

PROSE II

Edited By

Dr. Digvijay Pandya

Printed by
USI PUBLICATIONS
2/31, Nehru Enclave, Kalkaji Ext.,
New Delhi-110019
for
Lovely Professional University
Phagwara

SYLLABUS

Prose II

Objectives:

- To introduce essay as a specific genre of literature and discuss its various aspects
- To improve students' understanding of essay writing and its critical and analytical aspects
- To discuss the stylistic features of the essayists included in the syllabus

Sr. No.	Content
1	Hazlitt—On Genius And Common Sense: Introduction, Detailed Study, Critical appreciation. Hazlitt—On the Importance of the Learned: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis
2	David Hume—Of Essay Writing: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis
3	Harriet Martineau—On Marriage: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis. Harriet Martineau—On Women: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis
4	Swift—Hints Towards An Essay On Conversation: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis. Swift-Thoughts on various subjects: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis
5	Eliot-Tradition And Individual Talent: Introduction and Detailed Study, Critical appreciation cum analysis. G.K. Chesterton- On Lying In Bed: Introduction and

CONTENTS

Unit 1:	Hazlitt—On Genius And Common Sense-Introduction *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	1
Unit 2:	Hazlitt—On Genius and Common Sense: Detailed Study *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	25
Unit 3:	Hazlitt—On Genius and Common Sense: Critical Appreciation *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	40
Unit 4:	Hazlitt—On The Ignorance of The Learned: Introduction and Detailed Study *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	57
Unit 5:	Hazlitt—On The Ignorance of The Learned: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	67
Unit 6:	David Hume—Of Essay Writing: Introduction and Detailed Study *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	74
Unit 7:	David Hume—Of Essay Writing: Critical Appreciation and Analysis *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	89
Unit 8:	Harriet Martineau—On Marriage: Introduction and Detailed Study *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	115
Unit 9:	Harriet Martineau—On Marriage: Critical Appreciation Cum Analysis *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	126
Unit 10:	Harriet Martineau—On Women: Introduction and Detailed Study *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	137
Unit 11:	Harriet Martineau—On Women: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	146
Unit 12:	Swift—Hints Towards an Essay on Conversation: Introduction and Detailed Study *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	161
Unit 13:	Swift—Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	169
Unit 14:	Swift: Thoughts on Various Subjects: Introduction and Detailed Study *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	179
Unit 15:	Swift: Thoughts on Various Subjects: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	191
Unit 16:	T.S. Eliot: Tradition and Individual Talent: Introduction and Detailed Study *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	196
Unit 17:	Eliot-Tradition And Individual Talent: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	203
Unit 18:	G.K. Chesterton—On Lying In Bed: Introduction and Detailed Study *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	218
Unit 19:	G.K. Chesterton—On Lying In Bed: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	224

Notes

Unit 1: Hazlitt-On Genius And Common Sense-Introduction

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
1.1 Life and Works
1.2 Success and Trouble
1.3 Solitude and Infatuation
1.4 The Spirit of the Age
1.5 Summary
1.6 Key-Words
1.7 Review Questions
1.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about Hazlitt's Life and Works
- Understand the essay On Genius and Common Sense

Introduction

William Hazlitt, the son of an Irish Unitarian clergyman, was born in Maidstone, Kent, on 10th April, 1778. His father was a friend of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. As a result of supporting the American Revolution, Rev. Hazlitt and his family were forced to leave Kent and live in Ireland.

The family returned to England in 1787 and settled at Wem in Shropshire. At the age of fifteen William was sent to be trained for the ministry at New Unitarian College at Hackney in London. The college had been founded by Joseph Priestley and had a reputation for producing freethinkers. In 1797 Hazlitt lost his desire to become a Unitarian minister and left the college.

While in London Hazlitt became friends with a group of writers with radical political ideas. The group included Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, Thomas Barnes, Henry Brougham, Leigh Hunt, Robert Southey and Lord Byron. At first Hazlitt attempted to become a portrait painter but after a lack of success he turned to writing.

Charles Lamb introduced Hazlitt to William Godwin and other important literary figures in London. In 1805 Joseph Johnson published Hazlitt's first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. The following year Hazlitt published *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*, an attack on William Pitt and his government's foreign policy. Hazlitt opposed England's war with France and its consequent heavy taxation. This was followed by a series of articles and pamphlets on political corruption and the need to reform the voting system.

Hazlitt began writing for *The Times* and in 1808 married the editor's sister, Sarah Stoddart. His friend, Thomas Barnes, was the newspaper's parliamentary reporter. Later, Barnes was to become the editor of the newspaper. In 1810 he published the *New and Improved Grammar of the English Language*.

Hazlitt also contributed to *The Examiner*, a radical journal edited by Leigh Hunt. Later, Hazlitt wrote for the *Edinburgh Review*, the Yellow Dwarf and the London Magazine. In these journals

Notes

Hazlitt produced a series of essays on art, drama, literature and politics. During this period he established himself as England's leading expert on the writings of William Shakespeare.

Hazlitt wrote several books on literature including *Characters of Shakespeare* (1817), *A View of the English Stage* (1818), *English Poets* (1818) and *English Comic Writers* (1819). In these books he urged the artist to be aware of his social and political responsibilities. Hazlitt continued to write about politics and his most important books on this subject is *Political Essays with Sketches of Public Characters* (1819). In the book Hazlitt explains how the admiration of power turns many writers into "intellectual pimps and hirelings of the press."



In 1813 Hazlitt was employed as the parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, the country's leading Whig newspaper. However, in his articles, Hazlitt criticized all political parties.

Hazlitt's marriage to Sarah ended in 1823 as a result of an affair with a maid, Sarah Walker. Hazlitt wrote an account of this relationship in his book *Liber Amoris*. In 1824 Hazlitt married Isabella Bridgewater but this relationship only lasted a year.

In the *The Spirit of the Age: Contemporary Portraits* (1825) Hazlitt provides a series of contemporary portraits including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, William Cobbett, William Godwin and William Wilberforce. This was followed by *The Plain Speaker* (1826) and *Life of Napoleon* (4 volumes, 1828-30). William Hazlitt died in poverty of stomach cancer on 18th September 1830.

11.1 Life and Works

Background

The family of Hazlitt's father were Irish Protestants who moved from the county of Antrim to Tipperary in the early 18th century. Also named William Hazlitt, Hazlitt's father attended the University of Glasgow (where he was taught by Adam Smith), receiving a master's degree in 1760. Not entirely content with his Presbyterian faith, he became a Unitarian minister in England. In 1764 he became pastor at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, where in 1766 he married Grace Loftus, daughter of a recently deceased ironmonger. Of their many children, only three survived infancy. The first of these, John (later known as a portrait painter) was born in 1767 at Marshfield in Gloucestershire, where the Reverend William Hazlitt had accepted a new pastorate after his marriage. In 1770, the elder Hazlitt accepted yet another position and moved with his family to Maidstone, Kent, where his first and only surviving daughter, Margaret (usually known as "Peggy"), was born that year.

Childhood

House in Wem, Shropshire where the Reverend William Hazlitt and his family lived between 1787 and 1813 William, the youngest of the surviving Hazlitt children, was born in Mitre Lane, Maidstone, in 1778. In 1780, when he was two, his family began a migratory existence that was to last several years. From Maidstone his father took them to Bandon, County Cork, Ireland; and from Bandon in 1783 to the United States, where the elder Hazlitt preached, lectured, and founded the First Unitarian Church at Boston, Massachusetts. In 1786–87 the family returned to England and lived at Wem, in Shropshire. William would remember little of his years in America, save the taste of barberries.

Notes

Education

Hazlitt was educated at home and at a local school until 1793, when his father sent him to a Unitarian seminary on what was then the outskirts of London, the Unitarian New College at Hackney (commonly referred to as Hackney College). Although Hazlitt stayed there for only about two years, its impact was enormous.

The curriculum at Hackney was very broad, including a grounding in the Greek and Latin classics, mathematics, history, government, science, and, of course, religion.Much of this was traditional; however, the tutelage having been strongly influenced by eminent Dissenting thinkers of the day like Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, there was also much that was nonconformist. Priestley, whom Hazlitt had read and who was also one of his teachers, was an impassioned commentator on political issues of the day. This, along with the turmoil in the wake of the French Revolution, sparked in Hazlitt and his classmates lively debates on these issues, as they saw their world being transformed around them.

Changes were taking place within the young Hazlitt as well. While, out of respect for his father, Hazlitt never openly broke with his religion, he suffered a loss of faith, and left Hackney before completing his preparation for the ministry.

Although he rejected the Unitarian theology, Hazlitt's time at Hackney left him with much more than religious scepticism. He had read widely and formed habits of independent thought and respect for the truth that remained with him for life.He had thoroughly absorbed a belief in liberty and the rights of man, and of the mind as an active force which, by disseminating knowledge, through both the sciences and the arts, could reinforce the natural tendency in humanity toward the good. He had had impressed upon him the ability of the individual, working both alone and within a mutually supportive community, to effect beneficial change by adhering to strongly held principles. The belief of many Unitarian thinkers in the natural disinterestedness of the human mind had also laid a foundation for the young Hazlitt's own philosophical explorations along those lines. And, though harsh experience and disillusionment later compelled him to qualify some of his early ideas about human nature, he was left with a hatred of tyranny and persecution that he retained to his last days.

The young philosopher

Returning home, around 1795, his thoughts were directed in more secular channels, encompassing not only politics but, increasingly, modern philosophy, which he had begun to read with fascination at Hackney. He spent much of his time in intensive study of English, Scottish, and Irish thinkers like John Locke, David Hartley, George Berkeley, and David Hume, and French thinkers like Claude Adrien Helvétius, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, the Marquis de Condorcet, and Baron d'Holbach. From then on Hazlitt's goal was to become a philosopher. His thoughts were focused on man as a social and political animal, and, even more intensely, on the philosophy of mind, what would later be called psychology.

In this period he discovered Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who became one of the most important influences on the budding philosopher's thought, and Edmund Burke, whose writing style impressed him enormously. He was painstakingly working out a treatise on the "natural disinterestedness of the human mind", meant to disprove the idea that man is naturally selfish, a fundamental concept in most of the philosophy of the day. Hazlitt's treatise would not be published for a number of years, after further reading, and after other changes had occurred to alter the course of his career, but to the end of his life he would think of himself as a philosopher.

Besides residing with his father while trying to find his voice and work out his thoughts as a philosopher, he often in these years stayed with his older brother John, who had studied under Joshua Reynolds and was following a career as a portrait painter. He also spent delighted evenings at the theatre in London, but did not yet know how this too would be important to his later

Notes

writing. Mostly at this time he led a contemplative existence, still feeling frustrated in being unable to express on paper the thoughts and feelings that churned within him. The course of this existence was now to be interrupted by a life-changing event that, with its aftermath, had an impact on his career as a writer that Hazlitt in retrospect believed to have been greater than any other.

First acquaintance with poets

In January 1798, Hazlitt encountered, preaching at the Unitarian chapel in Shrewsbury, the minister Samuel Taylor Coleridge, soon much better known as a poet, critic, and philosopher. He was dazzled. "I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres", he wrote years later in his essay "My First Acquaintance with Poets". "Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion."

Later still, long after they had parted ways, Hazlitt would speak of Coleridge as "the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius".That Hazlitt learned to express his thoughts "in motley imagery or quaint allusion", that his understanding "ever found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge", he later wrote. In conversation afterwards, Coleridge for his part expressed interest in the younger man's germinating philosophical ideas and offered encouragement.

In April Hazlitt joined Coleridge at his residence in Nether Stowey, where they both spent time with the poet William Wordsworth. Again, Hazlitt was enraptured. While he was not immediately struck by Wordsworth's appearance, when he observed the look in Wordsworth's eye as he contemplated a sunset, he reflected, "With what eyes these poets see nature!" On that occasion given the opportunity to read the *Lyrical Ballads* in manuscript, Hazlitt saw that Wordsworth had the mind of a true poet, and he had created something entirely new.

At that time, the three shared a passion for the ideas of liberty and rights of man. Tramping back and forth across the countryside, they talked of poetry, philosophy, and the political movements that were changing the earth. This unity of spirit was not to last, but it validated for Hazlitt, just twenty years old, the idea that there is much to be learned and appreciated in poetry as well as in the philosophy to which he was already devoted. These experiences also encouraged him to pursue his own thinking and writing.Coleridge, on his part, later revealed that he had been highly impressed by Hazlitt's promise as a thinker: "He sends well-headed and well-feathered Thoughts straight forwards to the mark with a Twang of the Bow-string."[33]

The itinerant painter

Meanwhile, the fact remained that Hazlitt had chosen not to follow a pastoral career. Although he never abandoned his goal of writing a philosophical treatise on the disinterestedness of the human mind, it had to be put aside indefinitely. Still dependent on his father, he was now obliged to earn his own living. Artistic talent seemed to run on his mother's side of the family. Starting in 1798 he became increasingly fascinated by paintings. His brother, John, had by now become a successful painter of miniature portraits. So it occurred to William that he might earn a living similarly, and he began to take lessons from John.

Hazlitt also visited various picture galleries, and he began to get work doing portraits, painting somewhat in the style of Rembrandt. And so he managed to make something of a living for a time, travelling back and forth between London and the country, wherever he could get work. By 1802, his work was considered good enough that a portrait he had recently painted of his father was accepted for exhibition by the Royal Academy.

Later in 1802, Hazlitt was commissioned to travel to Paris and copy several works of the old masters hanging in the Louvre. This was one of the great opportunities of his life. Over a period of three months, he spent long hours in rapture studying the paintings. He later thought long and

Notes

hard about what he had seen, and this provided substance for a considerable body of art criticism some years afterward. He also had an opportunity to see Napoleon (at a distance), whom he idolised as the rescuer of the common man from the oppression of royal "Legitimacy". Eighteen years later, Hazlitt reviewed nostalgically the "pleasure in painting, which none but painters know", and all the delight he found in this art, in his essay "On the Pleasure of Painting".

Back in England, Hazlitt again travelled up into the country, having obtained more work painting portraits. One commission again proved fortunate, as it brought him back in touch with Coleridge and Wordsworth. He painted portraits of both, as well as of Coleridge's son Hartley. Always endeavouring to paint the best pictures he could, even if they failed to flatter their subjects, he produced results not found satisfactory by either poet. (And yet Wordsworth and their friend Robert Southey thought his portrait of Coleridge a better likeness than one by the celebrated James Northcote.)

In this period also a mishap occurred that shadowed his life for many years. The young Hazlitt rarely felt comfortable in the society of women, especially those of the upper and middle classes. Tormented by sexual desires, he sought the company of prostitutes and "loose women" of lower social and economic strata. During his last stay in the Lake District with Coleridge, his actions led to a near disastrous blunder, as a misunderstanding of the intentions of one local woman led to an altercation, followed by Hazlitt's precipitous retreat from the town under cover of darkness. This strained his relationship with Coleridge and Wordsworth, which was already coming apart at the seams for other reasons.

Marriage, family, and friends

In 1803, Hazlitt met Charles Lamb and his sister Mary. There was an immediate sympathy between William and Charles, and they became fast friends. The friendship, though sometimes strained by Hazlitt's difficult ways, lasted until the end of Hazlitt's life.He was fond of Mary as well, and—ironically in view of her intermittent fits of insanity—he considered her the most reasonable woman he had ever met. (Coming from one whose view of women at times took a misogynistic turn, this was high praise indeed.)

Portrait of Charles Lamb by William Hazlitt, 1804

Hazlitt frequented the society of the Lambs for the next several years. He was not getting much work as a painter, but now he finally found the opportunity to complete his philosophical treatise, which was published in 1805 as *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind*. This gained him little notice as an original thinker, and no money. Hazlitt's outrage at events then taking place in English politics in reaction to Napoleon's wars led to his writing and publishing, at his own expense (though he had almost no money), a political pamphlet, *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs* (1806). Finally, he began to find enough work to support himself, if just barely. Although the treatise he valued above anything else he wrote was never, at least in his own lifetime, recognised for what he believed was its true worth, it brought him attention as one who had a grasp of contemporary philosophy. He therefore was commissioned to abridge and write a preface to a now obscure work of mental philosophy, *The Light of Nature Pursued* by Abraham Tucker (originally published in seven volumes from 1765 to 1777), which appeared in 1807 and may have had some influence on his own later thinking.

Hazlitt also contributed three letters to William Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register* at this time, all scathing critiques of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798 and later editions). Another project that came his way was a compilation of parliamentary speeches, released in 1807 as *The Eloquence of the British Senate*. In the prefaces to the speeches, he began to show a skill he would later develop to perfection, the art of the pithy character sketch. He was able to get more work as a portrait painter as well.

Notes

In 1808, Hazlitt married Sarah Stoddart, a friend of Mary Lamb and sister of John Stoddart, a journalist who became editor of *The Times* newspaper in 1814. Shortly before the wedding, John Stoddart established a trust into which he began paying £100 per year, for the benefit of Hazlitt and his wife—this was a very generous gesture, but Hazlitt detested being supported by his brother-in-law, whose political beliefs he despised.Although incompatibilities would later drive the couple apart, at first the union seemed to work well enough. Miss Stoddart was an unconventional woman who would be accepted by one as unconventional in his way as Hazlitt, and would in turn tolerate his eccentricities. It was hardly a match of love, but at first there were signs of a certain playful, affectionate behaviour between them. They made an agreeable social foursome with the Lambs, who visited them when they set up a household in Winterslow, a village a few miles from Salisbury, Wiltshire, in southern England. The couple had three sons over the next few years, but only one survived infancy—William, born in 1811 (to be the father of William Carew Hazlitt).

Now, as the head of a family, Hazlitt was more than ever in need of money. Through William Godwin, with whom he was frequently in touch, he obtained a commission to write an English grammar, published at the end of 1809 as *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue*. Another project that came his way was the work that was published as *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*, a compilation of autobiographical writing by the recently deceased playwright, novelist, and radical political activist, together with additional material by Hazlitt himself. Though completed in 1810, this work did not see the light of day until 1816, and so provided no financial gain to satisfy the needs of a young husband and father. But Hazlitt had not abandoned his ambitions as a painter. He found opportunities for landscape painting in the environs of Winterslow, and he spent considerable time in London getting commissions for portraits.

In January 1812 Hazlitt embarked on a sometime career as a lecturer, in this first instance in a series of talks on the British philosophers, at the Russell Institution in London. A central thesis of the talks was that Thomas Hobbes, rather than John Locke, had laid the foundations of modern philosophy. After a shaky beginning, Hazlitt gained some attention (as well as much-needed money) by these lectures, and they gave him an opportunity to expound some of his own ideas.

The year 1812 also seems to have been the last in which Hazlitt entertained serious ambitions to make a living as a painter. Although he had demonstrated some talent, the results of his most impassioned efforts always fell far short of the standards he had set for himself by comparison with such masters as Rembrandt, Titian, and Raphael. Nor did his commissioned portraits often please their subjects, as he obstinately refused to sacrifice to flattery what he considered truth. But other opportunities awaited him.

The journalist

In October 1812, Hazlitt was hired by *The Morning Chronicle* as a parliamentary reporter. Soon he met John Hunt, publisher of *The Examiner*, and his younger brother Leigh Hunt, the poet and essayist, who edited the weekly paper. Hazlitt admired both as champions of liberty, and befriended especially the younger Hunt, who found work for him. He began to contribute miscellaneous essays to *The Examiner* in 1813, and the scope of his work for the *Chronicle* was expanded to include drama criticism, literary criticism, and political essays. In 1814 *The Champion* was added to the list of periodicals that accepted Hazlitt's by-now profuse output of literary and political criticism. A critique of Joshua Reynolds' theories about art appeared there as well, one of Hazlitt's major forays into art criticism.

Having by 1814 become established as a journalist, Hazlitt had begun to earn a satisfactory living. A year earlier, with the prospect of a steady income, he had moved his family to a house at 19 York Street, Westminster, which had been occupied by the poet John Milton, whom Hazlitt admired above all other English poets except Shakespeare. As it happened, Hazlitt's landlord was the

Notes

philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham. Hazlitt was to write considerably about both Milton and Bentham over the next few years.

His circle of friends expanded, though he never seems to have been particularly close with any but the Lambs and to an extent Leigh Hunt and the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon. His poor tolerance for any who, he thought, had abandoned the cause of liberty, along with his frequent outspokenness, even tactlessness, in social situations made it difficult for many to feel close to him, and at times he tried the patience of even Charles Lamb. His criticism of Wordsworth's poem *The Excursion* lavished extreme praise on the poet—and equally extreme censure. Wordsworth, who seems to have been unable to tolerate anything less than unqualified praise, was enraged, and relations between the two became cooler than ever.

Though Hazlitt continued to think of himself as a "metaphysician" (less often as a painter; he had by now given up his professional ambitions along those lines), he began to feel comfortable in the role of journalist. His self-esteem received an added boost when in early 1815 he began to contribute regularly to the quarterly *The Edinburgh Review*, the most distinguished periodical on the Whig side of the political fence (its rival *The Quarterly Review* occupied the Tory side). Writing for so highly respected a publication was considered a major step up from writing for weekly papers, and Hazlitt was proud of this connection.

On 18 June 1815, Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. Having idolised Napoleon for years, Hazlitt took it as a personal blow. The event seemed to him to mark the end of hope for the common man against the oppression of "legitimate" monarchy. Profoundly depressed, he took up heavy drinking and was reported to have walked around unshaven and unwashed for weeks. He idolised and spoiled his son, William Jr., but in most respects his household grew increasingly disordered over the next year, his marriage deteriorated, and he spent more and more time away from home. As a part-time drama critic, he found an excuse to spend evening after evening at the theatre. Afterwards he spent time among those friends who could tolerate his irascibility, the number of whom dwindled as a result of his sometimes outrageous behaviour.

Hazlitt continued to produce articles on miscellaneous topics for *The Examiner* and other periodicals, including political diatribes against any whom he felt ignored or minimised the needs and rights of the common man. Defection from the cause of liberty had become easier in light of the oppressive political atmosphere in England at that time, in reaction to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Opposing this tendency, the Hunts were his primary allies. Lamb, who tried to remain uninvolved politically, tolerated his abrasiveness, and that friendship managed to survive, if only just barely in the face of Hazlitt's growing bitterness, short temper, and propensity for hurling invective at friends and foes alike.

For relief from all that weighed on his mind, Hazlitt became a passionate player at a kind of racquet ball similar to the game of Fives (a type of handball of which he was a fan) in that it was played against a wall. He played with savage intensity, dashing around the court like a madman, drenched in sweat, and was accounted a good player. More than just a distraction from his woes, this devotion led to musings on the value of competitive sports and on human skill in general, expressed in writings like his notice of the "Death of John Cavanagh" (a celebrated Fives player) in *The Examiner* on 9 February 1817, and the essay "The Indian Jugglers" in *Table-Talk* (1821).

Early in 1817, a series of Hazlitt's essays that had appeared in *The Examiner* in a regular column called "The Round Table" was collected in book form, including a few contributions by Leigh Hunt. Hazlitt's contributions to *The Round Table* were written somewhat in the manner of the periodical essays of the day, a genre defined by such eighteenth-century magazines as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

Some essays blend Hazlitt's social and psychological observations in a calculatedly thought-provoking way, presenting to the reader the "paradoxes" of human nature. The first of the collected

Notes

essays, "On the Love of Life", explains, "It is our intention, in the course of these papers, occasionally to expose certain vulgar errors, which have crept into our reasonings on men and manners.... The love of life is ... in general, the effect not of our enjoyments, but of our passions".

Again, in "On Pedantry", Hazlitt declares that "The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits ... is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature". In "On Different Sorts of Fame", "In proportion as men can command the immediate and vulgar applause of others, they become indifferent to that which is remote and difficult of attainment". And in "On Good-Nature", "Good nature, or what is often considered as such, is the most selfish of all the virtues...."

Many of the components of Hazlitt's style begin to take shape in these *Round Table* essays. Some of his "paradoxes" are so hyperbolic as to shock when encountered out of context: "All country people hate each other", for example, from the second part of "On Mr. Wordsworth's Excursion". He interweaves quotations from literature old and new. They help drive his points home, and (as some critics have felt) he used quotations as a device as well as anyone ever has, yet all too often he gets the quotes wrong. In one of his essays on Wordsworth he misquotes that very poet:

Though nothing can bring back the hour of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower..

Though Hazlitt was still following the model of the older periodical essayists, these quirks, together with his keen social and psychological insights, began here to coalesce into a style very much his own.

1.2 Success and Trouble

In this period, the state of Hazlitt's marriage continued its downward spiral; he was writing furiously for several periodicals to make ends meet; waiting so far in vain for the collection *The Round Table* to be issued as a book (which it finally was in February 1817); suffering bouts of illness; and making enemies by his venomous political diatribes. He found relief by a change of course, shifting his critical focus from the acting of Shakespeare's plays to the substance of them. The result was *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817), a collection of critical essays on the drama of William Shakespeare.

His approach was something new. There had been criticisms of Shakespeare before, but either they were not comprehensive or they were not aimed at the general reading public. As Ralph Wardle put it, before Hazlitt wrote this book, "no one had ever attempted a comprehensive study of all of Shakespeare, play by play, that readers could read and reread with pleasure as a guide to their understanding and appreciation". Somewhat loosely organised, and even rambling, the studies offer personal appreciations of the plays that are unashamedly enthusiastic. Hazlitt does not present a measured account of the plays' strengths and weaknesses, as did Dr. Johnson, or view them in terms of a "mystical" theory, as Hazlitt thought his contemporary A.W. Schlegel did (though he approves of many of Schlegel's judgements and quotes him liberally). Without apology, he addresses his readers as fellow lovers of Shakespeare and shares with them the beauties of what he thought the finest passages of the plays he liked best.

Readers took to it, the first edition selling out in six weeks. It received favourable reviews as well, not only by Leigh Hunt, a close friend who might have shown bias, but by Francis Jeffrey, the editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, a notice that Hazlitt greatly appreciated. (Hazlitt had contributed to that quarterly, had exchanged business correspondence with Jeffrey, and held him in great respect, but they had never met and were in no sense personal friends.) Jeffrey saw the book not as a learned study of Shakespeare's plays but rather as a loving appreciation of them, and an insightful and eloquent one at that, "a book of considerable originality and genius".

Now looking at the prospect of being out of debt, and enjoying critical and popular acclaim, Hazlitt could relax a bit and bask in the light of his growing fame.

Notes

Meanwhile, however, Hazlitt's reputation in literary circles had become tarnished, apparently by retaliatory rumours spread by such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, whom he had continued to criticise openly for their personal failings in contrast to their earlier actual or potential accomplishments. And the worst was yet to come.

But Hazlitt soon found a new source of satisfaction, along with escape from his financial woes, in a return to the lecture hall. In early 1818 he delivered a series of talks on "the English Poets", from Chaucer to his own time. His presentation was uneven in quality, but ultimately the lectures were judged a success. In making the arrangements for the lectures, he also met Peter George Patmore, Secretary of the Surrey Institution, where the lectures were presented, and soon to become a friend and confidant of Hazlitt's in the most troubled period of the latter's life.

The Surrey Institution lectures were printed in book form, followed by a collection of his drama criticism, *A View of the English Stage*, and the second edition of *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*.[81] Hazlitt's career as a lecturer gained some momentum, and his growing popularity allowed him to get a collection of his political writings published as well, *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*. Lectures on "the English Comic Writers" soon followed, and these as well were published in book form. After them came lectures on dramatists who were Shakespeare's contemporaries, published as *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*. The latter did not go over so well as lectures, but were reviewed enthusiastically after they were published.

More trouble was brewing, however. Hazlitt was attacked brutally in *The Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, both Tory publications. One *Blackwood's* article mocked him as "pimpled Hazlitt", accused him of ignorance, dishonesty, and obscenity, and incorporated vague physical threats. Though Hazlitt was rattled by these attacks, he sought legal advice and sued. The lawsuit against *Blackwood's* was finally settled out of court in his favour. Yet the attacks did not entirely cease. The *Quarterly Review* issued a review of Hazlitt's published lectures in which he was condemned as ignorant and his writing as unintelligible. Such partisan onslaughts brought spirited responses. One, unlike an earlier response to the *Blackwood's* attack that never saw the light of day, was published, as *A Letter to William Gifford, Esq.* (1819; Gifford was the editor of the *Quarterly*). (Among other things, this pamphlet was notable for Hazlitt's use of the term "ultracrepidarian", which he might have coined; see Ultracrepidarianism.) In this pamphlet Hazlitt presented what amounted to an *apologia* for his life and work thus far and showed he was well able to defend himself. Yet Hazlitt's attackers had done their damage. Not only was he personally shaken, he found it more difficult to have his works published, and once more he had to struggle for a living.

1.3 Solitude and Infatuation

His lecturing in particular had drawn to Hazlitt a small group of admirers. Best known today is the poet John Keats, but there were others, such as the diarist and chronicler Henry Crabb Robinson and the novelist Mary Russell Mitford. But the rumours that had been spread demonising him, along with the vilifications of the Tory press, not only hurt his pride but seriously obstructed his ability to earn a living. Income from his lectures had also proved insufficient to keep him afloat.

His thoughts drifted to gloom and misanthropy. His mood was not improved by the fact that by now there was no pretence of keeping up appearances: his marriage had failed. Years earlier he had grown resigned to the lack of love between him and Sarah. He had been visiting prostitutes and displayed more idealised amorous inclinations toward a number of women whose names are lost to history. Now in 1819, he was unable to pay the rent on their rooms at 19 York Street and his family were evicted. That was the last straw for Sarah, who moved into rooms with their son and broke with Hazlitt for good, forcing him to find his own accommodation. He would sometimes see his son and even his wife, with whom he remained on speaking terms, but they were effectively separated.

Notes

For long periods, for solace and so he could concentrate on his writing, he frequently retreated to the country, staying at "The Hut", an inn at Winterslow, near where his wife had some property (he had come to love that countryside at the beginning of his marriage). He shut himself away like a hermit and returned to contributing to periodicals, including the recently reestablished (1820) *London Magazine*, to which he contributed drama criticism and miscellaneous essays. Roman road towards Middle Winterslow, and the route which Hazlitt preferred to take to the village

One idea that particularly bore fruit was that of a series of articles called "Table-Talk". (Many were written expressly for inclusion in the book of the same name, *Table-Talk; or, Original Essays*, which appeared in different editions and forms over the next few years.) These were essays in the "familiar style" of the sort that had begun with Montaigne two centuries earlier, and were greatly admired by Hazlitt. Here he brought his essay writing much closer to the model of the "familiar essay"as distinct from the eighteenth-century periodical essay. The personal "I" was now substituted for the editorial "we". In a preface to a later edition of the book, Hazlitt explained that rather than being scholarly and precise, these essays attempted to combine the "literary and the conversational". As in a conversation between friends, the discussion would often branch off into topics related only in a general way to the main theme, "but which often threw a curious and striking light upon it, or upon human life in general".

Though the essays were structured in the loose manner of conversations held at a table, this was a time when Hazlitt frequently secluded himself in isolation at Winterslow. His motivation is explained in one of the *Table-Talk* essays, "On Living to One's-Self" (January 1821), as not wanting to withdraw completely but rather to become an invisible observer of society. Also here and elsewhere in the series he weaves personal material into more general reflections on life, frequently bringing in long recollections of happy days of his years as an apprentice painter (as in "On the Pleasure of Painting", written in December 1820) as well as other pleasurable recollections of earlier years, "hours ... sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts thereafter" ("On Going a Journey", written January 1822). Hazlitt also had to spend time in London in these years. In another violent contrast, a London lodging house was the stage on which the worst crisis of his life was to play itself out.

In August 1820, he rented a couple of rooms in 9 Southampton Buildings in London from a tailor named Micaiah Walker. Walker's 19-year-old daughter Sarah, who helped with the housekeeping, would bring the new lodger his breakfast. Immediately, Hazlitt became infatuated with Miss Walker, more than 22 years his junior. His brief conversations with Walker cheered him and alleviated the loneliness that he felt from his failed marriage. He dreamed of marrying her, but that would require a divorce from Sarah Hazlitt—no easy matter. Finally, his wife agreed to grant him a Scottish divorce, which would allow him to remarry (as he could not had he been divorced in England).

Sarah Walker was, as some of Hazlitt's friends could see, a fairly ordinary girl. She had aspirations to better herself, and a famous author seemed like a prize catch, but she never really understood Hazlitt. When another lodger named Tomkins came along, she entered into a romantic entanglement with him as well, leading each of her suitors to believe he was the sole object of her affection. With vague words, she evaded absolute commitment until she could decide which she liked better or was the more advantageous catch.

Hazlitt discovered the truth about Tomkins, and from then on his jealousy and suspicions of Sarah Walker's real character afforded him little rest. For months, during the preparations for the divorce and as he tried to earn a living, he alternated between rage and despair, on the one hand, and the comforting if unrealistic thought that she was really "a good girl" and would accept him at last. The divorce was finalised on 17 July 1822, and Hazlitt returned to London to see his beloved—only to find her cold and resistant. They then become involved in angry altercations of jealousy and recrimination. And it was over, though Hazlitt could not for some time persuade himself to believe so. His mind nearly snapped. At his emotional nadir, he contemplated suicide.

Notes

It was with some difficulty that he eventually recovered his equilibrium. In order to ascertain Sarah's true character, he persuaded an acquaintance to take lodgings in the Walkers' building and attempt to seduce Sarah. Hazlitt's friend reported that the attempt seemed to be about to succeed, but she prevented him from taking the ultimate liberty. Her behaviour was as it had been with several other male lodgers, not only Hazlitt, who now concluded that he had been dealing with, rather than an "angel", an "impudent whore", an ordinary "lodging house decoy". Eventually, though Hazlitt could not know this, she had a child by Tomkins and moved in with him.

By pouring out his tale of woe to anyone he happened to meet (including his friends Peter George Patmore and James Sheridan Knowles), he was able to find a cathartic outlet for his misery. But catharsis was also provided by his recording the course of his love in a thinly disguised fictional account, published anonymously in May 1823 as *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion*. (Enough clues were present so that the identity of the writer did not remain hidden for long.) Critics have been divided as to the literary merits of *Liber Amoris*, which is quite unlike anything else Hazlitt ever wrote. Wardle suggests that it was compelling but marred by sickly sentimentality, and also proposes that Hazlitt might even have been anticipating some of the experiments in chronology made by later novelists.

One or two positive reviews appeared, such as the one in the *Globe*, 7 June 1823: "The *Liber Amoris* is unique in the English language; and as, possibly, the first book in its fervour, its vehemency, and its careless exposure of passion and weakness—of sentiments and sensations which the common race of mankind seek most studiously to mystify or conceal—that exhibits a portion of the most distinguishing characteristics of Rousseau, it ought to be generally praised".

However, such complimentary assessments were the rare exception. Whatever its ultimate merits, *Liber Amoris* provided ample ammunition for Hazlitt's detractors, and even some of his closest friends were scandalised. For months he did not even have contact with the Lambs. And the strait-laced Robinson found the book "disgusting", "nauseous and revolting", "low and gross and tedious and very offensive", believing that "it ought to exclude the author from all decent society".As ever, peace of mind proved elusive for William Hazlitt.

The philosopher, again

Unsurprisingly, there were times in this turbulent period when Hazlitt could not focus on his work. But often, as in his self-imposed seclusion at Winterslow, he was able to achieve a "philosophic detachment", and he continued to turn out essays of remarkable variety and literary merit, most of them making up the two volumes of *Table-Talk*. (A number were saved for later publication in *The Plain Speaker* in 1826, while others remained uncollected.)

Some of these essays were in large part retrospectives on the author's own life ("On Reading Old Books" [1821], for example, along with others mentioned above). In others, he invites his readers to join him in gazing at the spectacle of human folly and perversity ("On Will-making" [1821], or "On Great and Little Things" [1821], for example). At times he scrutinises the subtle workings of the individual mind (as in "On Dreams" [1823]); or he invites us to laugh at harmless eccentricities of human nature ("On People with One Idea" [1821]).

Other essays bring into perspective the scope and limitations of the mind, as measured against the vastness of the universe and the extent of human history ("Why Distant Objects Please" [1821/2] and "On Antiquity" [1821] are only two of many). Several others scrutinise the manners and morals of the age (such as "On Vulgarity and Affectation", "On Patronage and Puffing", and "On Corporate Bodies" [all 1821]).

Many of these "Table-Talk" essays display Hazlitt's interest in genius and artistic creativity. There are specific instances of literary or art criticism (for example "On a Landscape of Nicholas Poussin" [1821] and "On Milton's Sonnets" [1822]) but also numerous investigations of the psychology of creativity and genius ("On Genius and Common Sense" [1821], "Whether Genius Is Conscious of

Notes

Its Powers" [1823], and others). In his manner of exploring an idea by antitheses (for example, "On the Past and the Future" [1821], "On the Picturesque and Ideal" [1821]), he contrasts the utmost achievements of human mechanical skill with the nature of artistic creativity in "The Indian Jugglers" [1821].

Hazlitt's fascination with the extremes of human capability in any field led to his writing "The Fight" (published in the February 1822 *New Monthly Magazine*).This essay never appeared in the Table-Talk series or anywhere else in the author's lifetime. A direct, personal account of a prize fight, it was controversial in its time as depicting too "low" a subject.Written at a dismal time in his life—Hazlitt's divorce was pending, and he was far from sure of being able to marry Sarah Walker—the article shows scarcely a trace of his agony. Not quite like any other essay by Hazlitt, it proved to be one of his most popular and was frequently reprinted after his death.

Another article written in this period, "On the Pleasure of Hating" (1823; included in *The Plain Speaker*), is a pure outpouring of spleen, a distillation of all the bitterness of his life to that point. It concludes, "...have I not reason to hate and to despise myself? Indeed I do; and chiefly for not having hated and despised the world enough".

Not only do the "Table-Talk" essays frequently display "trenchant insights into human nature", they at times reflect on the vehicle of those insights and of the literary and art criticism that constitute some of the essays. "On Criticism" (1821) delves into the history and purposes of criticism itself; and "On Familiar Style" (1821 or 1822) reflexively explores at some length the principles behind its own composition, along with that of other essays of this kind by Hazlitt and some of his contemporaries, like Lamb and Cobbett.

In *Table-Talk*, Hazlitt had found the most congenial format for this thoughts and observations. A broad panorama of the triumphs and follies of humanity, an exploration of the quirks of the mind, of the nobility but more often the meanness and sheer malevolence of human nature, the collection was knit together by a web of self-consistent thinking, a skein of ideas woven from a lifetime of close reasoning on life, art, and literature.He illustrated his points with bright imagery and pointed analogies, among which were woven pithy quotations drawn from the history of English literature, primarily the poets, from Chaucer to his contemporaries Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats. Most often, he quoted his beloved Shakespeare and to a lesser extent Milton. As he explained in "On Familiar Style", he strove to fit the exact words to the things he wanted to express and often succeeded—in a way that would bring home his meaning to any literate person of some education and intelligence.

These essays were not quite like anything ever done before. They attracted some admiration during Hazlitt's lifetime, but it was only long after his death that their reputation achieved full stature, increasingly often considered among the best essays ever written in English. Nearly two centuries after they were written, for example, biographer Stanley Jones deemed Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* and *The Plain Speaker* together to constitute "the major work of his life", and critic David Bromwich called many of these essays "more observing, original, and keen-witted than any others in the language".

In 1823 Hazlitt also published anonymously *Characteristics: In the Manner of Rochefoucault's Maxims*, a collection of aphorisms modelled explicitly, as Hazlitt noted in his preface, on the *Maximes* (1665–1693) of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld. Never quite as cynical as La Rochefoucauld's, many, however, reflect his attitude of disillusionment at this stage of his life. Primarily, these 434 maxims took to an extreme his method of arguing by paradoxes and acute contrasts.

There are some persons who never succeed, from being too indolent to undertake anything; and others who regularly fail, because the instant they find success in their power, they grow indifferent, and give over the attempt.

Notes

But they also lacked the benefit of Hazlitt's extended reasoning and lucid imagery, and were never included among his greatest works. Recovery and second marriage

At the beginning of 1824, though worn out by thwarted passion and the venomous attacks on his character following *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt was beginning to recover his equilibrium. Pressed for money as always, he continued to write for various periodicals, including *The Edinburgh Review*. To *The New Monthly Magazine* he supplied more essays in the "Table-Talk" manner, and he produced some art criticism, published in that year as *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries of England*.

He also found relief, finally, from the Sarah Walker imbroglio. In 1823, Hazlitt had met Isabella Bridgwater (*née* Shaw), who married him in March or April 1824, of necessity in Scotland, as Hazlitt's divorce was not recognised in England. Little is known about this Scottish-born widow of a planter in the West Indies, or about her interaction with Hazlitt. She may have been attracted to the idea of marrying a well-known author. For Hazlitt, she offered an escape from loneliness and to an extent from financial worries, as she possessed an independent income. The arrangement seems to have had a strong element of convenience for both of them. Certainly Hazlitt nowhere in his writings suggests that this marriage was the love match he had been seeking, nor does he mention his new wife at all.

In any case, the union afforded the two of them the opportunity to travel. First, they toured parts of Scotland, then, later in 1824, began a European tour lasting over a year.

1.4 The Spirit of the Age

Before Hazlitt and his new bride set off for the continent, he submitted, among the miscellany of essays that year, one to the *New Monthly* on "Jeremy Bentham", the first in a series entitled "Spirits of the Age". Several more of the kind followed over the next few months, at least one in the *Examiner*. Together with some newly written, and one brought in from the "Table-Talk" series, they were collected in book form in 1825 as *The Spirit of the Age: Or, Contemporary Portraits*.

These sketches of twenty-five men, prominent or otherwise notable as characteristic of the age, came easily to Hazlitt. In his days as a political reporter he had observed many of them at close range. Others he knew personally, and for years their philosophy or poetry had been the subject of his thoughts and lectures.

There were philosophers, social reformers, poets, politicians, and a few who did not fall neatly into any of these categories. Bentham, Godwin, and Malthus, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron were some of the most prominent writers; Wilberforce and Canning were prominent in the political arena; and a few who were hard to classify, such as The Rev. Edward Irving, the preacher, William Gifford, the satirist and critic, and the recently deceased Horne Tooke, a lawyer, politician, grammarian, and wit.

Many of the sketches presented their subjects as seen in daily life. We witness, for example, Bentham "tak[ing] a turn in his garden" with a guest, espousing his plans for "a code of laws 'for some island in the watery waste'", or playing the organ as a relief from incessant musings on vast schemes to improve the lot of mankind. As Bentham's neighbour for some years, Hazlitt had had good opportunity to observe the reformer and philosopher at first hand.

He had already devoted years to pondering much of the thinking espoused by several of these figures. Thoroughly immersed in the Malthusian controversy, for example, Hazlitt had published *A Reply to the Essay on Population* as early as 1807, and the essay on Malthus is a distillation of Hazlitt's earlier criticisms.

Where he finds it applicable, Hazlitt brings his subjects together in pairs, setting off one against the other. So here he points out that, for all the limitations of Godwin's reasoning, as given in that essay, Malthus comes off worse: "Nothing...could be more illogical...than the whole of Mr. Malthus's

Notes

reasoning applied as an answer...to Mr. Godwin's book".Most distasteful to Hazlitt was the application of "Mr. Malthus's 'gospel'", greatly influential at the time. Many in positions of power had used Malthus's theory to deny the poor relief in the name of the public good, to prevent their propagating the species beyond the means to support it; while on the rich no restraints whatsoever were imposed.

Yet, softening the asperities of his critique, Hazlitt rounds out his sketch by conceding that "Mr. Malthus's style is correct and elegant; his tone of controversy mild and gentlemanly; and the care with which he has brought his facts and documents together, deserves the highest praise".

His portraits of such Tory politicians as Lord Eldon are unrelenting, as might be expected. But elsewhere his characterisations are more balanced, more even-tempered, than similar accounts in past years. Notably, there are portraits of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, which are, to an extent, essences of his former thoughts about these poets—and those thoughts had been profuse. He had earlier directed some of his most vitriolic attacks against them for having replaced the humanistic and revolutionary ideas of their earlier years with staunch support of the Establishment. Now he goes out of his way to qualify his earlier assessments.

In "Mr. Wordsworth", for example, Hazlitt notes that "it has been said of Mr. Wordsworth, that 'he hates conchology, that he hates the Venus of Medicis.'..." (Hazlitt's own words in an article some years back). Indirectly apologising for his earlier tirade, Hazlitt here brings in a list of writers and artists, like Milton and Poussin, for whom Wordsworth did show appreciation.

Coleridge, whom Hazlitt had once idolised, gets special attention, but, again, with an attempt to moderate earlier criticisms. At an earlier time Hazlitt had dismissed most of Coleridge's prose as "dreary trash". Much of *The Friend* was "sophistry".The *Statesman's Manual* was not to be read "with any patience". *A Lay Sermon* was enough to "make a fool...of any man". For betraying their earlier liberal principles, both Coleridge and Southey were "sworn brothers in the same cause of righteous apostacy".

Now, again, the harshness is softened, and the focus shifts to Coleridge's positive attributes. One of the most learned and brilliant men of the age, Coleridge may not be its greatest writer—but he is its "most impressive talker". Even his "apostacy" is somewhat excused by noting that in recent times, when "Genius stopped the way of Legitimacy...it was to be...crushed", regrettably but understandably leading many former liberals to protect themselves by siding with the powers that be.

Southey, whose political about-face was more blatant than that of the others, still comes in for a measure of biting criticism: "not truth, but self-opinion is the ruling principle of Mr. Southey's mind".Yet Hazlitt goes out of his way to admire where he can. For example, "Mr. Southey's prose-style can scarcely be too much praised", and "In all the relations and charities of private life, he is correct, exemplary, generous, just".

Hazlitt contrasts Scott and Byron; he skewers his nemesis Gifford; he praises—not without his usual strictures—Jeffrey; and goes on to portray, in one way or another, such notables as Mackintosh, Brougham, Canning, and Wilberforce.

His praise of the poet Thomas Campbell has been cited as one major instance where Hazlitt's critical judgement proved wrong. Hazlitt can scarcely conceal his enthusiasm for such poems as Gertrude of Wyoming, but neither the poems nor Hazlitt's judgement of them have withstood the test of time. His friends Hunt and Lamb get briefer coverage, and—Hazlitt was never one to mince words—they come in for some relatively gentle chiding amid the praise. One American author makes an appearance, Washington Irving, under his pen name of Geoffrey Crayon.

In this manner twenty-five character sketches combine to "form a vivid panorama of the age". Through it all, the author reflects on the Spirit of the Age as a whole, as, for example, "The present

Notes

is an age of talkers, and not of doers; and the reason is, that the world is growing old. We are so far advanced in the Arts and Sciences, that we live in retrospect, and doat on past achievements".

Some critics have thought the essays in *The Spirit of the Age* highly uneven in quality and somewhat hastily thrown together, at best "a series of perceptive but disparate and impressionistic sketches of famous contemporaries". It has also been noted, however, that the book is more than a mere portrait gallery. A pattern of ideas ties them together. No thesis is overtly stated, but some thoughts are developed consistently throughout.

Roy Park has noted in particular Hazlitt's critique of excessive abstraction as a major flaw in the period's dominant philosophy and poetry. ("Abstraction", in this case, could be that of religion or mysticism as well as science.) This is the reason, according to Hazlitt, why neither Coleridge, nor Wordsworth, nor Byron could write effective drama. More representative of the finer spirit of the age was poetry that turned inward, focusing on individual perceptions, projections of the poets' sensibilities. The greatest of this type of poetry was Wordsworth's, and that succeeded as far as any contemporary writing could.

Even if it took a century and a half for many of the book's virtues to be realised, enough was recognised at the time to make the book one of Hazlitt's most successful. Unsurprisingly the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine* lamented that the pillory had fallen into disuse and wondered what "adequate and appropriate punishment there is that we can inflict on this rabid caitiff". But the majority of the reviewers were enthusiastic. For example, the *Eclectic Review* marvelled at his ability to "hit off a likeness with a few artist-like touches" and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, with a few reservations, found his style "deeply impregnated with the spirit of the masters of our language, and strengthened by a rich infusion of golden ore..."

European tour

On 1 September 1824, Hazlitt and his wife began a tour of the European continent, crossing the English Channel by steamboat from Brighton to Dieppe and proceeding from there by coach and sometimes on foot to Paris and Lyon, crossing the Alps in Savoy, then continuing through Italy to Florence and Rome, the most southerly point on their route. Crossing the Apennines, they travelled to Venice, Verona, and Milan, then into Switzerland to Vevey and Geneva. Finally they returned via Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France again, arriving at Dover, England, on 16 October 1825.

There were two extended stops on this excursion: Paris, where the Hazlitts remained for three months; and Vevey, Switzerland, where they rented space in a farmhouse for three months. During those lengthy pauses, Hazlitt accomplished some writing tasks, primarily submitting an account of his trip in several instalments to *The Morning Chronicle*, which helped to pay for the trip. These articles were later collected and published in book form in 1826 as *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (despite the title, there is also much about the other countries he visited, particularly Switzerland).

This was an escape for a time from all the conflicts, the bitter reactions to his outspoken criticisms, and the attacks on his own publications back in England. And, despite interludes of illness, as well as the miseries of coach travel and the dishonesty of some hotel keepers and coach drivers, Hazlitt managed to enjoy himself. He reacted to his sight of Paris like a child entering a fairyland: "The approach to the capital on the side of St. Germain's is one continued succession of imposing beauty and artificial splendour, of groves, of avenues, of bridges, of palaces, and of towns like palaces, all the way to Paris, where the sight of the Thuilleries completes the triumph of external magnificence...."

He remained with his wife in Paris for more than three months, eagerly exploring the museums, attending the theatres, wandering the streets, and mingling with the people. He was especially glad to be able to return to the Louvre and revisit the masterpieces he had adored twenty years

Notes

ago, recording for his readers all of his renewed impressions of canvases by Guido, Poussin, and Titian, among others.

He also was pleased to meet and befriend Henri Beyle, now better known by his *nom de plume* of Stendhal, who had discovered much to like in Hazlitt's writings, as Hazlitt had in his. Finally he and his wife resumed the journey to Italy. As they advanced slowly in those days of pre-railway travel (at one stage taking nearly a week to cover less than two hundred miles), Hazlitt registered a running commentary on the scenic points of interest. On the road between Florence and Rome, for example,

Towards the close of the first day's journey ... we had a splendid view of the country we were to travel, which lay stretched out beneath our feet to an immense distance, as we descended into the little town of Pozzo Borgo. Deep valleys sloped on each side of us, from which the smoke of cottages occasionally curled: the branches of an overhanging birch-tree or a neighbouring ruin gave relief to the grey, misty landscape, which was streaked by dark pine-forests, and speckled by the passing clouds; and in the extreme distance rose a range of hills glittering in the evening sun, and scarcely distinguishable from the ridge of clouds that hovered near them.

Hazlitt, in the words of Ralph Wardle, "never stopped observing and comparing. He was an unabashed sightseer who wanted to take in everything available, and he could recreate vividly all he saw".

Yet frequently he showed himself to be more than a mere sightseer, with the painter, critic, and philosopher in him asserting their influence in turn or at once. A splendid scene on the shore of Lake Geneva, for example, viewed with the eye of both painter and art critic, inspired the following observation: "The lake shone like a broad golden mirror, reflecting the thousand dyes of the fleecy purple clouds, while Saint Gingolph, with its clustering habitations, shewed like a dark pitchy spot by its side; and beyond the glimmering verge of the Jura ... hovered gay wreaths of clouds, fair, lovely, visionary, that seemed not of this world....No person can describe the effect; but so in Claude's landscapes the evening clouds drink up the rosy light, and sink into soft repose!"

Likewise, the philosopher in Hazlitt emerges in his account of the following morning: "We had a pleasant walk the next morning along the side of the lake under the grey cliffs, the green hills and azure sky....the snowy ridges that seemed close to us at Vevey receding farther into a kind of lofty background as we advanced.... The speculation of Bishop Berkeley, or some other philosopher, that distance is measured by motion and not by the sight, is verified here at every step".

He was also constantly considering the manners of the people and the differences between the English and the French (and later, to a lesser extent, the Italians and Swiss). Did the French really have a "butterfly, airy, thoughtless, fluttering character"? He was forced to revise his opinions repeatedly. In some ways the French seemed superior to his countrymen. Unlike the English, he discovered, the French attended the theatre reverently, respectfully, "the attention ... like that of a learned society to a lecture on some scientific subject".And he found culture more widespread among the working classes: "You see an apple-girl in Paris, sitting at a stall with her feet over a stove in the coldest weather, or defended from the sun by an umbrella, reading Racine and Voltaire".

Trying to be honest with himself, and every day discovering something new about French manners that confounded his preconceptions, Hazlitt was soon compelled to retract some of his old prejudices. "In judging of nations, it will not do to deal in mere abstractions", he concluded. "In countries, as well as individuals, there is a mixture of good and bad qualities; yet we attempt to strike a general balance, and compare the rules with the exceptions".

As he had befriended Stendhal in Paris, so in Florence, besides visiting the picture galleries, he became friends with Walter Savage Landor. He also spent much time with his old friend Leigh Hunt, now in residence there.

Notes

Hazlitt was ambivalent about Rome, the farthest point of his journey. His first impression was one of disappointment. He had expected primarily the monuments of antiquity. But, he asked, "what has a green-grocer's stall, a stupid English china warehouse, a putrid *trattoria*, a barber's sign, an old clothes or old picture shop or a Gothic palace ... to do with ancient Rome?" Further, "the picture galleries at Rome disappointed me quite".Eventually he found plenty to admire, but the accumulation of monuments of art in one place was almost too much for him, and there were also too many distractions. There were the "pride, pomp, and pageantry" of the Catholic religion, as well as having to cope with the "inconvenience of a stranger's residence at Rome....You want some shelter from the insolence and indifference of the inhabitants....You have to squabble with every one about you to prevent being cheated, to drive a hard bargain in order to live, to keep your hands and your tongue within strict bounds, for fear of being stilettoed, or thrown into the Tower of St. Angelo, or remanded home. You have much to do to avoid the contempt of the inhabitants....You must run the gauntlet of sarcastic words or looks for a whole street, of laughter or want of comprehension in reply to all the questions you ask....

Venice presented fewer difficulties, and was a scene of special fascination for him: "You see Venice rising from the sea", he wrote, "its long line of spires, towers, churches, wharfs ... stretched along the water's edge, and you view it with a mixture of awe and incredulity".The palaces were incomparable: "I never saw palaces anywhere but at Venice".Of equal or even greater importance to him were the paintings. Here there were numerous masterpieces by his favourite painter Titian, whose studio he visited, as well as others by Veronese, Giorgione, Tintoretto, and more.

On the way home, crossing the Swiss Alps, Hazlitt particularly desired to see the town of Vevey, the scene of Rousseau's 1761 novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, a love story that he associated with his disappointed love for Sarah Walker. He was so enchanted with the region even apart from its personal and literary associations that he remained there with his wife for three months, renting a floor of a farmhouse named "Gelamont" outside of town, where "every thing was perfectly clean and commodious". The place was for the most part an oasis of tranquility for Hazlitt. As he reported:

Days, weeks, months, and even years might have passed on much in the same manner.... We breakfasted at the same hour, and the tea-kettle was always boiling...; a *lounge* in the orchard for an hour or two, and twice a week we could see the steam-boat creeping like a spider over the surface of the lake; a volume of the Scotch novels..., or M. Galignani's Paris and London *Observer*, amused us till dinner time; then tea and a walk till the moon unveiled itself, "apparent queen of the night," or the brook, swoln with a transient shower, was heard more distinctly in the darkness, mingling with the soft, rustling breeze; and the next morning the song of peasants broke upon refreshing sleep, as the sun glanced among the clustering vine-leaves, or the shadowy hills, as the mists retired from their summits, looked in at our windows.

Hazlitt's time at Vevey was not passed entirely in a waking dream. As at Paris, and sometimes other stopping points such as Florence, he continued to write, producing one or two essays later included in *The Plain Speaker*, as well as some miscellaneous pieces. A side trip to Geneva during this period led him to a review of his *Spirit of the Age*, by Francis Jeffrey, in which the latter takes him to task for striving too hard after originality. As much as Hazlitt respected Jeffrey, this hurt (perhaps the more because of his respect), and Hazlitt, to work off his angry feelings, dashed off the only verse from his pen that has ever come to light, "The Damned Author's Address to His Reviewers", published anonymously on 18 September 1825, in the *London and Paris Observer*, and ending with the bitterly sardonic lines, "And last, to make my measure full,/Teach me, great J[effre]y, to be dull!"

Much of his time, however, was spent in a mellow mood. At this time he wrote "Merry England" (which appeared in the December 1825 *New Monthly Magazine*). "As I write this", he wrote, "I am sitting in the open air in a beautiful valley.... Intent upon the scene and upon the thoughts that stir

Notes

within me, I conjure up the cheerful passages of my life, and a crowd of happy images appear before me".

The return to London in October was a letdown. The grey skies and bad food compared unfavorably with his recent retreat, and he was suffering from digestive problems (these recurred throughout much of his later life), though it was also good to be home. But he already had plans to return to Paris.

"The old age of artists"

As comfortable as Hazlitt was on settling in again to his home on Down Street in London in late 1825 (where he remained until about mid-1827), the reality of earning a living again stared him in the face. He continued to provide a stream of contributions to various periodicals, primarily *The New Monthly Magazine*. The topics continued to be his favourites, including critiques of the "new school of reformers", drama criticism, and reflections on manners and the tendencies of the human mind. He gathered previously published essays for the collection *The Plain Speaker*, writing a few new ones in the process. He also oversaw the publication in book form of his account of his recent Continental tour.

But what he most wanted was to write a biography of Napoleon. Now Sir Walter Scott was writing his own life of Napoleon, from a strictly conservative point of view, and Hazlitt wanted to produce one from a countervailing, liberal perspective. Really, his stance on Napoleon was his own, as he had idolised Napoleon for decades, and he prepared to return to Paris to undertake the research. First, however, he brought to fruition another favourite idea.

Always fascinated by artists in their old age (see "On the Old Age of Artists"), Hazlitt was especially interested in the painter James Northcote, student and later biographer of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and a Royal Academician. Hazlitt would frequently visit him—by then about 80 years old—and they conversed endlessly on men and manners, the illustrious figures of Northcote's younger days, particularly Reynolds, and the arts, particularly painting.

Northcote was at this time a crochety, slovenly old man who lived in wretched surroundings and was known for his misanthropic personality. Hazlitt was oblivious to the surroundings and tolerated the crotchetiness. Finding congeniality in Northcote's company, and feeling many of their views to be in alignment, he transcribed their conversations from memory and published them in a series of articles entitled "Boswell Redivivus" in *The New Monthly Magazine*. (They were later collected under the title *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.*) But there was little in common between these articles and Boswell's life of Johnson. Hazlitt felt such a closeness to the old artist that in his conversations, Northcote was transformed into a kind of alter ego. Hazlitt made no secret of the fact that the words he ascribed to Northcote were not all Northcote's own but sometimes expressed the views of Hazlitt as much as Hazlitt's own words.

Some of the conversations were little more than gossip, and they spoke of their contemporaries without restraint. When the conversations were published, some of those contemporaries were outraged. Northcote denied the words were his; and Hazlitt was shielded from the consequences to a degree by his residing in Paris, where he was at work on what he thought would be his masterpiece.

The last conversation (originally published in *The Atlas* on 15 November 1829, when Hazlitt had less than a year to live) is especially telling. Whether it really occurred more or less as given, or was a construct of Hazlitt's own imagination, it provides perspective on Hazlitt's own position in life at that time.

