly, through experiment and observation, but can only be known deductively. Mill considers various scientific methods and the extent to which they may be applied to the social sciences. Although many of the methods of the natural sciences do not work for the social sciences, the methods of induction may still be applied to understand causes and effects, such as the effects of a given policy or legislative act. The social sciences can also be approached deductively, by starting with a priori laws of human nature and reasoning based on them. Mill divides the social sciences into two branches: those in which the causes and effects of human behavior are studied in a context that is assumed to be stable, and those sciences that examine progress and historical change.

### **Analysis**

The most innovative aspect of *A System of Logic* is its rigorous, systematic explanation of induction. This explanation is a particularly impressive accomplishment given how unscientific and unsystematic induction seems to be at first glance, especially in comparison with the certainty of a deduction or syllogism. For example, in the famous syllogism, "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Socrates must be mortal," if you know for certain that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man, you can be very certain of your conclusion-that Socrates will die at some point. However, if you work in the reverse direction, which induction requires you to do, you get a much less certain answer. Socrates died, and Socrates was a man, so perhaps all men are mortal-but maybe not. The fact that Socrates' friends Diabetes and Bursitis also died can be offered as further evidence that all men are mortal, but it still doesn't prove it. Nevertheless, for those who believe that all our ideas come from

experience, induction is the source of every general principle that we think we know, so induction is the foundation on which deduction is based.

## **21.5 PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* was first published in 1848, and it went through various editions; the final edition was the seventh, which appeared in 1871. Political Economy is the term nineteenth-century writers use to refer to the study of what we today call macroeconomics, though its practitioners, such as Adam Smith, Mill, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx, were more philosophical and less empirical in their methods than modern economists. In this book, Mill examines the fundamental economic processes on which society is based: production, the distribution of goods, exchange, the effect of social progress on production and distribution, and the role of government in economic affairs.

Book I deals with production and begins by identifying the basic requisites that enable production to exist: labor and natural objects. Labor may be defined as an agent of production, though not all labor leads to the production of a material object. Labor produces three types of utilities. The first is the creation of objects for human use, wherein labor invests external material things with properties that make these things usable. Second, some labor renders human beings serviceable to society and to themselves, such as the labor of teachers and doctors. The third utility is the labor of giving pleasure or entertainment, which does not make other people more productive or result in a tangible product. In addition to labor and natural objects, production requires capital, without which it would cease. In essence, capital is the accumulated stock of the products of labor. After discussing such aspects and manifestation of capital, such as fixed versus circulating capital, Mill examines the social forms of production, such as cooperation, combination of labor, production on a small and large scale, and the increase of labor, which results in the increase of capital as well as production. Last, Mill examines production from land and recognizes that such production is markedly different from the one achieved through labor and capital, since production from land is limited and not likely to greatly increase.

Book II examines distribution as it is manifested in the allocation of property and produce. Mill discusses the effect on distribution of such factors as competition; customs; slavery; ownership by peasants; and the various types of laborers, wages, profits, and rents. Mill acknowledges the difference between workers and capitalists (he includes landowners in this category), both of whom share the products of labor. In book III, Mill addresses the topics of exchange and value, defining the latter in terms of supply and demand. Mill sees value as relative, since it depends on the quantity of another thing or things. There is no general rise and fall of value, for it rises only when a fall is supposed and it falls when a rise is supposed. Mill considers money and its relationship to supply and demand, cost of production, and credit (which is a substitute for money). Further, he looks at the influence of credit on prices, the function of currency, international trade and values, and rates of interest.

Book IV deals with the relationship between a society's progress and its economic affairs. Mill defines social progress in terms of the increase of knowledge, the improved protection of citizens and property, the transformation of taxes so they are less oppressive, the avoidance of war, and the increase in the prosperity of the people brought about by improvements in business capacities, including the more effective employment of the citizens through education. Mill notes that social progress is not infinite and that a given state of affairs may become stationary if production does not improve and if the overflow of capital from the affluent to the less affluent countries becomes suspended. This recognition of a state of stagnation leads Mill to speculate on the future of the laboring classes, which he foresees rising beyond the patriarchal values of society and becoming emancipated through education. The newly empowered working class will generate massive change in society.

Book V analyzes the influence of government on society, arguing that the functions of government can be divided into the necessary and the optional. The necessary is that which is inseparable from the very of idea of government, such as security, protection, and taxation. Everything else that government does is optional and subject to question. Mill concludes by considering the question of a government's interference with individual liberty. Mill asserts

that government should always restrict itself to doing only what is necessary. First, a government should prohibit and punish individual behavior that harms other people, such as force, fraud, or negligence. Second, a government should work to limit or even eliminate the great amount of energy being spent on the harming of one nation by another. Third, a government should turn such destructive behavior into bettering human faculties, namely, transforming the powers of nature so they serve the greatest physical and moral good. Finally, Mill proposes that governments should adopt a laissez-faire policy, in that they would abstain from interfering with individual choice and grant unconstrained freedom to people, who should be able to pursue their happiness without restrictions.

### **Analysis**

In *Principles*, Mill turns economics into a viable philosophical area of inquiry by exploring what people really want and what economics can measure and assess. Mill's approach to economics is based on his belief in the superiority of socialism, in which economic production would be driven by cooperatives owned by the workers. To this end, Mill argues that the laws of production may be natural laws, but the laws of distribution are created and enacted by human beings. In other words, wealth is the natural end product of labor, but the distribution of wealth is determined by the decisions and the will of actual people (the elite) and is not simply part of the order of nature. Mill carries this view quite far, maintaining that human laws and institutions can and should determine how wealth is distributed. Thus, for Mill, economics is closely tied to social philosophy and politics.

Mill believes that society will continue to grow and change, but he recognizes that such change is limited by the capabilities of the land and of labor, both of which have to be handled with care since neither can continue to produce an increasing amount in order to satisfy a growing demand. Mill agrees with Thomas Malthus that population must be controlled so that it does not outgrow its food supply.

Mill does discuss the benefits of free competition and the useful and favorable social energies that competition releases. He goes so far as

to note that if a society becomes too entrenched in protecting its members from competition, the result is stagnation and mental inertia in its citizens. Therefore, it is important to encourage self-initiative and individual responsibility, and government policy should never weaken or discourage this positive force. Although this does not free the state from its responsibilities of providing security and well-being for its citizens, Mill does modify his generally laissez-faire stance by stating that private monopolies must be prevented, the poor must be properly looked after, and the education of children must be suitably available. Mill firmly believes that it is only the well educated and therefore enlightened citizen who can help society grow, change, and progress. Moreover, education allows the lower classes to become more socially active and responsible.

One of the most remarkable facets of *Principles* is its call for equal rights for women. Just as the poor need to be emancipated from their dependence on the vicissitudes of a class-structured society, which reflect a patriarchal orientation, women need to be freed from the dependence on men. Thus, Mill advocates that women not be barred from seeking employment in areas traditionally the preserve of men.

The most important aspect of *Principles* is the use of a scientific method in the analysis of politics, thus giving a practical application to theoretical ideas. This gave a fresh impetus to liberal thought by placing its various concepts and ideals firmly within the realm of social and political action, grounded in the rigor of science.

## **21.6. ON LIBERTY**

*On Liberty* is one of Mill's most famous works and remains the one most read today. In this book, Mill expounds his concept of individual freedom within the context of his ideas on history and the state. *On Liberty* depends on the idea that society progresses from lower to higher stages and that this progress culminates in the emergence of a system of representative democracy. It is within the context of this form of government that Mill envisions the growth and development of liberty.

Chapter I defines civil liberty as the limit that must be set on society's power over each individual. Mill undertakes a historical review of the concept of liberty, beginning with ancient Greece and Rome, and proceeding to England. In the past, liberty meant primarily protection from tyranny. Over time, the meaning of liberty changed along with the role of rulers, who came to be seen as servants of the people rather than masters. This evolution brought about a new problem: the tyranny of the majority, in which a democratic majority forces its will on the minority. This state of affairs can exercise a tyrannical power even outside the political realm, when forces such as public opinion stifle individuality and rebellion. Here, society itself becomes the tyrant by seeking to inflict its will and values on others. Next, Mill observes that liberty can be divided into three types, each of which must be recognized and respected by any free society. First, there is the liberty of thought and opinion. The second type is the liberty of tastes and pursuits, or the freedom to plan our own lives. Third, there is the liberty to join other like-minded individuals for a common purpose that does not hurt anyone. Each of these freedoms negates society's propensity to compel compliance.

Chapter II examines the question of whether one or more persons should be able to curtail another person's freedom to express a divergent point of view. Mill argues that any such activity is illegitimate, no matter how beyond the pale that individual's viewpoint may be. We must not silence any opinion, because such censorship is simply morally wrong. Mill points out that a viewpoint's popularity does not necessarily make it correct-this fact is why we must allow freedom of opinion. Dissent is vital because it helps to preserve truth, since truth can easily become hidden in sources of prejudice and dead dogma. Mill defines dissent as the freedom of the individual to hold and articulate unpopular views.

Chapter III discusses whether people who hold unpopular views should be allowed to act on them without being made social outcasts or facing a legal penalty. Actions cannot be as free as ideas or viewpoints, and the law must limit all actions whose implementation would harm others or be an outright nuisance. He states that human beings are fallible, and therefore they need to experiment with different ways of living. However, individual liberty must always be expressed in order to achieve social and personal progress.

Chapter IV examines whether there are instances when society can legitimately limit individual liberty. Mill rejects the concept of the social contract, in which people agree to be a part of society and recognize that society can offer certain forms of protection while asking for certain forms of obligations. However, he does suggest that because society offers protection, people are obliged to behave in a certain way, and each member of society must defend and protect society and all its members from harm. In brief, society must be given power to curtail behavior that harms others, but no more.

Chapter V summarizes and elucidates Mill's twofold argument. First, individuals are not accountable to society for behavior and actions that affect only them. Second, a person is answerable for any type of behavior or action that harms others, and in such cases it is the responsibility of society to punish and curtail such behavior and action. However, Mill does note that there are some types of actions that certainly harm others but bring a larger benefit to society, as when one person succeeds in business more than his rival. In the rest of the chapter, Mill examines particular examples of his doctrine.

### **Analysis**

The key concept in *On Liberty* is the idea that liberty is essential to ensure subsequent progress, both of the individual and society, particularly when society becomes more important than the state. This state of affairs would be attained in a representative democracy in which the opposition between the rulers and the ruled disappears, in that the rulers only represent the interests of the ruled. Such a democracy would make the liberty of the individual possible, but it would not guarantee it. When society becomes free of the constraints of government, it begins to entrench the interests of a select and powerful few, which threatens individual liberty in a new way. Mill grapples with the problem of envisioning society progressing in such a way as to prevent the repression of the individual by the ever more powerful and confident majority. Social progress can only take place if limits are placed on individual liberty, but it also necessitates the freeing of the individual from such limits.



Mill sidesteps this dilemma by delving into moral theory, where the only important thing is the happiness of the individual, and such happiness may only be attained in a civilized society, in which people are free to engage in their own interests, with all their skills and capabilities, which they have developed and honed in a good system of education. Thus, Mill stresses the fundamental value of individuality, of personal development, both for the individual and society for future progress. For Mill, a civilized person is the one who acts on what he or she understands and who does everything in his or her power to understand. Mill holds this model out to all people, not just the specially gifted, and advocates individual initiative over social control. He asserts that things done by individuals are done better than those done by governments. Moreover, individual action advances the mental education of that individual, something that government action cannot ever do, for government action always poses a threat to liberty and must be carefully watched.

#### **21.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Mill, James. *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, edited and with notes by John Stuart Mill, Longmans, Green and Dyer, 1869.
- ◆ Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, gen. Ed. John M. Robson, vol. 33, University of Toronto Press, 1963-91.

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**J. S. MILL :**  
***THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN***

- 22.1 Objective**
- 22.2 Historical Context**
- 22.3 Publication of *The Subjection of Women***
- 22.4 Structure of the Pamphlet**
- 22.5 Chapter 1**
- 22.6 Chapter 2**
- 22.7 Chapter 3**
- 22.8 Chapter 4**
- 22.9 Critical Comments**
- 22.10 Let Us Sum Up**
- 22.11 Self-Assessment Questions**
  - 22.11.1 Fill in the Blanks**
  - 22.11.2 Short Answer Questions**
- 22.12 Answer Key**
- 22.13 Suggested Reading**
- 22.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this chapter is to analyze *The Subjection of Women*, its publication , title and all the four chapters in detail.

## 22.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The question of women's roles and rights in society has been a hotly debated topic for centuries. The Victorian Age of 19th century England is no exception. In Victorian England, women gradually gained more legal rights (like the right to divorce), but they were still inferior to men in education, political rights, and social status. Many thinkers, politicians, activists, and writers, including *John Stuart Mill* (1806-1873) contributed to this debate on gender roles in the Victorian Age, aptly named the ***Woman Question***. Mill was a British philosopher and writer who was fed up with women being treated as subordinate and disempowered. So, in 1869, Mill published his book, *The Subjection of Women*, which analyzed women's status and advocated for women's equality in Victorian society.

According to Mill, custom (by which he means, Victorian culture or society) insists that a woman's primary duty is to please and serve others, and to put her own desires on hold. That means women were expected and taught to attract a suitable husband, and once married, to stay home, raise the children, submit to her husband, and attend to household affairs. This concept of female gender role was also referred to as the ***cult of domesticity***. Mill rejected all of this and instead argued that such custom kept women from reaching their full potential. Instead, Mill argued women should be granted more political and legal rights as well as given more social and economic opportunities.

## 22.3 PUBLICATION OF *THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN*

*The Subjection of Women* was written in 1861 and published in 1869. According to Mill himself, it was written in collaboration with his wife ***Harriet Taylor***. Taylor died a few years before Mill put their commonly held ideas about gender equality to paper, but in his own words, "When two people have their thoughts and speculations completely in common, it is of little consequence in respect to the question of originality which of them holds the pen." The essay, then, was the result of ideas the two had discussed extensively over the course of their long friendship and eventual marriage.

It is not surprising that Harriet Taylor was not acknowledged as a contributor when "The Subjection of Women" was first published: Mill knew very well that philosophical arguments presented by men stood a better chance of being taken seriously, so it's easy to imagine him playing by the rules and working within the system in the hope of later being able to change it from the inside. It does make me a little sad, however, that no contemporary edition has (to my knowledge) changed this and acknowledged Taylor's role.

The critical reception of "The Subjection of Women" is also very interesting to read about. One of Mill's main arguments was that one could not know the true nature of the differences between men and women because one couldn't oneself ourselves from an environment that at the very least clearly reinforced them. This, however, was dismissed on the grounds that it showed his "ignorance of science". Russett says :

*Contemporary scientists and scientific popularizers dismissed Mill as the one who ignored science. Darwin, who respected Mill, nonetheless lamented his scientific ignorance. The London anthropological Society, devoted to racial and sexual inequality, excoriated the "school of Mill."*

## **22.4 STRUCTURE OF THE PAMPHLET**

The book is divided into four chapters. These do not have titles. Their content can be gathered from the first sentence of each.

On the basis of the first sentence and the content of the chapters, critics have given the chapters titles. Here are the chapters, the first sentence, and the titles critics have given to the chapters

### **CHAPTER 1: The question can be raised**

Reason versus 'instinct'

Modern changes of attitude

Slavery and absolute

Natural

Complaints

Affection

The course of history

The 'nature' of women

The 'need' for compulsion

**CHAPTER 2: The laws governing marriage**

Judging by the best instances

The need for decisions

Would liberated women be fair

The moral education of mankind

Property rights

**CHAPTER 3: Occupations for women outside marriage**

Women as governors

Practice versus theory

Nervous temperament

The size and quality of brains

Different nations, different views

Women in the arts and sciences

Moral differences

**CHAPTER 4: What good would reform do?**

The moral education of males

Doubling the brain pool

The moral influence of women: chivalry

The moral influence of women: charity

The moral influence of wives on husbands

The moral effects of difference

The moral effects of inferiority

Benefits to the individual woman.

## 22.5. CHAPTER 1

*The Subjection of Women* is divided into four chapters, each chapter presenting and supporting an aspect of Mill's argument. In chapter 1, Mill states his general aim explicitly. He challenges the common notion that women are by nature unequal to men. He explains that "the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement," and the systematic subordination of women by men "ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other." Mill acknowledges that his views challenge accepted views and practices, but he counters by pointing out the historical foundations of subjection, that is, the conversion of "mere physical fact into a legal right." The subjection of women, then, is based on a premodern law of force, not on the modern use of reason. Since no other system has been tried, the then-present system of subjugation of the "weaker" female sex to the "stronger" male sex rests upon unproven theory, says Mill. Mill hoped to pave the way for a new system of equality, based on theory, as no practice of gender equality had as yet been allowed.

Using an analogy that angered many of his readers, Mill compares women's subordination to men to that of the slave to his master and speaks of a kind of domestic slavery to the family. Unlike the slave, however, the woman's master not only wants her labor but also her sentiments, and he conspires to bind nature and education to accomplish his desire for the loving, submissive, domestic slave over whom he, as husband, has absolute control. The relationship between men and women is merely the customary relationship, and whatever is customary appears natural. To those with power over others, their domination appears natural, perhaps even good, and appears owing to the nature of the dominated. Women's true natures cannot be verified, however,

for they are repressed in some areas and unnaturally stimulated in others, according to Mill. Furthermore, women have seldom been allowed to testify to their own natures; rather, they have been described by the men who exercise power over them. Since women have never been allowed to develop naturally without the repression, stimulation, or guidance of men, a system of subordination founded on women's "natural" sensitivity and lack of more "masculine" qualities is not inherently more valid than any other system based on theory alone.

Mill begins by facing the real problem: no one will listen to his arguments. There is a deep feeling to be contended with, a deep feeling which supports the most intimate of daily relationships, and when a given condition rests on a feeling that arguments cannot reach, the arguments against it get ever hotter. (In Chapter 2 he goes on to delineate how 50% of the human race profits strongly from the arrangement so that also makes for the difficulty of anyone trying to change it, and explains how it is that the present 50% exploited is complicit and co-opted.)

Then he goes on to argue against feeling as a recent basis for justification. He says this is really resting a case on instinct, and suggests that the instinct argument has replaced arguments said to be founded on reason (the 18th century mode). He doesn't say here but later (again Chapter 2 - these chapters links) that the instinct of the generality (or average person) is a false guide for setting up what is just and fair.

So where did the arrangements which keep women subordinate to men (and remember in this period women couldn't own their own income, could be beaten by husbands as husbands pleased) come from? Mill resorts to the kind of myth-making Locke, Hume, Rousseau, and others have done: it's a reductive tale telling that posits a general state of things in synecdoches. From the earliest twilight of society we find women paired with men in a state of bondage, and this gave rise to laws and customs which justified and elaborated this reality. He says the bondage was to make things easy for men who attached value to the woman as a companion (when she served him as he wanted).

He says that a great deal of the original brutality has been lost or modified, but a great deal is still self-evident. The difference between 19th century modes

and earlier ones didn't think it necessary to justify the law of superior strength. They were not ashamed. He insists on how the relationship is still based on law of force. One way in which the situation was justified at the time was to present a very soft view of it.

Then he does make the argument I referred to above: this power arrangement comes "home to the person and hearth of every male head of a family and of everyone who looks forward to being so." Women are individually in the subject class; as present arrangements go, if she objects, she just gets in trouble with her master and gets nowhere: "each individual of the subject-class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation."

He stops to present the rhetoric that's used about inferior classes (women are weak and emotional is what he refers to but doesn't make explicit) and how the rationale here is "the feebler and more un-war-like races [groups, "the sex" of women] should submit to the braver and manlier [more capable].

At this point he denies that women's character as presently seen is natural or the one they would have if not for education and continual training in submissiveness. Women says Mill are taught to be submissive, sacrificing, self-controlled (no fighting, no anger); they are made to direct all their efforts in getting the affections of a man as the solution for how to get through life and what they should want out of it. Given that only through men they are allowed to fulfill ambition and get respect, he says it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become all encompassing

Mill's second and historical argument is: the modern world works differently than the old. Mill celebrates the change where people are enormously freer to choose how they can spend their existences:

"The peculiar character of the modern world ... is, that human beings are no longer born to their places in life, and chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to, but are free to employ their faculties, and such favourable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them more desirable."

Women learn not to tell the truth (as slaves did): anyone looking up to



another in power is not going to be "open" and "completely sincere." (Actually few are that anyway. Again there is a high idealism and nobility of outlook in Mill.) For writers who want to make money, "very few of them dare anything, which men, on whom their literary success depends, are unwilling to hear."

So women are not going to do what is contrary to their nature as now formed by society. The anxiety of people to interfere on their behalf or against them is in a way irrelevant for now. Change comes slow.

The present arrangement boils down to forcing women to marry and produce children. It's a way of compelling it. No wonder women of spirit don't want it or aren't keen. If this is all you want of them and will not allow them to marry and have children in equal conditions (meaning that the way of mothering children would then become very different and also marriage as then practised), then says he all that has been done in the modern world to relax the chain on the minds of women, has been a mistake. They never should have been allowed to receive a literary education. Women in the present arrangement who read, much more women who write, are in the existing constitution of things, a contradiction and disturbing element.

## **22.6. CHAPTER 2**

In chapter 2, Mill attacks women's status in the marriage contract, which he sees as a kind of legal bondage. All property and any income derived from marriage belonged to the husband, even if the wife had brought the property in the marriage. Additionally, only the father had legal rights over his children.

A woman who left her husband could take nothing with her, not even her children. Any action she might take must have her husband's tacit approval. Indeed, Mill sees the bondage of marriage as a more profound slavery than slavery itself, not because a woman might be treated as badly as any slave-though he does not neglect the physical power the husband has over his wife and the potential for physical abuse-but because "hardly any slave . . . is a slave at all hours and all minutes." A wife and mother, on the other hand, is available at all times to all people. No activity a wife does is considered important enough

to protect her from being interrupted to meet the needs of others.

Mill argues for a marriage contract based on equality before the law and the division of powers in the home.

Mill begins with marriage. As he has ended on the thought the way the world is set up is meant to coerce women into marriage and having children, so he begins here.

An 1869 reviewer of *The Subjection of Women* objected that Mill discussed sex nowhere. Unless the reviewer means by sex romance and his belief that women are masochistic (want to suffer, are attracted to punishment), Mill does discuss sex. He discusses it throughout: in the original bondage he says we find people paired in, in men wanting to possess women. Agreed he does not discuss sexual attraction as the reason women go in for marriage; his view is sex has nothing to do with marriage, but is what women are forced to do to find safety and respect. He does not discuss all the sex that goes on outside marriage either. Sex is viewed by Mill as a commodity men want and women offer up as part of an exchange in marriage. The reviewer's response is not to explain but to use the word "sex" over and over as an instinct (unexplained) and say it comes first and explains all.

So Mill begins by saying that given that marriage is the focal point of the way women are brought up and educated, you'd think the society would make marriage as attractive as possible. But that is not the case. Women are in history forced into it, pushed by circumstances and mores.

He then provides a section about how the laws are set up to prevent her from owning anything and having any say in her destiny her husband doesn't want. The two are one person (the husband's will) under the law. Carol Pateman (a legal philosopher) has a book where she says the society is set up as men contracting with one another, and they allow women to opt in through contracting to a particular family or male - except for those women who achieve the successful independent income and career (not possible in Mill's time and one of his goals I suppose).

Since women are so stuck, one justice would be to allow them to get rid

of a bad husband. But she is not allowed to leave - punishments are meted out to her on all sides. (This makes me remember how in Trollope's *Small House* Lord de Courcy's valet says he's better off than Lady de Courcy; he can give notice.)

Of course not all men take such gross advantage of the law and custom, and many are kind and good, and a marriage is a partnership - of sorts. The woman is still subject and subordinate. But says he (and I think this important) "Laws and institutions require to be adapted, not to good men, but to bad. Marriage is not an institution designed for a select few."

It would be tiresome to repeat all the commonplaces about how men as a group are unfit for this kind of power over another human being. Still he goes on to suggest the sorts of misery that can be inflicted on the powerless in private life. What mitigates the situation: personal affection that the marriage starts with, when it grows up between the two, shared pragmatic interests. People tell the woman she can tyrannize over others beneath her (say children I suppose, servants, those who need her husband), but Mill says (rightly) "A Sultan's favorite slave has slaves under on, over whom she tyrannized, but the desirable thing would be that she should neither have slaves or be a slave."

Mill puts it forward as a self-evident truth that "the only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals." Earlier ages rested social relationships openly on force and entirely on it. He is arguing the changeover occurring should include women.

And he goes farther by implication (includes children) when he argues that decency in life and happiness, and practical good for all, must come out of adapting the above moral rule to family life. Many people do live today in this just morality, but many do not, and women are not allowed to have any life outside the family.

He then brings up religion to show it's a rationale (as in Chapter 1 social norms) for supporting a brute power relationship. Wives must obey husbands .

Mill says while he supports wholeheartedly the idea of community of goods, he would not want to be in such a community (of two) where "what is

mine is yours, but what is yours is not mine." Both should profit.

He again (as he has done throughout) brings out the parallel between wifehood and slavery as presently practised and now rejoices slavery has ended in the US, and says (in effect) since women are bodily answerable to men in marriage, having to bear the children and bring them up (usually all by herself as he's gone from the home), it is the most basic justice that she should be secure financially, when she can be permitted to contribute and control her own earnings, be treated in effect as an adult (which she is as when she is thrown out).

Reality comes in here as Mill imagines the man drinking and idle - he is thinking of working class ideals but it covers upper class life too. "The power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman." Also of course a man. So when the two marry, the woman should be seen as and given the right to choose who she marries, as she would a profession or career. He imagines a much better life for all.

### **22.7 CHAPTER 3**

Here Mill makes the case for women as being fit for a number of professions traditionally reserved for men only including political roles, scientific pursuits, literary pursuits, and the arts and music beyond fulfilling the requirements of domestic grace. Mill concedes that at present, it is actually impossible to tell what differences there may be between men and women with respect to their natural abilities and propensities, because of the great disparity between the ways in which men and women are educated and socialized. Nevertheless, Mill writes that "*doubt does not forbid conjecture,*" and ventures, in this chapter, many speculations about men and women's respective capacities and propensities. For example, Mill contends that *women are better at a "rapid and correct insight into present fact,"* which he then links up with the pragmatic, the consideration of individuals, and depth of thinking, and men are better at speculation of a more theoretical nature, the consideration of the general, and breadth of thinking. Both of these tendencies are forces that ought to balance each other out. With respect to temperament, Mill seems to concede that women might be hereditarily more "nervous" but then he goes on to defend the "nervous temperament" as one which possesses much energy--energy that might be directed towards "the leadership

of mankind." Near the end of the chapter, Mill again expands the notion of allowing women to partake equally in professional and public life as good for all of humanity, and concludes with the thought that the *fight for female emancipation must be undertaken by both men and women*.

In much of the chapter Mill is concerned to fight off stereotypical ideas about women.

Women as we presently see them, and men too, are the product of artificial perverse constraints and mores. (The men don't suffer as much since the perversions and strains are put there to release their power.) But after he has said we cannot know what women are or could be, he launches into a few things he thinks are really intrinsic to women. These are: they are practical and intuitive. The rest he observes he says are the result of training or no education, the narrow circumstances of their lives, that they themselves are working to do for themselves in highly limited ways (under threat of loss or punishment and as contingent beings).

## **22.8 CHAPTER 4**

In the final chapter, Mill enumerates the many ways that the liberation of women would benefit both men and women, and hence society as a whole. He argues that men's own minds are perverted by pride when boys are falsely taught that they are superior merely because of their sex. Mill further argues that the education of women would also double "the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity." Additionally, even in the current time in which subjection of women continues to be practiced, Mill points to women's involvement in religion and charity as evidence that women would be a tempering moral force in society, though he is critical of philanthropic involvement which does not take into account the "bigger picture" and which tends to make individuals dependent--this, however, is not the fault of women who try to do good, but the fault of society for not allowing women to be educated about the ways of the world. Finally, Mill ends with some thoughts about the improved relations and specifically, marriages, that would result from more similar upbringings between men and women: in the ideal marriage,

*men and women would be partners in the higher service of humanity.*

## **22.9 CRITICAL COMMENTS**

One of the most interesting tensions in *Mill's The Subjection of Women* is between his strong conjectures over ostensibly natural differences between men and women, and his equally strong disavowal of men's capacity to know anything about women due to society disallowing women the liberty to express their true natures. Mill doesn't spend much time trying to resolve these tensions; except, perhaps with the several brief statements as to how "doubt does not forbid conjecture." As we know from *On Liberty*, however, feeling any degree of certainty (where absolute certainty is not possible) requires an extremely assiduous critical process of checking one's opinions against opposing ones. It seems that one must assume that Mill's claims have already gone through this vigorous process, but then one wonders, on the ground of Mill's own principles, as to how any kind of certainty can be arrived at when there is so little information at all, since the half of the population that might know best can't express themselves.

Of course, practically speaking, if this premise of Mill's were fully embraced, he would have very little to write about in *The Subjection of Women*. Unlike *On Liberty*, *The Subjection of Women* seems to be more "embroiled" in that it seems to insist upon the usefulness of taking a stand (even while knowing that the stand is based on very little information and might be wrong). In a way then, Mill (knowingly, and to a lesser degree) commits the same act as those who would base their stand on women's inferiority on little to no factual information, but perhaps only to provide the opposing opinion in a critical dialogue in order that society might come closer to the truth.

## **22.10 LET US SUM UP**

### **I. The social organization that puts men above women is wrong.**

- ◆ It was derived from physical superiority, not rational justification.
- ◆ No alternative social hierarchies, such as placing women above men, have been tried to see which organization of society maximizes

the happiness of society.

- ◆ Whatever reasons there were in the past for allowing men to rule women may not be good ones now.
- ◆ Mill compares the relationship of men over women to slavery.
- ◆ Although slavery in Christian Europe had been all but abandoned for me, for women it had become a form of dependence.

Historically, the obedience of slaves had been obtained by the use of fear, but in the case of women the mind had been enslaved. Women were conditioned from childhood: all their nature was to live for others.

- ◆ When they are able to protest, they do:
  - by increasing the number of written protests;
  - by petitioning Parliament for suffrage;
  - by pushing for equality in education;
  - by pushing for admission into the professions.
- ◆ The small origins of women's protesting against excessive oppression will lead to calls for full-blown equality with men. All revolutionary movements start with modest protests and build on them.
- ◆ It is not surprising that women do not protest brutal treatment by their husbands more, for even when they protest, the judicial system hands them back to their husbands, doubtless to suffer more violence. So of course few women protest their maltreatment by husbands.
- ◆ Women are taught that it is their duty to be obedient to men. Their whole point in life becomes to be accepted by men, due to the following powerful forces:
  - the natural attraction between men and women;
  - the wife's total dependence on her husband's power: everything she gets she gets through him;
  - the wife's only access to "consideration" (esteem, or regard) from

anyone is through her husband's approval.

## **II. There should be equality between husbands and wives**

- ◆ Slavery as an arrangement of society is wrong.
- ◆ Slavery should also not exist in the private world of a marriage.
- ◆ To live together as equals is a true virtue of human beings.
- ◆ English law gives women very few rights, maybe fewer than slaves used to have in Rome. She swears her obedience to her husband at their marriage, and this is enforced by law for the rest of her life.
- ◆ The family is a school in which children learn about right and wrong. They should learn about true cooperation, not having power on one side and obedience on the other, in the same way that people best learn about virtue in a free society.
- ◆ Anyone who can live as the absolute master of his family cannot love freedom.
- ◆ The whole of modern history consists of the slow wearing away of the distinctions between free male citizens, slaves, women, and the "unenfranchised" residents, i.e., people who had no legal rights.

## **III. Women should be allowed to compete equally for positions in society.**

- ◆ If male society could admit that women were equal, then they would be able to admit the injustice of excluding half the population from obtaining rewarding jobs and positions in public life. But men are mainly unable to face women as equals.
- ◆ In the past, it was rare for men to even bother trying to justify their exclusion of women from positions of power.
- ◆ When they did try to justify the exclusion, it was generally on the ground that it was better for society (which meant the interests of men).
- ◆ But in Mill's day, the general justification of the exclusion of women from the public sphere is that women are unfit for jobs outside of the family.



- ◆ The only legitimate reason there could be for preventing women from competing with men for public jobs would be if the most talented women did not match the least talented men.
- ◆ It is not sufficient for the justification of exclusion of women to show that the average ability of women is less than the average ability of men. That would simply mean that fewer women would get jobs than men, and that will happen anyway since many women will choose to be mothers rather than have careers.
- ◆ Women have proved themselves to be worthy and capable of equality with men in many different realms. While there may be some areas where women have not shown as much ability as men, in most there have been women who have shown themselves comparable in ability to the best men.
- ◆ Society as a whole can't afford to reject women because it works against both women and society as a whole.
- ◆ Even if society could afford to exclude women from jobs, it would still be unfair to do so; unfair not just to women, but also to men, who would benefit from women's skills.
- ◆ There is no evidence that women are less gifted than men, and so there is no evidence that the oppression of women is for their own good.

## 22.11. SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### 22.11.1 Fill in the Blanks

1. *The Subjection of Women* was published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This pamphlet is divided into \_\_\_\_\_ chapters.
3. The pamphlet talks about \_\_\_\_\_ status and their equality.
4. Mill compared Victorian marriages where the wife is totally subordinate to the husband to \_\_\_\_\_ relationship.
5. In Mill's terms, \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the ideal status where neither gender

has any special legal or social privilege or hindrance.

6. Mill challenges the common notion that women are by nature \_\_\_\_\_ to men.
7. Society as a whole can't afford to reject women because it works against both \_\_\_\_\_ as a whole.

### **22.11.2 Short Answer Questions**

- Q1 “Women are naturally intellectually, physically, and psychologically inferior to men.” Comment.
- Q2 What argument does Mill put forth in chapter one?
- Q3. Briefly analyse the title of the pamphlet.
- Q4. Mill enumerates in many ways the liberation of women would benefit both men and women . Discuss.

### **22.12 ANSWER KEY**

1. 1869
2. 04
3. women's
4. slave and master
5. sexism
6. unequal
7. women and society

### **22.13 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Heydt, Colin. “Mill, Bentham, and ‘Internal Culture.’” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 2006, 275-302.
- ◆ Heydt, Colin. *Rethinking Mill's Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education*. Continuum Press, 2006.

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**J. S. MILL :**

***THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN: CHAPTER 4***

**23.1 Introduction**

**23.2 Objective**

**23.3 The Moral Education of Males**

**23.3.1 Glossary**

**23.3.2 Explanation**

**23.4 Doubling the Brain Pool**

**23.4.1 Glossary**

**23.4.2 Explanation**

**23.5 The Moral Influence of Women: Chivalry**

**23.5.1 Glossary**

**23.5.2 Explanation**

**23.6 The Moral Influence of Women: Charity**

**23.6.1 Glossary**

**23.6.2 Explanation**

**23.7 Examination Oriented Questions**

**23.8 Suggested Reading**

## **23.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 4 of *The Subjection of the Women* can be best analyzed by dividing it into eight sub-parts.

- 1) The moral education of males
- 2) Doubling the brain pool
- 3) The moral influence of women: chivalry
- 4) The moral influence of women: charity
- 5) The moral influence of wives on husbands
- 6) The moral effects of difference
- 7) The moral effects of inferiority
- 8) Benefits to the individual woman

## **23.2 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the main subject of *The Subjection of Woman* focusing on chapter 4. This lesson will only focus the first four main topics as discussed by Mill in chapter 4.

## **23.3 THE MORAL EDUCATION OF MALES**

### **23.3.1 Glossary**

Importunately : urgent or persistent in solicitation

Uncandid : not friendly

Tyrannise : to exercise absolute power or control

Propensities : a natural inclination or tendency

Servitude : slavery or bondage of any kind

Plenitude : fullness or adequacy in quality, measure or degree

Chivalrous : having the qualities of chivalry

Arrogance : offensive display of superiority or self importance

Deference : respectful submission or yielding to the judgement, opinion.

### **23.3.2 Explanation**

Mill starts chapter 4 by a series of questions, namely:

*What good are we to expect from the changes you propose in our customs and institutions? Would mankind be better off if women were free? If not, why disturb their minds and try to make a social revolution in the name of an abstract right?*

This question isn't likely to be asked regarding the proposed change in the condition of women in marriage. The countless instances of suffering, immorality, evils of all sorts that come from the subjection of individual women to individual men are far too terrible to be overlooked. Thoughtless or dishonest people who attend only to cases that are extreme or that receive publicity may say that these evils are 'exceptional'; but no-one can be blind to their existence or (often) to their intensity. And it is perfectly obvious that the abuse of the power can't be lessened very much while the power remains. This power is given or offered not to good men or to decently respectable men, but to all men, including the most brutal and the most criminal. The only constraint is that of opinion, and such men are usually unaffected by any opinion except that of men like themselves.... The law of servitude in marriage is a monstrous contradiction to all the principles of the modern world, and to all the experience through which those principles have been slowly and painfully worked out. Now that negro slavery has been abolished, marriage is the only institution in which a human whose faculties are all in excellent order is delivered up to the tender mercies of another human being, in the hope that this other will use the power solely for the good of the person subjected to it. Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There are no longer any legal slaves except the mistress of every house.

So the question "*Cui bono?*" [Latin = 'Who will benefit from this?'], is not likely to be asked regarding the reform of the marriage law. We may be told that the evil of such reform would outweigh the good, but there can be no denying that there would be good results. In regard to the larger question, however,

removing women's disabilities;

recognising them as the equals of men in every aspect of citizenship;

opening up to them all honourable employments; and

allowing them to have the training and education that would qualify them for those employments,

for many people it isn't enough that this inequality has no just or legitimate defence; they demand to know what definite positive advantage would come from abolishing it.

Mill says that his first answer to the above asked question is: the advantage of having the most universal and pervading of all human relations regulated by justice instead of injustice. That bare statement will tell anyone who attaches a moral meaning to words what a vast gain this would be for the human condition; it's hardly possible to make it any stronger by any explanation or illustration. All of mankind's selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference, are rooted in and nourished by the present constitution of the relation between men and women. Think what it does to a boy to grow up to manhood in the belief that-without any merit or any exertion of his own, though he may be the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind-by the mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of every one of half the human race. That 'inferior' half probably includes some whose real superiority to himself he has daily or hourly occasion to feel! But even if his whole conduct is guided by a woman -governess or teacher-, if he is a fool he thinks that of course she isn't and can't be his equal in ability and judgment; and if he isn't a fool he does worse, he sees that she

is superior to him, and believes that still he is entitled to command and she is bound to obey. What effect on his character will this lesson have? And men of the cultivated classes are often not aware how deeply the lesson sinks into most male minds. That is because among right-feeling and well-bred people the inequality is kept out of sight as much as possible—especially out of sight of the children. Boys are required to be as obedient to their mother as to their father; they aren't allowed to domineer over their sisters, and aren't accustomed to seeing their sisters made subordinate to them; on the contrary, feelings of chivalry towards females are highlighted, while the servitude that requires those feelings is kept in the background. Well brought up youths in the higher classes thus often escape the bad influences of the subordination of women in their early years, and experience them only when they arrive at manhood and fall under the dominion of facts as they really exist. Such people are little aware, regarding a boy who is differently brought up, of,

how early the notion of his inherent superiority to a girl arises in his mind;

how it grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength;

how schoolboys inject it into one another;

how early the youth thinks himself superior to his mother, owing her patience but no real respect; and,

how lofty and sultan-like a sense of superiority he feels over the woman whom he honours by admitting her to a partnership of his life.

Mill says that it is obvious that all this perverts the whole manner of existence of the man, both as an individual and as a social being. It matches a hereditary king's feeling that he is excellent above others because he was born a king, or a noble because he was born a noble. The relation between husband and wife is like that between lord and vassal, except that the wife is held to more unlimited obedience than the vassal was. The vassal's character may have been affected for better and for worse by his subordination, but it is obvious that the lord's character was affected

greatly for the worse. If he came to believe that his vassals were really superior to himself, or to feel that he was given command over people as good as himself, through no merits or labours of his own but merely for having taken the trouble to be born, still the situation will have harmed his character. The self-worship of the monarch or of the feudal lord is matched by the self-worship of the male. Anyone who grows up from childhood with unearned distinctions is bound to become conceited and self-congratulatory about them, this being the worst sort of pride and when the feeling of being raised above the whole of the other sex is combined with personal authority over one woman. The situation may be 'educational' in either of two ways: (1) To men whose strongest points of character are conscience and affection, the marriage may be a school of conscientious and affectionate gentleness and patience, but (2) to men of a different sort it will be a regularly constituted College for training them in arrogance and over bearingness.

Basing domestic existence on a relation that conflicts with the first principles of social justice-think about the example this sets and the education that it gives to the sentiments! The very nature of man ensures that it will have such an enormous perverting influence that we can hardly even imagine the enormous improvement that would come about if the unjust basis for marriage were removed. Everything that education and civilisation are doing to erase the influences on character of the law of force, and replace them by influences of the law of justice, remains merely on the surface as long as the enemy's stronghold is not attacked. The principle of the modern movement in morals and politics is that what entitles someone to respect is his conduct and nothing else; that men's claim to deference comes not from what they are but from what they do; that (above all) the only rightful claim to power and authority comes from merit, not birth. If no human being were given permanent authority over any other, society wouldn't be employed in building up with one hand character-traits that it has to curb with the other. For the first time in man's existence on earth, the child would really be trained in the way he



should go, and when he grew up there would be a chance of his staying on that path. But so long as the right of the strong to have power over the weak rules in the very heart of society, the attempt to get people's conduct to be guided by the principle of equal rights for the weak will always be an uphill struggle

## **23.4 Doubling the Brain Pool**

### **23.4.1 Glossary**

Circumscribed : to draw a line around; encircle

Precedency : law

Accession : an increase by something added

Speculation : process of consideration

Interdicted : to exclude some one under a religious interdict

Immense : vast; huge

Mitigating : the act of making a condition

Endeavoured : to make an effort

### **23.4.2 Explanation**

#### **Doubling the Brain Pool**

According to Mill the second benefit to be expected from giving to women the free use of their abilities by leaving them free to choose their employments and opening up to them the same range of occupation and the same rewards and encouragements as other human beings have, would be doubling the supply of abilities available for the higher service of humanity. Where there is now one person qualified to benefit mankind. as a public teacher or an administrator of some branch of public or social affairs, there would then be a chance of two. As things now stand, there is a terrific shortage of people who are competent to do excellently anything that needs any significant amount of ability to do; so that the world suffers

a serious loss by refusing to make use of half the talent it possesses. It's true that this amount of mental power isn't totally lost: much of it is employed, and would in any case be employed, in domestic management and in the few other occupations open to women; and the personal influence of individual women over individual men brings some indirect benefit to other activities. But these benefits are partial; their range is extremely narrow; and if you insist on deducting them from the total amount of fresh social power that would be gained by liberating women, then you must add to that total the benefit of the stimulus that men's intellects would get from the competition posed by liberated women.

This great gain for the intellectual power of our species. . . . would come partly through better and more complete intellectual education of women, which would then improve in step with the improvement of men's. Women in general would be brought up with the same ability to understand business, public affairs, and the higher matters of theorising as men in the same class of society; and the select few of either sex who were qualified not only to understand the work and thought of others but to think or do something considerable themselves would get the same help in improving and training their capacities. In this way, the widening of women's sphere of action would operate for good, by raising their education to the level of men's and making it share in all improvements made in men's education. But independently of all this, merely breaking down the barrier would have an educational virtue of the highest worth. The mere getting rid of the idea that all the wider subjects of thought and action, all the things that are of general and not solely of private interest, are men's business from which women are to be warned off-positively debarred from most of it and coldly tolerated in the little that is allowed them.

The mere consciousness a woman would then have of being a human being like any other, entitled to choose her pursuits, urged or invited to interest herself in whatever is interesting to human beings, entitled to have her opinion (like any other) taken account of in human concerns,

whether or not she tried to participate in them-this alone would enormously expand women's faculties while also broadening the range of their moral sentiments.

## **23.5 THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF WOMEN: CHIVALRY**

### **23.5.1 Glossary**

Acme	:	the highest point; peak
Subordinate	:	placed in or belonging to a lower order or rank
Lamented	:	mourned for
Chivalrous	:	having the quality of courage, courtesy
Inevitable	:	that cannot be avoided
Exigencies	:	urgency
Tyrannise	:	to exercise absolute power or control
Conjugal	:	of, relating to marriage

### **23.5.2 Explanation**

The liberation of women according to Mill would double the amount of individual talent available for the conduct of human affairs, which certainly aren't at present so rich in able guidance that they can afford to do without half of what nature offers! The result of that would be that women's opinions would have a more beneficial influence than they now do on the general mass of human belief and sentiment. A 'more beneficial' rather than a 'greater' influence. Yes, because women's influence over the general tone of opinion has always, or at least from the earliest known period, been very considerable. Mothers' influence on the early character of their sons, and the desire of young men to be liked by young women, have throughout history been important factors in the formation of character, and have determined some of the chief steps in the progress of civilisation. Even in the Homeric age, the great Hector acknowledged being powerfully

motivated by his concern for how he would appear to the Trojan women. [Mill says this by quoting a line from Homer's Greek.] The moral influence of women has worked in two ways. (1) It has been a softening influence. Those who were most liable to be the victims of violence have naturally tended as much as they could towards limiting its scope and cutting back its excesses. Those who were not taught to fight have naturally tended to favour any way of settling differences other than fighting. In general, those who have suffered most from others' giving free rein to their selfish passions have naturally been the most earnest supporters of any moral law that offered a way of controlling passion. Women were powerfully instrumental in inducing the northern conquerors to adopt the creed of Christianity, a creed so much more favourable to women than any that preceded it. The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and of the Franks may be said to have been begun by the wives of Ethelbert and Clovis. (2) Women's opinions have conspicuously given a powerful stimulus to the qualities in men that women needed their protectors to have because they weren't themselves trained in them. Courage and the other military virtues have always been greatly indebted to men's wish to be admired by women; and this mechanism works for far more than just this one class of eminent qualities, because. . . .being thought highly of by men has always been the best passport to the admiration and favour of women.

The combination of (1-2) those two kinds of moral influence by women gave birth to the spirit of chivalry, the special feature of which is that it aims at combining the highest standard of (2) the warlike qualities with (1) the development of gentleness, generosity, and self-denial towards the non-military and defenseless classes generally, with a special submission and worship directed towards women. What distinguished women from the other defenceless classes was their power to give high rewards to those who tried to earn their favour rather than forcing them into obedience. The practice of chivalry fell sadly short of its theoretical standard-even more than practice generally falls below theory!-and yet it remains one of the most precious monuments of humanity's moral history.

It was a remarkable example of an organised joint effort by a most disorganized and distracted society to raise up and act on a moral ideal greatly in advance of its social condition and institutions. It was indeed so far in advance that it was completely frustrated in the main objective; and yet it was never entirely ineffective, and has left its mark—a very detectable and (for the most part) highly valuable mark—on the ideas and feelings of all subsequent times.

The chivalrous ideal is the high point of women's influence on the moral development of mankind; and if women are to remain in subjection it is lamentable that the chivalrous standard has passed away, because it's the only standard that has any power to alleviate the demoralizing influences of the subjection of women. But changes in the general state of mankind made it inevitable that the chivalrous ideal of morality would be replaced by a totally different one. Chivalry tried to infuse moral elements into a state of society in which everything depended for good or evil on individual strength and skill, under the softening influences of individual delicacy and generosity. In modern societies everything is settled not by individual effort but by the combined operations of many people, and society's main occupation has changed from fighting to business, from military to industrial life. The demands of this new life don't rule out the virtues of generosity, any more than the demands of the old life did, but the new life doesn't entirely depend on them—as the old life did. The main foundations of the moral life of modern times must be,

- \* justice: each person's respect for the rights of every other person, and
- \* prudence: each person's ability to take care of himself.

Chivalry didn't erect legal barriers to any of the forms of wrong that reigned unpunished throughout society; the most it achieved in that line was to steer the instruments of praise and admiration in such a way as to encourage a few men to do right in preference to wrong. But what morality must really depend on are its penal sanctions, its power to deter people from acting badly. The security of society cannot rest merely

on honouring right behaviour: that is a relatively weak motive in most people, and in some it has no force at all. Modern society can repress all kinds of wrong conduct by an appropriate use of the superior strength that civilisation has given it, and thus make life tolerable for the weaker members of society (who are no longer defenseless but protected by law), doing this without having to rely on the chivalrous feelings of those who are in a position to tyrannise. The beauties and graces of the chivalrous character are still what they always were, but the rights of the weak and the general comfort of human life now rest on a far surer and steadier support. Or, rather, they do so in every relation of life except the marriage relation.

## **23.6 THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF WOMEN: CHARITY**

### **23.6.1 Glossary**

Contagion	:	harmful or undesirable contact or influence
Fostering	:	to promote the growth or development
Auxiliaries	:	additional; supplementary
Abnegation	:	denying oneself some rights
Stimulus	:	something that excites an organism
Philanthropy	:	the activity of donating to such persons or purposes
Proselytism	:	the state or condition of being a proselyte
Commends	:	to present, mention, or praise as worthy of confidence
Benevolent	:	desiring to help others

### **23.6.2 Explanation**

The moral influence of women these days says Mill is just as real as it used to be, but it is no longer so marked and definite: it has moved nearer to being merged in the general influence of public opinion. [Regarding the phrase 'the contagion of sympathy.' The root meaning of 'sympathy' is 'feeling with'; in early modern times the word covered kinds of going-along-with that didn't involve feelings at all, e.g. a violin's

G-string starts vibrating because another nearby G-string has been plucked. Mill is thinking about feelings, of course, but not only feeling for people's misfortunes: in his day someone's sharing a friend's pleasure could be called 'sympathy.' You can see why he used 'contagion'; he wasn't implying that there is anything wrong with sympathy.] Both through the contagion of sympathy, and through men's wish to shine in the eyes of women, the feelings of women have great effect in keeping alive what remains of the chivalrous ideal-in encouraging the feelings and continuing the traditions and spirit of generosity. In these aspects of character, women's standard is higher than men's; in the quality of justice, it is somewhat lower. As regards the relations of private life, the influence of women is, broadly speaking, but with some individual exceptions, encouraging to the softer virtues, discouraging to the sterner ones. Virtue's biggest trials in the concerns of life involve the conflict between interest and principle; and women's influence in these is of a very mixed character. When the principle involved happens to be one of the very few that women's religious or moral education has strongly impressed on them, they are powerful aids to virtue; and their husbands and sons are often prompted by them to acts of self-denial that they couldn't have performed without that stimulus. But the moral principles that have been impressed on women, given their present education and position, cover only a small proportion of the field of virtue, and they are principally negative-forbidding particular acts but having little to do with the positive direction of thoughts and purposes. I'm afraid it must be said that women's influence does little to encourage or support the devotion of the energies to purposes that don't promise private advantages to the family. It is small blame to them that they discourage projects of which they haven't learnt to see the advantage, and which take their men away from them and from the interests of the family. But the consequence is that women's influence is often anything but favourable to public virtue.

But they do today have some influence in setting the tone for public moralities; that has been the case since their sphere of action has

been a little widened and a good many of them have worked to promote objectives that stretch beyond their own family and household. The influence of women counts for a great deal in two of the most marked features of modern European life, its aversion to war, and its addiction to philanthropy. Excellent characteristics both; but unfortunately the influence of women, while it is valuable in encouraging these feelings in general, does at least as much harm as good in the directions in which it steers them. On the philanthropic side more particularly, the two areas chiefly cultivated by women are religious missionary-work and charity. Religious missions at home are merely ways of making religious animosities even more bitter; and foreign missions usually involve blindly running at an object without either knowing or caring about the fatal harms-fatal to the religious purpose itself as well as to any other desirable purpose-which may be produced by the means the missionaries employ. As for charity: that is an affair in which the immediate effect on the persons directly concerned are apt to be completely at war with the ultimate consequence to the general good; and women can't see and are unwilling to admit the ultimately harmful tendency of any form of charity or philanthropy that commends itself to their sympathetic feelings. This is result of their education, which educates their feelings rather than their understanding, and of the habit that their whole life has instilled in them of looking to immediate effects on individuals and not to more distant effects on classes of people. The large and growing mass of unenlightened and shortsighted benevolence, which, by taking the care of people's lives out of their own hands and relieving them from the disagreeable consequences of their own acts, undermines the very foundations of the self-respect, self-help, and self-control that are essential both for individual prosperity and for social virtue

Mill says that this waste of resources and of benevolent feelings in doing harm instead of good, is immensely increased by women's contributions and stimulated by their influence. This mistake isn't likely to be made by women who have the practical management of projects for helping people. It sometimes happens that women who administer public



charities recognize clearly the demoralising influence of the help that is given, and could give lessons on this to many a male political economist. (They are brought to this recognition by an ability that women usually have more than men do, namely insight into present fact, and especially into the minds and feelings of those with whom they are in immediate contact.) But women who only give their money, and aren't brought face to face with the effects it produces-how can they be expected to foresee the effects? If a woman is born to the present lot of women, and is content with it, how is she to appreciate the value of self-dependence? She is not self-dependent; she is not taught self-dependence; her destiny is to receive everything from others, and why should what is good enough for her be bad for the poor? The notions of good that she is familiar with are of blessings descending from a superior. She forgets that she isn't free and that the poor are; that if what they need is given to them unearned, they can't be compelled to earn it; that everybody can't be taken care of by everybody, but people need some motive to take care of themselves; and that the only charity that turns out in the long run to be charity is: helping people to help themselves if they are physically able to do so.

If women were socially and politically emancipated, they would be better educated and would have more practical experience of the things that their opinions influence; and the points I have been making show that those changes would improve the part that women take in the formation of general opinion.

### **23.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 When was *The Subjection of Woman* published?
- Q.2 Explain the concept of doubling the brain pool as discussed by J.S. Mill.
- Q.3 What are the various intellectual and moral distinctions enforced between men and women?
- Q.4 What were the hindrances in the path of women's liberation as stated by Mill?

### 23.8. SUGGESTED READING

- ◆ Donner, Wendy, and Richard A. Fumerton. *Mill*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
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- ◆ Okin, Susan Moller. *Women in Western Political Thought*, New ed., Princeton University Press, 1992.
- ◆ Pyle, Andrew, ed. "The Subjection of Women" *Contemporary Responses to John Stuart Mill*, England, 1995
- ◆ Reeves, Richard. *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand*, Atlantic Books, 2007.
- ◆ Tulloch, Gail. *Mill and Sexual Equality*, Lynne Rienner, 1989.

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**J. S. MILL :**  
**THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN: CHAPTER 4**

- 24.1 Objective**
- 24.2 The Moral influence of Wives on Husbands**
  - 24.2.1 Glossary**
  - 24.2.2 Explanation**
- 24.3 The Moral Effects of Difference**
  - 24.3.1 Glossary**
  - 24.3.2 Explanation**
- 24.4 The Moral Effects of Inferiority**
  - 24.4.1 Glossary**
  - 24.4.2 Explanation**
- 24.5 Benefits to the Individual Woman**
  - 24.5.1 Glossary**
  - 24.5.2 Explanation**
- 24.6 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 24.7 Suggested Reading**

**24.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the main argument *The Subjection of Women* focusing on chapter 4. This

lesson will only focus the last four topics as discussed by Mill in his essay chapter 4.

## **24.2 THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF WIVES ON HUSBANDS**

### **24.2.1 Glossary**

- Temptation : Something that tempts, entices, or allures
- Servitude : slavery or bondage
- Approbation : approval or sanction
- Pecuniary : of or relating to money
- Compensation: the state of being compensated or rewarded in this way
- Feebleness : physically weak
- Eccentricity : an oddity or peculiarity, as of conduct
- Meritorious : deserving praise, reward.
- Dissenter : a person who dissents, as from an established church
- Effectual : producing or capable of producing an intended effect
- Exclusion : an act or instance of excluding

### **24.2.2 Explanation**

Mill says that the classes that are most exposed to temptation, a man's wife and children tend to keep him honest and respectable-through his wife's direct influence and his concern for the family's future welfare. No doubt this is often the case, with men who are more weak than wicked; and this beneficial influence would be preserved and strengthened under laws that put the wife on a level with her husband. But when we go higher in the social scale, we encounter a totally different set of moving forces. The wife's influence tends to prevent the husband from falling below the country's common standard of approval; and it tends quite as strongly to hinder him from rising above it. The wife is the assistant of common public opinion. A man who is married to a woman who is his inferior in intelligence finds her a perpetual dead weight or

even worse, a drag-on: every active wish he has to be better than public opinion requires him to be. It is hardly possible for someone who is in these bonds to achieve a really high level of virtue. If a man differs in his opinion from the mass-if he sees truths that haven't yet dawned on them, or if he would like to act more conscientiously than most people do on truths that they all nominally recognise but don't feel in their hearts as he does-to all such thoughts and desires marriage is the heaviest of drawbacks, unless the lucky man has a wife who is as much above the common level as he is.