In words attributed to Northcote: "You have two faults: one is a *feud* or quarrel with the world, which makes you despair, and prevents you taking all the pains you might; the other is a carelessness and mismanagement, which makes you throw away the little you actually do, and brings you into difficulties that way."

Notes

Hazlitt justifies his own contrary attitude at length: "When one is found fault with for nothing, or for doing one's best, one is apt to give the world their revenge. All the former part of my life I was treated as a cipher; and since I have got into notice, I have been set upon as a wild beast. When this is the case, and you can expect as little justice as candour, you naturally in self-defence take refuge in a sort of misanthropy and cynical contempt for mankind." And yet on reflection, Hazlitt felt that his life was not so bad after all:

The man of business and fortune ... is up and in the city by eight, swallows his breakfast in haste, attends a meeting of creditors, must read Lloyd's lists, consult the price of consols, study the markets, look into his accounts, pay his workmen, and superintend his clerks: he has hardly a minute in the day to himself, and perhaps in the four-and-twenty hours does not do a single thing that he would do if he could help it. Surely, this sacrifice of time and inclination requires some compensation, which it meets with. But how am I entitled to make my fortune (which cannot be done without all this anxiety and drudgery) who do hardly any thing at all, and never any thing but what I like to do? I rise when I please, breakfast *at length*, write what comes into my head, and after taking a mutton-chop and a dish of strong tea, go to the play, and thus my time passes.

He was perhaps overly self-disparaging in this self-portrait, but it opens a window on the kind of life Hazlitt was leading at this time, and how he evaluated it in contrast to the lives of his more overtly successful contemporaries.

Hero worship

In August 1826, Hazlitt and his wife set out for Paris again, so he could research what he hoped would be his masterpiece, a biography of Napoleon, seeking "to counteract the prejudiced interpretations of Scott's biography".Hazlitt "had long been convinced that Napoleon was the greatest man of his era, the apostle of freedom, a born leader of men in the old heroic mould: he had thrilled to his triumphs over 'legitimacy' and suffered real anguish at his downfall".

This did not work out quite as planned. His wife's independent income allowed them to take lodgings in a fashionable part of Paris; he was comfortable, but also distracted by visitors and far from the libraries he needed to visit. Nor did he have access to all the materials that Scott's stature and connections provided him with for his own life of Napoleon. Hazlitt's son also spent time with them, and there were conflicts between him and his father which also drove a wedge between Hazlitt and his second wife, and that marriage was now deteriorating rapidly.

None of his books were selling at all well, and thus time also had to be spent churning out more articles to pay expenses. Despite all the distractions, a few essays written at this time proved to be among his finest, such as "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth", published in *The Monthly Magazine* (not to be confused with the similarly named *New Monthly Magazine*) in March 1827. The essay "On a Sun-Dial", which appeared late in 1827, may have been written on an interpolated second tour to Italy with his wife and son.

Finally, after Hazlitt returned to London with his son in August 1827, he was shocked to discover that his wife, still in Paris, was leaving him. He settled in modest lodgings on Half-Moon Street in London, and from then on fought a continual battle against poverty, regularly forced to grind out a stream of articles, mostly undistinguished, just to pay expenses. Relatively little is known of Hazlitt's other activities in this period. He spent as much time, apparently, at Winterslow as he did in London. Some meditative essays emerged from this stay in his favourite country retreat, and he also made progress with his life of Napoleon. But he also found himself struggling against bouts of illness, nearly dying at Winterslow in December 1827.Two volumes—the first half—of the Napoleon biography appeared in 1828, only to have the publisher fail soon thereafter. This meant even more financial difficulties for the author, and what little evidence we have of his activities at the time, apart from a stream of hastily written articles turned out to pay the bills, consists in large part of begging letters to publishers for advances of money.

Notes

The easy life he had spoken of to Northcote had largely vanished by the time that conversation was published about a year before his death. By then he was overwhelmed by the degradation of poverty, frequent bouts of physical as well as mental illness—depression caused by his failure to find find true love and by his inability to bring to fruition his defence of the man he worshipped as a hero of liberty and fighter of despotism.

Although Hazlitt retained a few devoted admirers, his reputation among the general public had been destroyed by the cadre of reviewers in Tory periodicals whose efforts Hazlitt had excoriated in "On the Jealousy and the Spleen of Party".According to John Wilson of *Blackwood's Magazine*, for example, Hazlitt had already "been excommunicated from all decent society, and nobody would touch a dead book of his, any more than they would the body of a man who had died of the plague".

This dark period was marked by a stream of short articles for weekly magazines like *The Atlas*, written to generate desperately needed cash. Nor has time been kind to the life of Napoleon itself. However much Hazlitt hoped it would be his masterpiece, it was not merely a financial failure. Although its four volumes represent his longest work, that work, as was eventually demonstrated, is a hodge-podge of mostly borrowed materials, poorly integrated, only about a fifth consisting of Hazlitt's own words. Here and there, a few inspired passages stand out, such as the following:

I have nowhere in any thing I may have written declared myself to be a Republican; nor should I think it worth while to be a martyr and a confessor to any form or mode of government. But what I have staked health and wealth, name and fame upon, and am ready to do so again and to the last gasp, is this, that there is a power in the people to change its government and its governors. Hazitt managed to complete *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* shortly before his death, but did not live to see it published in its entirety.

Last years

Plaque in Bouverie Street, London, marking the site of William Hazlitt's house. The site of Hazlitt's grave in the churchyard of St Anne's, Soho, with a new memorial commissioned following a campaign led by Tom Paulin.

Few details remain of Hazlitt's daily life in his last years. Much of his time was spent by choice in the bucolic setting of Winterslow. But he needed to be in London for business reasons. There, he seems to have exchanged visits with some of his old friends, but few details of these occasions were recorded. Often he was seen in the company of his son and son's fiancee. Otherwise, he continued to produce a stream of articles to make ends meet.

In 1828, Hazlitt found work reviewing for the theatre again (for *The Examiner*). In playgoing he found one of his greatest consolations. One of his most notable essays, "The Free Admission", arose from this experience.As he explained there, attending the theatre was not merely a great solace in itself; the atmosphere was conducive to contemplating the past, not just memories of the plays themselves or his reviewing of past performances, but the course of his whole life. In words written within his last few months, the possessor of a free admission to the theatre, "ensconced in his favourite niche, looking from the 'loop-holes of retreat' in the second circle ... views the pageant of the world played before him; melts down years to moments; sees human life, like a gaudy shadow, glance across the stage; and here tastes of all earth's bliss, the sweet without the bitter, the honey without the sting, and plucks ambrosial fruits and amaranthine flowers (placed by the enchantress Fancy within his reach,) without having to pay a tax for it at the time, or repenting of it afterwards."

He found some time to return to his earlier philosophical pursuits, including popularised presentations of the thoughts expressed in earlier writings. Some of these, such as meditations on "Common Sense", "Originality", "The Ideal", "Envy", and "Prejudice", appeared in *The Atlas* in early 1830. At some point in this period he summarised the spirit and method of his life's work as

Notes

a philosopher, which he had never ceased to consider himself to be; but "The Spirit of Philosophy" was not published in his lifetime. He also began contributing once again to *The Edinburgh Review*; paying better than the other journals, it helped stave off hunger.

After a brief stay on Bouvier Street in 1829, sharing lodgings with his son, Hazlitt moved into a small apartment at 6 Frith Street, Soho. He continued to turn out articles for *The Atlas*, *The London Weekly Review*, and now *The Court Journal*. Plagued more frequently by painful bouts of illness, he began to retreat within himself. Even at this time, however, he turned out a few notable essays, primarily for *The New Monthly Magazine*. Turning his suffering to advantage, he described the experience, with copious observations on the effects of illness and recovery on the mind, in "The Sick Chamber". In one of his last respites from pain, reflecting on his personal history, he wrote, "This is the time for reading. ... A cricket chirps on the hearth, and we are reminded of Christmas gambols long ago. ... A rose smells doubly sweet ... and we enjoy the idea of a journey and an inn the more for having been bed-rid. But a book is the secret and sure charm to bring all these implied associations to a focus. ... If the stage [alluding to his remarks in "The Free-Admission"] shows us the masks of men and the pageant of the world, books let us into their souls and lay open to us the secrets of our own. They are the first and last, the most home-felt, the most heart-felt of our enjoyments".At this time he was reading the novels of Edward Bulwer in hopes of reviewing them for *The Edinburgh Review*.

Such respites from pain did not last. Though a few visitors cheered these days, toward the end he was frequently too sick to see any of them. By September 1830, Hazlitt was confined to his bed, with his son in attendance, his pain so acute that his doctor kept him drugged on opium much of the time. His last few days were spent in delirium, obsessed with some woman, which in later years gave rise to speculation: was it Sarah Walker? Or was it, as biographer Stanley Jones believes, more likely to have been a woman he had met more recently at the theatre? Finally, with his son and a few others in attendance, he died on 18 September. His last words were reported to have been "Well, I've had a happy life".

William Hazlitt was buried in the churchyard of St Anne's Church, Soho in London on 23 September 1830, with only his son William, Charles Lamb, P.G. Patmore, and possibly a few other friends in attendance.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Hazlitt lost his desire to become a unitarian minister and left the college

(*a*) 1797 (*b*) 1785 (*c*) 1795 (*d*) 1780

(*ii*) Hazlitt's first book, An Essay on the Principles of Human Action' was published in

(*a*) 1810 (*b*) 1800 (*c*) 1805 (*d*) 1815

(*iii*) New and Improved Grammar of the English language was published in

(*a*) 1810 (*b*) 1805 (*c*) 1815 (*d*) 1820

(*iv*) In 1803, Hazlitt met .....

(*a*) Bacon (*b*) Addison

(*c*) Charles Lamb (*d*) None of these

1.5 Summary

- Charles Lamb introduced Hazlitt to William Godwin and other important literary figures in London. In 1805 Joseph Johnson published Hazlitt's first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. The following year Hazlitt published *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*, an attack on William Pitt and his government's foreign policy. Hazlitt opposed England's war with

Notes

France and its consequent heavy taxation. This was followed by a series of articles and pamphlets on political corruption and the need to reform the voting system.

- Hazlitt began writing for *The Times* and in 1808 married the editor's sister, Sarah Stoddart. His friend, Thomas Barnes, was the newspaper's parliamentary reporter. Later, Barnes was to become the editor of the newspaper. In 1810 he published the *New and Improved Grammar of the English Language*.
- In 1813 Hazlitt was employed as the parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*.
- Hazlitt was educated at home and at a local school until 1793, when his father sent him to a Unitarian seminary on what was then the outskirts of London, the Unitarian New College at Hackney (commonly referred to as Hackney College). Although Hazlitt stayed there for only about two years, its impact was enormous.
- In April Hazlitt joined Coleridge at his residence in Nether Stowey, where they both spent time with the poet William Wordsworth. Again, Hazlitt was enraptured. While he was not immediately struck by Wordsworth's appearance, when he observed the look in Wordsworth's eye as he contemplated a sunset, he reflected, "With what eyes these poets see nature!" On that occasion given the opportunity to read the *Lyrical Ballads* in manuscript, Hazlitt saw that Wordsworth had the mind of a true poet, and he had created something entirely new.
- Hazlitt also visited various picture galleries, and he began to get work doing portraits, painting somewhat in the style of Rembrandt. And so he managed to make something of a living for a time, travelling back and forth between London and the country, wherever he could get work. By 1802, his work was considered good enough that a portrait he had recently painted of his father was accepted for exhibition by the Royal Academy.
- Hazlitt frequented the society of the Lambs for the next several years. He was not getting much work as a painter, but now he finally found the opportunity to complete his philosophical treatise, which was published in 1805 as *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind*. This gained him little notice as an original thinker, and no money. Hazlitt's outrage at events then taking place in English politics in reaction to Napoleon's wars led to his writing and publishing, at his own expense (though he had almost no money), a political pamphlet, *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs* (1806). Finally, he began to find enough work to support himself, if just barely. Although the treatise he valued above anything else he wrote was never, at least in his own lifetime, recognised for what he believed was its true worth, it brought him attention as one who had a grasp of contemporary philosophy. He therefore was commissioned to abridge and write a preface to a now obscure work of mental philosophy, *The Light of Nature Pursued* by Abraham Tucker (originally published in seven volumes from 1765 to 1777), which appeared in 1807 and may have had some influence on his own later thinking.
- In 1808, Hazlitt married Sarah Stoddart, a friend of Mary Lamb and sister of John Stoddart, a journalist who became editor of *The Times* newspaper in 1814. Shortly before the wedding, John Stoddart established a trust into which he began paying £100 per year, for the benefit of Hazlitt and his wife—this was a very generous gesture, but Hazlitt detested being supported by his brother-in-law, whose political beliefs he despised.Although incompatibilities would later drive the couple apart, at first the union seemed to work well enough.
- In October 1812, Hazlitt was hired by *The Morning Chronicle* as a parliamentary reporter.
- Hazlitt continued to produce articles on miscellaneous topics for *The Examiner* and other periodicals, including political diatribes against any whom he felt ignored or minimised the needs and rights of the common man. Defection from the cause of liberty had become easier in light of the oppressive political atmosphere in England at that time, in reaction to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Opposing this tendency, the Hunts were his

Notes

primary allies. Lamb, who tried to remain uninvolved politically, tolerated his abrasiveness, and that friendship managed to survive, if only just barely in the face of Hazlitt's growing bitterness, short temper, and propensity for hurling invective at friends and foes alike.

- Hazlitt discovered the truth about Tomkins, and from then on his jealousy and suspicions of Sarah Walker's real character afforded him little rest. For months, during the preparations for the divorce and as he tried to earn a living, he alternated between rage and despair, on the one hand, and the comforting if unrealistic thought that she was really "a good girl" and would accept him at last. The divorce was finalised on 17 July 1822, and Hazlitt returned to London to see his beloved—only to find her cold and resistant. They then become involved in angry altercations of jealousy and recrimination. And it was over, though Hazlitt could not for some time persuade himself to believe so. His mind nearly snapped. At his emotional nadir, he contemplated suicide.
- Many of these "Table-Talk" essays display Hazlitt's interest in genius and artistic creativity.
- In *Table-Talk*, Hazlitt had found the most congenial format for this thoughts and observations.
- Before Hazlitt and his new bride set off for the continent, he submitted, among the miscellany of essays that year, one to the *New Monthly* on "Jeremy Bentham", the first in a series entitled "Spirits of the Age". Several more of the kind followed over the next few months, at least one in the *Examiner*. Together with some newly written, and one brought in from the "Table-Talk" series, they were collected in book form in 1825 as *The Spirit of the Age: Or, Contemporary Portraits*.
- Hazlitt had published *A Reply to the Essay on Population* as early as 1807
- Hazlitt contrasts Scott and Byron; he skewers his nemesis Gifford; he praises—not without his usual strictures—Jeffrey; and goes on to portray, in one way or another, such notables as Mackintosh, Brougham, Canning, and Wilberforce.
- Hazlitt was ambivalent about Rome, the farthest point of his journey. His first impression was one of disappointment. He had expected primarily the monuments of antiquity. But, he asked, "what has a green-grocer's stall, a stupid English china warehouse, a putrid *trattoria*, a barber's sign, an old clothes or old picture shop or a Gothic palace ... to do with ancient Rome?" Further, "the picture galleries at Rome disappointed me quite".Eventually he found plenty to admire, but the accumulation of monuments of art in one place was almost too much for him, and there were also too many distractions. There were the "pride, pomp, and pageantry" of the Catholic religion, as well as having to cope with the "inconvenience of a stranger's residence at Rome....You want some shelter from the insolence and indifference of the inhabitants....You have to squabble with every one about you to prevent being cheated, to drive a hard bargain in order to live, to keep your hands and your tongue within strict bounds, for fear of being stilettoed, or thrown into the Tower of St. Angelo, or remanded home. You have much to do to avoid the contempt of the inhabitants....You must run the gauntlet of sarcastic words or looks for a whole street, of laughter.
- Hazlitt justifies his own contrary attitude at length: "When one is found fault with for nothing, or for doing one's best, one is apt to give the world their revenge. All the former part of my life I was treated as a cipher; and since I have got into notice, I have been set upon as a wild beast. When this is the case, and you can expect as little justice as candour, you naturally in self-defence take refuge in a sort of misanthropy and cynical contempt for mankind." And yet on reflection, Hazlitt felt that his life was not so bad after all.

1.6 Key-Words

1. Solitude : It is a state of seclusion or isolation, i.e., lack of contact with people.
2. Infatuation : It is a state of being completely carried away by unreasoned passion or love.

Notes

1.7 Review Questions

1. Introduce Hazlitt as an essayist.
2. Discuss life and works of Hazlitt.
3. Why Hazlitt is regarded as the young philosopher?
4. Explain solitude and infatuation presented in Hazlitt essays.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*c*) (*iii*) (*a*) (*iv*) (*c*)

1.8 Further Readings



1. P.S. Sastri, Hazlitt selected essays, Doaba House, Delhi.
2. Geoffrey Keynes, selected essays of William Hazlitt 1778 to 1830.
3. Peter Quennell, *A History of English Literature* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), p. 380.
4. Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955-65), vol. 3: *The Age of Transition,* p. 125.
5. Stephen F. Fogle, "Leigh Hunt and the End of Romantic Criticism," in *Some British Romantics*, ed. James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye (Columbus: Ohio StateUniversity Press, 1966), p. 128.
6. James R. Thompson, *Leigh Hunt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 106.
7. These essays are conveniently reprinted by John R. Nabholtz, ed., *William Hazlitt: Selected Essays* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 18-43.
8. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, introduced by A. R. Waller (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910, 1955), p. 343.
9. Nabholtz, p. 30.

Notes

Unit 2: Hazlitt—On Genius and Common Sense: Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
2.1 On Genius and Common Sense
2.2 Summary
2.3 Key-Words
2.4 Review Questions
2.5 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Introduce Hazlitt and his writings
- Discuss on Genius and Common Sense

Introduction

Charles Lamb introduced Hazlitt to William Godwin and other important literary figures in London. In 1805 Joseph Johnson published Hazlitt's first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. The following year Hazlitt published *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*, an attack on William Pitt and his government's foreign policy. Hazlitt opposed England's war with France and its consequent heavy taxation. This was followed by a series of articles and pamphlets on political corruption and the need to reform the voting system. Hazlitt began writing for *The Times* and in 1808 married the editor's sister, Sarah Stoddart. His friend, Thomas Barnes, was the newspaper's parliamentary reporter. Later, Barnes was to become the editor of the newspaper. In 1810 he published the *New and Improved Grammar of the English Language*. Hazlitt also contributed to *The Examiner*, a radical journal edited by Leigh Hunt. Later, Hazlitt wrote for the *Edinburgh Review*, the Yellow Dwarf and the London Magazine. In these journals Hazlitt produced a series of essays on art, drama, literature and politics. During this period he established himself as England's leading expert on the writings of William Shakespeare.

Hazlitt wrote several books on literature including *Characters of Shakespeare* (1817), *A View of the English Stage* (1818), *English Poets* (1818) and *English Comic Writers* (1819). In these books he urged the artist to be aware of his social and political responsibilities. Hazlitt continued to write about politics and his most important books on this subject is *Political Essays with Sketches of Public Characters* (1819). In the book Hazlitt explains how the admiration of power turns many writers into "intellectual pimps and hirelings of the press."

2.1 On Genius and Common Sense

We hear it maintained by people of more gravity than understanding, that genius and taste are strictly reducible to rules, and that there is a rule for everything. So far is it from being true that the finest breath of fancy is a definable thing, that the plainest common sense is only what Mr. Locke would have called a mixed mode, subject to a particular sort of acquired and undefinable tact. It is asked,

Notes

"If you do not know the rule by which a thing is done, how can you be sure of doing it a second time?" And the answer is, "If you do not know the muscles by the help of which you walk, how is it you do not fall down at every step you take?

" In art, in taste, in life, in speech, you decide from feeling, and not from reason; that is, from the impression of a number of things on the mind, from which impression is true and well founded, though you may not be able to analyse or account for it in the several particulars. In a gesture you use, in a look you see, in a tone you hear, you judge of the expression, propriety, and meaning from habit, not from reason or rules; that is to say, from innumerable instances of like gestures, looks, and tones, in innumerable other circumstances, variously modified, which are too many and too refined to be all distinctly recollected, but which do not therefore operate the less powerfully upon the mind and eye of taste. Shall we say that these impressions (the immediate stamp of nature) do not operate in a given manner till they are classified and reduced to rules, or is not the rule itself grounded, upon the truth and certainty of that natural operation?

How then can the distinction of the understanding as to the manner in which they operate be necessary to their producing their due and uniform effect upon the mind? If certain effects did not regularly arise out of certain causes in mind as well as matter, there could be no rule given for them: nature does not follow the rule, but suggests it. Reason is the interpreter and critic of nature and genius, not their law-giver and judge. He must be a poor creature indeed whose practical convictions do not in almost all cases outrun his deliberate understanding, or who does not feel and know much more than he can give a reason for. Hence the distinction between eloquence and wisdom, between ingenuity and common sense. A man may be dexterous and able in explaining the grounds of his opinions, and yet may be a mere sophist, because he only sees one-half of a subject. Another may feel the whole weight of a question, nothing relating to it may be lost upon him, and yet he may be able to give no account of the manner in which it affects him, or to drag his reasons from their silent lurking-places. This last will be a wise man, though neither a logician nor rhetorician. Goldsmith was a fool to Dr. Johnson in argument; that is, in assigning the specific grounds of his opinions: Dr. Johnson was a fool to Goldsmith in the fine tact, the airy, intuitive faculty with which he skimmed the surfaces of things, and unconsciously formed his Opinions. Common sense is the just result of the sum total of such unconscious impressions in the ordinary occurrences of life, as they are treasured up in the memory, and called out by the occasion. Genius and taste depend much upon the same principle exercised on loftier ground and in more unusual combinations.

I am glad to shelter myself from the charge of affectation or singularity in this view of an often debated but ill-understood point, by quoting a passage from Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses, which is full, and, I think, conclusive to the purpose. He says:—

> 'I observe, as a fundamental ground common to all the Arts with which we have any concern in this Discourse, that they address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility.
>
> 'All theories which attempt to direct or to control the Art, upon any principles falsely called rational, which we form to ourselves upon a supposition of what ought in reason to be the end or means of Art, independent of the known first effect produced by objects on the imagination, must be false and delusive. For though it may appear bold to say it, the imagination is here the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous, because the end is not obtained; the effect itself being the test, and the only test, of the truth and efficacy of the means.
>
> 'There is in the commerce of life, as in Art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty which supersedes it and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at

Notes

once, by what appears a kind of intuition, to the conclusion. A man endowed with this faculty feels and acknowledges the truth, though it is not always in his power, perhaps, to give a reason for it; because he cannot recollect and bring before him all the materials that gave birth to his opinion; for very many and very intricate considerations may unite to form the principle, even of small and minute parts, involved in, or dependent on, a great many things:—though these in process of time are forgotten, the right impression still remains fixed in his mind.

'This impression is the result of the accumulated experience of our whole life, and has been collected, we do not always know how or when. But this mass of collective observation, however acquired, ought to prevail over that reason, which, however powerfully exerted on any particular occasion, will probably comprehend but a partial view of the subject; and our conduct in life, as well as in the arts, is or ought to be generally governed by this habitual reason: it is our happiness that we are enabled to draw on such funds. If we were obliged to enter into a theoretical deliberation on every occasion before we act, life would be at a stand, and Art would be impracticable.

'It appears to me therefore' (continues Sir Joshua) 'that our first thoughts, that is, the effect which any thing produces on our minds on its first appearance, is never to be forgotten; and it demands for that reason, because it is the first, to be laid up with care. If this be not done, the artist may happen to impose on himself by partial reasoning; by a cold consideration of those animated thoughts which proceed, not perhaps from caprice or rashness (as he may afterwards conceit), but from the fulness of his mind, enriched with the copious stores of all the various inventions which he had ever seen, or had ever passed in his mind. These ideas are infused into his design, without any conscious effort; but if he be not on his guard, he may reconsider and correct them, till the whole matter is reduced to a commonplace invention.

'This is sometimes the effect of what I mean to caution you against; that is to say, an unfounded distrust of the imagination and feeling, in favour of narrow, partial, confined, argumentative theories, and of principles that seem to apply to the design in hand, without considering those general impressions on the fancy in which real principles of sound reason and of much more weight and importance, are involved, and, as it were, lie hid under the appearance of a sort of vulgar sentiment. Reason, without doubt, must ultimately determine everything; at this minute it is required to inform us when that very reason is to give way to feeling.'

Mr. Burke, by whom the foregoing train of thinking was probably suggested, has insisted on the same thing, and made rather a perverse use of it in several parts of his _Reflections on the French Revolution; and Windham in one of his Speeches has clenched it into an aphorism—'There is nothing so true as habit.' Once more I would say, common sense is tacit reason. Conscience is the same tacit sense of right and wrong, or the impression of our moral experience and moral apprehensions on the mind, which, because it works unseen, yet certainly, we suppose to be an instinct, implanted in the mind; as we sometimes attribute the violent operations of our passions, of which we can neither trace the source nor assign the reason, to the instigation of the Devil! I shall here try to go more at large into this subject, and to give such instances and illustrations of it as occur to me.

One of the persons who had rendered themselves obnoxious to Government and been included in a charge for high treason in the year 1794, had retired soon after into Wales to write an epic poem and enjoy the luxuries of a rural life. In his peregrinations through that beautiful scenery, he had arrived one fine morning at the inn at Llangollen, in the romantic valley of that name. He had ordered his breakfast, and was sitting at the window in all the dalliance of expectation when a face

Notes

passed, of which he took no notice at the instant—but when his breakfast was brought in presently after, he found his appetite for it gone—the day had lost its freshness in his eye—he was uneasy and spiritless; and without any cause that he could discover, a total change had taken place in his feelings. While he was trying to account for this odd circumstance, the same face passed again—it was the face of Taylor the spy; and he was longer at a loss to explain the difficulty. He had before caught only a transient glimpse, a passing side-view of the face; but though this was not sufficient to awaken a distinct idea in his memory, his feelings, quicker and surer, had taken the alarm; a string had been touched that gave a jar to his whole frame, and would not let him rest, though he could not at all tell what was the matter with him. To the flitting, shadowy, half-distinguished profile that had glided by his window was linked unconsciously and mysteriously, but inseparably, the impression of the trains that had been laid for him by this person;—in this brief moment, in this dim, illegible short-hand of the mind he had just escaped the speeches of the Attorney and Solicitor-General over again; the gaunt figure of Mr. Pitt glared by him; the walls of a prison enclosed him; and he felt the hands of the executioner near him, without knowing it till the tremor and disorder of his nerves gave information to his reasoning faculties that all was not well within. That is, the same state of mind was recalled by one circumstance in the series of association that had been produced by the whole set of circumstances at the time, though the manner in which this was done was not immediately perceptible. In other words, the feeling of pleasure or pain, of good or evil, is revived, and acts instantaneously upon the mind, before we have time to recollect the precise objects which have originally given birth to it. The incident here mentioned was merely, then, one case of what the learned understand by the association of ideas: but all that is meant by feeling or common sense is nothing but the different cases of the association of ideas, more or less true to the impression of the original circumstances, as reason begins with the more formal development of those circumstances, or pretends to account for the different cases of the association of ideas. But it does not follow that the dumb and silent pleading of the former (though sometimes, nay often, mistaken) is less true than that of its babbling interpreter, or that we are never to trust its dictates without consulting the express authority of reason. Both are imperfect, both are useful in their way, and therefore both are best together, to correct or to confirm one another. It does not appear that in the singular instance above mentioned, the sudden impression on the mind was superstition or fancy, though it might have been thought so, had it not been proved by the event to have a real physical and moral cause. Had not the same face returned again, the doubt would never have been properly cleared up, but would have remained a puzzle ever after, or perhaps have been soon forgot.—By the law of association as laid down by physiologists, any impression in a series can recall any other impression in that series without going through the whole in order; so that the mind drops the intermediate links, and passes on rapidly and by stealth to the more striking effects of pleasure or pain which have naturally taken the strongest hold of it. By doing this habitually and skillfully with respect to the various impressions and circumstances with which our experience makes us acquainted, it forms a series of unpremeditated conclusions on almost all subjects that can be brought before it, as just as they are of ready application to human life; and common sense is the name of this body of unassuming but practical wisdom. Common sense, however, is an impartial, instinctive result of truth and nature, and will therefore bear the test and abide the scrutiny of the most severe and patient reasoning. It is indeed incomplete without it. By ingrafting reason on feeling, we 'make assurance double sure.'

> 'Tis the last key-stone that makes up the arch... Then stands it a triumphal mark! Then men Observe the strength, the height, the why and when It was erected; and still walking under,Meet some new matter to look up, and wonder.

But reason, not employed to interpret nature, and to improve and perfect common sense and experience, is, for the most part, a building without a foundation. The criticism exercised by reason, then, on common sense may be as severe as it pleases, but it must be as patient as it is severe. Hasty, dogmatical, self-satisfied reason is worse than idle fancy or bigoted prejudice. It is

Notes

systematic, ostentatious in error, closes up the avenues of knowledge, and 'shuts the gates of wisdom on mankind.' It is not enough to show that there is no reason for a thing that we do not see the reason of it: if the common feeling, if the involuntary prejudice sets in strong in favour of it, if, in spite of all we can do, there is a lurking suspicion on the side of our first impressions, we must try again, and believe that truth is mightier than we. So, in ordering a definition of any subject, if we feel a misgiving that there is any fact or circumstance emitted, but of which we have only a vague apprehension, like a name we cannot recollect, we must ask for more time, and not cut the matter short by an arrogant assumption of the point in dispute. Common sense thus acts as a check-weight on sophistry, and suspends our rash and superficial judgments. On the other hand, if not only no reason can be given for a thing, but every reason is clear against it, and we can account from ignorance, from authority, from interest, from different causes, for the prevalence of an opinion or sentiment, then we have a right to conclude that we have mistaken a prejudice for an instinct, or have confounded a false and partial impression with the fair and unavoidable inference from general observation. Mr. Burke said that we ought not to reject every prejudice, but should separate the husk of prejudice from the truth it encloses, and so try to get at the kernel within; and thus far he was right. But he was wrong in insisting that we are to cherish our prejudices 'because they are prejudices': for if all are well founded, there is no occasion to inquire into their origin or use; and he who sets out to philosophise upon them, or make the separation Mr. Burke talks of in this spirit and with this previous determination, will be very likely to mistake a maggot or a rotten canker for the precious kernel of truth, as was indeed the case with our Political sophist.



Did u know? Common sense is only a judge of things that fall under common observation, or immediately come home to the business and bosoms of men.

There is nothing more distinct than common sense and vulgar opinion. This is of the very essence of its principle, the basis of its pretensions. It rests upon the simple process of feeling,—it anchors in experience. It is not, nor it cannot be, the test of abstract, speculative opinions. But half the opinions and prejudices of mankind, those which they hold in the most unqualified approbation and which have been instilled into them under the strongest sanctions, are of this latter kind, that is, opinions not which they have ever thought, known, or felt one tittle about, but which they have taken up on trust from others, which have been palmed on their understandings by fraud or force, and which they continue to hold at the peril of life, limb, property, and character, with as little warrant from common sense in the first instance as appeal to reason in the last. The ultima ratio regum proceeds upon a very different plea. Common sense is neither priest craft nor state-policy. Yet 'there's the rub that makes absurdity of so long life,' and, at the same time, gives the sceptical philosophers the advantage over us. Till nature has fair play allowed it, and is not adulterated by political and polemical quacks (as it so often has been), it is impossible to appeal to it as a defence against the errors and extravagances of mere reason. If we talk of common sense, we are twitted with vulgar prejudice, and asked how we distinguish the one from the other; but common and received opinion is indeed 'a compost heap' of crude notions, got together by the pride and passions of individuals, and reason is itself the thrall or manumitted slave of the same lordly and besotted masters, dragging its servile chain, or committing all sorts of Saturnalian licenses, the moment it feels itself freed from it.—If ten millions of Englishmen are furious in thinking themselves right in making war upon thirty millions of Frenchmen, and if the last are equally bent upon thinking the others always in the wrong, though it is a common and national prejudice, both opinions cannot be the dictate of good sense; but it may be the infatuated policy of one or both

Notes

governments to keep their subjects always at variance. If a few centuries ago all Europe believed in the infallibility of the Pope, this was not an opinion derived from the proper exercise or erroneous direction of the common sense of the people; common sense had nothing to do with it—they believed whatever their priests told them. England at present is divided into Whigs and Tories, Churchmen and Dissenters; both parties have numbers on their side; but common sense and party spirit are two different things. Sects and heresies are upheld partly by sympathy, and partly by the love of contradiction; if there was nobody of a different way of thinking, they would fall to pieces of themselves. If a whole court say the same thing, this is no proof that they think it, but that the individual at the head of the court has said it; if a mob agree for a while in shouting the same watchword, this is not to me an example of the sensus communis, they only repeat what they have heard repeated by others. If indeed a large proportion of the people are in want of food, of clothing, of shelter—if they are sick, miserable, scorned, oppressed—an d if each feeling it in himself, they all say so with one voice and one heart, and lift up their hands to second their appeal, this I should say was but the dictate of common sense, the cry of nature. But to waive this part of the argument, which it is needless to push farther,—l believe that the best way to instruct mankind is not by pointing out to them their mutual errors, but by teaching them to think rightly on indifferent matters, where they will listen with patience in order to be amused, and where they do not consider a definition or a syllogism as the greatest injury you can offer them.

There is no rule for expression. It is got at solely by feeling, that is, on the principle of the association of ideas, and by transferring what has been found to hold good in one case (with the necessary modifications) to others. A certain look has been remarked strongly indicative of a certain passion or trait of character, and we attach the same meaning to it or are affected in the same pleasurable or painful manner by it, where it exists in a less degree, though we can define neither the look itself nor the modification of it. Having got the general clue, the exact result may be left to the imagination to vary, to extenuate or aggravate it according to circumstances. In the admirable profile of Oliver Cromwell after—, the drooping eyelids, as if drawing a veil over the fixed, penetrating glance, the nostrils somewhat distended, and lips compressed so as hardly to let the breath escape him, denote the character of the man for high-reaching policy and deep designs as plainly as they can be written. How is it that we decipher this expression in the face? First, by feeling it. And how is it that we feel it? Not by re-established rules, but by the instinct of analogy, by the principle of association, which is subtle and sure in proportion as it is variable and indefinite. A circumstance, apparently of no value, shall alter the whole interpretation to be put upon an expression or action and it shall alter it thus powerfully because in proportion to its very insignificance it shows a strong general principle at work that extends in its ramifications to the smallest things. This in fact will make all the difference between minuteness and subtlety or refinement; for a small or trivial effect may in given circumstances imply the operation of a great power. Stillness may be the result of a blow too powerful to be resisted; silence may be imposed by feelings too agonising for utterance. The minute, the trifling and insipid is that which is little in itself, in its causes and its consequences; the subtle and refined is that which is slight and evanescent at first sight, but which mounts up to a mighty sum in the end, which is an essential part of an important whole, which has consequences greater than itself, and where more is meant than meets the eye or ear. We complain sometimes of littleness in a Dutch picture, where there are a vast number of distinct parts and objects, each small in itself, and leading to nothing else. A sky of Claude's cannot fall under this censure, where one imperceptible gradation is as it were the scale to another, where the broad arch of heaven is piled up of endlessly intermediate gold and azure tints, and where an infinite number of minute, scarce noticed particulars blend and melt into universal harmony. The subtlety in Shakespear, of which there is an immense deal scattered everywhere up and down, is always the instrument of passion, the vehicle of character. The action of a man pulling his hat over his forehead is indifferent enough in itself, and generally speaking,

Notes

may mean anything or nothing; but in the circumstances in which Macduff is placed, it is neither insignificant nor equivocal. What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows, etc.

It admits but of one interpretation or inference, that which follows it:—

> Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak, Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break.

The passage in the same play, in which Duncan and his attendants are introduced, commenting on the beauty and situation of Macbeth's castle, though familiar in itself, has been often praised for the striking contrast it presents to the scenes which follow.—The same look in different circumstances may convey a totally different expression. Thus the eye turned round to look at you without turning the head indicates generally slyness or suspicion; but if this is combined with large expanded eyelids or fixed eyebrows, as we see it in Titian's pictures, it will denote calm contemplation or piercing sagacity, without anything of meanness or fear of being observed. In other cases it may imply merely indolent, enticing voluptuousness, as in Lely's portraits of women. The languor and weakness of the eyelids give the amorous turn to the expression. How should there be a rule for all this beforehand, seeing it depends on circumstances ever varying, and scarce discernible but by their effect on the mind? Rules are applicable to abstractions, but expression is concrete and individual. We know the meaning of certain looks, and we feel how they modify one another in conjunction. But we cannot have a separate rule to judge of all their combinations in different degrees and circumstances, without foreseeing all those combinations, which is impossible; or if we did foresee them, we should only be where we are, that is, we could only make the rule as we now judge without it, from imagination and the feeling of the moment. The absurdity of reducing expression to a preconcerted system was perhaps never more evidently shown than in a picture of the Judgment of Solomon by so great a man as N. Poussin, which I once heard admired for the skill and discrimination of the artist in making all the women, who are ranged on one side, in the greatest alarm at the sentence of the judge, while all the men on the opposite side see through the design of it. Nature does not go to work or cast things in a regular mould in this sort of way. I once heard a person remark of another, 'He has an eye like a vicious horse.' This was a fair analogy. We all, I believe, have noticed the look of a horse's eye just before he is going to bite or kick. But will any one, therefore, describe to me exactly what that look is? It was the same acute observer that said of a self-sufficient., prating music-master, 'He talks on all subjects at sight'—which expressed the man at once by an allusion to his profession. the coincidence was indeed perfect. Nothing else could compare with the easy assurance with which this gentleman would volunteer an explanation of things of which he was most ignorant, but the nonchalance with which a musician sits down to a harpsichord to play a piece he has never seen before. My physiognomical friend would not have hit on this mode of illustration without knowing the profession of the subject of his criticism; but having this hint given him, it instantly suggested itself to his 'sure trailing.' The manner of the speaker was evident; and the association of the music-master sitting down to play at sight, lurking in his mind, was immediately called out by the strength of his impression of the character. The feeling of character and the felicity of invention in explaining it were nearly allied to each other. The first was so wrought up and running over that the transition to the last was very easy and unavoidable. When Mr. Kean was so much praised for the action of Richard in his last struggle with his triumphant antagonist, where he stands, after his sword is wrested from him, with his hands stretched out, 'as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power,' he said that he borrowed it from seeing the last efforts of Painter in his fight with Oliver. This assuredly did not lessen the merit of it. Thus it ever is with the man of real genius. He has the feeling of truth already shrined in his own breast, and his eye is still bent on Nature to see how she expresses herself. When we thoroughly understand the subject it is easy to translate from one language into another. Raphael, in muffling up the figure of Elymas the Sorcerer in his garments, appears to have extended the idea of blindness even

to his clothes. Was this design? Probably not; but merely the feeling of analogy thoughtlessly suggesting this device, which being so suggested was retained and carried on, because it flattered or fell in with the original feeling. The tide of passion, when strong, overflows and gradually insinuates itself into all nooks and corners of the mind. Invention (of the best kind) I therefore do not think so distinct a thing from feeling as some are apt to imagine. The springs of pure feeling will rise and fill the moulds of fancy that are fit to receive it. There are some striking coincidences of colour in well-composed pictures, as in a straggling weed in the foreground streaked with blue or red to answer to a blue or red drapery, to the tone of the flesh or an opening in the sky:—not that this was intended, or done by the rule (for then it would presently become affected and ridiculous), but the eye, being imbued with a certain colour, repeats and varies it from a natural sense of harmony, a secret craving and appetite for beauty, which in the same manner soothes and gratifies the eye of taste, though the cause is not understood. Tact, finesse, is nothing but the being completely aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations, passions, etc., and the being consequently sensible to their slightest indications or movements in others. One of the most remarkable instances of this sort of faculty is the following story, told of Lord Shaftesbury, the grandfather of the author of the Characteristics. He had been to dine with Lady Clarendon and her daughter, who was at that time privately married to the Duke of York (afterwards James II.), and as he returned home with another nobleman who had accompanied him, he suddenly turned to him, and said, 'Depend upon it, the Duke has married Hyde's daughter.' His companion could not comprehend what he meant; but on explaining himself, he said, 'Her mother behaved to her with an attention and a marked respect that it is impossible to account for in any other way; and I am sure of it.' His conjecture shortly afterwards proved to be the truth. This was carrying the prophetic spirit of common sense as far as it could go.


Notes

Sentiment has the same source as that here pointed out. Thus the Ranz des Vaches, which has such an effect on the minds of the Swiss peasantry, when its well-known sound is heard, does not merely recall to them the idea of their country, but has associated with it a thousand nameless ideas, numberless touches of private affection, of early hope, romantic adventure and national pride, all which rush in (with mingled currents) to swell the tide of fond remembrance, and make them languish or die for home. What a fine instrument the human heart is! Who shall touch it? Who shall fathom it? Who shall 'sound it from Its lowest note to the top of its compass?' Who shall put his hand among the strings, and explain their wayward music? The heart alone, when touched by sympathy, trembles and responds to their hidden meaning!

Genius or originality is, for the most part, some strong quality in the mind, answering to and bringing out some new and striking quality in nature.

Imagination is, more properly, the power of carrying on a given feeling into other situations, which must be done best according to the hold which the feeling itself has taken of the mind. In new and unknown combinations the impression must act by sympathy, and not by rule, but there can be no sympathy where there is no passion, no original interest. The personal interest may in some cases oppress and circumscribe the imaginative faculty, as in the instance of Rousseau: but in general the strength and consistency of the imagination will be in proportion to the strength and depth of feeling; and it is rarely that a man even of lofty genius will be able to do more than carry on his own feelings and character, or some prominent and ruling passion, into fictitious and uncommon situations. Milton has by allusion embodied a great part of his political and personal history in the chief characters and incidents of Paradise Lost. He has, no doubt, wonderfully

Notes

adapted and heightened them, but the elements are the same; you trace the bias and opinions of the man in the creations of the poet. Shakespear (almost alone) seems to have been a man of genius raised above the definition of genius. 'Born universal heir to all humanity,' he was 'as one, in suffering all who suffered nothing'; with a perfect sympathy with all things, yet alike indifferent to all: who did not tamper with Nature or warp her to his own purposes; who 'knew all qualities with a learned spirit,' instead of judging of them by his own predilections; and was rather 'a pipe for the Muse's finger to play what stop she pleasd,' than anxious to set up any character or pretensions of his own. His genius consisted in the faculty of transforming himself at will into whatever he chose: his originality was the power of seeing every object from the exact point of view in which others would see it. He was the Proteus of human intellect. Genius in ordinary is a more obstinate and less versatile thing. It is sufficiently exclusive and self-willed, quaint and peculiar. It does some one thing by virtue of doing nothing else: it excels in some one pursuit by being blind to all excellence but its own. It is just the reverse of the cameleon; for it does not borrow, but lends its colour to all about it; or like the glow-worm, discloses a little circle of gorgeous light in the twilight of obscurity, in the night of intellect that surrounds it. So did Rembrandt. If ever there was a man of genius, he was one, in the proper sense of the term. He lived in and revealed to otters a world of his own, and might be said to have invented a new view of nature. He did not discover things out of nature, in fiction or fairy land, or make a voyage to the moon 'to descry new lands, rivers or mountains in her spotty globe,' but saw things in nature that every one had missed before him and gave others eyes to see them with. This is the test and triumph of originality, not to show us what has never been, and what we may therefore very easily never have dreamt of, but to point out to us what is before our eyes and under our feet, though we have had no suspicion of its existence, for want of sufficient strength of intuition, of determined grasp of mind, to seize and retain it. Rembrandt's conquests were not over the ideal, but the real. He did not contrive a new story or character, but we nearly owe to him a fifth part of painting, the knowledge of chiaroscuro—a distinct power and element in art and nature. He had a steadiness, a firm keeping of mind and eye, that first stood the shock of 'fierce extremes' in light and shade, or reconciled the greatest obscurity and the greatest brilliancy into perfect harmony; and he therefore was the first to hazard this appearance upon canvas, and give full effect to what he saw and delighted in. He was led to adopt this style of broad and startling contrast from its congeniality to his own feelings: his mind grappled with that which afforded the best exercise to its master-powers: he was bold in act, because he was urged on by a strong native impulse. Originality is then nothing but nature and feeling working in the mind. A man does not affect to be original: he is so, because he cannot help it, and often without knowing it. This extraordinary artist indeed might be said to have had a particular organ for colour. His eye seemed to come in contact with it as a feeling, to lay hold of it as a substance, rather than to contemplate it as a visual object. The texture of his landscapes is 'of the earth, earthy'—his clouds are humid, heavy, slow; his shadows are 'darkness that may be felt,' a 'palpable obscure'; his lights are lumps of liquid splendour! There is something more in this than can be accounted for from design or accident: Rembrandt was not a man made up of two or three rules and directions for acquiring genius.

I am afraid I shall hardly write so satisfactory a character of Mr. Wordsworth, though he too, like Rembrandt, has a faculty of making something out of nothing, that is, out of himself, by the medium through which he sees and with which he clothes the barrenest subject. Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to 'look abroad into universality,' if that alone constituted genius: he looks at home into himself, and is 'content with riches fineless.' He would in the other case be 'poor as winter,' if he had nothing but general capacity to trust to. He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist. He is 'self-involved, not dark.' He sits in the centre of his own being, and there 'enjoys bright day.' He does not waste a thought on others. Whatever does not relate exclusively and wholly to himself is foreign to his views. He

Notes

contemplates a whole-length figure of himself, he looks along the unbroken line of his personal identity. He thrusts aside all other objects, all other interests, with scorn and impatience, that he may repose on his own being, that he may dig out the treasures of thought contained in it, that he may unfold the precious stores of a mind for ever brooding over itself. His genius is the effect of his individual character. He stamps that character, that deep individual interest, on whatever he meets. The object is nothing but as it furnishes food for internal meditation, for old associations. If there had been no other being in the universe, Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would have been just what it is. If there had been neither love nor friendship, neither ambition nor pleasure nor business in the World, the author of the Lyrical Ballads need not have been greatly changed from what he is—might still have 'kept the noiseless tenour of his way,' retired in the sanctuary of his own heart, hallowing the Sabbath of his own thoughts. With the passions, the pursuits, and imaginations of other men he does not profess to sympathise, but 'finds tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.' With a mind averse from outward objects, but ever intent upon its own workings, he hangs a weight of thought and feeling upon every trifling circumstance connected with his past history. The note of the cuckoo sounds in his ear like the voice of other years; the daisy spreads its leaves in the rays of boyish delight that stream from his thoughtful eyes; the rainbow lifts its proud arch in heaven but to mark his progress from infancy to manhood; an old thorn is buried, bowed down under the mass of associations he has wound about it; and to him, as he himself beautifully says.

The meanest flow'r that blows can give Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.It is this power of habitual sentiment, or of transferring the interest of our conscious existence to whatever gently solicits attention, and is a link in the chain of association without rousing our passions or hurting our pride, that is the striking feature in Mr. Wordsworth's mind and poetry. Others have left and shown this power before, as Wither, Burns, etc., but none have felt it so intensely and absolutely as to lend to it the voice of inspiration, as to make it the foundation of a new style and school in poetry. His strength, as it so often happens, arises from the excess of his weakness. But he has opened a new avenue to the human heart, has explored another secret haunt and nook of nature, 'sacred to verse, and sure of everlasting fame.' Compared with his lines, Lord Byron's stanzas are but exaggerated common-place, and Walter Scott's poetry (not his prose) old wives' fables. There is no one in whom I have been more disappointed than in the writer here spoken of, nor with whom I am more disposed on certain points to quarrel; but the love of truth and justice which obliges me to do this, will not suffer me to blench his merits. Do what he can, he cannot help being an original-minded man. His poetry is not servile. While the cuckoo returns in the spring, while the daisy looks bright in the sun, while the rainbow lifts its head above the storm

Yet I'll remember thee, Glencairn, And all that thou hast done for me!

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in endeavouring to show that there is no such thing as proper originality, a spirit emanating from the mind of the artist and shining through his works, has traced Raphael through a number of figures which he has borrowed from Masaccio and others. This is a bad calculation. If Raphael had only borrowed those figures from others, would he, even in Sir Joshua's sense, have been entitled to the praise of originality? Plagiarism, in so far as it is plagiarism, is not originality. Salvator is considered by many as a great genius. He is what they call an irregular genius. My notion of genius is not exactly the same as theirs. It has also been made a question; whether there is not more genius in Rembrandt's Three Trees than in all Claude Lorraine's landscapes. I do not know how that may be; but it was enough for Claude to have been a perfect landscape-painter.

Capacity is not the same thing as genius. Capacity may be described to relate to the quantity of knowledge, however acquired; genius, to its quality and the mode of acquiring it. Capacity is power over given ideas combinations of ideas; genius is the power over those which are not given, and for which no obvious or precise rule can be laid down. Or capacity is power of any sort;

Notes

genius is power of a different sort from what has yet been shown. A retentive memory, a clear understanding, is capacity, but it is not genius. The admirable Crichton was a person of prodigious capacity; but there is no proof (that I know) that he had an atom of genius. His verses that remain are dull and sterile. He could learn all that was known of any subject; he could do anything if others could show him the way to do it. This was very wonderful; but that is all you can say of it. It requires a good capacity to play well at chess; but, after all, it is a game of skill, and not of genius. Know what you will of it, the understanding still moves in certain tracks in which others have trod it before, quicker or slower, with more or less comprehension and presence of mind. The greatest skill strikes out nothing for itself, from its own peculiar resources; the nature of the game is a thing determinate and fixed: there is no royal or poetical road to checkmate your adversary. There is no place for genius but in the indefinite and unknown. The discovery of the binomial theorem was an effort of genius; but there was none shown in Jedediah Buxton's being able to multiply 9 figures by 9 in his head. If he could have multiplied 90 figures by 90 instead of 9, it would have been equally useless toil and trouble. He is a man of capacity who possesses considerable intellectual riches: he is a man of genius who finds out a vein of new ore. Originality is the seeing nature differently from others, and yet as it is in itself. It is not singularity or affectation, but the discovery of new and valuable truth. All the world do not see the whole meaning of any object they have been looking at. Habit blinds them to some things; short-sightedness to others. Every mind is not a gauge and measure of truth. Nature has her surface and her dark recesses. She is deep, obscure, and infinite. It is only minds on whom she makes her fullest impressions that can penetrate her shrine or unveil her Holy of Holies. It is only those whom she has filled with her spirit that have the boldness or the power to reveal her mysteries to others. But Nature has a thousand aspects, and one man can only draw out one of them. Whoever does this is a man of genius. One displays her force, another her refinement; one her power of harmony, another her suddenness of contrast; one her beauty of form, another her splendour of colour. Each does that for which he is bast fitted by his particular genius, that is to say, by some quality of mind into which the quality of the object sinks deepest, where it finds the most cordial welcome, is perceived to its utmost extent, and where again it forces its way out from the fulness with which it has taken possession of the mind of the student. The imagination gives out what it has first absorbed by congeniality of temperament, what it has attracted and moulded into itself by elective affinity, as the loadstone draws and impregnates iron. A little originality is more esteemed and sought for than the greatest acquired talent, because it throws a new light upon things, and is peculiar to the individual. The other is common; and may be had for the asking, to any amount.

The value of any work is to be judged of by the quantity of originality contained in it. A very little of this will go a great way. If Goldsmith had never written anything but the two or three first chapters of the Vicar of Wakefield or the character of a Village Schoolmaster, they would have stamped him a man of genius. The editors of Encyclopedias are not usually reckoned the first literary characters of the age. The works of which they have the management contain a great deal of knowledge, like chests or warehouses, but the goods are not their own. We should as soon think of admiring the shelves of a library; but the shelves of a library are useful and respectable. I was once applied to, in a delicate emergency, to write an article on a difficult subject for an Encyclopedia, and was advised to take time and give it a systematic and scientific form, to avail myself of all the knowledge that was to be obtained on the subject, and arrange it with clearness and method. I made answer that as to the first, I had taken time to do all that I ever pretended to do, as I had thought incessantly on different matters for twenty years of my life; that I had no particular knowledge of the subject in question, and no head for arrangement; and that the utmost I could do in such a case would be, when a systematic and scientific article was prepared, to write marginal notes upon it, to insert a remark or illustration of my own (not to be found in former Encyclopedias), or to suggest a better definition than had been offered in the text. There are two sorts of writing.

Notes

The first is compilation; and consists in collecting and stating all that is already known of any question in the best possible manner, for the benefit of the uninformed reader. An author of this class is a very learned amanuensis of other people's thoughts. The second sort proceeds on an entirely different principle: instead of bringing down the account of knowledge to the point at which it has already arrived, it professes to start from that point on the strength of the writer's individual reflections; and supposing the reader in possession of what is already known, supplies deficiencies, fills up certain blanks, and quits the beaten road in search of new tracts of observation or sources of feeling. It is in vain to object to this last style that it is disjointed, disproportioned, and irregular. It is merely a set of additions and corrections to other men's works, or to the common stock of human knowledge, printed separately. You might as well expect a continued chain of reasoning in the notes to a book. It skips all the trite, intermediate, level common-places of the subject, and only stops at the difficult passages of the human mind, or touches on some striking point that has been overlooked in previous editions. A view of a subject, to be connected and regular, cannot be all new. A writer will always be liable to be charged either with paradox or common-place, either with dulness or affectation. But we have no right to demand from any one more than he pretends to. There is indeed a medium in all things, but to unite opposite excellencies is a task ordinarily too hard for mortality. He who succeeds in what he aims at, or who takes the lead in any one mode or path of excellence, may think himself very well off. It would not be fair to complain of the style of an Encyclopedia as dull, as wanting volatile salt; nor of the style of an Essay because it is too light and sparkling, because it is not a caput mortuum. So it is rather an odd objection to a work that it is made up entirely of 'brilliant passages'—at least it is a fault that can be found with few works, and the book might be pardoned for its singularity. The censure might indeed seem like adroit flattery, if it were not passed on an author whom any objection is sufficient to render unpopular and ridiculous. I grant it is best to unite solidity with show, general information with particular ingenuity. This is the pattern of a perfect style; but I myself do not pretend to be a perfect writer. In fine, we do not banish light French wines from our tables, or refuse to taste sparkling Champagne when we can get it because it has not the body of Old Port. Besides, I do not know that dulness is strength, or that an observation is slight because it is striking. Mediocrity, insipidity, want of character is the great fault.

Mediocribus esse poetis Non Dii, non homines, non concessere columnae.Neither is this privilege allowed to prose-writers in our time any more than to poets formerly. It is not then acuteness of organs or extent of capacity that constitutes rare genius or produces the most exquisite models of art, but an intense sympathy with some one beauty or distinguishing characteristic in nature. Irritability alone, or the interest taken in certain things, may supply the place of genius in weak and otherwise ordinary minds. As there are certain instruments fitted to perform certain kinds of labour, there are certain minds so framed as to produce certain chef-d'oeuvres in art and literature, which is surely the best use they can be put to. If a man had all sorts of instruments in his shop and wanted one, he would rather have that one than be supplied with a double set of all the others. If he had them twice over, he could only do what he can do as it is, whereas without that one he perhaps cannot finish any one work he has in hand. So if a man can do one thing better than anybody else, the value of this one thing is what he must stand or fall by, and his being able to do a hundred other things merely as well as anybody else would not alter the sentence or add to his respectability; on the contrary, his being able to do so many other things well would probably interfere with and encumber him in the execution of the only thing that others cannot do as well as he, and so far be a drawback and a disadvantage. More people, in fact, fail from a multiplicity of talents and pretensions than from an absolute poverty of resources. I have given instances of this elsewhere. Perhaps Shakespear's tragedies would in some respects have been better if he had never written comedies at all; and in that case his comedies might well have been spared, though they must have cost us some regret. Racine, it is said, might have rivalled Moliere in comedy; but he gave up the cultivation of his comic talents to devote himself wholly to the tragic Muse. If, as

Notes

the French tell us, he in consequence attained to the perfection of tragic composition, this was better than writing comedies as well as Moliere and tragedies as well as Crebillon. Yet I count those persons fools who think it a pity Hogarth did not succeed better in serious subjects. The division of labour is an excellent principle in taste as well as in mechanics. Without this, I find from Adam Smith, we could not have a pin made to the degree of perfection it is. We do not, on any rational scheme of criticism, inquire into the variety of a man's excellences, or the number of his works, or his facility of production. Venice Preserved is sufficient for Otway's fame. I hate all those nonsensical stories about Lope de Vega and his writing a play in a morning before breakfast. He had time enough to do it after. If a man leaves behind him any work which is a model in its kind, we have no right to ask whether he could do anything else, or how he did it, or how long he was about it. All that talent which is not necessary to the actual quantity of excellence existing in the world, loses its object, is so much waste talent or talent to let. I heard a sensible man say he should like to do some one thing better than all the rest of the world, and in everything else to be like all the rest of the world. Why should a man do more than his part? The rest is vanity and vexation of spirit. We look with jealous and grudging eyes at all those qualifications which are not essential; first, because they are superfluous, and next, because we suspect they will be prejudicial. Why does Mr. Kean play all those harlequin tricks of singing, dancing, fencing, etc.? They say, 'It is for his benefit.' It is not for his reputation. Garrick indeed shone equally in comedy and tragedy. But he was first, not second-rate in both. There is not a greater impertinence than to ask, if a man is clever out of his profession. I have heard of people trying to cross-examine Mrs. Siddons. I would as soon try to entrap one of the Elgin Marbles into an argument. Good nature and common sense are required from all people; but one proud distinction is enough for any one individual to possess or to aspire to.

Self-Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Gold Smith was a fool to

(*a*) Dr. Johnson (*b*) Hazlitt

(*c*) Goldsmith (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) Dr. Johnson was fool to

(*a*) Hazlitt (*b*) Goldsmith

(*c*) Joshna Renolds (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Genius and ..... depend much upon the some principle

(*a*) Stupidity (*b*) Intelligence

(*c*) Taste (*d*) Penchant

(*iv*) Common sense is neither ..... craft nor state policy

(*a*) Genius (*b*) Wise

(*c*) Learned (*d*) Priest

2.2 Summary

- This essay is a remarkable enunciation of theme that common sense is rarely found. The so-called common sense is truly uncommon. It is a rare quality and one who possesses it is really enviable. Many so-called wise men in different branches of life do not possess it. Very few have it without knowing that they have it. It is known only from its results. It reveals as a necessary condition that the owner is free from all pretension.
- The common man laughs at the scholar for not having common sense. But the former mistakes bigotry to be the same as common sense. It is a kind of mental instinct and it feels the air of

Notes

truth and propriety. The piling up of knowledge destroys natural simplicity and restricts the unbiased freedom of mind.