One reason for this is that there is always some sacrifice of personal interest required, either of social status or of money, perhaps even a risk to the means of subsistence. A man may be willing to confront these sacrifices and risks for himself, but he will hesitate to impose them on his family. In this context, 'his family' refers to his wife and daughters; for he always hopes that his sons will feel as he does, and that anything he can do without they will also do without, willingly, in the same cause. But his daughters are in a different situation: their marriage may depend on it. And if his wife,

- ♦ can't enter into or understand the objectives for which these sacrifices are made,
- ♦ if she thought them worth any sacrifice, would think so solely for his sake and taking his word for it; and
- ♦ couldn't join in any of the enthusiasm or self-approval that he may feel, when the things that he is disposed to sacrifice are everything to her.

Won't the best and most unselfish man be the most reluctant to bring this consequence down on his wife? And if what is at stake is not the comforts of life but only social status, the burden on his conscience and feelings is still very severe. Anyone who has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs. Grundy [a character in an 18th century play, embodying the thoughts and feelings of conventional society,

especially attitudes of prudish disapproval]. The approval of that potentate may not matter to him but it is of great importance to his wife. The man may be above that sort of thing, or he may feel sufficiently compensated by the approval of those of his own way of thinking. But he has no compensation to offer the women connected with him. The almost invariable tendency of the wife to throw the weight of her influence on the side of social status is sometimes made a reproach to women, and represented as a streak of weakness and childishness in their character, but that is surely most unfair. Society makes the whole life of a woman in the easy classes [Mill's phrase] a continual self-sacrifice; it exacts from her an unceasing restraint of all her natural inclinations; and the only return it makes to her for what often amounts to a martyrdom is consideration [= 'social acceptance and respect']. Her consideration is inseparably tied to her husband's; and after paying the full price for it she finds that she is threatened with losing it for no reason that she can feel to be valid. Having sacrificed her whole life to it, she's not going to let her husband sacrifice it to a whim, a caprice, an eccentricity-something not recognised or allowed for by the world, and which the world will agree with her in thinking to be at best a folly. This dilemma is hardest on the very meritorious man who doesn't have talents that qualify him to be prominent among those whose opinion he shares, but who holds his opinion from conviction and feels bound in honour and conscience to serve it by professing his belief and giving his time, labour, and means to anything undertaken on its behalf. It is hardest of all when such a man happens to be of a rank and position that doesn't automatically include him in what is considered the best society but does debar him from it either. His admission to the best society depends mainly on what people think of him personally, and his being identified with opinions and public conduct unacceptable to those who set the tone for society would operate as an effective barrier. Many a woman soothes herself with the thought (nine times out of ten a wrong thought) that nothing prevents her and her husband from moving in the highest society of her neighbourhood-society in which others well known to her, and in the same

class of life, mix freely-except that her husband is unfortunately a dissenter [= 'a non-Anglican protestant'], or has the reputation of mingling in low radical politics. With such an influence in every house, either exerted actively or operating all the more powerfully for not being asserted, is it any wonder that people in general are kept down to the middling level of respectability that is becoming a marked feature of modern times?

### **24.3. THE MORAL EFFECTS OF DIFFERENCE**

#### **24.3.1 Glossary**

- Disabilities : lack of adequate power, strength or physical ability.  
Intimate : associated in close personal relation  
Radically : with regard to origin or root  
Barefacedness : shameless; impudent  
Inclination : something to which one is inclined or bent

#### **24.3.2 Explanation**

Mill further talks about the women's disabilities directly but at the broad line of difference those disabilities create between a woman's education and character and a man's. The difference has very harmful consequences; indeed, nothing can be more unfavourable to the union of thoughts and inclinations that is the ideal of married life. An intimate relation between people who are radically unlike one another-that is an idle dream! Unlikeness may attract, but likeness is what retains; and the more alike a couple are the better fitted they are to give each other a happy life. While women are so unlike men, it's not surprising that selfish men should feel the need to have arbitrary power in their own hands, to stop a life-long conflict of inclinations before it gets started, by deciding every issue on the side of their own preference. When people are extremely unlike, they can't have any real identity of interest. Very often a married couple have a conscientious difference of opinion concerning the highest points of duty. Is there any reality in the marriage union where this is the case?

Yet it is common enough wherever a married woman has any earnestness of character; and it is very common in Catholic countries, when the wife is supported in her dissent by the only other authority to which she is taught to bow, the priest. With the usual barefacedness of power that isn't used to being challenged, the influence of priests over women is attacked by Protestant and Liberal writers, less for being bad in itself than because it is a rival to the husband's authority, and raises up a revolt against his infallibility. When there is no difference of moral or religious opinion, mere differences of taste can detract greatly from the happiness of married life. [Differences of taste, Mill says, are created by differences in education. Girls are trained in music, dancing etc. rather than (he implies) spending that time and energy on an education more like their brothers'; and although that may 'stimulate the amatory propensities of men' it creates differences that aren't conducive to married happiness. He continues, if the married pair are well-bred and well-behaved, they tolerate each other's tastes; but is mutual toleration what people look forward to when they enter into marriage? These differences of inclination will naturally make their wishes different, if not restrained by affection or duty, with regard to almost all domestic questions that arise. What a difference there must be in the society the spouses will wish to frequent! Each will want associates who share his or her own tastes; the persons agreeable to one will be indifferent or positively disagreeable to the other; yet all their associates must be common to both, because married people these days don't live in different parts of the house and have totally different visiting lists. They can't help having different wishes about the upbringing of the children: each will want to see reproduced in the children his or her own tastes and sentiments; and either there is a compromise, giving only half satisfaction to each, or the wife has to yield-often with bitter suffering.

It would of course be foolish to suppose that these differences of feeling and inclination exist only because women are brought up differently from men. Obviously there would be some differences of taste under any imaginable circumstances. But it isn't foolish to say that the difference in



upbringing immensely increases those differences and makes them wholly inevitable. While women are brought up as they are, a man and a woman will rarely find themselves in real agreement of tastes and wishes regarding daily life. They will generally have to give up as hopeless the attempt to have in their private daily life the *idem velle, idem nolle* [Latin = 'same desires, same dislikes'] which is the recognised bond of any society that really is a society. Or the man succeeds in obtaining it by choosing a woman who is so complete a nullity that she has no *velle* or *nolle* at all, and is as ready to go along with one thing as with another if anybody tells her to do so. Even this calculation of the man's is apt to fail; dullness and lack of spirit are not always a guarantee of the submission that is so confidently expected from them. But even if they were, is this the ideal of marriage? What in this case does the man get by marriage except an upper servant, a nurse, or a mistress? On the other hand, when each of two persons instead of being a nothing is a something; when they are attached to one another and are not too unlike to begin with; the constant shared experience of the same things, assisted by their sympathy, draws out the latent capacities of each for being interested in the things that were at first interesting only to the other. This produces a gradual assimilation of their tastes and characters to one another, partly by the gradual modification of each but more by a real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to its own. This often happens between two friends of the same sex who are much in one another's company in their daily life: and it would be common in marriage if it weren't that the totally different bringing up of the two sexes make it nearly impossible to form a really well-suited union. If this were remedied, whatever differences there might still be in individual tastes, there would usually be complete unity and unanimity regarding the great objectives of life. When spouses both care for great objectives, and help and encourage each other in anything concerning these, the minor matters on which their tastes may differ are not all-important to them; and there's a basis for solid friendship of an enduring character, more likely than anything else to make it a lifelong greater pleasure for each to give pleasure

to the other than to receive it.

## **24.4. THE MORAL EFFECTS OF INFERIORITY**

### **24.4.1 Glossary**

Aggravates	:	to annoy; irritate
Renounce	:	to give up or put aside voluntarily
Nullity	:	the state or quality of being null
Partaking	:	to receive, take, or have a share or portion
Assimilation	:	the state or condition of being assimilated or of being absorbed into something.
Unanimity	:	the state or quality of being unanimous
Remedied	:	tending to remedy something
Prodigiously	:	extraordinary in size, amount
Aggravated	:	annoyed ; irritated
Endeavours	:	to exert oneself to do something
Connexion	:	connection
Impunity	:	exemption from punishment
Deteriorating	:	to disintegrate or wear away
Reciprocity	:	a reciprocal state or relation
Congenial	:	suited or adapted in spirit, feeling
Pecuniary	:	of or related to money

### **24.4.2 Explanation**

Mill then talks about the effects of mere unlikeness between the wife and the husband on the pleasures and benefits of marriage; but the power for bad is vastly increased when the unlikeness is inferiority. When unlikeness is merely difference of good qualities, it

may be more a benefit in the way of mutual improvement than a drawback from comfort. When each spouse wants and tries to acquire the other's special qualities, the difference between them doesn't drive their interests apart but rather pulls them together, making each spouse still more valuable to the other. But when one of them has much less mental ability and cultivation than the other, and isn't actively trying with the other's aid to rise to the other's level, this marriage will have a wholly bad influence on the mental development of abler of the two; and even more in a reasonably happy marriage than in an unhappy one. Someone who shuts himself up with an inferior, choosing that inferior as his one completely intimate associate, is doing himself harm. Any society that isn't improving is deteriorating: and the closer and more familiar it is, the more it deteriorates. Even a really superior man, in nearly all cases, begins to deteriorate when he is habitually (as the phrase is) 'king of his company', and someone whose habitual 'company' is a wife who is inferior to him is always 'king' of it. While his self-satisfaction is constantly ministered to on the one hand, on the other he unconsciously acquires the ways of feeling and of looking at things that belong to a more ordinary or a more limited mind than his own. [Mill goes on to say that this 'evil' in marriages, unlike many others that he has discussed, is becoming worse, because men are increasingly pulling away from 'the rough amusements and convivial excesses that formerly occupied most men in their hours of relaxation' and spend correspondingly more time with 'the home and its inmates'. He continues:] The improvement that has been made in women's education has made them in some degree capable of being men's companions in ideas and mental taste, but it still leaves most women hopelessly inferior to their spouses. What generally happens, then, is that the husband's desire for mental communion is satisfied by a communion from which he learns nothing. An unimproving and unstimulating companionship is substituted for (what he might otherwise have been forced to seek) the society of men whose abilities equal his and who share his interest in the higher pursuits. Thus, we see that very promising young men usually stop

improving as soon as they marry, and when they don't improve they inevitably degenerate. If the wife doesn't push the husband forward, she always holds him back. He stops caring for what she doesn't care for; he no longer wants-and eventually he dislikes and avoids the company of people who share his former aspirations, and his higher faculties of mind and of heart are no longer called into activity. This change coincides with the new and selfish interests that are created by the family, so that after a few years he doesn't differ significantly from those who never did have any higher aspirations.

When two persons of high ability, identical in opinions and purposes, have the best kind of equality,

similarity of powers and capacities, with each being superior to the other in some things, so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and they can take turns in the pleasure of leading and the pleasure of being led in the path of development

I shan't try to describe what that marriage will be like. Those who can conceive it don't need my description; those who can't conceive it would brush off my description as the raving of a fanatic. But I am deeply convinced that this, and only this, is the ideal of marriage; and that all opinions, customs, and institutions that favour any other notion of marriage, or turn the ideas and aims connected with marriage into any other direction are relics of primitive barbarism. The moral renewal of mankind won't really start until the most basic of all social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and human beings learn to develop their strongest sympathy with someone who is their equal in rights and in cultivation.

## **24.5 BENEFITS TO THE INDIVIDUAL WOMAN**

### **24.5.1 Glossary**

Grievous	:	causing grief or great sorrow
Exclusion	:	the state of being excluding

Superfluous	:	being more than is sufficient
Obstructive	:	to block or close up with an obstacle
Antagonism	:	an opposing force, principle ,or tendency
Ardent	:	intense feeling
Unscrupulous	:	unrestrained by scruples
Fettered	:	a chain or shackle placed on the feet
Competency	:	competence
Ludicrous	:	causing laughter because of absurdity
Injudiciousness	:	showing lack of judgement
Peremptory	:	leaving no opportunity for denial

#### **24.5.2 Explanation**

Up to here Mill has discussed the social rather than the individual benefits that would come from abolishing the subjection of women; but it would be a grievous understatement of the case to omit the most direct benefit of all, the indescribably great gain in the private happiness of members of the liberated half of the species [Mill's phrase]-the difference to them between a life of subjection to the will of others and a life of rational freedom. After the basic needs for food and clothing, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature. While mankind is lawless, they want lawless freedom. When they have learned to understand the meaning of duty and the value of reason, they are increasingly inclined to be guided and restrained by these in the exercise of their freedom; but that doesn't mean that they desire freedom less; they don't become disposed to accept the will of other people as the representative and interpreter of those guiding principles of duty and reason. On the contrary, the communities in which reason has been most cultivated and the idea of social duty has been most powerful are the very ones that have most strongly asserted the freedom of action of the individual, the liberty of each person to govern his conduct by his own feelings of duty, and by such

laws and social restraints as his own conscience can subscribe to.

Anyone who wants a sound sense of the worth of personal independence as an ingredient in happiness should consider how he values it as an ingredient in his own happiness. What a man judges for himself on this subject, as much as on any subject, differs from what he judges for other people. When he hears others complaining that they aren't allowed freedom of action, that their own will has too little influence in the regulation of their affairs, he is inclined to ask: 'What are their grievances?' 'What positive damage are they suffering?' 'How do they think their affairs are mismanaged?'; and if they can't answer these questions in a way that seems to him to be adequate, he turns a deaf ear, and regards their complaint as the fanciful querulousness of people whom nothing reasonable will satisfy. But he has a quite different standard of judgment when he is deciding for himself. In that case, faultless administration of his interests by a tutor who has been set over him doesn't satisfy his feelings: the sheer fact of his personal exclusion from the deciding authority is the greatest grievance of all, removing any need to go into the question of mismanagement. It is the same with nations. What citizen of a free country would listen to any offers of good and skilful government in return for the abdication of freedom? Even if he believed that good and skilful administration can exist among a people ruled by a will not their own—better and more skillful, indeed, than his country now has his feelings about the rough and imperfect handling of public affairs is compensated for by his sense that he and his fellow-citizens are working out their own destiny under their own moral responsibility. Well, whatever he feels about this, he can be sure that women feel it just as much. Whatever has been said or written, from the time of Herodotus [the first historian] to the present, about the enabling influence of free government,

- ◆ the nerve and spring that it gives to all the faculties;
- ◆ the larger and higher objectives that it presents to the intellect and

feelings;

- ◆ the more unselfish public spirit, and calmer and broader views of duty, that it creates;
- ◆ the higher platform on which it elevates the individual as a moral, spiritual, and social being,

is every bit as true of women as of men. Aren't these things an important part of individual happiness? Let any man recall what he felt on emerging from boyhood-from the tutelage and control of even loved and affectionate elders-and entering on the responsibilities of manhood. Wasn't it like the physical effect of taking off a heavy weight? Didn't he feel twice as alive, twice as much a human being, as before? And does he imagine that women have none of these feelings? Mill goes on to say that personal pride is all-important to men although they don't take it seriously in others. Women have their pride also, and when it is thwarted the energies behind it flow in other directions. An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek power; refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by trying to control others. To allow to any human beings no existence of their own except what depends on others is motivating them to bend others to their purposes. Where liberty can't be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire. Hence women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display, and all the evils that flow from that. The love of power and the love of liberty are in eternal antagonism. Where there is least liberty, the passion for power is the most ardent and unscrupulous. The desire for power over others can't cease to be a depraving agency among mankind until each individual human being can do without it, and that can't happen until respect for each person's liberty is an established principle.

But it is not only through the sense of personal dignity that the free direction and disposal of their own faculties is a source of individual happiness, and to be fettered and restricted in it is a source of unhappiness, to human beings, and not least to women. Apart from disease, extreme

poverty and guilt, nothing is as fatal to the pleasurable enjoyment of life as the lack of something worthwhile to do. While a woman has the care of a family, that provides an outlet for her active faculties, and usually that is enough. But what about the ever-increasing number of women who have had no opportunity of exercising the vocation that they are mocked by telling them is their proper one [i.e. women who have no families]. What about the women whose children have been lost to them by death or distance, or have grown up, married, and formed homes of their own? There are many examples of men who after a life taken up by business retire with a pension and find that their change to a life of inactivity brings boredom, depression, and premature death; their trouble being their inability to acquire new interests and excitements to replace the old. Yet no-one thinks of the parallel case of so many worthy and devoted women, who,

- ◆ having paid what they are told is their debt to society;
- ◆ having brought up a family blamelessly to manhood and womanhood;
- ◆ having kept house as long as they had a house needing to be kept, are deserted by the only occupation they have fitted themselves for, and are left with undiminished activeness but with no use to make of it, unless perhaps a daughter or daughter in-law is willing to let them do the same work in her own younger household. For women like these and for others who have never had this task. The only resources, speaking generally, are religion and charity. But their religion, though it may be one of feeling and of ceremonies, can't be a religion of action except in the form of charity. Many of these women are by nature admirably fitted for charitable work; but to practise charity usefully-indeed, to practise charity without doing harm-one needs the education, the skills, the knowledge, and the thinking powers of a skilful administrator. Anyone who is fit to do useful charitable work could perform almost any of the



administrative functions of government. In this as in other cases (notably the education of children), the duties permitted to women can't be performed properly unless they are trained for duties that (to the great loss of society) they aren't allowed to perform.

Let me point out here the strange way in which the question of women's disabilities is often presented by people who, confronted by the prospect of something they don't like, find it easier to draw a ludicrous picture of it than to answer the arguments for it. When it is suggested that women's executive capacities and prudent advice might sometimes be valuable in affairs of State, these lovers of fun hold up to the ridicule of the world a picture of girls in their teens or young wives in their early twenties being transported bodily, exactly as they are, from the drawing-room to the House of Commons or the Cabinet room. They forget that males aren't usually selected at this early age for a seat in Parliament or for responsible political functions. Common sense, if they had any, would tell them that if such trusts were confided to women it would be to women with no special vocation for married life, or women who choose some other employment of their abilities, or more often perhaps widows or wives of forty or fifty who could, with the aid of appropriate studies, make available to the wider world the knowledge of life and skill in government that they have acquired in their families. In every European country the ablest men have often experienced and keenly appreciated the advice and help of clever and experienced women of the world, in achieving both private and of public objectives; and there are important aspects of public administration in which few men are as competent as such women e.g. the detailed control of expenditure. But my present topic is not society's need for women's services in public business, but the dull and hopeless life it condemns them to by forbidding them to exercise the practical abilities that many of them are conscious of having, in any wider field than one that is now closed to some of them and to others was never open. If there is anything vitally important to the happiness of human beings it is that they should like what they habitually do. This requirement for an

enjoyable life is very imperfectly granted, or entirely denied, to a large part of mankind; and because of the lack of it many a life that seems to have everything needed for success is actually a failure. But if such failures are often inevitable now, because of circumstances that society isn't yet skilful enough to overcome, society needn't itself inflict them! Many men spend their lives doing one thing reluctantly and badly when they could have done other things happily and well; this may come about through bad choices by parents, or a youth's own inexperience, or the absence of opportunities for the congenial vocation and their presence for an uncongenial one. But on women this sentence is imposed by actual law, and by customs equivalent to law. What in unenlightened societies colour, race, religion, or nationality are to some men, sex is to all women-an abrupt exclusion from almost all honourable occupations except ones that others can't perform or aren't willing to perform. Sufferings arising from this cause usually meet with so little sympathy that few people realize how much unhappiness is produced, even now, by the feeling of a wasted life. This will happen even more frequently when increased cultivation [Mill's word] creates a greater and greater disproportion between women's ideas and abilities and the scope that society allows for their activity.

When we consider the positive evil caused to the disqualified half of the human race first in the loss of the most inspiriting and elevating kind of personal enjoyment, and then in the weariness, disappointment, and profound dissatisfaction with life that are so often the substitute for it, one feels that among all the lessons that men [here = human beings'] need to learn for carrying on the struggle against the inevitable imperfections of their lot on earth, no lesson is more needed than not to add to the evils that nature inflicts by their jealous and prejudiced restrictions on one another. Their stupid fears only substitute other and worse evils for the ones that they are lazily anxious about; while every restraint on the freedom of conduct of any of their human fellow-creatures (otherwise than by making them responsible for any evil actually caused by their conduct) does its bit towards drying up the principal fountain of

human happiness, and leaves our species less rich in all that makes life valuable to the individual human being.

#### **24.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Explain these lines, "Women's obedience and subservience to men is voluntary, unlike a slave's obedience to his master."
- Q.2 What is the moral effect of inferiority on woman as stated by Mill?
- Q.3 How relevant is the title of the pamphlet *The Subjection of Woman*?
- Q.4 Attempt a critical appreciation of the pamphlet *The Subjection of Woman*.

#### **24.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Reeves, Richard. *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand*, Atlantic Books, 2007.
- ◆ Tulloch, Gail. *Mill and Sexual Equality*, Lynne Rienner, 1989.

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**JOHN RUSKIN : HIS LIFE AND TIMES****25.1 Objective****25.2 His Life****25.3 As a Lover and Critic of Fine Arts****25.4 Ruskin as a Critic of Society****25.5 His Social Doctrines****25.6 Ruskin's Later Life****25.7 Salient Features of the Times in which Ruskin Wrote****25.8 Ruskin's Reaction against Prevailing Social and Economic Setup****25.9 His Criticism of the Orthodox Economy****25.10 Examination Oriented Questions****25.11 Suggested Reading****25.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the life and times of John Ruskin, his works; his being a critic of society and other contemporary issues which shaped his personality as a writer.

**25.2 HIS LIFE**

John Ruskin (1819 - 1900) had a pious Calvinistic upbringing. While yet a child, he became a keen reader of the Bible. He also read in his early childhood

Pope's *Homer*, Scott's novels, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. All these works influenced deeply both his life and works. His early education also included, besides reading, travels through England, Italy, and Switzerland, where he accompanied his father on his business trips, along with his mother (his father was a wine merchant). The direct effect of Ruskin's early education was that he began writing literary pieces at the age of seven. When he was nine years old, he wrote a "Poem on the Universe." He published at the age of fifteen an essay on "The Geological State of Mont Blanc." Despite all his precocity, however, Ruskin remained in some ways singularly undeveloped. For instance, when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, his mother had to settle in the town to watch over him. He used to have tea with her every day. Except for his stay at Oxford and a brief span of unhappy married life, he spent all his years at the family home in the southern suburbs of London till the age of fifty-two. Here, he would daily read to his mother chapters of Scriptures, although he had long ceased to hold his mother's religious views.

### **25.3 AS A LOVER AND CRITIC OF FINE ARTS**

Ruskin's love for the work of J. M. W. Turner (1775 - 1851), an English romantic landscape painter, began long before that painter gained public recognition. At the age of seventeen, Ruskin was already defending him. Ruskin's first volume of his *Modern Painters* (1843) was almost a manifesto on behalf of Turner. Ruskin's book created a sensation in the world of art. He also assured Turner great fame as a painter. Immediately captured by Turner, Ruskin was to become an artist under his influence. But his painting, like his poetry, finally proved marginal. The lasting effect of Turner was to confirm a critical gift of genius. As a critic of all the arts and of society, Ruskin became, and still remains, a distinguished figure in the European tradition of culture. His distinction has to be understood in terms of the history of sensibility.

His subsequent books on the criticism of art and architecture raised his status to the highest level. *The Seven Types of Architecture* followed by *Stones of Venice*, were considered books of great merit. For instance, Carlyle called *Stones of Venice* a "sermon in stones." Ruskin held up the Gothic architecture of Venice as an example of art which reflected in all its features a pure national faith

and domestic virtue. During the writing of this book in 1848, Ruskin married Euphemia Gray, on whose request in her girlhood he had written a fairy tale, *The King of the Golden River*. The marriage broke after five years. His divorced wife married Sir John Millais, the painter. In the year of his divorce, 1853, Ruskin became a lecturer in the New Working Men's College being run by F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley. This college was considered a centre for Christian Socialism.

#### **25.4 RUSKIN AS A CRITIC OF SOCIETY**

Ruskin delivered in 1857, his lectures at Manchester on the Political Economy of Art. These lectures were published as *A Joy For Ever*. One can see in these lectures the germ of the social work which was to dominate the rest of his life. His interest in men replaced his interest in art. In 1860, the turning point in Ruskin's life was reached. He flung a challenge to the political economists in the essays *Unto This Last*. These essays were first published in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Despite all odds, Ruskin never withdrew this challenge. Infact, he repeatedly renewed it in his lecture, in his book, and in his own practice. However, the more vehemently he posed this challenge, the greater came the opposition to it.

Ruskin himself always regarded the change in his interest from art to society, as an inevitable outcome of his earlier work. He viewed it as a natural development of his theory that good art was only possible in a nation morally sound. Even as early as 1849 "the melancholy knowledge of the agricultural condition of Switzerland and Italy" was causing him a good deal of trouble. His lectures at the Working Men's College gave him a more intimate understanding of the social and economic problems of England. The immediate occasion for his *Cornhill* essays was the builders' strike of 1859. "For my own part," he said, "I feel the force of mechanism and the fury of avaricious commerce to be at present so irresistible, that I have seceded from the study not only of architecture, but nearly of all art, and have given myself, as I would in a besieged city, to seek the best modes of getting bread and butter for its multitudes." His destructive criticism of the well established Political Economy in & *Unto This Last*. It was later also supported by the more constructive work of *Munera Pulveris* and *Time and Tide*, followed by *Sesame and Lilies*. The last of these books proved the most popular of his works, its subjects being a treatise on

books and a sermon to women.

## **25.5 HIS SOCIAL DOCTRINES**

Ruskin delivered his Oxford Lectures in 1870, which mark a further stage in his career as a critic. During the fifteen years, he was Senior Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford, he intermittently delivered these lectures. These lectures also tend to be social sermons rather than lectures on art. During this very period, he was also proclaiming his social doctrine in his famous letters published under the title *Fors Clavigera*, making at the same time practical, if not very successful, experiments in social reform. One of the leading experiments of these was the St. George's Company or Guild. He demanded of the company's supporters to give one tenth of their wealth to help the workers. Very few responded to his call. He himself, however, gave away £157,000 which his father had left for him. He lived in retirement only on the income he received from the sales of his books. He was so strict in the observance of the principles of economy he preached that he refused to invest money and earn interest on it. One of the important laws of St. George's Company was that there would be "no use of steam-power, nor of any machines where arms will serve." Incidentally, Mahatma Gandhi was highly influenced by Ruskin's ideas which he practised and promoted in India, including cottage industry where men, not machines, would produce consumable goods. Gandhi ji also translated *Unto This Last* in Gujarati and Hindi.

## **25.6 RUSKIN'S LATER LIFE**

In 1871, after his mother's death that year, Ruskin, now 52 years of age, felt deprived of one great feminine influence on him. A feeling of extreme loneliness led him to propose, the very next year, to Rosa La Touche, a young woman of twenty-three, whom he had known since he was a child. But his unorthodox religious views came in the way. She maintained her refusal until her death three years later, although she expressed her love for him. This event of his life affected Ruskin much more than the breakup of his first marriage. Rosa's refusal and her death affected him deeply, and he remained heart-broken at her death. The shock was so deep that it unhinged his mind. Consequently, in 1878, he had complete mental breakdown. This state of mind is reflected in the incoherence of his later works, such as *Fors*

*Clavingera* and even the *Oxford Lectures*. From this state of mind, Ruskin could not recover until his death in 1900. As a consequence of his ill mental health, he abandoned his Oxford lectures, and retired finally to his house at Coniston in the Lake District. He had gone to this house the first time on the death of his mother in 1871. He lived in this house until his death in 1900, with intermittent periods of mental collapse. His work was done, except for one piece. Incidentally, this last work is considered most beautiful of all his writings. Written in the lucid intervals of his mental health from 1885 to 1889, *Praeterita* is a record of his earlier years, based on his diaries. But this work is often the old man's retrospect rather than an absolute reflection of his mind in the years that it describes.

#### **25.7 SALIENT FEATURES OF THE TIMES IN WHICH RUSKIN WROTE :**

Ruskin was born at a time (in 1819) when England was in the middle of the great upheaval, known as the Industrial Revolution. This very important event in the history of England had brought vast changes in the lives of the masses of the people between the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth century. The salient features of the Industrial Revolution included the use of steam and power-driven machinery, and the growth of large-size factories and mills. One of the direct consequences of this phenomenon was the conversion of large tracks of common land measuring thousands of acres into private property. The mill and factory owners became the proprietors of these large tracks of common land. People who earlier supported themselves on their own small holdings, grazing their sheep and cattle on the common land, were thus unable now to make a living. They had to sell their small farms and become hired labourers in the mills and factories, or on the large farms. The wages of these labourers were very low. Thus, large part of the rural population was now, as never before, a class without property, entirely dependent upon a class of employers who owned mills, factories, and big farms.

This caused, owing to Industrial Revolution, an unprecedented migration of population from the villages to the towns and cities. These people were uprooted from their traditional natural way of life in which there had been stability and continuity for hundreds of years. Now suddenly, they found themselves thrown into an unnatural environment reflecting neither stability nor continuity. Besides,



they lost whatever little freedom they enjoyed in the villages. The new machinery in the industry adversely affected the small people who were used to buying their own materials, spin and weave them, and sell the finished goods. The machine-based mills and industries threw these people out of jobs. Obviously, the cottage industry could not compete with the mechanized mills. These people too, were reduced from the position of skilled craftsmen to that of "hands" or workers in factories. Those days, the wages were so low that good or decent living could not be afforded with those wages. All the members of a family, young and old, had to work to make both ends meet. And yet life remained full of hardships. So much so that in 1825, there were about three million children working on these low wages in the factories of the rich. These children on the average earned one shilling (which is one sixteenth of a pound) a week. As for the adult males among the wage earners, which numbered over four million, the great majority earned from 8 to 12 shillings a week.

Conditions of service were very severe for these poor workers. Under Combination Laws, the formation of trade unions or participation in a strike was prevented under penalty of imprisonment or transportation. Then there were prosecutions for breach of contract. Children were put up to auction and carried off by contractors to work sometimes as far as 200 miles from their parents or relatives. Women's lot was no better than that of children. A woman of 22, for example, was sent to jail for breaking a contract to work 12 hours a day (exclusive of meal-times), for 2 years, at three and a half shillings a week for the first year, and 4 shillings a week for the second year surviving on bread and water. Children, in fact, worked even for more hours than did women. Carlyle wrote in 1833 of "little children labouring for 16 hours a day, inhaling at every breath a quantity of cotton fuzz, falling asleep over their wheels, and roused again by the lash of thongs over their backs or the slap of 'billy-rollers' over their little crowns" in factories with a temperature of 80° F - 85° F.

In these times of Ruskin's early life, workers, even the better-paid among them, had no voting right until 1832. The first Reform Bill of 1832 granted the voting right to the workers. The political economy of the time, which Ruskin attacked in his *Unto This Last*, maintained that any interference with industry was wrong.

It was as a result of this philosophy that the British Parliament rejected for a long time any attempt to lay down law about working hours and service conditions of the workers. Also, even when the laws were laid for the first time, they failed because of constant invasion combined with the fact that the mill-owners themselves were the magistrates who were to decide the disputes. It was only in 1847 that the number of working hours for all under the age of 18 were restricted to ten in a day, exclusive of meal-time. Even then, as the practice goes even today, the working hours for children outside the factory remained unlimited.

The only matter where the Victorian economists had favoured the governmental interference with the trade was the importation of corn. But there was the system of protection which raised the price of corn. As a result, the price of bread was also raised to a level which, in "the hungry forties" (1840's) meant almost starvation for many working families. Also, most necessities of life were heavily taxed. Added to these miseries was an absence of State education. The entire education system was in private hands, making it impossible for the poor to have an access to education. Also, the long time spent in the mill made it impossible for working children (as well as adults) to receive even the traditional knowledge at home. As an example, in 1842, not even one adult male in fifty could read in South Wales. As for the living conditions of the workers, insanitary slums were built for them. These slums were put up for them not only in the towns but also in the country. Accumulation of wealth was considered a "virtue" by the dominant rich. And since a better return on capital was available from hovels than wholesome houses, the rich preferred to put up slums.

It was not until cholera broke out in 1855 that questions were raised about the reigning philosophy of "good business", which relied on the doctrine of "buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market." The questions were forced by the fact that cholera had spread from the sweated workers in the slums to the rich folk whose clothes the workers had made. This brought home the realization that mere accumulation of wealth may not ensure safety of others around, especially those whose labour you convert into capital, who are living in miserable conditions. No doubt, the Industrial Revolution and the policy of non-interference (called *Laissez Faire*) had, in the years following the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth

century, made England the richest country of the world. These very wars had impoverished the rest of the European countries. But England's richness was achieved at the cost of thousands of young children who worked and starved to death, millions of whom surviving ruined in health and reduced to the status of ignorant slaves.

## **25.8 RUSKIN'S REACTION AGAINST PREVAILING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SETUP**

In other words, this system of exploitation of the poor, especially the adolescent, made England rich, but kept its majority poor and miserable. It was this England to which Ruskin had reacted strongly in his historical *Unto This Last*. Although some improvement in the working conditions had taken place before Ruskin wrote his book in 1860, the life of the average worker was still short, owing to toil, hunger, dirt, and disease. The only relief these miserable poor could look for was the oblivion of drunkenness. An idea of state interference was still met with bitter opposition by the rich and powerful of the nation. The orthodox political economy, which was in vogue in Ruskin's England, still maintained that man is motivated only by self-interest. It also maintained that if employers and the workers (the rich and the poor) each tried to get as much wealth as possible unrestricted or uncontrolled by state regulations, the country as a whole would profit. Obviously, the philosophy was heavily biased in favour of the rich. It worked for the promotion of the interests of the rich in the name of the wealth of the nation. To the orthodox economist, wealth was merely material, which meant money or money's worth calculated in gross terms, not in terms of individuals.

## **25.9 HIS CRITICISM OF THE ORTHODOX ECONOMY**

Ruskin's opposition to the philosophy of the orthodox economist was inspired by the ideas of Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881). Senior to Ruskin in age, Carlyle was considered, besides Ruskin, the other great political prophet of the Victorian period. Ruskin took up the task of exposing the weaknesses, especially in human and moral terms, of the classical or orthodox economists. He opposed their promotion of the human passion for greed on moral grounds. He set out to offer a saner and

more humane political economy than that of the *laissez-faire* being followed by the ruling classes of his country. He tried to force recognition of the fact that self-interest is only one of the various motives that move men (as well as women). Ruskin vehemently insisted that the only true wealth of a nation was the body of its citizens; that if these citizens were healthy and happy, the nation was wealthy; but if they were poor and miserable, then the nation was poor.

In keeping with the reformist spirit of his age, Ruskin wrote, as did Carlyle, Dickens, and others, for the welfare of the people, especially the poor. As against the spiritual and metaphysical concerns of the Romantics before them, the Victorians were chiefly concerned with the material and physical conditions of his age. In the face of grim situation created by the expanding industry and utilitarianism, the writers of the Victorian age, unless insensitive, could not afford to look far beyond into the airy regions of the universe.

#### **25.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Write a note on the life and times of John Ruskin.
- Q.2 Discuss Ruskin as a critic of Society.
- Q.3 Who inspired Ruskin in context of economy and why?

#### **25.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ John Ruskin : *The Critical Haritage*. Edited by J. L. Bradley.
- ◆ John Ruskin : *His Life and Teaching* by Marshall Mather.

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**JOHN RUSKIN: *UNTO THIS LAST*****26.1 Objective****26.2 Title of the Book****26.3 Utilitarian Creed****26.4 Ruskin's Reaction against Utilitarianism****26.5 Relevance of Ruskin's Views in a Democratic Society****26.6 Ethical Bias of Ruskin's Philosophy****26.7 Let Us Sum Up****26.8 Examination Oriented Questions****26.9 Suggested Reading****26.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the important themes and the significance of the book *Unto This last*.

**26.2 TITLE OF THE BOOK**

John Ruskin borrowed the title of his book *Unto This Last* from St. Matthew, xx.14. The story given in chapter xx of St. Matthew's Gospel in *The New Testament* reads as under:

1. For the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a house holder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.
3. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place.
4. And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.
5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.
6. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle.
7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.
8. So when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.
9. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.
10. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.
11. And when they had received it, they murmured against the Goodman of the house.
12. Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.
13. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny.
14. Take that thine is, and go thy way : I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

Thus, we have in *The Gospel of St. Matthew* (xx.14) the title that Ruskin chose to give his book. The context of the title, rooted as it is in the text of *The New Testament*, explains the significance of the subject relating to work and value in the political economy of a country. Ruskin's bent of mind, his approach to the subject, his concern for each and every human, all come together in clear light, when we go to the source of his book's title.

Another inspiration, besides the works of Carlyle, for writing *Unto This Last*, was Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times*, which Ruskin highly admired. He strongly urged that the novels of Dickens, "but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions." The author said this in his Preface to *Unto This Last* itself. Dickens was the first to mobilize the Victorian resentment against the utilitarians with a dazzling creative zest in his satirical novel, *Hard Times*. The novel hit hard the practitioners of the utilitarian ideas formulated by the famous classical economists, Bentham, Ricardo, and Malthus. Dickens, like Ruskin, cannot be dismissed as "bad economist." We do not go to *Hard Times* and *Unto This Last* for a technical appraisal of the influence and achievement of the utilitarians. We go to these works to make connection with the living spirit; to see how economic theories, when applied to human life, come out for the promotion or degradation of the human spirit and human society as a family of humans.

### **26.3 UTILITARIAN CREED**

In the nineteenth century England, utilitarianism was primarily the creed of the ruling middle class. Utilitarianism had little to offer to the landed gentry on the one hand, and on the other it seemed to offer only negatives to the artisans. No doubt, only a small number of Victorian men and women could be described as utilitarians or philosophical radicals in the sense of subscribing to certain views concerning the nature of man, the grounds of morality, the scope of government, the meaning of freedom, and so on. The vast majority of those who talked the language of *laissez-faire* and individual self-interest were merely rationalizing their own habits and prejudices. Utilitarianism itself was full of paradoxes. Although, based like so many eighteenth-century theories, upon a

minimal view of human nature, "economic man," it did become an inspiration of many a reform of the day in parliamentary and local government, in the working of the law, in standards of sanitation, and in education. Though it theoretically favoured *laissez-faire*, it, nevertheless, came to stand for efficient centralized administration and a strong civil service. Though in some matters, such as the agitation for cheap bread, the utilitarians were friends of the working men, in others, such as the regulation of conditions in factories, they were their enemies. But the overall effect of its dominance in Victorian England was highly detrimental to the life of the poor. Hence, writers like Ruskin, Carlyle, and Dickens strongly reacted to its pernicious influence on the culture of the society.

In England, there had been a tradition of thought going back to Edmund Burke and deriving (from) the stream of Anglican apologetics since the time of Hooker, which formed the natural opposite of utilitarian atomism. This tradition received tremendous boost from the Romantics such as Burke, Coleridge, and Scott. Against utilitarian doctrine it stressed history, tradition, and altruism. Instead of the land owning, profit making, and wage-earning contraries of the political economists; it emphasized common pieties and interests. Against self-seeking atomism, it stressed on organic conception of society. Much of this idealist tradition was far too good to be quite true. Akin to this tradition, in fact, a direct descendant of it, was that of the Christian Socialists, with F. D. Maurice as their chief thinker. This tradition, too, like the romantics, belonged to the Anglican reaction against depersonalizing forces, such as utilitarianism, in Victorian society. Ruskin was one of the Christian Socialists, sharing many of his views also with Burke and Coleridge.

#### **26.4 RUSKIN'S REACTION AGAINST UTILITARIANISM**

No doubt, there is a good deal of sentimentality in the Victorian writings which came out in reaction to utilitarianism. All the moralists and novelists who might be described as critics of utilitarianism tend to become emotional as they delineate the ideal working man. This ideal man is presented to atone for the gross materialism of the times by accepting a feudal role in an utterly unfeudal epoch. Carlyle made a singular contribution in awakening the conscience of the



middle class. But he, too, could not help being emotional and vague when it came to the question of these workmen. Ruskin, too, concluded his best piece of social criticism, *Unto This Last*, with the familiar emotionalism of the Victorian moralist, "Note, finally, that all effectual advancement towards this true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort." Thus, the subject of Ruskin's famous critique of utilitarianism emerged against the background of the conditions the England of his time faced, which we have been describing in these pages.

About the subject of the four essays combined under the title *Unto This Last*, Ruskin himself argues in the Preface, "The real gist of these papers, their central meaning and aim is to give, as I believe, for the first time in plain English - it has often been incidentally given in good Greek by Plato and Xenophone, and good Latin by Cicero and Horace - a logical definition of WEALTH: such definition being absolutely needed for a basis of economical science." Reacting rather sharply to John Stuart Mill's essay on *Principles of Political Economy*, ridiculing his opening statement, "writers on political economy profess to teach, or to investigate, the nature of wealth," Ruskin remarks that, "where investigation is necessary, teaching is impossible." Pointing out the logical faults in Mill's argument, Ruskin goes on to ridicule the former's rather casual attitude to a subject of serious concern. He, then, reiterates his object in writing his four papers included in *Unto This Last* (1860) :

It was, therefore, the first object of these following papers to give an accurate and stable definition of wealth. Their second object was to show that the acquisition of wealth was finally possible only under certain moral conditions of society, of which quite the first was a belief in the existence and even, for practical purposes, in the attainability of honesty.

Carrying forward the elaboration of his book's subject, Ruskin cites Pope's assertion that an honest man is among God's best works presently visible. He also insists, "Honesty is not a disturbing force, which deranges the orbits of economy; but consistent and commanding force, by obedience to which - and by no other obedience - those orbits can continue clear of chaos."

Expressing great faith in the virtue of honesty, he feels pained that people in his age "have lost faith in common honesty, and in the working power of it." He expresses as one of the aims of his book, as well as of his life, "to recover and keep" faith in honesty. He declares this aim to be his "first business" in this book. And this aim, he hopes to achieve by "not only believing, but even by experience assuring ourselves, that there are yet in the world men who can be restrained from fraud otherwise than by the fear of losing employment; nay, that it is even accurately in proportion to the number of such men in any State, that in said State does or can prolong its existence."

Thus, the essays in *Unto This Last*, says Ruskin, are mainly directed to two points : (i) definition of wealth and (ii) recovery of faith in honesty. As for the subject of the organization of labour, he says, it is only casually touched upon. The reason that he gives for this is, in fact, a matter of his firm faith in the power of honesty. In his view, "if we once can get a sufficient quality of honesty in our captains, the organization of labour is easy... but if we cannot get honesty in our captains, the organization of labour is far evermore impossible." To ensure a proper political creed and an equally proper economic order, Ruskin considers it imperative that "there should be training schools for youth, established at government cost, and under government discipline, over the whole country." In a way, he is insisting upon the idea of compulsory education for all; where the following three things must be taught:

- (a) The laws of health, and the exercises enjoined by them;
- (b) Habits of gentleness and justice; and,
- (c) The calling by which he is to live."

Describing his own social "Utopia" further, Ruskin gives the idea of the public sector in competition with the private :

that, in connection with these training schools, there should be established, also entirely under government regulations, many factories and workshops, for the production and sale of every necessity of life, and for the exercise of every useful art. And

that, interfering no whit with private enterprise, nor setting any restraints or tax on private trade, but leaving both to do their best, and beat the government if they could - there should, at these government factories and shops, be authoritatively good and exemplary work done, and pure and true substance sold; so that a man could be sure, if he chose to pay the government price, that he got for his money bread that was bread, ale that was ale, and work that was work.

Elaborating his idea of a "utopian" state (or welfare state as it came to be called in the later twentieth century), he proposes that the third measure necessary for an honest policy should be: "that any man, or woman, or boy, or girl, out of employment, should be at once received at the nearest government school, and set to such work as it appeared, on trial, they were fit for, at a fixed rate of wages determinable every year." As a man of immense humanity and foresight Ruskin also proposes, as the fourth essential step for ensuring honest polity, "that for the old and destitute, comfort and home should be provided; which provision, when misfortune had been by the working of such a system sifted from guilt, would be honourable instead of disgraced to the receiver." Finally, Ruskin cites passage from his *Political Economy of Art*, wherein the conditions for the workers are, in a way, laid down :

... a labourer serves his country with his spade, just as a man in the middle ranks of life serves it with sword, pen, or lancet. If the service be less, and, therefore, the wages during health less, then the reward when the health is broken may be less, but not less honourable; and it ought to be quite as natural and straightforward a matter for a labourer to take his pension from his parish, because he has deserved well of his parish, as for a man in higher rank to take his pension from his country, because he has deserved well of his country.."

Thus, Ruskin, once again, gives an idea (of pension for the working

class) which was inconceivable in his time. He compares the work done by a factory hand to that of a soldier, and the two, in his view, have equally served the nation. He is aware of the impractical aspect of his ideas, but he is also aware that ideas are to be conceived first, and that their implementation, always imperfect, follows later.

## **26.5 RELEVANCE OF RUSKIN'S VIEWS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

No wonder, then, that even for long after he wrote it, *Unto This Last* was mocked at as the beautiful vapouring of an unpractical idealist. But much that he proposed in the most famous of his writings is now an accomplished fact or forms a part of the programme of one or another political party in the subsequent democracies of the world. Even his view of machinery has come to be seen largely justified. No doubt, perhaps none today would advocate the abolition of machinery, it has been increasingly recognized that machine-minding does tend to dehumanize men, and that means must be sought to make man the master, and not the servant, of the machine.

Ruskin's message embodied in *Unto This Last*, is expressed, in one form or another, in his other writings as well, whatever be the ostensible subject of an individual piece. He himself explained the different facets of his grand subject as they find expression in his various writings when he said:

“*Modern Painters* taught the claim of all lower nature in the hearts of men: of the rock, and wave, and herb, as a part of their necessary spirit life...*The Stones of Venice*, taught the laws constructive art and the dependence of all human work or edifice, for its beauty, on the happy life of the workman.”

*Unto This Last*, taught the laws of that life itself and its dependence on the Sun of Justice, the *Inaugural of Oxford Lectures*, the necessity that it should be led, and the gracious laws of beauty and labour recognized, by the upper no less than the lower classes of England; and, lastly, *Fors Clavigera* has declared the relation of these to each other, and the only possible condition of peace and honour for low and high, for rich and poor, together in the holding of the first Estate, under the only Despot, God ... and in keeping

which service is perfect freedom; and inheritance of all that a loving Creator can give to his creatures, and an immortal father to his children.

## **26.6 ETHICAL BIAS OF RUSKIN'S PHILOSOPHY**

Thus, the sum and substance of all his writings comes to the following: Truth in art, honesty in thought and work constitute man's creed. *Unto This Last* makes the strongest plea for this honesty of thought and work. Those opposed to his creed, the orthodox or classical political economists, come under heavy attack in this most favourite of his books. He attacks them because they ignore the "social affections" and treat men as non-moral machines. His method in this book, as well as in others, is trenchant, his language often violent. But a prophet inspired by indignation and pity would not speak "comforting words."

As can be easily seen from a reading of *Unto This Last*, as well as from a reading of his other writings, that the essential import of his message is ethical. His ethical teaching appears in so many forms and in so many different works that any summary of that teaching would be found inadequate. For a full half century, he remained "the apostle of beauty" in England, and the beauty for which he pleaded was never sensuous or pagan, as in the Renaissance; instead, it was always spiritual, appealing to the soul of man rather than to his eyes, leading to better work and better living. In his economic essays, both in *Unto This Last* and *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin is even more directly and positively ethical. In order to mitigate the evils of unreasonable competitive system imposed by the followers of utilitarianism, under which workers labour and sorrow; to bring the mill-owner and the mill-hand together in mutual trust and affection; to seek beauty, truth and goodness as the chief ends of life, and, having found them, to make our characters correspond; to share the best treasures of art and literature with rich and poor alike; to labour always, and, whether we work with hand or head, to do all that work in praise of God. This sums up Ruskin's purpose and message. The best part of Ruskin as a writer is that, like Chaucer's country parson, he always practised his creed before he preached it.

## 26.7 LET US SUM UP

The significance of *Unto This Last's* subject (call it message, if you so like) is all the more pertinent in our time. In the present era of global economic competition, the theory of liberalization of world economy, with free, but not fair, competition, the poor of the world, individuals as well as countries, are facing similar hardships which the workers did in the time of Ruskin. The call for the human face of global economy today being made from different quarters is in no way different from the call Ruskin had given in *Unto This Last* for a moral approach to matters economic, for it is ultimately people who have to count in any order, and every order must work for their good.

## 26.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Discuss the themes and significance of *Unto This Last*.
- Q.2 Comment on the relevance of *Unto This Last* in the contemporary world.
- Q.3 Why was Ruskin against Utilitarianism?

## 26.9 SUGGESTED READING

- ♦ Aesthetic and Critical theory of John Ruskin by De Gruyter.
- ♦ John Ruskin : *His Life and Teaching* by Marshall Mather.

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**JOHN RUSKIN : RUSKIN AS A SOCIAL CRITIC****27.1 Introduction****27.2 Objective****27.3 Ruskin's Emphasis on Morality of Art****27.4 Ruskin as a Social Critic and a Humanist****27.5 Ruskin as a Christian Socialist****27.6 Let Us Sum Up****27.7 Examination Oriented Questions****27.8 Suggested Reading****27.1 INTRODUCTION**

John Ruskin belongs to the tradition of criticism, which aimed at creating consciousness in general as an attempt to improve the standards of taste and effect moral refinement in society. Coleridge and Arnold in the nineteenth century, and Leavis and Trilling in the twentieth century also belonged to the same tradition. These critics came to be called public critics, for whom literature, as well as other arts, are only means to an end, which is the general education of the mind about the quality of life in contemporary society. The idea of liberal education also stressed such an education. For them, literature is not a narrow special field of knowledge to be appreciated or interpreted in the technical terms of any theory. The function of criticism, for them, was to

relate literature to life and offer thereby an interpretation of life itself, addressing the general question, how to live? Hence, they wrote on education and economics, arts and literature, culture and industry, submitting all to the scrutiny of a fine intelligence which looked in each and all for the values, moral and ethical, essential for making life meaningful for individuals as well as societies. Ruskin's criticism in *Unto This Last* is, therefore, to be viewed in the light of this tradition, not in relation to the history of economics in England.

Ruskin began his career as critic with several books on the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. His first book, *The Poetry of Architecture*, was written when he was an undergraduate student. Soon after he wrote several volumes of *Modern Painters* between 1854 and 1860. His *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* in 1840s and 50's won him great fame as an art critic. Ruskin turned to direct social criticism in 1860. In his most eloquent and vital book, *Unto This Last* (1860), he stood forth as a fully armed opponent of utilitarianism. The central experiences of his life had led him beyond his earlier fascination for Wordsworth's quietism. He returned now to the Biblical origins of his vision. The "theoretic faculty" of man, the ability to enter into the state of aesthetic contemplation, as depicted by Wordsworth in his *Tintern Abbey*, had now to express itself in the Hebraic and Protestant eagerness to free all men from the bondage of material hardships which prevented them from an enjoyment of life more divinely interfused. Although Ruskin had always been eloquent in his writings right from the beginning, he rose to the heights of his rhetorical power in *Unto This Last*. If there is a kernel passage in his work, it is the one that climaxes :

There is no wealth but life – Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble happy human beings.

This is the moral force, which comes out so forcefully in *Unto This Last* from where the passage just cited has been lifted, behind the apocalyptic



yearnings of the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters*, also published in 1860. The same moral force also informs the pages of *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884), and *Sesame and Lilies* (1865).

## **27.2 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss John Ruskin as a social critic.

## **27.3 RUSKIN'S EMPHASIS ON MORALITY OF ART**

There are three major areas of Ruskin's achievement as critic: art, social, and literary criticism. Most histories of criticism tag Ruskin as a "moral" critic. The tag is not altogether inappropriate. But it is true only in Ruskin's own terms, and not in the conventional sense of the word moral. An Oxford lecture he delivered in 1870, makes clear the special sense in which Ruskin insists upon the morality of art :

You must first have the right moral state, or you cannot have art. But when the art is once obtained, its reflected action enhances and completes the moral state out of which it arose, and, above all, communicates the exultation to other minds which are already morally capable of the like ....Accuracy in proportion to the rightness of the cause, and purity of the emotion, is the possibility of fine art. You cannot paint or sing yourself into being good men; you must be good men before you can either paint or sing, and then the colour and sound will complete in you all that is best....

Here, the "right moral state" and "being good men" are phrases that suggest conventional moral attitudes. And yet, the only moral state mentioned is that of the skylark (left out in the citation), "the pure gladness." One can sense that behind this passage are both Wordsworth and Shelley. The point of resemblance between Ruskin and the romantics is not the image of the skylark alone; more important sharing between them is in their common insistence upon the artist's joy and the concept of art as an expression of the best and

happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.

Ruskin believed that since great art is in some sense a revelation of God, it cannot be produced by aesthetic means alone. Therefore, only a man who is in balance, a good man can produce great art. Hence, the “Aesthetic Man” is as much an absurdity as the “Economic Man.” The great artist, in Ruskin's view, is a phenomenon of nature, extraordinarily sensitive to the world around him and able to see life clearly. He delights in his material and is influenced by it. In his view, the noblest art is that which reveals most ideas. There did remain the problem of incoherence in his theory of art. One of the reasons for this was that he based his criticism on the existence of a transcendent order. As a result, when his faith was shaken in his later life, that shook his theory of art also. Secondly, he was too honest to his own impressions to maintain strict consistency. When he liked what his theory excluded, he enlarged the theory to include the object.

#### **27.4 RUSKIN AS A SOCIAL CRITIC AND A HUMANIST**

Ruskin's social criticism, related as it is to his art and literary criticism, has similar strong and weak points. His criticism of the “Economic Man” has been widely praised for its effectiveness and significance. Ruskin's social theories are, in fact, an application of the microcosm on Denmark Hill, with its paternalism and stratification intact, to the world at large. That society was in some ways exemplary and in others sadly lacking, like the orderly world that John Ruskin visualized or envisioned. Also, the strength of his criticism, both social and literary, lies not so much in a unified theory, which is not there, as in the passages of rhapsody, in the subtle analyses of his own conflicting emotions, which decorate all his works. His commitment to the subject he is writing about is so deep and total that he never leaves us in any doubt that he is dealing with a passionate issue, momentous to anyone able to grasp the inspiring breadth. Although as a critic of art, Ruskin at times seemed capricious and unjust, as a social critic he always sounded a prophet.

Ruskin's social criticism, especially his attack on the “Economic Man,” was

based on three positions. Firstly, he believed that orthodox or classical economics scorned Christian morality. Secondly, although it professed to be a science of humanity in one set of relationships, it ignored all human characteristics except the brutish. Finally, even considered as no more than a commercial science, it was obviously false. At the heart of the matter lay the distinction between "value in use" and "value in exchange," which originated with Adam Smith and came down intact to Marshall. For more than a century and a half, British economists of the orthodox variety, including John Stuart Mill, ignored the use and concentrated on the exchange. Methodologically speaking, they were right to do so, but ignoring the real harm caused by certain forms of production and consumption led to the ideological abuses of various business interests. Ruskin's attack on the economists may be "ignorant and unjustifiable" in purely technical terms, but if certain interests resorted to perversion of the theorists, then in all fairness, it would seem that he was entitled to attack the perversion. Mill himself admitted that his economics dealt only with man as a being who sought wealth, although he also warned that economic theory could not be applied without reinstating the actual man in place of the economic abstraction.

*Unto This Last* leaves us in no doubt that the motive behind Ruskin's somewhat fussy attack on the earlier economists was fundamentally a sensible one. His aim was to bring into prominence human factors which had come to be obscured by the influence of the economists who relied upon abstract notions and figures. He contested their tendency to consider buying and selling, value and wealth as mere statistics to be calculated in terms of profit and loss, investment and return. His reminder to the economists was about the crucial human factor which they had just not taken into account. They had ignored the moral aspects of the means employed to achieve the ends. They had also ignored the fact that no one existed alone, that each was a part of the larger set-up called society, and that every individual's profit and loss involved the loss and profit of all others. In other words, no aspect concerning man's life could be considered in isolation, separating it from the other aspects of his nature as a human being, or from the other human beings who constituted the society of which every individual was a part.