- Common sense is characterised by a sound and impartial judgement on everything concerning the activities of man. It is treated as wisdom when it is combined with great attainments and with a capacity to think. We do not have an instance of one person combining in himself the practical and theoretical kinds of wisdom. There are many who are wise in the affairs of the world and in the activities involving their own interests. But in judging general questions people fall victims of their own weakness or vanity.
- For instance, a person may be an excellent scholar combing in himself varied talents. He would show his want of common sense in a trivial thing like giving a tip. He may be well versed in law and have all the arguments ready. But he forgets that in given situation he has to deal with the impalpable essences like interest and custom. He fails to checkmate a police officer or a customs official with the help of his syllogisms and authorities.
- One acquires wisdom as he realises that he must strike a compromise with existing circumstances. Life demands a modification of our convictions. We have proofs of this throughout our lives. Here common sense effectively function. A few like Hampden may agree to go to the jail instead of paying 'ship-money'. Such instances are exceptions. Normally, our lives are governed more by our feelings, not by our logical arguments. We cannot afford to ignore the importance of feeling. But there are some who are victims of argument, just as some are extremely particular about minute details. The former seeks an argument for everything, while the other needs facts to support a conclusion. The latter are deficient in common sense. Their ideas are local and literal. They fail to grasp the whole problem. They forget their principles in their quest for proofs.
- The Scotch have this matter-of-fact understanding. They believe that their land has no equal. Everything Scotch is considered to be great, including the beggars of Scotland. But women are best fitted to set right such fantastic attitudes. They lose common sense only when they go beyond this sphere of feeling and observation and when they accept the opinions of their learned husbands.
- A country-shoemaker understands shoe-making, though he knows nothing about the problem of Catholics in England. The old woman in the village believes that she will be burnt at the stake because she was told so by those who, according to her, are supposed to know better. Such vulgar errors have nothing to do with common sense. Common sense is a collection of true experiences, while common place is made of cant phrases. A common place book is filled with trite and affected platitudes.
- Affectation put an end to common sense, for the latter requires utmost simplicity and sincerity. A liar has not common sense because he is always busy putting on false appearances. The conceited person does not have common sense because he colours everything with the hues of his own personality. Great talkers sacrifice truth in trying to make a fine speech or to express a fine sentiment. They look at nature only to find out what they can say about it. Passionate people do not show common sense. Coleridge acquired knowledge by painful methodical labour. But being phlegmatic he is half a philosopher and half a clown. Since poets seek to create a world according to their own imagination they can do very well without common sense.
- There is no remedy for want of tact and insight into human affairs. The only remedy that can be suggested is a study of Fielding's great novel *Tom Jones.* The most absurd characters are those who act in opposition to their better knowledge. The capricious and the fickle, the perverse and the obstinate, the idle and the vicious have only biased wills, not deficient understandings. The greatest fools in practice are some times the wisest men in theory. They

Notes

can give the best advice to others, though they do not follow it in their own lives. They see and approve the better course, and follow the worse. Their judgements are clear and just, though their habits and affections follow the wrong way. They escape from reason and common sense.

- This is a remarkable essay. By common sense Hazlitt only means natural good sense of a practical kind in every day affairs. It is tact or social good sense. It involves sincerity and it is based on a valid insight into human affairs.

2.3 Key-Words

1. Rare	:	not common
2. Its price	:	Originally this was said of wisdom. See Job, 28.18.'the price of wisdom is above rubies' and Proverbs, 8.11. 'wisdom is better than rubies'
3. Pedant	:	one who prides in his scholarship.
4. Fairly worth the seven	:	from Pope's Moral Essays, Epistle 4.43. The medieval schools had seven sciences. These are grammar. rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.
5. Does not consist with	:	is not compatible with
6. Warn and trammel	:	give a bias to, hamper.
7. Common sense	:	natural good sense of a practical kind in every day affairs. It is social good sense, tact.
8. 'Comes home to ... men'	:	from the Dedication of Bacon's Essays.
9. Of the later ... instance	:	one and the same person having both kinds of wisdom, namely, practical and theoretical kinds.
10. Dupes	:	victims.

2.4 Review Questions

1. Briefly discuss Hazlitt's eassy On Genius and Common Sense.
2. What does Hazlitt want to indicate by Common Sense? Explain

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*c*) (*iv*) (*d*)

2.5 Further Readings



1. P.S. Sastri, Hazlitt selected essays, Doaba House, Delhi.
2. Geoffrey Keynes, selected essays of William Hazlitt 1778 to 1830.
3. Peter Quennell, *A History of English Literature* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), p. 380.
4. Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955-65), vol. 3: *The Age of Transition,* p. 125.
5. Stephen F. Fogle, "Leigh Hunt and the End of Romantic Criticism," in *Some British Romantics*, ed. James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye (Columbus: Ohio StateUniversity Press, 1966), p. 128.

Notes

Unit 3: Hazlitt--On Genius and Common Sense: Critical Appreciation

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
3.1 Basic Principle of Hazlitt Essays
3.2 Wit, Humour, Irony and Satire
3.3 Observations of Style
3.4 Hazlitt's Style
3.5 Critical Appreciation
3.6 Summary
3.7 Key-Words
3.8 Review Questions
3.9 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Understand Hazlitt literary style and taste
- Examine critically Hazlitt's essay On Genius and Common Sense

Introduction

Hazlitt's literary tastes are catholic. He read widely and wisely. He knew intimately the literature of the Elizabethan age. He brought his sympathetic insight into an understanding of the Restoration drama, admired Pope for his technical virtuosity, and joined no group to condemn or praise any period in its entirety. Cazamian observed: "he it was who traced the first roads, marked out the vantage points and gauged the heights on the virgin soil of Romanticism, and almost in every case his literary judgment remains that of today; he anticipates the future, and sees with the eyes of posterity". His remarks on Shakespeare, Pope, Burns, and Coleridge show his understanding and estimate of the nature of genius. Though he looks like Sainte-Beuve, "he is" , says Hugh Walker, "not so safe as the French critic; he is not so careful; he lacks the lucidity of style which apparently is the inalienable birthright of all French critics; but there is more vigour in him than there is in the southern writer, less of that cool detachment which may chill the enthusiastic but which is a healthy corrective against prejudice". But is should be noted that his study of literature was imperfect, and that there were large gaps which he never cared to fill. Thus forgetting his own incomplete knowledge, he spoke of the rugged metre of Chaucer, and admired the Greek spirit in Pope's translation of Homer. Evidently he did not grasp the Greek spirit of Homer. Though he did not read well, he could write about the authors in a nonchalant way. It is a casual approach based on a defective knowledge that appears at times in the Lectures on English Poets. Yet he is never without his characteristic gusto which makes the literary text he examines breathe vitality. He presents his grasp of the text with a personal love. As Saintsbury remarked: 'where Hazlitt is inadequate, he more instructive than many men's adequacy could be, and where he is not, he

Notes

prepares us for that ineffable and half-reluctant outburst on Coleridge". Speaking of his now attitude towards his contemporaries, Hazlitt remarked: "I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of the dead; but I cannot speak of them with the same reverence because I do not feel it". His comments are frank and blunt, and they emerge from his honesty and sincerity.

Hazlitt's literary criticism is at times a "prodigious variation" on the subject. He continues to say, without being tired, what poetry is and what it is not in his Lectures on English Poets. At other times he reveals a peculiar attitude exemplified in his treatment of specific texts and authors. This attitude is best expressed in the words: "I somehow felt it as a point of honour not to make my hearers think less highly of some of these old writers that I myself did of them. If I have praised an author, it was because I liked him; if I have quoted a passage if was because it pleased me in the reading; if I have spoken contemptuously of any one, it has been reluctantly". At still other times he was led by his prejudices and pre-conceived ideas, or by his own incompatible mental traits. He was "often a creature of prejudice, of prejudice so irrational as to make him uncritical. His very individuality, his originality, is sometimes a snare; he never enjoyed running in double harness, and he sometimes kicks over the traces from sheet wilfulness.



Did u know? Hazlitt's literary theory is clearly expressed in three essays. These are "On Poetry in General", "On Gusto", and "Why the Arts are not Progressive".

In these essays we find that poetry is "the language of the imagination and the passions". In his approach to poetry he sought to understand "the internal character, the living principle" and to arrive at an acceptable standard for the "improvement of taste", The ideas expressed in these essays are not vague, in spite of Mr. Watson's Cavalier attitude of Hazlitt; for Mr. Watson fails to see Hazlitt's theory in the context of the Romantic theory of poetry. Since Mr. Watson bandies about vague terms like "analysis" and "descriptions", he finds vagueness whereever the critic avoided it. Hazlitt was a highly sensitive student of literature, and therefore succeeds in articulating what we feel in the presence of great literature. Accordingly he observers that "poetry is literature and with a rare common sense which always attended his ecstasies, he read and wrote with a gusto. There is always a "continuity of impression" in all that he wrote. This is a criticism which is always fresh and original. It is not therefore surprising to find that he was the first to discover many important authors. Even when Johnson was half-hearted in his attitude to the novelists, Hazlitt wrote on them with admirable tact and taste. Candidly does he express even here his like and dislikes. This is an intimately personal kind of criticism which is not burdened by an abstract literary theory. He was eager to recreate for himself and for his readers the experience out of which a given work of art may have sprung. He did to take kindly to the oblique poetry of Danne; but he was sympathetic to the metaphysical poets. In emphasizing Milton's "Force of Imagination", he drew attention to the nature and value of the epic as a literary genre. He refers to those "superior, happy spirits who slid through life on the rollers of learning". He presented Dryden and People, who were disliked by many Romantic poets and critics, as poets who should be popular because they are poet of art who "polished life". In such critical appraisals we notice his "extraordinary fertility and felicity in judgement, of individual authors, books, or pieces"

3.1 Basic Principle of Hazlitt Essays

The basic principle he followed as a literary critic was expressed by him thus: "I have undertaken merely to read over a set of authors with the audience, as I would do with a friend, to point out a favourite passage, to explain an objection; or of a remark or a theory as it occurs to state it in illustration of the subject: but neither tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantic rules and pragmatical

Notes

formulas of criticism that can do no good to any body. I do not come to the task with a pair of compasses or a ruler in my pocket to see whether a poem is round or squre, or to measure its mechanical dimensions, like a metre. In a word, I have endeavoured to feel what is good and to give a reason for the faith that was in me, when necessary and when in my power. This is what I have done and what I must continue to do". He attempted to see how far ad in what way he could justify the impressions he received from the literary texts. Always alive to the significance of situation, character, phrase,or word, he tried to rationalise his judgements. Starting with an assumption that life and literature form an organic whole, he gave an account of the critical intelligence in the essays "On the Conversation of Authors" and "On the Ignorance of the Learned". This account is ably illustrated by appropriate texts. Thus we have an individualistic criticism which breathes his feelings, intuitions, and imagination.

Yet Hazlitt's conclusions are not sporadic utterances of a lay mind. They were based on long and repeated encounters with the great work of literature; and they were ably reasoned out. Even if he condemns Sidney's Arcadia as being perverse, he gives his reasons.

His central theory appears in the essay "Thoughts on Taste" There we read: "Genius is the power of producing excellence; taste is the power of perceiving the excellence thus produced in its several sorts and degrees, with all their force of refinement, distinctions and connections. In other words, taste is strictly the power of being properly affected by works of genius. It is the proportioning admiration to power, pleasure to beauty; it is entire sympathy with the fitnest impulses of imagination, not antipathy, not indifference to them". The critic must have taste which is a form empathy. The artist reads human interest, Values, and feelings into his objects; and the critic reads or finds his values, feelings and interests in the work of art. This explains the ever-present of gusto of Hazlitt, and also his antipathies. This doctrine of empathy is the foundation of much criticism that Hazlitt gave. In this criticism we notice his unique admiration for his authors, and his pleasure and sympathy in defining or describing his experience of the works. The kind of taste he enunciated is an active reaction of a keen and sensitive mind, and it becomes the work of genius when he embodies it in words. The resulting criticism is both on expression and a communication. Though he could not divine the actual nature of the creative process, he was richly compensated by a fine taste, a vigorous understanding, a disposition to argue coherently, and a living speech. For example, he observes with tact and with a modulated response born of a sensitivity, what happened when he met Lamb for the first time: It was at Godwin's that I met him with Holcroft and Coleridge, when they were disputing fiercely which was the best–man as he was,or man as he is to be. 'Give me', says Lamb, 'man as he is not to be', This saying was the beginning of a friendship between us, which I believe still continues". This passage tells us more about Lamb and Hazlitt than all the works written by them or on them.

Hazlitt was guilty of many errors in his critical evaluations. But these are not many if we remember that he lived in an age which did not possess any sound textual scholarship as we understand it today. He was never worried by the sources of a text, for "the play is the thing".

3.2 Wit, Humour, Irony and Satire

Wit is based on the activity of the intellect. The critical disposition on Hazlitt made him exercise his wit very powerfully. He speaks of "a conceited fellow.... who talks always and every where on this subject (Kantean philosophy). He wears the categories round his neck like a pearl-chain; he plays off the primary and transcendental qualities like rings on his fingers. He talks of the Kantean system whole he dances: he talks of it while he dines, he talks of it to his children, to his apprentices, to his customers". This person displays his knowledge of philosophy every where; and this is a symptom of an incurable disease. Hazlitt loved philosophy deeply; and yet he wanted philosophy to keep to its own proper sphere. One should be aware of his limitations. Even this awareness can be made to look witty. He notes that "Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he

Notes

too was admired". The wit here is implicit in the word "too". Such a wit has its target in that which lacks a sense of proportion. Generally in Hazlitt wit is fused with irony: and then we have the pure delight involving the animal spirits. When this is aided by exaggeration, the result is the embodiment of what is called the grotesque.

Hazlitt's wit is blended with irony and satire. Irony is that mental characteristic which transforms an unpleasant phrase, word, or idea into a pleasant one. It has an element of sarcasm. In satire the critical activity is present, and it is directed towards the unpleasant and unacceptable modes of behaviour; or it exposes to ridicule certain drawbacks and weaknesses which make man unpleasant. Hazlitt was more ironical and satirical. His insight into the real nature of human life and his prejudices led him to point out those failing of man which need correction. This frame of mind does not make one generous and sympathetic. Even if he had to acknowledge the merit of others. Hazlitt did it rather grudgingly. In acquiring the tone of irony from swift, Jane Austen and others, Hazlitt was helped also by his earnestness. He admired Wordsworth, and yet we are told that the poet looked "more gaunt and Don Quixote-like"

In the essay "On the Ignorance of the Learned" we have a Hazlitt who was alert to the shortcomings of a mere bookish individual. The man of a single idea becomes the object of satire. The learned one does not breathe the common air, for he is a parasite living on the ideas of others; and hence he becomes a "literary drudge". He is one "who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility". The most learned man is then one who has lost touch with the actualities of life. This is both witty and satirical. The satire becomes biting when we read that the scholar "must be ignorant even of looks" since the use of books is never taught by books.

A mild satirical his appears when we read that Wordsworth "did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference, in defence of his claim to originality. Any the slightest variation would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind". Sarcasm and irony are blended here, and the under current of humour does not prevent our admiration for the poet. Elsewhere Hazlitt exposes vanity with the aid of an elegant wit.

When irony and satire appear in an exaggerated manner and when these are aided by wit, we have the grotesque. In the achievement of grotesque portraiture, Hazlitt is superb. Thus when he met Wordsworth for the first time, he was "Dan Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, lounge in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell". This grotesque picture is lovable since there is a warmth of affection in the delineation. It borders on fun.

Fun involves the evocation of the animal spirits. It rouses the mind and the body into a fresh enjoyment of vigour. This appears in the case of a person who longs to be conspicuous and who yearns for applause. Such a one, he says, "must envelop himself in a halo of mystery- he must ride in an equipage of opinion—he must walk with a train of self- concept it following him–he must surround himself with a cortege of prejudices, like the signs of Zodiac". This is crushing and yet boisterous.

Humour is based on insight into the human condition, and it is born of a sympathy with mankind. It has been well said that the "dull, phlegmatic, retiring humour is not in a fair way to be corrected, but confirmed and rendered desperate". Following this method, Hazlitt offers lively strokes of humour. At times this humour can hit the target hard. Thus we have Hunt who "requires not only to be appreciated, but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees to feel himself quite at home". We have only to remember here that Hazlitt was a good friend of Hunt. There is humour born of sympathy when we read that Hunt 'has a set of bye-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh". Sympathy and antipathy are blended when Hazlitt finds a target in himself or in his friends. He observes the long hair of Coleridge swinging like theatre and poetry. It has a flexibility which slides into unexpected forms.

Notes

Humour and irony are blended in the picture of Hunt given in "The Indian Jugglers": "Hunt is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business". Here is a fine picture of the society in which both Hunt and Hazlitt lived. When he talks of the contemporary society, Hazlitt can be extremely sarcastic. Thus he states that "it is a maxim with me that stage-coaches, and consequently stage-coachmen are respectable in proportion to the distance they have to travel". Elsewhere he said that "footmen are no party of Christianity". Such instances reveal the operation of the comic spirit which aims at correcting human attitudes, outlook, or behaviour.

There are many instances of innocent humour in Hazlitt's writings. He refers to a doctor whose regimen harmed him. The doctor "assured me that the whole pharmacopeia contained nothing comparable to the prescription he had given me; and as a proof of its undoubted efficacy, said, that he had one gentleman with my complaint under his hand for the last fifteen years". At lucid intervals and in moments of felicity Hazlitt gives us such sentences which bring him closer to Lamb and other great humorists.

3.3 Observations of Style

Hazlitt wrote an essay "On Familiar Style". This essay gives us in broad outline the salient features of Hazlitt's own style. It is a style which is neither simple, nor ornate, nor grotesque. It is a familiar style which demands a great effort on the part of the writer because it is not common or colloquial. If one writes as he likes, it may become a cheap style. The familiar style is characterised by precision and purity of expression. It is the golden mean between the simple and the ornate forms of expression. It is opposed to the Johnsonese style. It is equally opposed to the loose, unconnected form of expression. The familiar style requires first the selection of the best appropriate word form among those in common use; and it next demands the proper arrangement of such words. This arrangement is governed by the idiom of the language and by the genius of the writer. These two principles give ease, force, and perspicuity to the style and make it read like normal conversation. This is because it avoids the pedantic and rhetorical devices or tricks. At the same time, this familiar style carries the writer's accent and intonation and his own inflection of the words, thereby it becomes a personal style.

The familiarly style, says Hazlitt, is determined by the theme, by the persons addressed to, and by the writer's attitude to his theme and to his listeners. It is also determined by the familiar association of sound with sense. Such an expression opens the mind and heart of the writer to the listener or reader. This is achieved by observing simplicity and propriety. As a result the familiar style is realised only with difficulty. For instance, when an author has to express the idea of motion, he may have a score of words ready to jump into the sentence. But he must examine and find out which particular word will fit exactly into his meaning. If one word fits in, he must then see whether it harmonises with the other sounds in the sentence. The word here is to a symbol of an idea or feeling; nor is it a translation of his thought or feelings into sound. The word must be an exact equivalent of the idea or feeling. As Hazlitt put it, "out of eight or ten words equally common, equally intelligible, with nearly equal pretensions, it is a matter of some nicety and discrimination to pick out the very one, the perferableness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive". The choice of the right word is then the first major factor in the concept of familiar style.

Hazlitt observes that Johnson's style does not attach significance to discrimination, selection, or variety in the choice of words. Johnson employs many polysyllabic words derived from Greek or Latin. A native Englishman would normally use pure Anglo-Saxon word to express his feelings, emotions, and basic thoughts. One can easily acquire a mastery over polysyllabic words and thereby appear to have a dignified style. But such a style will have neither the charm nor the sweetness nor the effectiveness of the familiar style. The Johnsonese is affected and stilled; and

Notes

Hazlitt rejects it in spite of his great love for Johnson's writings.

The familiar style involves hard task. One has to use common words without appearing to be low or vulgar. This is because this style is neither quaint nor vulgar which employs living and vigorous words and phrases that are in universal use. Such expressions include "cut with a knife" and "cut a piece of wood", not "cut an acquintance". The last one is rejected as it belongs to slang: and it may be accepted if it becomes as part of normal usage. In outlining this principle,Hazlitt of glory, shining inscriptions, the figures of a transparency". The images employed by such writers have little to do with their feelings; and then the images become adventitious. The ignorance of the writer is also revealed by the absence of any relation between the word and the thing, between the object and the feeling, and between the image ad its context. The writer of such a passage is "the plagiarist of words", a writer revelling in obscurity and in far-fetched words.

Hazlitt's emphasis was therefore on a style that is not far different from the language of conversation. This style is informal and yet literary; and it demands a clarity in working, a mastery of vocabulary, an alert mind, and a sensitive approach to words and things. The writer must love his words.

3.4 Hazlitt's Style

Stevenson, himself a great stylist, observed: "We may all be mighty fine fellows, but none of us can write like William Hazlitt". It is a style which is vigorous and English and which has no idiosyncrasy. As Hazlitt remarked, "I hate my style to be known, as I hate all idiosyncrasy". The style of Hazlitt is one of the glorious worthies of English literature.

Hazlitt's style was moulded by the influences he received from the Elizabethan writers, the poets and dramatists of the Restoration, the prose writers of the eighteenth century, and his contempoaries like Wordsworth and Coleridge. These influences and his native gifts gave him a "lively and substantial" style which is "buoyant without being forthy, glittering with no tinsel frippery". This style is easy, incisive, homely, picturesque, and vigorous, since he emulated Burke who "Poured out his mind on paper". Rejecting the pedantic devices like antithesis and parallelism, he arrived at a forked, playful, and trimmed style. Trusting like a musician the immediate impact of the sounds of words, he came to develop a style that is nearer the spoken tongue It can be read aloud with great effect.

In this style the dominant factor is the intellect. Since the cultivation of a good style is not an instance of the mechanical skill, it is not possible to achieve perfection here.

3.5 Critical Appreciation

A wonderfully apt, succinct characterization of Leigh Hunt appears in a recent popular literary history: "Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) was a gifted and industrious man of letters, who spent much of his working life in the company of men of genius.'' A better brief estimation would be hard to find, but it points to a special problem. How does one write about an author whose work was done more than a century ago if that writer was not himself a genius? How do you talk about a man of considerable talent who, it is asserted, never wrote anything absolutely of the first rank but whose work you nevertheless wish to commend? In reading the scholarly critical literature on Hunt, again and again one finds condemning, or at best apologetic, assessments. "[Hunt's criticism] lacks theoretical power, as his loose derivative theory of the imagination shows. He has little judgment However important as a middleman of romantic ideas and tastes he lacks real distinction of mind.'' "Hunt [employing the critical vocabulary of romanticism] is using these terms for the emotional aura that surrounds them, and all precision of meaning is lost.''"We should acknowledge at the outset... that Hunt's intellectual faculties for synthesis were not of the first order and that he was not especially interested in theoretical matters.'' One has to sympathize with the scholars who

Notes

have come to these assessments because a fair judgment must discriminate, and in the comparison with his great contemporaries, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt — geniuses all — Hunt is left behind. If that is the case, however, why do we bother to remember him?

In saying that Hunt was not a genius in the way that his great contemporaries were, I was thinking of Hazlitt's discussion in the essays "On Genius and Common Sense" that appeared in *Table Talk* (1821). If we cannot praise Hunt for his genius, we can perhaps praise him for his common sense and, by studying the term and his embodiment of it, appreciate a quality, important to the romantic critics, that is by no means contemptible, nor even always easily achieved. Approaching him in this vein, we may approximate the view held by his great contemporary admirers. Shelley, for instance, dedicated *The Cenci* to Hunt thus: "Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for the work the ornament of his name.... One of simpler, and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners I never knew." When a writer as serious in his ideals as Shelley speaks this way, saying he uses his words "in the highest sense," we know he doesn't simply mean that Hunt is a pleasant man without notable vulgarities of manner or motive. Hazlitt, too, has judicious but high praise for Hunt. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) he notes the faults in Hunt's writing, which are that "he perhaps takes too little pains, and indulges in too much wayward caprice." But he also says, "He is the only poet or literary man we ever knew who... united rare intellectual acquirements with outward grace and natural gentility." Furthermore "a wit and a poet, Mr. Hunt is also distin guished by fineness of tact and sterling sense.'' Compare this praise with a sentence from the first essay "On Genius and Common Sense": "*Tact, finesse*, is nothing but the being completely aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations, passions,& c. and the being consequently sensible to their slightest indications or movements in others.'Hazlitt uses this sentence to introduce his culminating example of the quality of common sense, Lord Shaftesbury's discovery of Anne Hyde's secret marriage to the Duke of York from subtle changes in her mother's bearing toward her. "This," Hazlitt concludes, "was carrying the prophetic spirit of common sense as far as it could go." If we consider Hazlitt's remarks carefully, it thus seems that something akin to the "prophetic spirit of common sense" is one of the "rare intellectual acquirements" he attributes to Hunt when praising his "fineness of tact and sterling sense."

So far as "prophetic spirit" goes, even Hunt's severest detractors agree that he had an uncanny ability to discover and encourage young poetic talent. Stephen F. Fogle, for instance, recognizing Hunt's great contribu tions to practical criticism, says, "To have brought out in The, examiner, one of the most influential papers of the day, the first published work of John Keats, and to have used its power to assist both Keats and Shelley is an act of prescience from which nothing can detract.'' Amy Lowell earlier created the phrase that subsequent writers have seized as the most favorable and least controversial judgment they could make concerning Hunt's critical achievement, though even she feels obliged to disclaim any illusions that he was greater than he should be: "Hunt was not a great creator certainly, but he was a great introducer .... I can never forget that it was his Imagination and Fancy which first taught me what poetry was. There is no better text-book for the appreciation of poetry than that volume.'' James B. Misenheimer, Jr. elaborates on Lowell's concept of "introducer," in a similarly defensive way:

Although his own creative powers were not great, his appreciation of creative ability in others was wide and sound.... Hunt had an almost uncanny power to single out good poets and good works and to make independent evaluations that would stand the test of time.

But when Hazlitt referred to the "prophetic spirit of common sense" he surely meant something other than a good record of accurate prediction. Among the liberal romantics of Hunt's acquaintance, the notion of prophecy had a special force. Let us consider Shelley's use of the term in his "Defence of Poetry" which, like Hazlitt's essay "On Genius and Common Sense," first appeared in the world in 1821, the crucial year in which Hunt began his Italian adventure and his renewed hopes

Notes

for the liberal cause. Shelley's discussion of the prophetic spirit, not of common sense precisely, but of poetry in general, must have buoyed Hunt's spirits for the task he was undertaking. Shelley optimistically describes an inevitable progress in human society and human morality led by and expressed by the poets:

[The poets] are not only the authors of language and of music;... they are the institutors of laws, and founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the True, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion Poets .... Poets.... were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets; a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and fruit of latest time.

The special appeal such a passage would have for Hunt is its sense of a powerful sweep of society forward into ever better institutions, manners, and enjoyments, precisely the sort of movement that he too served as a liberal editor and man of letters. To be associated in this kind of constructive activity with two of the most powerful poets of his time was the purpose of his emigration to Italy.

Because Leigh Hunt's knowledge of Shelley's and Hazlitt's theoretical essays was so close and so basic to his own critical attitudes, some further attention to the details of their thought will help place Hunt's contribution to romantic criticism in its proper frame. In Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," "imagination" — that workhorse term of romanticism — refers to a class of mental actions that compose from individual thoughts, "as from elements," other more complex thoughts which are synthesized integrities or unities. Poetry is defined as "the expression of the imagination" or, in other words, as the creation or synthesis of these unities. Furthermore, "poetry is connate with the origin of man," because to be human means to engage in the process of perceiving or constructing these unities. In a lyrical but completely empirical formulation that John Locke would not have disagreed with, Shelley states, "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven." This experiential process is delightful, and the child or the primitive man will try to express in voice and gesture both its delight and its shaping of these impressions into the most comprehensive unities possible. And indeed as the experiential impressions fade, he will try to prolong them by those expressions he has associated with them. These expressions constitute the products and history of the poetic or synthesizing spirit. At the earliest stages man delights in the external world; then comes self-consciousness, social consciousness, and finally civilized societal awareness. At each stage imagination strives to create those unified expressions of experience that assure the keenest delight: "For there is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other: the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers."


Notes Hazlitt, we have seen, had used the word taste, or its synonyms tact and finesse, in his description of Hunt.

In the earliest stages of human development, Shelley continues, every individual can express this order well. Shelley rather cumbersomely calls this power of expression the "faculty of approximation to the beautiful." As time goes on some persons are recognized to possess the faculty to a much higher degree than others, and to them is granted the specialized task of expressing the fundamental human order most fully so that "the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the

Notes

influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community." The poets, in other words, are those who express the truest vision of humanity — the most comprehensively integrated and the most accordant with "pleasure." And this vision the rest of society receives and assimilates to itself. Thus it is that the poets, "who imagine and express this indestructible order," become the institutors, the founders, the teachers, and the prophets. For Shelley, then, the poets are practical people of thought and action leading forward the evolutionary march of human knowledge and institu tions. And when we are looking for sources of Leigh Hunt's literary principles we might remember this essay. Shelley, a true genius, provided a coherent, rational structuring of literary principles, including answers to those questions that occupied several of the greater romantic writers: what is a poet? and what does a poet do? And to this structure, in part, Leigh Hunt, a man of taste and common sense, assimilated his own thought. If we accept this view of the matter, we can get a little closer to understanding what quality Hunt possessed that enabled him to be the great discoverer, nurturer, and introducer of literary genius to his age. Remember again Shelley's remark: "There is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation, from which the hearer and spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other: the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers."

Let us turn now to the essay by Hunt's other great critical friend, who commended him for his "fineness of tact and sterling sense." Begin again with the passage from "On Genius and Common Sense" quoted earlier. "Tact, finesse, is nothing but the being completely aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations, passions, &c. and the being consequently sensible to their slightest indications or movements in others." Just as Shelley did, Hazlitt bases his model of human experience and thought in "feeling," or what the British empirical philosophers called impression. He says, "in art, in taste, in life, in speech, you decide from feeling, and not from reason; that is, from the impression of a number of things on the mind, which impression is true and well-founded though you may not be able to analyze or account for it in the several particulars" [my emphasis]. A little further on he calls these impressions "the immediate stamp of nature." The single or unified impression that results from "the impression of a number of things" clearly involves a synthesis of many elements into an integrated experience which includes a power to respond, express, or, as he says, "judge." Hazlitt elaborates more fully upon the power of judgment and expression at the level of ordinary experience, the level he calls "common sense." "Common sense is the just result of the sum-total of such unconscious impressions in the ordinary occurrences of life, as they are treasured up in the memory, and called out by the occasion. Genius and taste depend upon much the same principle exercised on loftier ground and in more unusual combinations."

"Common sense" for Hazlitt is a powerful and firm guide to action. It is the "just result" of "the sum-total" of the unconscious impressions that constitute experience. Common sense, then, is accurate human feeling, directly representative of a pure humanity uncontaminated by prejudice, false refinement, or vulgar opinion. It is easily tainted, but in persons of genuine tact or finesse it can function as "the prophetic spirit of common sense." And it is on the basis of this common sense that loftier acts of genius or taste occur. Hunt stood between Hazlitt and Shelley, these literary men of genius, highly regarded by both for powers of taste and judgment, remarkable because grounded in a pure and honest common sense. As a critic, editor, and representer of ideals they believed in, according to their own testimony, these men found none more capable of understanding and supporting them — and their genius — than Leigh Hunt.

To follow this last point a little further, let us consider Hazlitt's other term. If Hunt is exemplary of common sense, fineness of tact, indeed "sterling" sense, what is it that sets "genius" apart? Hazlitt says the man of real genius "has the feeling of truth already shrined in his own breast, and his eye is still bent on nature to see how she expresses herself.'' Based on his own self-awareness,

Notes

his own experience of the fundamental human order, the man of genius looks for accordant expressions on the part of nature herself. But the man of common sense does this too, does he not? How else could he regard her but in the light of his fundamental interpretive finesse or tact unless it be with something less appropriate, like prejudice or vanity. The difference, then, is that the man of genius creates new relationships with nature which common sense never realized before. "Genius or originality is, for the most part, *some strong quality in the mind, answering to and bringing out some new and striking quality in nature* [Hazlitt's emphasis].'' Apparently the "prophetic spirit" of common sense in some persons of extreme capacity, which sets them over into a new category of intellect, can enter or realize uncharted territories of internal or external nature and thus open them more fully to experience. What genius discovers, once revealed, is available to all persons of common sense. Those persons, however, do not merely passively receive what genius has given them. Rather they themselves, having been shown the way, must positively reenact the discovery, extending by imagination their own stores of passion or feeling into the revealed area of experience.

The creations of imagination, syntheses of various impressions, organize themselves for Hazlitt around particular strong passions, not according to structured forms: "[In acts of association] any impression in a series can recall any other impression in that series without going through the whole in order: so that the mind drops the intermediate links, and passes on rapidly and by stealth to the more striking effects of pleasure or pain which have naturally taken the strongest hold of it.'' The organizing nodes of mental syntheses, in Hazlitt's view, are not rational, esthetic, or logical arrangements and structures of impres sions, but rather strong predominating passions, elemental in force, to which all other impressions are drawn, as to a magnet.

A key point to be observed in Hazlitt's critical theory is that imagination belongs as well to the person of common sense, the person of taste, and the person of genius. Imagination, based on feeling, responsive to external and internal impressions according to the modes of a fundamen tal human order of experience, is the power that communicates between them. And the fact that imagination operates throughout the scale of cognition from the just-awakening common sense to the loftiest genius means that a common instrument for expression or communication exists whereby the discoveries of genius can be assimilated into the community at large; and, thus, the liberal march of progress is effected. If the geniuses are the innovators and leaders of moral, cultural, or artistic reform, persons of reliable common sense are needed to consolidate and establish the reformation. Shelley recognized in Leigh Hunt such a person and invited him to Italy on that basis.

This essay has devoted considerable space to reviewing fundamental critical principles expressed by two romantic creators who were closest to Hunt during, probably, the most crucial year of his life. One reason to conduct such a review, is that Hunt's intelligence and critical reputation have been attacked by influential scholars who have not considered the relevant context, but instead have denigrated his work because it has not explicated Coleridge. In fact, the primary elements in Hunt's critical principles owe far more to Hazlitt and Shelley, whom he assimilated and represented to the general reading public. A second reason for reviewing Shelley and Hazlitt, especially the latter, is that they define a process, as it were a social program of art at its highest levels of influence over the progressive tendencies of humankind, which explains precisely what Hunt's position and what his work amounted to in the romantic scheme of things. Hazlitt's depiction of genius and common sense provides the clearest model of what we may assume Hunt's relation to his greater contemporaries to be. It is a model which explains in more detail and gives significant depth to the character Amy Lowell gave us of Hunt as "a great introducer." Hunt had a power of taste, in the high sense defined by Shelley and Hazlitt, that was effective in its own time and can still instruct in its own right, and complete our awareness of that splendid age of literary art. Let us consider an example.

Before turning to one of Hunt's best pieces of practical criticism, let us address Hazlitt's mild

Notes

censure of his writing in The Spirit of the Age: "he perhaps takes too little pains, and indulges in too much wayward caprice." This applies to much of Hunt's vast production as a literary journalist, and it has been made the occasion for critical abuse and ridicule. But we need to focus on his best work, as we do for the greater geniuses of his age. A "balanced" judgment of Wordsworth would reveal that the volume of his mediocre verse exceeds that of his irreplaceable poetry by a considerable margin. And the same proportion would exist for Byron and many other writers. lndeed Hunt himself remarks on this general fact in his discussion of Middleton, Dekker, and Webster in *In Imagination and Fancy* (1844): "When about to speak of these and other extraordinary men of the days of Shakespeare... I wasted a good deal of time in trying to find out how it was that, possessing, as most of them did, such a pure vein of poetry... they wrote so much that is not worth reading, sometimes not fit to be read. I might have considered that, either from self-love, or necessity, or both, too much writing is the fault of all ages and of every author.'' This is not the only place in Hunt's writings where he intimates a shortcoming of his own in this regard. But there are many examples where the trenchancy of his style and the vigor of his common sense combine with delightful effect.

The example we turn to, recalling Hazlitt's distinction between common sense and vulgar opinion, is Hunt's defense of the unconventional genius of Byron's *Don Juan* against its canring, hypocritically moral detractors. In *The Examiner* of October 31, 1819, he writes, "*Don Juan* is accused of being an 'immoral' work, which we cannot discover." He describes the situation in Canto I leading to the mutual seduction of Juan and Julia. "This, it is said, has tendency to corrupt the minds of 'us youth,' and to make us *think* lightly of breaking the matrimonial contract. But if to do this be immoral, we can only say that Nature is immoral." He goes on, "Lord Byron does no more than relate the consequences of certain absurdities. If he speaks slightingly of the ties between a girl and a husband old enough for her father, it is because the ties themselves *are* slight. He does not ridicule the bonds of Marriage generally, or where they are formed as they should be: he merely shows the folly and wickedness of setting forms and opinions against nature." Clearly Hunt is speaking with the insight of unblemished common sense, as Hazlitt discussed it, and from this base is opening to his readers the opportunity to respond justly to the work against the conventionally antisexual morality that was already forming this early in the nineteenth century. In fact, with a clearheaded awareness of powerful forces within human nature that William Blake would not have disdained, Hunt wittily attacks the moralists straight on.

There are a set of prudish and very suspicious moralists who endeavor to make vice appear to inexperienced eyes much more hateful than it really is. They would correct Nature ;— and they always overreach themselves .... Now the said prudes ... are constantly declaiming on the deformity of vice, and its almost, total want of attraction. The consequence is, that when they are found to have deceived (as they always are) and immoral indulgence is discovered to be not without its charms.— the minds of young persons are apt to confound their true with their false maxims.

Because Hunt's stand here —for common sense and for human nature — links him with several of the great geniuses of his age, notably Shelley and William Blake as well as Byron, it is worth quoting a little further from this review. Lacking an independent income, having many children to feed, entirely dependent on an accepting public for his maintenance, Hunt shows courageous fidelity to the standards of common sense as well as a keen, "prescient" anticipation of the long-running history and resolution of this issue. Discussing Canto II, Hunt says, We suppose there has been some sermonizing on the description of the delight arising from the "illicit intercourse" of Juan and Haidee. People who talk in this way can perceive no distinctions.

He goes on to describe briefly the circumstance of those lovers, removed from the artificial constraints of society. Then, But what is there to blame in a beautiful and affectionate girl who gives way to a passion for a young shipwrecked human creature bound to her by gratitude as well as love? ... Does she not receive, as well as bestow, more real pleasure (for that is the question) in

Notes

the enjoyment of a first and deep passion, than in becoming the wife of some brother in iniquity to whom her pirating father would have trucked her for lucre?

The ironic cadences of that last sentence cut to the bone, not merely as wit but as incisive criticism of social sickness in his age. Hunt interprets Byron more deeply perhaps than Byron intended. In a sense, Hunt extends Byron's poem to a level of application that the apparent levity and flippancy of Byron's tone might not otherwise reach with the general reader. Hunt reveals in Byron that which Byron's tone might have concealed. Finally, the concluding paragraph of Hunt's review is surely an example of *tact* and*finesse* yielding "the prophetic spirit of common sense." It is short, but to students of romanticism it cannot but suggest the struggles of Los with Vala in *The Four Zoas* or of Los with his Spectre in *Jerusalem*, which Blake was working out at the very time Hunt was writing. Here is the paragraph. The fact is, at the bottom of all these questions, that many things are made vicious, which are not so by nature; and many things made virtuous, which are only so by calling and agreement: and it is on the horns of this self-created dilemma, that society is continually writhing and getting desperate.

For another exhibit of Leigh Hunt's role as romantic critic, let us turn to his only extended effort at theoretical exposition, the essay "What Is Poetry?" which opens the 1844 volume *Imagination and Fancy*. This essay has been most severely — and strangely — denigrated by scholars in the past quarter century. The negative estimates concerning Hunt's intelligence and critical achievement quoted at the beginning of this discussion are directed mainly at the 1844 essay. The essay has received more mockery than sympathetic reading in recent years. Ernest Bernbaum in 1929 called it "one of the clearest and most comprehensive, though not the profoundest, treatment of the subject by any of the Romantics." But M. H. Abrams wittily set the tone for contemporary reception of the essay by reminding his readers of a critical joke made at Hunt's expense in the previous century. After summarizing differences between Coleridge, Hazlitt, Shelley, and Byron in the definition of poetry, Abrams quips, "Finally Leigh Hunt reconciled these differences by the simple device of a definition which, as David Masson has remarked, is 'constructed on the principle of omitting nothing that anyone would like to see included'. "

It seems to have been the elaborateness of Hunt's opening definition that has led his detractors to deny him judgment or distinction of mind. Yet it seems to me that if one reads his opening paragraph, keeping in mind the relevant background of Hazlitt, Shelley, and the other great critical geniuses of the era, one may well be enlightened, pleased, and indeed impressed by the distinguished qualities of mind revealed. Hunt gives an imaginatively integrated account of romantic poetic theory that begins with a lucid, tightly structured outline, that is developed with clarity and cogency, and that ends with a fruitful juxtaposition of passages from Milton, Coleridge, and Shelley, which resonate with new significance in the context he has prepared for them. Perhaps by 1844 the principles expressed are no longer revolutionary. But neither are Hunt's intentions revolutionary. They are, rather, "to furnish such an account, in an essay, of the nature and requirements of poetry, *as may enable readers in general to give an answer on those points to themselves and others*" [Hunt's emphasis] .

Turning to the essay, one discovers that Masson's and Abrams's word is not precisely accurate. The paragraph in question is not a "definition" according to the meaning by which one expects a man of abstract thought to summarize a topic or concept broadly and memorably in a short pithy expression. Rather, Hunt's paragraph is an announcement and outline of the aspects of his subject to be covered at length in the essay, all brought together in a connected, if full, statement of his intent (current academic rhetoricians call such a passage occurring at the beginning of an essay the thesis statement). Indeed Hunt's 1844 essay might seem to lack the lightning flashes of genius used by the romantic essayists, but Hunt's procedure ably organizes for the wider, though educated Victorian reading public the complex theories of the romantic innovators. Here is the opening statement of "What Is Poetry?"

Notes

Poetry, strictly and artistically so called, that is to say, considered not merely as poetic feeling, which is more or less shared by all the world, but as the operation of that feeling such as we see it in the poet's book, is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embody ing and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity. Its means are whatever the universe contains; and its end, pleasure and exaltation. Poetry stands between nature and convention, keeping alive among us the enjoyment of the external and spiritual world: it has constituted the most enduring fame of nations; and next to Love and Beauty, which are its parents, is the greatest proof to man of the pleasure to be found in all things, and of the probable riches of infinitude.

Every point that Hunt develops in the 46 pages of his essay is touched on in this outline, and the transitions he will develop in full are intimated. Each of the topics can be paralleled in an important precursor essay by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Shelley, or others, but Hunt richly illustrates each and treats it with his own taste and good sense. Notice the opening distinction between poetry as the actual expressions in the poet's book and a more general poetic feeling "which is more or less shared by all the world." This has been regarded by Stephen F. Fogle, among others, as so much soft and meaningless verbiage padding out an already overblown statement. [27] Although "general poetic feeling" is a concept easily and often sentimentalized, Hunt is making an important point here, one already commented on in relation to Shelley's "Defence of Poetry." Hunt wishes to insist that what the poets express in their books is not foreign, alien, effeminate, or imaginary. Rather, poets express a fundamental human order shared by all members of the species, an order expressible with greatest comprehensives and pleasurableness by the best poets in their achievements of greatest truth and beauty.

The concepts of truth and beauty, as well as two others equally important to Hazlitt and Shelley, are referred to then in the section of Hunt's outline that might properly be singled out as the "definition." The more limited "definition" reads "Poetry ... is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power." Each of these key terms receives further elaboration.

- "Poetry is a passion, because it seeks the deepest impressions; and because it must undergo, in order to convey them." The poet must feel, and feel deeply, the myriad impressions that nature and his own responses play across his sensibility. He must willingly undergo these feelings if he is genuinely to register and thus be able to express truly the fundamental human order.
- "It is a passion for truth, because without truth the impression would be false or defective." "Truth" here means an accurate registration of the realities of nature. In Hazlitt's terminology passion for truth would involve the distinction between common sense and vulgar opinion. The passion for truth, for instance, is what Hunt showed to be operative in Byron's attack on hypocritical moralities in his review of *Don Juan*.
- "It is a passion for beauty, because its office is to exalt and refine by means of pleasure, and because beauty is nothing but the loveliest form of pleasure." Hunt is referring here to Shelley's notion of beauty as the degree of expression approximating most closely to the fundamental order or rhythm of experience from which, accordingly, the purest and most intense degree of pleasure ensues. Thus he calls it the "loveliest," meaning the most desirable, the most pleasing form of pleasure. It must be remembered also that, in his time, Hunt would need to distinguish by some such adjective the pleasure he is discussing because of the Benthamite Utilitarian scheme to reduce all pleasures to the same qualitative level.
- Finally, "It is a passion for power, because power is impression triumphant, whether over the poet, as desired by himself, or over the reader, as affected by the poet." Only by feeling deeply, by "ardent subjection of one's self to emotion" can one realize the pleasure, the beauty, the truth, and so on. In a way this axiom repeats the earlier three, but by stating it in this form, Hunt is able to recall Hazlitt's doctrine that the synthesis or ordering of experience, poetry triumphant, occurs across the nodes of most intense feeling or impression.

Notes

These few passages, I believe, illustrate how vividly Hunt's essay picks up and redeploys the concepts of his great precursors. One or two further comments must suffice for this demonstration. Hunt's discussion of imagination and fancy has been much discussed by Wellek, Fogle, Thompson, and others, who do or do not believe he knew what he was talking about. Those who think he did not know insist that he was trying to explain Coleridge but could not. I would simply agree with James R. Thompson that in the distinction he makes between the two terms, "It is more likely... that Hunt's reference is to the preface of Wordsworth's 1815 edition in which he attempts to justify his classifications'' than it is to *Biographia Literaria*, To me, Hunt's discussion of imagination and fancy is sufficiently compatible with Wordsworth's to demonstrate a reasoned and intelligent position on his part rather than the dim-witted pretense at understanding implied by Wellek.

One further example: Fogle is remarkably disturbed by Hunt's mention of love and beauty in the final clause of his outline. Fogle writes, "To make Poetry the child of Love and Beauty... is to create a family group that defies analysis .... One would like to ask what the exact qualities of Love and Beauty are that are reproduced in their child Poetry.'' The answer to Fogle is rather simple. Hunt has claimed that poetry "is the greatest proof to man of the pleasure to be found in all things, and of the probable riches of infinitude." This is easy enough to interpret in the light of poetry's relation to the fundamental order of experience between man and nature. Maybe the phrase "probable riches of in finitude" refers to transcendent implications, like Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality"; but that need not concern us for the present. Hunt also says, however, that two qualities, love and beauty, are even greater proofs of these felicities than poetry is, and furthermore, it is apparently these greater qualities that by their conjunction give birth to poetry. This is the assertion that has confused.

The discussion so far concerning the meaning of "Beauty" for Hunt and Shelley explains how she might be called the giver of felicity and the mother of poetry. But how does "Love" enter the picture? Realizing that we are reading the last clause of Hunt's topical outline for his essay, if we turn to the last topic developed, we find another quotation from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," wherein the bridegroom appeareth. The first part of the quoted passage alludes again to the progressive recovery of the beauty of existence through poetic expressions which use external nature to reveal the exalted humanity of our interior spirit: poetry represents or "impersonates" objects, which then stand as "memorials of that gentle and exalted content" — human feeling and human being — "which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it co-exists." It is also notable that this part of Shelley's paragraph describes the activity of the poet himself, the maker of the book proper which Hunt distinguished in the opening phrases of his essay. Reading on into the second half of the quoted passage, we see that "Love" is the new concept introduced. Additionally, it becomes apparent by the last sentence of the passage that the perspective has shifted away from the poet who makes the book to the reader of the book, the receiver of the effects of poetry, which are explicitly stated in this instance to be moral in character. In commenting on his choice of this passage, Hunt calls it a "peroration." As a good Latinist Hunt would know that the basic meaning of the word is not simply a fancy passage of prose, but the concluding rhetorical summation of the primary point of a discourse. But in fact the passage is not, in Shelley's "Defence," the peroration. It comes from the early middle of the essay and is merely one among a number of parallel ideas. But the passage is Hunt's peroration. By his selection and placement of Shelley's paragraph, he makes it the rhetorical conclusion of his own essay. He assimilates his thought to it and ties conclusively together the various threads of his critical exposition.

The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another, and of many others: the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.

Though Shelley's expression of his critical genius is compact and intense, it can be explicated

simply enough. Love, he says, is a going out from our own selfish nature to an identification of ourselves with the beautiful, which, as we know by now, is the most intense and comprehensive realization of the fundamental order. The instrument of this going out and identification is the imagination, or that capacity of the mind whereby "true" and "beautiful" syntheses of our impressions are achieved. At first, poetry expresses the imagination of the poet, the man of genius; but, equally important, once expressed by genius, the poetry affects the imagination of the man of common sense, causing his basic humanity to go beyond its personal embodiment to awareness of unity — identification — with the universal order of humanity.

Hunt has chosen a complex passage from Shelley to stand as his summation, but his choice reveals deep critical insight and an editor's keen skill as he incorporates the passage and its reverberations with his own ideas. The dual perspective of the paragraph as it shifts from poet to reader reenacts the passage of insight from genius to common sense. In the first half of the passage the poet extends his own humanity, his own sense of fundamental order, out to nature to represent or "impersonate" it and make it partake of this order. Then, as described in the second half of the passage, the reader recognizes his own deepest self in this impersonation of nature and other beings. Thus not only is that deepest self evoked, but it is also extended into imaginative identification — love — with the order (the beautiful) in persons not himself. Because of this identification — at the deepest level of common humanity benevolence, goodwill, tolerance, and so forth, the profoundest acts of moral good are brought about. Poetry achieves this end by acting upon the cause of this end, which is, simply, the imaginative perception of beauty or fundamental order.

There is another sense of the word love evoked in Hunt's quotation from Shelley that goes beyond the ideal of imaginative identification with the fundamental order of beauty. In distinguishing between beauty and love, Hunt overleaps the kind of dangerous aestheticism or solipsistic indulgence which might rest satisfied in a "Palace of Art" (a topic written on by Tennyson in his poem of that name first published in 1832 and in revised form in 1842, respectively twelve and two years before Hunt's essay appeared). Hunt emphasizes instead the active progression in knowledge and being that accords with his liberal social hopes for man kind. The two words depict a staged response to perception of the fundamental human order. The first stage is simply the most comprehensive and pleasurable apprehension of this order, experienced as beauty. The second stage, however, is the sense of this beauty made self-conscious and active. This is the stage called love. Relatively speaking, beauty might be experienced in a passive or receptive mode of pure delight — a passion and hence a power, but a quiescent, inwardly absorbed one, perhaps not even fully cognizant. But love, more self-conscious and explicitly active in its association with moral good, as Shelley's passage stipulates, unites itself with the quieter state. And the union of quiescent receptive power with active outgoing power, both emanating from percep tion of the fundamental human order, results in a new birth of expression, a new utterance of the fundamental order — a new utterance of power, passion, truth, and beauty, which we recall was Hunt's basic definition of poetry. Keeping in mind the dual aspect of imagination that Hunt evoked by selecting this particular passage from Shelley's essay, involving both the reader of the poem and its maker, let us note that the utterance or expression of the reader will be active and moral whereas the utterance of the poet proper will be cognitive and verbal. It is in this rich sense that Hunt refers to poetry as the child of love and beauty.

Hunt's formulation, then, is another redeployment of the powerful romantic concepts concerning poetry, art, and social responsibility created by his great precursors. His is not so complex as their fuller analyses, but neither does it merely mimic, nor does it distort in its greater simplicity. His remarks resonate with theirs. Is this resonance absolutely essential to our understanding of romantic literary theory? Rationally, perhaps it is not. But romantic literary theory emphasizes other qualities than the coldly rational. It cares for pleasure, taste, and passion, too. And the pleasure of knowing Leigh Hunt at his best and appreciating his intelligence, his taste, and his passion for literature, just as his great contemporaries knew and appreciated it, is available to us still in his finer work. It is integral to the even richer pleasure of knowing the era we recall as the romantic age of genius and common sense.

Notes

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Hazlitt On Genius and Common Sense appeared in Table talk in

(*a*) 1821 (*b*) 1830 (*c*) 1810 (*d*) 1825

(*ii*) 'The Examiner' published in

(*a*) 1819 (*b*) 1821 (*c*) 1825 (*d*) 1820

(*iii*) Fogle is remarkably disturbed by mention of love and beauty in the final clause of his outline.

(*a*) Hazlitt (*b*) Coleridge (*c*) Hunt (*d*) None of these

3.6 Summary

- Hazlitt's literary tastes are catholic. He read widely and wisely. He knew intimately the literature of the Elizabethan age. He brought his sympathetic insight into an understanding of the Restoration drama, admired Pope for his technical virtuosity, and joined no group to condemn or praise any period in its entirety. Cazamian observed: "he it was who traced the first roads, marked out the vantage points and gauged the heights on the virgin soil of Romanticism, and almost in every case his literary judgment remains that of today; he anticipates the future, and sees with the eyes of posterity".His remarks on Shakespeare, Pope, Burns, and Coleridge show his understanding and estimate of the nature of genius.
- Hazlitt's literary criticism is at times a "prodigious variation" on the subject. He continues to say, without being tired, what poetry is and what it is not in his Lectures on English Poets. At other times he reveals a peculiar attitude exemplified in his treatment of specific texts and authors.
- Hazlitt's literary theory is clearly expressed in three essays. These are "On Poetry in General", "On Gusto", and "Why the Arts are not Progressive". In these essays we find that poetry is "the language of the imagination and the passions". In his approach to poetry he sought to understand "the internal character, the living principle" and to arrive at an acceptable standard for the "improvement of taste"
- The basic principle he followed as a literary critic was expressed by him thus: "I have undertaken merely to read over a set of authors with the audience, as I would do with a friend, to point out a favourite passage, to explain an objection; or of a remark or a theory as it occurs to state it in illustration of the subject: but neither tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantic rules and pragmatical formulas of criticism that can do no good to any body.
- Hazlitt was guilty of many errors in his critical evaluations. But these are not many if we remember that he lived in an age which did not possess any sound textual scholarship as we understand it today. He was never worried by the sources of a text, for "the play is the thing".
- Hazlitt wrote an essay "On Familiar Style". This essay gives us in broad outline the salient features of Hazlitt's own style. It is a style which is neither simple, nor ornate, nor grotesque. It is a familiar style which demands a great effort on the part of the writer because it is not common or colloquial. If one writes as he likes, it may become a cheap style. The familiar style is characterised by precision and purity of expression.
- Hazlitt observes that Johnson's style does not attach significance to discrimination, selection, or variety in the choice of words. Johnson employs many polysyllabic words derived from Greek or Latin. A native Englishman would normally use pure Anglo-Saxon word to express his feelings, emotions, and basic thoughts.
- "Common sense" for Hazlitt is a powerful and firm guide to action. It is the "just result" of "the sum-total" of the unconscious impressions that constitute experience. Common sense, then, is accurate human feeling, directly representative of a pure humanity uncontaminated

Notes

by prejudice, false refinement, or vulgar opinion. It is easily tainted, but in persons of genuine tact or finesse it can function as "the prophetic spirit of common sense."

- In *The Examiner* of October 31, 1819, he writes, "*Don Juan* is accused of being an 'immoral' work, which we cannot discover.
- In Hazlitt's terminology passion for truth would involve the distinction between common sense and vulgar opinion.
- The two words depict a staged response to perception of the fundamental human order.

3.7 Key-Words

1. Douceur	:	tip
2. Grotius	:	Hugo Grotius (1583 —1645). 'a Dutch jurist who laid the foundations of international law.
3. Puffendorf	:	Samuel Von Puffendorf (1632 —1694), a German jurist who wrote on equity and on international law.
4. The statues at large	:	the complete body of the existing and operating Acts of Parliament, as they were originally enacted.
5. Premises	:	Statements of facts from which conclusions can be drawn logically.
6. Tide-waiter	:	Customs officer
7. Syllogism	:	argument stated in the strict logical form.
8. Reductio ad absurdum	:	an argument which shows that absurdity results if we assumes the opposite of what has to be proved.

3.8 Review Questions

1. Discuss Hazlitt as a literary critic.
2. Explain humour, irony and satire in Hazlitt essays.
3. Critically examine Hazlitt's essay On Genius and Common Sense.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*c*)

3.9 Further Readings



1. P.S. Sastri, Hazlitt selected essays, Doaba House, Delhi.
2. Geoffrey Keynes, selected essays of William Hazlitt 1778 to 1830.
3. Peter Quennell, *A History of English Literature* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), p. 380.
4. Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955-65), vol. 3: *The Age of Transition,* p. 125.
5. Stephen F. Fogle, "Leigh Hunt and the End of Romantic Criticism," in *Some British Romantics*, ed. James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye (Columbus: Ohio StateUniversity Press, 1966), p. 128.
6. James R. Thompson, *Leigh Hunt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 106.
7. These essays are conveniently reprinted by John R. Nabholtz, ed., *William Hazlitt: Selected Essays* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 18-43.
8. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, introduced by A. R. Waller (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910, 1955), p. 343.

Notes

Unit 4: Hazlitt - On The Ignorance of The Learned: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
4.1 William Hazlitt: Philosopher, Essayist, and Critic
4.2 Text-On the Ignorance of the Learned
4.3 Summary
4.4 Key-Words
4.5 Review Questions
4.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss Hazlitt as an essayist
- Explain On the Ignorance of the Learned

Introduction

William Hazlitt, the son of an Irish Unitarian clergyman, was born in Maidstone, Kent, on 10th April, 1778. His father was a friend of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. As a result of supporting the American Revolution, Rev. Hazlitt and his family were forced to leave Kent and live in Ireland. The family returned to England in 1787 and settled at Wem in Shropshire. At the age of fifteen William was sent to be trained for the ministry at New Unitarian College at Hackney in London. The college had been founded by Joseph Priestley and had a reputation for producing freethinkers. In 1797 Hazlitt lost his desire to become a Unitarian minister and left the college.

While in London Hazlitt became friends with a group of writers with radical political ideas. The group included Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, Thomas Barnes, Henry Brougham, Leigh Hunt, Robert Southey and Lord Byron. At first Hazlitt attempted to become a portrait painter but after a lack of success he turned to writing.

Charles Lamb introduced Hazlitt to William Godwin and other important literary figures in London. In 1805 Joseph Johnson published Hazlitt's first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. The following year Hazlitt published *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*, an attack on William Pitt and his government's foreign policy. Hazlitt opposed England's war with France and its consequent heavy taxation. This was followed by a series of articles and pamphlets on political corruption and the need to reform the voting system.

Hazlitt began writing for *The Times* and in 1808 married the editor's sister, Sarah Stoddart. His friend, Thomas Barnes, was the newspaper's parliamentary reporter. Later, Barnes was to become the editor of the newspaper. In 1810 he published the *New and Improved Grammar of the English Language*.

In 1813 Hazlitt was employed as the parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, the country's leading Whig newspaper. However, in his articles, Hazlitt criticized all political parties. Hazlitt also contributed to *The Examiner*, a radical journal edited by Leigh Hunt. Later, Hazlitt wrote for

Notes

the *Edinburgh Review*, the Yellow Dwarf and the London Magazine. In these journals Hazlitt produced a series of essays on art, drama, literature and politics. During this period he established himself as England's leading expert on the writings of William Shakespeare.

Hazlitt wrote several books on literature including Characters of Shakespeare (1817), A View of the English Stage (1818), English Poets (1818) and English Comic Writers (1819). In these books he urged the artist to be aware of his social and political responsibilities. Hazlitt continued to write about politics and his most important books on this subject is Political Essays with Sketches of Public Characters (1819). In the book Hazlitt explains how the admiration of power turns many writers into "intellectual pimps and hirelings of the press."

Hazlitt's marriage to Sarah ended in 1823 as a result of an affair with a maid, Sarah Walker. Hazlitt wrote an account of this relationship in his book Liber Amoris. In 1824 Hazlitt married Isabella Bridgewater but this relationship only lasted a year.

In the The Spirit of the Age: Contemporary Portraits (1825) Hazlitt provides a series of contemporary portraits including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, William Cobbett, William Godwin and William Wilberforce. This was followed by The Plain Speaker (1826) and Life of Napoleon (4 volumes, 1828-30). William Hazlitt died in poverty of stomach cancer on 18th September 1830.

4.1 William Hazlitt: Philosopher, Essayist, and Critic

Among the many great essayists of the Romantic era, considered one of the best is William Hazlitt. The London born actor Hazlitt was extremely trenchant essayist, and a blunt and overall carping critic known for arguing over a vast field of topics such as government and politics of England. When writing "On the Pleasure of Hating" and his other essays, William Hazlitt was influenced most prominently by his life and schooling, other great writers, and his literary experience.

Hazlitt's father was a minister who was known for his radical political beliefs influenced Hazlitt in the sense that he grew up with the same political values and stayed faithful to those beliefs until his death . These radical tendencies are also believed to be the reason for his fighting. Hazlitt was always known to argue and fight, and this was a source of happiness for him . At first following in his father's footsteps, Hazlitt went to college in London studying and learning in the field of ministry; however, the young William Hazlitt withdrew from these plans. After giving up the field of ministry, Hazlitt then began to explore the fields of philosophy, politics, and literature that made him the tough critic and quintessential writer that he became known as.

Continuing his young life, Hazlitt attended Hackney College in London to study philosophy as a teenager and young adult. While interested in philosophy, he wrote books and lectures on the subject, further expanding his experience and diversity of literary fields. Hazlitt then changed his interests another time by switching his focus onto politics and the French Revolution, which Hazlitt was in favor of. Not only was Hazlitt a huge supporter of the French Revolution, but also supported the French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte. Contrary to the opinions of many people, Hazlitt viewed Napoleon as a hero rather than a power-hungry emperor . The reason for William Hazlitt's opinions on Napoleon can best be supported by the fact that he was extremely radical in his politics, because many other radical politicians shared the same views of the French emperor Napoleon. Throughout Hazlitt's younger years, he explored philosophy, politics, and literature while he grew as a writer. The diversity of his literary abilities created his convincing style.

Also playing a vital role in the development of influences in Hazlitt's writing is the influence of great writers such as William Shakespeare and Wordsworth. For example, "the dialect of this poetics of power depends upon an interplay of Shakespearean and Wordsworthian influences upon Hazlitt ." Shakespeare was an especially important influence in the sense that Hazlitt was known for writing essays on Shakespeare. William Shakespeare gave Hazlitt "an awareness that

Notes

character may be fate, yet only personality bestows some measure of freedom ." In addition to Shakespeare, he also exhibited great insight regarding the literary works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. By studying Coleridge, Hazlitt was able to continue developing his impressionistic criticism, including its most important trait, gusto. Gusto was the zest or hearty keen enjoyment that Hazlitt used within his essays not only to appeal to those that agree with him, but also those that may contradict his beliefs . This gusto also is to be found within the essay "On the Pleasure of Hating," where Hazlitt appeals to all audiences throughout the essay by allowing his writings to apply to everyone.

From Wordsworth, Hazlitt took "a new consciousness of how a writer could begin again despite the strength and persistence of cultural traditions." Also from Wordsworth, Hazlitt became more advanced in the originality of writing by learning to replace subject matter with subjectivity . By studying writers such as Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Coleridge, and others, Hazlitt was influenced by his writing not only by gaining his gusto, which has been noted as his dominate trait, but he developed a style all his own.

Also extremely important in influencing Hazlitt's writing is his vast and well-rounded knowledge and experience in the field of literature. When he became interested in politics, he began working for Parliament for the *Morning Chronicle* as a reporter. Also he began work on many essays that were collected in books such as *Original Essays on Men and Manners, The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men, and Things,* and *Table Talk.* He also wrote for many magazines including *London Magazine,* the *Examiner,* and *New Monthly Magazine.* As a critic and writer, "these helped establish Hazlitt as a tough, outspoken, and independent-minded critic." Being the tough critic that he is, Hazlitt was able to earn the respect of other literary writers; however, he lost friends in the process. But this was the nature of Hazlitt's behavior, and this is what made him the great critic that he was. He was never afraid to challenge another writer or critic, and always stood by his beliefs. Even if it meant damaging relationships with another person.

While Hazlitt gave lectures on philosophy, writings covered far more than this field. He wrote on the subjects of ethics, politics, and economics as well. He further expanded his experience in literature as he began work in journalism, working for *The Morning Chronicle.* He worked up from a journalist all the way to becoming the drama critic. Also, he was writing essays here and there for other periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*. Hazlitt continued to work while he published more works such as *Liber Amoris: Or, The New Pygmalion, The Spirit of the Age: Or Contemporary Portraits,* and *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, which was his final work. He also contributed essays to many volumes. The broad range of literary experience gives him the edge over others, and has him more prepared in his writings. He learned to "make them [Hazlitt's ideas for essays] personal without reducing their vitality ." For example, in Hazlitt's essay, "On the Pleasure of Hating", he writes of a spider crawling across the floor where he sits:

But as I do not start up and seize upon the straggling caitiff, as he would upon a hapless fly within his toils, he takes heart, and ventures on with mingled cunning, impudence and fear. As he passes me, I lift up the matting to assist his escape, am glad to get rid of the unwelcome intruder, and shudder at the recollection after is gone . . . I bear the creature no illwill, but still I hate the very sight of it. The spirit of malevolence survives the practical exertion of it.

In the essay, Hazlitt makes his ideas personal by referring to his self, and stating how he feels on the subject.

From his schooling as a young man, his father's radical beliefs, studying writers such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, to working for uncountable and various jobs for papers and magazines, Hazlitt grew as a writer and was greatly influenced by all of these variables when he wrote the essay "On the Pleasure of Hating" and the entirety of his other literary works. Although he never was widely known or received great fame during his lifetime, he is now one of the greatest critics and essayists of the Romantic era.

Notes

4.2 Text-On the Ignorance of the Learned

"For the more languages a man can speak,
His talent has but sprung the greater leak;
And, of the industry he has spent upon't,
Must full as much some other way discount.
The Hebrew, Chaldee, and the Syriac
Do, like their letters, set men's reason back,
And turn their wits that strive to understand it
(Like those that write the characters) left-handed.
Yet he that is but able to express
No sense at all in several languages,
Will pass for learneder than he that's known
To speak the strongest reason in his own". *Butler (Samuel)*

The description of persons who have the fewest ideas of all others are mere authors and readers. It is better to be able neither to read nor write than to be able to do nothing else. A lounger who is ordinarily seen with a book in his hand is (we may be almost sure) equally without the power or inclination to attend either to what passes around him or in his own mind. Such a one may be said to carry his understanding about with him in his pocket, or to leave it at home on his library shelves. He is afraid of venturing on any train of reasoning, or of striking out any observation that is not mechanically suggested to him by passing his eyes over certain legible characters; shrinks from the fatigue of thought, which, for want of practice, becomes insupportable to him; and sits down contented with an endless, wearisome succession of words and half-formed images, which fill the void of the mind, and continually efface one another. Learning is, in too many cases, but a foil to common sense; a substitute for true knowledge. Books are less often made use of as 'spectacles' to look at nature with, than as blinds to keep out its strong light and shifting scenery from weak eyes and indolent dispositions. The book-worm wraps himself up in his web of verbal generalities, and sees only the glimmering shadows of things reflected from the minds of others Nature *puts him out*. The impressions of real objects, stripped of the disguises of words and voluminous roundabout descriptions, are blows that stagger him; their variety distracts, their rapidity exhausts him; and he turns from the bustle, the noise, and glare, and whirling motion of the world about him (which he has not an eye to follow in his fantastic changes, nor an understanding to reduce to fixed principles), to the quite monotony of the dead languages, and the less startling and more intelligible combinations of the letters of the alphabet. It is well, it is perfectly well. 'Leave me to my repose', is the motto of the sleeping and dead. You might as well ask the paralytic to leap from his chair and throw away his crutch, or, without a miracle, to 'take up his bed and walk', as expect the learned reader to thrown down his book and think for himself. He clings to it for his intellectual support; and his dread of being left to himself is like the horror of a vacuum. He can only breathe a learned atmosphere, as other men breath common air. He is a borrower of sense. He has no ideas of his own, and must live on those of other people. The habit of supplying our ideas from foreign sources 'enfeebles all internal strength of thought' as a course of dram drinking destroys the tone of the stomach. The faculties of the mind, when not exerted, or when cramped by custom and authority, become listless, torpid, and unfit for the purposes of thought or action. Can we wonder at the languor and lassitude which is thus produced by a life of learned sloth and ignorance; by poring over lines and syllables that excite little more idea or interest than if they were the characters of an unknown tongue, till the eye closes on vacancy, and the book drops from the feeble hand! I would rather be a wood-cutter, or the meanest hind, that all day 'sweats in the eye of Phoebus,

Notes

and at night sleeps in Elysium', than wear out my life so, 'twixt dreaming and awake. The learned author differs from the learned student in this, that the one transcribes what the other reads. The learned are mere literary drudges. If you set them upon original compositions their heads turn, they don't know where they are. The indefatigable readers of books are like the everlasting copiers of pictures, who, when they attempt to do anything of their own, find they want an eye quick enough, and hand steady enough, and colours bright enough, to trace the living forms of nature.

Anyone who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. It is an old remark, that boys who shine at school do not make the greatest figure when they grow up and come out into the world. The things, in fact, which a boy is set to learn at school, and on which his success depends, are things which do not require the exercise either of the highest or the most useful faculties of the mind. Memory (and that of the lowest kind) is the chief faculty called into play in conning over and repeating lessons by rote in grammar, in languages, in geography, arithmetic, etc., so that he who has the most of this technical memory, with the least turn for other things, which have a stronger and more natural claim upon his childish attention, will make the most forward school-boy. The jargon containing the definitions of the parts of speech, the rules for casting up an account, or the inflections of a Greek verb, can have no attraction to the tyro of ten years old, except as they are imposed as a task upon him by others, of from his feeling the want of sufficient relish or amusement in other things. A lad with a sickly constitution and no very active mind, who can just retain what is pointed out to him, and has neither sagacity to distinguish, nor spirit to enjoy for himself, will generally be at the head of his form. An idler at school, on the other hand, is one who has high health and spirits, who has the free use of his limbs, with all his wits about him, who feels the circulation of his blood and the motion of his heart, who is ready to laugh and cry in a breath, and who had rather chase a ball or a butterfly, feel the open air in his face, look at the fields or the sky, follow a winding path, or enter with eagerness into all the little conflicts and interests of his acquaintances and friends, than doze over a musty spelling-book, repeat barbarous distichs, after his master, sit so many hours pinioned to a writing-desk, and receive his reward for the loss of time and pleasure in paltry prize-medals at Christmas and Midsummer. There is indeed a degree of stupidity which prevents children from learning the usual lessons, or ever arriving at these puny academic honours. But what passes for stupidity is much oftener a want of interest, of a sufficient motive to fix the attention and force a reluctant application of the dry and unmeaning pursuits of school learning. The best capacities are as much above this drudgery as the dullest are beneath it. Our men of the greatest genius have not been most distinguished for their acquirements at school or at the university.

The enthusiast Fancy was a truant ever.

Gray and Collins were among the instances of this wayward disposition. Such persons do not think so highly of the advantages, nor can they submit their imaginations so servilely to the trammels of strict scholastic discipline. There is a certain kind and degree of intellect in which words take root, but into which things have not power to penetrate. A mediocrity of talent, with a certain slenderness of moral constitution, is the soil that produces the most brilliant specimens of successful prize-essays and Greek epigrammatists. It should not be forgotten that the least respectable character among modern politicians was the cleverest boy at Eton.

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known to others, and which we can only derive at second-hand from books or other artificial sources. The knowledge of that which is before us, or about us, which appeals to our experience, passions, and pursuits, to the bosom and businesses of men, is not learning. Learning is the knowledge of that which none but the learned know. He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate

Notes

stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions. It is seeing with the eyes of others, hearing with their ears, and pinning our faith on their understandings. The learned man prides himself in the knowledge of names and dates, not of men or things. He thinks and cares nothing about his next-door neighbours, but is deeply read in the tribes and castes of the Hindoos and Calmuc Tartars. He can hardly find his way into the next street, though he is acquainted with the exact dimensions of Constantinople and Pekin. He does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool, but he can pronounce a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history. He cannot tell whether an object is black or white, round or square, and yet he is a professed master of the laws of optics and rules of perspective. He knows as much of what he talks about as a blind man does of colours. He cannot give a satisfactory answer to the plainest question, nor is he ever in the right in any one of his opinions upon any one matter of fact that really comes before him, and yet he gives himself out for an infallible judge on all those points, of which it is impossible that he or any other person living should know anything but by conjecture. He is expert in all the dead and in most of the living languages; but he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly. A person of this class, the second Greek scholar of his day, undertook to point out several solecisms in Milton's Latin style; and in all is own performance there is hardly a sentence of common English. Such was Dr. — Such is Dr. —. Such was not Porson [Richard Porson (1759-1808)]. He was an exception that confirmed the general rule, — a man that, by uniting talent and knowledge with learning, made the distinction between them more striking and palpable.

A mere scholar, who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. 'Books do not teach the use of books.' How should he know anything of a work who knows nothing of the subject of it? The learned pedant is conversant with books only as they are made of other books, and those again of others, without end. He parrots those who have parroted others. He can translate the same word into ten different languages, but he knows nothing of the *thing* which it means in any one of them. He stuffs his head with authorities built on authorities, with quotations quoted from quotations, while he locks up his senses, his understanding, and his heart. He is unacquainted with the maxims and manners of the world; he is to seek in the characters of individuals. He sees no beauty in the face of nature or of art. To him 'the mighty world of eye and ear' is hid; and 'knowledge', except at one entrance, 'quite shut out'. His pride takes part with his ignorance, and his self-importance rises with the number of things of which he does not know the value, and which he therefore despises as unworthy of his notice. He knows nothing of pictures,— 'of the colouring of Titian, the grace of Raphael, the purity of Domenichino, the *corregioscity* of Correggio, the learning of Poussin, the airs of Guido, the taste of the Caracci, or the grand contour of Micheal Angelo',—of all those glories of the Italian and miracles of the Flemish school, which have filled the eyes of mankind with delight, and to the study and imitation of which thousands have in vain devoted their lives. These are to him as if they had never been, a mere dead letter, a by-word; and no wonder, for he neither sees nor understands their prototypes in nature. A print of Rubins' Watering place, or Claude's Enchanted Castle, may be hanging on the walls of his rooms for months without his once perceiving them; and if you point them out to him he will turn away from them. The language of nature, or of art (which is another nature), is one that he does not understand. He repeats indeed the names of Apelles and Phidias, because they are to be found in classic authors, and boasts of their works as prodigies, because they no longer exist; or when he sees the finest remains of Grecian art actually before him in the Elgin Marbles, takes no other interest in them than as they lead to a learned dispute, and (which is the same thing) a quarrel about the meaning of a Greek particle. He is equally ignorant of music; he 'knows no touch of it', from the strains of the all-accomplished Mozart to the Shepherd's pipe upon the mountain. His ears are nailed to his books; and deadened with the sound of the Greek and Latin tongues, and the din and smithery of school-learning. Does he know anything more of poetry? He knows the number of feet in a verse, and of acts in a play; but of the soul or spirit he knows nothing. He can

Notes

turn a Greek ode into English, or a Latin epigram into Greek verse; but whether either is worth the trouble he leaves to the critics. Does he understand 'the act and practique part of life' better than 'the theorique'? No. He knows no liberal or mechanic art, no trade or occupation, no game of skill or chance. Learning 'has no skill in surgery', in agriculture, in building, or in working in wood or in iron; it cannot make any instrument of labour, or use it when made; it cannot handle the plough or the spade, or the chisel or the hammer; it knows nothing of hunting or hawking, fishing or shooting, of horses or dogs, of fencing or dancing, or cudgel-playing, or bowls or cards, or tennis, or anything else. The learned professor of all arts and sciences cannot reduce any one of them to practice, though he may contribute an account of them to an Encyclopedia. He has not the use of his hands or of his feet; he can neither run, nor walk, nor swim; and he considers all those who actually understand and can exercise any of these arts of body or mind as vulgar and mechanical men,—though to know almost any one of them in perfection requires long time and practice, with powers originally fitted, and a turn of mind particularly devoted to them. It does not require more than this to enable the learned candidate to arrive, by painful study, at a doctor's degree and a fellowship, and to eat, drink and sleep the rest of his life!

The thing is plain. All that men really understand is confined to a very small compass; to their daily affairs and experience; to what they have an opportunity to know and motives to study or practise. The rest is affectation and imposture. The common people have the use of their limbs; for they live by their labour or skill. They understand their own business and the characters of those they have to deal with; for it is necessary that they should. They have eloquence to express their passions, and wit at will to express their contempt and provoke laughter. Their natural use of speech is not hung up in monumental mockery, in an obsolete language; nor is there sense of what is ludicrous, or readiness at finding out allusions to express it, buried in collections of *Anas*. You will hear more good things on the outside of a stage-coach from London to Oxford than if you were to pass a twelve month with the undergraduates, or heads of colleges, of that famous university; and more *home* truths are to be learnt from listening to a noisy debate in a an ale house than from attending to a formal one in the House of Commons. An elderly country gentlewoman will often know more of character, and be able to illustrate it by more amusing anecdotes taken from the history of what has been said, done, and gossiped in a country town for the last fifty years, than the best blue-stocking of the age will be able to glean from that sort of learning which consists in an acquaintance with all the novels and satirical poems published in the same period. People in towns, indeed are woefully deficient in a knowledge of character, which they see only *in the bust*, not as a whole-length. People in the country not only know all that has happened to a man, but trace his virtues or vices, as they do his features, in their descent through several generations, and solve some contradiction in his behaviour by a cross in the breed half a century ago. The learned know nothing of the matter, either in town or country. Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned in all ages want. The vulgar are in the right when they judge for themselves; they are wrong when they trust to their blind guides. The celebrated nonconformist divine, Baxter, was almost stoned to death by the good women of Kidderminster, for asserting from the pulpit that 'hell was paved with infants' skulls'; but, by the force of argument, and of learned quotations from the Fathers, the reverend preacher at length prevailed over the scruples of his congregation, and over reason and humanity.

Such is the use which has been made of human learning. The labourers in this vineyard seem as if it was their object to confound all common sense, and the distinctions of good and evil, by means of traditional maxims and preconceived notions taken upon trust, and increasing in absurdity with increase of age. They pile hypotheses on hypotheses, mountain high, till it is impossible to come to the plain truth on any question. They see things, not as they are, but as they find them in books, and 'wink and shut their apprehension up', in order that they may discover nothing to interfere with their prejudices or convince them of their absurdity. It might be supposed that the height of human wisdom consisted in maintaining contradictions and rendering nonsense sacred.

Notes

There is no dogma, however fierce or foolish, to which these persons have not set their seals, and tried to impose on the understandings of their followers, as the will of Heaven, clothed with all the terrors and sanctions of religion. How little has the human understanding been directed to find out the true and useful! How much ingenuity has been thrown away in defense of creeds and systems! How much time and talents have been wasted in theological controversy, in law, in politics, in verbal criticism, in judicial astrology and in finding out the art of making gold! What actual benefit do we reap form the writings of a Laud or Whitgift, or of Bishop Bull or Bishop Waterland, or Prideaux' *Connections* or Beausobre, or Calmet, or St Augustine, or Puffendorf, or Vattel, or from the more literal but equally learned and unprofitable labours of Scaliger, Cardan, and Scioppius? How many grains of sense are there in their thousand folio or quarto volumes? What would the world lose if they were committed to the flames to-morrow? Or are they not already 'gone to the vault of all the Capulets'? Yet all these were oracles in their time, and would have scoffed at you or me, at common sense and human nature, for differing with them. It is our turn to laugh now.

To conclude this subject. The most sensible people to be met with in society are men of business and of the world, who argue from what they see and know, instead of spinning cobweb distinctions of what things ought to be. Women have often more of what is called *good sense* then men. They have fewer pretensions; are less implicated in theories; and judge of objects more from their immediate and involuntary impression on the mind, and, therefore, more truly and naturally. They cannot reason wrong; for they do not reason at all. They do not think or speak by rule; and they have in general more eloquence and wit, as well as sense, on that account. By their wit, sense and eloquence together, they generally contrive to govern their husbands. Their style, when they write to their friends (not for the booksellers), is better than that of most authors. — Uneducated people have most exuberance of invention and the greatest freedom from prejudice. Shakespeare's was evidently an uneducated mind, both in the freshness of his imagination and the variety of his views; as Milton's was scholastic, in the texture both of his thoughts and feelings. Shakespeare had not been accustomed to write themes at school in favour of virtue or against vice. To this we owe the unaffected but healthy tone of his dramatic morality. It we wish to know the force of human genius we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning we may only study his commentators.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Hazlitt's family settled at

(*a*) Maidstone (*b*) Shropshire

(*c*) Hackney (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) Hazlitt was employed as the Parliamentary reporter for the Morning Chronicle.

(*a*) 1813 (*b*) 1812 (*c*) 1815 (*d*) 1810

(*iii*) 'Characters of Shakespeare' was written by

(*a*) Hazlitt (*b*) Charles Lamb

(*c*) Coleridge (*d*) William Wordsworth

(*iv*) Leigh Hunt edited a radical journal entitled

(*a*) The Examiner (*b*) Edinburgh Review

(*c*) English Poets (*d*) None of these

4.3 Summary

- **William Hazlitt** has a sharp, idiomatic, familiar style. His is the pure diction and aphorism. Consciousness and propriety of words and phrases is a great characteristic of him. Its true's

Notes

to say in the least possible space. There is always in the style of Hazlitt a certain amount of refine taste which becomes his most marked characteristic. In whatever that Hazlitt did he had an enthusiasm and a courageous spirit. It was this that enabled him to say things with a conviction and spirited. He was keen to keep in his memory certain experiences that he had come across-books that he had read', plays which he had seen; pictures that he had admired, actually, the fact was that he liked to say something's he liked and to say them in his own way critically. In his present essay while defining artistic sensibility in the piece of art, he is fearlessly expressing an honest and individual opinion. He has his own enjoyment and his own gift for evoking unnoticed beauties. Here his judgments' are based on his emotional relations rather than an objectively applied principle.

- In style Hazlitt in fact strongly contrasts with the elaborate or chest ration of the complex sentence and the magic of the delicate word tracery which we have seen in de quinsy. His brief, abrupt sentences have the vigor and directness which his views demand. His lectures are mainly of simplicity and something of the looseness of organization which is typical of good conversation. For example ,"learning is in too many cases, but a foil to common sense; a substitute for true knowledge".
- "The faculties of mind, when not exerted, or when not exerted, or when cramped by custom and authority, becomes listless, torpid, and unfit for the purposes of thought or action".
- On the Ignorance of the Learned. "There is gusto in the coloring of Titian. Not only do his heads seem to think – his bodies seem to feel".
- "The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive".
- People, who have been nourished on the Victorian model and have grown priggish, murmur at the lack of amoral purpose in **Hazlitt**. It is no doubt a fact that in Hazlitt one does not discover any of such moral purpose; a theory or a principle as one finds in **Ruskin, Carlyle** and **Arnold**, neither is there the shallowness and railing of a pessimist. He has an abiding faith in human nature, a devotion to beauty and a belief and honesty –all these things being clearly exhibited in a clear and courageous style that he possessed.
- The somewhat discursive manner of his writings is a strong point with him as well as a weakness. His style is forcible and spontaneous; it progresses by means of successive traits which issue from one and the same central act of perception; subjected to the continuous light of consciousness and examined in turn under all its aspects. Such a device ensures movements, sincerity and a telling force of style. But this discontinuity in an order which is wholly organic is not entirely happy. It gives no safety against repetition and prolixity at times it wearies that mind that cannot readily perceive the logical sequence of thought, the point of departure or the goal. At bottom, extremely English and national, **Hazlitt**'s critical method finds, in the sufficiency of composition, the defect of its quality. Our present essay **On Gusto** is no exception in this manner.

4.4 Key-Words

1. Discursive manner : In a rambling manner
2. Prolixity : Long-windedness, an excess of words

4.5 Review Questions

1. Explain Hazlitt as an essayist.
2. What Hazlitt try to provide to the readers by On the Ignorance of the Learned?
3. Write a short note On the Ignorance of the Learned.

Notes

4.6 Further Readings



1. P.S. Sastri, Hazlitt selected essays, Doaba House, Delhi.
2. Geoffrey Keynes, selected essays of William Hazlitt 1778 to 1830.
3. Peter Quennell, *A History of English Literature* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), p. 380.
4. Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955-65), vol. 3: *The Age of Transition,* p. 125.
5. Stephen F. Fogle, "Leigh Hunt and the End of Romantic Criticism," in *Some British Romantics*, ed. James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye (Columbus: Ohio StateUniversity Press, 1966), p. 128.
6. James R. Thompson, *Leigh Hunt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 106.
7. These essays are conveniently reprinted by John R. Nabholtz, ed., *William Hazlitt: Selected Essays* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 18-43.
8. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, introduced by A. R. Waller (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910, 1955), p. 343.
9. Nabholtz, p. 30.

Notes

Unit 5: Hazlitt - On The Ignorance of The Learned: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
5.1 Biographical Information
5.2 Major Works
5.3 Critical Reception
5.4 On the Ignorance of the Learned - Critical Appreciation
5.5 Summary
5.6 Key-Words
5.7 Review Questions
5.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss Major Works of Hazlitt
- Examine critically On the Ignorance of the Learned.

Introduction

William Hazlitt was one of the leading prose writers of the Romantic period. Influenced by the concise social commentary in Joseph Addison's eighteenth-century magazine, the *Spectator*, and by the personal tone of the essays of Michel de Montaigne, Hazlitt was one of the most celebrated practitioners of the "familiar" essay. Characterized by conversational diction and personal opinion on topics ranging from English poets to washerwomen, the style of Hazlitt's critical and autobiographical writings has greatly influenced methods of modern writing on aesthetics. His literary criticism, particularly on the Lake poets, has also provided readers with a lens through which to view the work of his Romantic contemporaries.

5.1 Biographical Information

Hazlitt was born in Wem, Shropshire, and educated by his father, a Unitarian minister whose radical political convictions influenced the reformist principles that Hazlitt maintained throughout his life. In 1793 Hazlitt entered Hackney Theological College, a Unitarian seminary, where he studied philosophy and rhetoric and began writing the treatise on personal identity titled *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805). During this time Hazlitt began to question his Christian faith and, considering himself unsuited to the ministry, withdrew from the College and returned to Wem.

In 1798 Hazlitt was introduced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge whose eloquence and intellect inspired him to develop his own talents for artistic expression. Shortly afterward he followed the example of his older brother, John, and began to pursue a career as a painter. Hazlitt lived in Paris and studied the masterpieces exhibited in the Louvre, particularly portraits painted by such Italian

Notes

masters as Raphael and Leonardo, whose technique he adopted. Commissioned by Coleridge and William Wordsworth to paint their portraits, Hazlitt spent the summer of 1803 at their homes in the Lake District. His political views and quarrelsome nature, however, offended the poets. Moreover, his moral conduct was suspect, and his friendship with them ended when he was forced to leave the Lake District in fear of reprisals for his assault on a woman. As a painter, Hazlitt achieved little success. He moved to London in 1804 and began to direct his energies toward writing.

In London Hazlitt became a close friend of Charles and Mary Lamb, at whose weekly social gatherings he became acquainted with literary society. Through the Lambs he also met Sarah Stoddart, whom he married in 1808. During this time Hazlitt wrote philosophical works that were criticized for their dense prose style. In 1811 Hazlitt began working as a journalist; he held the positions of parliamentary correspondent for the *Morning Chronicle*, drama critic and political essayist for Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, and columnist for the *Edinburgh Review*. The liberal political views expressed in Hazlitt's writing incurred resentment from the editors of and contributors to Tory journals such as *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, who attacked Hazlitt's works and his character. In 1818 Hazlitt published a collection of his lectures on English literature and in 1822 John Scott of the *London Magazine* invited him to contribute essays to a feature entitled "Table-Talk." The reflective pieces he wrote were well received and are now among Hazlitt's most acclaimed works. During this period of success, however, Hazlitt's marriage was failing and he became involved in an unfortunate affair with the daughter of an innkeeper. He chronicled his obsession with this young woman in *Liber Amoris; or, the New Pygmalion* (1823). After a divorce from his wife, Hazlitt entered into a second unsuccessful marriage with a rich widow. He continued to write until his death in 1830, producing numerous essays, a series of sketches on the leading men of letters of the early nineteenth century entitled *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), and a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte (1826-30).

5.2 Major Works

Hazlitt's most important works are often divided into two categories: literary criticism and familiar essays. Of his literary criticism Hazlitt wrote, "I say what I think: I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are." Representative of his critical style is *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), which contains subjective, often panegyrical commentary on such individual characters as Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet. This work introduces Hazlitt's concept of "gusto," a term he used to refer to qualities of passion and energy that he considered necessary to great art. In accord with his impressionistic approach to literature, Hazlitt's concept of gusto also suggests that a passionate and energetic response is the principal criterion for gauging whether or not a work achieves greatness. Hazlitt felt that Shakespeare's sonnets lacked gusto and judged them as passionless and unengaging despite the "desperate cant of modern criticism." Hazlitt was no less opinionated on the works of his contemporaries. In the final section of *Lectures on the English Poets* (1812) he criticized Coleridge and Wordsworth, whose emphasis on nature and the common aspects of life acknowledged, in his view, "no excellence but that which supports its own pretensions." In addition to literature, Hazlitt also focused on drama and art in his critical essays, many of which are collected in *A View of the English Stage* (1818) and *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (1824).

The many and varied familiar essays that Hazlitt wrote for magazine publication and collected in the volumes of *The Round Table, Table-Talk*, and *The Plain Speaker* are usually considered his finest works. Critics differentiate between the essays of *The Round Table* and those in *Table-Talk* and *The Plain Speaker:* the former contain observations on "Literature, Men, and Manners" in a style that tends to imitate the essays of Addison and Montaigne, while the latter focus on Hazlitt's personal

Notes

experiences in a more original, conversational style. Often beginning with an aphorism, Hazlitt's familiar essays are characterized by informal diction and an emotional tone. This informal style, in Hazlitt's words, "promises a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method." Hazlitt described his essays as "experimental" rather than "dogmatical," in that he preferred to use the model of common conversation to discuss ordinary human experiences rather than to write in what he believed was the abstract and artificial style of conventional nonfiction prose. Among other things, Hazlitt's essays express discomfort with his reputation as irascible ("On Good Nature"), attack those who question his abilities as a writer ("The Indian Juggler"), extol the benefits of common sense, which, he felt, comprises "true knowledge" ("On the Ignorance of the Learned"), and otherwise defend his character.

5.3 Critical Reception

Hazlitt's critics had a wide range of reactions to the style and content of his familiar writing. Hazlitt's political opinions caused bitter antagonism with Coleridge and Wordsworth, as well as a great majority of his countrymen. Modern critics Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling, however, consider Hazlitt to be "the pre-eminent master in English" in the genre of the familiar essay. In addition, many modern critics note Hazlitt's unique ability to write on a wide range of literary subjects with a depth of taste John Keats considered one of "three things superior in the modern world."

While modern literary historians generally agree on Hazlitt's acumen as a critic and essayist, lively debate has continued since Hazlitt's death on the merit of *Liber Amoris*, which—for good or ill—has become Hazlitt's most puzzling legacy. An account of Hazlitt's infatuation with Sarah Walker, *Liber Amoris* has been considered alternatively a pathetic attempt at catharsis, a precursor of Freudian psychoanalytic method, a personal confession, an analysis of the idea of infatuation, a critique of Romanticism, and, according to Gerald Lahey, "a parable of the entire Romantic period trying to come to terms with its flawed visionary conception of reality." Recently the critical treatment of *Liber Amoris* has become something of a gauge for determining the relevance of Hazlitt's familiar style for contemporary readers: if this, the most personal of Hazlitt's writings, has merit beyond its autobiographical curiosity, the familiar essay may remain an effective genre in the modern period and Hazlitt's position as a forebearer of modern literary practices will be secured.

5.4 On the Ignorance of the Learned—Critical Appreciation

This is the eighth essay in in Table Talk and it offers an intimate insight into the mind of Hazlitt. Himself learned in the old-fashioned way, he can look at the learned in a half-serious and half-humorous way.

Author and reader have the fewest ideas. There were important Rings in life than reading and writing. A person with a boo in his band has generally neither power nor inclination to note what is around him or what is in his own mind. Such a one carries his understanding in his pocket, not in his mind. He is afraid of arguing systematically on any subject, and he cannot make any unborrowed observation. He cannot think. In many cases learning is a foil to common sense, a substitute for true knowledge. Books are employed to keep the readers away from the external world. The bookworm sees only the shadows of things as they are reflected from the minds of others. Hence nature puts him out. He cannot bear the impressions of real objects. He is distracted by their variety and rapidity. Like the sleeping and the dead, he prefers to be left to his own repose. If you ask him to think for himself, it is like asking the lame one to walk without his crutches. He borrows ideas and lives on them. When the mental faculties are not exerted or when

Notes

they get cramped, they become useless for thought or action. The life of learned sloth and ignorance thus produces of kind of inertia. The learned auther transcribes something and it is read by the learned student. The learned are only literary drudges.

A rigorous classical education deprives the mind of any freshness of outlook. The boys who shine at school fail to make a work in real life. What is needed to pass creditably at an examination, is not the highest or the most useful mental faculty. One needs only memory. The young student is subjected to a study of useless things and he fails to relish them. The one who succeeds in this mind of study is a boy with a sickly constitution, having no active mind. The idler at school has health and high spirits. He has all his wits about him and he enjoys everything in the world around him. When a student is said to be a stupid, it means the absence of interest, the absence of a motive to concentrate and an unwillingness to pursue the dry and unmeaning things that go by the name of learning. Men of great genius have not been distinguished scholars at school. Such were Gray and Collins who could not surrender their imagination to the chains of scholastic discipline. To be a prize-winner in an essay competition at school one must have mediocre talents and a slender moral constitution.

Learning in the knowledge of something not known to others, and it is derived at second-hand. If we have the knowledge of the past or of the present, if we have a knowledge which appeals to the feelings and activities of men, it is not learning. Learning is that knowledge which only the learned know. This knowledge is farthest removed from common life and actual observation. It has no utility and it cannot be tested by experience. It is charged with uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions. The learned man does not use his own senses. He cares nothing for his neighbours, though he knows everything about distant and remote peoples. He can give the dimensions of Constantinople, though he cannot find his way into the next street. He cannot judge his friends, but he can lecture on the characters found in history. He is never in the right in any one of his opinions, though he talks as an infallible judge. He is an expert in languages, though he cannot speak his own fluently, Dr, Bentley thus pointed many solecisms in Milton's Latin style though Bentley could not write ordinary English. Porson was a Greek scholar and a good writer in English.

If a scholar knows nothing but books, he must be ignorant even of books. Books do not teach the use of books. The pedant is acquainted only with books that are made of other books. He knows the meaning of a word, not the things to which it refers. His mind is stored with references, quotations, and authorities. He has no touch with life and its ways. He does see beauty in nature or in art. His pride in his scholarship is accompanied with his ignorance of the things. His self-importance becomes greater as his ignorance of the value of things increases. He talks about painters and sculptors without being able to appreciate their work; for he cannot appreciate the originals of these works existing in the universe. He is ignorant of music too, for his ears are nailed to his books. He knows the number of feet in a line, or the number of acts in a drama. But he knows nothing of poetry or drama. He does not know any liberal art, nor a mechanical art, nor any game of skill or chance. Scholarship is useless in many important walks of life. The scholar will write on all these things, without being able to do any one of these. By painful study he takes his Doctor's degree, becomes a fellow of his college or university, and leads a monotonous life.

What en really understand is limited to the small range of their daily life and experience. Everything else they claim of understand is an affectation. The common people use their limbs and work. They know their business and they understand the people with whom they have dealings. They express their passions clearly; and they succeed in expressing their contempt or in provoking laughter. They do not fall back on authorities on such occasions. We have more good things outside a college campus, and more home truths in an ale-house. The elderly country gentle woman knows more of human character, and she can give better examples from life, than the fashionable ladies who talk of literature in their parlours. People in the towns know human nature

Notes

only one parts. In the country the people know the virtues or vices of a man and trace them to several generations. The man of society has common sense, and the learned lack it. The unlearned one is always right when he judges anything by himself; and he goes wrong when he trusts to the opinions of the learned.

The labourers is learning accept blindly traditional maxims and preconceived notions. Then they find it hard to come at the plain truth on any question because of the accumulation of theories. They see things as they find them in the books. They Preserve contradictions and render nonsense scared. They cherish dogmas and refuse to find out the true and the useful. Thus the scholars have wasted their intelligence and understanding in defending creeds and theories of law. The same wastage is to be found in the discussions concerning politics, alchemy, astrology, and words. The labours of these scholars like Land, Bull, Waterland, St. Augustine, Puffendorf and Vattel in the theology and law have yielded no useful results. The same is true of the theorists like Scaliger, Cardan, and Scioppius. Their works fill the vaults. Though they were important personalities in their time, we laugh at them today.

The most sensible people are the men of business. They argue from what they see and know. Women have more good sense than men. They have fewer false claims and they are not committed to theories like fanatics. They judge things more truly and naturally on the basis of their immediate impressions. They do not think or speak in accordance with a set of rules, and therefore, they have more eloquence, wit, and common sense. This enables them to govern their husbands. Their style is better when they write to their friends.

The uneducated are more inventive and they are free from prejudice. Thus the uneducated mind of Shakespeare reveals a freshness of imagination, and he has a variety of ideas. Milton was scholastic in his thoughts and feelings. Since Shakespeare was not trained as a scholar, he has an unaffected and healthy tone of dramatic morality. We should read Shakespeare, if we want to know the force of human genius. We can know the insignificance of human learning by going through the writings of Shakespeare's commentators.

Hazlitt himself did not have a formal scholastic education Hence his violent treatment of the training of a scholar.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Hazliti began writing the treatise on personal identity titled

(*a*) An essay on the Principles of Human Action

(*b*) Morning Chronicle

(*c*) Edinburgh Review

(*d*) London Magazine

(*ii*) Hazlitt was introduced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in

(*a*) 1798 (*b*) 1795 (*c*) 1790 (*d*) 1785

(*iii*) On the Ignorance of the Learned is the ..... essay in Table Talk.

(*a*) Second (*b*) Fourth

(*c*) Fifth (*d*) Eighth

(*iv*) The boys who shine at schools ..... to make a work in real life

(*a*) Succeed (*b*) Fail

(*c*) Both *a* and *b* (*d*) None of these

Notes

5.5 Summary

- One of the triumvirate of eminent romantic essayists – Lamb, De Quincy and Hazlitt – Hazlitt is the least mannered or rather eccentric. While in Lamb's and De Quincy emotion and imagination relegated the fast and the analytical to the insignificant, Hazlitt's is a futile blend of emotion and thought, passion and logic imagination and analysis, the real and the romantic. However, he is famous for the lucidity and brilliance, in both style and content, of his many essays. Fully endowed with the ability of soaring in an imaginative flight, as in his essays **On the Picturesque and Ideal** and **On a Sundial**, his dominating bias was however for a union of romantic temperament and classical vigour. The resulting essays, including **Common Sense on Fashion**, **On the want of Money** and **On Nicknames** have the fine-wrought grace of the golden mean. His prose displays the same discrimination between the vulgar and the otiose, for he had a Wordsworthian faith in the simple and the sincere.
- **The Round Table, Table Talk** and **The Plain Speaker** cover a variety of subjects ranging from art and philosophy to politics and prizefighting. These works helped to establish Hazlitt's reputation as the most versatile critic of his day. **The Spirit of the Age**, a work that is regarded as his critical masterpiece, contains valuable biographical sketches of these writers and of other contemporary intellectual leaders. William Hazlitt was not only acquainted with that point of view as it appeared in books, but had the advantage of knowing the authors personally, and hearing their informal discussions of of individual writers.Farther, Hazlitt lectured extensively on English drama: **Characters of Shakespeare's Plays**, **Lectures on the English Poets, Views of the English Stage**, **Essays on the English Comic Writers,** and **Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth**. With these works Hazlitt established himself as one of the foremost literary critics of the romantic period and as a master of the informal essay.
- The romantics are renowned for expatiating at length upon the relatively trivial, and Hazlitt is no exception. Hazlitt has the romanticism to turn the humble topic of nicknames into an elaborate and animated discussion. A Juliet may contend that 'a rose called by any other name would smell as sweet', but Hazlitt describes how nicknames alter our perception of a person. To use the analogy of reflection used by Addison, the same person appears distorted when seen through the medium of nicknames.
- Whether in his literary essays on in his essays about everyday life, Hazlitt amazes the reader with his logical rigour. He points out that the basis of nicknames is a perception of difference or distinction: 'The only meaning of those vulgar nicknames… is that others differ from you in some respect or other' (whether it be opinion, dress, clime or complexion).
- Ironically, those who give nicknames often forget that those who have been given such opprobrious names have the same right to confer equally repulsive *nicknames* on the same principle of difference. Further, *nicknames*, as he points out with admirable logic, are effective only because they do not require any material proof, any causal evidence. Finally *nicknames* are much more effective than direct charges simply because while direct charges can be refuted, 'a *nickname* baffles reply by the very vagueness of the influences from it'. Hazlitt also answers the question as to whom or what kind of men uses *nicknames*. He feels that it is the hidden enemies, the cowards and the hypocrites who use *nicknames*.
- Hazlitt is the erudite among the romantic essayists, like Coleridge among the romantic poets. He uses ordinary proverbs – 'Give a dog an ill name and hang him' – as well as learned or foreign phrases, such as *causa causal causa causatic*. But his greatest virtuosity lies in his idolizations of literary quotations from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline, Julius Caesar, as well as numerous others from Southey, Foxe, Male, Voltare & so on.

Notes

- But Hazlitt is no analytical Bacon, for his analysis and erudition are always tempered by a romantic and personal passion.
- He reproaches the 'vulgarity' and 'violence' of those who give *nicknames*. On the other hand, he evidences his personal pathos and gentleness when he speaks of the endearing use of *nicknames* by a man like Dr. Johnson who called Goldsmith 'Goldy'. Hazlitt's humour is evident in the recounting of an anecdote about how an entire hall reverberated with the name of 'Dr. Topping' when he initially failed to respond to his name.
- As for his prose, Hazlitt the romantic has a greater affinity with Wordsworth than with Lamb. While Lamb is notorious for his idiosyncratic words and phrases, Hazlitt takes meticulous care to render them comprehensible the deity. In his essay **On Familiar Style** he objects to Dr. Johnson's classical use of language for his tale, 'opaque words' and 'words with the greatest number of syllables'. His very beginning suggests the lucidity of his language.
- This is a more important subject than it seems at first sight. The variety of his sentence construction is the other hand, evident in occasional complex structures: "What are one half the convulsions of the civilized world-The frequent overthrow of states and kingdoms – the shock and hostile encounters of mighty continents." Here to quote few more lucid phrases: "The art of pleasing consists in being pleased.
- In his essay "On the ignorance of the learned", William Hazlitt says, about the learned people, "He Knows as much of what he talks about, as a blind man does of colors." Hazlitt in his essay on the 'Ignorance of the Learned' teaches much the same doctrine. Its general truth is indisputable, though Bagehot himself makes exception in favor of Sir Walter Scott. But the two famous critics are united in their conviction that learned people are generally dull, and that books which are the work of habitual writers are not amusing.

5.6 Key-Words

1. For the more : from Samuel Butler's (1612 — 1680) Hudibras, a satire.
2. Chaldee : the language of Chaldeans
3. Syriac : language of ancient Syria, Western Aramic.
4. Lounger : Idler, one who saunters or strolls.
5. In his pocket : In the book which he keeps in his pocket.
6. Efface : remove, obliterate
7. Spectacles : media of vision
8. Puts him out : disconcerts, confuses, annoys, or irritates him.

5.7 Review Questions

1. Briefly explain the essay 'On the Ignorance of the Learned.'
2. What are Hazlitt major works? Discuss.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*d*) (*iv*) (*b*)

5.8 Further Readings



1. P.S. Sastri, Hazlitt selected essays, Doaba House, Delhi.
2. Geoffrey Keynes, selected essays of William Hazlitt 1778 to 1830.

Notes

Unit 6: David Hume- Of Essay Writing: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
6.1 Life and Works
6.2 As Historian of England
6.3 Problem of Miracles
6.4 Political and Economic Theory
6.5 Text—Of Essay Writing
6.6 Summary
6.7 Key-Words
6.8 Review Questions
6.9 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about David Hume's life and works
- Discuss Of Essay Writing by Hume

Introduction

David Hume was a Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist, known especially for his philosophical empiricism and skepticism. He was one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment. Hume is often grouped with John Locke, George Berkeley, and a handful of others as a British Empiricist.

Beginning with his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume strove to create a total naturalistic "science of man" that examined the psychological basis of human nature. In stark opposition to the rationalists who preceded him, most notably Descartes, he concluded that desire rather than reason governed human behavior, saying: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." A prominent figure in the sceptical philosophical tradition and a strong empiricist, he argued against the existence of innate ideas, concluding instead that humans have knowledge only of things they directly experience. Thus he divides perceptions between strong and lively "impressions" or direct sensations and fainter "ideas", which are copied from impressions. He developed the position that mental behaviour is governed by "custom", that is acquired ability; our use of induction, for example, is justified only by our idea of the "constant conjunction" of causes and effects. Without direct impressions of a metaphysical "self", he concluded that humans have no actual conception of the self, only of a bundle of sensations associated with the self.

Hume advocated a compatibilist theory of free will that proved extremely influential on subsequent moral philosophy. He was also a sentimentalist who held that ethics are based on feelings rather than abstract moral principles. Hume also examined the normative is–ought problem. He held notoriously ambiguous views of Christianity,but famously challenged the argument from design in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1777).

Notes

Kant credited Hume with waking him up from his "dogmatic slumbers" and Hume has proved extremely influential on subsequent philosophy, especially on utilitarianism, logical positivism, William James, philosophy of science, early analytic philosophy, cognitive philosophy, and other movements and thinkers. The philosopher Jerry Fodor proclaimed Hume's *Treatise* "the founding document of cognitive science". Also famous as a prose stylist, Hume pioneered the essay as a literary genre and engaged with contemporary intellectual luminaries such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith (who acknowledged Hume's influence on his economics and political philosophy), James Boswell, Joseph Butler, and Thomas Reid.

6.1 Life and Works

David Hume, originally David Home, son of Joseph Home of Chirnside, advocate, and Katherine Falconer, was born on 26 April 1711 (Old Style) in a tenement on the north side of the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh. He changed the spelling of his name in 1734, because the fact that his surname 'Home' was pronounced 'Hume' in Scotland was not known in England. Throughout his life Hume, who never married, spent time occasionally at his family home at Ninewells by Chirnside, Berwickshire, which had belonged to his family since the sixteenth century.

Education

An engraving of Hume from his The History of England Vol. I (1754) Hume attended the University of Edinburgh at the unusually early age of twelve (possibly as young as ten) at a time when fourteen was normal. At first he considered a career in law, but came to have, in his words, "an insurmountable aversion to everything but the pursuits of Philosophy and general Learning; and while [my family] fanceyed I was poring over Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the Authors which I was secretly devouring."He had little respect for the professors of his time, telling a friend in 1735, "there is nothing to be learnt from a Professor, which is not to be met with in Books."

Hume made a philosophical discovery that opened up to him "...a new Scene of Thought," which inspired him "...to throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it." He did not recount what this "Scene" was, and commentators have offered a variety of speculations. Due to this inspiration, Hume set out to spend a minimum of ten years reading and writing. He came to the verge of nervous breakdown, after which he decided to have a more active life to better continue his learning.

Career

As Hume's options lay between a travelling tutorship and a stool in a merchant's office, he chose the latter. In 1734, after a few months occupied with commerce in Bristol, he went to La Flèche in Anjou, France. There he had frequent discourse with the Jesuits of the College of La Flèche. As he had spent most of his savings during his four years there while writing *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he resolved "to make a very rigid frugality supply my deficiency of fortune, to maintain unimpaired my independency, and to regard every object as contemptible except the improvements of my talents in literature".He completed the *Treatise* at the age of 26.

Although many scholars today consider the *Treatise* to be Hume's most important work and one of the most important books in Western philosophy, the critics in Great Britain at the time did not agree, describing it as "abstract and unintelligible". Despite the disappointment, Hume later wrote, "Being naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper, I soon recovered from the blow and prosecuted with great ardour my studies in the country". There, he wrote the *Abstract* Without revealing his authorship, he aimed to make his larger work more intelligible.

After the publication of Essays Moral and Political in 1744, Hume applied for the Chair of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. However, the position was

Notes

given to William Cleghorn, after Edinburgh ministers petitioned the town council not to appoint Hume because he was seen as an atheist.

During the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, Hume tutored the Marquis of Annandale (1720–92), who was officially described as a "lunatic".This engagement ended in disarray after about a year. But it was then that Hume started his great historical work The History of England, which took fifteen years and ran over a million words, to be published in six volumes in the period between 1754 and 1762, while also involved with the Canongate Theatre. In this context, he associated with Lord Monboddo and other Scottish Enlightenment luminaries in Edinburgh. From 1746, Hume served for three years as secretary to Lieutenant-General St Clair, and wrote *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, later published as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The *Enquiry* proved little more successful than the *Treatise*.

Hume was charged with heresy, but he was defended by his young clerical friends, who argued that—as an atheist—he was outside the Church's jurisdiction. Despite his acquittal, Hume failed to gain the chair of philosophy at the University of Glasgow.

It was after returning to Edinburgh in 1752, as he wrote in *My Own Life*, that "the Faculty of Advocates chose me their Librarian, an office from which I received little or no emolument, but which gave me the command of a large library".This resource enabled him to continue historical research for *The History of England*.

Hume achieved great literary fame as a historian. His enormous *The History of England*, tracing events from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688, was a best-seller in its day. In it, Hume presented political person as a creature of habit, with a disposition to submit quietly to established government unless confronted by uncertain circumstances. In his view, only religious difference could deflect people from their everyday lives to think about political matters.

Hume's volume of *Political Discourses* (published by Kincaid & Donaldson, 1752) was the only work he considered successful on first publication.

Religion

Tomb of David Hume in Edinburgh Hume wrote a great deal on religion. The question of what were Hume's personal views on religion is a difficult one. The Church of Scotland seriously considered bringing charges of infidelity against him.

In works such as *On Superstition and Enthusiasm*, Hume specifically seems to support the standard religious views of his time and place. This still meant that he could be very critical of the Catholic Church, referring to it with the standard Protestant epithets and descriptions of it as superstition and idolatry as well as dismissing what his compatriots saw as uncivilised beliefs. He also considered extreme Protestant sects, which he called *enthusiasts*, to be corrupters of religion.Yet he also put forward arguments that suggested that polytheism had much to commend it in preference to monotheism.

It is likely that Hume was sceptical both about religious belief (at least as demanded by the religious organisations of his time) and of the complete atheism promoted by such contemporaries as Baron d'Holbach. Paul Russell suggests that perhaps Hume's position is best characterised by the term "irreligion". O'Connor (2001, p19) writes that Hume "did not believe in the God of standard theism. ... but he did not rule out all concepts of deity". Also, "ambiguity suited his purposes, and this creates difficulty in definitively pinning down his final position on religion". When asked if he was an atheist, Hume would say he did not have enough faith to believe there was no god.

The perception of Hume as an atheist with an axe to grind is an oversimplification and contrasts his views on extremist positioning. Hanvelt dubs Hume as an Aristotelian in his view that rhetoric is a form of ethical studies, which ultimately make it political.

Later Years

From 1763 to 1765, Hume was secretary to Lord Hertford in Paris. He met and later fell out with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He wrote of his Paris life, "I really wish often for the plain roughness of

Notes

The Poker Club of Edinburgh ... to correct and qualify so much lusciousness." For a year from 1767, Hume held the appointment of Under Secretary of State for the Northern Department. In 1768 he settled in Edinburgh where he lived from 1771 until his death in 1776 at the south-west corner of St. Andrew's Square in Edinburgh's New Town, at what is now 21 Saint David Street. (A popular story, consistent with some historical evidence, suggests the street was named after Hume.)

James Boswell saw Hume a few weeks before his death (which was from some form of abdominal cancer). Hume told him he sincerely believed it a "most unreasonable fancy" that there might be life after death.This meeting was dramatized in semi-fictional form for the BBC by Michael Ignatieff as *Dialogue in the Dark*. Hume asked that he be interred in a "simple roman tomb." In his will he requests that it be inscribed only with his name and the year of his birth and death, "leaving it to Posterity to add the Rest."It stands, as he wished it, on the south-western slope of Calton Hill, in the Old Calton Cemetery.

6.2 As Historian of England

In 1754 to 1762 Hume published the *History of England*, a 6-volume work of immense sweep, which extends, says its subtitle, "From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688". Inspired by Voltaire's sense of the breadth of history, Hume widened the focus of history, away from merely Kings, Parliaments, and armies, to literature and science as well. He argued that the quest for liberty was the highest standard for judging the past, and concluded that after considerable fluctuation, England at the time of his writing had achieved "the most entire system of liberty, that was ever known amongst mankind."

Hume's coverage of the political upheavals of the 17th century relied in large part on the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1646-69). Generally Hume took a moderate Royalist position and thought revolution was unnecessary. Hume's indeed was considered a Tory history, and emphasized religious differences more than constitutional issues. He was anti-Presbyterian, anti-Puritan, anti-Whig, and pro-monarchy. Historians have debated whether Hume posited a universal unchanging human nature, or allowed for evolution and development.

Hume was an early cultural historian of science. His short biographies of leading scientists explored the process of scientific change. He developed new ways of seeing scientists in the context of their times by looking at how they interacted with society and each other. He covers over forty scientists, with special attention paid to Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and Isaac Newton. Hume awarded the palm of greatness to William Harvey.

The *History* sold well and was influential for nearly a century when it was superseded by Goldsmith's history (which itself was partly plagiarized from Hume's). By 1894, there were at least 50 editions. There was also an often-reprinted abridgement, *The Student's Hume* (1859).

Thought

A statue of Hume by Alexander Stoddart on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh In the introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes "'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, more or less, to human nature ... Even *Mathematics*, *Natural Philosophy*, and *Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man". Also, "the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences", and the method for this science assumes "experience and observation" as the foundations of a logical argument. Because "Hume's plan is to extend to philosophy in general the methodological limitations of Newtonian physics",Hume is characterised as an empiricist.

Until recently, Hume was seen as a forerunner of the logical positivist movement; a form of anti-metaphysical empiricism. According to the logical positivists, unless a statement could be verified by experience, or else was true or false by definition (i.e. either tautological or contradictory), then it was meaningless (this is a summary statement of their verification principle). Hume, on this view, was a proto-positivist, who, in his philosophical writings, attempted to demonstrate how

Notes

ordinary propositions about objects, causal relations, the self, and so on, are semantically equivalent to propositions about one's experiences.

Many commentators have since rejected this understanding of Humean empiricism, stressing an epistemological, rather than a semantic reading of his project. According to this view, Hume's empiricism consisted in the idea that it is our knowledge, and not our ability to conceive, that is restricted to what can be experienced. To be sure, Hume thought that we can form beliefs about that which extends beyond any possible experience, through the operation of faculties such as custom and the imagination, but he was skeptical about claims to *knowledge* on this basis.

Induction

Few philosophers are as associated with induction as David Hume; but Hume himself rarely used the term and when he did, he used it to support a point he was arguing. He made no indication that he saw any problem with induction. Induction became associated with Hume only in the early twentieth century; John Maynard Keynes may have been the first to draw the connection. The connection is now standard, but is based on what current scholars mean by "induction", not how Hume used the term in his writings.

The cornerstone of Hume's epistemology is the problem of induction. This may be the area of Hume's thought where his scepticism about human powers of reason is most pronounced. Understanding the problem of induction is central to grasping Hume's philosophical system.

The problem concerns the explanation of how we are able to make inductive inferences. Inductive inference is reasoning from the observed behaviour of objects to their behaviour when unobserved; as Hume says, it is a question of how things behave when they go "beyond the present testimony of the senses, and the records of our memory". Hume notices that we tend to believe that things behave in a regular manner; i.e., that patterns in the behaviour of objects will persist into the future, and throughout the unobserved present. This persistence of regularities is sometimes called Uniformitarianism or the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature.

Hume's argument is that we cannot rationally justify the claim that nature will continue to be uniform, as justification comes in only two varieties, and both of these are inadequate. The two sorts are: (1) demonstrative reasoning, and (2) probable reasoning. With regard to (1), Hume argues that the uniformity principle cannot be demonstrated, as it is "consistent and conceivable" that nature might stop being regular. Turning to (2), Hume argues that we cannot hold that nature will continue to be uniform because it has been in the past, as this is using the very sort of reasoning (induction) that is under question: it would be circular reasoning. Thus no form of justification will rationally warrant our inductive inferences.

Hume's solution to this problem is to argue that, rather than reason, natural instinct explains the human ability to make inductive inferences. He asserts that "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable [*sic*] necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel". Although many modern commentators have demurred from Hume's solution, some have notably concurred with it, seeing his analysis of our epistemic predicament as a major contribution to the theory of knowledge. For example, philosopher John D. Kenyon writes:

Reason might manage to raise a doubt about the truth of a conclusion of natural inductive inference just for a moment in the study, but the forces of nature will soon overcome that artificial skepticism, and the sheer agreeableness of animal faith will protect us from excessive caution and sterile suspension of belief.

Causation

The notion of causation is closely linked to the problem of induction. According to Hume, we reason inductively by associating constantly conjoined events, and it is the mental act of association that is the basis of our concept of causation. There are three main interpretations of Hume's theory

Notes

of causation represented in the literature: (1) the logical positivist; (2) the skeptical realist; and (3) the quasi-realist.

The logical positivist interpretation is that Hume analyses causal propositions, such as "A caused B", in terms of regularities in perception: "A caused B" is equivalent to "Whenever A-type events happen, B-type ones follow", where "whenever" refers to all possible perceptions.

power and necessity... are... qualities of perceptions, not of objects... felt by the soul and not perceived externally in bodies. This view is rejected by sceptical realists, who argue that Hume thought that causation amounts to more than just the regular succession of events. When two events are causally conjoined, a necessary connection underpins the conjunction:

Shall we rest contented with these two relations of contiguity and succession, as affording a complete idea of causation? By no means ... there is a *necessary connexion* to be taken into consideration.

Hume held that we have no perceptual access to the necessary connection, hence *skepticism*, but we are naturally compelled to believe in its objective existence, ergo *realism*. He thus concluded that there are no necessary connections, only constant conjunctions.

Referring to the Law of Causality, Hume wrote, "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that something could arise without a cause." It has been argued that, while Hume did not think causation is reducible to pure regularity, he was not a fully fledged realist either: Simon Blackburn calls this a quasi-realist reading. On this view, talk about causal necessity is an expression of a functional change in the human mind, whereby certain events are predicted or anticipated on the basis of prior experience. The expression of causal necessity is a "projection" of the functional change onto the objects involved in the causal connection: in Hume's words, "nothing is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation which they occasion."