## 27.5 RUSKIN AS A CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST

Ruskin in *Unto This Last*, as well as in his other works, was contending the irreligious, unchristian, and inhuman tendencies let loose in his age in the name of "liberty," "science," and "progress." He, along with Arnold, was countering the influence as much of the agnostics like Spencer and Huxley as that of utilitarians like Bentham and Mill. Persons of faith, though not of orthodox hue, found it oppressive to live in agnosticism. As Beatrice Webb, who turned away from Catholicism as "intellectual suicide," put it, it seemed impossible for a woman to live in agnosticism. That is a creed which is only the product of one side of our nature, the purely rational, and ought we, persistently, to refuse authority of that other faculty which George Eliot calls 'emotive thought.' There was a dilemma over this issue. Persons like Webb, Arnold, and Ruskin in the Victorian age found the increasing secularity and commercialization of English life rather stifling. It was in this late Victorian ethos that intellectuals like Arnold and Yeats turned to Hinduism and Buddhism for solace. Ruskin, who did not turn to the oriental beliefs, upheld a staunch belief in Christianity. And it was this unshaken faith of his in the Divine order that coloured even his socialism he carved out in his role as a social critic. *Unto This Last*, too, is, in part, an illustration of his Christian socialism.

Although moral Puritanism is by no means entailed by an agnostic attitude to religion, it was the case that Victorian agnosticism developed some of the characteristic narrowness and rigidity associated with Puritanism. Charles Darwin, the father of agnosticism, so to say, deplors the loss of the ability to enjoy poetry or painting or music :

My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

By agnostic we mean a person, like Darwin, whose mind is constantly constrained, oppressed, and cramped by a negative response to Christianity. He is the one who is so nervous about his rationalism that all that of life, which is not science - the world of desire, love, hate, hope, tragedy, comedy, and of choice - suffers paralysis of enjoying life in its human aspects. Almost unconsciously, there emerged and developed amongst the literate men and women in the nineteenth century England, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Ruskin, and Arnold included, a human attitude to life which was not a matter of creeds and dogmas or their denial, but of recognition and acceptance of the human condition, of love, loyalties, duties, respect for intelligence, and feelings, which are not less relevant to religion than to art and science.

The earlier Wordsworth can be said to count for much in the development of this unassertive resolution and independence. Although it offers no transcendence except in unattended moments and no answers to ultimate questions, humanism helps to keep alive a sense of their importance and to maintain standards of sincerity, delicacy, and intellectual honesty by which religion itself must be judged. In the Victorian age, writers like Dickens, Carlyle, Arnold, and Ruskin, whatever be their differences of ideas and beliefs otherwise, made significant contributions to the development of what may be termed unofficial humanism. Ruskin, as a part of this development of unofficial humanism, raised questions regarding the utilitarian and agnostic views of man. While utilitarians viewed him only as an "Economic Man" with appetites of greed and selfishness, the agnostics viewed him as merely a rational man with belief in nothing but fact and reason. Both the views of man, Ruskin found, were utterly inadequate which ignored the complete nature of man as it had been manifested through the ages. Here is an example of what Ruskin thought of the human species :

Man, considered as an animal, is indeed limited by the same laws: hunger, or plague, or war, are the necessary and only restraints upon his increase - effectual restraints hitherto - his principal study

having been how most swiftly to destroy himself, or ravage his dwelling places, and his highest skill directed to give range to the famine, seed to the plague, and sway to the sword. But, considered as other than an animal, his increase is not limited by these laws. It is limited only by the limits of his courage and his love. Both of these have their bounds also; and ought to have: his race has its bounds also; but these have not yet been reached, nor will be reached for ages.

Thus, in the final analysis or at bottom, the quarrel between the political economists, the utilitarians, and agnostics on the one hand, and on the other the humanists, the chartists, and the artists, boils down to their differences on the concept of man. It is from these differing concepts that their different philosophies and theories are formulated. The passage just cited from *Unto This Last*, underlines Ruskin's noble view of man, as against the ignoble, or the human as against the animal view of man.

Another aspect of Ruskin's Christian socialism, besides its humanism, is his view of society as a family, as against the political economist's view of it as an interest. Here again, the difference is between the two views of man, one noble and the other ignoble, one human and the other biological. The following passage from *Unto This Last*, makes clear Ruskin's view of society as against the one held by the political economist:

It is proposed to better the condition of the labourer by giving him higher wages. "Nay", says the economist, "if you raise his wages, he will either people down to the same point of misery at which you found him, or drink your wages away." He will. I know it. Who gave him this will? Suppose it were your own son of whom you spoke, declaring to me that you dared not take him into your firm, nor give him his just labourer's wages, because if you did, he would die of drunkenness, and leave half a score

of children to the parish. "Who gave your son these dispositions?"  
- I should inquire. Has he them by inheritance or by education?  
By one or other they must come; and as in him, so also in the  
poor.

The images and norms and analogies that Ruskin uses in his pleadings for humanist attitude to the social problems of the Victorian age, including the plight of the poor, clearly shows his bias towards religion, which considers all humans, as children in the kingdom of God. One may even characterize this attitude as sentimental. Ruskin, for sure was, like Lamb before him, a sentimentalist.

Humanism, it is generally argued, is necessarily incomplete though not lacking in absoluteness, and implies the acceptance of strain, a tension between our love and our absurdity, especially in societies as exposed as the English to ceaseless propaganda, and so deficient in civilizing routines. But it ought not to be described, therefore, as "parasitical" or "essentially critical." For "criticism is as essential as breathing." Humanism, properly understood, works for intelligibility and fairness. It is the point at which all who would not refuse conversation must meet.

## **27.6 LET US SUM UP**

One of the main contributions of Ruskin as a social critic, attacking virulently the political economists (Mill in particular) was his development of the concepts of social utility and social cost. He questioned the economist's definition of "wealth" in absolute terms, considering it as an item merely of exchange value. His emphasis was that wealth is to be viewed in social terms; where the moral status of the one who owns the wealth, the means he adopts in earning or accumulating that wealth, the use or uses to which he puts that wealth, are all legitimate considerations for attaching value to that wealth. Similarly, his objection to the use of big machines, once considered eccentric, at last came to be recognized as a contribution to creating consciousness against pollution as also to enacting laws about the working and living conditions

of the poor, labourers in particular. His instinctive fear of new and artificial sources of energy was also regarded for long an eccentric reaction of an abnormal mind. It was also considered reactionary. Today, it appears prophetic. Ruskin also contributed to drawing a clear distinction between the truth of science and the truth of art. In his view, science got at the truth of essences. Whereas, art aimed at the truth of appearances, including the emotions of the beholder in the presence of the object. He, eventually, became disillusioned by the destructiveness of science. Technology threatened to ruin life on earth by polluting air and water. His *The Eagle's Nest* was an attack on this aspect of science.

### **27.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Discuss John Ruskin as a social critic with special reference to *Unto This Last*.
- Q.2 Name the works of John Ruskin.
- Q.3 Comment on Ruskin as a Christian socialist.

### **27.8 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Aesthetic and Critical theory of John Ruskin by De Gruyter.

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***UNTO THIS LAST : CONCEPTS OF VALUE AND WEALTH***

- 28.1 Objective**
- 28.2 Science of Political Economy**
- 28.3 Definition of Wealth**
- 28.4 Definition of Value**
- 28.5 Let Us Sum Up**
- 28.6 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 28.7 Suggested Reading**

**28.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss the concepts of value and truth as enumerated in *Unto This Last*.

**28.2 SCIENCE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, consists of four essays, namely "The Roots of Honour," "The Veins of Wealth," "Qui Judicatis Terram" and "Ad Valorem." These essays were first published in *Cornhill Magazine*, which was being edited by the novelist W. M. Thackeray, in 1860. As Ruskin reports in his Preface, the essays "were reprobated in a violent manner ... by most of the readers they met with." But Ruskin was equally adamant on his side. As he retorted: "Not a whit the less, I believe them to be the best, that is to say, the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable things I have even written; and the last of them, having had especial pains spent on it, is probably

the best I shall ever write." His quarrel, in these essays, is with the political economists, especially John Stuart Mill, whose essay *On Liberty* (1859) was the immediate provocation for the writing of these *Essays* (1860). As Ruskin describes it, the science of political economy was "based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection." Considering the science of political economy faulty like "alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and other such popular creeds," he cites the following view from Mill to underline its erroneous view of "social affections".

The social affections are accidental and disturbing elements in human nature; but avarice and the desire of progress are constant elements. Let us eliminate the inconstants, and, considering the human being merely as a covetous machine, examine by what laws of labour, purchase, and sale, the greatest accumulative result in wealth is obtainable.

Disagreeing with this purely negative view of man, Ruskin counters it with the following :

Modern political economy stands on a precisely similar basis. Assuming, not that the human being has no skeleton, but that it is all skeleton; it found an ossifant theory of progress on this negation of a soul; and having shown the utmost that may be made of bones, and constructing a number of interesting geometrical figures with death's heads and humeri; successfully proves the inconvenience of the reappearance of a soul among these corpuscular structures. I do not deny the truth of this theory: I simply deny its applicability to the present phase of the world.

Thus, contending the general premises of the theory of political economy advanced by Bentham, Malthus, Ricardo, and Mill, Ruskin concludes his first

essay. He counters their selfish-individualism by selfless-collectivism, in which the mill-owner is like the captain of the ship: " And as the captain of a ship is bound to be the last man to leave the ship in case of wreck, and to share his last crust with the sailors in case of famine, so the manufacturer, in any commercial crisis or distress, is bound to take the suffering of it with his men... as a father would in a famine, shipwreck, or battle, sacrifice himself for his son."

### **28.3 DEFINITION OF WEALTH**

With this idealist and moralist argument, as against the cynical and amoral theory of utilitarianism, concluded in the first essay, Ruskin moves on to his second essay entitled "The Veins of Wealth." It is in this essay of *Unto This Last* that he proposes his own definition of wealth as against the one advanced by the political economists of the day. Opening with what the economists have to say about it, he summarizes: "Our science is simply the science of getting rich.... Persons, who follow its precepts, do actually become rich, and persons, who disobey them, become poor.... Every man of business knows by experience how money is made, and how it is lost." In response to this belief, Ruskin retorts that "men of business rarely know the meaning of the word 'rich'. At least if they know, they do not in their reasonings allow for the fact, that it is a relative word, implying its opposite 'poor' as positively as the word 'north' implies its opposite 'south'." He considers the economist's view of richness or wealth rather faulty and illusory. In his opinion, those who become rich or wealthy do not, in point of fact, know what it really means to be wealthy or rich. As he puts it,

Men nearly always speak and write as if riches were absolute, and it were possible, by following certain scientific precepts, for everybody to be rich. Whereas riches are a power like that of electricity, acting only through inequalities or negations of itself. The force of the guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbour's pocket. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of

power it possesses depends accurately upon the need or desire he has for it - and the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor.

Here, Ruskin wants "the reader clearly and deeply to understand the difference between the two economies, to which the terms 'Political' and 'Mercantile' might not unadvisably be attached."

Elaborating the definitions of the two terms, Ruskin clarifies that "political economy" is the economy of a state or its citizens, not that of any individual or a number of individuals. It consists, he says, in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things. For example, the farmer who cuts his hay at the right time; the shipwright who drives his bolts well home in sound wood; the builder who lays good bricks in well-tempered mortar; the housewife who takes care of her furniture in the parlour, and guards against all waste in her kitchen; and the singer who rightly disciplines, and never overstrains her voice: are all political economists in the true and final sense; adding continually to the riches and well-being of the nation to which they belong.

On the contrary, Ruskin goes on to explain, the "mercantile economy," the economy of 'merces,' as he calls it, or of 'pay,' signifies the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal or moral claim upon, or power over, the labour of others; every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side, as it implies riches or right on the other. Such a wealth or riches does not necessarily add to the actual property, or well-being, of the state in which it exists. But since, such a wealth or riches is nearly always convertible at once into real property, while real property is not always convertible, at once, into power over labour. Hence, what is really desired, under the name of riches, is, essentially, power over men. In its simplest sense, it is the power of obtaining for our own advantage the labour of servant, tradesman, and artist. And this power of wealth is, of course, greater or lesser in direct proportion to the poverty of the men over whom it is exercised. And it is in inverse proportion to the number of persons who are as rich as ourselves, and

who are already to give the same price for an article of which the supply is limited. So, the art of becoming "rich," in the common sense, is not absolutely, nor finally, the art of accumulating much money for ourselves, but also of contriving that our neighbours shall have less. In accurate terms, it is "the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour."

Going further into the various aspects of what it means to be rich or wealthy, Ruskin speaks of the eternal and inevitable law, by which the beneficialness of the inequality depends, first, on the methods by which it was accomplished, and, secondly, on the purposes to which it is applied. Inequalities of wealth, unjustly established, have assuredly injured the nation in which they exist during their establishment. And if these inequalities of wealth are unjustly directed, they injure the nation yet more during their existence. But inequalities of wealth justly established, benefit the nation in the course of their establishment; and, if nobly used, aid it yet more by their existence. Thus, the circulation of wealth, in Ruskin's view, resembles that of the blood. Just as proper blood circulation keeps a body healthy, so the proper wealth circulation keeps a nation healthy. There is also the quickness of the current, says the author, which comes of cheerful emotion or wholesome exercise. There is one quickness of the current which comes of shame or of fever. There is also the flesh of body which is full of warmth and life; and another which will pass into putrefaction. Hence, Ruskin summarises, the whole question respecting not only the advantage, but even the quantity, of national wealth, resolves itself finally into one of abstract justice. It is impossible to conclude, of any given mass of acquired wealth, merely by the fact of its existence, whether it signifies good or evil to the nation in the midst of which it exists. Its real value depends on the moral sign attached to it, just as sternly as that of a mathematical quantity depends on the algebraical sign attached to it.

Approaching the conclusion of his argument, Ruskin reiterates that the chief value and virtue of money consists in its having power over human beings; that, without this power, large material possessions are useless, and to any person possessing such power, comparatively unnecessary. But power over human beings is also attainable by other means than by money. In Ruskin's view, money power is always imperfect and doubtful. "There are many things

which cannot be reached with it, others which cannot be retained by it." Many joys may be given to men which cannot be bought for gold, and many fidelities found in them which cannot be rewarded with it. Reaching the climax of his argument, Ruskin poses the question: "Since the essence of wealth consists in power over men, will it not follow that the nobler and the more in number the persons are over whom it has power, the greater the wealth?" Perhaps, it may even appear after some consideration, says Ruskin, that "*the persons themselves are the wealth*" - that these pieces of gold with which we are in the habit of guiding them, are, in fact, nothing more than a kind of Byzantine harness for trappings, very glittering and beautiful in barbaric sight, wherewith we bridle the creatures. But if these same living creatures could be guided without the fretting and jingling of the Byzants in their mouths and ears, they might themselves be more valuable than their bridles. As Ruskin remarks, "*the true veins of wealth are purple* - and not in Rock, but in flesh - perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. Our modern wealth says the author has rather, a tendency the other way; most political economists appearing to consider multitudes of human creatures not conducive to wealth, or at best conducive to it in a dim-eyed and narrow-chested state of being.

#### **28.4 DEFINITION OF VALUE**

The third essay in *Unto This Last*, entitled "QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM," is borrowed from Solomon (*The Bible*). In English, it means "The Rule of Justice." Before reaching the stage of defining "value," Ruskin devotes this chapter to the idea of justice, in determining wages for example, explaining how even when he is for justice to all, cannot be recommend equality among all men :

My continual aim has been to show that eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one men to all others; and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors, according to their own better

knowledge and wiser will.... Government and co-operation are in all things the Laws of Life; Anarchy and competition the Laws of Death.

Thus, concluding the chapter on justice with the assertion that equality is impossibility, Ruskin comes to the final chapter on "value" entitled "AD VALOREM." Questioning J.S Mill's approach to the subject of "value", he first summarizes his opponent's views on the subject. "The word value, when used without adjunct, always means, in political economy, value in exchange." So that, if two ships cannot exchange their rudders, their rudders are, in political economic language, of no value to either. But "the subject of political economy is wealth." And wealth "consists of all useful and agreeable objects which possess exchangeable value." Hence, according to Mill the utilitarian, usefulness and agreeableness underlie the exchange value, and must be ascertained to exist in the thing, before we can esteem it an object of wealth.

Exposing the faults of such a view of value, which considers value only as an exchange property, resting it on the usefulness and agreeableness of the object, which again are considered in absolute terms, Ruskin redefines the various components involved in Mill's definition. As he pointed out in the case of wealth, so does he indicate here, that these terms are all relative and cannot be taken in absolute terms. He insists, for example, that the economic "usefulness" of a thing depends not merely on its own nature, but on the number of people who can and will use it. A horse is useless, and therefore unusable, if no one can ride - a sword if no one can strike, and meat, if no one can eat. Thus, every material, utility depends on its relative human capacity. Similarly, Ruskin shows how the agreeableness of an object is also related to human capacity, and does not have an absolute value of its own. Hence, he concludes that political economy, being a science of wealth, "must be a science respecting human capacities and dispositions. But moral considerations have nothing to do with political economy. Therefore, moral considerations have nothing to do with human capacities and dispositions." It is on the ground of the missing human factor in Mill's theory that Ruskin rejects it.

Going back to the Latin origin of the word "value," which is a derivative of valor, Ruskin infers, "to be 'valuable,' therefore, is to 'avail towards life.' A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength." Our author's firm belief, which he logically derives from the origin of the word value, is that the value of a thing "is independent of opinion, and of quantity. Think what you will of it, the value of the thing itself is neither greater nor less. For ever it avails, or avails not; no estimate can raise, no disdain depress, the power which it holds from the Maker of things and of men." Feeling strongly against the utilitarians who sold the idea of "mercantile economy" in the name of "political economy," Ruskin retorts, "The real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science [mercantile economy], as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life; and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction."

Next, Ruskin takes on Mill for his definition of wealth once again. "To be wealthy is," says Mill, "to have a large stock of useful articles." Taking up the definition word by word, he begins with the word "have," to "possess," and then the word "useful." He clarifies their meanings and underlines the faults in Mill's definition of "wealth." Ridiculing the definition of the economist, Ruskin gives an example: "Lately in a wreck of Californian ship, one of the passengers fastened a belt about him with two hundred pounds of gold in it, with which he was found afterwards at the bottom. Now, as he was sinking - had he the gold? Or had the gold him?" Here again, he rejects the "absolute" aspect of Mill's definition. In his view, "possession" or having is not an absolute, but a gradated power; and consists not only in the quantity or nature of the thing possessed, but also (and in a greater degree) in its suitability to the person possessing it, and in his vital power to use it." Hence, the definition of "wealth," in Ruskin's view, becomes: "The possession of useful articles, *which we can use.*" Then Ruskin defines the other word "useful," saying that "usefulness is value in the hands of the valiant; so that this science of wealth being...when regarded as the science of accumulation, accumulative of capacity as well as of material - when regarded as the Science of Distribution, is distribution not absolute, but discriminate; not of everything to every man, but of the right thing to the



right man. A difficult science, dependent on more than arithmetic. "THE POSSESSION OF THE VALUABLE BY THE VALIANT," and in considering it as a power existing in a nation, the two elements, the value of the thing, and the valour of its possessors, must be estimated together.

Coming to the question of labour, price, and value, Ruskin proceeds, as usual, with definitions, clarifying them with examples from the familiar areas of life. First, he defines "labour" as contest of life with an opposite; the term life including man's intellect, soul, and physical power. Second, he discriminates between different kinds of labour: "Labour is of a higher or lower order, as it includes more or fewer of the elements of life." Third, he speaks of the "value" and "price" of labour. "It is necessary," he says, "always to understand labour of a given rank and quality, as we should speak of gold or silver of a given standard. Bad (that is, heartless, inexperienced, or senseless) labour cannot be valued; it is like gold of uncertain alloy, or flawed iron." Finally, "The quality and kind of labour being given, its *value*, like that of all other *valuable* things, is invariable. But the quantity of it which must be given for other things is variable: and in estimating this variation the price of other things must always be counted by the quantity of labour; not the price of labour but by the quantity of other things." Hence, Ruskin concludes, "THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE." Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others."

Ruskin was also against the philosophy of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. Behind this philosophy of the economists, the motive is profit only, ignoring completely the ethical aspect of buying and selling. To give this mercantile activity a moral tinge, he prescribed the following :

In all buying, consider, first, what condition of existence you cause in the producers of what you buy; secondly, whether the sum you have paid is just to the producer, of what you

buy; and in due proportion, lodged in his hands; thirdly, to how much clear use, for food, knowledge, or joy, this that you have bought can be put; and fourthly, to whom and in what way it can be most speedily and serviceably distributed: in all dealings whatsoever insisting on entire openness and loveliness of accomplishments; especially on fineness and purity of all marketable commodity: watching at the same time for all ways of gaining or teaching, powers of simple pleasure; and of showing "how great profit there is in asphodel" - the sum of enjoyment depending not on the quantity of things tasted, but on the vivacity and patience of taste.

## **28.5 CONCLUSION**

As is clear from this and other extracts from *Unto This Last*, Ruskin is primarily a religious person having an ideal of society to protect and promote in his writings. His attack on the utilitarians has been of great importance in the development of civilization in the West. He, along with others, has given a warning to our age, which is highly committed to going ahead with technological development and commercial growth without caring about the human individuals. Even today the debate between the votaries of liberal economy and others committed to the larger human cause is being carried out on the same platform. Hence, Ruskin's relevance to our time is as much as it was to the Victorian age.

## **28.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 How many essays are there in *Unto This Last*?
- Q.2 Discuss in detail the main argument of the essay "The Veins of Wealth"

## **28.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ John Ruskin : Literary theories of Modern relevance by Krishna Singh.
- ◆ Dreams of an English Eden : Ruskin and His Tradition in Social Criticism by Jeffrey L. Spear.

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**JOHN RUSKIN'S : PROSE STYLE**

- 29.1 Objective**
- 29.2 Influence of Personality on Style**
- 29.3 As a Versatile Writer**
- 29.4 Influences on Ruskin's Style**
- 29.5 Let Us Sum Up**
- 29.6 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 29.7 Suggested Reading**

**29.1 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson exposes the learner to the writing style of John Ruskin.

**29.2 INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY ON STYLE**

In their excellent book, *Fundamentals of Good Writing*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, who belonged to the school of New Criticism, compared style in writing to the grain in wood. They contended, "The style of a work is not a sort of veneer glued over the outside. On the contrary, it is like the pattern of the grain in a piece of wood. It is a pattern that goes all the way through: a manifestation of the growth and development of the structure of the tree itself." As a man thinks and feels, so will he write. A person's writing reflects the working of his/her mind. If one's thoughts are muddled, one's style will also be muddled. And if one's thoughts are clear and sharp,

one's writing will also be clear and sharp. As Emerson once remarked, "A man's style is his mind's voice." He also added: "Wooden minds, wooden voices." Now since style is something ingrained in writing, and not something stuck on top of one's writing like a veneer it follows' that a man's manner of writing will be an expression of his personality and his way of looking at life. This explains the famous and much-quoted definition of style given by Buffon, a French writer and naturalist of the eighteenth century. He said, "Style, it is the man himself." An implication of this view of style is that the author's personality becomes an important aspect of his writings. The New Critics in the early twentieth century discounted the writer's personality, considering the literary work independent of its creator. Later, the post-modernist critics declared him dead, freeing the reader to have a free play of his mind in interacting with the literary text.

The author-centered approach being an essentialist view of style, it cannot be ignored that the style of a prose piece is also determined by the subject in hand, the purpose behind the piece, the literary convention in which one writes one's piece, the literary form one chooses to adopt, etc. Hence, to relate style only to the personality of the writer is to view it, rather too, narrowly. After all, the writer's personality is only one, however, important aspect among many, which determines the nature of one's style. Whether one is writing a tragedy or comedy, satire or panegyric; whether one is writing in the neo-classical or romantic tradition; whether one is writing a romance or a novel; whether one is writing for the elite or the common reader, for the adults or the children; each of these (and may be many more) factors play its individual role in the shaping of one's style in writing. We shall, therefore, be well-advised to consider all these factors, and not the writer's personality alone, when trying to define or describe the style of a writer.

### **29.3 AS A VERSATILE WRITER**

John Ruskin attained an immense reputation in the Victorian age, although he is sparingly read in our time. He was a versatile writer, not just an art critic

or an enthusiastic apostle of the beautiful in nature and art, for he wrote on different subjects, such as political economy as well as fine arts, religion as well as aesthetics, education as well as labour laws, etc. Although, like many of his contemporaries, he wrote almost as a preacher, he chose for writing a variety of subjects, namely religion, nature, Gothic art and architecture, Turner's paintings, stones of Venice, writings of classics as well as contemporaries. On these different subjects, his intentions and motives were different. Hence, different styles were adopted by him to achieve his different goals and purposes. It is therefore, necessary that while considering the matter of Ruskin's style, it should not be treated as something absolute, static, and straightened. Rather, its dynamism in rising to the occasion to fulfill the requirements of the particular purpose and the peculiar form must be given due attention.

#### **29.4 INFLUENCES ON RUSKIN'S STYLE**

One of the greatest influences on Ruskin as man and writer was his mother, and through his mother *The Bible*. His mother was a strict Evangelical Protestant who believed passionately in *The Bible*. She made the young Ruskin read aloud a chapter of *The Bible* every day and learn long passages of it by heart. Ruskin was deeply fascinated by the rhythm and sound of the Biblical prose. So much that when he came to compose his own prose pieces, he tried to make their prose as musical as that of *The Bible*. In his early writings in particular, *Modern Painters*, *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*, he also aimed at poetic prose, at passages full of colour and heightened rhythm. This style is for sure, ornamental unlike the plain English of *The Bible*. An example of this type of writing is, among others of this phase, *The Stones of Venice*. He is said to have gone over the manuscript of this book to add ornament to many a plain statement. Since, this exercise was taking time, he wrote to his father, "I am getting rather jealous of the time spent in turning sentences musically." He became a cultivator of what is generally called "the purple patch." The term is in fact, used derogatively to describe a passage of conscious fine writing, where the writer has deliberately heightened the emotion, used decorative images and musical cadences; or to use another

phrase, where the writer has gone in for "word-painting ." Of course, Ruskin was not the inventor of "purple patch." We can see its origin in the Elizabethan age, and then its re-occurrence in the Romantic period. His contribution to it was to give it a vogue, creating an enthusiasm for it among the younger writers in the later nineteenth century. Walter Pater is an outstanding example of such a writer.

To have a clear idea of what "purple-patch" is, we better have, for example, a sample from Ruskin's early writings. Here is, for instance, a passage from *The Stones of Venice*. He describes in the said passage the city of Venice as he imagined it must have appeared to the Painter Giorgione in his boyhood :

A city of marble, did I say? Nay, rather a golden city, paved with emerald. For truly, every pinnacle and turret glanced or glowed, overlaid with gold, or bossed with jasper. Beneath, the unsullied sea drew in deep breathing, to and fro, its eddies of green wave. Deep-hearted, majestic, as the sea - the men of Venice moved in sway of power and war; pure as her pillars of alabaster, stood her mothers and maidens; from foot to brow, and noble, walked her knights; the low-bronzed gleaming of sea-rusted armour shot angrily under their blood-red mantle-folds. Fearless, faithful, patient, impenetrable, implacable, - every word a fate - sate her senate.... A world from which all ignoble care and petty thoughts were banished, with all the common and poor elements of life. No foulness, nor tumult, in those tremulous streets, that filled, or fell, beneath the moon; but rippled music of majestic change, or thrilling silence. No weak walls could rise above them; no low-roofed cottage, nor straw-built shed. Only the strength as a rock, and the finished setting of stones most precious.... Above, free winds and fiery clouds ranging at their will; - brightness out of the north, and balm from the South, and the stars of the evening and morning clear in the limitless light of

arched heaven and circling sea.

Without any reservation, this can be called poetry in prose, or poetic-prose, with poetic devices of alliteration and inversion in every sentence, with the alliterative phrases assisting the rhythmical cadences. Here is a prose, which could be arranged easily as blank verse. The rich colour and emotive power of the passage is irresistible. But if we compare the portrait of the city painted here with the real city in Italy, we would know how reality gets lost in the colours created by the author's imagination.

In his later life, Ruskin felt rather uneasy about his reputation as a "fine" writer. He felt that people read his books only to enjoy the music and colour of his words, altogether ignoring the meaning and message so dear to him. When one of his admirers, a lady, was compiling a selection of his writing for publication, he wrote to her :

It is the chief provocation of my life to be called a 'word-painter' instead of thinker. I hope you haven't filled your book with descriptions. I thought it was the thoughts you were looking for.