The Self

According to the standard interpretation of Hume on personal identity, he was a bundle theorist, who held that the self is nothing but a bundle of experiences ("perceptions") linked by the relations of causation and resemblance; or, more accurately, that the empirically warranted idea of the self is just the idea of such a bundle. This view is forwarded by, for example, positivist interpreters, who saw Hume as suggesting that terms such as "self", "person", or "mind" referred to collections of "sense-contents". A modern-day version of the bundle theory of the mind has been advanced by Derek Parfit in his *Reasons and Persons* (1986).

However, some philosophers have criticised the bundle-theory interpretation of Hume on personal identity. They argue that distinct selves can have perceptions that stand in relations of similarity and causality with one another. Thus perceptions must already come parcelled into distinct "bundles" before they can be associated according to the relations of similarity and causality: in other words, the mind must already possess a unity that cannot be generated, or constituted, by these relations alone. Since the bundle-theory interpretation portrays Hume as answering an ontological question, philosophers who see Hume as not very concerned with such questions have queried whether the view is really Hume's, or "only a decoy".Instead, it is suggested, Hume might have been answering an epistemological question, about the causal origin of our concept of the self. In the Appendix to the Treatise, Hume declares himself dissatisfied with his account of the self in Book 1 of the Treatise, and the question of why he is dissatisfied has received a number of different answers. Another interpretation of Hume's view of the self has been argued for by James Giles. According to this view, Hume is not arguing for a bundle theory, which is a form of reductionism, but rather for an eliminative view of the self. That is, rather than reducing the self to a bundle of perceptions, Hume is rejecting the idea of the self altogether. On this interpretation Hume is proposing a 'No-Self Theory' and thus has much in common with Buddhist thought. Alison Gopnik has argued that Hume was in a position to learn about Buddhist thought during his time in France in the 1730s.

Notes

Practical Reason

Hume's anti-rationalism informed much of his theory of belief and knowledge, in his treatment of the notions of induction, causation, and the external world. But it was not confined to this sphere, and permeated just as strongly his theories of motivation, action, and morality. In a famous sentence in the *Treatise*, Hume circumscribes reason's role in the production of action: Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. It has been suggested that this position can be lucidly brought out through the metaphor of "direction of fit": beliefs—the paradigmatic products of reason—are propositional attitudes that aim to have their content fit the world; conversely, desires—or what Hume calls passions, or sentiments—are states that aim to fit the world to their contents. Though a metaphor, it has been argued that this intuitive way of understanding Hume's theory that desires are necessary for motivation "captures something quite deep in our thought about their nature". Hume's anti-rationalism has been very influential, and defended in contemporary philosophy of action by neo-Humeans such as Michael Smith and Simon Blackburn. The major opponents of the Humean view are cognitivists about what it is to act for a reason, such as John McDowell, and Kantians, such as Christine Korsgaard.

Ethics

Is–ought problem Hume's views on human motivation and action formed the cornerstone of his ethical theory: he conceived moral or ethical sentiments to be intrinsically motivating, or the providers of reasons for action. Given that one cannot be motivated by reason alone, requiring the input of the passions, Hume argued that reason cannot be behind morality.

Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. Hume's sentimentalism about morality was shared by his close friend Adam Smith, and Hume and Smith were mutually influenced by the moral reflections of Francis Hutcheson.

Hume's theory of ethics has been influential in modern day metaethical theory, helping to inspire various forms of emotivism,error theory-and ethical expressivism and non-cognitivism[75] and Allan Gibbard.

Free Will, Determinism, and Responsibility

Hume, along with Thomas Hobbes, is cited as a classical compatibilist about the notions of freedom and determinism. The thesis of compatibilism seeks to reconcile human freedom with the mechanist belief that human beings are part of a deterministic universe, whose happenings are governed by the laws of physics.

Hume argued that the dispute about the compatibility of freedom and determinism has been kept afloat by ambiguous terminology: From this circumstance alone, that a controversy has been long kept on foot... we may presume, that there is some ambiguity in the expression.[78] Hume defines the concepts of "necessity" and "liberty" as follows:

Necessity: "the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together.." Liberty: "*a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*. Hume then argues that, according to these definitions, not only are the two compatible, but Liberty *requires* Necessity. For if our actions were not necessitated in the above sense, they would "...have so little in connexion with motives, inclinations and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other." But if our actions are not thus hooked up to the will, then our actions can never be free: they would be matters of "chance; which is universally allowed not to exist".

Moreover, Hume goes on to argue that in order to be held morally responsible, it is required that our behaviour be caused, i.e. necessitated, for Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and

Notes

perishing; and where they proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil This argument has inspired modern day commentators. However, it has been argued that the issue of whether or not we hold one another morally responsible does not ultimately depend on the truth or falsity of a metaphysical thesis such as determinism, for our so holding one another is a non-rational human sentiment that is not predicated on such theses. For this influential argument, which is still made in a Humean vein, see P. F. Strawson's essay, *Freedom and Resentment*.

6.3 Problem of Miracles

In his discussion of miracles in An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding (Section 10) Hume defines a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent". Given that Hume argues that it is impossible to deduce the existence of a Deity from the existence of the world (for he says that causes cannot be determined from effects), miracles (including prophecy) are the only possible support he would conceivably allow for theistic religions.

Hume discusses everyday belief as often resulted from probability, where we believe an event that has occurred most often as being most likely, but that we also subtract the weighting of the less common event from that of the more common event. In the context of miracles, this means that a miraculous event should be labelled a miracle only where it would be even more unbelievable (by principles of probability) for it not to be. Hume mostly discusses miracles as testimony, of which he writes that when a person reports a miraculous event we [need to] balance our belief in their veracity against our belief that such events do not occur. Following this rule, only where it is considered, as a result of experience, less likely that the testimony is false than that a miracle occur should we believe in miracles.

Although Hume leaves open the possibility for miracles to occur and be reported, he offers various arguments against this ever having happened in history:

- People often lie, and they have good reasons to lie about miracles occurring either because they believe they are doing so for the benefit of their religion or because of the fame that results.
- People by nature enjoy relating miracles they have heard without caring for their veracity and thus miracles are easily transmitted even where false.
- Hume notes that miracles seem to *occur* mostly in "ignorant" and "barbarous" nations and times, and the reason they don't occur in the "civilized" societies is such societies aren't awed by what they know to be natural events.
- The miracles of each religion argue against all other religions and their miracles, and so even if a proportion of all reported miracles across the world fit Hume's requirement for belief, the miracles of each religion make the other less likely.

Despite all this Hume observes that belief in miracles is popular, and that "The gazing populace receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition and promotes wonder". Critics have argued that Hume's position assumes the character of miracles and natural laws prior to any specific examination of miracle claims, and thus it amounts to a subtle form of begging the question. They have also noted that it requires an appeal to inductive inference, as none have observed every part of nature or examined every possible miracle claim (e.g., those yet future to the observer), which in Hume's philosophy was especially problematic.

Hume's main argument concerning miracles is the following. Miracles by definition are singular events that differ from the established Laws of Nature. The Laws of Nature are codified as a result of past experiences. Therefore a miracle is a violation of all prior experience. However the probability that something has occurred in contradiction of all past experience should always be judged to be

Notes

less than the probability that either my senses have deceived me or the person recounting the miraculous occurrence is lying or mistaken, all of which I have past experience of. For Hume, this refusal to grant credence does not guarantee correctness – he offers the example of an Indian Prince, who having grown up in a hot country refuses to believe that water has frozen. By Hume's lights this refusal is not wrong and the Prince is thinking correctly; it is presumably only when he has had extensive experience of the freezing of water that he has warrant to believe that the event could occur. So for Hume, either the miraculous event will become a recurrent event or else it will never be rational to believe it occurred. The connection to religious belief is left inexplicit throughout, save for the close of his discussion wherein Hume notes the reliance of Christianity upon testimony of miraculous occurrences and makes an ironic remark that anyone who "is moved by faith to assent" to revealed testimony "is aware of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

Design Argument

Anthropic principle and Problem of evil One of the oldest and most popular arguments for the existence of God is the design argument: that order and "purpose" in the world bespeaks a divine origin. Hume gave a criticism of the design argument in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Firstly, Hume argued that for the design argument to be feasible, it must be true that order and purpose are observed only when they result from design. But order is often observed to result from presumably mindless processes like the generation of snowflakes and crystals. Design can account for only a tiny part of our experience of order.

Second, that the design argument is based on an incomplete analogy: because of our experience with objects, we can recognise human-designed ones, comparing for example a pile of stones and a brick wall. But in order to point to a designed universe, we would need to have an experience of a range of different universes. As we only experience one, the analogy cannot be applied.

Next, even if the design argument is completely successful, it could not in and of itself establish a robust theism; one could easily reach the conclusion that the universe's configuration is the result of some morally ambiguous, possibly unintelligent agent or agents whose method bears only a remote similarity to human design.

Furthermore, if a well-ordered natural world requires a special designer, then God's mind (being so well-ordered) also requires a special designer. And then this designer would likewise need a designer, and so on ad infinitum. We could respond by resting content with an inexplicably self-ordered divine mind; but then why not rest content with an inexplicably self-ordered natural world?

Finally, Hume advanced a version of the Anthropic Principle. Often, where it appears that an object has a particular feature in order to secure some goal, is in fact the result of a filtering process. That is, the object wouldn't be around did it not possess that feature, and the perceived purpose is only interesting to us as a human projection of goals onto nature. This mechanical explanation of teleology anticipated the notion of natural selection.

6.4 Political and Economic Theory

Political Theory

It is difficult to categorize Hume's political affiliations. His thought contains elements that are, in modern terms, both conservative and liberal, as well as ones that are both contractarian and utilitarian, though these terms are all anachronistic. Thomas Jefferson banned Hume's *History* from the University of Virginia, fearing that it "has spread universal toryism over the land". Yet, Samuel Johnson thought Hume "a Tory by chance... for he has no principle. If he is anything, he

Notes

is a Hobbist".His central concern is to show the importance of the rule of law, and stresses throughout his political *Essays* the importance of moderation in politics. This outlook needs to be seen within the historical context of eighteenth century Scotland, where the legacy of religious civil war, combined with the relatively recent memory of the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite risings, fostered in a historian such as Hume a distaste for enthusiasm and factionalism that appeared to threaten the fragile and nascent political and social stability of a country that was deeply politically and religiously divided. He thinks that society is best governed by a general and impartial system of laws, based principally on the "artifice" of contract; he is less concerned about the form of government that administers these laws, so long as it does so fairly (though he thought that republics were more likely to do so than monarchies).

Hume expressed suspicion of attempts to reform society in ways that departed from long-established custom, and he counselled peoples not to resist their governments except in cases of the most egregious tyranny.However, he resisted aligning himself with either of Britain's two political parties, the Whigs and the Tories. Hume writes My views of *things* are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of persons to Tory prejudices.

McArthur says that Hume believed that we should try to balance our demands for liberty with the need for strong authority, without sacrificing either. McArthur characterizes Hume as a 'precautionary conservative', whose actions would have been "determined by prudential concerns about the consequences of change, which often demand we ignore our own principles about what is ideal or even legitimate".He supported liberty of the press, and was sympathetic to democracy, when suitably constrained. Douglass Adair has argued that Hume was a major inspiration for James Madison's writings, and the *Federalist No. 10* in particular.Hume was also, in general, an optimist about social progress, believing that, thanks to the economic development that comes with the expansion of trade, societies progress from a state of "barbarism" to one of "civilisation". Civilised societies are open, peaceful and sociable, and their citizens are as a result much happier. It is therefore not fair to characterise him, as Leslie Stephen did, as favouring "...that stagnation which is the natural ideal of a skeptic."

Though it has been suggested Hume had no positive vision of the best society, he in fact produced an essay titled *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, which lays out what he thought was the best form of government. His pragmatism shone through, however, in his caveat that we should only seek to implement such a system should an opportunity present itself, which would not upset established structures. He defended a strict separation of powers, decentralisation, extending the franchise to anyone who held property of value and limiting the power of the clergy. The Swiss militia system was proposed as the best form of protection. Elections were to take place on an annual basis and representatives were to be unpaid. It is also important to note that the ideal commonwealth laid out by Hume was held to be ideal only for the British Isles in the 18th century. According to Hume "good constitutions... will ensure that the private interest of men, even of bad men, will controlled and directed as to serve and produce the public good. Such is the aim of free government, which Hume calls the "happiest" society... Liberty in the sense of free government is, Hume says, "the perfection of civil society"... The wise statemen... in attempting to improve a constitution will adapt his innovations to the "ancient fabric", so as not to disturb society. His caution may be reinforced by reflections on the limits of human foresight".

Contributions to Economic Thought

Through his discussions on politics, Hume developed many ideas that are prevalent in the field of economics. This includes ideas on private property, inflation, and foreign trade.

In contrast to Locke, Hume believes that private property isn't a natural right. Hume argues it is justified, because resources are limited. Private property would be an unjustified, "idle ceremonial", if all goods were unlimited and available freely. Hume also believed in an unequal distribution of

Notes

property, because perfect equality would destroy the ideas of thrift and industry. Perfect equality would thus lead to impoverishment.

Influence

Attention to Hume's philosophical works grew after the German philosopher Immanuel Kant credited Hume with awakening him from "dogmatic slumbers".

According to Schopenhauer, "there is more to be learned from each page of David Hume than from the collected philosophical works of Hegel, Herbart and Schleiermacher taken together".

A. J. Ayer (1936), introducing his classic exposition of logical positivism, claimed: "The views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and Hume."Albert Einstein (1915) wrote that he was inspired by Hume's positivism when formulating his Special Theory of Relativity. Hume was called "the prophet of the Wittgensteinian revolution" by N. Phillipson, referring to his view that mathematics and logic are closed systems, disguised tautologies, and have no relation to the world of experience. David Fate Norton (1993) asserted that Hume was "the first post-sceptical philosopher of the early modern period".

Hume's Problem of Induction was also of fundamental importance to the philosophy of Karl Popper. In his autobiography, *Unended Quest*,he wrote: "'Knowledge' ... is *objective*; and it is hypothetical or conjectural. This way of looking at the problem made it possible for me to reformulate Hume's *problem of induction*". This insight resulted in Popper's major work The Logic of Scientific Discovery.

"I approached the problem of induction through Hume. Hume, I felt, was perfectly right in pointing out that induction cannot be logically justified".

6.5 Text—Of Essay Writing

The legant Part of Mankind, who are not immers'd in the animal Life, but employ themselves in the Operations of the Mind, may be divided into the *learned* and *conversible.* The Learned are such as have chosen for their Portion the higher and more difficult Operations of the Mind, which require Leisure and Solitude, and cannot be brought to Perfection, without long Preparation and severe Labour. The conversible World join to a sociable Disposition, and a Taste of Pleasure, an Inclination to the easier and more gentle Exercises of the Understanding, to obvious Reflections on human Affairs, and the Duties of common Life, and to the Observation of the Blemishes or Perfections of the particular Objects, that surround them. Such Subjects of Thought furnish not sufficient Employment in Solitude, but require the Company and Conversation of our Fellow-Creatures, to render them a proper Exercise for the Mind: And this brings Mankind together in Society, where every one displays his Thoughts and Observations in the best Manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives Information, as well as Pleasure.

The Separation of the Learned from the conversible World seems to have been the great Defect of the last Age, and must have had a very bad Influence both on Books and Company: For what Possibility is there of finding Topics of Conversation fit for the Entertainment of rational Creatures, without having Recourse sometimes to History, Poetry, Politics, and the more obvious Principles, at least, of Philosophy? Must our whole Discourse be a continued Series of gossipping Stories and idle Remarks? Must the Mind never rise higher, but be perpetually

Stun'd and worn out with endless Chat Of WILL did this, and NAN said that.*2 This wou'd be to render the Time spent in Company the most unentertaining, as well as the most unprofitable Part of our Lives.

On the other Hand, Learning has been as great a Loser by being shut up in Colleges and Cells, and secluded from the World and good Company. By that Means, every Thing of what we call *Belles Lettres*° became totally barbarous, being cultivated by Men without any Taste of Life or Manners, and without that Liberty and Facility of Thought and Expression, which can only be acquir'd by

Notes

Conversation. Even Philosophy went to Wrack by this moaping recluse Method of Study, and became as chimerical in her Conclusions as she was unintelligible in her Stile and Manner of Delivery. And indeed, what cou'd be expected from Men who never consulted Experience in any of their Reasonings, or who never search'd for that Experience, where alone it is to be found, in common Life and Conversation?

'Tis with great Pleasure I observe, That Men of Letters, in this Age, have lost, in a great Measure, that Shyness and Bashfulness of Temper, which kept them at a Distance from Mankind; and, at the same Time, That Men of the World are proud of borrowing from Books their most agreeable Topics of Conversation. 'Tis to be hop'd, that this League betwixt the learned and conversible Worlds, which is so happily begun, will be still farther improv'd to their mutual Advantage; and to that End, I know nothing more advantageous than such *Essays* as these with which I endeavour to entertain the Public. In this View, I cannot but consider myself as a Kind of Resident or Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation; and shall think it my constant Duty to promote a good Correspondence betwixt these two States, which have so great a Dependence on each other. I shall give Intelligence to the Learned of whatever passes in Company, and shall endeavour to import into Company whatever Commodities I find in my native Country proper for their Use and Entertainment. The Balance of Trade we need not be jealous of, nor will there be any Difficulty to preserve it on both Sides. The Materials of this Commerce must chiefly be furnish'd by Conversation and common Life: The manufacturing of them alone belongs to Learning.

As 'twou'd be an unpardonable Negligence in an Ambassador not to pay his Respects to the Sovereign of the State where he is commission'd to reside; so it wou'd be altogether inexcusable in me not to address myself, with a particular Respect, to the Fair Sex, who are the Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation. I approach them with Reverence; and were not my Countrymen, the Learned, a stubborn independent Race of Mortals, extremely jealous of their Liberty, and unaccustom'd to Subjection, I shou'd resign into their fair Hands the sovereign Authority over the Republic of Letters. As the Case stands, my Commission extends no farther, than to desire a League, offensive and defensive, against our common Enemies, against the Enemies of Reason and Beauty, People of dull Heads and cold Hearts. From this Moment let us pursue them with the severest Vengeance: Let no Quarter be given, but to those of sound Understandings and delicate Affections; and these Characters, 'tis to be presum'd, we shall always find inseparable.

To be serious, and to quit the Allusion before it be worn thread-bare, I am of Opinion, that Women, that is, Women of Sense and Education (for to such alone I address myself) are much better Judges of all polite Writing than Men of the same Degree of Understanding; and that 'tis a vain Pannic, if they be so far terrify'd with the common Ridicule that is levell'd against learned Ladies, as utterly to abandon every Kind of Books and Study to our Sex. Let the Dread of that Ridicule have no other Effect, than to make them conceal their Knowledge before Fools, who are not worthy of it, nor of them. Such will still presume upon the vain Title of the Male Sex to affect a Superiority above them: But my fair Readers may be assur'd, that all Men of Sense, who know the World, have a great Deference for their Judgment of such Books as ly within the Compass of their Knowledge, and repose more Confidence in the Delicacy of their Taste, tho' unguided by Rules, than in all the dull Labours of Pedants and Commentators. In a neighbouring Nation, equally famous for good Taste, and for Gallantry, the Ladies are, in a Manner, the Sovereigns of the *learned* World, as well as of the *conversible;* and no polite Writer pretends to venture upon the Public, without the Approbation of some celebrated Judges of that Sex. Their Verdict is, indeed, sometimes complain'd of; and, in particular, I find, that the Admirers of *Corneille,* to save that great Poet's Honour upon the Ascendant that *Racine* began to take over him, always said, That it was not to be expected, that so old a Man could dispute the Prize, before such Judges, with so young a Man as his Rival. But this Observation has been found unjust, since Posterity seems to

Notes

have ratify'd the Verdict of that Tribunal: And *Racine,* tho' dead, is still the Favourite of the Fair Sex, as well as of the best Judges among the Men. There is only one Subject, on which I am apt to distrust the Judgment of Females, and that is, concerning Books of Gallantry and Devotion, which they commonly affect° as high flown as possible; and most of them seem more delighted with the Warmth, than with the justness of the Passion. I mention Gallantry and Devotion as the same Subject, because, in Reality, they become the same when treated in this Manner; and we may observe, that they both depend upon the very same Complexion. As the Fair Sex have a great Share of the tender and amorous Disposition, it perverts their Judgment on this Occasion, and makes them be easily affected, even by what has no Propriety in the Expression nor Nature in the Sentiment. Mr. *Addison's* elegant Discourses of Religion have no Relish with them, in Comparison of Books of mystic Devotion: And *Otway's* Tragedies are rejected for the Rants of Mr. *Dryden*.*3

Wou'd the Ladies correct their false Taste in this Particular; Let them accustom themselves a little more to Books of all Kinds: Let them give Encouragement to Men of Sense and Knowledge to frequent their Company: And finally, let them concur heartily in that Union I have projected betwixt the learned and conversible Worlds. They may, perhaps, meet with more Complaisance from their usual Followers than from Men of Learning; but they cannot reasonably expect so sincere an Affection: And, I hope, they will never be guilty of so wrong a Choice, as to sacrifice the Substance to the Shadow.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) David Hume was a

(*a*) British Philosopher (*b*) French Philosopher

(*c*) Scottish Philosopher (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) David Hume was born on

(*a*) 26 April 1712 (*b*) 26 April 1712

(*c*) 26 April 1715 (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Hume was called the ..... of the Wittgensteinian revolution

(*a*) Father (*b*) Pioneer

(*c*) Prophet (*d*) None of these

6.6 Summary

- Hume advocated a compatibilist theory of free will that proved extremely influential on subsequent moral philosophy. He was also a sentimentalist who held that ethics are based on feelings rather than abstract moral principles. Hume also examined the normative is–ought problem. He held notoriously ambiguous views of Christianity,but famously challenged the argument from design in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1777).
- Hume achieved great literary fame as a historian. His enormous *The History of England*, tracing events from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688, was a best-seller in its day. In it, Hume presented political person as a creature of habit, with a disposition to submit quietly to established government unless confronted by uncertain circumstances. In his view, only religious difference could deflect people from their everyday lives to think about political matters.
- Hume's volume of *Political Discourses* (published by Kincaid & Donaldson, 1752) was the only work he considered successful on first publication.
- From 1763 to 1765, Hume was secretary to Lord Hertford in Paris.

Notes

- In 1754 to 1762 Hume published the *History of England*, a 6-volume work of immense sweep, which extends, says its subtitle, "From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688".
- Hume's coverage of the political upheavals of the 17th century relied in large part on the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1646-69). Generally Hume took a moderate Royalist position and thought revolution was unnecessary. Hume's indeed was considered a Tory history, and emphasized religious differences more than constitutional issues. He was anti-Presbyterian, anti-Puritan, anti-Whig, and pro-monarchy. Historians have debated whether Hume posited a universal unchanging human nature, or allowed for evolution and development.
- Hume was an early cultural historian of science. His short biographies of leading scientists explored the process of scientific change. He developed new ways of seeing scientists in the context of their times by looking at how they interacted with society and each other. He covers over forty scientists, with special attention paid to Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and Isaac Newton. Hume awarded the palm of greatness to William Harvey.
- Hume's anti-rationalism informed much of his theory of belief and knowledge, in his treatment of the notions of induction, causation, and the external world. But it was not confined to this sphere, and permeated just as strongly his theories of motivation, action, and morality. In a famous sentence in the *Treatise*, Hume circumscribes reason's role in the production of action: Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. It has been suggested that this position can be lucidly brought out through the metaphor of "direction of fit": beliefs—the paradigmatic products of reason—are propositional attitudes that aim to have their content fit the world; conversely, desires—or what Hume calls passions, or sentiments—are states that aim to fit the world to their contents. Though a metaphor, it has been argued that this intuitive way of understanding Hume's theory that desires are necessary for motivation "captures something quite deep in our thought about their nature". Hume's anti-rationalism has been very influential, and defended in contemporary philosophy of action by neo-Humeans such as Michael Smith and Simon Blackburn. The major opponents of the Humean view are cognitivists about what it is to act for a reason, such as John McDowell, and Kantians, such as Christine Korsgaard.
- Hume, along with Thomas Hobbes, is cited as a classical compatibilist about the notions of freedom and determinism. The thesis of compatibilism seeks to reconcile human freedom with the mechanist belief that human beings are part of a deterministic universe, whose happenings are governed by the laws of physics.
- Hume argued that the dispute about the compatibility of freedom and determinism has been kept afloat by ambiguous terminology: From this circumstance alone, that a controversy has been long kept on foot... we may presume, that there is some ambiguity in the expression.[78] Hume defines the concepts of "necessity" and "liberty" as follows:
- Miracles by definition are singular events that differ from the established Laws of Nature. The Laws of Nature are codified as a result of past experiences.
- Hume gave a criticism of the design argument in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.
- Design can account for only a tiny part of our experience of order.
- Hume expressed suspicion of attempts to reform society in ways that departed from long-established custom, and he counselled peoples not to resist their governments except in cases of the most egregious tyranny.However, he resisted aligning himself with either of Britain's two political parties, the Whigs and the Tories. Hume writes My views of *things* are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of persons to Tory prejudices.

Notes

- Hume was called "the prophet of the Wittgensteinian revolution" by N. Phillipson
- David Fate Norton (1993) asserted that Hume was "the first post-sceptical philosopher of the early modern period

6.7 Key-Words

1. Empiricism : The theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience.
2. Skepticism : Doubt about the truth of something.

6.8 Review Questions

1. What is the problem of miracle? Discuss.
2. Discuss Hume's life and works.
3. Write a short note on Of Essay Writing by David Hume.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*c*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*c*)

6.9 Further Readings



1. David Hume, selected Essays Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press.
2. Davide Hume Essays (Of Essay Writing).

Notes

Unit 7: David Hume-Of Essay Writing: Critical Appreciation and Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
7.1 Context
7.2 Of Essay Writing: Critical Analysis
7.3 Beauty and Taste in Hume's Moral Theory
7.4 Hume's Essay on Taste
7.5 Hume's Essay on Tragedy
7.6 David Hume–A Critical Analysis
7.7 Summary
7.8 Key-Words
7.9 Review Questions
7.10 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Understand Hume's context and Terminology
- Discuss Hume's Essay on Taste and on Tragedy
- Analyse Hume's Of Essay Writing

Introduction

David Hume (1711–1776) was born in Edinburgh, and was trained for the law. He early showed an eager interest in philosophy, and devoted himself to study with such intensity as to injure his health. He traveled in France more than once, and was on intimate terms with such men as d'Alembert, Turgot, and Rousseau, for the last of whom he found a pension and a temporary refuge in England.

Hume is most celebrated for his philosophical writings, in which he carried the empirical philosophy of Locke to the point of complete skepticism. He wrote also a "History of England" in eight volumes, and a large number of treatises and essays on politics, economics, ethics, and esthetics. The following essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," is a typical example of his clear thinking and admirable style. "He may be regarded," says Leslie Stephen, "as the acutest thinker in Great Britain of the eighteenth century, and th**e** most qualified interpreter of its intellectual tendencies."

7.1 Context

Hume's aesthetic theory received limited attention until the second half of the Twentieth Century, when interest in the full range of Hume's thought was enlivened by the gradual recognition of his importance among philosophers writing in English. Unfortunately, many discussions of Hume's aesthetics concentrate on a single late essay, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757). This emphasis misrepresents the degree to which Hume's aesthetic theory is integrated into his philosophical system.

Notes

The "Advertisement" to his first publication, A Treatise of Human Nature, promises that if the first two volumes find suitable "approbation," the project will conclude with "the examination of morals, politics, and criticism; which will compleat this Treatise of human nature". Sadly, the Treatise was not a success and Hume limited the third and final volume to the topic "Of Morals." He never produced his systematic treatment of politics and criticism and so never completed his new "science" of human nature. Those topics would be handled piecemeal in several collections of short essays, the "polite" writing that brought him the publishing success he desired.

Hume's concept of criticism is not interchangeable with either aesthetics or philosophy of art. These now-familiar labels were not available to Hume when he published his Treatise in 1739 and 1740. The Abbé Charles Batteux did not defend the idea of grouping the arts together in an investigation of fine art until 1746. Hume knew and drew from the French tradition leading to and following from Batteux's work. Under this influence, his essays occasionally refer to the "the finer arts" of painting, music, sculpture, and poetry. He never uses the expression "fine art" and he was probably not aware of Alexander Baumgarten's Reflections on Poetry of 1735, the work that introduced the term "aesthetics." The thesis that aesthetic judgments are completely distinct from moral judgments would not receive its modern formulation until Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment (1790), after Hume's death in 1776. So Hume's aesthetics occupies a pivotal niche between the appearance of fine art theory and Kant's defense of an independent aesthetic judgment in the Critique of Judgment – a defense clearly influenced by Kant's reading of Hume's essays and An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.

Hume's theory is most firmly rooted in the work of Joseph Addison and Francis Hutcheson. From the older tradition, elegantly expounded by Addison in numerous essays written between 1709 and 1715, Hume retains the idea that the values within the scope of criticism are essentially pleasures of the human imagination. Although Hume acknowledges cases where beauty seems a merely sensory pleasure, he emphasizes beauty's status as a cognitive pleasure. Taking beauty as his paradigm case of such a value, Hume combines Addison's theory of taste as an operation of imagination with Hutcheson's proposal that emotions are the foundation of moral judgment. Elaborating on the "inner sense" theory, Hume endorses Hutcheson's stance on the general question of the nature of both moral and aesthetic value. Value judgments are expressions of taste rather than reasoned analysis. Values cannot be addressed except in the context of a general theory about our shared human nature. Although recognition of aesthetic and moral beauty is a manifestation of taste (and perhaps they cannot ultimately be distinguished from one another), taste must not be dismissed as subjective, idiosyncratic preference.

Granted, Hume has many other influences. His celebrated essay on taste, for example, draws heavily on French thought, particularly on that of the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos. Nonetheless, a reading that emphasizes "Of the Standard of Taste" at the expense of the Treatise and Enquiries shortchanges the theory's complexity.

Within this framework of concerns and influences, Hume is neither interested in working out a theory of art (in contributing to philosophy of art) nor in analyzing aesthetic properties (in doing aesthetics). Due to the seamless connection he posits between moral and aesthetic value, much of his technical discussion of aesthetics appears only as an illustration of his moral theory. Other details of Hume's aesthetics emerge in contexts where he expounds his theory of imaginative association, elaborates on the value of delicacy of taste (DOT), and denies that his appeal to sentiment leads to skepticism about value distinctions.

Thus, the two essays that appear to summarize Hume's aesthetics are best understood as applications of a larger philosophical account of human nature, including our social nature. The construction of each essay suggests a purpose of working out details of the larger project in the face of an obvious counterexample. Those counterexamples are the relativity of taste (SOT) and the pleasure we take in tragic fiction (OT). Yet their limited purpose does not detract from their continuing

Notes

importance. They provide insight into perennial problems and so serve as the historical foundation for subsequent attempts to defend a subjectivist aesthetic theory.

Unfortunately, numerous interpretative challenges arise from Hume's scattered presentation, his range of references, and his eighteenth-century assumptions about art. Like many of his contemporaries, Hume regards "poetry and the polite authors" as the most important arts (PW 3, 19). Poetry differs from the other arts in being designed for the primary purpose of giving pleasure (SOT, 277). When using the terms "art" and "artist," Hume sometimes means any human artifice and any skilled designer (in one context, an "artist" is someone who repairs a clock (EHU, 87)). In contexts where he can only be taken to be interested in the narrower category of fine art, Hume variously mentions painting, statuary, architecture, dance, poetry, and music. But he places poetry among the arts of eloquent public discourse.



Did u know? Eloquence includes sermons, essays, argumentative discourse, and other categories that we today would regard as too overtly didactic to be fine art (E).

Hume assumes that every product of human labor has some definite purpose, with only a limited subset of art being produced for the sake of pleasure alone. (He is skeptical about appeals to teleological or final causes in nature.) Houses will be designed and built apart from any need to satisfy our taste for beauty, and representational art will be produced in order to provide visual information. The interesting questions are why houses and visual representations also appeal to taste, and what this appeal tells us about the relative contributions of human nature and education as conditions for appropriate responses to our surroundings.

So what label best summarizes Hume's theory of moral and aesthetic taste? It may be easier to specify which labels do not fit his theory than to attach one to it. He rejects normative realism. (There is considerable controversy on the question of whether Hume is a realist regarding matters of fact. Putting that issue to one side, he clearly denies that normative judgments have the same degree of objectivity that holds for matters of fact.) Hume is equally at pains to deny that reason provides an adequate foundation for judgments of taste. Is he therefore a subjectivist? Not if subjectivism implies that such judgments are arbitrary. He is not a relativist, for the main point of the essay on taste is that some judgments of taste are superior to others. Nor, in his own terms, is he a skeptic regarding aesthetic properties and value judgments. Despite his philosophical view that beauty is not a real property of things, Hume never questions the meaningfulness of general practice of making aesthetic judgments. Because the verdicts of taste are sentiments, devoid of truth-value, there is no opportunity for the conflicts and failures of reason that give rise to philosophical skepticism.

Hume's Terminology

Hume regards the natural capacity of taste as fundamental to the human ability to make moral and aesthetic judgments. Like his predecessors, Hume sees an analogy between an "inner sense" for beauty and the sense of taste for food and drink. Natural, general laws guide both. Both permit of education and refinement and thus better and worse responses. Both produce sentiments or feelings of approval and disapproval. But only the "mental" taste, the exercise of which is involved in moral and aesthetic judgment, admits of refinement through "the interposition" of ideas.

Hume's eighteenth-century terminology includes a pair of terms no longer in general use. In his basic nomenclature, "taste in morals, eloquence, or beauty" assigns either "approbation" or "disapprobation" (or some combination of both) to objects of taste (T, 547n). Approbation is "a

peculiar delight" (T, 298) and a "particular kind of pleasure" (T, 472). It feels different from other pleasures. He variously characterizes approbation as a feeling of approval, liking, or affection. A beautiful object or action strikes us as amiable, agreeable, and desirable. Hume describes the feeling of disapprobation as one of disapproving, disliking, and contempt. An ugly object or vicious action feels odious, disagreeable, and undesirable.

In the eighteenth-century context of moral theory, "sentiment" is a generic label for emotions. (Hume's theory is sometimes identified as "sentimentalism," but that term has unfortunate modern connotations.) In Hume's technical vocabulary, all emotions are impressions, not ideas. The sentiments associated with beauty and ugliness are reflective impressions. They are not "impressions of the senses." Instead, they are responses to sensory impressions.



Hume is an inner sense theorist who treats aesthetic pleasure as an instinctive and natural human response. Successful art exploits our natural sentiments by employing appropriate composition and design. Only empirical inquiry can establish reliable ways to elicit the approval of taste.

Beauty is a feeling of approbation, and an original, simple impression of the mind. Impressions are contrasted with ideas, which he alternatively calls "thoughts." Ideas are "copies" of impressions, and seldom have the force or clarity of the experiences they copy. For Hume, experiencing beauty is a necessary condition for thinking about the idea of beauty. An individual cannot construct the idea of beauty out of other ideas, which is equivalent to saying that the idea derives from the proper sentiment of approbation (T, 469). In the complete absence of the operations of taste, thoughts about beauty would not occur.

Hume seems to equate perception of beauty with the experience of the sentiment. (This equation underlies the problem of whether all tastes are equal). Does he distinguish between the critic's experience of the sentiment and the judgment or verdict? If a verbal pronouncement that an object is beautiful is nothing more than an expression or report of the speaker's sentiment, then Hume faces the difficulty that a critic's verdict is not really a recommendation of the object. If your pronouncement that a piece of music is beautiful means no more than that you have felt a certain pleasure upon hearing it, then your verdict expresses your pleasure without saying anything about the music's capacity to please others. So although critics issue judgments of taste based on their own sentiments, a judgment of taste must involve something more than a pleasing or displeasing sentiment.

Hume observes that there is a difference between expressing one's own sentiments and making a moral distinction. When someone speaks of another's behavior as "vicious or odious or depraved, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which he expects all his audience to concur with him" (EPM, 272). Moral and aesthetic judgment requires "steady and general points of view" (T, 581–82; see also SOT, 276), common to others (EPM, 272). Hume's various descriptions of this point of view invite conflicting interpretations. However, it clearly requires the critic to reflect upon the relationship between the sentiment and its object.

Whether we call them "aesthetic judgments" or "judgments of taste," aesthetic verdicts are unlike ordinary judgments about matters of fact. Matters of fact are relevant states of affairs, which render complex ideas either true or false. The same cannot be said about verdicts arising from the operations of taste. Sentiment, and sentiment alone, determines that a particular object is or is not beautiful.

Truth is disputable; not taste: what exists in the nature of things is the standard of our judgement; what each man feels within himself is the standard of sentiment. Propositions in geometry may be

Notes

proved, systems in physics may be controverted; but the harmony of verse, the tenderness of passion, the brilliancy of wit, must give immediate pleasure (EPM, 171).

We do not infer that a sunset is beautiful and so deserving of approbation. We see the sunset, and the visual impressions please us. If we have the proper point of view, we are justified in saying that the sunset is beautiful. This verdict is more than a report or expression of the sentiment, yet the sentiment is an irreplaceable element of the judgment. A parallel claim is made of moral discrimination. "Pleasure and pain," he insists, are the "essence" of beauty and deformity (T, 299). But how does a a literary work "give immediate pleasure"?



Did u know? Taste is the capacity to respond with approbation and disapprobation. But how does taste relate to Hume's various remarks about "perceptions" and "discernments" of beauty, of our "judging" a work, and of critics who "give judgment" and who "give" or "pronounce" a "verdict" or "recommendation" (SOT, passim)?

One of Hume's most puzzling claims is that taste is an "immediate" response. In his extended treatment of the passions and emotions in the Treatise, Hume says that "immediate" feelings are ones that do not involve the "interposition" of ideas (T, 275). Some pleasures and pains are "immediate" in the sense that they are impressions that immediately accompany other impressions (e.g., the experience of a very hot flame is accompanied by an experience of pain). How does a literary work "give immediate pleasure"? Taken literally, Hume appears to claim that literary works are beautiful independent of the audience's ability to assign ideas or meanings to the words. But this is certainly not Hume's position. The solution is that that there is "mental, as well as bodily taste" (SOT, 274). Moral and aesthetic discrimination depend on mental taste. The requisite sentiments are spontaneous products of the mind, but they are not uninformed responses.

Mental taste normally requires some intervening thought process. So the pleasures and pains of aesthetic judgment are not immediate in being direct responses to other impressions.

Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance, command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment. But in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection. There are just grounds to conclude, that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind (EPM, 173).

Mental taste arises in response to ideas that arise in response to impressions (e.g., viewing a photograph occasions thoughts about the place pictured, leading to thoughts about experiences one had or might have there, and the thoughts arising in this imaginative process are pleasurable or painful). Hume regards this "immediacy" of taste as entirely compatible with the influence of intellectual and imaginative faculties.

Taste is immediate and spontaneous, yet the application of "good sense" and "reason" improves it (SOT, 277). Taste is not improved by reasoning from a priori normative principles. Moral and aesthetic discriminations "are not conclusions of reason" (T, 457). Neither results from a mere "comparing of ideas" (T, 463). However, taste can be influenced by consultation of "general rules of art" or "rules" that "are founded only on experience and observation" (SOT, 270). Mental taste involves reason in the sense of "sound understanding," which ultimately depends on imaginative associations of ideas. So taste involves imaginative pleasure, as Addison proposed. This doctrine of imaginative pleasure has no special connection with creativity or with the capacity to produce art.

Notes

To summarize Hume on taste, aesthetic and moral response is "immediate" in the sense that the feeling occurs spontaneously in anyone who makes customary imaginative associations. Hume wants to emphasize that a critic does not infer the presence of beauty. Yet he also acknowledges the relevance of sound understanding to taste. This combination of doctrines has implications for the practice of justifying judgments of taste, and becomes the focus of the essay "Of the Standard of Taste." Knowing that a sonnet has the same form as a second, beautiful sonnet will not offer any reason to think that they are equally fine poems. Only a reading of the sonnet can support claims about its beauty. However, Hume's theory should be interpreted with caution, against the backdrop of his other claims about moral and aesthetic distinctions. The general, natural principles of taste are supplemented by learned rules, so that knowledge of other sonnets contributes to a more accurate or refined evaluation of the merits and flaws of a particular sonnet. His subjectivism does not lead to relativism. Not every sentiment is equally good.

7.2 Of Essay Writing: Critical Analysis

"Of Essay Writing" appeared in 1742 in Volume two of Hume's Essays, Moral and Political, but was removed from all subsequent editions of that text published during Hume's life. The text file here is based on the 1875 Green and Grose edition. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized. Of Essay Writing The elegant part of mankind, who are not immersed in the animal life, but employ themselves in the operations of the mind, may be divided into the learned and conversible. The learned are such as have chosen for their portion the higher and more difficult operations of the mind, which require leisure and solitude, and cannot be brought to perfection, without long preparation and severe labour. The conversible world join to a sociable disposition, and a taste of pleasure, an inclination to the easier and more gentle exercises of the understanding, to obvious reflections on human affairs, and the duties of common life, and to the observation of the blemishes or perfections of the particular objects, that surround them. Such subjects of thought furnish not sufficient employment in solitude, but require the company and conversation of our fellow-creatures, to render them a proper exercise for the mind: and this brings mankind together in society, where everyone displays his thoughts and observations in the best manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives information, as well as pleasure. The separation of the learned from the conversible world seems to have been the great defect of the last age, and must have had a very bad influence both on books and company: for what possibility is there of finding topics of conversation fit for the entertainment of rational creatures, without having recourse sometimes to history, poetry, politics, and the more obvious principles, at least, of philosophy? Must our whole discourse be a continued series of gossiping stories and idle remarks? Must the mind never rise higher, but be perpetually Stun'd and worn out with endless chat Of Will did this, and Nan said that? This would be to render the time spent in company the most unentertaining, as well as the most unprofitable part of ourlives. On the other hand, learning has been as great a loser by being shut up in colleges and cells, and secluded from the world and good company. By that means, every thing of what we call Belles Lettres became totally barbarous, being cultivated by men without any taste of life or manners, and without that liberty and facility of thought and expression, which can only be acquired by conversation. Even philosophy went to wrack by this moaping recluse method of study, and became as chimericalin her conclusions as she was unintelligible in her stile and manner of delivery. And indeed, what could be expected from men who never consulted experience in any of their reasonings, or who never searched for that experience, where alone it is to be found, in common life and conversation?'Tis with great pleasure I observe, that men of letters, in this age, have lost, in a great measure, that shyness and bashfulness of temper, which kept them at a distance from mankind; and, at the same time, that men of the world are proud of borrowing from books their most agreeable topics of conversation. 'Tis to be hoped, that this league betwixt the learned and conversible worlds, which is so happily begun, will be still farther improved, to their mutual advantage; and to that end, I know nothing more advantageous

Notes

than such Essays as these with which I endeavour to entertain the public. In this view, I cannot but consider myself as a kind of resident or ambassador from the dominions of learning to those of conversation; and shall think it my constant duty to promote a good correspondence betwixt these two states, which have so great a dependence on each other. I shall give intelligence to the learned of whatever passes in company, and shall endeavour to import into company whatever commodities I find in my native country proper for their use and entertainment. The balance of trade we need not be jealous of, nor will there beany difficulty to preserve it on both sides. The materials of this commerce must chiefly be furnished by conversation and common life: the manufacturing of them alone belongs tolearning. As 't would be an unpardonable negligence in an ambassador not to pay his respects to the sovereign of the state where he is commissioned to reside; so it would be altogether inexcusable in me not to address myself, with a particular respect, to the fair sex, who are the sovereigns of the empire of conversation. I approach them with reverence; and were not my countrymen, the learned, a stubborn independent race of mortals, extremely jealous of their liberty, and unaccustomed to subjection, I should resign into their fair hands the sovereign authority over the republic of letters. As the case stands, my commission extends no farther, than to desire aleague, offensive and defensive, against our common enemies, against the enemies of reason and beauty, people of dull heads and cold hearts. From this moment let us pursue them with these verest vengeance: let no quarter be given, but to those of sound understandings and delicate affections; and these characters, 'tis to be presumed, we shall always find in separable. To be serious, and to quit the allusion before it be worn thread-bare, I am of opinion, that women, that is, women of sense and education (for to such alone I address myself) are much better judges of all polite writing than men of the same degree of understanding; and that 'tis a vain pannic, if they be so far terrified with the common ridicule that is levelled against learned ladies, as utterly to abandon every kind of books and study to our sex. Let the dread of that ridicule have no other effect, than to make them conceal their knowledge before fools, who are not worthy of it, nor of them. Such will still presume upon the vain title of the male sex to affect a superiority above them: but my fair readers may be assured, that all men of sense, who know the world, have a great deference for their judgment of such books are within the compass of their knowledge, and repose more confidence in the delicacy of their taste, though unguided by rules, than in all the dull labours of pedants and commentators. In a neighbouring nation, equally famous for good taste, and forgallantry, the ladies are, in a manner, the sovereigns of the learned world, as well as of the conversible; and no polite writer pretends to venture upon the public, without the approbation of some celebrated judges of that sex. Their verdict is, indeed, sometimes complained of; and, in particular, I find, that the admirers of Corneille, to save that great poet's honour upon the ascendant that Racine began to take over him, always said, that it was not to be expected, that so old a man could dispute the prize, before such judges, with so young a man as his rival. But this observation has been found unjust, since posterity seems to have ratified the verdict of that tribunal: and Racine, though dead, is still the favourite of the fair sex, as well as of the best judges among the men. There is only one subject, on which I am apt to distrust the judgment of females, and that is, concerning books of gallantry and devotion, which they commonly affect as high flown as possible; and most of them seem more delighted with the warmth, than with the justness of the passion. I mention gallantry and devotion as the same subject, because, in reality, they become the same when treated in this manner; and we may observe, that they both depend upon the very same complexion. As the fair sex have a great share of the tender and amorous disposition, it perverts their judgment on this occasion, and makes them be easily affected, even by what has no propriety in the expression nor nature in the sentiment. Mr. Addison's elegant discourses of religion have no relish with them, in comparison of books of mystic devotion: and Otway's tragedies are rejected for the rants of Mr. Dryden. Would the ladies correct their false taste in this particular; let them accustom themselves a little more to books of all kinds: let them give encouragement to men of sense and knowledge to frequent their company: and finally, let them concur heartily in that

Notes

union I have projected betwixt the learned and conversible worlds. They may, perhaps, meet with more complaisance from their usual followers than from men of learning; but they cannot reasonably expect so sincere an affection: and, I hope, they will never be guilty of so wrong a choice, as to sacrifice the substance to the shadow.

David Hume was one of the most influential philosophers of modern times. Hume argued that man gains knowledge through experience and that we should be skeptical of all other knowledge. Hume analyzed various aspects of life, but was probably best recognized for his theory of causality. Hume set up criteria for determining cause and effect. These criteria explained his skepticism about causality and why he came to the conclusion that humans were not capable of discovering truth.

In order to fully understand Hume's analysis of causality, we must first understand the importance he placed on the senses. Hume is skeptical of all that is not in some way connected to our senses. Hume separated human perceptions into two distinct categories: impressions and ideas. Impressions include sensations and emotions. They are original and more forceful and lively than ideas. They are what we see, hear, feel, love or hate. Ideas are copies or reflections of impressions and are less lively than the original impression. For example, if I place my hand on a hot pan and feel the heat, I have an impression. Later, when I go over the experience in my thoughts, I may recall the heat, I may remember the burning pain, but I cannot truly experience the sensation again. That reflection upon my experience is an idea. Hume also believed that there are simple and complex impressions and ideas. The impression of the color red, for example, is simple. Whereas a red cup can be separated into parts and is therefore is complex. Simple and complex ideas are always derived from simple impressions. Hume thought that because of this, there are no innate ideas, and that all ideas must come from experience, and therefore relies on our senses. If humans were to have no senses they would continue Reading This Essay

- Hume concludes that cause is "an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it in the imagination, that the idea of one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other."

David Hume's views on aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art are to be found in his work on moral theory and in several essays. Although there is a tendency to emphasize the two essays devoted to art, "Of the Standard of Taste" and "Of Tragedy," his views on art and aesthetic judgment are intimately connected to his moral philosophy and theories of human thought and emotion. His theory of taste and beauty is not entirely original, but his arguments generally display the keen analysis typical of his best work. Hume's archaic terminology is occasionally an obstacle to appreciating his analysis, inviting conflicting readings of his position.

7.3 Beauty and Taste in Hume's Moral Theory

Subjectivism

Hume proposes that feeling, not thought, informs us that an object is beautiful or ugly, or that an action exhibits virtue or vice: "The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration" (T, 471). The feeling or sentiment is itself an aesthetic or moral discrimination. It is prior to, and the basis of, any subsequent expression of praise or admiration. The sentiment is the beauty of the object and it is the virtue of desirable human action. Sentiment is the sole source of values governing human activity. Taste is a "productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation." That new creation is "beauty and deformity, virtue and vice" (EPM, 294). However, the sentiment is calm rather than violent, so an unphilosophical perspective treats it as a property "of the object" (S, 218).

This moral and aesthetic subjectivism attracts Hume for the same reason that it attracts Hutcheson. The appeal to sentiment offers a middle position between the two prevailing theories within

Notes

English letters, Hobbesian egoism and ethical rationalism. Hutcheson holds that virtue and beauty are not qualities of the people and things to which they are attributed. We may speak as if objects and people have moral and aesthetic properties, but the relevant property is merely an "idea raised in us." Hume alters Hutcheson's theory by imposing his own philosophical vocabulary, making beauty an impression rather than an idea. But they agree that to describe a person as virtuous or an object as beautiful is to make a claim about their tendency to cause a certain response. Is it imprudent and "too strong," Hume asks Hutcheson, to summarize the thesis in the following terms? "[W]hen you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind" (T, 469). But virtue and beauty are not strictly analogous to secondary qualities, such as heat and cold, because a critic's claim that a work is beautiful involves an element of endorsement that does not arise in the observation that ice is cold.

Hume defends the centrality of sentiment with the following reasoning. Recognitions of virtue and beauty require particular sentiments in human observers. If the discriminations of taste took place without these sentiments, we would lack any motivation to do what we regard as moral. Moral and aesthetic judgments have practical consequences that mere reason lacks. So taste differs from the assent that characterizes understanding or reason. Although taste responds to real qualities of objects, we cannot replace the exercise of taste with the assent of reason.

But taste is a fallible indicator of beauty and deformity. The underlying sentiments never "refer" to anything in their cause (SOT, 268). Feelings do not represent any aspect of their occasioning objects, and they are easily attached to objects other than their cause (T, 280). (As with any causal relationship, such as the causal link between smoke and fire, an isolated effect does not refer back to its cause, nor does it provide us with information about the nature of the object or event that causes it. If we experience smoke but have never experienced fire, the smoke will tell us nothing about the nature of fire.) As effects of our interaction with the world, sentiments cannot reliably inform us about the nature of their causes. It will not always be clear, prior to careful attention and reflection, which features of a work of art are responsible for our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation. On Hume's analysis, the chain running from cause to effect turns out to be extremely complex, for the relationship is indirect and "the human body is a mighty complicated machine" with many "secret powers". Knowing this, good critics pronounce their verdicts only after they clarify how their own sentiments relate to the object that is being evaluated (SOT, 270–71).

The Dispositional Analysis

Our sentiments obey general principles governing our species. Yet we must be able to make judgments of taste immediately, without having to be aware of the laws governing them.

Hume's acknowledgment of regular, predictable causes of the moral and aesthetic sentiment is sometimes taken as an indication that Hume is not a genuine subjectivist. On this reading, he equates beauty and virtue with dispositional properties of external objects. Attributions of moral and aesthetic properties to objects indicate a speaker's acknowledgment of the object's tendency to produce the sentiment. There are passages that suggest such a reading: "beauty is such an order and constitution of parts, as … is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul".

Despite such passages, it is questionable whether Hume really offers a dispositional analysis. A dispositional analysis tells us which properties would exist if certain conditions were satisfied. A simplified dispositional analysis treats "Cork is buoyant" as equivalent in meaning to "If a piece of cork is placed in water, it floats." A simplified dispositional analysis of beauty treats "This object is beautiful" as equivalent in meaning to "If anyone perceives this object under ideal conditions, a sentiment of approbation accompanies the perception." On this account, beauty is

Notes

distinct from the sentiment of approbation. The sentiment is incorporated into the analysis, but the sentiment is not itself a dispositional property.

Suppose that Hume regards beauty as a dispositional property. Like the dispositional terms "buoyant" and "brittle," "beauty" could be predicated of objects, generating judgments that are true or false for different objects. Statements attributing dispositional properties to objects are true even if the appropriate conditions are never satisfied (e.g., "This vase is brittle" can be true despite the fact that the vase never gets broken). Yet Hume clearly denies that judgments of taste are truth-valued, and he denies that it makes sense to make inferences about an object's beauty in advance of the requisite sentiment (S, 219).

Hume famously argues that, in order to clarify any idea, "we need but enquire, from what impression is that supposed idea derived" (EHU, 22). If beauty is a dispositional property, then one arrives at the idea of beauty by associating particular causes with particular effects under specific conditions. In Hume's terminology, a dispositional idea of beauty would be the idea of a complex relation of cause and effect. It would be a causal principle, and we could not employ the idea prior to formulating such a principle. Yet, once again, Hume denies an implication of the dispositional analysis. The sentiment of approbation is our only source for our idea of beauty, and there are cases where we recognize beauty in advance of any reasoning about the beautiful object (EPM, 173).

Furthermore, if Hume regards beauty as a dispositional property, he has a model close at hand in Hutcheson's analysis. But Hume avoids offering any such account. Aside from a willingness to identify several ways that works of art must fail to please refined taste, Hume ignores the traditional and familiar project of criticism, the stipulation of rules for successful art. He does not try to identify the properties of objects that regularly cause the sentiment of approbation. Instead, he recognizes that any established correlation between sentiment and objective properties might be defeated by the next example that we encounter (SOT, 270). Despite the existence of "general principles of approbation or blame," taste depends on too many variables ("incidents and situations") to offer a detailed dispositional analysis (SOT, 271).

Passages endorsing a dispositional account might be slips of the pen. Or, more likely, Hume does not believe that it is possible to define evaluative terms. They are indefinable, primitive terms. Hume emphasizes that "certain qualities in objects" are the occasions for our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation (SOT, 273). Formal design is one such quality (SOT 271; T, 299, 364). The existence of occasioning qualities provides theoretical support for the possibility of a convergence of refined taste. So our primitive evaluative terms are not arbitrarily applied. Nonetheless, it is irresponsible to endorse any particular thing or action in advance of the verdict of unprejudiced taste.

Imagination and Point of View

Informed understanding makes a vital contribution to most aesthetic and moral judgment (EPM, 173; SOT, 277). For Hume, taste is improved by practice in making "comparisons" among objects (SOT, 275) and by the employment of "good sense" (SOT, 277).

Hume blurs traditional distinctions between thinking and imagining. Thoughts would not extend beyond our actual experiences were it not for the imaginative associations established by the force of repetition or "custom" (T, 170; EHU, 43). Learned associations encourage us to rearrange our ideas in intelligible patterns, permitting us to create ideas of things never actually experienced (e.g., fictitious creatures or distant places). Imagination also creates chains of associated ideas, encouraging thoughts to move rapidly from one idea to another.

Good taste therefore presupposes an active imagination. Suppose one wakes in the morning and smells the distinctive aroma of coffee, and the experience is pleasurable. This appreciation depends on a learned, imaginative association: the smell brings to mind its cause, the brewing coffee, and

Notes

its purpose, the consumption of the coffee. The agreeable sentiment is a response to this complex association of impressions and ideas, not to the smell alone. Critical evaluation is therefore highly contextual: "The passion, in pronouncing its verdict, considers not the object simply, as it is in itself, but surveys it with all the circumstances, which attend it" (S, 224).

But Hume does not regard imagination as a free and unrestrained activity. Human thought is constrained by a relatively small set of permanent principles of imaginative association (T, 10, 225; EHU, 24). Although poets may "profess to follow implicitly the suggestions of their fancy" (T, 225), their poetry has little chance of pleasing others if their "fancy" or imagination employs irregular associations. The universal principles of imaginative association allow artists to predict how their representational and narrative designs will move audiences.

Hume recognizes a very small class of cases for which imagination association is not needed to recognize beauty. In these cases, initial impressions of the mere "form" of a material object generate approbation (T, 364). Such cases are more typical of natural beauty than art (EPM, 173). So imagination is not always necessary for discovering beauty. Pleasing form is sometimes sufficient. However, "'tis seldom we rest there" (T, 363).

So Hume does not advocate a simple causal relationship between form and sentiment. In most cases, our beliefs about the object alter our sentiments. Forms are generally most pleasing when "the order and construction of parts" (T, 299) suggests a corresponding utility for humans or expresses agreeable emotions. These suggestions need not be accurate in order to trigger approbation and disapprobation. A particular object might appear balanced, graceful, and beautiful despite our knowledge of its limited utility (T, 584). Objects may displease taste despite their genuine utility.

A house may displease me by being ill-contrived for the convenience of the owner; and yet I may refuse to give a shilling towards the rebuilding of it. Sentiments must touch the heart, to make them controul our passions: But they need not extend beyond the imagination, to make them influence our taste. When a building seems clumsy and tottering to the eye, it is ugly and disagreeable; though we be fully assured of the solidity of the workmanship. 'Tis a kind of fear, which causes this sentiment of disapprobation; but the passion is not the same with that which we feel, when obliged to stand under a wall, that we really think tottering and insecure. The seeming tendencies of objects affect the mind: And the emotions they excite are of a like species with those, which proceed from the real consequences of objects, but their feeling is different. Nay, these emotions are so different in their feeling, that they may often be contrary, without destroying each other; as when the fortifications of a city belonging to an enemy are esteemed beautiful upon account of their strength, though we could wish that they were entirely destroyed. The imagination adheres to the general views of things, and distinguishes the feelings they produce, from those which arise from our particular and momentary situation (T, 586–87).

It is tempting to read such passages as foreshadowing the subsequent theory of aesthetic response as "disinterested" pleasure. Hume uses the term "disinterest" as the contrary of "self-love" (EPM, 296), but he does not use the term in relation to aesthetic sentiment. Hume's "common," "universal," or "general view of things" is a simpler proposal. He wants to remind us that we cannot expect the agreement of others if we judge things from a limited and prejudiced perspective (EPM, 272).

Relations of form and function can operate at an extremely abstract level: "A building, whose doors and windows were exact squares, would hurt the eye by that very proportion: as ill adapted to the figure of a human creature, for whose service the fabric was intended" (EPM, 212–13). Those who respond with sentiment are moved by "imaginary" and general consequences, not simply utility for the person passing judgment (EPM, 217–18). Furthermore, formal design itself can convey emotions which influence aesthetic response: "There is no rule in painting or statuary more indispensable than that of balancing the figures, and placing them with the greatest exactness on their proper centre of gravity. A figure, which is not justly balanced, is ugly; because it conveys the disagreeable ideas of fall, harm, and pain" (EPM, 245).

Notes

Thus, Hume blocks the conclusion that all taste is equal by distinguishing between two points of view that we can adopt toward any person, object, or action. We can respond from the point of view of our own self-interest. But this response is prejudiced and often produces "a false relish" (EPM, 173). Or we can respond from the general point of view, a reflective evaluation that is not motivated by self-interest. The general point of view is influenced by myriad beliefs about the object and its context. For example, believing that something is rare greatly magnifies our pleasure (S, 224). Where self-interest might make me jealous of your new home and will interfere with the sentiment of beauty, a reflective response will allow me to appreciate its construction and design.

For Hume, normative conflicts can only be resolved by moving to a properly informed general perspective, with "just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained" (EPM, 173). The essay on taste defends this position and outlines a theory of how critics can place themselves in such a position:when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances. A person influenced by prejudice, complies not with this condition; but obstinately maintains his natural position, without placing himself in that point of view, which the performance supposes (SOT, 276–77).

Hume also invokes the operation of a sympathetic sentiment. Since sympathy plays an important role in his moral theory (T, 577; EPM, 225), he must include it in his aesthetic theory if he is to sustain the close ties he posits between morals and aesthetics. The general point of view takes notice of pleasure that the object is fitted to bring to other people. The idea of their benefit generates sympathetic pleasure, increasing the sentiment of approbation (T, 364–65).

However, the claim that almost all judgments of beauty involve some element of sympathy becomes harder to maintain in cases of fine art. It is not clear how the appreciation of a sonnet or melody involves an idea of the value it has for others. Hume frequently talks as if artistic beauty is entirely a question of formal design. Hume seems to think that the utility of some art is the pleasure it affords (e.g., with poetry), as if he advocates an early art-for-art's-sake position. But the fact that a poem pleases someone else does not encourage sympathetic approbation for the poem.

Hume may have an answer to this difficulty. He hypothesizes a connection between form in art and the appearance of utility. He offers examples of basic design in painting (T, 364–65) and of "unharmonious" literature (EPM, 224). Reading begins with impressions of dark shapes arranged in lines on white pages. Readers silently associate the printed text with aural ideas (the voice of a human speaker). Through imaginative association, literary forms have expressive human characters that elicit sympathetic pleasure and pain. Because Hume does not operate with assumptions about the uniqueness of fine art, his theory cuts across the distinction between fine art and rhetoric. Good design and eloquence are beautiful and desirable in all artifacts and speech, not merely in fine art (E).

Where appropriate, the refined taste of a good critic will weigh the relative contributions of all aspects of the object of taste. Formal design is a contributing excellence and not the sole focus of aesthetic discrimination. To arrive at a proper moral judgment, "all the circumstances and relations must be previously known; and the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame" (EPM, 290). Aesthetic discrimination works in the same way (EPM, 291). In some situations, a single inharmonious element can upset the beauty of the whole. Hume discusses such cases in "Of the Standard of Taste." But then what of tragic literature, in which sympathy produces ongoing unease? How can there be an impression of approbation for a tragic play? Hume addresses this problem in "Of Tragedy."

In the wake of reader-response criticism, Hume is frequently challenged for not making enough allowances for the legitimate differences that readers bring to the same piece of writing. No two

Notes

readers will respond with the same associations of ideas. So how can Hume hypothesize a convergence of critical response? As a criticism of Hume, this reply backfires. Hume concedes, "each mind perceives a different beauty" (SOT, 268). But he recognizes an even more radical problem. He admits that every stable object is really a "fiction" posited by the operations of imagination and sentiment. We always "bestow on the objects a greater regularity than what is observed in our mere perceptions" (T, 197). However, this philosophical grasp of the situation has no practical effect in making anyone skeptical of the existence of houses, trees, and books. It does not detract from the truth and falsity of what we ordinarily say about them. Novels and plays and paintings are not special cases. Admitting that they call for complex operations of imagination does not differentiate them from other objects and should not count against the possibility of critical judgment.

The crux of the problem is the difference between saying that Hamlet is a play by William Shakespeare and saying that Hamlet is a flawed play. The former claim expresses a matter of fact; the latter expresses a normative judgment. Both stem from complex imaginative associations. The presence of imaginative thought poses no special problem for the convergence of evaluative discrimination. The problem is how sentiment, as the source of value, is subject to principled dispute. Hume directly confronts this problem in "Of the Standard of Taste."

7.4 Hume's Essay on Taste

Hume tells us that "Of the Standard of Taste" was written in some haste and exists only to permit publication of other essays (HL 2, 253). On the advice of Philip Stanhope, Hume removed "Of the Immortality of the Soul" and "Of Suicide" from a planned volume of new essays. His publisher informed him that the resulting volume was too slim to print, bind, and sell. Hume then brought the book to an acceptable length by penning a new essay, "Of the Standard of Taste." Hume made nearly two hundred editorial corrections over the subsequent twenty years and multiple editions, the majority of which involve punctuation. He never altered his argument. The essay is his last word on any topic in "criticism."

Hume reminds us of the radical difference in kind between matters of fact and the pronouncements of sentiment. Verdicts of sentiment lack a truth-value. So it is surprising to find him endorsing the position that many judgments of taste are "absurd and ridiculous" (SOT, 269). Small differences affect taste, yet most people notice only "the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object" (SOT, 278). Only judges with a more refined taste will respond to the "universal" appeal of superior art. Because refinement demands considerable practice, such critics are few in numbers.

It is tempting to read Hume's argument as a move away from his signature subjectivism and toward some brand of normative realism. But a careful reading of the text reveals that nothing is said to deny his earlier support for subjectivism and there are no direct endorsements of realism. The standard of taste should provide rules for "confirming one sentiment, and condemning another" (SOT, 268). It must explain why the sentiments of some critics are better and worse, not which are true and false in any absolute sense. This explanation is accompanied by closely associated criteria for identifying good critics: "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character" (SOT, 278).

After several stabs at identifying the standard of taste, Hume identifies it as the consensus or "joint verdict" of "true critics" (SOT, 278–79). But it does not follow that the same set of critics will serve as the standard for every work of art. Different critics are better or worse at evaluating different kinds of things, so the critical pronouncements of better critics invalidate the claims of unqualified critics.

Hume ultimately grants that even the best critics will fail to elicit universal agreement with their verdicts. Yet he sticks to his motivating insight, borrowed from Hutcheson, that sentiment is the

Notes

essence of evaluation. Even the worst critic says nothing false in foolishly saying that one work is better than another, however prejudiced the sentiment. Yet even the best critics—those with the most refined taste—will retain some immovable preferences. Even the best critics will display a variety of responses. But if their differences are "blameless," there is no interference of prejudice (SOT, 280). The problem of finding a standard of taste leads Hume to the problem of deciding which disagreements are blameless, in order to distinguish them from prejudices that disqualify a sentiment as a public recommendation.

Hume highlights two sources that contribute to differences of sentiment among qualified critics: basic dispositions of character, and moral differences arising from cultural differences (SOT, 280). Today, we are more likely to notice a third source of disagreement, Hume's recognition that each kind of object has its own species of beauty. Becoming a qualified judge of epic poetry does not contribute to being a qualified judge of architecture. Addison is a better writer than John Locke, but the comparison assumes that they are both writing philosophy (EHU, 7). We can compare John Milton and John Ogilby, and only a false critic would rank Ogilby above Milton (SOT, 269). But it makes no sense to compare Milton and Addison, for Milton is a poet, not a philosopher.

Furthermore, different cultures employ different customs when handling the same artistic medium. "You will never convince a man, who is not accustomed to Italian music, and has not an ear to follow its intricacies, that a Scotch tune is not preferable" (S, 217). So the good critic must overcome the challenge of cultural prejudice. "A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration" (SOT, 276). Hume emphasizes the great difficulties involved in overcoming the prejudices of one's time and place (SOT, 281–82).

Many readers balk at Hume's willingness to grant a strong influence of moral judgment upon aesthetic evaluation (SOT, 283–84). Hume discusses the moral failing of several plays (SOT, 284) and of the Koran, considered as a literary "performance" (SOT, 267). How can Hume reconcile this position with his endorsement of Batteux's influential thesis, in which the mechanical arts are distinguished from fine art by the fact that the latter exists only to provide pleasure? ("Of Tragedy" proceeds as if literature exists solely to provide the pleasure of the experience.) But there is also a side of Hume that refuses to distinguish between literature and other, "practical" writing. Every work of art is evaluated according to its distinctive purpose, with poetry alone singled out as having the purpose of "pleasing" the imagination (SOT, 277). Ultimately, there is very little art that Hume might treat as art-for-art's-sake.

There should be no great surprise that Hume insists that moral judgments must sometimes enter into our aesthetic evaluations. Hume does not offer a sharp distinction between moral and aesthetic taste. Evaluations that subsequent aesthetic theories regard as a purely aesthetic are, for Hume, concluding sentiments following numerous observations of contributing strengths and weaknesses. When a work of art represents human activity, then Hume's account of moral evaluation requires that moral sentiment accompany apprehension of the action. The fictional status of the work weakens our sympathetic response, but the mere sequence of ideas will be sufficient to produce weaker versions of the sentiments that one would have if one were faced with the actual events. Given Hume's moral theory, there is no possibility of suspending our moral response. Moral sentiments are natural and immediate. At best, one can gain a better understanding of the cultural context responsible for the work, so that one's moral sentiments will not be negative through mere prejudice. Hume's theory of sentiments requires that if we are going to have an aesthetic evaluation of a play's plotting and language, then we are also going to have a moral response to its display of virtue and vice. Both must enter into our final sentiment of approbation or disapprobation.

Although Hume emphasizes the variety of responses that different groups and individuals have with the same works, some sources of preference are "blameless" (SOT, 280) and "innocent" (SOT,

Notes

281). Despite myriad differences, there are two basic types of taste: vulgar taste and refined taste. Given his thorough anti-realism about values, Hume cannot dismiss vulgar taste as subjective and mistaken. Hume has a different strategy for recommending refined taste as the more objective of the pair. Vulgar taste is more idiosyncratic and capricious. Refined taste is more properly rule-governed and stable. The two are equally subject to "rules," but the person of refined taste is better informed about the material.

Hume's contrast of vulgar and refined taste parallels his general treatment of the doxastic positions of the vulgar and the wise (T, 150; EHU, 110). Vulgar thinking is dominated by "the first influence of general rules" upon the mind. Such rules are instinctively but "rashly formed" to regulate the imagination. If these rules are allowed to govern thought in the absence of further reflection and refinement, the result is prejudice instead of wisdom. (T, 146,150) The wise, in contrast, take care to survey the broadest possible range of experience, allowing a "second influence of general rules" to supplant the first. In this manner, the "capricious and uncertain" ideas of the vulgar give way to "the more general and authentic operations of the understanding" and the superior judgments of the wise (T, 150). As for the normative question of why the refined judgments of the wise are preferable to the rash prejudices of the vulgar, Hume is content that moral sense assigns approbation to the "original instincts" underlying moral and aesthetic taste (T, 619).

Having argued that we can overcome prejudice and make superior assessments of ordinary matters of fact, Hume imports his contrast of vulgarity and wisdom into his aesthetic theory. Sound understanding makes inferences and arrives at a belief. Beliefs influence taste. Although a judgment of taste terminates in a reflective passion, rather than in a belief with a truth-value, taste employs operations of the imagination subject to rules internalized by the judging subject. Consequently, the contrast between first and second influences of general rules applies as much to taste as to "wisdom." Vulgar taste should betray the same degree of capriciousness and prejudice as vulgar reasoning. Good taste, in contrast, should be more stable, for it will display "a certain point of view" appropriate to its object (SOT, 276). Refined taste reflects what Hume elsewhere calls the "more general" view. As with moral response, good taste meets with approbation while a prejudiced taste "loses all credit and authority" (SOT, 277). However, as a matter of interpretation, Hume's references to a requisite "delicacy of imagination" (SOT, 272) complicate and obscure the account, for it is not clear what this delicacy is, nor how it contributes to a more settled, general view.

So what are the rules of taste, over and above any rules or principles involved in sound judgment about the object of taste? Surprisingly, Hume never offers a clear case of one. At least two proposals about such rules can be extracted from Hume's example of Sancho's kin and the hogshead of wine, Hume's "evidence" that there are general rules of taste (SOT, 272–73). On the one hand, it is tempting to read the rules as strictly parallel with the empirical laws discussed in the Treatise and first Enquiry. If so, they are causal laws specifying which properties and combinations of properties cause what kind and degree of pleasure. An example might be, "An aftertaste of iron or leather reduces the pleasure taken in an otherwise good wine." Unfortunately, such rules seem suitable only for arriving at some probability about the likely effect of drinking such wine. Applying such a rule may result in a belief about the wine, but knowing the rule would not encourage the requisite sentiment. Where we can find them, rules of this sort are useful for separating true from pretend critics, if only in allowing us to point out inconsistencies in critical response (SOT 273–74).

But general rules of taste have a second function. Even if rules "had never been methodized" (SOT, 273), their existence supports the view that practice and comparison improves taste (SOT, 275). Those with adequate experience of a particular art form will perceive cases with greater accuracy. The existence of rules gives reason to agree that practice heightens the subject's awareness of disruptive impressions (the taste of iron) and missing impressions (no fruity bouquet), resulting in a more reflective adjudication of the whole experience. They will also direct the imagination to expect various combinations of properties in light of one's recognition that it is a thing of a specific

Notes

kind. Properly amended to reflect mental rather than bodily taste, the story of Sancho's kinsmen underlies the whole argument of "The Standard of Taste." Even if the rule has not been formalized, the wine taster will operate as if reasoning from a rule (e.g., "since this is red wine, it will have a fruity bouquet but no hint of leather or iron"). The experienced reader or viewer will approach art with "the same excellence of faculties which contributes to the improvement of reason" (SOT, 278), discovering the true character of the object within "the disorder, in which they are presented" (SOT, 273).

7.5 Hume's Essay on Tragedy

The motivating issue in "Of Tragedy" is that of unpleasant emotion as a positive feature of a work. Hume proposes to explain how "a well-written tragedy" is pleasing when that pleasure appears to depend on "sorrow, terror, anxiety," and other naturally disagreeable emotions (OT, 258).

Originally published beside "Of the Standard of Taste" in Four Dissertations, "Of Tragedy" is a peculiar essay. Its engagement with the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos confirms Hume's strong interest in French aesthetics. Yet the essay says little about the topic of tragedy, and what it says is combined with discussions of melodramas and historical writing. Its real topic is the experience of conflicting emotions directed simultaneously at a single object, a topic treated in the Treatise. Because the pleasure offered by tragedy and melodrama depends on and is proportionate with their capacity to arouse grief, fear, and other unpleasant passions, Hume uses literature and theater as an occasion to elaborate on his theory of mixed emotions. As Hume formulates it, the problem is to explain the nature of the relationship between our approbation, which is pleasurable, and the presence of "sorrow, terror, anxiety," and other naturally disagreeable emotions (OT, 258). The solution, Hume claims, is that any emotion "which attends a passion, is easily converted into it, though in their natures they be originally different from, and even contrary to each other" (T, 419).

So "Of Tragedy" grapples with a very different set of problems than "Of the Standard of Taste." In the essay on taste, the unchallenged appearance of vice is treated as a flaw, and unpleasant emotion is a defect. But when "Of Tragedy" identifies a flaw in Nicholas Rowe's The Ambitious Stepmother, the play's defect is not the endorsement of vice. Instead, its flaw is the staging of action that is "too bloody and atrocious" (OT, 264). But why is "shocking" spectacle a flaw that leads to general disapprobation? Is it simply a question of the degree of shock? But why should that prevent the audiences from "converting" the shock into a "contrary" and pleasurable experience, as Hume claims happens with terror and anxiety? The obstacle does not seem to be moral in nature, of the sort explored in "Of the Standard of Taste" where Hume discusses a work's failure to direct proper disapprobation at vicious manners. The essay on taste suggests that the same content would not be a flaw if proper adjustments were made. But "Of Tragedy" does not call attention to the moral dimension of Rowe's play. So "Of Tragedy" is a discourse on an interesting puzzle about human psychology, namely the fact that unpleasant elements can be either strengths or ruinous defects. "Of Tragedy" says nothing about moralism and art.

Hume's account of tragic pleasure has two components. First, different features of the work must generate the viewer's agreeable and disagreeable responses. Disagreeable aspects contribute to our general approbation because those properties are balanced by naturally agreeable properties. Second, a general psychological principle explains how it is possible for competing emotions to produce a complex, pleasing sentiment. Borrowed from the Treatise (T, 419), that principle holds that when the same object produces different passions, even those "of a contrary nature," then the subordinate passion can be "converted" into the predominant (OT, 262). "Of Tragedy" combines these two ideas. Our natural delight in "imitation" provides a strong and predominant passion. The naturally disagreeable emotions aroused by the plot provide a subordinate and contrary

Notes

emotion, the "movement" of which "fortifies" the predominant passion. Unless the negative emotion becomes predominant, the overall effect of a well-written tragedy will be an audience "pleased in proportion as they are afflicted" (OT 258).

Although Hume illustrates his general principle with numerous examples, few readers claim to understand or accept his theory. Hume thinks it is obvious that Rowe's play fails due to its gory and shocking spectacle, which tips the balance in the wrong direction. But the obvious reply is that many viewers enjoy the spectacle of violence. Hume basically says so: "The English theatre abounds too much with such shocking images" (OT, 265). How can Hume contend that the play is ruined when so many viewers enjoy it? For there is no appeal except to sentiment.

Hume must think that shocking spectacle satisfies vulgar taste but not refined taste. "Of the Standard of Taste" posits differences in audience members to account for different responses. Hume's sketchy theory in "Of Tragedy" is compatible with most people enjoying aesthetically uninteresting works, for routine design readily delights most people (SOT, 276). But a refined taste is equally sensitive to all facets of the work, including formal design. Just as the wine tasted funny to Sancho's kinsmen (SOT, 272–73), a run-of-the-mill work "gives pain" to true critics (SOT, 276). Only the best critics worry about the absence of genius.

The rules of taste endorsed in "Of the Standard of Taste" facilitate habituated expectations based on previous experiences with similar art. Aesthetic pleasure frequently depends on "custom" (T, 299) and on associations and expectations developed by the life experiences of the intended audience. If audience expectations are violated by excessive violence, and if there is no compensating reward for its inclusion, then the work has been improperly staged for its intended audience. But works that merely satisfy expectations will please the less discerning critics. Hence "shocking images" that are routine in English theater will please the audience. The same gory spectacle and "dismal" stories, insufficiently "softened" by genius and eloquence, will displease a refined taste (OT 265).

Unfortunately, this interpretation merely heightens the problem. What is it that rewards vulgar taste? Why does violent spectacle attract anyone to routine, predictable potboilers? Natural sympathy should arouse uneasiness at the gory spectacle, yet the vulgar have no compensating reward. Brilliant language is surely an attraction of Shakespeare's Othello, but no such achievement is to be found in most of the popular fiction that reliably delights its audience. Hume even implies that the vulgar do not attend to "eloquence" and similar formal achievement. However, the mere fact of "imitation" seems insufficient to explain the predominant pleasure in the face of this material. Is it the spectacle's "exactness of imitation" (SOT, 276)? But that would seem to be a compensating pleasure in all but the most inept production, and would lead us to expect that vulgar audiences would respond with equal pleasure to almost any inferior work that meets their expectations. But this is simply not the case. "Of Tragedy" does not meet the standards of argument and insight set by Hume's other contributions to aesthetics.

7.6 David Hume—A Critical Analysis

David Hume (1711-76) is one of the greatest philosophers of the Enlightenment. Writing as an independent intellectual he made significant contributions to epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion and ethics. He is widely reputed as a brilliant although skeptical critic of every kind of dogmatism and of any pretension to establish objectively valid foundations of human knowledge. Except for the abstract ideas of mathematics and immediate experiential impressions he did not believe that there is anything in our mind that deserved full trust and the honorific title of truth. Consequently, metaphysics and philosophy were, for him, at best a good pastime (see his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748). In view of these assertions it is surprising to find out that Hume, on the other hand, had not dismissed judging of artworks as just a matter of personal idiosyncrasy. Despite his low opinion of metaphysical pursuits he had a very strong appreciation for the arts and possessed himself a

Notes

pretty subtle aesthetic sense. In his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757) he advances the claim that evaluating art should not be regarded as arbitrary and entirely relativist. Hume composed this essay (the last before his death) in order to meet the demand of his publisher who needed about 20 pages to fill in the gap that emerged after two other (possibly too "atheistic") essays were removed from the planned collection. The essay is "derivative" as it heavily depends on some French and British authors of the time but it still represents an original piece, probably the most important work in Aesthetics before Kant.

Although an "opportunistic" product of Hume's literary activity, the essay is a masterpiece of elegance and style. Its polished and subtle manner of exposition proves, however, to be very deceptive. It creates the impression that the argumentation flows smoothly and clearly from the beginning to the end whereas in reality it abounds with reversals and almost all provided explanations raise more questions than they manage to answer. A careful student should be mindful of many snares intentionally or unintentionally laid down throughout the course of Hume's analysis.

Variety of Taste: In keeping with his empiricist epistemology Hume starts with a factual statement about the existing variety of taste and opinion. He focuses on the former as the latter proves to be less egregious.

The variety of human taste stretches over different individuals (even siblings may have different taste), across different cultures and throughout different historical periods.

Hume was more interested in art criticism (judging art) than in the philosophy of art as an effort to explain the essence of art. He was particularly intrigued by the question whether our judgments on art are subjective and relativist or objective and universalizable. This explains why he talks about taste (the receptive side) rather than about the artwork itself (the creative side). For Hume, taste denotes the capacity to respond with approbation or disapprobation to external stimuli. If the stimulus is an artistic one the ensuing taste should be understood as the "refined ability to perceive quality in any artwork". This ability corresponds, roughly speaking, to what we would call "aesthetic experience" in general (Hume didn't use the word Aesthetics yet). If likes and dislikes are expressed in value judgments we regard them as judgments of taste. Whether there is a standard of taste is an open issue that allows arguing for both sides (the debate parallels somewhat the debate about the relativity of moral norms).

Relativity

People react to different taste with surprise and mistrust. The label (epithet) "barbarous" (supposedly denoting the low taste or the lack of taste) is culturally conditioned. It does not tell us anything universally valid (except that it is used with the same arrogance by different people for contrary things). It cannot serve as the criterion of taste since it simply reflects our preference for our taste. It is an expression of conceit.

The differences in aesthetic taste are too obvious and great to be denied. Hume contends that they are in fact greater than they appear. The true extent of the differences is covered by linguistic generalities that indicate universal approval or disapproval. But these generalities conceal the differences in particulars. In almost all cultures there is a consensus in evaluating positively certain epithets. For instance



Almost all Hume's examples in this essay are taken from one single art - literature. We wish he could have provided some non-literary examples as well but this preference for literary arts was the signature of the time.

Notes

Discrepancy

The apparent consensus in words expressing aesthetic attitudes stands in stark contrast with a seeming disagreement in words expressing our ordinary or theoretical views about reality. Upon examination, however, we realize that they are in fact reversed. In this regard, the apparent differences in taste and opinion prove to be deeper where they appear lesser and the other way round. Here is how they differ:

Resolution

Differences in opinion (belief) could be in many cases resolved by clarifying the language (purely verbal disagreements) and resorting to the facts. In science we can advance different theories (paradigms) to account for the phenomena (for instance the corpuscular or the wave theory of light) but we can disagree only temporarily about the facts. For example, what is the tallest building in the world?

In contrast, disagreements in taste typically become greater once the illusion of verbal agreement from general discourse is replaced by a closer scrutiny of facts. After we check the reference of generally accepted aesthetic terms we realize that our appreciation of these facts is different. All people value beauty and regard ugliness as repulsive but they disagree what objects are beautiful and what are ugly.Beauty is not something rational (size and order) or objective (beauty in itself) but only an effect on the mind.

The arts as the object of taste have many more things in common with morals than with the sciences. The arts and morals are both more grounded in sentiments than in reason. The verbal unanimity is not a result of universal reasoning but a sheer effect of the inner logic of language. This is why both art and morality accept universal precepts while hopelessly differing in practical application. The following table details the similarities between art and morality as well as their common opposition to science. In science language creates apparent disagreements while in art it creates apparent agreements.


Notes

Hume does not see a big difference between artistic and moral values. What as a pleasurable sentiment translates in approbation in taste closely corresponds to the sentiment of approbation within our heart: "virtue is whatever mental action or quality gives a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation".

Moral Unanimity

The unanimity in morals is also more apparent than real. The apparent universality of moral principles is commonly ascribed to the workings of human reason. In reality, its source is the inculcated positive validation of certain terms (virtues: justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity).

However, the content and the application of these terms may be very different; so much so that sometimes they represent a kind of relations that are called contrarieties (for instance, black and white). Thus it is conceivable that the content of the above virtues, if transferred to another culture, could be regarded as injustice, inhumanity, stinginess, imprudence and mendacity.

Example 1: Homer's general moral precepts are similar to Fenelon's, but the morality of their heroes is different as it could be. For instance, Homer praises the heroism of Achilles and the prudence of Odysseus (Ulysses) as general virtues. But this type of heroism contains a lot of cruelty while the prudence of Odysseus borders with fraud and slyness.

Notes

The content of Homeric virtues separates his heroes from Odysseus' son Telemachus as portrayed by Fenelon. While his father is rather mendacious for modern standards he is truthful to the bone and never departs from his noble values.



Fenelon (1651-1715) was a bishop and poet (he composed the poem Telemaque in French).

Example 2: Hume's second example introduces a comparison between two moralities: Islamic and English. The Quran (Alcoran) praises equity, justice, temperance, meekness, charity, as our Western culture does, but from the point of view of English morality the content of Mohammedan virtues equals treachery, inhumanity, cruelty, revenge, bigotry.

This remark does not sound very politically correct (especially in conjunction with the contention that the Koran presents a "wild and absurd performance") but Hume's intention is rather to show (partly in a biased Eurocentric way) the discrepancy between the universality of the accepted precepts and the real sentiments on both sides rather than to assert the superiority of English morality over Arabic mores. At the end of the essay he finds that many events in the Bible present a similar picture of cruelty and inhumanity which he repudiates equally because the most sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition not only does not condemn the vicious manners of some biblical heroes but even condones them (cf. God commands the destruction of Jericho and Ai).

Conclusion: There is no standard of morality that universally distinguishes right and wrong. There are no eternal moral norms, only historically and culturally conditioned habits disguised into seeming general precepts. But this generality is more linguistic than real.

Merit: The value of general precepts, commandments and duties is very spurious. The effectiveness of such precepts is questionable. Formulating universal ethical principles is a big stretch. Their strength does not surpass the meaning of the words used. Their import is purely verbal - at best they explicate the implicit positive connotation of certain expressions. For instance by commending charity, virtue, etc., we say that that these notions ar conceived as commendable. It is safer to follow the 'inculcated' (intended) meaning of these words than to derive universal maxims of conduct based on some supposed objective obligations. The writers, preachers and legislators who go for the latter are doomed to be less convincing than what the sheer word semantics suggest. Only what is already contained in the connotation resonates - everything else is a chimera.

Hume's reasoning could be summarized in the following way: Moral precepts either state what is already meant by language or they go beyond it. If the former they are redundant, if the latter they overreach their boundaries.

Application: The same reasoning should apply to aesthetic terms. They, being just condensed expressions of sentiments (of pleasure or displeasure), include some approbation or disapprobation - but they do not warrant any universal and objective rules about objects.

In Search of a Standard

Claims: One would expect, based on Hume's general stance and the above observations, that he is going to assert the inescapability of utter subjectivism and relativism in matters of taste. Surprisingly, however, he makes a series of non-skeptical and non-relativist claims:

1. It is natural to seek a standard of taste.
2. Such a standard of taste exists.
3. The standard of taste can reconcile different sentiments.
4. The standard of taste allows to evaluate different tastes as to their quality and thus decides which one is to be preferred.

Notes

Comprehensiveness vs. Discrimination Notice that (3) and (4) are not identical claims. The former suggests the existence of a general and more comprehensive rule, the latter only something that could be used in discriminatory way so that different artworks and aesthetic judgments could be ranked. Hume hopes to be able to find at least (4) if it turns out that the sentiments of men are so different that they cannot be possibly harmonized (3). But throughout the essay he vacillates between these two kinds of standards (the more ambitious one and the more discriminative one).

Objection One kind of philosophy (skeptical) opposes the idea that there is any standard of taste. It asserts the equal right of every personal evaluation. In that respect, it agrees with one strain of common sense which preaches the equal value of all taste. These are the main characteristics of this position:

The refusal of any standard of taste is based on one fundamental distinction that sharply separates the nature of sentiments from that of judgments. This distinction corresponds to the distinction between taste and opinion. The former is a matter of feelings, the latter of facts. Other differences could be represented as follows:

As Hume states at the beginning of the essay, there is a huge variety of taste (sentiments) and opinion (judgments). While all sentiments regarding one and the same object are right, only one opinion out of many possible could be right. We can conclusively resolve factual disputes by matching opinions with relevant facts, we cannot but "acquiesce" to our subjective feelings in matters of what we like or dislike. Taste is a kind of sentiment and therefore subjective. There is a parallel between bodily and mental taste to the effect that both are subjective.

Beauty - Deformity Beauty and deformity are not objective qualities. They exist only in the mind as the sentiments of blame and approbation exist in our heart. Some people will regard object beautiful that others perceive as ugly. Therefore it is fruitless to seek the real beauty and deformity as is fruitless to seek the real sweet or real bitter.

The prominence of taste and beauty in the discussion of art is defining for the 18th century aesthetics. Hume is here under influence of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747) who held that beauty is not a quality of objects but a subjective idea. Another point of agreement with his contemporaries: mental (aesthetic) taste is very similar in its functioning and status with physiological (bodily) taste. Hume pursues this analogy throughout the essay. What makes something sweet or bitter is the disposition of the organs that are aroused by the perception of certain object. The same holds true of beauty and deformity. The disposition of our organs (that is, its previous or current condition) decides what we'll like or dislike. If we put our left hand in a bucket with cold water while holding the right hand in the bucket with hot water and then both immerse in a vessel. Aesthetic sentiments like beauty and perfection are in fact more subjective than bodily taste because aesthetic feelings depend ml with lukewarm water we'll have two different sensations.

Aesthetic sentiments like beauty and perfection are in fact more subjective than bodily taste because aesthetic feelings depend more on the consciousness of the perceiving individual and are therefore more idiosyncratic. Therefore it is in vain to seek objective, "real", "true" beauty. However, there is another strain of common sense (and another kind of philosophy, although not named by Hume). It recognizes the obvious differences in quality between various artists and artworks and asserts the objectivity and inequality of taste. Some judgments of taste are just plainly wrong whereas some other are obviously right. This position (represented by Thomas Reid) is characterized by the following features:

1. Philosophy Objectivist Criticism
2. Common Sense 2nd Type
3. Standard Yes
4. Justification Inequality of Taste

Notes

5. Formula According to Rules
6. Outcome Disagreements Irrelevant

Grading The crucial evidence in favor of the non-subjectivity of taste is the possibility of grading artists and the products of art. It would be foolish to claim that there is no difference in rank and quality between a sheer translator, like John Ogilby, and a great poet of a John Milton's stature, or between a mediocre essayist like John Bunyan and a great one like Joseph Addison.

Absurdity Even if somebody would advance the view that these differences do not matter and that the judgments of taste regarding these artists are all equal nobody would pay attention to such a claim because it is in itself implausible and irrelevant. Hume pronounces the sentiment of such a critic absurd and ridiculous despite the previous contention that all sentiments are right.

Similes Any attempt to equalize and level all artists is not less implausible than to negate obvious differences in physical size. It is an "extravagant paradox" or "palpable absurdity". To deny evident qualitative differences would be tantamount to an easily falsifiable factual assertion that a pond is equal to the ocean or a molehill to the great rock of the Tenerife island.

- Small Big Mediocre Great
- Mole-hill Tenerife Bunyan Addison
- Pond Ocean Ogilby Milton

Disproportion The principle of equality among different tastes cannot be applied to the objects of ostensibly different value and quality. Both experts and regular people realize that great artworks are much more valuable than the "kitsch" products of popular culture even if they like the latter. Everyone agrees that accomplished artists can do more and better than amateurs, etc. Hume notes that this discrepancy is obvious to common sense as well. It is acknowledged by it despite the wide acceptance of the proverb De gustibus non disputandum est.

- Conclusion All artworks are not equally good.
- All artists are not equally accomplished.
- All judgments of taste are not right.

Dilemma The question Hume is facing now is which of the two positions is right. It seems that Hume has to choose between an utterly subjective relativism and the abstract objectivity of aesthetic principles. Apparently this is a difficult choice for a radical empiricist who still believes that his judgment on aesthetic matters is not equal to the taste of a boor.

Rules and Principles of Taste

Whether aesthetic judgments are objective and universal or subjective and relativistic is one of the most hotly debated issues in Aesthetics.

Relativism: It is clear that Hume does not espouse aesthetic relativism even though it would be consistent with his general theory of sentiments and his contention that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder.

Objectivism: However, he does not accept objectivism either. Especially not in the form of a priori rules of composition or "abstract conclusions" derived from eternal and steady relations of ideas. He remains convinced that the rules of art are not rational, universal and necessary. "It is evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasoning a priori..."

Solution: So what is Hume's solution to the above problem of two contradictory views on taste? He does not have a straight one; he rather struggles to get around the unpleasant dilemma of choosing between relativism and objectivism. What he suggests sounds like a middle way (an intermediate ground) between these two extremes: he accepts that differences in rank and quality are too evident to be ignored but still clings to his starting belief that aesthetic judgments are just expressions of our sentiments which do not represent anything in objects.

Notes

Rules: In a nutshell, his solution is: There are general rules but they are all empirical and contingent. They are more a summary of what pleases than an explanation of what constitutes good art. Therefore they are not universally binding.

Note: Unfortunately, Hume does not give a single example of these rules and principles that would allow us to get a grasp of their nature. As some authors have noticed, he proceeds as if they do not really exist or in fact are not really rules.

Compromise Anyway, he defines his position on these rules by means of the following four statements:

1. Rules exist.
2. They are empirical (experiential not logical).
3. They are general (comprising all cultures and all ages).
4. But they are based on sentiments (that what pleases overall).

As irregularities can please (falsehood, metaphor, perversion), exact rules do not work in art. As far as the source and nature of these rules are concerned, Hume rejects the rationalist theory of their origin and adopts a thoroughly empirical view. The contrast between what he regards as the real rules and those that are commonly envisioned but not existent could be represented in the following way:

1. Rules of Composition Real Illusionary
2. Origin Experience Reasoning a priori
3. Status General Observation Abstract Conclusions / Exactness
4. Validation Factual Pleasure Eternal Norms

If the standard of taste is based on experience and derived from the observations of common sentiments then the supposed "rules of compositions" cannot be but sheer empirical generalizations of what is accepted. All the more so as they are not necessary. What matters is whether something pleases or not, for pleasant sentiments decide ultimately what should count as a rule.

Exactness Owing to their empirical nature the rules do not apply geometrically and in a formulaic manner. The role of art criticism is not to enforce these rules mechanically by suppressing any departure from them. A work composed exactly according to a steady canon of hard rules would be dull and unconvincing. The Middle These admonitions resemble Aristotle's statements on the right method of ethics. It seems that Hume has transferred some of these ideas into the realm of aesthetics (right measure, lack of scientific exactness, need to create the right disposition and identify the right situation for judging, etc.)

- Poetry Geometric Exactness General Rules
- Possession Not Yes
- Nature Scientific Observation Genius

Genius If there are some rules they should be binding, that is to say, we need to see them defining taste. Still Hume insists that the rules discovered by acute observation are binding for poetry. But he does not state a single one that could be tested as binding. On the contrary, he says that we cannot engineer any great art by simply following the rules. On the other hand he allows that they could be discovered by inspiration (genius) as well. Hume was too much of a connoisseur not to realize that art emerges in a creative and innovative way.

Genius and taste were the privileged topics of the 18th century aesthetics. It is noteworthy that Hume allows the possibility of a shortcut in the painstaking empirical process of ascertaining the rule - it is a possibility open to exceptional creators or individuals with a true taste.

Expressions: Throughout the essay Hume uses several expressions when speaking about these rules. They indicate both the various aspects of these rules as well as his uncertainty about their true status. These are his main four phrases with their prevalent significations:

Notes

1. General Rules of Art What pleases in all times and countries
2. General Rules of Composition Avowed Patterns
3. General Rules of Beauty Established Models
4. General Principles of Approbation Uniform Sentiments

The common trait in all these formulas is that they all presume the recipient's position rather than any objective features of the artwork.

Exceptions Another reason why universal, abstract and mechanical rules are not possible in art is that art allows deformities and distortions of every kind. We simply cannot regulate art if we do not want to kill its spontaneity. The flexible rules of art do not rule out every single aberration. Distortion is permissible in art as well as falsehood and fiction. A departure from the rules could still yield a great artwork despite some deformities.

- These deformities are overpowered by qualities.
- Some deformities can please. In that case they are not faults.
- Some rules are a matter of inspiration.

Hume's example of a successful artwork that includes distortions and exaggerations is Ariosto's Furious Orlando. From visual arts he could have cited El Greco or Alessandro Magnasco with their overextended figures and exaggerated movements. Deformities How these artworks please notwithstanding their fantastic sallies? Hume's answer is that they please in spite of their transgressions owing to some other qualities that in fact represent these rules. The pleasure arising from these qualities must overpower the displeasure stemming from deformities, that is to say, the negative impact of transgressions must not surpass the total tally of positive qualities.

The most Hume is ready to allow for deformities and exaggerations is that they could occur without compromising all artistic value; inventiveness and "clarity of expression" render the violations of rules non-important. But Hume vehemently denies that aesthetic quality could reside in these violations themselves. According to Hume, Ariosto's poem pleases owing to its charms and accomplishments, not because of its imperfections and deformities.

An artwork can combine and in reality combines perfections with the components that are less than perfect. The chart below brings a pretty exhaustive inventory of these aspects in Ariosto: Deformity Improbable monstrous fiction Bizarre mixture of serious and comic Want of coherence Continual interruptions. Charm Force of expression Clarity of expression Variety of inventions Natural pictures of passion

Principle

Deformities do not please. Nobody can enjoy them. If the rules of composition are derived from what generally pleases, then we cannot say that deformities are being enjoyed because that would contradict the very nature of the rules extracted from pleasurable emotions (approval of object). We can say in general: Nothing that does not please is art. In general, rules contribute to the increase of pleasure. Rules of Art = Increase of Satisfaction On the other hand, what pleases cannot be a fault. If Turn to Rules Decrease satisfaction Faults Faults Increase Satisfaction Aesthetic Qualities

If departures from the rules please they are not deformities. Hence art criticism must adjust its normative judgments to what actually pleases. Therefore the fact that a supposed fault pleases does not undermine the standing of art criticism if it acknowledges the fact. The above principles tying taste with pleasure delineate the realm of art. This equation between pleasure and art threatens to compromise the distinction between good and bad art since "bad art" could be very popular (take Thomas Kinkade or Jack Vittriano). Notice, however, that Hume does not proclaim the principle "Everything that pleases is art"; he does not say "Nothing that pleases is not art." either.

Notes

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) "Of Essay Writing' appeared in

(*a*) 1742 (*b*) 1740 (*c*) 1741 (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) Hume's death took place in

(*a*) 1776 (*b*) 1745 (*c*) 1773 (*d*) 1765

(*iii*) Part of mankind divided into

(*a*) Learned (*b*) Conversible

(*c*) Both (*a*) and (*b*) (*d*) None of these

7.7 Summary

- Hume is most celebrated for his philosophical writings, in which he carried the empirical philosophy of Locke to the point of complete skepticism. He wrote also a "History of England" in eight volumes, and a large number of treatises and essays on politics, economics, ethics, and esthetics. The following essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," is a typical example of his clear thinking and admirable style. "He may be regarded," says Leslie Stephen, "as the acutest thinker in Great Britain of the eighteenth century, and the most qualified interpreter of its intellectual tendencies."
- Hume's aesthetic theory received limited attention until the second half of the Twentieth Century, when interest in the full range of Hume's thought was enlivened by the gradual recognition of his importance among philosophers writing in English. Unfortunately, many discussions of Hume's aesthetics concentrate on a single late essay, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757). This emphasis misrepresents the degree to which Hume's aesthetic theory is integrated into his philosophical system.
- Hume's theory is most firmly rooted in the work of Joseph Addison and Francis Hutcheson.
- Hume regards the natural capacity of taste as fundamental to the human ability to make moral and aesthetic judgments.
- Beauty is a feeling of approbation, and an original, simple impression of the mind. Impressions are contrasted with ideas, which he alternatively calls "thoughts.
- Taste is the capacity to respond with approbation and disapprobation.
- One of Hume's most puzzling claims is that taste is an "immediate" response.
- "Of Essay Writing" appeared in 1742 in Volume two of Hume's Essays, Moral and Political, but was removed from all subsequent editions of that text published during Hume's life. The text file here is based on the 1875 Green and Grose edition. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized. Of Essay Writing The elegant part of mankind, who are not immersed in the animal life, but employ themselves in the operations of the mind, may be divided into the learned and conversible. The learned are such as have chosen for their portion the higher and more difficult operations of the mind, which require leisure and solitude, and cannot be brought to perfection, without long preparation and severe labour. The conversible world join to a sociable disposition, and a taste of pleasure, an inclination to the easier and more gentle exercises of the understanding, to obvious reflections on human affairs, and the duties of common life, and to the observation of the blemishes or perfections of the particular objects, thatsurround them. Such subjects of thought furnish not sufficient employment in solitude, but require the company and conversation of our fellow-creatures, to render them a proper exercise for the mind: and this brings mankind together in society, where everyone displays his thoughts and observations in the best manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives information, as well as pleasure.
- David Hume was one of the most influential philosophers of modern times. Hume argued that man gains knowledge through experience and that we should be skeptical of all other

Notes

knowledge. Hume analyzed various aspects of life, but was probably best recognized for his theory of causality. Hume set up criteria for determining cause and effect. These criteria explained his skepticism about causality and why he came to the conclusion that humans were not capable of discovering truth.

- Hume separated human perceptions into two distinct categories: impressions and ideas.
- Ideas are copies or reflections of impressions and are less lively than the original impression.
- David Hume's views on aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art are to be found in his work on moral theory and in several essays. Although there is a tendency to emphasize the two essays devoted to art, "Of the Standard of Taste" and "Of Tragedy," his views on art and aesthetic judgment are intimately connected to his moral philosophy and theories of human thought and emotion. His theory of taste and beauty is not entirely original, but his arguments generally display the keen analysis typical of his best work. Hume's archaic terminology is occasionally an obstacle to appreciating his analysis, inviting conflicting readings of his position.
- Hume was more interested in art criticism (judging art) than in the philosophy of art as an effort to explain the essence of art. He was particularly intrigued by the question whether our judgments on art are subjective and relativist or objective and universalizable. This explains why he talks about taste (the receptive side) rather than about the artwork itself (the creative side). For Hume, taste denotes the capacity to respond with approbation or disapprobation to external stimuli. If the stimulus is an artistic one the ensuing taste should be understood as the "refined ability to perceive quality in any artwork". This ability corresponds, roughly speaking, to what we would call "aesthetic experience" in general (Hume didn't use the word Aesthetics yet). If likes and dislikes are expressed in value judgments we regard them as judgments of taste. Whether there is a standard of taste is an open issue that allows arguing for both sides (the debate parallels somewhat the debate about the relativity of moral norms).

7.8 Key-Words

1. Empirical : Based on concerned with, or verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic.
2. Interpretative : To Explain.

7.9 Review Questions

1. Discuss Of Essay Writing by Hume.
2. Give an analysis of Hume's life.
3. Write a brief note on Beauty and Taste in Hume's moral theory.
4. Examine critically Hume's essay "Of Essay Writing"

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*c*)

7.10 Further Readings



1. David Hume, selected Essays Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press.
2. Davide Hume Essays (Of Essay Writing).

Notes

Unit 8: Harriet Martineau-On Marriage: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
8.1 Martineau's Life and Works
8.2 Mesmerism and Ambleside
8.3 Economics and Social Sciences
8.4 Text-On Marriage
8.5 Summary
8.6 Key-Words
8.7 Review Questions
8.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to

- Discuss Martineau's Life and Works
- Explain the essay On Marriage.

Introduction

Harriet Martineau was an English social theorist and Whig writer, often cited as the first female sociologist.

Martineau wrote 35 books and a multitude of essays from a sociological, holistic, religious, domestic, and, perhaps most controversial, a feminine perspective; she also translated various works from Auguste Comte. She earned enough to be supported entirely by her writing, a challenging feat for a woman in the Victorian era. Martineau has said of her approach: "when one studies a society, one must focus on all its aspects, including key political, religious, and social institutions". She believed a thorough societal analysis was necessary to understand woman's status.

The novelist Margaret Oliphant said "as a born lecturer and politician she (Martineau) was less distinctively affected by her sex than perhaps any other, male or female, of her generation." While she was commonly described as having a masculine intellect, Martineau introduced feminist sociological perspectives in her writing on otherwise overlooked issues such as marriage, children, domestic and religious life, and race relations.

8.1 Martineau's Life and Works

The sixth of eight children, Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich, England, where her father was a manufacturer. Her mother was the daughter of a sugar refiner and a grocer. The family was of French Huguenot ancestry and professed Unitarian views. She was closest to her brother, James, who became a clergyman in the tradition of the English Dissenters. According to the writer Diana Postlethwaite, Harriet's relationship with her mother was strained and lacking affection,

Notes

which contributed to views expressed in her later writing. Martineau claimed her mother abandoned her to a wet nurse.

Her ideals on domesticity and the "natural faculty for housewifery" as described in her piece, *Household Education* written in 1848, stemmed from her lack of nurture growing up. Martineau's mother was the antithesis of the warm and nurturing qualities which Harriet believed to be necessary for girls at an early age. Martineau's mother urged all her children to be well-read but at the same time, opposed female pedantics "with a sharp eye for feminine propriety and good manners. Her daughters could never be seen in public with a pen in their hand." Her mother strictly enforced proper feminine behavior, pushing her daughter to "hold a sewing needle" as well as the pen.

Martineau began losing her sense of taste and smell, becoming increasingly deaf at a young age and having to use an ear trumpet. It was the beginning of many health problems in her life. In 1821 she began to write anonymously for the *Monthly Repository*, a Unitarian periodical, and in 1823 she published *Devotional Exercises and Addresses, Prayers and Hymns*. Her father's business failed in 1829. At 27 years old, Martineau stepped out of feminine propriety in order to earn a living for her family. Along with her needlework, she began selling her articles to the *Monthly Repository*. Her first commissioned volume, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, was published in February 1832 and quickly became successful. Martineau agreed to compose monthly volumes for 24 months, each critiquing various political and economic affairs. She developed the multi-volume work as a fictional tutorial on different political economists such as Malthus, Ricardo, and Bentham for the general public. It was her first piece to receive widespread acclaim. She continued to write for the *Repository*, earning accolades, including three essay prizes from the Unitarian Association. Her work with the *Repository* established her as a successful writer.

In 1832 Martineau moved to London. Among her acquaintances were: Henry Hallam, Harriet Taylor, Alexander Maconochie, Henry Hart Milman, Thomas Malthus, Monckton Milnes, Sydney Smith, John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charles Lyell, as well as Thomas Carlyle. She met Florence Nightingale and Charlotte Brontë later on in her literary career.

Until 1834 Martineau was occupied with her political economy series as well as a supplemental series of *Illustrations of Taxation*. About the same time, she published four stories expressing support of the Whig Poor Law reforms. These tales (direct, lucid, written without any appearance of effort, and yet practically effective) display the characteristics of their author's style. Tory paternalists reacted by calling her a Malthusian "who deprecates charity and provision for the poor", while Radicals opposed her to the same degree. Whig high society fêted her.

In May 1834 Charles Darwin, on his expedition to the Galapagos Islands, received a letter from his sisters saying that Martineau was "now a great Lion in London, much patronized by Ld. Brougham who has set her to write stories on the poor Laws" and recommending *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* in pamphlet-sized parts. They added that their brother Erasmus "knows her & is a very great admirer & every body reads her little books & if you have a dull hour you can, and then throw them overboard, that they may not take up your precious room".

In 1834, after completing the economic series, Harriet Martineau paid a long visit to the United States. During this time, she visited with James Madison, the former president, at his home of Montpelier. She also met numerous abolitionists in Boston and studied the emerging girls' schools established for their education. Her support of abolitionism, unpopular in the South, caused controversy. Her publication, soon after her return, of *Society in America* (1837) and *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), added to the controversy. The two books are considered to have led to the founding of modern sociology.

Notes

In *Society in America,* the scholar angrily criticized the state of women's education. She wrote, "The intellect of women is confined by an unjustifiable restriction of... education... As women have none of the objects in life for which an enlarged education is considered requisite, the education is not given... The choice is to either be 'ill-educated, passive, and subservient, or well-educated, vigorous, and free only upon sufferance." Her article "The Martyr Age of the United States" (1839), in the *Westminster Review*, introduced English readers to the struggles of the abolitionists in America several years after Britain had abolished slavery.

In October 1836, soon after returning from the voyage of the *Beagle*, Charles Darwin went to London to stay with his brother Erasmus. He found him spending his days "driving out Miss Martineau", who had returned from her trip to the United States. Charles wrote to his sister, "Our only protection from so admirable a sister-in-law is in her working him too hard." He commented, "She already takes him to task about his idleness— She is going some day to explain to him her notions about marriage— Perfect equality of rights is part of her doctrine. I much doubt whether it will be equality in practice."

The Darwins shared Martineau's Unitarian background and Whig politics, but their father Robert was concerned that, as a potential daughter-in-law, the writer was too extreme in her politics. Charles noted that his father was upset by a piece read in the *Westminster Review* calling for the radicals to break with the Whigs and give working men the vote "before he knew it was not hers [Martineau's], and wasted a good deal of indignation, and even now can hardly believe it is not hers." In early December 1836 Charles Darwin called on Martineau and may have discussed the social and natural worlds she was writing about in her book *Society in America*, including the "grandeur and beauty" of the "process of world making" she had seen at Niagara Falls. He remarked in a letter, "She was very agreeable and managed to talk on a most wonderful number of subjects, considering the limited time. I was astonished to find how little ugly she is, but as it appears to me, she is overwhelmed with her own projects, her own thoughts and own abilities. Erasmus palliated all this, by maintaining one ought not to look at her as a woman."

In April 1838 Charles wrote to his older sister Susan that "Erasmus has been with her noon, morning, and night: if her character was not as secure, as a mountain in the polar regions she certainly would loose it. Lyell called there the other day and there was a beautiful rose on the table,and she coolly showed it to him and said 'Erasmus Darwin' gave me that. How fortunate it is, she is so very plain; otherwise I should be frightened: She is a wonderful woman".

Martineau wrote *Deer brook* (1838), a three-volume novel published after her American books. She portrayed a failed love affair between a physician and his sister-in-law. It was considered her most successful novel. She also wrote *The Hour and the Man: An Historical Romance* (1839), a three-volume novel about the Haitian slave leader Toussaint L' Ouverture, who contributed to the island nation's gaining independence in 1804.

In 1839, during a visit to Continental Europe, Martineau was diagnosed with a uterine tumor. She several times visited her brother-in-law, Thomas Michael Greenhow, who was a celebrated doctor in Newcastle upon Tyne, to try to alleviate her symptoms. On the last occasion she stayed for six months in the Greenhow family house at 28 Eldon Square. Immobile and confined to a couch, she was cared for by her mother until purchasing a house and hiring a nurse to aid her.

She next moved downriver to Tynemouth, where she stayed at Mrs Halliday's boarding-house, 57 Front Street, for nearly five years from 16 March 1840. The critic Diana Postlethwaite wrote of this period for Martineau:

"Being homebound is a major part of the process of becoming feminine. In this interior setting she (Martineau) is taught the home arts of working, serving, and cleaning, as well as the rehearsals for the role of mothering. She sees her mother... doing these things. They define femininity for her." Her illness caused her to literally enact the social constraints of her gender during this time.

Notes

Martineau wrote at least three books during her illness, and a historical plaque marks this house. In 1844 she published both *Crofton Boys*, the children's novel, and *Life in the Sickroom: Essays by an Invalid,* an autobiographical reflection on invalidism. She wrote *Household Education* (1848), the handbook on the 'proper' way to raise and educate children. Lastly, she began working on her autobiography. Completed much later, it included some hundred pages to this period. Notable visitors included Richard Cobden and Thomas Carlyle and his wife.

Life in the Sickroom is considered to be one of Martineau's most underrated works. It upset evangelical readers as they "thought it dangerous in 'its supposition of self-reliance.' This series of essays embraced traditional womanhood. Martineau dedicated it to Elizabeth Barrett, as it was "an outpouring of feeling to an idealized female alter ego, both professional writer and professional invalid- and utterly unlike the women in her own family." Written during a kind of public break from her mother, this book was Martineau's proclamation of independence.

At the same time, Martineau turned the traditional patient/doctor relationship on its head by asserting control over her space even in sickness. The sickroom was her space. *Life in the Sickroom* explained how to regain control even in illness. Alarmed that a woman was suggesting such a position in the power dynamic, critics suggested that, as she was an invalid, her mind must also be sick and the work was not to be taken seriously. *British and Foreign Medical Review* dismissed Martineau's piece on the same basis as the critics: an ill person cannot write a healthy work. They thought it was unheard of for a woman to suggest being in a position of control, especially in sickness. Instead, the *Review* recommended patients' follow "unconditional submission" to the advice of doctors. They disagreed with the idea that Martineau might hold any sort of "authority to Britain's invalids."

Expecting to remain an invalid for the rest of her life, Martineau delighted in the new freedom of views using her telescope. Across the Tyne was the sandy beach 3 where there are frequent wrecks – too interesting to an invalid... and above the rocks, a spreading heath, where I watch troops of boys flying their kites; lovers and friends taking their breezy walks on Sundays..." She expressed a lyrical view of Tynemouth:

"When I look forth in the morning, the whole land may be sheeted with glistening snow, while the myrtle-green sea tumbles... there is none of the deadness of winter in the landscape; no leafless trees, no locking up with ice; and the air comes in through my open upper sash, but sun-warmed. The robins twitter and hop in my flower-boxes... and at night, what a heaven! What an expanse of stars above, appearing more steadfast, the more the Northern Lights dart and quiver!"

During her illness, she for a second time declined a pension on the civil list, fearing to compromise her political independence. After publication of her letter on the subject, some of her friends raised a small annuity for her soon after.

8.2 Mesmerism and Ambleside

In 1844 Martineau underwent a course of mesmerism, returning to health after a few months. There was national interest in mesmerism at this time. Also known as 'animal magnetism', it can be defined as a "loosely grouped set of practices in which one person influenced another through a variety of personal actions, or through the direct influence of one mind on another mind. Mesmerism was designed to make invisible forces augment the mental powers of the mesmeric object."She eventually published an account of her case in sixteen *Letters on Mesmerism*, which caused much discussion. Her work led to friction with "the natural prejudices of a surgeon and a surgeon's wife" (her brother-in-law and sister).

In 1845 she left Tynemouth for Ambleside in the Lake District, where she built herself the house called "The Knoll", where she spent the greater part of her later life. In 1845 she published three volumes of *Forest and Game Law Tales*. In 1846 she toured Egypt, Palestine and Syria with some

Notes

friends, and on her return published *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848). This travelogue expressed her concept that, as humanity passed through one after another of the world's historic religions, the conception of the Deity and of Divine government became at each step more and more abstract and indefinite. She believed the ultimate goal to be philosophic atheism, but did not explicitly say so in the book. She described ancient tombs, "the black pall of oblivion" set against the paschal "puppet show" in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and noted that Christian beliefs in reward and punishment were based on and similar to heathen superstitions. Describing an ancient Egyptian tomb, she wrote, "How like ours were his life and death!... Compare him with a retired naval officer made country gentleman in our day, and in how much less do they differ than agree!" The book's "infidel tendency" was too much for the publisher John Murray, who rejected it.

Martineau wrote *Household Education* in 1848, lamenting the state of women's education. She believed women had a natural inclination to motherhood and believed domestic work went hand in hand with academia for a proper, well-rounded education. She stated, "I go further than most persons... in desiring thorough practice in domestic occupations, from an early age, for young girls" She proposed that freedom and rationality, rather than command and obedience, are the most effectual instruments of education.

Her interest in schemes of instruction led her to start a series of lectures, addressed at first to the school children of Ambleside, but afterward extended to their parents, at the request of the adults. The subjects were sanitary principles and practice, the histories of England and North America, and the scenes of her Eastern travels. At the request of the publisher Charles Knight, in 1849 she wrote *The History of the Thirty Years' Peace, 1816–1846*, an excellent popular history from the point of view of a "philosophical Radical". Martineau productively spanned a variety of subjects in her writing and did so with more assertiveness than was expected of women at the time. She has been described as having an "essentially masculine nature". It was commonly thought that a progressive woman, in order to be progressive, was emulating the qualities of a man.

Martineau edited a volume of *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, published in March 1851. Its epistolary form is based on correspondence between her and the self-styled scientist Henry G. Atkinson. She expounded the doctrine of philosophical atheism, which she thought the tendency of human belief. She did not deny a first cause but declared it unknowable. She and Atkinson thought they affirmed man's moral obligation. Atkinson was a zealous exponent of mesmerism. The prominence given to the topics of mesmerism and clairvoyance heightened the general disapproval of the book. Literary London was outraged by its mesmeric evolutionary atheism, and the book caused a lasting division between Martineau and some of her friends. From 1852 to 1866, she contributed regularly to the *Daily News,* writing sometimes six leaders a week. It also published her *Letters from Ireland*, written during a visit to that country in the summer of 1852. For many years she was a contributor to the *Westminster Review*; in 1854 she was among financial supporters who prevented its closing down.

Martineau believed she was psychosomatic; this medical belief of the times related the uterus to emotions and hysteria. She had symptoms of hysteria in her loss of taste and smell. Her partial deafness throughout life may have contributed to her problems. Various people, including the maid, her brother, and Spencer T. Hall (a notable mesmerist) performed mesmerism on her. Some historians attribute her apparent recovery from symptoms to a shift in the positioning of her tumor so that it no longer obstructed other organs. As the physical improvements were the first signs of healing she had in five years and happened at the same time of her first mesmeric treatment, Martineau confidentially credited mesmerism with her "cure."

She continued her political activism during the late 1850s and 1860s. She supported the Married Women's Property Bill and in 1856 signed a petition for it organized by Barbara Bodichon. She also pushed for licensed prostitution and laws that addressed the customers rather than the women. She supported women's suffrage and signed Bodichon's petition in its favor in 1866.

Notes

In the early part of 1855, Martineau was suffering from heart disease. She began to write her autobiography, as she expected her life to end. Completing the book rapidly in three months, she postponed its publication until after her death, and lived another two decades. Her autobiography was published posthumously in 1877.

When Darwin's book *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, his brother Erasmus sent a copy to his old flame Harriet Martineau. At age 58, she was still reviewing from her home in the Lake District. From her "snow landscape", Martineau sent her thanks, adding that she had previously praised "the quality and conduct of your brother's mind, but it is an unspeakable satisfaction to see here the full manifestation of its earnestness & simplicity, its sagacity, its industry, and the patient power by which it has collected such a mass of facts, to transmute them by such sagacious treatment into such portentous knowledge. I should much like to know how large a proportion of our scientific men believe he has found a sound road."