Of course, if readers praised Ruskin for the purple-patch, he himself was to blame for it, because he did write his early books in that style of English prose. Infact, despite his best efforts, some of his early habits continued to persist even in his later writings. Very consciously and deliberately, he attempted in his later books an idea-dominated prose with much greater emphasis on clarity, simplicity, and precision. And yet, as it is said, old habits die hard. No doubt, he largely abandoned word-painting. At the same time, he did not find it easy to drop his love for the sound of words and the colour of images. As R. H. Wilenski, in his book *John Ruskin*, rightly observed :

After forty he could strike out arresting sentences, charm, interest, excite and stimulate the reader. He could use language as a drug to excite emotions. He could communicate his passion. He could make his writing fiery, flowery, witty or urbane. But as I understand

prose writing he was not a good prose writer - he was unable, that is to say, to use words and sentences as the precise communication or ordered thought.

It was this earlier Ruskin that most Victorians admired. 'Word-painting' became in the later part of the century a vogue. Ruskin alone was, of course, not responsible for this vogue. The religion or worship of beauty had many other followers, which ultimately culminated in the practice by Pater and his followers, of Art for Art's sake.

Our concern here is more with later Ruskin because *Unto This Last*, our present preoccupation, belongs to this phase. As Ruskin grew, he became more mature in thought and more committed to his mission. This brought about a change in his prose style also. He no longer aimed at dazzling the reader with colourful images and musical cadences, with the beauties of phrases and inversions. On the contrary, he concentrated now convincing the reader by the force of argument, by the power of logic, and by the appeal to general humanity. Note, for instance, the following from *Unto This Last* :

Labour being thus various in its result, the prosperity of any nation is in exact proportion to the quantity of labour which it spends in obtaining and employing means of life. Observe I say, obtaining and employing; that is to say, not merely wisely producing, but wisely distributing and consuming. Economists usually speak as if there were no good in consumption absolute. So far from this being so, consumption absolute is the end, crown, and perfection of production. Twenty people can gain money for one who can use it; and the vital question, for individual and for nation is, never "how much do they make?" but "to what purpose do they spend?"

The reader may, perhaps, have been surprised at the slight reference, I have hitherto made to "capital," and its functions. It is here the place to define them.



Capital signifies "head, or source, or root material" - it is material by which some derivative or secondary good, is produced. It is only capital proper... when it is, thus, producing something different from itself. It is a root, which does not enter into vital function till it produces something else than a root; namely, fruit. That fruit will, in time, again produce roots; and so all living capital issues in reproduction of capital; but capital which produces nothing but capital is only root producing root; bulb issuing in bulb, never in tulip; seed issuing in seed, never in bread.

Here, one can see how the present passage is the complete opposite of the one we had cited from Ruskin's early prose, *The Stones of Venice*. No longer is there any attempt to create jingle of words, nor clusters of images. What we have instead is a clear argument in simple and straight syntax without any distraction of music or colour. If there are any comparisons used, they are purely functional, and not at all decorative. The entire concentration in the present passage is on putting the ideas across to the reader, not to involve him in the pleasures of imagination. Here is, in other words, clean English prose style, which is purely functional, and not-at-all ornamental. It is because of the style of *Unto This Last* that Frederick Harrison, a fellow-worker with Ruskin, called this book "a masterpiece of pure, incisive, imaginative, lucid English... [full of] wit, eloquence, versatility, passion."

A writer's English is clean when he conveys clearly and effectively what he wishes to convey to the reader. When you are yourself carried along easily by the descriptions, the events, or the thoughts, that are presented to you, then you are hardly conscious of a writer's "style." See, for instance, the simple and natural movement of prose in the following passage drawn from *Unto This Last* :

It can never be shown generally either that the interests of master and labour are alike, or that they are opposed; for, according to circumstances, they may be either. It is indeed, always the interest of both that the work should be rightly done, and a just price obtained for it; but, in the division of profits, the gain of the one may or may not be the loss of the other. It is not the master's interest to pay wages so low as to leave the men sickly and depressed, not the workman's interest to be paid high wages if the smallness of the master's profit hinder him from enlarging his business, or conducting it in a safe and liberal way. A stoker ought not to desire high pay if the company is too poor to keep the engine-wheels in repair.

Although a Victorian, Ruskin's writing, here, and elsewhere in *Unto This Last* is free from the ponderousness that we find in the writings of many Victorians, no doubt, the sentences are rather lengthy, but they are not complex, nor erudite. The sentences are marked by simplicity of language and syntax, with easy and natural movement. There is absolutely no trace of any sort of affectation or mannerism. The writing nowhere calls attention to itself. We are kept engaged all along with the ideas being defined and explained in the book. Sobriety and sincerity are the hallmarks of Ruskin's prose in *Unto This Last*. Its prose has the beauty of clear light and air. Also, there is nothing abrupt or jerky about the style in this book. It flows easily and quietly.

One aspect of Ruskin's prose of the later period, which is largely devoted to social criticism, is that it tends perforce to be rhetorical. Rhetoric being the art of persuasion, of winning the reader to the viewpoint being presented in prose, is an appropriate device used in *Unto This Last*, which has as its goal to win over the reader to the writer's view of political economy as against the viewpoint on the same subject of the utilitarians like J. S. Mill. Note, for instance, the following:

No man ever knew, or can know, what will be the ultimate result to himself, or to others, of any given line of conduct. But every man may know, and most of us do know, what is a just and unjust act. And all of us may know also, that the consequences of justice will be ultimately the best possible, both to others and ourselves, though we can neither say what is best, or how it is likely to come to pass.

Here, the use of the rhetorical device of repletion, such as that of the word "know", or of the parallel construction of phrases and clauses, is quite effective. It keeps reinforcing the subject the writer wants to put across to us. A complex or involved construction will not serve the purpose here. Infact, it will take away the effect the writer intends to create through his rhetorical prose.

The prose style of *Unto This Last*, is also free from the patronizing archness and condescension, which irritates us in, *Sesame and Lilies* or *Ethics of the Dust*. It is also free from the aggressive dogmatism of *Fors Clavigera*. Here, Ruskin states his case as temperately as such a case can be stated. No doubt, Ruskin is greatly provoked by the mechanical (and rather inhuman) view of the political economy arrogantly advocated by Mill and other utilitarians. But he states his case as coolly as such a case can be stated. He does feel, at times, indication for the views of his philosophic opponents. But, since there is nothing personal about his feeling of indignation, it only reflects the moral and religious indignation of one who is deeply concerned with the plight of the poor. It is an indication which expresses itself in a general way against all those who seem to him to take a purely economic or scientific view of man, ignoring his soul and all that goes with it. Note, for instance, the following:

But there are many sciences, as well as many arts, of getting rich. Poisoning people of large estates was one employed largely in the middle ages; adulteration of food of people of small estates, is one employed largely now. The ancient and honourable Highland method of black mail; the more modern and less honourable

system of obtaining goods on credit, and the other variously improved methods of appropriation - which in major and minor scales of industry, down to the most artistic pocket-picking, we owe to recent genius- all come under the general head of sciences, or arts, of getting rich.

### **29.5 LET US SUM UP**

Although not typical of the nineteenth century writers, the ironic prose, here, is at its best. One is reminded of Swift and Sterne, with the vital difference that while these eighteenth century satirists used irony as an instrument of demolishing the object, Ruskin shows no such intention. Like his contemporaries, he was a reformist rather than a misanthropist. Hence, the moral tone remains predominant in the prose of his later period (to which *Unto This Last* belongs) as well as in the prose of the early period. The happy combination that Ruskin is able to achieve of his "plain style," borrowed from *The Bible*, "rhetorical style," required to perform the role of the prophet of his age, and "ironic style," necessary for exposing the nefarious aspect of the science of getting rich or wealthy. It is this combination of the otherwise disparate nuances of English prose which gives Ruskin's writing in *Unto This Last*, a special punch and flavour, a peculiar tone and tenor. The moralist and the satirist, the reformist and the retaliator in Ruskin combine to make his book on political economy a unique document, which has been an influential text next only to *The Bible*. Mahatma Gandhi derived his economic philosophy entirely from this book. His translation of the book under the title *Sarvodya* left a lasting mark on the life of our nation. Even the style Gandhi ji forged for himself owed something to Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Ruskin may not have been a great stylist, ironist, satirist, or moralist, but he did have a fair quantity of all these, and he used them in the service of humanity, especially the deprived and the destitute.

### **29.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Bring out the merits of Ruskin's prose style.

Q.2 Elaborate on Ruskin's critique of political economy in *Unto this last*.

Q.3 Explain the term "Purple Patch".

**29.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern by Dinah Birch.

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**JOHN RUSKIN : *UNTO THIS LAST* : THE ROOTS OF  
HONOUR & THE VEINS OF WEALTH**

**30.1 Introduction**

**30.2 Objective**

**30.3 Biographical Sketch of John Ruskin**

**30.4 Introduction of *Unto This Last***

**30.5 Introduction of “ The Roots of Honour”**

**30.6 Introduction of “ The Veins of Wealth”**

**30.7 Let Us Sum Up**

**30.8 Self-Assessment Questions**

**30.9 Examination Oriented Questions**

**30.10 Answer Key**

**30.11 Suggested Reading**

**30.1 INTRODUCTION**

John Ruskin was a versatile British writer and critic. In his essay, of which two are studied here, he lays out his humanist theory of economics and calls for government intervention in the economy to serve values of social justice, high morality, and better aesthetics. He offers a vision of how government and culture might work together for the betterment of all people.

## **30.2 OBJECTIVE**

The aim is to introduce to learner John Ruskin, a prominent social, political and economic thinker of England. Through the reading of the essays by John Ruskin, the objective is to acquaint learners with the meaning of wealth as defined by John Ruskin and his explanation of the ideal relationship between the workers and their masters.

## **30.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JOHN RUSKIN**

John Ruskin was born in London on February 8, 1819, of Scottish parents. His father, John James, was a wealthy wine merchant. His mother was a staunch puritan and a great disciplinarian. John Ruskin, the only child of his parents, was subjected to rigid discipline. He had to get up early in the morning. He was punished for small lapses and there were no toys for him to play with.

He had his early education at home and as a small child he was forced by his mother to read *The Bible* for hours everyday. No doubt this discipline was hard, but these readings became an essential part of his education. At the same time, his father was interested in reading good poetry and prose. At an early age John had read Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Pope, Spenser, Byron, Goldsmith, Addison, and Samuel Johnson. Ruskin's father had a great desire that his son should write good pious poetry. John Ruskin's education was supplemented by his regular tours to Europe in the company of his father which in turn cultivated his literary and aesthetic taste.

After a very short stay at a day school he was sent to Christ Church, Oxford in 1837 where he spent five years. The stay was not very comfortable as he did not like the rather suffocating environment of the university. After leaving the university he dedicated himself to writing. His first book came out anonymously under the title *Modern Painters* in 1843. By this time he had started contributing his articles to leading magazines of England. Ruskin married Euphemia Chalmera Gray in 1848. This marriage was not happy and ultimately they divorced each other in 1853.

In 1853, Ruskin started his career as an Art Lecturer. In 1857, he delivered some lectures on Political Economy at Manchester. He became increasingly interested in social reforms and economic problems of the contemporary world. During the 1960s, Ruskin published a number of books in which he propounded his advanced theories on political economy. He was offered Professorship of Poetry at Oxford, which he decided to decline. However, in 1869, he accepted the post of State Professorship of Art. Ruskin's interest in social reform is also shown in his popular work *Seasme and Lilies* (1865), and *The Crown of the Wild Olive* (1866). In 1885 Ruskin began *Praeterita*, his autobiography, but he could not complete it. Bad health clouded his later years and obscured his fine genius. He died on 20 January, 1900, and was buried at Coniston. Ruskin is regarded as a great thinker, a social reformer and an artist, the match of which is hard to find in the history of England.

#### **30.4. INTRODUCTION OF *UNTO THIS LAST***

John Ruskin gave his four essays published in 1862 the title *Unto This Last* when he brought them in book form. The title has reference to the parable of workers in the vineyard: "I will give unto this last even as unto thee" in which one person tells the other that whatever is due to him will be given to him. In fact, the title refers to Christ's parable of the vineyard labourers from Chapter 20 of Matthew's Gospel. This is the story of the farm owner who hired different groups of day labourers at dawn, breakfast, noon, and supper to work in his vineyards. When dusk came and it was time to pay up, he gave the same amount of money to each, no matter how many hours of work each had done. When some of the fellows hired at dawn grumbled and said that this is unfair, the landowner told them to mind their own business. Ruskin chose this title because the parable specifically undermines conventional attitudes about wages and suggests the need for an ethical dimension in economic transactions.

In the 'Preface' to *Unto This Last* John Ruskin commented that his job was to define wealth and investigate its nature in a logical manner. Another objective of his book is to demonstrate that the acquisition of wealth is finally possible only under certain moral conditions of the society, particularly the quality



of honesty. Ruskin believed that honesty is not the disturbing force which deranges the orbits of economy; it is, in fact, a consistent and commanding force which would keep these orbits clear of chaos. Ruskin laments that the English have lost faith in honesty and its working power. He feels that it is imperative for the English people to recover and practice honesty.

Ruskin also takes up the subject of the organization of labour. He suggests that if we train our captains of industry in honesty, the organization of labour will become easy. He also suggests that there should be training schools for the youth established at Government cost and under Government discipline. These schools should impart training to the youth along with other skills, the following three things: the laws of health, and the exercises enjoined by them; habits of gentleness and justice, and the calling by which he is to live. Ruskin also suggests that Government should undertake to manufacture all things necessary for human life. However, it should allow healthy environment for private enterprise as well. Thus the Government and private enterprise can co-exist in healthy competition. The Government should also see to it that all things are manufactured and sold in their pure form. Further, Ruskin suggests that any man or woman, boy or girl who is out of employment should be given suitable work. Training may be given to these unemployed people, if required. However, if there are people unwilling to work as per their capabilities and potential they should be punished. Lastly, John Ruskin recommends a respectable system of social support for the old and the destitute. They should be provided with home and comfort in a manner which would generate a feeling of honour instead of guilt among them. Thus whatever is due to everyone must be given to him.

### **30.5 INTRODUCTION OF “THE ROOTS OF HONOUR”**

In this introductory essay Ruskin deals with the idea whether an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespective of the influence of social affection. He also considers questions regarding ideal relationship between the workers and their masters. He disagrees with political economists of the nineteenth century who believed that social affections are accidental and disturbing elements in human nature. The chief exponents of the political economy in the 19th century were John Stuart Mill, Thomas Robert

Malthus, and David Ricardo.

Though Mill was an advocate of liberty, he was of the opinion that public option and law should work against increase in population. As it would be difficult to maintain a decent standard of living, he, thus, agrees with Malthus who discussed the relation of population to means of subsistence. He further argues that the former must by nature outrun the latter. Ricardo also accepts the theory propounded by Malthus.

Ruskin has criticised those economic thinkers who, according to him, are self-styled political economists. These economists believe that social affections are accidental and disturbing elements in human nature. Greed and the desire of progress on the other hand are constant elements. According to these economists the inconstants should be eliminated and human being is to be treated as a covetous machine. After that, we should examine what laws of labour, purchase and sale etc., operate in a society in order to obtain wealth. They also feel that these laws once determined will allow each individual to introduce as much of the disturbing affections as he chooses and thus he would be able to determine for himself the result of the new conditions.

Ruskin thus creates the ground for his discussion. He finds faults with the aforesaid economists because of two main reasons. First, he believes that the behaviour of a man should be traced under constant conditions and the causes of variations should be determined later. He also suggests that elements of social affections do not operate mathematically but chemically. Secondly, he disagrees with contemporary political economists in that they considered human being as nothing but a mere skeleton, an automation without a soul. Like many other idealists Ruskin too protests against the concept of human beings as machines. In order to make his argument possible he borrows images from chemistry and human anatomy. In spite of influence of science on his writings, Ruskin does not hesitate in rejecting the popular view that human body is a machine. He exploits the example of the use of pure nitrogen as a very manageable gas. However, when we deal with its flourides, it can cause havoc to us and our apparatus. In the same way he bombards the theory of progress at the cost of the negation of a

soul. By giving these examples Ruskin propounds the view that human problems cannot be solved by mathematical precision. He also points to the inapplicability of such a theory in the context of strike of the workers.

Here he takes up for discussion a vital problem concerning the relation between the employer and the employee. He feels that all the leading economists of the 19th century preferred to remain silent on this issue. They are not able to reconcile the interests of the opposing parties. Ruskin, on the other hand, believes that the interests of the masters and the workers are the same, and there is no antagonism between them. He suggests that all cordial relations between the masters and the servants depend on "balance of justice," a term that includes emotional relations between one man and another. He ruthlessly rejects the politico-economic view that a worker is merely an engine whose motivating power is steam, magnetism, and gravitation. For him the motivating power of a worker is a soul which is of an unknown quantity. He believes that this motivating force involving the will and the spirit of man is brought to its greater strength by its own proper feeling, namely the affection which these political economists have called accidental and disturbing elements in human nature. He concludes the argument by suggesting that the relationship between the master and the workers must be based on affection because there is no hostility between them nor do their interests clash. After this Ruskin discusses the problem related to wages. He believes in the equality of wages and asserts that constant number of worker should remain in employment. A bad worker should not be discriminated against with a good one in terms of wages. If a master has to choose a workman, he always chooses a good workman. A bad workman should not be allowed to offer his work even at half wages and he should not be permitted to take the place of a good worker. He completely rules out competition for the sake of insufficient sum. Similarly a good workman should get satisfaction from the fact that he is chosen for his work. He should not feel proud for the higher wages he earns.

Ruskin believes that in every civilized society there exist five intellectual professions, namely the soldier, the pastor, the physician, the lawyer, and the merchant. Persons belonging to these professions are expected to perform their

duty honestly. The merchant, for instance, must supply perfect and pure things to the people. But the question that perturbs Ruskin's mind is what social pressure can be exercised against a dishonest person.

In this first essay of *Unto This Last* Ruskin's mind is preoccupied with the question on the individual conscience. He believes that the society can be transformed only when the individual is reformed. Thus personal honesty will lead to social honesty as against the mechanical theories of the other contemporary political economists. Ruskin's theory of political economy is based on an ethical code of life. An amoral person is likely to act against the general interests of society. So in spite of the fact that Ruskin does not oppose individual's right to run industries and employ workers, he wants an ethical basis to form the core of all social and financial endeavours. Thus in the first essay "Roots of Honour" Ruskin tries to put forth his views in an ethical framework. However, he leaves certain vital questions unanswered.

### **30.6. INTRODUCTION OF "THE VEINS OF WEALTH"**

In the second essay "The Veins of Wealth," John Ruskin begins to distinguish between 'political economy' and 'mercantile economy'. He says that 'political economy' involves production, preservation, and distribution at a given time and place generating worthy, helpful, and pleasurable things, but 'mercantile economy' implies the accumulation of wealth in the hands of an individual who usually is the head of an organization and often overpowers, dominates, and controls the workers working under him, creating two extreme disparities of a social order - one, smothering under the chains of debt and poverty, and, the other, drawing riches as much as they can in their custody. Thus, it can be stated that the ultimate success lies in achieving power over men in the name of riches. Therefore, Ruskin deduces that "wealth" has two components: material possessions/ ownership and power. Christopher May points out that "Wealth (or riches) is an aspect of power over others, not power/control of any specific resources themselves, and wealth maximisation implies that political economy is the science of 'establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour' (*Unto This Last* 182), rather than the

establishment and development of widespread social welfare" (*Political Economy* 191). The power of wealth is directly proportional to the poverty of the people over whom it is exercised, and it is inversely proportional to those who have amassed wealth and riches, and are always ready to pay for those goods and commodities that have very limited supply. It can be stated that the formation and development of the mercantile wealth which involves control on labour signifies a political reduction of the real wealth which consists in significant and considerable possessions. As the title of this essay goes, Ruskin concludes that the true veins of wealth lie in flesh (men) and not in material possessions.

### **30.7 LET US SUM UP**

Ruskin attacks the economic system and believed that it produced despairing, inhuman relations of men in society. Emphasizing on communal responsibility, the dignity of labour, and the quality of life, Ruskin confronts the so-called experts and denies the relevance of their ideas. Whereas classical economists proceeded on the assumption that men always exist in conditions of scarcity, Ruskin, who realized that a new political economy was demanded by new conditions of production and distribution, argues that his contemporaries in fact exist in conditions of abundance and that therefore the old notions are simply irrelevant.

### **30.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

#### **30.8.1 Fill in the Blanks:**

1. Readings of \_\_\_\_\_ in his childhood years became an essential part of his education.
2. The compilation of Ruskin's four essays, entitled \_\_\_\_\_ was published in 1862.
3. Ruskin has criticised those economic thinkers who, according to him, are self-styled \_\_\_\_\_ economists.
4. Ruskin suggests that elements of social affections do not operate

\_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_.

### **30.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

30.9.1 Write a brief note on the idea of *Unto This Last*.

30.9.2 What is the central idea of John Ruskin's following essays:

a) “The Roots of Honour”    b) “The Veins of Wealth”

### **30.10 ANSWER KEY**

#### **30.10.1 Fill in the Blanks:**

Bible; Unto This Last; political; mathematically, chemically

### **30.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern by Dinah Birch.
- ◆ Ruskin and Oxford : The Art of Education by Robert Hemison.

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**JOHN RUSKIN'S *UNTO THIS LAST*: THE ROOTS  
OF HONOUR & THE VEINS OF WEALTH**

- 31.1 Introduction**
- 31.2 Objective**
- 31.3 Summary of “The Roots of Honour”**
- 31.4 Summary of The “Veins of Wealth”**
- 31.5 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 31.6 Let Us Sum Up**
- 31.7 Suggested Reading**

**31.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson provides the summaries of the two essays of John Ruskin. “The Roots of Honour” and “The Veins of Wealth” present Ruskin's opinions and urgings regarding the civic society through the economic point of view. The essays reflect Ruskin's contribution to rightness of thought and approach.

**31.2 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson aims to offer a comprehension of the arguments that John Ruskin presents in his two essays. The objective is to offer to the learners a perspective on political economy and its place in comprehending human condition.

**31.3 SUMMARY OF “THE ROOTS OF HONOUR”**

One of the many misconceptions that people are occupied with is the self-

styled political economy, which may whet the curiosity but may not be as creditable. The science is based on the presumption that "an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection."

According to Ruskin, the economists claim that just as the occurrences in case of other popular doctrines like astrology and even witchcraft, exhibit a probability at its base, similarly political economy has a conceivable and reasonable idea at its foundation. The economists, argues Ruskin, believe that social affections are unintentional, troubling and unsettling rudiments in human nature, but materialism and urge towards advancement are elements that remain constant.

The inconstant elements need to be removed. For, regarding humans as avaricious and desirous machine, it is essential to inspect and scrutinize how the right kind of "laws of labour, purchase, and sale," which lead to accumulation of wealth, be laid out. Once these laws are determined and put forward, it will be up to the individual to bring in as much as those disturbing affectionate elements as he wants to and then find out the results on the new condition. While underscoring that political economists have been mistaken to ignore human affections and have focused instead only on human greed, Ruskin explains that "supposing a body in motion to be influenced by constant and inconstant forces, it is usually the simplest way of examining its course to trace it first under the persistent conditions, and afterwards introduce the causes of variation. But the disturbing elements in the social problem are not of the same nature as the constant ones; they alter the essence of the creature under examination the moment they are added; they operate, not mathematically, but chemically, introducing conditions which render all our previous knowledge unavailable." He gives another example: while experimenting with nitrogen, it is not the gas but its chloride that could create problems.

Similarly, he says, political economy wrongly assumes that humans are merely and wholly skeletons, and negates the existence of a soul. Though Ruskin does not completely deny this theory but insists that it can't be applied to the contemporary world. And he argues that the inapplicability of such theoretical assumption has been proved by the strikes of workers. He says: "Here occurs



one of the simplest cases, in a pertinent and positive form, of the first vital problem which political economy has to deal with (the relation between employer and employed); and at a severe crisis, when lives in multitudes, and wealth in masses, are at stake, the political economists are helpless-practically mute; no demonstrable solution of the difficulty can be given by them, such as may convince or calm the opposing parties." Both single the parties involved-masters and operatives, and can't agree on a single viewpoint and no political science can bring them on the same plane. Furthermore, citing the example of mother-child relationship where both are starving and with just a crust of bread available, Ruskin highlights the fact that the interests of the two may not be the same but this does not place them against each other. Similarly, it may not be correct to assume that "whatever the relations of the persons may be between two, because their interests are diverse, they must necessarily regard each other with hostility, and use violence or cunning to obtain the advantage." Even if one is to believe that men are as bad as rats and swine, with no moral underpinnings influencing their decisions, it is still not feasible that masters and slaves are always opposed or always share the same interests. Rather, it can be either case. Although, both would be keen on getting the work done in the best possible manner and getting a fair price for it, but as the profits get distributed, it always proves a gain for one but not necessarily the loss for the other. For instance, he says: "It is not the master's interest to pay wages so low as to leave the men sickly and depressed, nor the workman's interest to be paid high wages if the smallness of the master's profit hinders him from enlarging his business, or conducting it in a safe and liberal way." And, there are innumerable conditions which effect these interests that to determine any rules becomes a futile exercise.

However, every man ought and does understand what is a just and unjust act. Also, the results of justice would prove best for all even if it is hard to say how it will come about to happen: "I have said balances of justice, meaning, in the term justice, to include affection, -such affection as one man owes to another. All right relations between master and operative, and all their best interests, ultimately depend on these."

Ruskin goes on to delve deeper into the relations of master and operative

through the examination of the position of domestic servants. In the equation between the master and servant, the master would push the servant to the extent that proper work is delivered, corresponding to the wages and while providing him in terms of food and shelter as minimal as can be withstood by any human. The upper limit of pushing the servant would be the point till the point where the servant does not give up and leaves. Hereby, there is no "violation of justice," as it is commonly understood. On the other hand, if the servant can find better options, he is free to take them up and "the master can only tell what is the real market value of his labour, by requiring as much as he will give." This is how the terms are understood as per the political economists who assert that by this procedure the greatest average of work will be obtained from the servant, and therefore, the greatest benefit to the community, and through the community, by reversion, to the servant himself.

However, Ruskin disagrees and says that this is possible only "if the servant were an engine of which the motive power was steam, magnetism, gravitation, or any other agent of calculable force." Rather, he is a machine who is operated by an engine called Soul, and it is the force of this soul that plays a role in falsifying the logically derived equations of the political economists. And this engine will work the best not because of pressure or because it is being properly fueled but because of "affections."

Ruskin, to explain the master-operative relation, takes up another example, and that is of the commander of a regiment and his men. Instead of dictating the terms through strict discipline and firmness, a commander who develops good personal relations with his men and takes interest in their needs will be able to get work done in a better way. In fact, this would be truer when the numbers are large.

Moving on to the complex relationship between a manufacturer and his workmen, Ruskin argues that "no action of the affections can take place, but only an explosive action of disaffections, two points offer themselves for consideration in the matter. The first, how far the rate of wages may be so regulated as not to vary with the demand for labour, and the second, how far is it possible that bodies of workmen may be engaged and maintained at such fixed rate of

wages (whatever the state of trade may be), without enlarging or diminishing their number, so as to give them permanent interest in the establishment with which they are connected." Thus, it is wrong to say that wages can't be regulated when they already are so. Furthermore, the objective for Ruskin is to acquire not just equality of wages but also to keep the workforce consistent, irrespective of the demand of the goods that they produce. Ruskin then goes on to discuss the nature and duty of merchants. He states that the general perception about a merchant is that he is a selfish being. His work is essential for the community but his objective is personal, with focus on maximum profit or returns for the self. But such conception of a merchant will have to be given up. Instead, commerce should be looked at in a new light; it should be understood that a true merchant differs as much from a merchant according to laws of modern political economy. The political economists would find that "commerce is an occupation which gentlemen will every day see more need to engage in, rather than in the businesses of talking to men, or slaying them; that, in true commerce, as in true preaching, or true fighting, it is necessary to admit the idea of occasional voluntary loss; that sixpences have to be lost, as well as lives, under a sense of duty; that the market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit; and trade its heroisms, as well as war". Ruskin says that the true functions of a merchant have never clearly been put forward.

According to Ruskin, the merchant's function is "to provide for the nation." Just as a clergyman or a physician, a merchant too has a job to perform irrespective of the returns that come to him. And in order to perform the services assigned to them he must understand the qualities of the things he is dealing in, the means of producing them and subsequently distributing them. Ruskin further explains: "And because the production or obtaining of any commodity involves necessarily the agency of many lives and hands, the merchant becomes in the course of his business the master and governor of large masses of men in a more direct, though less confessed way." While doing all this, he ought to ensure that those involved in the process are also benefitted. Moreover, to maintain the proper functioning, he must take care of his engagements and ensure that the things provided are perfect and pure. At the same time, the merchant must not forget that he has not

only authority over the men working under him but also their responsibility on him.