Martineau supported Darwin's theory because it was not based in theology. Martineau strove for secularism stating, "In the present state of the religious world, Secularism ought to flourish. What an amount of sin and woe might and would then be extinguished." She wrote to her fellow Malthusian (and atheist) George Holyoake enthusing, "What a book it is! – overthrowing (if true) revealed Religion on the one hand, and Natural (as far as Final Causes and Design are concerned) on the other. The range and mass of knowledge take away one's breath." To Fanny Wedgwood she wrote,"I rather regret that C.D. went out of his way two or three times to speak of "The Creator" in the popular sense of the First Cause.... His subject is the "Origin of Species" and not the origin of Organisation; and it seems a needless mischief to have opened the latter speculation at all – There now! I have delivered my mind."

8.3 Economics and Social Sciences

As early as 1831, Martineau wrote on the subject "Political Economy" (as the field of economics was then known). Her goal was to popularise and illustrate the principles of *laissez faire* capitalism, though she made no claim to original theorising.

Martineau's reflections on *Society in America*, published in 1837, are prime examples of her approach to the area later known as sociological methods. Her ideas in this field were set out in her 1838 book *How to Observe Morals and Manners*. She believed that some very general social laws influence the life of any society, including the principle of progress, the emergence of science as the most advanced product of human intellectual endeavour, and the significance of population dynamics and the natural physical environment.

Auguste Comte coined the name sociology and published a rambling exposition under the title of *Cours de Philosophie Positive* in 1839. Martineau undertook a translation that was published in two volumes in 1853 as *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte (freely translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau)*. It was a remarkable achievement, but a successful one. Comte recommended her volumes to his students instead of his own. Some writers regard Martineau as "the first woman sociologist". Her introduction of Comte to the English-speaking world and the elements of sociological perspective in her original writings support her credit as a sociologist.

Death

Harriet Martineau died at "The Knoll" on 27 June 1876. She left an autobiographical sketch to be published by the *Daily News*, in which she wrote. "Her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say. In short, she could popularize while she could neither discover nor invent."

Notes

The following year, her autobiography was published. It was rare for a woman to publish such a work, let alone one secular in nature. Her book was regarded as dispassionate, 'philosophic to the core' in its perceived masculinity, and a work of necessitarianism. She deeply explored childhood experiences and memories, expressing feelings of having been deprived of her mother's affection, as well as strong devotion to her brother James Martineau, a theologian.

8.4 Text—On Marriage

The Marriage compact is the most important feature of the domestic state on which the observer can fix his attention. If he be a thinker, he will not be surprised at finding much imperfection in the marriage state wherever he goes. By no arrangements yet attempted have purity of morals, constancy of affection, and domestic peace been secured to any extensive degree in society. Almost every variety of method is still in use, in one part of the world or another. The primitive custom of brothers marrying sisters still subsists in some Eastern regions. Polygamy is very common there, as every one knows. In countries which are too far advanced for this, every restraint of law, all sanction of opinion, has been tried to render that natural method,—the restriction of one husband to one wife,—successful, and therefore universal and permanent. Law and opinion have, however, never availed to anything like complete success. Even in thriving young countries, where no considerations of want, and few of ambition, can interfere with domestic peace,—where the numbers are equal, where love has the promise of a free and even course, and where religious sentiment is directed full upon the sanctity of the marriage state,—it is found to be far from pure. In almost all countries, the corruption of society in this department is so deep and wide-spreading, as to vitiate both moral sentiment and practice in an almost hopeless degree. It neutralizes almost all attempts to ameliorate and elevate the condition of the race.—There must be something fearfully wrong where the general result is so unfortunate as this. As in most other cases of social suffering, the wrong will be found to lie less in the methods ordained and put in practice, than in the prevalent sentiment of society, out of which all methods arise.

It is necessary to make mention (however briefly) of the kinds of false sentiment from which the evil of conjugal unhappiness appears to spring.—The sentiment by which courage is made the chief ground of honour in men, and chastity in women, coupled with the inferiority in which women have ever been sunk, was sure to induce profligacy. As long as men were brave nothing more was required to make them honourable in the eyes of society: while the inferior condition of women has ever exposed those of them who were not protected by birth and wealth to the profligacy of men.

Marriage exists everywhere, to be studied by the moral observer. He must watch the character of courtships wherever he goes;—whether the young lady is negotiated for and promised by her guardians, without having seen her intended; like the poor girl who, when she asked her mother to point out her future husband from among a number of gentlemen, was silenced with the rebuke, "What is that to you?"—or whether they are left free to exchange their faith "by flowing stream, through wood, or craggy wild," as in the United States;—or whether there is a medium between these two extremes, as in England. He must observe how fate is defied by lovers in various countries…Scotch lovers agree to come together after so many years spent in providing the "plenishing." Irish lovers conclude the business, in case of difficulty, by appearing before the priest the next morning. There is recourse to a balcony and rope-ladder in one country; a steam-boat and back-settlement in another; trust and patience in a third; and intermediate flirtations, to pass the time, in a fourth. He must note the degree of worldly ambition which attends marriages, and which may therefore be supposed to stimulate them, how much space the house with two rooms in humble life, and the country-seat and carriages in higher life, occupy in the mind of bride or bridegroom.—He must observe whether conjugal infidelity excites horror and rage, or whether it is so much a matter of course as that no jealousy interferes to mar the arrangements of

mutual convenience.—He must mark whether women are made absolutely the property of their husbands, in mind and in estate; or whether the wife is treated more or less professedly as an equal party in the agreement.—He must observe whether there is an excluded class, victims to their own superstition or to a false social obligation, wandering about to disturb by their jealousy or licentiousness those whose lot is happier.—He must observe whether there are domestic arrangements for home enjoyments, or whether all is planned on the supposition of pleasure lying abroad; whether the reliance is on books, gardens, and play with children, or on the opera, parties, the ale-house, or dances on the green.—He must mark whether the ladies are occupied with their household cares in the morning, and the society of their husbands in the evening, or with embroidery and looking out of balconies; with receiving company all day, or gadding abroad; with the library or the nursery; with lovers or with children.—In each country, called civilized, he will meet with almost all these varieties: but in each there is such a prevailing character in the aspect of domestic life, that intelligent observation will enable him to decide, without much danger of mistake, as to whether marriage is merely an arrangement of convenience, in accordance with low morals, or a sacred institution, commanding the reverence and affection of a virtuous people. No high degree of this sanctity can be looked for till that moderation is attained which, during the prevalence of asceticism and its opposite, is reached only by a few. That it yet exists nowhere as the characteristic of any society,—that all the blessings of domestic life are not yet open to all, so as to preclude the danger of any one encroaching on his neighbour,—is but too evident to the travelled observer. He can only mark the degree of approximation to this state of high morals wherever he goes.

The traveller everywhere finds woman treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal interest. Any agreement thus formed is imperfect, and is liable to disturbance; and the danger is great in proportion to the degradation of the supposed weaker party. The degree of the degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country.

The Indian squaw carries the household burdens, trudging in the dust, while her husband on horseback paces before her, unencumbered but by his own gay trappings. She carries the wallet with food, the matting for the lodge, the merchandize (if they possess any), and her infant. There is no exemption from labour for the squaw of the most vaunted chief. In other countries the wife may be found drawing the plough, hewing wood and carrying water; the men of the family standing idle to witness her toils. Here the observer may feel pretty sure of his case. From a condition of slavery like this, women are found rising to the highest condition in which they are at present seen, in France, England, and the United States,—where they are less than half-educated, precluded from earning a subsistence, except in a very few ill-paid employments, and prohibited from giving or withholding their assent to laws which they are yet bound by penalties to obey. In France owing to the great destruction of men in the wars of Napoleon, women are engaged, and successfully engaged, in a variety of occupations which have been elsewhere supposed unsuitable to the sex. Yet there remains so large a number who cannot, by the most strenuous labour in feminine employments, command the necessaries of life, while its luxuries may be earned by infamy, that the morals of the society are naturally bad. Great attention has of late been given to this subject in France: the social condition of women is matter of thought and discussion to a degree which promises some considerable amelioration. Already, women can do more in France than anywhere else; they can attempt more without ridicule or arbitrary hindrance: and the women of France are probably destined to lead the way in the advance which the sex must hereafter make. At present, society is undergoing a transition from a feudal state to one of mutual government; and women, gaining in some ways, suffer in others during the process. They have, happily for themselves, lost much of the peculiar kind of observance which was the most remarkable feature of the chivalrous age; and it has been impossible to prevent their sharing in the benefits of the improvement and diffusion of knowledge. All cultivation of their powers has secured to them the use of new power; so that their condition is far superior to what it was in any former age. But new difficulties about securing a maintenance have arisen. Marriage is less general; and the husbands

Notes

of the greater number of women are not secure of a maintenance from the lords of the soil, any more than women are from being married. The charge of their own maintenance is thrown upon large numbers of women, without the requisite variety of employments having been opened to them, or the needful education imparted. A natural consequence of this is, that women are educated to consider marriage the one object in life, and therefore to be extremely impatient to secure it. The unfavourable influence of these results upon the happiness of domestic life may be seen at a glance.

This may be considered the sum and substance of female education in England; and the case is scarcely better in France, though the independence and practical efficiency of women there are greater than in any other country. The women in the United States are in a lower condition than either, though there is less striving after marriage, from its greater frequency, and little restriction is imposed upon the book-learning which women may obtain. But the old feudal notions about the sex flourish there, while they are going out in the more advanced countries of Europe; and these notions, in reality, regulate the condition of women. American women generally are treated in no degree as equals, but with a kind of superstitious outward observance, which, as they have done nothing to earn it, is false and hurtful. Coexisting with this, there is an extreme difficulty in a woman's obtaining a maintenance, except by the exercise of some rare powers. In a country where women are brought up to be indulged wives, there is no hope, help, or prospect for such as have not money and are not married.

In America, women can earn a maintenance only by teaching, sewing, employment in factories, keeping boarding-houses, and domestic service. Some governesses are tolerably well paid,—comparing their earnings with those of men. Employment in factories, and domestic service, are well paid. Sewing is so wretched an occupation everywhere, that it is to be hoped that machinery will soon supersede the use of human fingers in a labour so unprofitable. In Boston, Massachusetts, a woman is paid nine pence (sixpence English) for making a shirt. In England, besides these occupations, others are opening; and, what is of yet greater consequence, the public mind is awakening to the necessity of enlarging the sphere of female industry. Some of the inferior branches of the fine arts have lately offered profitable employment to many women. The commercial adversity to which the country has been exposed from time to time, has been of service to the sex, by throwing hundreds and thousands of them upon their own resources, and thus impelling them to urge claims and show powers which are more respected every day. In France this is yet more conspicuously the case. There, women are shopkeepers, merchants, professional accountants, editors of newspapers, and employed in many other ways, unexampled elsewhere, but natural and respectable enough on the spot.

Domestic morals are affected in two principal respects by these differences. Where feminine occupations of a profitable nature are few, and therefore overstocked, and therefore yielding a scanty maintenance with difficulty, there is the strongest temptation to prefer luxury with infamy to hardship with unrecognized honour. Hence arises much of the corruption of cities,—less in the United States than in Europe, from the prevalence of marriage,—but awful in extent everywhere. Where vice is made to appear the interest of large classes of women, the observer may be quite sure that domestic morals will be found impure. If he can meet with any society where the objects of life are as various and as freely open to women as to men, there he may be sure of finding the greatest amount of domestic purity and peace; for, if women were not helpless, men would find it far less easy to be vicious.

The other way in which domestic morals are affected by the scope which is allowed to the powers of women, is through the views of marriage which are induced. Marriage is debased by being considered the one worldly object in life,—that on which maintenance, consequence, and power depend. Where the husband marries for connexion, fortune, or an heir to his estate, and the wife for an establishment, for consequence, or influence, there is no foundation for high domestic morals and lasting peace; and in a country where marriage is made the single aim of all women, there is no security against the influence of some of these motives even in the simplest and purest cases of attachment. The sordidness is infused from the earliest years; the taint is in the mind before the attachment begins, before the objects meet; and the evil effects upon the marriage state are incalculable.

Notes

All this—the sentiment of society with regard to Woman and to Marriage, the social condition of Woman, and the consequent tendency and aim of her education,—the traveller must carefully observe. Each civilized society claims for itself the superiority in its treatment of woman. In one, she is indulged with religious shows, and with masquerades, or Punch, as an occasional variety. In another, she is left in honourable and undisputed possession of the housekeeping department. In a third, she is allowed to meddle, behind the scenes, with the business which is confided to her husband's management. In a fourth, she is satisfied in being the cherished domestic companion, unaware of the injury of being doomed to the narrowness of mind which is the portion of those who are always confined to the domestic circle. In a fifth, she is flattered at being guarded and indulged as a being requiring incessant fostering, and too feeble to take care of herself. In a sixth society, there may be found expanding means of independent occupation, of responsible employment for women; and here, other circumstances being equal, is the best promise of domestic fidelity and enjoyment.

It is a matter of course that women who are furnished with but one object,—marriage,—must be as unfit for anything when their aim is accomplished as if they had never had any object at all. They are no more equal to the task of education than to that of governing the state; and, if any unexpected turn of adversity befalls them, they have no resource but a convent, or some other charitable provision. Where, on the other hand, women are brought up capable of maintaining an independent existence, other objects remain where the grand one is accomplished. Their independence of mind places them beyond the reach of the spoiler; and their cultivated faculty of reason renders them worthy guardians of the rational beings whose weal or woe is lodged in their hands. There is yet, as may be seen by a mere glance over society, only a very imperfect provision made anywhere for doing justice to the next generation by qualifying their mothers; but the observer of morals may profit by marking the degrees in which this imperfection approaches to barbarism. Where he finds that girls are committed to convents for education, and have no alternative in life but marriage, in which their will has no share, and a return to their convent, he may safely conclude that there a plurality of lovers is a matter of course, and domestic enjoyments of the highest kind undesired and unknown. He may conclude that as are the parents, so will be the children; and that, for one more generation at least, there will be little or no improvement. But where he finds a variety of occupations open to women; where he perceives them not only pursuing the lighter mechanic arts, dispensing charity and organizing schools for the poor, but occupied in education, and in the study of science and the practice of the fine arts, he may conclude that here resides the highest domestic enjoyment which has yet been attained, and the strongest hope of a further advance.

From observation on these classes of facts,—the Occupation of the people, the respective Characters of the occupied classes, the Health of the population, the state of Marriage and of Women, and the character of Childhood,—the moralist may learn more of the private life of a community than from the conversation of any number of the individuals who compose it.

Self Assessment

1. Fill in the blanks:

(*i*) Martineau's reflections on *Society in America*, published in .....

(*ii*) The traveller everywhere finds woman treated as the.....

(*iii*) In America, women can earn a maintenance only by teaching, sewing, and employment in .....

(*iv*) Auguste Comte coined the name…….

(*v*) Martineau edited a volume of *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, published in…….

(*vi*) In Boston, Massachusetts, a woman is paid……

8.5 Summary

- The sixth of eight children, Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich, England, where her father was a manufacturer. Her mother was the daughter of a sugar refiner and a grocer. The

Notes

family was of French Huguenot ancestry and professed Unitarian views. She was closest to her brother, James, who became a clergyman in the tradition of the English Dissenters.

- Martineau wrote at least three books during her illness, and a historical plaque marks this house. In 1844 she published both *Crofton Boys*, the children's novel, and *Life in the Sickroom: Essays by an Invalid,* an autobiographical reflection on invalidism. She wrote *Household Education* (1848), the handbook on the 'proper' way to raise and educate children. Lastly, she began working on her autobiography. Completed much later, it included some hundred pages to this period. Notable visitors included Richard Cobden and Thomas Carlyle and his wife.
- The Marriage compact is the most important feature of the domestic state on which the observer can fix his attention. If he be a thinker, he will not be surprised at finding much imperfection in the marriage state wherever he goes. By no arrangements yet attempted have purity of morals, constancy of affection, and domestic peace been secured to any extensive degree in society. Almost every variety of method is still in use, in one part of the world or another. The primitive custom of brothers marrying sisters still subsists in some Eastern regions. Polygamy is very common there, as every one knows. In countries which are too far advanced for this, every restraint of law, all sanction of opinion, has been tried to render that natural method,—the restriction of one husband to one wife,—successful, and therefore universal and permanent. Law and opinion have, however, never availed to anything like complete success. Even in thriving young countries, where no considerations of want, and few of ambition, can interfere with domestic peace,—where the numbers are equal, where love has the promise of a free and even course, and where religious sentiment is directed full upon the sanctity of the marriage state,—it is found to be far from pure. In almost all countries, the corruption of society in this department is so deep and wide-spreading, as to vitiate both moral sentiment and practice in an almost hopeless degree. It neutralizes almost all attempts to ameliorate and elevate the condition of the race.—There must be something fearfully wrong where the general result is so unfortunate as this. As in most other cases of social suffering, the wrong will be found to lie less in the methods ordained and put in practice, than in the prevalent sentiment of society, out of which all methods arise.

8.6 Key-Words

1. Abolitionist : A person who favors the abolition of a practice or institution, especially capital punishment or formerly slavery.
2. Importunities : A set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.

8.7 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on Harriet's Life and Works.
2. Briefly describe the essay " On Marriage".

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1837 (*ii*) inferior party
   (*iii*) factories (*iv*) sociology
   (*iv*) March 1851 (*vi*) nine pence

8.8 Further Readings



1. Martineau, Harriet, 'On Marriage' 1838. Quotidian. Ed. Patrick Madden. 12th Feb., 2007.

Notes

Unit 9: Harriet Martineau-On Marriage: Critical Appreciation Cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
9.1 Analysis on Marriage
9.2 Views on Women
9.3 The Successful Author
9.4 Religion and Women's lssues
9.5 Summary
9.6 Key-Words
9.7 Review Questions
9.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss Martineau as an Author
- Analyse Martineau's views on Marriage

Introduction

Harriet Martineau authored the first systematic methodological treatise in sociology, conducted extended international comparative studies of social institutions, and translated August Comte's Cours de philosophy positive into English, thus structurally facilitating the introduction of sociology and positivism into the United States. In her youth she was a professional writer who captured the popular English mind by wrapping social scientific instruction in a series of widely read novels. In her maturity she was an astute sociological theorist, methodologist, and analyst of the first order. To the extent that any complex institutional phenomenon such as sociology can have identifiable founders, Alice Rossi justly celebrates Harriet Martineau as 'the first woman sociologist.'"

Harriet Martineau was the most astute female politician in England through almost four decades of the mid-nineteenth century. She did her work as a writer, an investigative traveler, a correspondent, and an interpreter of a multitude of intellectual trends. In all the vast number of her works and interests she was ever conscious of being female. She knew that being a woman meant that she had to do whatever she did differently from a man. Early in 1832 she wrote in a letter to Francis Place from her native Norwich, "I wish I were in London, . . . I want to be doing something with the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power."

She was able to move to London within the year, for her monthly series of didactic fictional accounts of the ideas of the new economics, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, had made her instantly famous, and the income from the series made her self-supporting. She was to earn her living as a writer, her reputation as a radical economic, political, and social commentator, and her historical mark as a social scientist, current historian, and feminist. She is known today by scholars of American society through her keenly analytic work, *Society in America*, published in 1837 after a

Notes

two-year journey in Jacksonian America. She is known by English people as the renowned progressive journalist and leader writer (editorialist) for the London *Daily News*, author of a history of a period through which she lived, *The History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace, 1816-1846*, translator into English of Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, and proponent of positivism and the social scientific method. In England she is even remembered locally as an amiable resident-householder of Ambleside in the Lake District, the informal educator of local workers through her winter series of instructive evening lectures and her personal lending library. In this, as in all her work, she was the progressive, enlightening reformer, perpetually confident in the rightness of her truth. Her feminism, perhaps because it was part and parcel of the whole of her political philosophy, is not as well known as her other ideas. Yet she took a stand and commented on virtually every campaign regarding women in England and America of her day and addressed some women's issues that were not identified so clearly as such until the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Martineau's politics included a thoroughgoing attention to women. It was an essential part of her blend of radicalism, and it had emerged well before her declaration to Place a month before her thirtieth birthday in 1832 that she must act with her pen, as that was the only access to politics a woman had. Her feminist politics was to continue strong throughout her life. Sensitive to her own womanhood and the limitations it imposed on her, the entry to feminism for many a woman through several feminist generations, Martineau gradually turned this personal sensitivity to social ends until the rights of women and advocacy of women's causes became one of her lifelong major efforts. The first piece she ever published—at age nineteen—was on women: "Female Writers of Practical Divinity." In 1869, while an invalid confined to her home The Knoll at Ambleside, as her last public work she applied her mighty pen in support of the campaign by the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. This campaign was an organized effort by women to get Parliament to repeal a group of laws that they believed incriminated women indiscriminately. Euphemistically named, the laws purported to control syphilis and gonorrhea through controlling prostitution, while giving sweeping authority to police in garrison towns to detain and examine women on mere suspicion of prostitution. Englishwomen made the repeal of these laws a rallying focus for their first fully organized feminist operation. In her sixties Harriet Martineau wrote the drafts for their petitions, wrote speeches for the campaign leader, Josephine Butler, wrote the newspaper letters that launched the effort.

A London female journalist, Sarah Curtis, standing for Parliament in 1974 at the peak of the contemporary women's movement in Great Britain, called Harriet Martineau "the woman journalist of *our* time, then." Curtis encapsulated in that statement the reason we need a fresh look at Martineau's feminism. I think this can best be accomplished through reading her own words on the subject, and to that end I present these selections of her works on women.

Harriet Martineau was a complicated female intellectual at a time when often the most a bookish middle-class woman in need of employment could aspire to was a position as a governess. She was full of contradictions, at times the advance messenger of a new movement, at times a reflector of Victorian eccentric views and narrow morality, sometimes farsighted, other times petty, sometimes mean, other times generous and wise, occasionally brilliant, but often verbose, repetitious, and tedious. Yet she was surely what we called in the early days of the recent women's movement "a role model from history," a woman of achievement, independence, and autonomy, whose hard-won gains resulted from her own effort. For Victorian England the magnitude of her accomplishment is astounding. She wrote without a significant break from early adulthood into her late sixties, despite health obstacles, supporting herself all her life by writing, and publishing well over 100 separately printed titles, scores of periodical articles, and some 1,642 newspaper editorials. The content of all that she wrote was wide-ranging, substantial, and serious.

Notes

As we reconsider her influence, we realize that we are not recovering a "lost woman writer" whose few small gems have been lost to the public for many years. Rather, hers is an enormous output. She never revised, and although some of her writing is lively and brilliant, some of it is very dull. She can be credited with neither painstaking attention to craft nor stylistic grace. Some of her vast outpouring has remained in print, and she has continued to hold a small place of historical recognition. Thus, it is neither because of neglect nor because of her virtuosity as a writer that we should again turn our attention to her.

As she was not entirely lost to history, so she was not a typical woman of her time, either. Harriet Martineau cannot be used as a case study of a nineteenth-century woman. She was not inarticulate or limited in public expression as most women were. She was not even a typical woman writer, for there were few women journalists, women writers tending to concentrate more on fiction and poetry. As a single woman, she was not dependent on an individual man for her economic or emotional well-being as the vast majority of women were. No one thing that she did, no one aspect of her life makes her in any way a representative nineteenth-century woman.

On the other hand, even though she more often expressed new trends than typified currents, she was not an original thinker. Her genius lay in her ability to discern new ideas with quick intelligence, to communicate them clearly to the popular mind, and thus to rally, time and again, supporters and advocates of the new viewpoints and causes. Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, James Mill, Joseph Priestley, Jeremy Bentham thought up the doctrines of political economy, necessarian philosophy, and utilitarianism that she taught in the early years of her adulthood. Mrs. Jane Marcet in *Conversations on Political Economy* even invented the format she first used, the simplified lesson in print aimed at educating common people. Martineau took the ideas and perfected the form—the primer textbook in a sophisticated field, the how-to manual—at a time when the desire for general education was highly developed, but the instructional materials for it were not. Similarly, her account of her travels in the United States helped change the shape of the travel book. Although it was in vogue for Europeans to travel in the new republic and write about it, Martineau did more than simply describe her journey. She formulated a comparative method for studying societies and analyzed the new American culture by measuring it against carefully stated principles. Quite possibly, she wrote the first "methodological essay" ever published, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*.. Her greatest originality was in her method. Significantly, she translated and abbreviated Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, the wellspring of social scientific thought, so effectively that it spread the Comtean word far and wide and gave Martineau herself a new systematic framework in positivism. Comte himself believed it was so good that he had it retranslated into French for his French disciples, and her translation and abridgment are still the standard edition of Comte's work used in English sociology textbooks today.

It was the same with political issues. She did not begin a single campaign, but whether it was British reform politics, American abolitionism, nursing in the Crimean War, or feminism, she was in the forefront, interpreting and fighting for the cause. John Stuart Mill took the first petition for woman's suffrage to Parliament in 1866, but Harriet Martineau signed it and had long worked for it. American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was her hero, and no other English writer wrote so much in the cause of American abolition of slavery as she. Florence Nightingale was on the battlefield, organizing and professionalizing nursing in the Crimea, and then back home organizing nursing education and the War Office in England, but Martineau was her champion in the press. It is the cumulative effect of Martineau's numerous contributions that forms a part of her lasting contribution.

Although in some ways Martineau was very much a woman of her time and a Victorian intellectual, she was also, along with a group of her contemporaries, a true progenitor of the intellectual mode that reigns in Anglo-American liberalism today and provides the dominant informing paradigm of mainstream Western feminism. It is this intellectual influence that constitutes her greatest

Notes

contribution. Her radicalism was the consistent strand in all her far-flung efforts. Its tenets were rationalism, progressivism, organizational order, voice for the inarticulate, respect for the individual, and faith in science, all of which determined right thinking. Hers was a singularly principled posture. She held the position that human free will is limited. What free will there is rests on the ability of the human to uncover the immutable laws of nature, physical, economic, and social. This radicalism of the Victorian era became the twentieth century's liberalism, and liberalism became the idea that did more than any other conceptual nucleus to make room for twentieth-century feminism clear into the 1980s. Harriet Martineau, I think, spelled out a feminist overview in the nineteenth century in terms that were radical then, and did it better, more consistently, and more often than most other feminists. I do not think she knew what she was doing, and I think she was often "wrong." I find some of her conclusions inadequate and even bigoted for my time and place. As an English-language feminist intellectual, I think I would recognize her as my forebear and the ancestor of my culture more readily than I would identify my illiterate Irish American great-grandmother who came to America in 1850 to escape the potato famine—or Emma Goldman, the Russian American anarchist feminist whom I would like a great deal, and whose radical twentieth-century ideas I enjoy exploring. But Goldman and our great-grandmothers have had minimal influence on what most American and English women think, and what we socially assume even outside the range of our conscious deliberations, whereas Martineau spelled out a century ahead of us these thoughts and deliberations. Harriet Martineau's radicalism led her to make a cogent, rational economic argument about conditions in Ireland in 1843 that included specific consideration of the special poverty of women in the same decade that my great-grandmother Graham was preparing for her boat trip to New Orleans to avoid starvation near Dublin. Martineau's kind of radicalism rattled the whole Anglo-American cognitive universe as well as the political one. Unlike the radicalism of the Emma Goldmans, it set in place the cognitive assumptions the majority of us, whether socialist, radical, or liberal feminists, operate under today, whether fully consciously or vaguely from within our culture's orientation to the world. These assumptions are the belief in order, the belief that change will bring about betterment, the belief that knowledge is power, the belief that the individual will do good if she or he is taught the good, and, above all, the substitution of a science of society for a theological or speculative base, as the first premise for other individual and collective ideas.

For the contemporary British journalist Sarah Curtis and me, and, I believe, the majority of the world that looks to concepts originating in English, Harriet Martineau articulated the world view that was formative, comprehensible, palatable for our feminism. For Martineau, it was very much a part of a whole, of politics, of economics, of life-style, of philosophy, of a belief system. Being inside the paradigm, she did not know this was so. She gave us our liberal faith in progress, science, and order, a faith that included feminism, what she and her contemporaries called the woman question, which would have as its "natural," inevitable outcome rights of women corresponding to those of men.

Although in our day challenges to the paradigm, both the undergirding philosophic one and the feminist one, have arisen, making us conscious of the characteristics of that world view and challenges to it, I believe that what Martineau gave us is an explanation of the fundamental intellectual precepts on which most of our feminism is posited. A retrospective look at some of her works on the subject of women and some of her advocacy of women's causes will help us, I believe, explain to ourselves where we have come from.

9.1 Analysis on Marriage

"Marriage is so unlike everything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings. Even if we loved some one else better than—than those we were married to, it would be of no use"—poor Dorothea, in her palpitating anxiety, could only seize her language brokenly—"I

Notes

mean, marriage drinks up all our power of giving or getting any blessedness in that sort of love. I know it may be very dear—but it murders our marriage—and then the marriage stays with us like a murder—and everything else is gone. And then our husband—if he loved and trusted us, and we have not helped him, but made a curse in his life—"

If Marian Evans rejected the sanctions which society has imposed on thelove of man and woman in the legal forms of marriage, it was not in awilful and passionate spirit. There are reasons for believing that she was somewhat touched in her youth with the individualistic theories of the time, which made so many men and women of genius reject the restraints imposed by society, as in the case of Goethe, Heine, George Sand, Shelley and many another; yet she does not appear to have been to more than a very limited extent influenced by such considerations in regard to her own marriage. The matter for surprise is, that one who regarded all human traditions, ceremonies and social obligations as sacred, should have consented to act in so individualistic a manner. She makes Rufus Lyon say—and it is her own opinion—that "the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness." Her marriage, after the initial act, had in it nothing whatever of lawlessness.

She believed there exists a higher rule than that of Parliament, and to this higher law she submitted. To her this was not a law of self-will and personal inclination, but the law of nature and social obligation. That she was not overcome by the German individualistic and social tendencies may be seen in the article on "Weimar and its Celebrities," in the Westminster Review, where, in writing of Wieland as an educator, she says that the tone of his books was not "immaculate," and that it was "strangely at variance, with that sound and lofty morality which ought to form the basis of every education." She also speaks of the philosophy of that day as "the delusive though plausible theory that no license of tone, or warmth of coloring, could injure any really healthy and high-toned mind." In the article on "Woman in France," she touches on similar theories. As this article was written just at the time of her marriage, one passage in it may have a personal interest, and shows her conception of a marriage such as her own, based on intellectual interest rather than on passionate love. She is speaking of the laxity of opinion and practice with regard to the marriage tie.

Heaven forbid [she adds] that we should enter on a defence of French morals, most of all in relation to marriage! But it is undeniable that unions formed in the maturity of thought and feeling, grounded only on inherent fitness and mutual attraction, tended to bring women into more intelligent sympathy with men, and to heighten and complicate their share in the political drama. The quiescence and security of the conjugal relation are, doubtless, favorable to the manifestation of the highest qualities by persons who have already attained a high standard of culture, but rarely foster a passion sufficient to rouse all the faculties to aid in winning or retaining its beloved object—to convert indolence into activity, indifference into ardent partisanship, dullness into perspicuity.

Her conception of marriage may have been affected by that presented by Feuerbach in his Essence of Christianity. In words translated into English by herself, Feuerbach says, "that alone is a religious marriage which is a true marriage, which corresponds to the essence of marriage—love." Again, he says that marriage is only sacred when it is an inward attraction confirmed by social and personal obligations; "for a marriage the bond of which is merely an external restriction, not the voluntary, contented self-restriction of love—in short, a marriage which is not spontaneously concluded, spontaneously willed, self-sufficing—is not a true marriage, and therefore not a truly moral marriage." As a moral and social obligation, marriage is to be held sacred; its sacredness grows out of its profound human elements of helpfulness, nurture and emotional satisfaction, while its obligation rises from its primary social functions. It does not consist in any legal form, but in compliance with deep moral and social responsibilities. Some such conception of marriage as this she seems to have accepted, which found its obligation in the satisfaction it gives to the

Notes

inner nature, and in the fulfilment of social responsibilities. The influence of Compte may also have been felt in the case of both Lewes and Marian Evans; they saw in the marriage form a fulfilment of human, not of legal, requirements.

While there is no doubt they would both gladly have accepted the legal form had that been possible, yet they were sufficiently out of sympathy with the conventionalities of society to cause them to disregard that form when it could not be complied with. They regarded themselves, however, as married, and bound by all the ties and requirements which marriage imposes. They proclaimed themselves to their friends as husband and wife, and they were so accepted by those who knew them. In her letters to literary correspondents she always mentioned Lewes as "my husband." The laws of most civilized nations recognize these very conditions, and regard the acceptance of the marriage relation before the world as a sufficient form.

Those who have written of this marriage, bear testimony to its devotion and beauty. The author of the account of her life and writings in the Westminster Review, an early and intimate friend, says the "union was from the first regarded by themselves as a true marriage, as an alliance of a sacred kind, having a binding and permanent character. When the fact of the union was first made known to a few intimate friends, it was accompanied with the assurance that its permanence was already irrevocably decreed. The marriage of true hearts for a quarter of a century has demonstrated the sincerity of the intention. 'The social sanction,' said Mr. Lewes once in our hearing, 'is always desirable.' There are cases in which it is not always to be had. Such a ratification of the sacrament of affection was regarded as a sufficient warrant, under the circumstances of the case, for entrance on the most sacred engagement of life. There was with her no misgiving, no hesitation, no looking back, no regret; but always the unostentatious assertion of quiet, matronly dignity, the most queenly expression and unconscious affirmation of the 'divine right' of the wedded wife. We have heard her own oral testimony to the enduring happiness of this union, and can, as privileged witnesses, corroborate it. As a necessary element in this happiness she practically included the enjoyment inseparable from the spontaneous reciprocation of home affection, meeting with an almost maternal love the filial devotion of Mr. Lewes's sons, proffering all tender service in illness, giving and receiving all friendly confidence in her own hour of sorrowful bereavement, and crowning with a final act of generous love and forethought the acceptance of parental responsibilities in the affectionate distribution of property, the visible result of years of the intellectual toil whose invisible issues are endless."

Their marriage helped both to a more perfect work and to a truer life. She gave poise and purpose to the "versatile, high-strung, somewhat wayward nature" of her husband, and she "restrained, raised, ennobled, and purified" his life and thought. He stimulated and directed her genius life into its true channel, cared for her business interests with untiring faithfulness, made it possible for her to pursue her work without burdens and distractions, and gave her the inspiration of a noble affection and a cheerful home. Miss Edith Simcox speaks of "the perfect union between these two," which, she says, "lent half its charm to all the worship paid at the shrine of George Eliot." She herself, Miss Simcox proceeds to say, "has spoken somewhere of the element of almost natural tenderness in a man's protecting love: this patient, unwearying care for which no trifles are too small, watched over her own life; he stood between her and the world, her relieved her from all those minor cares which chafe and fret the artist's soul; he wrote her letters; in a word, he so smoothed the course of her outer life as to leave all her powers free to do what she alone could do for the world and for the many who looked to her for help and guidance. No doubt this devotion brought its own reward; but we are exacting for our idols and do not care to have even a generous error to condone, and therefore we are glad to know that, great as his reward was, it was no greater than was merited by the most perfect love that ever crowned a woman's life." Mr. Kegan Paul also writes of the mutual helpfulness and harmony of purpose which grew out of this marriage. "Mr. Lewes's character attained a stability and pose in which it had been somewhat

Notes

lacking, and the quiet of an orderly and beautiful home enabled him to concentrate himself more and more on works demanding sustained intellectual effort, while Mrs. Lewes's intensely feminine nature found the strong man on whom to lean in the daily business of life, for which she was physically and intellectually unfitted. Her own somewhat sombre cast of thought was cheered, enlivened and diversified by the vivacity and versatility which characterized Mr. Lewes, and made him seem less like an Englishman than a very agreeable foreigner."

This marriage presents one of the curious ethical problems of literature. In this case approval and condemnation are alike difficult. Her own teaching condemns it; her own life approves it. We could wish it had not been, for the sake of what is purest and best; and yet it is not difficult to see that its effects were in many ways beneficial to her. That it was ethically wrong there is no doubt. That it was condemned by her own teaching is so plain as to cause doubt about how she could herself approve it.

Lewes had a brilliant and versatile mind. He was not a profound thinker, but he had keen literary tastes, a vigorous interest in science, and a remarkable alertness of intellect. His gifts were varied rather than deep; literary rather than philosophical. As a companion, he had a wonderful charm and magnetism; he was a graceful talker, a marvellous story-teller, and a wit seldom rivalled. His intimate friend, Anthony Trollope, says, "There was never a man so pleasant as he with whom to sit and talk vague literary gossip over a cup of coffee and a cigar." By the same friend we are told that no man related a story as he did. "No one could say that he was handsome. The long bushy hair, and the thin cheeks, and the heavy mustache, joined as they were, alas! almost always to a look of sickness, were not attributes of beauty. But there was a brilliance in his eye which was not to be tamed by any sickness, by any suffering, which overcame all other feeling on looking at him."

9.2 Views on Women

- "If a test of civilization be sought, none can be so sure as the condition of that half of society over which the other half has power." The "test of civilization" refers to how well that civilization protects minorities. She is saying that the acid test is how do those who are in power treat those who are not? A wicked society oppresses them, and a moral society respects them.
- "There is no country in the world where there is so much boasting of the 'chivalrous' treatment she enjoys….In short, indulgence is given her as a substitute for justice." There is a saying about people who live in a gilded cage; they are given luxury but they are imprisoned.
- Compared supposed morals to actual behavior. The Declaration of Independence express the idea of equality, but both slavery and the treatment of women show a shortcoming of the expressed morals. "Is it to be understood that the principles of the Declaration of Independence bear no relation to half of the human race? If so, what is the ground of the limitation? If not so, how is the restricted and dependent state of women to be reconciled with the proclamation that "all are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?"
- Said that women are made to believe that marriage is the only thing of real importance in a woman's life-and that they are taught to pretend they don't think so.
- Said that the morals of women are crushed. Said that in America, "the whole apparatus of public opinion is brought to bear offensively upon individuals among women who exercise freedom of mind in deciding upon what duty is, and the methods by which it is to be pursued" . Basically she says that women are denied ethical independence (form their own ethical judgments); they can hold opinions, but are not allowed to act on them.

Marriage

- Says marriage in America seems like it is more fair and less worrisome than it is in other countries. Marriage can never be fully successful "while the one sex overbears the other".

Notes

Marriage is better than it is in Europe, but it will remain imperfect so long as women continue to be "ill-educated, passive, and subservient".

- Marriage is different throughout various parts of the U.S. Women in America have the right to hold property, especially in the south, where the husband and wife get half of the property each. (Marriage is seen as the fundamental unit of productive work; the income belongs to both of them.)
- The rules in the south copy the old Saxon law that gives a wife half her husband's earnings. Spain, France, Italy and Germany give the same rights and it is English laws fail to honor the rights of the woman. The faults of that English law are copied by Massachusetts.
- Divorce in England is so difficult for women that people use it as a means to defraud others, and it drives them to unfaithfulness to their spouse. Because it is so difficult, only the rich can afford it in England. In the U.S., it is much more easy to obtain.
- Divorce in some states is almost as rigid as it is in England; in other states, cruelty, which is grounds for divorce in any state, is so broad a term that almost anyone can get a divorce with relative ease. Because "cruelty" is so broad a term, it is almost never cited as the reason for a divorce. (A more modern term to explain broadly defined cruelty is "irreconcilable differences" or "we grew apart.") Broadened more so that many states have "no-fault divorce."
- The only proper role which legislation has in relation to marriage is in relation to property and its equitable distribution between the husband and wife and the children. It has no value in attempting to regulate morality.
- One would hope that marriage in America is more a marriage of equality in love, but it is beginning to take on some of the corruption of Europe, in that it is becoming a means of ensuring financial safety.
- "The unavoidable consequence of such a mode of marrying is, that the sanctity of marriage is impaired, and that vice succeeds. Any one must see at a glance that if men and women marry those whom they do not love, they must love those whom they do not marry." (154) Saying that if you marry for money you have almost certainly set yourself up for infidelity.
- "Laws and customs may be creative of vice; and should be therefore perpetually under process of observation and correction: but laws and customs cannot be creative of virtue: they may encouraged and help to preserve it; but they cannot originate it." Means that laws created with vice are made to take advantage of others. Laws can't create virtue because they can't stop a person from wanting to take advantage of others, but they can be created either to take advantage of others or to restrain those who would.
- "Women, especially, should be allowed the use and benefit of whatever native strength their Maker has seen fit to give them. It is essential to the virtue of society that they should be allowed the freest moral action, unfettered by ignorance, and unintimidated by authority: for it is unquestioned and unquestionable that if women were not weak, men could not be wicked: that if women were bravely pure, there must be an end to the dastardly tyranny of licentiousness." Saying that her basic principle is that if people are better educated and less imprisoned, they'll make better decisions and are less likely to get into trouble.

9.3 The Successful Author

As her success and recognition grew, Martineau travelled widely in England, Europe, America, and the Middle East. These travels produced a number of travel guides to specific regions, books that were much more than the usual travelogues popular at the time. In addition to descriptions of scenery and places of interest, she described and analyzed the social, political, class, and religious structures of the various countries. In particular, Society in America ([1837]) 1994) and How to Observe Manners and Morals ([1838] 1989) are important precursors to what would eventually become the discipline of sociology.

Notes

Society in America [(1837)] 1994) demonstrates the beginnings of a comprehensive, empirical-sociological analysis. Martineau organized social interactions by classifying them according to the institution in which they take place. The role of religion, government, economy, slavery, and the position of women were looked at in relation to the discrepancies between the actual conditions in the United States and its professed adherence to democracy. Unlike her contemporary, Comte, Martineau's analysis was grounded in the real world rather than in abstract theories of society and history.

How to Observe Morals and Manners ([1838] 1989) is, according to Lipset ([1962] 1994:7), "perhaps the first boom on the methodology of social research in the then still unborn disciplines of sociology and anthropology," predating Durkheim's The Rules of Sociological Method ([1985] 1938) by almost half of a century. In How to Observe Morals and Manners, Martineau systematically discussed rules for conducting field studies, how to collect data, and roles that sympathetic understanding and generalizations play in developing a conceptual framework for studying society.

After the publications of Society in America and *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, Martineau was ill with gynecologic problems, which produced severe back pain and a general loss of physical strength. This resulted in confinement to her home for almost six years (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992). During their period, she continued to write, even writing about her own illness. Life in the Sickroom, originally published anonymously in 1844, was a study of illness that focused on the patient and those who attended the patient. When she did not show any improvement, and fearing she would be a lifelong invalid, Martineau turned to the controversial treatment of mesmerism, a treatment based on the belief that magnetic fluid was present in the body and could be regulated by principles of electricity and magnetism.

Martineau's recovery was almost immediate and her pain decreased. This in turn, allowed her to give up opiates, upon which she had become increasingly dependent. Although, her brother-in-law, Dr. Thomas Greenhow, who had been in charge of her medical care, claimed she had been making progress all along, Martineau was convinced that mesmerism was responsible for her recovery and wrote a book about the experience, *Letters on Mesmerism*, published in 1845. The publication of the book engendered a great deal of controversy with the general public and within Martineau's own family.

Mesmerism was an extremely controversial procedure and presented a real challenge to traditional medicine. The medical establishment was harsh in its criticism of Martineau's account of her recovery. Closer to home, Greenhow, attempting to preserve his medical reputation, published a case study of Martineau's illness, discrediting the mesmerism treatments. (Martineau had originally given him permission to publish the case in medical journal, but he instead published it in a popular form). The result was a rancorous split in the family, with Martineau's mother and sister taking the side of Dr. Greenhow (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992).

9.4 Religion and Women's Issues

After this episode, Martineau returned to writing on the theme of religion, which she had written about when younger. Now, however, she had changed her views, moving from the piety of her youth of being a critic of religion. *Eastern Life: Past and Present* (1848), which came out of her travels to the Middle East two years earlier, advocated the position that religion was like any other social institution– it was influenced by change in the society in which it was found. Using Saint- Simon's and Comte's "Law of Three Stages" as the basis of her analysis, Martineau saw religion as evolutionary, moving from magic and superstition to polytheism, and then to monotheism.

Martineau's next important work, from a sociological perspective, was a collection of short previously published articles dealing with the socialization of children. The articles were brought together in Household Education (1849). Two years later, *The letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, coauthored with Henry George Atkinson (1851), publicly announced her movement from being a Unitarian theist to an agnostic and a naturalist. The book generated even more

Notes

controversy that had her views on mesmerism. Conceived of as a work that would expound on the positive philosophy of Auguste Comte (in which she had become very interested), the reading public and her critics instead chose to focus on her agnosticism.

After the controversy over mesmerism and her religious views, Martineau began a translation of *Comte's The Positive Philosophy*, which was then a great influence on her thought. Coming from a French Huguenot background, and having studied French as a child, she was quite conversant in the language. Martineau's translation, published in 1853, was success, and not only introduced Comte to the English-speaking world, but, when it was translated back into French, it substantially increased Comete's popularity.

After the Comte translation, Martineau turned again to the social problems of England-focusing primarily on women's issues. Using various publication outlets, such as newspaper editorials, popular journal articles, and book reviews, she argued for specific policies that would help women. One such policy was the Married Women's Property Bill, which was passed by Parliament in 1857, and which changed the divorce laws under which women had little, if any, rights. Another endevor concerned attempts to repeal the Contagious Disease Acts of 1866 and 1869, which on the surface had been passed to control prostitution, but in actuality "gave indiscriminate power to the police to arrest and humiliate women"

When Martineau was in her early fifties, illness began to progressively limit her activities. She was incapacitated again, and this time was confined to her home for five years. Her doctors told her she not have long to live, so she hurried to finish her autobiography, leaving strict instruction that it not be published until after her death. She outlasted the medical predictions by over twenty years, reaching the age of seventy-three, and she continued to write prolifically, even writing her own obituary two weeks before her death on June 25, 1876.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Sarah Curtis was a

(*a*) Warter (*b*) Novelist (*c*) Journalist (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) John Stuart Mill took the first petition for woman's suffrage to Parliament in

(*a*) 1850 (*b*) 1866 (*c*) 1860 (*d*) 1870

(*iii*) Martineau was very much a woman of her time of a

(*a*) Romantic period (*b*) Victorian Period

(*c*) Classical Period (*d*) None of these

(*iv*) Society in America published in

(*a*) 1837 (*b*) 1845 (*c*) 1825 (*d*) 1840

9.5 Summary

- Harriet Martineau authored the first systematic methodological treatise in sociology, conducted extended international comparative studies of social institutions, and translated August Comte's Cours de philosophy positive into English, thus structurally facilitating the introduction of sociology and positivism into the United States. In her youth she was a professional writer who captured the popular English mind by wrapping social scientific instruction in a series of widely read novels.
- Harriet Martineau was the most astute female politician in England through almost four decades of the mid-nineteenth century. She did her work as a writer, an investigative traveler, a correspondent, and an interpreter of a multitude of intellectual trends. In all the vast number of her works and interests she was ever conscious of being female. She knew that being a woman meant that she had to do whatever she did differently from a man. Early in

Notes

1832 she wrote in a letter to Francis Place from her native Norwich, "I wish I were in London, . . . I want to be doing something with the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power."

- Martineau's politics included a thoroughgoing attention to women. It was an essential part of her blend of radicalism, and it had emerged well before her declaration to Place a month before her thirtieth birthday in 1832 that she must act with her pen, as that was the only access to politics a woman had. Her feminist politics was to continue strong throughout her life. Sensitive to her own womanhood and the limitations it imposed on her, the entry to feminism for many a woman through several feminist generations, Martineau gradually turned this personal sensitivity to social ends until the rights of women and advocacy of women's causes became one of her lifelong major efforts. The first piece she ever published—at age nineteen—was on women: "Female Writers of Practical Divinity."
- "Marriage is so unlike everything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings. Even if we loved some one else better than—than those we were married to, it would be of no use"—poor Dorothea, in her palpitating anxiety, could only seize her language brokenly—"I mean, marriage drinks up all our power of giving or getting any blessedness in that sort of love. I know it may be very dear—but it murders our marriage—and then the marriage stays with us like a murder—and everything else is gone. And then our husband—if he loved and trusted us, and we have not helped him, but made a curse in his life—"
- Her conception of marriage may have been affected by that presented by Feuerbach in his Essence of Christianity. In words translated into English by herself, Feuerbach says, "that alone is a religious marriage which is a true marriage, which corresponds to the essence of marriage—love."
- This marriage presents one of the curious ethical problems of literature. In this case approval and condemnation are alike difficult. Her own teaching condemns it; her own life approves it. We could wish it had not been, for the sake of what is purest and best; and yet it is not difficult to see that its effects were in many ways beneficial to her. That it was ethically wrong there is no doubt. That it was condemned by her own teaching is so plain as to cause doubt about how she could herself approve it.

9.6 Key-Words

1. Didactic fictional : Inclined to teach or moralise excessively.
2. Euphemistically : Affected, metaphorical, mild.

9.7 Review Questions

1. Briefly examine the life of Martineau
2. Discuss the views of Martineau on Marriage

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*c*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*b*) (*iv*) (*a*)

9.8 Further Readings



1. Martineau, Harriet, 'On Marriage' 1838. Quotidian. Ed. Patrick Madden. 12th Feb., 2007.

Notes

Unit 10: Harriet Martineau-On Women: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
10.1 Martineau's Childhood
10.2 Adulthood
10.3 Martineau's Writings
10.4 On Women's Education
10.5 On Female Education
10.6 Summary
10.7 Key-Words
10.8 Review Questions
10.9 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about Harriet Martineau's Views on Women.
- Discuss Writings of Martineau

Introduction

Called by William Davenport "the first of the notable women of the nineteenth century," Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich on June 12th, 1802, the fifth child of Thomas Martineau and Elizabeth Rankin Martineau. Of French Huguenot origin, the extensive family boasted a long line of surgeons but Thomas Martineau was a bombazine manufacturer. Martineau's childhood, according to her Autobiography, was not a particularly happy one for she was a nervous, fearful child, often ill, and often imagining herself singled out by her mother and siblings for criticism. She was, however, fortunate in her education. After being taught Latin, writing, arithmetic, and French at home by her older brothers and sister, she and her sister Rachel attended Rev. Isaac Perry's school for two years where she received the same education as the boys. At about the age of 12, she first became troubled by the deafness that was to be with her for life, to a greater or lesser extent. As an unhappy teenager, she was sent to stay with her aunt in Bristol where she was inspired by the intellectual zeal of the family and influenced by the teachings of the prominent Unitarian minister, Dr. Lant Carpenter. In 1826 her father died, and three years later the family business failed. Martineau and her two sisters were thus forced to earn their own living, a circumstance which she felt was far better than living in genteel poverty. By then, however, Martineau had already embarked on a literary career, her first article appearing in the Unitarian periodical, The Monthly Repository, about 1821.

"Harriet Martineau authored the first systematic methodological treatise in sociology, conducted extended international comparative studies of social institutions, and translated August Comte's Cours de philosophi positive into English, thus structurally facilitating the introduction of sociology and positivism into the United States. In her youth she was a professional writer who captured the

Notes

popular English mind by wrapping social scientific instruction in a series of widely read novels. In her maturity she was an astute sociological theorist, methodologist, and analyst of the first order. To the extent that any complex institutional phenomenon such as sociology can have identifiable founders, Alice Rossi (1973, 118-124) justly celebrates Harriet Martineau as 'the first woman sociologist.'"

10.1 Martineau's Childhood

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802, the sixth of eight children in an upper middle class English family. Her parents were Thomas and Elizabeth (Rankin) Martineau. Thomas was a manufacturer of textiles and an importer of wine in the old cathedral city of Norwich. Norwich was once a distinguished cultural and manufacturing center, but became a casualty of the industrial revolution later in Harriet's life. Thomas's family was considered one of the first families of Norwich, he belonged to an elite literary circle that included Mrs. Barbauld and Amelia Opie. Thomas was a devout Unitarian, a trait that he passed onto his daughter Harriet.

Harriet's mother, Elizabeth was a literate and intelligent woman but had little formal education, making her feel out of place among the cultural elite of Norwich. Harriet described her mother as a domestic tyrant and believed that her tyrannies stemmed from her perceived social inadequacies. But at the same time, it is true that the frugal efficiency and impersonal nature with which she ran her house was characteristic of the 19th century matriarch. Elizabeth enforced in Harriet a fearfulness and feelings of self doubt that would take her years to work out.



Did u know? Harriet described childhood overall as a "burdensome experience" written in Household Education (1849)

No creature is so intensely reserved as a proud and timid child: and the cases are few in which the parents know anything of the agonies of its little heart...It hides its miseries under an appearance of indifference or obstinacy, till its habitual terror impairs its health, or drives it into a temper of defiance or recklessness. I can speak with some certainty of this, from my own experience. I was as timid a child as ever was born.

And though Harriet became deaf later in her life she claimed she had no sense of smell or taste, which some have linked to a traumatic event that blocked it out psychologically. Harriet's mother had turned her over to a wet nurse soon after she was born, which was custom at the time. "The wet nurse hired to suckle the child had concealed from Mrs. Martineau that she had all but ceased lactation". To make up for this neglect, Elizabeth made milk the staple of Harriet's diet, and though she hated it, could not bring herself to complain, ...and so went for years having the feeling of a heavy lump in her throat for the whole of every morning - sometimes choking with it, and sometimes stealing out into the yard to vomit; and worse than the lump in her throat she had depression of the spirits for the first half of every day, which much injured the action of her mind at lessons and was too much for her temper (Martineau in Household Education p.185)

Though most of her childhood was miserable, Harriet's two sources of joy came from her maternal instinct for her younger brother James and her youngest sister, Ellen. When Ellen was born, Harriet said she would " like to observe the growth of a human mind from the very beginning". Harriet's education was largely at home through self study. She had early exposure to subjects routinely taught only to males. University study was barred to women at the time, but Harriet maintained a regime of intense, self directed investigation throughout her life. When Harriet was about 15 years of age, and her deafness worsening, she was sent by her parents to stay with her aunt and uncle. It was through her uncle that she was introduced to the writings of Locke, Hartley and the principle of sensation. Her uncle was also a minister and reinforced her religious views as a devout Unitarian.

Notes

10.2 Adulthood

During the 1820's, the Martineau family went into economic decline when Thomas died. Despite the imposing threat of poverty, Harriet felt a sense of freedom in facing the reality of earning her own living. She was able to escape the confines of a middle class Victorian marriage when her fiance, John Hugh Worthington, had a mental and physical collapse. She had no relationship after this - stating later that "there is a power of attachment in me that has never been touched." She remained single and independent the rest of her life.

Harriet "successfully supported herself as an author in various forms, including essays, tracts, reviews, novels, journal articles, travelogues, biographies, how-to manuals, newspaper columns, histories, children's stories and sociologically informed non-fiction". By 1829 she had decided that decided to commit herself to the profession, writing:

I have determined that my chief subordinate object in life shall henceforth be the cultivation of my intellectual powers, with a view to the instruction of others by my writings. On this determination I pray for the blessing of God...I believe myself possessed of no uncommon talents, and of not an atom of genius; but as various circumstances have allowed me to think more accurately than some women, I believe that I may so write on subjects of universal concern as to inform some minds and stir up others...of posthumous fame I have not the slightest expectation or desire. To be useful in my day and generation is enough for me.

Harriet's first literary efforts were reverently religious due to her devout Unitarianism. The adoption of Necessitarianism by Harriet, however, provided her with the intellectual bridge to a social scientific perspective. In Economy Political of (1832-1834) she abandoned her ecclesiastical dogma and began a relationship with social theory. In this book she used fiction to explicate the principles of the new science of political economy. She lived in London during these years and became part of a very influential and advanced literary circle. The circle included: Charles Babbage, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, Florence Nightingale, Charles Dickens, Thomas Malthaus, William Wodsworth, Charlotte Bronte, and Charles Darwin.

10.3 Martineau's Writings

In 1834 Harriet began a two year study and visit of the United States. She reported her findings in *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). These empirical studies emerged at the same time as her foundational treatise on sociological data collection, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838). This book articulated the principles and methods of empirical social research.

Society in America is her most widely known work to sociologists in the U.S., addressing the issues of methodological strategy confronted with ethnocentrism. In this work she compared valued moral principles and observable social patterns, illustrating insightfully the distinctions between rhetoric and reality. Her writings in *How to Observe Morals and Manners* offered a positivist solution to the correspondence problem between inter subjectivity, verifiable observables, and unobservable theoretical issues.

Before Marx, Engels or Weber, Martineau examined social class, religion, suicide, national character, domestic relations, women's status, criminology, and interrelations between institutions and individuals. In 1848, after her trip to the Mid-East and the publication of her work: *Eastern Life Past and Present*, Harriet openly embraced atheism. She lost much of the support in her family, especially her younger brother James, a known cleric at the time. She also received a cold reception in the populous but was supported by her circle of literary friends. William Lloyd Garrison wrote in her support: I know what you have dared to be brave, what you have suffered, by the frank avowal of what a hireling priesthood and a corrupt church have branded atheistical sentiments. Though my belief in immortality is without peradventure, I desire to tell you that you skepticism, in lack of evidence, on that point, has never altered my confidence in the goodness of your heart and the

Notes

nobleness of your character...I respect and admire conscientious dissent and doubt...Heresy is the only thing that will redeem mankind. (Pichanick,191) In 1851 Harriet translated Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* into English, facilitating the introduction of positivism into American thought.

Later Life

Harriet Martineau spent her later years away from the bustling streets of London, moving to the serene Lake District. This was a welcome contrast to the years of constant trial and controversy that was characteristic of most of her life. There is no thorough bibliography of Martineau's reviews and journal articles. During her life, she wrote over 1500 columns, undertook pioneering methodological studies in what is now called sociology. She was forgotten, in sociology, literature, history, and journalism due to the male academic system. She died after years of illness in 1876, but, in her usual fashion, had already written her obituary, nearly twenty years before:

Her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say. In short, she could popularize, while she could neither discover nor invent. She could sympathize in other people's views and was too facile in doing so; and she could obtain and keep a firm grasp of her own, and, moreover, she could make them understood. The function of her life was to do this, and, insofar as it was done diligently and honestly, her life was of use, however far its achievements may have fallen short of expectations less moderate than her own. Her duties and her business were sufficient for the peace and the desires of her mind. She saw the human race, as she believed, advancing under the law of progress; she enjoyed her share of the experience, and had no ambition for a larger endowment, or reluctance or anxiety about leaving the enjoyment of such as she had. (Pichanick, 239).

10.4 On Women's Education

A central doctrine of Martineau's feminist thought from the very start of her writing career was the importance of education for women. Excerpts from her second *Monthly Repository* article,"On Female Education," written in 1822, open this section. In that piece, written when she was barely twenty years old, Martineau made the claim, amazing for her youth and period, that women's intellectual inferiority to men is based on women's lack of mental training, others' expectations of women, and women's circumstances rather than women's ability. She cleverly side stepped the issue of whether women can be men's equals, saying instead she was looking "to show the expediency of giving properscope and employment to the powers which they [women] do possess."

Similarly, she avoided the nature versus nurture argument of whether educational potential is dependent on "the structure of the body" or "bodily frame." Although in this youthful argument, published in the organ of Unitarian Christianity to which she was then faithful, she allowed that women should be educated to enhance their relationships to men and make them better mothers and held that the greatest value of education is to give women a better understanding of Christianity, she nevertheless had a very clear-sighted perception of the dreariness and degradation, the retrogression that lack of education means in women's lives. In later life, Martineau was to abandon and even to repudiate the religion that this early essay relied upon, but she was always to believe in the great importance of education for women.