#### **31.4 SUMMARY OF “THE VEINS OF WEALTH”**

John Ruskin begins the second essay with offering the words that a political economist would utter in response and they are as follows:

"It is indeed true that certain advantages of a general nature may be obtained by the development of social affections. But political economists never professed, nor profess, to take advantages of a general nature into consideration. Our science is simply the science of getting rich. So far from being a fallacious or visionary one, it is found by experience to be practically effective. Persons who follow its precepts do actually become rich, and persons who disobey them become poor. Every capitalist of Europe has acquired his fortune by following the known laws of our science, and increases his capital daily by an adherence to them. It is vain to bring forward tricks of logic, against the force of accomplished facts. Every man of business knows by experience how money is made, and how it is lost."

But Ruskin argues that the men of business would know all about their work, be it the losses incurred or the profits made, since they have been doing this for a long time. At the same time, they would not really be aware of everything else, every other game that can be played in the field of political economy. However, it is hard to say that these men know whether they are making money through fair means or whether their money is contributing to the national welfare. Ruskin then says that the men of business, who are dealing with money, do not know what does the term "rich" mean, which is and can be understood only in relation to "poor," rather than as something absolute. Riches are a power acting through inequalities or negations of itself. The worth and power of money in your pockets depends on how much of it is there in your neighbour's pocket. Making oneself rich is the art of keeping the other poor.

Ruskin goes on to discuss a few more concepts. He describes political economy as consisting simply in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things. The farmer who cuts his

hay at the right time; the builder who lays good bricks in well-tempered mortar; the housewife who takes care of her furniture in the parlour and guards against all waste in her kitchen are all political economists in the true and final sense, adding continually to the riches and well-being of the nation to which they belong. The mercantile economy, he says, "signifies the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal, or moral claim upon, or power over, the labour of others; every such claim implying, precisely as much poverty or debt on one side, as it implies riches or right on the other." The idea of riches among active men in civilized nations generally refers to such commercial wealth; and in estimating their possessions, they rather calculate the value of their horses and fields by the number of guineas they could get for them, than the value of their guineas by the number of horses and fields they could buy with them.

Real property is of little use to its owner, unless together with it he has commercial power over labour. Thus suppose a man has a large estate of fruitful land with rich beds of gold in its gravel; countless herds of cattle; houses, and gardens and storehouses; but suppose, after all, that he could get no servants? In order that he may be able to have servants, some one in his neighbourhood must be poor and in want of his gold or his corn.

Ruskin argues that in the guise of riches, it is actually the power over men that is desired. In other words, it is the authority to direct the masses towards different ends that is the goal. In its simplest sense, the power of obtaining for our own advantage the labour of servant, tradesman, and artist. If the musician is poor, he will sing for small pay, as long as there is only one person who can pay him; but if there be two or three, he will sing for the one who offers him most.

And, "this power of wealth of course is greater or less in direct proportion to the poverty of the men over whom it is exercised, and in inverse proportion to the number of persons who are as rich as ourselves, and who are ready to give the same price for an article of which the supply is limited." Thus, the art of accumulating wealth is not just about collecting money but also scheming how the other would have less or "establishing maximum inequality."

Now, believing that such inequalities would prove advantageous is a delusion on part of political economy. Furthermore, Ruskin says that circulation of wealth is like the circulation of blood in the body, with the quickness in its current courtesy the cheerful emotion and another that results from shame: "There is a flush of the body which is full of warmth and life; and another which will pass into putrefaction." Again even as diseased local determination of the blood involves depression of the general health of the system, all morbid local action of riches will be found ultimately to involve a weakening of the resources of the body politic.

To explain this, he cites the example of sailors who are left on uninhabited coast to explain how inequality of possession could be established between different persons and how it gives rise to mercantile forms of wealth and poverty.

If they both kept their health, and worked steadily, and in amity with each other, they might build themselves a convenient house, and in time come to possess a certain quantity of cultivated land, together with various stores laid up for future use. All these things would be real riches or property; and, supposing the men both to have worked equally hard, they would each have right to equal share or use of it. Their political economy would consist merely in careful preservation and just division of these possessions. Perhaps, however, after sometime one or other might be dissatisfied with the results of their common farming; and they might in consequence agree to divide the land they had brought under the spade into equal shares, so that each might thenceforward work in his own field and live by it. Suppose that after this arrangement had been made, one of them were to fall ill, and be unable to work on his land at a critical time, say of sowing or harvest. He would naturally ask the other to sow or reap, for him.

Then his companion might say, with perfect justice:

"I will do this additional work for you; but if I do it, you must promise to do as much for me at another time. I will count how many hours I spend on your ground, and you shall give me a written promise to work for the same number of hours on mine, whenever I need your help, and you are able to give it."

Suppose the disabled man's sickness to continue, and that under various circumstances, for several years, requiring the help of the other, he on each occasion

gave a written pledge to work, as soon as he was able, at his companion's orders, for the same number of hours which the other had given up to him. What will the positions of the two men be when the invalid is able to resume work?

Considered as a "Polis," or state, they will be poorer than they would have been otherwise: poorer by the withdrawal of what the sick man's labour would have produced in the interval. His friend may perhaps have toiled with an energy quickened by the enlarged need, but in the end his own land and property must have suffered by the withdrawal of so much of his time and thought from them; and the united property of the two men will be certainly less than it would have been if both had remained in health and activity. But the relations in which they stand to each other are also widely altered.

Ruskin underscores the fact that the : "establishment of the mercantile wealth which consists in a claim upon labour, signifies a political diminution of the real wealth which consists in substantial possessions".

### **31.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

#### **31.5.1 Briefly explain the following lines: And the varieties.... balances of justice."**

These lines are an extract from the first chapter entitled "The Roots of Honour" from John Ruskin's celebrated book *Unto This Last*. John Ruskin is a significant British Social thinker and in this chapter he deals with the questions of wealth, inter-relationships between the masters and workers, and the concepts of wealth and justice.

In the lines under consideration, Ruskin discusses the various circumstances which influence the mutual relationships between the master and the labourer. Whether it is the master or the workers, each act on the basis of urgent needs or demands that they are supposed to deal with. Each group has its own interests in mind. However, Ruskin believes that all these considerations are futile. He believes that all human actions should be guided by the balance of justice. God, the maker, intended that no human actions should be directed by the considerations of greed or self-interest. In fact, all human actions or relationships should have faith in

norms of ethics, mortality, and create a balance of justice. The above extract presents before the reader a sterling example of Ruskin's prose : it is so simple, so clear and yet so forceful. These lines also indicate Ruskin's moral angle in the matters related to society and its economic aspects.

**31.5.2. Briefly explain the following lines: "That however, is not... their results."**

These lines form an extract from John Ruskin's essay "The Roots of Honour." This essay happens to be the introductory chapter of his significant book *Unto This Last*, and herein John Ruskin introduces the moral and spiritual angle to the dry and mechanical theories on political economy propounded by his nineteenth century contemporary thinkers. In the lines under scrutiny, Ruskin asserts that the principle of greatest happiness to the greatest number of masses is wrong. Drawing an example, he suggests that a servant is not a mere machine. His motive power, like the machine is not magnetism or gravitation. It is not a force which can be calculated on some principle of physics. A servant, asserts, Ruskin is a human being; his soul is his motive power. This motivation power, like any other power or energy cannot be calculated. As such the very principle of the political economist who equates a worker with a soulless machine stands cancelled out. Here, in these lines Ruskin talks of man as a child of God and his motivational energy in his soul or spirit. Thus he reaffirms his ethical stance with the help of the perfect analogy of a soulless engine.

**31.5.3 Discuss the essay "The Roots of Honour."**

**31.5.4 Discuss the essay "The Veins of Wealth."**

**31.5.5 Through the reading of Ruskin's essay, discuss Ruskin's theory of wealth.**

**31.5.6 Ruskin uses the word "preference" to suggest the public's perception of the characteristics of a merchant in his essay "The Roots of Honour." What are they?**

**31.5.7 Answer**

Ruskin uses the word "preference" in his essay "The Roots of Honour" to suggest the public's perception of the characteristics of a



merchant. He suggests that his perception is a kind of collusion between the public and the actions of the merchants. The idea that the public sees the merchant as purely self-interested or profit based. With this public belief in place, the public then suggests that the merchant is of inferior character, "belonging to an inferior grade of human personality." Ruskin suggests that part of this perception about merchants comes from the actions of the merchants as a result of this public belief, stating, "and themselves reciprocally adopting it." Ruskin then goes on to discuss the nature and duty of merchants. He states that the general perception about a merchant is that he is a selfish being. His work is essential for the community but his objective is personal, with focus on maximum profit or returns for the self. But such conception of a merchant will have to be given up.

### **31.6 LET US SUM UP**

Ruskin examines the concept of "wealth." He argues that wealth has two components: material possessions and power. Briefly stated, wealth can consist of how much food, housing, clothing, etc, a person owns. In addition, it also consists of the ability to get other people to do things for you. Ruskin has argued that recent political economists have been mistaken to ignore human affections and focus instead on human greed. Also, the relations between employers and workers is crucial to actual economic life but has been ignored by recent political economists. Workers will work best for those who treat them decently; for, they are not mere machines. Paying the lowest possible wages is not a good way to get the best workers. Society tends to value people who give of themselves over those who seem selfish. Thus, doctors are generally valued over businessmen because the latter are presumed to act from selfish motives. Ideally, however, merchants and businessmen should not act from selfish motives. The ideal purpose of merchants and businessmen is to provide for the needs of the nation.

### **31.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- ◆ Ruskin and Oxford : The Art of Education by Robert Hemison.
- ◆ Dreams of an English Eden : Ruskin and His Tradition in social criticism by Jeffrey L. Spear.

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## **THOMAS CARLYLE**

### **32.1 Introduction**

### **32.2 Objective**

### **32.3 Thomas Carlyle's Biography**

### **32.4 Thomas Carlyle's Age**

#### **32.4.1. The Victorian Temper**

#### **32.4.2. Literacy, Publication and Reading**

### **32.5 Let Us Sum Up**

### **32.6 Self-Assessment Questions**

### **32.7 Answer Key**

### **32.8 Examination Oriented Questions**

### **32.9 Suggested Reading**

### **32.1 INTRODUCTION**

Thomas Carlyle is seen as innovator and survivor, a man born in the eighteenth century who lived through most of the nineteenth, whose early work predated Victoria's accession, and whose longevity almost matched his monarch's. Alive, he was an enigma; dead, he remains a problematic figure for the literary historian as well as for the critic.

### **32.2 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson aims to introduce the learners to the early life of Thomas

Carlyle and the times in which he lived. This introductory lesson helps to lay down the foundation of Carlyle's ideas that he engages with in his essay.

### **32.3 THOMAS CARLYLE'S BIOGRAPHY**

Thomas Carlyle (4 December 1795 - 5 February 1881) was a Scottish satirical writer, essayist, historian, and teacher during the Victorian era. He was the eldest child of James Carlyle, a stonemason, and Margaret (Aitken) Carlyle, and was born in the village of Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, in rural southwest Scotland. Thomas Carlyle's father was strict, short-tempered, a puritan of the puritans, but withal a man of rigid righteousness and strong character, while his mother too was of the Scottish earth. Thomas's education began at home by both the parents, who were pious and had a strong native sense, wanting to prepare him for the church. His father was a member of the Burgher Secession church. In early life, his family's (and nation's) strong Calvinist beliefs powerfully influenced the young man.

From the age of five till he was nine, the village school was where he went for his formal primary education. Then, his parents put him into the Annan Academy, Annan. But the years were those of torment for he was bullied enough to force him to quit after three years. However, he showed proficiency in mathematics and became well grounded in French and Latin. In November 1809, he went to Edinburgh and took up courses at the University till 1814, with an objective to become a minister. However, he left without a degree and became a mathematical tutor at Annan Academy in 1814. Later, he gave up the idea of entering the Kirk, having reached a theological position incompatible with its teachings. He had begun to learn German in Edinburgh, and had done much independent reading outside the regular curriculum. In 1816, when he moved to a school in Kirkcaldy, he came in contact with Edward Irving, an old boy of Annan School, and a schoolmaster there. It was this contact that transformed into an intellectual association for Carlyle, and the two became friends for life.

Before leaving for London Irving had introduced Carlyle to Jane Baillie Welsh daughter of the surgeon, John Welsh, descended from John Knox. She

was beautiful, precociously learned, talented, and a brilliant mistress of cynical satire. Among her numerous suitors, the rough, uncouth Carlyle at first made an ill impression; but a literary correspondence was begun, and on October 17, 1826, after a courtship that was in some sort a battle of strong wills, the two were married and went to live at Comely Bank, Edinburgh starting with a capital of £200. Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, was a cousin of the Welshes. He accepted Carlyle as a contributor, and during 1827 printed two important articles: "On Richter" and "The State of German Literature."

He was finally satisfied having met Jane Welsh, with whom the courtship went on for four years before they finally married on 17 October 1826. Finding it stimulating but too expensive, they moved to their celebrated fastness of Craigenputtoch, an isolated hill-farm in Dumfriesshire.

The Sage of Chelsea, or as some called him, the Sage of Ecclefechan, dominated a circle of disciples and cast a long shadow over distinguished contemporaries as various as Dickens and Tennyson, Browning and Forster, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell and George Eliot. Jane Carlyle had her own circle, less famous, still intensely clever and often advanced in particular on the question of woman's rights. In public Jane Carlyle deferred to her famous husband; in private she was a formidable presence, supportive of his creative work, ensuring the domestic order he craved, accepting his increasing eccentricity, and, finally, tolerating with bitterness his indifference to her feelings, his fascination with the aristocracy and particularly with Lady Harriet Ashburton. Jane Carlyle's health weakened steadily in the 1850s and 1860s; with his *History of Frederick the Great* finally complete in 1865, Carlyle intended to settle back and enjoy domestic retirement with Jane, but by then Jane was exhausted, and in 1866 while Carlyle was absent in Edinburgh, on the occasion of his installation as rector of his alma mater, Jane Carlyle collapsed in London and died. After the death of his wife, Carlyle ceased to be the same man. He dragged himself through the years though continued writing.

#### **32.4 THE AGE OF THOMAS CARLYLE**

During the Victorian Age, England changed as much and as dramatically as it had in all of its previous ages. However, it was in this period the reign of Queen

Victoria that England touched new heights as a world imperial power. Changes in ways of industrial production had a deep influence on almost all aspects of life for every class of people. While haphazard industrialization created great prosperity for a fortunate few, it proved miserable for the masses. Victorian era writers were mixed in their reactions to industrialization. Some celebrated the new age of promise, progress, and triumph, while others challenged the so-called benefits of industrial growth when so many were being affected so negatively.

### **32.4.1 THE VICTORIAN TEMPER**

In many ways the Victorian age reflected values that Queen Victoria herself embraced and supported: moral responsibility and domestic propriety. Though the Victorian period seemed quite perfect, yet there was as much evidence of social dissolution and indecorum as far as values and ethics were concerned. Queen Victoria, perhaps more so than any previous monarch, became visually synonymous with the country she ruled, in part because she was the first monarch who lived in the age of photography: her image could be relatively easily produced, reproduced, and distributed.

Writers of the Victorian period tended to note more explicitly than had writers of previous ages the degree to which theirs was, for good or ill, an era of rapid transition and change. Because the Victorian period lasted so long and because it was a time of such great change, it is hard to characterize in any singular, overarching way. Thus, scholars often refer to three distinct phases within the Victorian period: early (1830-1848); mid (1848-1870); and late (1870-1901). We often also recognize the final decade of the nineteenth century (the 1890s) as an important transitional period between the Victorian era and modernism.

According to the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, the early Victorian period is marked by two major non-literary events: first, public railways expanded on an unprecedented scale; and second, the British parliament passed a reform bill in 1832 that (at least to some degree) redistributed voting rights to reflect growing population in newly

industrializing centers like Manchester and Liverpool. The 1832 Reform Bill marked, for many Victorians, the beginning of a new age of political power unlike they had ever experienced. The 1830s and 1840s became known as the "Time of Troubles" largely because industrialization was producing such rapid change on such a profound scale; industrialization had a cascading effect in as much as it caused many other social "troubles". Working conditions were deplorable for the majority of people, including women and children, who worked in mines and factories. A group called the Chartists organized themselves to fight for workers' rights. The organization fell apart by 1848 but their efforts set the stage for real and meaningful reform. One of the most important reforms of the early Victorian period came with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. These laws imposed high tariffs on imported wheat and grains. And while the tariffs meant good profits for England's own agricultural producers, it also meant prohibitively high prices, especially on basic food items like bread, for the vast majority of the population. The literature of this time period often focused on the plight of the poor and the new urban reality of industrial England. Many writers commented on what had emerged as the two Englands: that of the wealthy (by far the minority) and that of the poor (by far the majority). The mid-Victorian era was somewhat less tumultuous than was the earlier Victorian period as the relationship between industry and government began to work itself out. However, the time was still one of great poverty and difficulty for many, even as England as a whole began to enjoy greater prosperity. A number of acts of Parliament curbed the worst abuses of laissez-faire industry, like child labor and dangerous working conditions. The 1850s were to many a time of optimism, with the promise of prosperity from industry seemingly so close. So too was England proud of its science and technology, as is evidenced by the Crystal Palace, centerpiece of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Crystal Palace was designed using modern architectural principles and materials, and its role in the Great Exhibition was to showcase English "progress" made possible by science and industry.

The mid-Victorian period was also a time when the British empire truly expanded around the globe (Australia, Canada, and India, for example), all part and parcel of the prosperity made possible by the industrial revolution. In England itself, debates about religion grew in intensity. By the mid-Victorian period the Church of England had evolved into three factions: a Low (or Evangelical) Church, a Broad Church, and a High Church. Each had their share of proponents and detractors. As a primary driver behind the industrial revolution, rationalist thought destabilized religious beliefs. Groups like the utilitarian "Benthamites" came to see traditional religion as little more than outmoded superstition (refer to *Norton Anthology of English Literature*).

New discoveries in the sciences also led to a new mode of reading the *Bible*: Higher Criticism approached the *Bible* not as a divine and infallible text but rather as an historically produced set of documents that reflected the prejudices and limitations of their human writers. Among other scientific works of the time Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) seemed to challenge all previous thinking about creation and man's special role in the world. As popular readers understood Darwin, man was just one among many creatures who existed as a product of a long evolutionary history. The mid-Victorian period would ultimately see often contrary forces like the promise of progress yet the emptiness of long-held beliefs that would come to a head during the final decades of the Victorian era and that would eventually be its undoing. For many, the late-Victorian period was merely an extension, at least on the surface, of the affluence of the preceding years. For many others, though, the late-Victorian period became a time to fundamentally question and challenge the assumptions and practices that had made such affluence possible. It became a time to hold England to account for the way in which it had generated wealth for so few on the backs of so many, both at home and throughout the empire.

Home-rule for Ireland became an increasingly controversial topic of debate. In 1867, a second Reform Bill passed, extending voting rights

even further to some working-class citizens. The political writings of authors like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels empowered the working class to imagine itself in control of the industry that it made possible. The final decade of the Victorian period marked a high point, both of English industry and imperial control, and of challenges to that industry and imperialism.

Even while British empire-building continued with great energy in Africa and India, in England many were starting to see the beginning of the end of the era. Gone was trust in Victorian propriety and morality. Instead, many writers struck a "*fin de siècle*" (or end-of-century) pose: a weary sophistication with the optimism of forward progress when the limits of that progress seemed all too near in sight. With the benefit of hindsight we can see the 1890s as a transitional phase between the optimism and promise of the Victorian period and the Modernist movement, during which artists began to challenge just how genuine that optimism and promise had been in the first place.

#### **32.4.2 Literacy, Publication, and Reading**

As of 1837, roughly half of England's population was literate; that figure continued to grow throughout the Victorian period (due especially to reforms that mandated at least minimal education for everybody). Because of advances in printing technology, publishers could provide more texts (of various kinds) to more people. The Victorian period saw enormous growth in periodicals of all kinds. Many famous novelists, like Charles Dickens, for example, published their work not in book form at first but in serial installments in magazines. The practical reality of publishing in serial form had a direct impact on style, including how plots were paced, organized, and developed. (The experience of reading serialized novels is similar to that of the modern television viewer watching a programme that unfolds in a series of hour or half-hour segments.)

As literacy proliferated, the reading public became more and more fragmented. Writers thus had to consider how (or if) their writing might appeal to niche audiences rather than to a unified "reading public." Short



fiction thrived during the Victorian period, thanks in part to the robust periodical culture of the time. The novel was perhaps the most prevalent genre of the time period; it was especially well suited to authors who wanted to capture the wide diversity of industrial life and the class conflict and divisions that industrialism created. A common theme among Victorian novelists involves a protagonist who is trying to define him- or herself relative to class and social systems.

While prose fiction was the most widely circulated kind of writing in the Victorian period, poetry retained its iconic status as "high literature." Most readers continued to expect poetry to teach a moral lesson, even though many writers were uncomfortable with that aim. As some Victorians would argue, it was through the writing and study of poetry in particular that individuals could cultivate their greatest human potential. Poets of the period ranged widely in their subject matter: some sought to revive mythic themes (Arthurian legend, for example) while others turned a critical eye on the industrial abuses of the present (such as the problem of child labour).

Non-fiction prose writing gained wide readership during the Victorian period (due again to the vibrant periodical culture). No less, authors were attracted to non-fiction prose as the best vehicle for addressing in a direct and specific way the problems of industrial England and, in some cases, for proposing solutions to these problems. Non-fiction prose authors, who were often writers of fiction and poetry as well tackled subjects that were as diverse as the age itself, including politics, religion, art, economics, and education. Much Victorian non-fiction prose is marked by a sense of urgency, which reflects the pace of change of the age: many authors felt that society would, at some point, be overwhelmed by change and descend into some form of what Matthew Arnold called simply "anarchy."

### **32.5 LET US SUM UP**

Thomas Carlyle made his name as an essayist of the Victorian age. The period in which he wrote had an impact on his thinking as well as writings. A.O.J Cockshut, describes Carlyle in these words:

Though incapable of lying, Carlyle was completely unreliable as an observer, since he invariably saw what he had decided in advance that he ought to see. ...Carlyle was never able to respect ordinary men ... His fierceness of spirit was composed of two elements, a serious Calvinistic desire to denounce evil and a habitual nervous ill temper, for which he often reproached himself but which he never managed to defeat.

## **32.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **32.6.1 Fill in the Blanks**

- a) Thomas Carlyle was a \_\_\_\_\_ satirical writer and essayist.
- b) The earliest education that Carlyle received was at \_\_\_\_\_ by his \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) As a literary form, \_\_\_\_\_ was the best vehicle for addressing the problems of industrial England during the Victorian Age.
- d) In the intellectual and literary circles, Thomas Carlyle was often called \_\_\_\_\_ or as some called him \_\_\_\_\_.

## **32.7 ANSWER KEY**

Scottish; home, parents; non-fictional prose; The Sage of Chelsea, the Sage of Ecclefechan

## **32.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

32.8.1 Write a brief note on the early life of Thomas Carlyle.

32.8.2 Briefly discuss the age in which Thomas Carlyle wrote.

## **32.9 SUGGESTED READING**

- ♦ Froude, J.A. *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of Life, 1795-1835* Longmans, 1970.

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**BY THOMAS CARLYLE : HERO AS POET.  
DANTE; SHAKESPEARE**

- 33.1 Introduction**
- 33.2 Objective**
- 33.3 Works of Thomas Carlyle**
- 33.4 Introduction to *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History***
- 33.5 Introduction to Hero as Poet : Dante, Shakespeare**
- 33.6 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 33.7 Answer Key**
- 33.8 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 33.9 Let Us Sum Up**
- 33.10 Suggested Reading**

**33.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is hard to describe Thomas Carlyle in straight adjectives. He was highly controversial, morally upright yet a crook, a rebel and yet conventional. However, it was his writings and lectures that brought him in limelight and popularized him as an intellectual.

**33.2 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson aims to introduce learners to various works of Thomas Carlyle and how he developed into an acclaimed essayist.

### 33.3 WORKS OF THOMAS CARLYLE

Thomas Carlyle was typically a Victorian author. He was also highly controversial, variously regarded as sage and irreligious, a moral leader, a moral crook, a radical at times and a conventional at another. Contradictions were rampant in the works of early biographers, and in the later 20th century, he is still far from being understood. In the early 1820s, he was introduced to a new world through German literature, in the readings of Schiller and Goethe. Although he remained aware of the Christian values, it made him restless and uneasy in the context of his newly discovered freedom and friendships at the university. The transformation that took place, as a result of scientific curiosity, formed the essence of his philosophical satire *Sartor Resartus* that was produced in 1836. Many critics find *Sartor Resartus* to be a perplexing, befuddling work in certain ways. Its form is quite experimental, with a layered narrative style and presence of multiple personae to offer the disordered and frenzied reality through an equally chaotic representation. *Sartor Resartus*: genuinely original in form and content, it combines biography, autobiography, essay, and political commentary with a layered structure and avoidance of final meaning which makes it seem well in advance of its time. Its narrative thrust is to tell the story of a protagonist whose academic setting suggests that he should be taken seriously, though readers who possess a smattering of German can easily interpret both his name (Devil's Excrement) and his university (Nowhere in Particular) as obvious jokes. Teufelsdröckh follows a familiar path from struggling beginning and self-doubt to awakening sensitivity to a supernaturally alive universe, from the terrible "Everlasting NO" and "centre of indifference" to the explosion of energy and affirmation in the "Everlasting YEA" which marks the turning point of the book. Typically, Carlyle mixes the serious with the almost farcical. In setting, name, manipulation of German for a largely ignorant readership, and manipulation of persona to hide overstatement, the book is clever tomfoolery.

While Carlyle was struggling to adapt to the changing tunes of his faith, on the other hand his growing success as a translator and essayist helped him sail through loneliness. In Dumfriesshire, where Thomas Carlyle and Jane Carlyle

spent six years, the genesis of the essays eventually collected in Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (1838) was produced. "Mechanical" thinking, in Carlyle's description, accompanies and stultifies mechanical success. Man has moved mountains literally and metaphorically, but suddenly and without consideration. Reducing operatives to cyphers, and giving up subtle and centuries-old mechanisms of an interdependent society, mankind has achieved miracles but discarded too much en route. Such, in brief, with amusing anecdotal outworks, is the message of Carlyle's early essays, which by the early 1840s were widely available on both sides of the Atlantic in the volumes entitled *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*.

It was in 1837 that Carlyle wrote his first major popular success, *The French Revolution*, and it became a celebrated piece of historical writing. Since he started living in London, Carlyle found his environment changed and it also showed its effect on the writing process. Instead of the isolation of the Dumfriesshire hills, he had the stimulus of a major capital city, its libraries and the enthusiasm of its people and characters. The French Revolution was the outcome of this first contact he had with the city and its lifestyle of affluence. The libraries gave him resources for his scrupulous research. John Stuart Mill and his set gave him many ideas, either in serious discussion or in the verbal jousting they engaged in. The stream of visitors to Chelsea also gave Carlyle an audience. The loneliness of the creative process (Carlyle wrote with difficulty, revising endlessly) gave him a focus for the chaotic input of his very full life. This work of his gathered some good responses, including those coming from Mill. The French Revolution touched events in the memories of many readers, and immediate in the history of many more. Fame and financial security followed this first major success, though not immediately. Many critics feel that the historical research and annotation bespeak careful preparation, and the artistic impulse behind the finished work orders and selects, to orchestrate a pattern clearly of the author's choosing and to highlight his message of the inevitability of revolution in a France rotten with abused social privilege, skeptical freethinking, and human exploitation. The French Revolution clearly articulates basic Carlylian principles: the king must rule, and the nobles effectively manage their estates; failing this, these orders of

society must be put down. That a society based on bankrupt, mechanical, repetitive values will inevitably fail is taken for granted, and the magnificently described scenes of carnage and horror are presented not as aberration but as inevitable, tragic harvest after years of bad government. Carlyle brought the conflict vividly to life for an audience who, in 1837, could remember uncomfortably the anarchy of Napoleonic war or Reform disturbance. The power of Carlyle as historian was not just to recreate the past but also to use his historical works to disturb the present.

As the time passed, Carlyle entertained guests who included the wits and thinkers, writers, and public figures of their age, who flocked to enjoy the salon and above all the company of two of the century's great conversationalists. Dickens, Forster, Browning, Tennyson, Mazzini, Jewsbury, Martineau—all literary London seemed to enjoy a night with the Carlyles, or an account of one from their friends. Much of what we see now as Carlyle's "message" came from those early Scottish years, a Calvinist obsession with order, with duty, with work, with destiny; a fear of anarchy in the home, in the State, in international relations; an obsessive feeling that the times were morally degenerate; a narrow view of international affairs and an anti-intellectual view of the fine arts; a willingness to oversimplify, often knowingly, in order to make a start at reform, rather than allow visible degeneracy to proceed.

After the death of his wife, Thomas Carlyle continued his voluminous correspondence and worked in private on a brilliant autobiographical document which was to be published posthumously as his *Reminiscences* (1881). However, Carlyle was no longer a public writer with any potential left.

Without Jane he became lonely, embittered, valetudinarian. He was courted by a large circle of admirers and still respected by many despite his political inclinations, which leaned further and further to the right with advancing age and which, with the polemic that stretched from the publication of his *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1853) to *Shooting Niagara: and After* (1867), finally alienated a whole generation of liberal thinkers, including John Stuart Mill. Yet he was there, centrally a figure who had been in the public

eye since the late 1820s, an innovator, a publicizer of new ideas, unquestionably an important writer and figurehead. When he died in 1881 there was a distinct sense that an era had ended.

Carlyle's early works, a translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1824), *A biography of Friedrich Schiller* (1825), and the four volumes of translations and biographical and critical notices entitled *German Romance* (1827), introduced to the British public those German writers who had opened new vistas for Carlyle himself. In the Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Carlyle found that Goethe had given shape to what had seemed frighteningly shapeless in Carlyle's own life--the search for a faith, for an understanding of an apparently hostile and shapeless universe, and for a moral imperative to act on knowledge and self-knowledge.

The 1829 essay "Signs of the Times" can be argued to mark the beginning of the Victorian age, even though Victoria was eight years from taking the throne. An original and clever piece of journalism, "Signs of the Times" ironically surveys the fallacies and weaknesses of a decade, sweetening a serious message which was developed two years later in another *Edinburgh Review* piece, "Characteristics." Briefly, that message had to do with the spiritual price to be paid for the industrial success and the onward movement of the early-nineteenth century: the reverberations of Carlyle's analysis were to be felt years later in Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell's *North and South* (1855).

Affluence came slowly. To eke out his early royalties, Carlyle had to give annual lectures, a process he detested and feared, yet which he seemed to perform with great public success, his normally impressive conversational and monologuing skills sharpened by nervousness and by the sense of occasion. His lectures on heroes, given in May 1840, were excellent. Published in 1841 as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*, they pick up some of the main concerns of the volumes on the French Revolution.

Carlyle's 1839 work, *Chartism*, is about the Chartist movement seeking worker representation and rights for the industrious (and often starving) poor. *Past and Present*, published in 1843, is about the same contemporary problem,

but Carlyle contrasts the nineteenth-century situation with that of the medieval monastery of St. Edmundsbury, in whose ordered community Carlyle found much to offer his age as a formula for improvement and reform.

In *Chartism* (1839) and *Past and Present* (1843) there is no spectacle of distinction comparable to that of the villainous aristocrats in *The French Revolution* (1837). Instead the specter of anarchy and collapse is always in the wings, overtaking society not openly (as the phoenix is consumed at the end of *Sartor Resartus*), but implicitly, should the aristocracy not take their duties of government seriously, should social planners not wake up to the enormity of current problems, should the managerial class not buckle down to the duties of true management, should all society not redirect its social and ethical concerns to the whole complex framework of industrial Britain, its impoverished Irish and its impoverished urban and rural poor, its growing pollution, its increasing population, its emptying churches, its shaky educational ideals. The past of St. Edmundsbury was not pastoral idyll. In fact, the monastery had been revealed in historical records (the publication of which by the Camden Society in 1840 had spurred Carlyle) as corrupt and weakly governed, needing a new leader, who is found in Abbot Samson, to put things right sternly, inflexibly, un pityingly, heroically. Such a man, clearly, is needed for the Britain described in *Chartism*, and the need is pressingly conveyed by Carlyle's insistent rhetoric that makes use of repetition, questions, unusual syntax, and coinages to convince, to hector, to wheedle. Carlyle often annoyed his readers, but he was hard to ignore. He believed, overwhelmingly, in the wrongness of his society and rightness of his message. While people might dispute his message--they did in the 1830s, and many more did by the 1860s--they found it difficult to ignore the problems he cited. Something plainly was wrong when Chartist protest was necessary. Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) explores the problem from ground level in working-class Manchester: Chartism takes the aerial view, dizzying, the details blurred, the excitement unmistakable. And Carlyle the historian warns that the problem is not new, and the result has been terribly visible in recent European history.

By the early 1840s Carlyle's works were selling well, and each new book conveyed an original mind at the peak of its powers. Oliver Cromwell's *Letters*



*and Speeches*, two volumes (1845), and a supplement (1846) is a case in point. The civil war fascinated Carlyle for decades, and the personality of its great hero (and he certainly saw the Protector in this light, as the strong leader who saved the country from collapsing into anarchy) gave him the focus for a historical work which blends narrative with letters and documents of the period, and intersperses all with the author's addresses to the figures he treats, especially Cromwell. It is an extraordinary history, almost a dialogue with a dead hero. It was provocative, original, fiercely contested at the time of its publication and more so when Carlyle was deceived by patent forgeries of Cromwellian letters--the celebrated "Squire Letters" offered him after he had completed the basic writing of his history. Carlyle accepted the letters uncritically and stubbornly clung to his belief in their authenticity after they had been revealed to the reasonable as forgeries. Just such a weakness makes it easy to criticize Carlyle's method and his conclusions: his method was intuitive, and his admiration for character (often on apparently inconsequential grounds) overrode many critical mechanisms which could have ensured greater objectivity. Carlyle's primary aim was to present a point of view, an analysis of past events, which could be read and understood by his contemporaries, and applied to his own time *mutatis mutandis*. Cromwell's methods were direct and crude; they violated human rights but they saved a country which was tearing itself apart in civil war. Carlyle's unambiguous stand on this issue (which hardened throughout the remainder of his life) shaped his following, steadily alienated liberal thinkers, sparked public argument, and made many politicians and thinkers uneasy.

### **33.4 INTRODUCTION TO *ON HEROES, HERO-WORSHIP & THE HEROIC IN HISTORY***

Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* remains one of the best repositories in English of the development in late Romanticism called heroic vitalism. The book, a series of six lectures that Carlyle delivered to London audience in 1840, represents not so much soundly based ideas about the making of history as it does Carlyle's view of how the world would be if powerful and inspired people were to have the power he thought

they deserved. The book thus became England's contribution to the nineteenth century cult of the "great man," a dream that was most seductively attractive to intellectuals forced to put their ideas in the marketplace with all the other merchants, but closed off from the real power that was being exercised in the newly industrialized world by economic entrepreneurs.

Carlyle promotes the notion that progress is good and inevitable; unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he does not believe that the passage of time in and of itself assures progress. Only when persons of heroic temperament step forward to lead the masses can true progress for society occur. The persons featured in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* were just such people; their actions, and their willingness to live in accordance with the vision of society that motivated them, changed history for the better. Carlyle finds no one around him acting in a way to set his own age right; given to commercialism and self-gratification, the people of nineteenth century Europe lack the will or the leadership to make something worthwhile of their lives. If his work is not totally successful in conveying a portrait of heroism good for all times, it does succeed in showing Carlyle's disenchantment with the nineteenth century and its lack of heroes.

Carlyle's basic idea is that all history is the making of great persons, gifted with supreme power of vision or action. It thus becomes one's duty to "worship Heroes."

In the world of onrushing liberalism and industrialism, with the memory of God ever dimming through the growth of science and skepticism, Carlyle needs a faith and develops one based on the worship of great men.

This faith, dubious enough under restrictions of law and order, not to mention the existence of great women, becomes even more dubious as handled by Carlyle. As the six lectures progress, he moves from myth to history with no clear distinction. He offers leaders of religious movements, great poets, and military conquerors as equally great or heroic. Hero worship not only should be devout; it actually was. In Carlyle's estimation, love of God is virtually identical with loyalty to a leader. Despite his scorn for business activity and its operators,

Carlyle's heroes are all men of practical intelligence. He values the same kind of industriousness, resoluteness, and obvious sincerity that could serve to build economic as well as political or clerical empires.

The performance of heroism depends on the interaction of the person with the great social forces of the age; heroes cannot change the course of history alone.

The lectures, as Carlyle's title makes clear, are about heroes. Carlyle considered his own father a hero who had bred in him the view that heroes were necessary for both the individual and society as figures of support and guidance in morally difficult times. In *On Heroes*, Carlyle goes through history to select different great men in literature and in religion, in war and in peace, in the far past and in the recent past, but not-- significantly--in Victorian Britain, which held few heroes for a man like Carlyle. He asks what each hero did for his age, and in every case he gives it shape, form, direction, values, coherence: often destructive, Carlyle's heroes prevented bloodshed, prevented anarchy, which even in the 1830s was a nightmare to many thinkers. Carlyle himself was becoming a hero to many. The ideas in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History* became some of his most widespread and influential. The lectures were republished many times, excerpted and made available to the new millions of literate poor. Their message was simple, clear, undemanding. Find your hero, give him your loyalty and your obedience. The times are dangerous, but follow your hero and fulfill your obligation to your creator. Christian and skeptic alike found in this clear and simple message a resonant faith, and Carlyle became more and more widely discussed.

### **33.5 INTRODUCTION TO HERO AS POET: DANTE, SHAKESPEARE**

In the essay, Carlyle speaks highly of the two jewelled poets, Dante Alighieri, the Father of the Italian language; and England's national poet, William Shakespeare, wherein he glorifies the poet to the stature of a hero. Carlyle underlines the importance of Dante and Shakespeare for the whole of Europe. Both poets appear to express typically European truths and values, which together form a cultural treasury. Dante will continue to live among the masses through his words, eloquent and eternal. On the other hand, Shakespeare in his attempt

to reach the masses managed to touch the souls, uplift them and create awe. Shakespeare hold up Western Civilization in the modern era as Dante did for the religious era.

### 33.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

#### 33.6.1 Choose the correct option:

- a) *Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History* is a collection of lectures/novel by Thomas Carlyle.
- b) Thomas Carlyle translated biography/novel of Friedrich Schiller.
- c) The lectures that Carlyle gave in May 1840 were on heroes/politics and fetched high acclamation.
- d) It was in 1837 that Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution/ Sartor Resartus* which was his first major success and became celebrated piece of historical writing.

#### 33.6.2 Fill in the Blanks:

- a) Carlyle's essay \_\_\_\_\_ can be argued to mark the beginning of the Victorian age.
- b) Essentially, Thomas Carlyle was a \_\_\_\_\_ author.
- c) *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* pick up some of the main concerns of the volumes on the \_\_\_\_\_.
- d) The transformation that took place, as a result of scientific curiosity, formed the essence of his philosophical satire \_\_\_\_\_.
- e) The two poets who are Heroes for Carlyle are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

### 33.7. ANSWER KEY

Correct options: lectures, biography, heroes, *The French Revolution*

#### 33.7.1 Fill in the Blanks:

Signs of the Times, Victorian, French Revolution, Sartor Resartus, Dante, Shakespeare

### **33.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

33.8.1 Write an essay on the development of Thomas Carlyle as a Victorian writer.

33.8.2 Write a short note on the idea of Carlyle's lecture series *Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*.

### **33.9 LET US SUM UP**

Thomas Carlyle did not gain instant success but gradually became an accomplished writer. Among all his works, *French Revolution* and his lectures, later published as a complete volume, have left a deeper impression. J.A. Froude, who was a personal friend, sums Carlyle's character as:

He was fierce and uncompromising. To those who saw but the outside of him he appeared scornful, imperious and arrogant. He was stern in his judgment of others.... insincerity.... he could never pardon.... He would not condescend to the conventional politenesses.... He called things by their right names, and in a dialect edged with sarcasm.... His temper had been ungovernable from his childhood; he had the irritability of a dyspeptic man of genius ... he who preached so wisely on 'doing the duty which lay nearest to us', forgot his own instructions.... He was always sad: often gloomy in the extreme.

### **33.10 SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Sanders, C.R., K.J. Fielding, and C de L Ryals. *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*. Duke University Press, 1970).

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**THOMAS CARLYLE : *HERO AS POET.*  
*DANTE; SHAKESPEARE***

**34.1 Introduction****34.2 Objective****34.3 Detailed Summary of *Hero as Poet. Dante; Shakespeare*****34.4 Self-Assessment Questions****34.5 Answer Key****34.6 Examination Oriented Questions****34.7 Let Us Sum Up****34.8 Suggested Reading****34.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the essay "Hero as Poet. Dante; Shakespeare," Thomas Carlyle argues that the poet too can be a heroic figure and he cites the case of Dante and Shakespeare, whom he considers to be Heroes.

**34.2 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson attempts to comprehend Carlyle's essay prescribed in the syllabus for the learner. Through the summary of the essay, the aim is to help get a grasp of the idea and arguments that Carlyle presents in this lecture that was then published in the volume.

### **34.3. DETAILED SUMMARY OF *HERO AS POET. DANTE; SHAKESPEARE***

The summary of the lecture is divided into three parts. The first part summarizes the initial paragraphs of the published lecture where Carlyle introduces his concept of hero as poet. The second part discusses how he describes Dante and the last part of the summary explains the paragraphs on Shakespeare.

#### **34.3.1 Part I: Hero a Poet**

Carlyle begins with a reference to his previous lectures in the series, saying that heroes are divinity, and prophet are a thing of the past. If men admire their fellow beings as God or as His representatives then it is obvious that there is a lack of scientific thinking. He says: "We are now to see our Hero in the less ambitious, but also less questionable, character of Poet; a character which does not pass." Carlyle argues that the Poet becomes a heroic figure who belongs not only to one particular age, but also to the new ages. If a soul has been sent by God to be a Hero then he would possibly take only the shape of a Poet.

Great men, says Carlyle, are given the titles of "Hero" or "Prophet" or even "Poet" in different times and spaces, depending on the qualities in them that are taken note of. However, the realm in which the person is born and then displays his credentials become an important factor in deciding what he would be—a poet, a prophet, a king or perhaps even a priest. Also, Carlyle says it is possible that one individual could be all kinds of these men: "The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher; in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these." But the main character that he should possess is the greatness. For instance, he says, Napoleon has words in him which are like Austerlitz Battles and Louis Fourteenth's Marshals are a kind of poetical men withal; the things Turenne says are full of sagacity and geniality, like sayings of Samuel Johnson.

Though Nature has a role to play, for it does not make even the great men of the same kind. While aptitude varies from one to the other, it is also the circumstances that make a difference. For when one sees a porter wobbling and walking zig-zag under his weight on the road and a tailor on the side, busy with his needle kit, one cannot disagree that it is not merely aptitude that has crafted out their destinies. Similarly, what vocation should the Great Man have? Is he to be Conqueror, King, Philosopher, Poet? Carlyle says: "It is an inexplicably complex controversial-calculation between the world and him! He will read the world and its laws; the world with its laws will be there to be read. What the world, on this matter, shall permit and bid is, as we said, the most important fact about the world."

He goes on to explain that we have different notions about Poet and Prophet, though in some old languages the titles could be exchanged in place of each other like Vates means both Prophet and Poet. Both the Prophet and the Poet could overlap. While Prophet can be understood as one who could foretell what we intend to do, the Poet can what could one love. But, at the same time, the Prophet will have know what one loves otherwise how would he know what he'd do. The fact, however, remains that the two terms are primarily same since they have pierced into the realm of the "Divine Mystery" which is like an open secret, known to all but still not visible. Carlyle says that people tend to worship, admire, the acts, deeds, and skills that demonstrate extraordinary abilities of men and then these men are put on a pedestal, made heroes.

For Carlyle, the two poets-Shakespeare and Dante-are heroes, they may not be converted into deities but at the same time they were to be regarded as saints, canonized through their work, for they are unmatched: "Shakspeare and Dante are Saints of Poetry; really, if we will think of it, canonized, so that it is impiety to meddle with them. The unguided instinct of the world, working across all these perverse impediments, has arrived at such result. Dante and Shakspeare are a



peculiar two. They dwell apart, in a kind of royal solitude; none equal, none second to them: in the general feeling of the world, a certain transcendentalism, a glory as of complete perfection, invests these two. They are canonized, though no Pope or Cardinals took hand in doing it!"

### **34.3.2 Part II: Dante**

Carlyle begins by saying that several volumes have been written about Dante and his work but yet we fail to know the real Dante. Seemingly a nomadic, mourning person, he did not make his presence felt while he was alive and now whatever little was written about his biography, that too has been lost to time. It is the Book that offers any possible information about him. Besides, there is a portrait of Dante that is attributed to Giotto. From that portrait, one finds the face as touching, but an expression of loneliness "the deathless sorrow and pain, the known victory which is also deathless; significant of the whole history of Dante!"

In fact, the face appears to be tragedy-stricken that wrenches the onlooker's heart. Yet there is a tender touch to it:

"...gentle affection of a child, but all this is as if congealed into sharp contradiction, into abnegation, isolation, proud hopeless pain. A soft ethereal soul looking out so stern, implacable, grim-trenchant, as from imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice! Withal it is a silent pain too, a silent scornful one: the lip is curled in a kind of godlike disdain of the thing that is eating out his heart, - as if it were withal a mean insignificant thing, as if he whom it had power to torture and strangle were greater than it."

At the same time, the face looks as if it has been struggling throughout life to pave its way in the world and yet has not given up completely. The warmth is converted into anger and resentment, which leaves him hard-hearted, posing a muteness that perhaps is god-like. And the eyes in the portrait seem surprised and poses a question as to why should the world be like this. Silently Dante seems to be singing his profound notes. Carlyle says that the little information that we have

about Dante's life seems to match with this Portrait and this Book. Dante was born in 1265 in Florence in a family of upper class. His education was the best that possibly could be accorded, for he gained insights into divinity, Aristotelean logic, Latin classics and with his kind of intelligence he proved better than the learned minds. He possessed a "cultivated understanding and subtlety" about scholarly matters. He knew what was within his proximity but due to lack of printed material he could not have had access to things that were distant.

Dante had his own share of miseries in life. He was a soldier, went on embassy before becoming a chief magistrate of Florence, and on the personal front he had met a girl Beatrice Portinari and loved her dearly but they never got married. She was wedded elsewhere and then died early. She finds place in Dante's poems and his life too that could not be replaced. Dante married but was never happily married, and could not love again. For Dante did not know what it 'true happiness" or 'miserable life' meant, for he just carried on living.

One of the instances that Carlyle describes is about Dante's banishment as a result of disturbances that caused his party to suddenly lose, his property being confiscated and his life becoming an ordeal. Dante felt that the whole thing was not fair, rather evil in the eyes of God and humans. He did make efforts to reverse the whole thing, but the orders were given out to burn him alive if found in Florence. To a proposal of accepting his guilt and apologizing, Dante replied that he would rather never return.

Dante never found a "home," wandering from one place to another, from one patron to the other, saying how hard is the way up and down another man's stairs. The men who are worthless are not regarded as good company: "Dante, poor and banished, with his proud earnest nature, with his moody humors, was not a man to conciliate men." Henceforth, it was the eternal world that occupied Dante's mind and thoughts, and that world is awful and gloomy. And what comes out is the *Divine Comedy* :

Dante's heart, long filled with this, brooding over it in speechless thought and awe, bursts forth at length into "mystic unfathomable song;" and this his *Divine Comedy*, the most remarkable of all modern Books, is the result. It was a work of sweat and blood and after finishing it Dante passed away at the age of fifty-six. He was buried in Ravenna, away from his native land.

Carlyle says that he holds Dante in the highest esteem while talking about his *Divine Comedy*, which according to Carlyle is a Song where melody and words weave together: "...for the essence and material of the work are themselves rhythmic. Its depth, and rapt passion and sincerity, makes it musical; go deep enough, there is music everywhere. A true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony, reigns in it, proportionates it all: architectural; which also partakes of the character of music." It is also the sincerest of all poems, for it "came deep out of the author's heart of hearts; and it goes deep, and through long generations, into ours." Reiterating Dante's extraordinary talent, Carlyle describes the Book as if it was produced from the wrenching of his soul. And, this is not an overview but each part of the Book is written with intense feeling, hence it appears as the truth. Each part complements the other, fits just perfectly, lacking nothing: "It is the soul of Dante, and in this the soul of the middle ages, rendered forever rhythmically visible there. No light task; a right intense one: but a task which is done." Carlyle argues that Dante does not come across as a rigid catholic, but instead as a partisan due to the times he was living in and due to his own nature: "His greatness has, in all senses, concentrated itself into fiery emphasis and depth. He is world-great not because he is worldwide, but because he is world-deep. Through all objects he pierces as it were down into the heart of Being. I know nothing so intense as Dante." Referring to his work, he underscores the fact that it is not only a vibrant work but also a very noble attempt from one's soul. This is because Dante, just as he is intense in his nature and character, is powerful and passionate in his work, delving into the essence of it.

The work present the unseen world as perceived within the framework of Christianity during the Middle Ages but it did not remain confined to a particular period. For the times to come, and for all people, the work became unforgettable. Perhaps, only Dante could have done this. The following words of Carlyle reflect his admiration for Dante: "One remark I may make: the contrast in this respect between the Hero-Poet and the Hero-Prophet. In a hundred years, Mahomet, as we saw, had his Arabians at Grenada and at Delhi; Dante's Italians seem to be yet very much where they were. Shall we say, then, Dante's effect on the world was small in comparison? Not so: his arena is far more restricted; but also it is far nobler, clearer; - perhaps not less but more important. Mahomet speaks to great masses of men, in the coarse dialect adapted to such; a dialect filled with inconsistencies, crudities, follies: on the great masses alone can he act, and there with good and with evil strangely blended. Dante speaks to the noble, the pure and great, in all times and places. Neither does he grow obsolete, as the other does. Dante burns as a pure star, fixed there in the firmament, at which the great and the high of all ages kindle themselves: he is the possession of all the chosen of the world for uncounted time. Dante, one calculates, may long survive Mahomet. In this way the balance may be made straight again."

### **34.3.3 Part III: Shakespeare**

Carlyle says that just as Dante was instrumental during the Middle Ages in bringing in religion in the lives in a form of eternal rhythm, connecting men to their inner life, Shakespeare, in modern Europe, underscored the musical notes of man's outer life: "its chivalries, courtesies, humors, ambitions, what practical way of thinking, acting, looking at the world, men then had." In other words, Carlyle argues: "Dante has given us the Faith or soul; Shakspeare, in a not less noble way, has given us the Practice or body." Shakespeare has achieved that status and ranking as to be placed on a pedestal at par with Homer and Dante. Carlyle claims that as in the writings of Homer we can envision Old Greece, similarly

Shakespeare's works captures Old Europe in different ways. According to Carlyle, the "sovereign" poet, Shakespeare, "with his seeing eye, with his perennial singing voice, was sent to take note" of the changing times in Europe. Describing Shakespeare as great, quiet, complete, and self-sufficing, and hence having never been heard of as a Poet, Carlyle says that the man has been satisfied in the confines of his rustic life.

All events are interconnected in a way, and in this manner too, the world gets to hear of the great poet Shakespeare. Carlyle uses nothing but superlatives to praise Shakespeare. He calls him priceless; calmness of depth; placid of joyous strength; great soul, true and clear; like a tranquil unfathomable sea. The ease with which Shakespeare achieves perfection is puzzling to Carlyle. Shakespeare is further on compared to an immaculately built house which makes us forget the rude disorderly quarry it was built from. The finished product, that is, Shakespeare, is so perfect, that we forget from what raw material he was made with. In the same manner, his finished plays are just as perfect as he is, and discerning the raw material used to make the play is not possible. The insight with which Shakespeare arranged the plot in his plays is in itself an art and shows the true intelligence of the man. Carlyle asserts that not even the scientific works of intellect of Sir Francis Bacon is earthly and secondary in comparison to Shakespeare, implying Shakespeare's work to be divine. If anyone from the modern times could be compared to Shakespeare, Carlyle believes that only the German Poet Goethe is somewhat comparable to the English Poet.

Furthermore, defining Shakespeare's faculty as that of "superiority of Intellect," Carlyle poses a question as to what faculties are. He argues that faculties are debated as things that are distinctive and can be separated from the being or perhaps amputated like the organs of the body and this, he insists, is a major blunder. Moreover, concepts like man's "intellectual nature," and "moral nature," are again taken to be as if they were divisible, and existed apart, which are wrong notions. Though in the manner of

speaking this is how they appear or are uttered, yet they should not be taken as true and final understanding of the matter. It is essential to note and be reminded of that these division or distinctions are merely language and that "man's spiritual nature, the vital Force which dwells in him, is essentially one and indivisible; that what we call imagination, fancy, understanding, and so forth, are but different figures of the same Power of Insight, all indissolubly connected with each other, physiognomically related; that if we knew one of them, we might know all of them." Explaining further, Carlyle says that without limbs a man might still walk but without morality, intellect, he would be a complete misfit.

For Carlyle, Shakespeare is not only superior intellectual, but much more than that. He underscores Shakespeare's skill at amalgamating the intellectual and moral nature of man. He does this beautifully in his works so there is continuity in nature. He calls Shakespeare the greatest intellect most of which isn't seen by many. Carlyle terms this as the, 'Unconscious Intellect' and also claims that there is more virtue in Shakespeare than he is even aware of. In his speech he quotes Novalis' opinion of the writer saying, "Those dramas of him are products of nature too, deep as Nature as herself." Carlyle believes Shakespeare's art is not Artifice but something that grows from the depths of nature. He possesses natural talent which pours out when he pens his work, as Carlyle says: "The very perfection of the house, as if Nature herself had made it, hides the builder's merit. Perfect, more perfect than any other man, we may call Shakespeare in this: he discerns, knows as by instinct, what condition he works under, what his materials are, what his own force and its relation to them is. It is not a transitory glance of insight that will suffice; it is deliberate illumination of the whole matter; it is a calmly seeing eye; a great intellect, in short."

However, despite knowing the poet so well, we don't know much about his own life's sorrows or struggles. It bewilders Carlyle "how a man delineate a Hamlet, a Coralanus, a Macbeth, so many sufferings heroic heart, if his own heroic hero had never suffered," at the same time all of

this is juxtaposed with overflowing love of laughter. Nonetheless, he had the fortitude and won the proverbial battle as far as comparison with Dante is concerned. This victory can be seen through all his writings. Thomas Carlyle through the words of August Wilhelm Schlegel and Marlborough reveals to us the historic nature of Shakespeare's works. While Wilhelm Schlegel calls them 'National Epic' Marlborough confesses to have learnt English history only through reading of his plays.

#### **34.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

##### **34.4.1 Fill in the Blanks:**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ as a heroic figure belongs to all ages.
- b) Men worship the \_\_\_\_\_ of great men.
- c) Carlyle refers to Dante's masterpiece called \_\_\_\_\_.
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ embodies the outer life, while \_\_\_\_\_ reflects the inner life.

##### **34.4.2 Write true or false on basis of the reading of the essay:**

- a) Nature does not make even the great men of the same mould.
- b) Poet and Prophet differ in our notions of the mind.
- c) Poet and Prophet do not intersect each other, and can be disjoined.
- d) Dante had a happy married life.
- e) Carlyle gives his highest praise saying that divine comedy is genuinely a song.

#### **34.5 ANSWER KEY**

##### **34.5.1 Fill in the Blanks:**

Poet, shows, *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare, Dante

True/False: true, true, false, false, true

### **34.6. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

34.6.1 Referring to Dante's portrait by Giotte, discuss how Carlyle describes Dante.

34.6.2 Carlyle calls Shakespeare as the chief of all poets. Comment.

34.6.3 With reference to Carlyle's essay, how do poets prove to be heroes?

### **34.7 LET US SUM UP**

Carlyle believes that every man strives to model himself after the great men, to live the virtues that they embody, to strive for the status that these men have achieved. They are the original men, the true men of each era, whose truth stretches on beyond their times. He underscores that Hero could be the Poet and cites Dante and Shakespeare to elucidate his idea. He describes them and their work are memorable and superior for all times.

### **34.8. SUGGESTED READING**

- \* Froude, J.A. *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of Life, 1795-1835* Longmans, 1970)
- \* Sanders, C.R., K.J. Fielding, and C de L Ryals. *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*. Duke University Press, 1970).

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