Forty years later she was of a different mind on the *purpose* but not on the benefit of women's education. Writing in *Once a Week* in 1861, she deplored the justification of "good intellectual training as fitting women to be 'mothers of heroes,''companions to men,' and so on. . . . Till it is proposed, in educating girls, to make them, in themselves and for their own sakes, as good specimens of the human being as the conditions of the case allow, very little will be effected by any expenditure of pains, time, and money." Included here are pieces on basic education for

Notes

women, including a section from her 1848 book, *Household Education*, which was a kind of popular manual for the moral and practical instruction of a household, and a long article from *Cornhill Magazine* (1864) entitled "Middle-Class Education in England: Girls." In both of these she held that education should be for the sake of improving the person. She insisted that girls should study the same subjects as boys, that both should have time in school for both study and play, mental exercise and physical exercise,but that girls should study the domestic arts as well.

Never did she question that women should become skillful at housekeeping; rather she claimed that education would make them better at it. This is drawn from her own life, for she prided herself on her needle work, her household management, and the sensible way in which she entertained. She argues in several contexts that not all Englishwomen are cared for by a man and that women need to be educated for an occupation so that they can earn their own way. These ideas came out of Martineau's own middle-class experience of having been left with a small legacy poorly invested. It did not occur to her to argue for universal education. She did, however, favor higher education for qualified women early on and enthusiastically supported the establishment in London of Queen's College in Hartley Street and the Ladies' College in Bedford Square (now Bedford College). An article on higher education, "What Women are Educated For," forms the third selection in this section.

10.5 On Female Education

In discussing the subject of Female Education, it is not so much my object to inquire whether the natural powers of women be equal to those of men, as to shew the expediency of giving proper scope and employment to the powers which they do possess. It may be as well, notwithstanding, to inquire whether the difference be as great as is generally supposed between the mental structure of men and of women.

Doubtless the formation of the mind must depend in a great degree on the structure of the body. From this cause the strength of mind observable in men is supposed to arise; and the delicacy of the female mind is thought to be in agreement with the bodily frame. But it is impossible to ascertain how much may depend on early education; nor can we solve our doubts on this head by turning our view to savage countries, where, if the bodily strength be nearly equal in the two sexes, their minds are alike sunk in ignorance and darkness. In our own country, we find that as long as the studies of children of both sexes continue the same, the progress they make is equal. After the rudiments of knowledge have been obtained, in the cultivated ranks of society, (of which alone I mean to speak,) the boy goes on continually increasing his stock of information, it being his only employment to store and exercise his mind for future years; while the girl is probably confined to low pursuits, her a spirings after knowledge are subdued, she is taught to believe that solid information is unbecoming her sex, almost her whole time is expended on light accomplishments, and thus before she is sensible of her powers, they are checked in their growth; chained down to mean objects, to rise no more;and when the natural consequences of this mode of treatment arise,all mankind agree that the abilities of women are far inferior to those of men. But in the few instances where a contrary mode of treatment has been pursued, where fair play has been given to the faculties, even without much assistance, what has almost invariably been the result? Has it not been evident that the female mind, though in many respects differently constituted from that of man, may be well brought into comparison with his? If she wants his enterprising spirit, the deficiency is made up by perseverance in what she does undertake; for his ambition, she has a thirst for knowledge; and for his ready perception, she has unwearied application. It is proof sufficient to my mind, that there is no natural deficiency of power, that, unless proper objects are supplied to women to employ their faculties, their energies are exerted improperly. Some aim they must have, and if no good one is presented to them,they must seek for a bad one. We may find evidence in abundance of this truth in the condition of women before the introduction of Christianity. Before the revelation of this blessed religion, (doubly blessed to the female sex,) what

Notes

was their situation? They were either sunk almost to the level of the brutes in mental darkness, buried in their own homes, the slaves instead of the companions of their husbands, only to be preserved from vice by being excluded from the world, or, not being able to endure these restraints, employing their restless powers and turbulent passions in the pursuit of vicious pleasures and sensual gratifications. And we cannot wonder that this was the case, when they were gifted with faculties which they were not permitted to exercise, and were compelled to vegetate from year to year, with no object in life and no hope in death.Observe what an immediate change was wrought by the introduction of Christianity. Mark the zeal, directed by knowledge, of the female converts, of so many of whom St. Paul makes honorable mention as his friends, on account of their exertions in the great cause. An object was held out for them to obtain, and their powers were bent to the attainment of it, instead of being engaged invice and folly. The female character has been observed to improve since that time, in proportion as the treasures of useful knowledge have been placed within the reach of the sex.

I wish to imply by what I have said, not that great stores of information are as necessary to women as to men, but that as much care should be taken of the formation of their minds. Their attainments cannot in general be so great, because they have their own appropriate duties and peculiar employments, the neglect of which nothing can excuse; but I contend that these duties will be better performed if the powers be rationally employed. If the whole mind be exercised and strengthened, it will bring more vigour to the performance of its duties in any particular province.

The first great objection which is made to enlightening the female mind is, that if engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, women neglect their appropriate duties and peculiar employments . Second That the greatest advances that the female mind can make in knowledge, must still fall far short of the attainments of the other sex. Third That the vanity so universally ascribed to the sex is apt to be inflated by any degree of proficiency in knowledge, and that women therefore become forgetful of the subordinate station assigned them by law, natural and divine.

To the first objection I answer, that such a pursuit of knowledge as shall lead women to neglect their peculiar duties, is not that cultivation of mind for the utility of which I am contending. But these duties may be well performed without engaging the whole time and attention. If "great thoughts constitute great minds," what can be expected from a woman whose whole intellect is employed on the trifling cares and comparatively mean occupations, to which the advocates for female ignorance would condemn her? These cares and these occupations were allotted to women to enable them to smooth our way through life; they were designed as a means to this end, and should never be pursued as the end itself. The knowledge of these necessary acts is so easily acquired, and they are so easily performed, that an active mind will feel a dismalvacuity, a craving after something nobler and better to employ the thoughts in the intervals of idleness which must occur when these calls of duty are answered, and if nothing nobler and better is presented to it, it will waste its energies in the pursuit of folly, if not of vice, and thus continually perpetuate the faults of the sex. . . .

It must be allowed by all, that one of woman's first duties is to qualify herself for being a companion to her husband, or to those with whom her lot in life is cast. She was formed to be a domestic companion, and such an one as shall give to home its charms, as shall furnish such entertainment that her husband need not be driven abroad for amusement. This is one of the first duties required from a woman, and no time can be misemployed which is applied to the purpose of making her such a companion, and I contend that a friend like this cannot be found among women of uncultivated minds. If their thoughts are continually occupied by the vanities of the world, if that time which is not required for the fulfilment of household duties, is spent in folly, or even in

Notes

harmless trifles in which the husband has no interest, how are the powers of pleasing to be perpetuated, how is she to find interesting subjects for social converse? If we consider woman as the guardian and instructress of infancy, her claims to cultivation of mind become doubly urgent. It is evident that if the soul of the teacher is narrow and contracted, that of the pupil cannot be enlarged. With respect to the second objection, viz., That the greatest advances which the female mind can make in knowledge must fall far short of the attainments of the other sex,—I allow that the acquirements of women can seldom equal those of men, and it is not desirable that they should. I do not wish to excite a spirit of rivalry between the sexes; I do not desire that many females should seek for fame as authors. I only wish that their powers should be so employed that they should not be obliged to seek amusements beneath them, and injurious to them. I wish them to be companions to men, instead of playthings or servants, one of which an ignorant woman must commonly be. If they are called to be wives, a sensible mind is an essential qualification for the domestic character; if they remain single, liberal pursuits are absolutely necessary to preserve them from the faults so generally attributed to that state, and so justly and inevitably, while the mind is buried in darkness.

If it be asked what kind and degree of knowledge is necessary to preserve women from the evils mentioned as following in the train of ignorance, I answer that much must depend on natural talent, fortune and station; but no English woman, above the lower ranks of life, ought to be ignorant of the Evidences and Principles of her religious belief, of Sacred History, of the outline atleast of General History, of the Elements of the Philosophy of Nature, and of the Human Mind; and to these should be added the knowledge of such living languages, and the acquirement of such accomplishments, as situation and circumstances may direct.

With respect to the third objection, viz., that the vanity souniversally ascribed to the sex is apt to be inflated by any degree of proficiency in knowledge, and that women, therefore, become forgetful of the subordinate station assigned them by law, natural and divine: the most important part of education, the implanting of religious principles must be in part neglected, if the share of knowledge which women may appropriate, should be suffered to inflate their vanity, or excite feelings of pride. Christian humility should be one of the first requisites in female education, and till it is attained every acquirement of every kind will become a cause of self-exaltation, and those accomplishments which are the most rare, will of course be looked upon with the most self-complacency. But if the taste for knowledge were more generally infused, and if proficiency in the attainments I have mentioned were more common, there would be much less pedantry than there is at present; for when acquirements of this kind are no longer remarkable, they cease to afford a subject for pride. Let woman then be taught that her powers of mind were given her to be improved. Let her be taught that she is to be a rational companion to those of the other sex among whom her lot in life is cast, that her proper sphere is *home*—that there she is to provide, not only for the bodily comfort of the man, but that she is to enter also into community of mind with him; . .. As she finds nobler objects presented to her grasp, and that her rank in the scale of being is elevated, she will engraft the vigorous qualities of the mind of man on her own blooming virtues, and insinuate into his mind those softer graces and milder beauties, which will smooth the ruggedness of his character:

Classical Feminist Theory

The contributions of female thinkers to classical sociological theory have generally been overlooked throughout the years, even though they systematically developed understandings of society similar to those of their male counterparts. However, the theories of these female thinkers are distinctive because they incorporate the standpoint of gender, focus on the lives and work of women, critically

Notes

engage the problem of social inequality, and offer solutions to ameliorate social problems. This chapter discusses the work of several women theorists, activists, and social reformers, and it presents the case for why it should be included in the canon of classical sociological theory.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Martineau was born in

(*a*) 1802 (*b*) 1805 (*c*) 1810 (*d*) 1819

(*ii*) Harriet described childhood as

(*a*) Burdensome (*b*) Joyful

(*c*) Most pleased (*d*) Golden

(*iii*) 'The book' How to observe morals and manners' published in

(*a*) 1836 (*b*) 1838 (*c*) 1850 (*d*) 1831

(*iv*) "On Female Education" was written in

(*a*) 1822 (*b*) 1820 (*c*) 1815 (*d*) 1825

10.6 Summary

- Martineau has come to be known as the "founding mother" of sociology for both her theoretical and empirical work. A prolific writer, Martineau published twenty-five didactic novels in a series called Illustrations of Political Economy; the first sociological research text, How to Observe Morals and Manners; three volumes on her field work in the United States, Society in America; and a book on her research in the Middle East, Eastern Life: Present and Past. She also translated and edited Comte's Positive Philosophy, a volume that was so highly acclaimed that Comte translated her rendition of his book back into French.
- Martineau viewed the central concern of sociology to be what she called "social life in society," the patterns, causes, consequences, and problems of the social world. Like Comte and Spencer, she was a positivist who believed in social laws and the progressive evolution of society. According to Martineau, the most important law of social life is human happiness, and much of her work sought to understand the extent to which individuals developed "morals and manners" to achieve this end.
- Martineau used a comparative methodological approach to study the moral principles in different societies and to uncover the degrees to which these societies had progressed. She devised three measures to study progress, including the condition of the less powerful groups in society, the cultural attitudes towards authority and autonomy, and the extent to which all individuals were provided the tools to realize autonomous moral action.
- Unlike Spencer, Martineau was overwhelmingly concerned with gender, racial, and class inequality. For example, when researching the moral condition of America, Martineau focused on marriage patterns and slavery. She also studied the conditions of wage-earning women in Great Britain and the lives of the poor in her field work in the Middle East.

10.7 Key-Words

1. Positivism : It is a philosophy of science based on the view that in the social as well as natural science.
2. Perseverance : Steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving.

Notes

10.8 Review Questions

1. Write briefly about Martineau's Childhood.
2. Explain the views of Harriet on Female Education.
3. Briefly describe Harriet's thought on women.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*b*) (*iv*) (*a*)

10.9 Further Readings



1. Martineau, Harriet, 'On Marriage' 1838. Quotidian. Ed. Patrick Madden. 12th Feb., 2007.

Notes

Unit 11: Harriet Martineau-On Women: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
11.1 Biographical Information
11.2 Major Works
11.3 Critical Reception
11.4 On Women
11.5 Analysis
11.6 Harriet Martineau's Feminism
11.7 Summary
11.8 Key-Words
11.9 Review Questions
11.10 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss the biographical information with the critical reception
- Examine Harriet Martineau's feminism

Introduction

Martineau was a writer of exceptional breadth and vitality, earning her reputation by unflinchingly inserting herself into the great debates of the day, including women's rights and slavery. She moved from genre to genre and from subject to subject with ease, writing children's stories and political commentary, travelogues and short stories, historical studies and translations of philosophy. Martineau's career spanned fifty-five years and despite tremendous physical and cultural obstacles she established a prominent position in the intellectual life of Victorian culture.

11.1 Biographical Information

Martineau was the sixth of eight children, born June 12, 1802 to Thomas and Elizabeth Martineau. Her childhood was marked by chronic digestive and nervous system ailments, and she was born without a sense of smell or taste. A voracious reader, the young Martineau committed large portions of *Paradise Lost* to memory, reciting verses to help her fall asleep. Raised within the Unitarian church, Martineau strongly believed in the doctrine that every effect has a cause which neither divine nor human will can change. Belief in this doctrine proved to be a stabilizing force throughout her life. In addition, Martineau's first writings appeared in the Unitarian periodical *Monthly Repository* in 1822. However, Martineau's religious beliefs began to depart from Unitarianism in the 1830s, and she began to identify the worship of God with the service of humanity.

In the years 1832-34, Martineau published a collection of stories entitled *Illustrations of Political Economy,* intended to inform the general reader about economic matters through the use of fiction.

Notes

The work was highly successful, and provided her with enough money to fund an extensive tour of the United States. Her experiences in America formed the basis of two books, *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). From 1839 to 1844, a uterine tumor left Martineau bedridden. In search of a cure for her condition, she allowed herself to be hypnotized, after which her pain vanished. In 1846, she traveled again, this time to the Middle East, where she studied ancient Egyptian religion and visited biblical sites. During the course of these studies, Martineau ceased to believe in Christian doctrines, including the afterlife. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Martineau became a prolific contributor to the *London Daily News* and other liberal periodicals, writing several articles per week. Despite a recurrence of her illness in 1854, Martineau continued to write, and over the course of her career she wrote more than 1,600 articles for the *Daily News.* Her illness forced Martineau to retire in 1866, and she died from bronchitis in 1876.

11.2 Major Works

Martineau worked in many genres and discussed many social, religious and political issues during her prolific career. Several of her first articles argued that the apparent differences in intellect between men and women were the product of educational discrimination. Her focus on education continued in *Household Education* (1849), which was based on personal experience. In this work, Martineau condemned the Christian practice of teaching a child that his or her nature is inherently evil and emphasized parental love as vital to the development of an individual's self-esteem. Her American travel experiences provided the material for *Society in America,* in which Martineau expressed a generally favorable impression of democracy. However, she also commented on several shortcomings she found in democratic society, including the fact that the free enterprise system allowed the greed of a few people to trample the rights of the many. Martineau also noted that women seemed more restricted in their lives than what she had anticipated after reading the Declaration of Independence. Her long illness prompted the writing of *Life in the Sick-Room,* in which she counseled readers on how to live with illness as well as how to behave when visiting those who are sick. Martineau's trip to the Middle East yielded *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848) in which she explained the reasons for her religious conversion. Her *Autobiography,* written in 1854 and 1855, but published posthumously in 1877, raised a furor due to its atypically secular focus as well as the perceived lack of decorum with which she described the inadequacies of her family.

11.3 Critical Reception

While she was admired and respected by many during her lifetime—Auguste Comte reportedly stated that he preferred her translation of his *Positive Philosophy* to his text—Martineau was also vehemently criticized for her writing on behalf of social causes. While Martineau was largely ignored by critics after her death, in recent years there has been a renewed interest in her political, social, and economic writings. Many of Martineau's social and philosophical beliefs, in the view of Mitzi Myers, were shaped by the author's early home life. Myers claims that the "key details in Harriet's early domestic history were fear, emotional deprivation, remorse, and lack of self-respect." Gillian Thomas has observed that in writing *Illustrations of Political Economy,* Martineau's aim was to "reach working-class readers" by rendering information on a complex subject in the style of a work of a fiction rather than that of an academic treatise. Valerie Sanders has expressed her agreement with this assessment, stating that "[Martineau's] *Illustrations* teem with teacher-figures, mostly clergymen and manufacturers, who try to enlighten the poorer members of their local community." Many critics believe that *Society in America* is Martineau's most enduring work because of its astute observations on early American society and how that society was living up to the goals set forth in the Declaration of Independence. It has often been compared to Alexis de Tocqueville's classic work *Democracy in America.* According to Shelagh Hunter, Martineau's study

Notes

"lacks both the detachment and the structural clarity of *Democracy in America,* but its thorough personal engagement is its peculiar strength." As Deborah Logan has asserted, Martineau's chief desire as a writer was to "eradicate slavery in its various forms: racial slavery, seen in the abolition-themed writings; sexual slavery, illustrated by her focus on world-wide oppressions of women; and social slavery, demonstrated by her aim to educate the working classes about the forces creating and perpetuating their economic exploitation."

11.4 On Women

Harriet Martineau was a life long feminist, and she became one early and on her own. "The woman question" was what she and other like-minded nineteenth-century thinkers and activists called what we call feminism. In addition to giving her individual attention to women and women's concerns Martineau participated in groups in both England and the United States that were fertile environments for deliberate efforts on women's behalf. Probably not too much should be made of the fact that she wrote admiringly of women writers in her first published piece ("Female Writers of Practical Divinity") or that she went to some length to establish the fact that the form she used for her political economy tales was derived from a woman. Still, these attributions acknowledged influences from women that she valued from the first. Her first intellectual groups, the Norwich and then the London Unitarians and Utilitarians, were probably far more important in her development, since a component of the thought of both Unitarian religion and Utilitarian philosophy was favorable to women having a larger place in intellectual and public pursuits. Although the first of Martineau's several breaches with people she had once favored came with W. J Fox, the Unitarian editor, because of his setting up a household with Eliza Flowers without marriage, Martineau was surely influenced by Fox's liberality toward talented women and the intellectual role such women as Flowers played in Fox's editorship. Her scruples about sexual liaisons were more stereotypically Victorian than the views and practices of many of her associates. Yet sexuality per se was not a feminist issue in the nineteenth century. To consider it an obstacle to the realization of feminist goals is to interpret nineteenth-century views in light of twentieth-century feminism which has made the link between sexuality and gender role assignment. It is ironic from a contemporary feminist stance, if not from her own, that she regenerated or kept up correspondence or a working relationship with the men in such affairs, but not the women. The American group with whom Martineau found the greatest affinity during her 1834-1836 travels, the Garrisonian abolitionists, like the British Unitarians and Utilitarians, valued the activity and importance of women and was markedly more advanced on the question than many other groups. Anti-slavery women's groups in America were to provide leaders and formative ideas in its early years for the movement for women's rights per se, a movement for women as well as a movement of and by women on behalf of slaves. The five pieces that follow are ones in which Martineau addressed feminism in some general way. In the opening selection she questions the advisability of marriage for everyone, a position that required considerable bravery in 1838. She raised the question as a means of making judgments about the character of a society, but whatever its intent, it was a courageous question to ask and one that anticipates such contrasting variations of the theme in the 1970s as Kate Millett's "sexual politics" and Jessie Bernard's study of "his" and "hers" marriages that yield greater benefits to men and lesser benefits to women. Martineau was shrewd and discerning to pick the place of women and the treatment of women in marriage as indices of a society's distinctiveness. In How to Observe Morals and Manners she set up criteria for analyzing a society. Published after her books on the United States, Society in America and Retrospect of Western Travel, it reflects the method of comparative study of societies used in those books. She set down what she believed to be an appropriate set of principles, laws of right and wrong, if you will, and then gauged the society by how well she thought it met the principles. As the title suggests, these principles had to do with "morals," deep values held and acted upon, and" manners," assumptions and practices of courtesy, kindness, politeness, or the absence thereof, the surface manifestations of moral depth.

Notes

This work was indeed an early sociological work on method, as Alice Rossi has claimed. Martineau goes halfway toward what early anthropologists and sociologists several decades later hoped to achieve. That is, her methodological approach involved the attempt to evolve some detached criteria for objectivity. That far, she succeeds in being a primitive scientist. But the other half of her approach provides her limitation. She inserts her own values, quite assuredly and dogmatically, as the appropriate criteria. This was, however, four years before Comte's Positive Philosophy was published and at least thirteen years before she read it. She was herself to criticize this phase of her thinking as "metaphysical" at a later time.

Her feminism and her social science may be in conflict in this article. To raise such questions about women and marriage was important on women's behalf however she did it, but to do it dogmatically is not good enough. Calling monogamy of the English variety "the natural method" for all coupling is application of an unexamined value system. Calling for removal of inferior treatment of women is suggesting a new one.

The second selection, "Criticism on Women," published in 1839, is ostensibly a review essay of three items, but is in fact an essay on the abuse of women and the right of women to be respected and honored or to be criticized according to standards of honesty and fairness to all people. One of the persons she defends so splendidly in this piece is the young Queen Victoria, just come to the throne in 1837. Another (this review is anonymous) is herself, attacked ad hominem for her deafness and her womanhood after daring to write on population. She had received vicious treatment in the reviews of "Wealand Woe in Garveloch." Writing under the editorship of John Gibson Lockhart in the Quarterly Review, John Wilson Croker was the first to damn her. He wrote, "and most of all it is quite impossible not to be shocked, nay, disgusted, with many of the unfeminine and mischievous doctrines on the principles of social welfare. . . . A woman who thinks child-bearing a crime against society! An unmarried woman who declaims against marriage! ! A young woman who deprecates charity and provision for the poor!!!" The attack was patently unfair, not only for its rejection of the mild story favoring birth control, but also for its sexi strebuke of Martineau personally as a woman who would dare to write on such a subject. In "Criticism on Women," she coins the word "Crokerism" to identify this particular kind of reputation smearing. The very year (1832) of Croker's article, in fact, she was still allowing for the possibility that she might marry and, hence, bear children herself. Writing to her mother in anticipation of her mother's coming to live with her in London, she laid out, along with her claim to professional independence as a woman, her right to marry: "There is another chance, dear mother, and that is, of my marrying. I have no thoughts of it. I see a thousand reasons against it. But I could not positively answer for always continuing in the same mind. . . . I mean no more than I say, I assure you; but, strong as my convictions are against marrying, I will not positively promise." The third piece is a marvelous letter written, no doubt, to Maria Weston Chapman and read at an American women's rights convention at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1851. In the letter, Martineau repeats her themes of the necessity of equal treatment of all humans, of the importance of education to enable women to flourish, of the need for the object of education to be occupation, and of the silliness of the old controversy of influence versus office. However, it is significant here that she couched her persuasive arguments in terms of the need to do a scientific experiment. Although her writing had always been analytical, this letter was written in the year she was first reading Comte's Positive Philosophy, and it is clear that she has a new faith that social experiment will yield proof of women's ability. This letter from 1851 is an early example of her work after she had found clarity in science and provides a good exhibit of her utter confidence in the outcome of an experiment not yet conducted. Only to those of us with post-Darwinian, post-Freudian, post-Einsteinian mentalities is such assurance unwarranted. It was entirely earnest and even revolutionary in Martineau.

If the personal is the political is the intellectual, we may have the key to Martineau's vast outpouring

Notes

of work about women. One element in the shaping of her young life was the insanity and apparent suicide of the one man to whom she ever seemed to have had a romantic attachment, her fiance John Worthington, a college friend of her brother James. I do not think it is the whole story. I do not think it is even a great part of the story. Yet, I take at her word the account she gives in the fourth selection of her singleness being the great benefit to her work, in effect her work being her love. In so doing, I differ with her recent biographers who have speculated about her lesbianism or absence of it, her sexuality, latent or active. R. K. Webb concludes that she was a "latent lesbian." Pichanick disagrees with him, arguing that although Martineau had important "affectionate female friendships," there is no evidence for her being alesbian. I believe she was probably behaviorally a sexual and emotionally sexually naive, and I think she means what she says in her Autobiography: that Worthington's death liberated her to be alone and like it. The fifth selection, on Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and the woman question, occurs in the context of a description of William Godwin as one of her morning visitors in London in the early days of her fame in 1833. She delighted in Godwin and greatly enjoyed his company, and, seeing no conflict of ideology loyalties, Martineau expressly denied that her interest in him arose because of his connection with Mary Wollstonecraft. Instead, she said, the opposite was true. She had no use for Wollstonecraft, while honoring Godwin. She claimed Wollstonecraft did the cause of woman a disservice, proclaiming Wollstonecraft "a poorvictim of passion, with no control over her own peace, and no calmness or content except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied."

All that, while extolling the pleasure of visiting with the man who loved Wollstonecraft—presumably with a passion of his own—and who had done everything he could to keep her memory alive! The passion she means, of course, is not merely sexual extravagance but the exaggerated romantic flamboyance of a personality like Wollstonecraft's. Following that judgment of Wollstonecraft, however, her comments on the woman question sound uncharacteristically self-righteous. Her tone is hostile toward some women, but her message is still consistently that of the rational moralist. She writes calmly of her expectation that women will achieve the right to vote.

11.5 Analysis

If I could be providence to the world for a time, for the express purpose of raising the condition of women, I should come to you to know the *means*—the *purpose* would be to remove all interference with affection, or with any thing which is, or which even might be supposed to be, demonstrative of affection—In the present state of women minds, perfectly uneducated, and with whatever of timidity and dependance is natural to them increased a thousand fold by their habits of utter dependance, it would probably be mischievous to remove at once all restraints, they would buy themselves protectors at a dearer cost than even at present—but without raising their natures at all, it seems to me, that once give women the desire to raise their social condition, and they have a power which in the present state of civilization and of mens characters, might be made of tremendous effect. Whether nature made a difference in the nature of men and women or not, it seems now that all men, with the exception of a few lofty minded, are sensualists more or less—Women on the contrary are quite exempt from this trait, however it may appear otherwise in the cases of some—It seems strange that it should be so, unless it was meant to be a source of power in demi-civilized states such as the present—or it may not be so—it may be only that the habits of freedom and low indulgence in which boys grow up and the contrary notion of what is called purity in girls may have produced the appearance of different natures in the two sexes—As certain it is that there is equality in nothing, now—all the pleasures such as there are being mens, and all the disagreables and pains being womens, as that every pleasure would be infinitely heightened both in kind and degree by the perfect equality of the sexes. Women are educated for one single object, to gain their living by marrying—(some poor souls get it without the churchgoing

Notes

in the same way—they do not seem to me a bit worse than their honoured sisters)—To be married is the object of their existence and that object being gained they do really cease to exist as to anything worth calling life or any useful purpose. One observes very few marriages where there is any real sympathy or enjoyment of companionship between the parties—The woman knows what her power is, and gains by it what she has been taught to consider "proper" to her state—The woman who would gain power by such means is unfit for power, still they *do* use this power for paltry advantages and I am astonished it has never occurred to them to gain some large purpose: but their minds are degenerated by habits of dependance—I should think that 500 years hence none of the follies of their ancestors will so excite wonder and contempt as the fact of legislative restraint as to matters of feeling—or rather in the expressions of feeling. When once the law undertakes to say which demonstration of feeling shall be given to which, it seems quite inconsistent not to legislate for *all,* and say how many shall be seen, how many heard, and what kind and degree of feeling allows of shaking hands—The Turks is the only consistent mode.

I have no doubt that when the whole community is really educated, tho' the present laws of marriage were to continue they would be perfectly disregarded, because no one would marry—The widest and perhaps the quickest means to do away with its evils is to be found in promoting education—as it is the means of all good—but meanwhile it is hard that those who suffer most from its evils and who are always the best people, should be left without remedy. Would not the best plan be divorce which could be attained by *any, without any reason assigned,* and at small expence, but which could only be finally pronounced after a long period? not *less* time than two years should elapse between suing for divorce and permission to contract again—but what the decision will be *must* be certain at the moment of asking for it—*unless* during that time the suit should be withdrawn—(I feel like a lawyer in talking of it only! O how absurd and little it all is!)—In the present system of habits and opinions, girls enter into what is called a contract perfectly ignorant of the conditions of it, and that they should be so is considered absolutely essential to their fitness for it!—But after all the one argument of the matter which I think might be said so as to strike both high and low natures is—Who would wish to have the person without the inclination? Whoever would take the benefit of a law of divorce must be those whose inclination is to separate and who on earth would wish another to remain with them against their inclination? I should think no one—people sophisticate about the matter now and will not believe that one "*really would wish to go*." Suppose instead of calling it a "law of divorce" it were to be called "Proof of affection"—They would like it better then—At this present time, in this state of civilization, what evil would be caused by, first placing women on the most entire equality with men, as to all rights and privileges, civil and political, and then doing away with all laws whatever relating to marriage? Then if a woman had children she must take the charge of them, women would not then have children without considering how to maintain them. Women would have no more reason to barter person for bread, or for any thing else, than men have—public offices being open to them alike, all occupations would be divided between the sexes in their natural arrangement. Fathers would provide for their daughters in the same manner as for their sons.

All the difficulties about divorce seem to be in the consideration for the children—but on this plan it would be the women's *interest* not to have children—*now* it is thought to be the womans interest to have children as so many *ties* to the man who feeds her. *Sex* in its true and finest meaning, seems to be the way in which is manifested all that is highest best and beautiful in the nature of human beings—none but poets have approached to the perception of the beauty of the material world—still less of the spiritual—and there never yet existed a poet, except by the inspiration of that feeling which is the perception of beauty in all forms and by all the means which are given us, as well as by *sight.* Are we not born with the *five* senses, merely as a foundation for others which we may make by them—and who extends and refines those material senses to the highest—into infinity—best fulfils the end of creation—That is only saying—*Who enjoys most, is most virtuous*—

Notes

It is for *you*—the most worthy to be the apostle of all loftiest virtue—to teach, such as may be taught, that the higher the *kind* of enjoyment, the *greater* the *degree*—perhaps there is but one class to whom this *can* be *taught*—the poetic nature struggling with superstition: *you* are fitted to be the saviour of such—If you've spent any time in Victorian England, you've undoubtedly run into Harriet Martineau. She's one of those persons who shows up everywhere there seems to be something important happening. There she is in the summer of 1830 at the dinner party where John Stuart Mill meets Mrs. Harriet Taylor. Two years later she can be spotted at Charles Babbage's home for a demonstration of a working component of his unfinished Calculating Engine. "All were eager to go to his glorious soirées;" she later wrote in her autobiography, "and I always thought he appeared to great advantage as a host. His patience in explaining his machine in those days was really exemplary. I felt it so, the first time I saw the miracle, as it appeared to me..." While Charles Darwin is sailing around the world aboard the *Beagle*, his older brother Erasmus is making the acquaintance of Harriet Martineau, who later spends much time with the Darwins and Wedgwoods, inspiring them with her strong anti-slavery politics. Some even think that marriage might be in the future for Erasmus Darwin and Harriet. (Harriet Martineau never married.)

When the controversial pseudo-scientific *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* is published anonymously in 1844, Harriet Martineau is suspected of being the author. (So is Charles Babbage, Augustus De Morgan, Charles Lyell, Charles Darwin, Lady Lovelace, and many others.) In 1845 Harriet Martineau meets the 25-year old Mary Ann Evans, and inspires the younger woman to become a professional writer and move to London, which she does to achieve great success under the pseudonym George Eliot. All this time, Harriet Martineau is writing dozens of novels and stories, and thousands of articles for periodicals, becoming the most famous female English journalist of the 19th century.

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802 to a Unitarian household. At the age of 20 she contracted otosclerosis, and as she aged she became increasingly deaf — requiring her to use an ear trumpet for most of her life — with no sense of smell and a defective sense of taste. Her father's business collapsed in the financial crisis of 1825–26, leaving the family poor and Harriet in the position of needing to earn an income. As a deaf woman, she couldn't teach and she had already been writing, so she began writing more, with fame and notoriety soon to follow. Her *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832—35) consisted of nine volumes of stories that explored various concepts of economics of the sort preferred by free-trade Whigs. She traveled to America and was threatened with lynching after speaking out against slavery, writing about her experiences in the three-volume *Society in America* (1837) followed by the three-volume *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). She wrote books on education, mesmerism, and history, became a follower of Comte, and published *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte, Freely Translated & Condensed by Harriet Martineau* (1853), which was then translated back into French because her condensation and elimination of repetition managed to improve on the original.

In 1858, Harriet Martineau began writing for *The Edinburgh Review* — standard reading for politically progressive households of the period, and one of several periodicals of the era that featured what seemed to be book reviews, but were actually long, often unsigned, essays. For the October 1858 issue, Harriet. Martineau contributed "The Slave Trade in 1858", one of her many articles about slavery.

Harriet Martineau's major contribution to the literature of 1859 was an April 1859 article for *The Edinburgh Review* focusing on another subject she was passionate about — the political and economic mistreatment of women in "Female Industry".

"Female Industry" is a fascinating artifact, mostly for the vision it gives us of the wide scope of jobs women performed in England 150 years ago. As Harriet Martineau indicates, English law of the period assumed that "every woman is supported ... by her father, her brother, or her husband." But this was no longer the case. With the rise of the middle class, many women were working

Notes

outside the home for their own subsistence, unfortunately for wages that would not allow them any type of retirement. How many women are we talking about? Using census figures and other data, Harriet Martineau comes to a conclusion towards the end of her article that I find astonishing:

Out of six millions of women above twenty years of age, in Great Britian, exclusive of Ireland, and of course of the Colonies, no less than half are industrial in their mode of life. More than a third, more than two millions, are independent in their industry, are self-supporting, like men."

Apparently English men and women of the time were also astonished, following court cases that resulted from a new limited ability for women to obtain divorces that had only been in effect in England following the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

The proceedings in the new Divorce Court, and in matrimonial cases before the police-magistrates, have caused a wide-spread astonishment at the amount of female industry they have disclosed. Almost every aggrieved wife who has sought protection, has proved that she has supported her household, and has acquired property by her effective exertions.

Toward the beginning of the article, Harriet Martineau makes it clear that for working women, "their work should be paid for by its quality, and its place in the market, irrespective of the status of the worker." She then methodically analyzes industry by industry, examining the work that women do in that industry, indicating its difficulty, and at times (when she has the data available) showing a wide discrepancy in wages between male and female workers.

The professional dairy woman ... has been about the cows since she was tall enough to learn to milk, and her days are so filled up, that it is all she can do to keep her clothes in decent order. She drops asleep over the last stage of her work; and grows up ignorant of all other knowledge, and unskilled in all other arts. Such work as this ought at least to be paid as well as the equivalent work of men; indeed, in the dairy farms of the West of England the same labour of milking the kine is now very generally performed by men, and the Dorset milkmaid, tripping along with her pail, is, we fear, becoming a myth. But even in Cheshire the dairymaids receive, it appears, only from 8*l*. to 10*l*. a-year, with board and lodging. The superintendent of a large dairy is a salaried personage of some dignity, with two rooms, partial or entire diet, coal and candle, and wherewithal to keep a servant — 50*l*. a year or more. But of the 64,000 dairy women of Great Britain, scarcely any can secure a provision for the time when they can no longer lean over the cheese tub, or churn, or carry heavy weights. For anyone who believes that "equal pay for equal work" was a concept developed by feminists in the 1970s, Harriet Martineau's article reveals just how long this concept was successfully resisted and suppressed. Low-paid work takes an enormous toll on the women, and Martineau finds that maids of all work are particularly susceptible to medical and financial problems:

The physician says that, on the female side of lunatic asylums, the largest class, but one, of the insane are maids of all work (the other being governesses). The causes are obvious enough: want of sufficient sleep from late and early hour, unremitting fatigue and hurry, and, even more than these, anxiety about the future from the smallness of the wages.... Too often we find that the most imbecile old nurses, the most infirm old charwomen, are the wrecks and ruins of the rosy cooks and tidy housemaids of the last generation. This ought not to be.

"Female Industry" was published without a byline (as many articles of that era were published), and the anonymous author of the article at times speaks from a male perspective — perhaps to sound a little more objective about the subject. (At one point the article even mentions "a letter from Harriet Martineau"!) Yet, the article does not look disapprovingly on working women. Martineau clearly feels that female industry is inevitable with the rise of the middle class. She seems to enjoy seeing women work outside the home, and argues that they be allowed to engage even in those occupations jealously guarded by the men. From our youth up, some of us have known how certain of the wisest and most appreciated of physicians have insisted that the health

of women and their children will never be guarded as it ought to be till it is put under the charge of physicians of their own sex. The moral and emotional considerations involved in this matter need no discussion. Given that millions of English women were already supporting themselves by their work, it would be useless to try to stop the trend. Instead, female industry must be nurtured with education and opportunities. She concludes: With this new condition of affairs, new duties and new views must be accepted. Old obstructions must be removed; and the aim must be sent before us, as a nation as well as in private life, to provide for the free development and full use of the powers of every member of the community. In other words, we must improve and extend education to the utmost; and then open a fair field to the powers and energies we have educed. This will secure our welfare, nationally and in our homes, to which few elements can contribute more vitally and more richly than the independent industry of our country women.

Harriet Martineau was a woman of strong opinions, not only about political and economic issues but about religious ones. From the beginnings of her Unitarian background, her religious beliefs gradually fell away, until an outright atheism was revealed in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851), co-authored with Henry G. Atkinson, a book that one wit summed up as "The doctrine seems to be this: There is no God, and Harriet is his prophet." She was very ready for Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published later in 1859. In one letter she wrote, What a book it is! — overthrowing (if true) revealed Religion on the one hand, & Natural (as far as Final Causes & Design are concerned) on the other. The range & mass of knowledge take away one's breath. (quoted in Adrian Desmond & James Moore, *Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist*, p. 486) To Darwin's cousin Fanny Wedgwood, Harriet Martineau wrote,

One might say "thank you" all one's life without giving any idea of one's sense of obligation.... we must all be glad that he has set the world on this great new track. (quoted in Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: The Power of Place*, p. 92) The only problem that Martineau found with the book was the religious terminology that Darwin seemed to use too much! As she continued in her letter to Fanny, I rather regret that C.D. went out of his way two or three times ... to speak of "the Creator" in the popular sense of the First Cause ... It is curious to see how those who would otherwise agree with him turn away because his view is "derived from" or "based on" "Theology" ... It seems to me that having carried us up to the earliest group of forms, or to the single primitive one, he & his have nothing to do with how those few forms, or that one, come here. His subject is the "Origin of Species," and not the origin of Organisation; & it seems a needless mischief to have opened the latter speculation at all. — There now! I have delivered my mind. (Desmond & Moore, p. 486-7)

11.6 Harriet Martineau's Feminism

It is tempting to follow Martineau's own method and measure her feminism against specific principles. For historical fairness, they should be principles that she herself endorsed. Yet that would not yield a full enough picture, for it is my intent to show her contribution to later feminism, including that of our time, as well as to the efforts of her time. Thus, the criteria must be both her own and ones that we still consider important today, though we must be aware of the difference between those ideas that were deliberately feminist on her part and the ones to which we in a later age have assigned feminist significance. Martineau, herself a model of women's accomplishment for later feminists, was often a genuine promoter of other women. She was sensitive and conscious of efforts made by women on women's behalf, even though her tongue could sometimes be acid in gossip about some women. Contemporary feminist scholars can note with appreciation that in her *Illustrations of Political Economy* she repeatedly gave Mrs. Jane Marcet credit for the idea of her own work. Though she raised her eyebrows at Mary Wollstonecraft's personal sexual behavior and what she regarded as her romantic excesses, she fully acknowledged Wollstonecraft as the first English public advocate of women's rights. Present at the dinner at which John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor met, she is reputed to have been one of the worst gossips about the long, devoted relationship Taylor and Mill maintained while Taylor was married to someone else. Yet

Notes

she was supportive of their feminism. Although she was not very tolerant of or informed about sexuality and unorthodox relationships, she was very supportive of work, education, political rights, and personal dignity for women; and she went a long way in supporting all manner of their manifestations. She came to be able to do this by objectifying the actual women involved as she led their causes.

In a leader in the London *Daily News* published June 28,1854, Harriet Martineau wrote that "the wife-beating which has excited so much attention for the last two or three years, and which we have endeavored to meet by express legislation, has revealed to alarmed thousands of us that the mistresses of tyrannical men have a great advantage over the wives in being able to free themselves from their tyrant when they please. They can tell the truth in court about the treatment they have undergone; for they have nothing to fear from the vindictiveness of the brute when he comes out of gaol again." This observation came in response to a report of a parliamentary Commission on Divorce. A Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was to pass in 1857, and Martineau's support of it in the newspaper and her expression of that support in terms of the easing of brutality against poor women are indications of her surprisingly foresighted feminist outlook. The new law only established a single court where there had previously been three different jurisdictions to handle divorce cases and did not actually give women much relief, but Martineau's argument is immensely important as an early feminist framework for later criticism and campaigns. Long before the coining of the word "feminist" and thirty years before the beginning of an organized women's rights campaign in England, Harriet Martineau was a wide-ranging, progressive, and thorough-going feminist in nearly every sense in which that word is used today. Embracing practically every cause clearly in favor of women's advancement in her lifetime and taking up certain issues that were not sodefinitely identified as parts of the feminist fabric until the 1960s and 1970s, Martineau was a giant among early feminists. An overview of Martineau's writings and the issues and campaigns she fought for with her pen gives a contemporary reader both a profile of the emergence of feminism in nineteenth-century England and America and a theoretical foundation for the feminist social philosophy still dominant today. She was the first Englishwoman to make the analogy between the American woman's lot and the slave's. Publishing that claim in *Society in America* in the context of a full analysis of the situation of American women, she and her book received far more attention, both positive and negative, for her abolitionist views than for her feminism. Yet the book included a very astute chapter entitled "The Political Non-Existence of Women," in which she claimed that the democratic principle was violated by the denial of political participation to women. It was from women that she had learned much that she knew about the United States, and she gave credit to these women for their achievements and talents. At the same time she criticized the lack of authority and choice for American women and the resulting servitude for many of them. Martineau's position as a model for today's feminists or as aninspiration for female achievers is important. Alice S. Rossi's inclusion of Martineau's chapter on women from *Society in America* in her selection of classic feminist statements, *The Feminist Papers* (1973), indicates the current value of Martineau's thought. In presenting her chapter from Martineau, Rossi especially represents Martineau as a forerunner of the discipline of sociology.

Others could make such a claim for her relation to economics, though Martineau was a popularizer in that field, not an original thinker. Although it would be much too extravagant to claim a significant place for her as a fiction writer—her didactic tales, children's stories, and novel *Deer brook* having small current readership—it is, nevertheless, important to note that she wrote a considerable amount of fiction. The most comprehensive "first" that Martineau accomplished as a woman was as a journalist, for besides earning her living from her early thirties by writing numerous popular books and many articles for major journals, she contributed, as mentioned, over 1,600 editorials to the London Daily *News* on an enormous range of political and social topics during the 1850s and 1860S.

Notes

The historian Janet Courtney, writing in the 1930s about the British women's movement in the 1830s, believed Harriet Martineau to be the leading feminist of the period. Courtney wrote, "And when I found Harriet Martineau, the ablest of them all, announcing that the best advocates of women's rights would be the successful professional women and the 'substantially successful authoresses,' I recognized that she had put in a nutshell the whole truth about the women's movement."

Courtney believed that in the 1830s women and women's rights made great advances only to fall back under the influence of Queen Victoria and the Victorians. Though Martineau did not write the passage Courtney selected until she wrote her *Autobiography* in 1855, faith in individual women's accomplishments was a central point of Martineau's feminism from the beginning. The female role model idea is significant in Martineau's first published piece, "Female Writers of Practical Divinity," published in the Unitarian journal *Monthly Repository* in 1822. The article opens,

I do not know whether it has been remarked by others as well as myself, that some of the finest and most useful English work son the subject of Practical Divinity are by female authors. I suppose it is owing to the peculiar susceptibility of the female mind, and its consequent warmth of feeling, that its productions, when they are really valuable, find a more ready way to the heart than those of the other sex; and it gives me great pleasure to see women gifted with superior talents, applying those talents to promote the cause of religion and virtue. In contradiction to her theme, however, she signed the article," Discipulus," implying a male author, a practice she followed in pseudonym or textual voice off and on throughout her career in spite of the fame she gained in the 1830s writing in her own name.

She was to echo her first printed sentiment about women achievers as models in a piece written as an obituary for Florence Nightingale when Nightingale was believed to be dying after the Crime an War, but not published until 1910 when Nightingale actually died. Florence Nightingale was the woman of her time whom Martineau perhaps most greatly admired, and she wrote, Florence Nightingale encountered opposition—from her own sex as much as the other; and she achieved, as the most natural thing in the world, and without the smallest sacrifice of her womanly quality, what would beforehand have been declared a deed for a future age.

She was no declaimer, but a housewifely woman; she talked little, and did great things. When other women see that there are things for them to do, and train themselves to the work, they will get it done easily enough. There can never be a more unthought-of and marvellous career before any working woman than Florence Nightingale has achieved; and her success has opened a way to all others easier than anyone had prepared for her.

Education for women was another theme Martineau pursued all her life. Her second published piece was on that topic. She was well aware early that intellectual occupation was not considered fitting for a girl, writing that "when I was young, it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously; and especially with pen in hand. . . . and thus my first studies in philosophy were carried on with great care and reserve." Martineau's youthful writings suggested that women should be educated in order to enhance their companionship with men and improve their teaching of their own children, although she alway sadvocated a rigorous course of study for girls, physical exercise for girls as well as boys, and domestic arts for women in addition to the program followed by males. Her feminist consciousness grew, and in later life, she encouraged the idea of education of women for its own sake and recommended a full program of advanced subjects. As a public figure and in the press, she supported the establishment of the colleges for women in London, Queens College in Harley Street and the Ladies College in Bed ford Square, of the first professional school of nursing at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, and of women's medical education.

Work for women was also a frequent theme. Martineau made a strong argument—amazing for the time—in favor of equal pay for equal work. Hers was not the literal argument still heard today

Notes

that women should be paid the same amount of money for exactly the same jobs as men but was much stronger, insisting that equivalent labor deserves equal pay. She made it most forcefully, in fact, on behalf of the dairy-maids whose job of milking the cows twice daily, straining the milk, preparing cheese, and churning but terhad formerly been exclusively a female occupation. She wrote that "such work as this ought at least to be paid as well as the equivalent work of men; indeed, in the dairy farms of the west of England the same labour of milking the kine is now very generally performed by men, and the Dorset milkmaid, tripping along with her pail, is, we fear, becoming a myth."

In her writings on women's work Martineau repeatedly expressed a concern for health as well as pay. She wrote in several pieces of the degeneration of stamina and mental well-being experienced by governesses and servant women because of the crushing demands of their employers: "The physician says that, on the female side of the lunatic asylums, the largest class, but one, of the in sane are maids of all work (the other being governesses). The causes are obvious enough: want of sufficient sleep from late and early hours, unremitting fatigue and hurry, and, even more than these, anxiety about the future from the smallness of the wages." If not the insane asylum, then the workhouse followed for many of these women, for they did not earn enough to save for their old age. But it was better wages and the obligation of good advice from their employers on savings pensions for themselves that Martineau advocated. Ever the laissez-faire economist, she did not envision a social scheme for retirement benefits.

For middle-class married women, Martineau advocated improved household man agement skills exemplified in learning expert cookery. The teaching of such skills as cookery could also become an occupation. These women need not be house bound, though, for many of them were already engaged alongside their husbands, brothers, and father sin shop keeping, crafts, small manufacturing, and the desk work, especially accounting, that went with such employment. Martineau believed that such women should be encouraged to be more active in these pursuits, but that they would be much more useful if they were taught sufficient arithmetic to manage sales and accounting effectively. Though she did not propose wide-scale female ownership of businesses in preference to men and typically discussed female shopkeeping as though husbands were in charge, she did encourage single women to learn business skills and widows to learn to manage their inherited shops to avoid having to remarry so quickly. She spoke of nursing and medicine as newly opened occupations that should be attractive to middle-class women and predicted that scientists, artists, and writers would emerge from among educated women.

When Harriet Martineau was fifty-two, she wrote to all her correspondents asking them to address her henceforth as "Mrs.," buther request had nothing to do with marriage. It was an acknowledgment that greater respect was carried by the title "Mrs." than "Miss" and an assertion that she was entitled to such respect. This was resonant with the original meaning of the word "mistress," of which "Mrs." was firstan abbreviation, a word that meant female authority in the household and had nothing to do with marital status. That meaning was largely gone by the end of the eighteenth century, but a few distinguished nineteenth-century single women like Martineau attempted to renewit, showing a sensitivity to the dignity conveyed by a title. Their attempts came from the same impulse that pressed feminists of the 1970s to introduce "Ms." as a general title by which a woman might be addressed whatever her marital status. Martineau was outspoken about the degradation and limits imposed on women by marriage, but she was understandably ambivalent in some of her statements and contradictory in some of her behavior having to do with marriage. In her time and place where marriage was so definitively normative for women, the wonder is that she was at times so piercingly critical of marriage in general, not that most of the time she fostered and approved of specific marriages between people she knew. This too is more consistent with contemporary feminists' views of the disabilities of marriage than with those of Martineau's own time.

Notes

This contradiction is vividly seen in two illustrations. In the" Memorials," Maria Weston Chapman reports the memory one of Harriet Martineau's oldest friends had of Martineau's deep regret at the marriage of a young lady friend. She related that Martineau said that marriage "would deprive her of larger opportunities of usefulness to the world." Yet in 1854 she was apparently very happy to sponsor the wedding for her maid from her house at Amble side. She wrote, refusing an invitation received from a Mrs. Barkworth: "Many thanks for your invitation; but the intended bridegroom will be here on Sunday, and I am engaged every day till after the wedding. My house, hands, heart and time will be very full till it is over."

More enigmatic is her approval of Margaret Fuller's marriage to Count Ossoli during the last years of Fuller's life. Given her opinion that marriage would "deprive [one young woman] of larger opportunities of usefulness," it is striking to find Martineau writing of "that remarkable regeneration which transformed her [Fuller] from the dreaming and haughty pedant in to the true woman. In a few months more she had loved and married; and how interesting and beautiful was the closing period of her life, when husband and child concentrated the power and affections which had so long run to waste in intellectual and moral eccentricity." This is a rather severe judgment of Fuller, for although Martineau claims to have been her friend, twice in the *Autobiography* she sharply criticizes the American woman. She is resentful that Fuller negatively criticized *Society in America* forits emphasis on the abolition of American slavery. She was also stung by a report from London that Fuller had called her" commonplace" after a visit as her house guest at The Knoll. Though near in age and occupation, and even in high-strung temperament, Martineau and Fuller were opposites philosophically, Martineau the rationalist, Fuller the romantic, Martineau the positivist, Fuller the transcendentalist. It is no wonder that they finally did not get along with each other. This evidence makes me wonder if Martineau was not being spiteful rather than truthful about the value of marriage for Margaret Fuller.

On marriage in theory, Martineau wrote in *How to Observe Morals and Manners*: " The traveller everywhere finds women treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal interest. Any agreement thus formed is imperfect, and is liable to disturbance; and the danger is great in proportion to the degradation of the supposed weaker party. The degree of the degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country." And "It is a matter of course that women who are furnished with but one object,—marriage—must be as unfit for anything when their aim is accomplished as if they had never any object at all. They are no more equal to the task of education than to that of governing the state; and, if any unexpected turn of adversity befals them, they have no resource but a convent, or some other charitable provision." Her observations of marriage were confirmed by letters she received from English women describing the "intolerable oppression" of women under law and custom in England.

Martineau published theoretical considerations of political equality for women several times between 1837 and 1851. All were about women in American society; and all were very positive. But only once, in a passage in her *Autobiography*, did she address at its most abstract level what was typically called in her day the woman question, and on that occasion she is atypically negative. The tone of that piece suggests that women will come to have political rights if women will be worthy of them. Most other times she was far more willing to indict the political system for excluding women.

The woman's suffrage campaign did not really get under way until the late 1860s when Martineau's health was failing. However, she had written in 1855, "I have no vote at elections, though I am a tax-paying housekeeper and responsible citizen; and I regard the disability as an absurdity, seeing that I have for a long course of years influenced public affairs to an extent not professed or attempted by many men."

She went on in that passage, however, to disclaim any intention of agitating over suffrage, believing that women would have a vote in time. The vote was clearly simply one among many women's

Notes

issues for her, not the central, singular driving focus for women's rights that it came to be in both England and America after her death. Nevertheless, she readily signed the petition for women's suffrage that John Stuart Mill presented to Parliament in 1866. She admired Mill and believed him to be an effective supporter of women's rights, but adding her name to those of the 1,498 other women on the petition was not a strong gesture. Her conviction of the rightness of the principle of the vote for women, incidentally, was not shared by the ruling Queen Victoria, still mourning deeply for her husband, then dead for five years, nor by the most admired woman in England at the time and Martineau's friend, Florence Nightingale.

Martineau's final act of political activism in her old age was on behalf of women and again in the service of a campaign led by another, the campaign of the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts led by Josephine Butler. This time a thoroughly feminist organization was launched. It was liberal and even patronizing in the sense that it consisted of "respectable" women working for "fallen" women. Nevertheless, this movement was radical in the sense that the women involved realized that all women were potentially incriminated by laws that identified prostitutes too vaguely and punished women but not men for acts of prostitution. Martineau was invigorated by writing publicly for this campaign, which provided an appropriate finale for a distinguished career as journalist, thinker, and feminist.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Martineau's first writings appeared in unitarian periodical published in

(*a*) 1822 (*b*) 1825 (*c*) 1830 (*d*) 1828

(*ii*) The first writing written by Harriet was

(*a*) Illustration of Political Economy (*b*) Monthly Depository

(*c*) Retrospect of Western Travel (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Martineau's Antobiography was written in

(*a*) 1854 – 85 (*b*) 1865 – 66

(*c*) 1850 -51 (*d*) 1853- 54

(*iv*) The Feminist Papers indicates the ..... of Martineau's thought

(*a*) Current value (*b*) Past Value

(*c*) Future value (*d*) None of these

11.7 Summary

- The selections in this book were chosen to give a full view of the ways in which Harriet Martineau wrote about women and about those feminist issues, both historical and contemporary, that she addressed. Often she wrote several pieces on the same topic, and I usually picked the shortest one if it gave the complete scope of her argument. To choose from her many biographical works on women, I used two criteria: that a particularly feminist point was made and that the biographee as herself notable. To my knowledge, the pieces on American women, Irish women, and the women in the harems in Cairo and Damascus are the only ones she wrote in a deliberately social mode about women in groups. I wanted to show how she attended to feminist material and developed feminist theory throughout her lifetime, so I chose material from different periods of her writing. Since my purpose was solely to develop the idea that over forty years Martineau fostered feminist causes and structured feminist theory in a great many works, Excluded from the selections printed here passages that were not directly about women. I have left nearly all of Martineau's spelling, punctuation, and phrasing as they were in the original source, even though occasionally one looks like a printer's error or a grammatical oversight. I have assumed that the reader's interest will be primarily on the topic of women, so I have kept to a minimum, interesting

though it is, commentary or notes on the surrounding historical background or incidental figures in Martineau's texts.

- All women should inform themselves of the condition of their sex and of their own position. It must necessarily follow that the noblest of them will, sooner or later, put forth a moral power which shall prostrate cant, and burst asunder the bonds (silken to some but cold iron to others) of feudal prejudice and usages. In the meantime is it to be understood that the principles of the Declaration of Independence bear no relation to half of the human race? If so, what is the ground of this limitation? There is no country in the world where there is so much boasting of the 'chivalrous' treatment she enjoys . . . . In short, indulgence is given her as a substitute for justice.
- What office is there which involves more responsibility, which requires more qualifications, and which ought, therefore, to be more honourable, than that of teaching? Teaching and training children is to a few, a very few, a delightful employment notwithstanding its toils and cares. Except to these few it is irksome: and when accompanied with poverty and mortification intolerable.
- A soul occupied with great ideas performs small duties. Religion is a temper, not a pursuit. I am in truth very thankful for not having married at all. The older I have grown, the more serious and irremediable have seemed to me the evils and disadvantages of married life as it exists among us at this time. I have no sympathy for those who, under any pressure of circumstances, sacrifice their heart's-love for legal prostitution. [on a visit to the United States:] The instruction furnished is not good enough for the youth of such a country . . . . There is not even any systematic instruction given on political morals: an enormous deficiency in a republic.

11.8 Key-Words

1. Unflinchingly : Showing neither fear nor indecision.
2. Feminism : Advocacy of Women's rights on the grounds of political, social and economic equality to men.

11.9 Review Questions

1. Martineau was a writer of exceptional breadth and vitality. Discuss.
2. What are the major works of Martineau?
3. Briefly analyse Martineau's view on women.
4. Describe Harriet's Feminism.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*a*) (*iv*) (*a*)

11.10 Further Readings



1. Martineau, Harriet, 'On Marriage' 1838. Quotidian. Ed. Patrick Madden. 12th Feb., 2007.

Notes

Unit 12: Swift–Hints Towards an Essay on Conversation: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
12.1 Introduction to Hints Towards An Essay On Conversation
12.2 Summary
12.3 Key-Words
12.4 Review Questions
12.5 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to

- Discuss Swift's Life and Works
- Introduce Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation

Introduction

Irish author and journalist, dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral (Dublin) from 1713, the foremost prose satirist in English language. Swift became insane in his last years, but until his death he was known as Dublin's foremost citizen. Swift's most famous works is *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where the stories of Gulliver's experiences among dwarfs and giants are best known. Swift gave to these journeys an air of authenticity and realism and many contemporary readers believed them to be true.

"They look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death; for they alledge, that care and vigilante, with a very common understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty hat no fence against superior cunning: and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit; where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no Law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone and the knave gets the advantage." (from *Gulliver's Travels:* 'A Voyage to Lilliput')

Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin. His father, Jonathan Swift Sr., a lawyer and an English civil servant, died seven month's before his son was born. Abigail Erick, Swift's mother, was left without private income to support her family. Swift was taken or "stolen" to England by his nurse, and at the age of four he was sent back to Ireland. Swift's mother returned to England, and she left her son to her wealthy brother-in-law, Uncle Godwin.

Swift studied at Kilkenny Grammar School (1674-82), Trinity College in Dublin (1682-89), receiving his B.A. in 1686 and M.A. in 1692. At school Swift was not a very good good student and his teachers noted his headstrong behavior. When the anti-Catholic Revolution of the year 1688 aroused reaction in Ireland, Swift moved to England to the household of Sir William Temple at Moor Park, Surrey - Lady Temple was a relative of Swift's mother. He worked there as a secretary (1689-95, 1696-99), but did not like his position as a servant in the household.

In 1695 Swift was ordained in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), Dublin. While in staying in Moor Park, Swift also was the teacher of a young girl, Esther Johnson, whom he called Stella. When she

Notes

grew up she become an important person in his life. Stella moved to Ireland to live near him and followed him on his travels to London. Their relationship was a constant source of gossips. According to some speculations, they were married in 1716. Stella died in 1728 and Swift kept a lock of her hair among his papers for the rest of his life.

"As the common forms of good manners were intended for regulating the conduct of those who have weak understandings; so they have been corrupted by the persons for whose use they were contrived. For these people have fallen into a needless and endless way of multiplying ceremonies, which have been extremely troublesome to those who practice them, and insupportable to everyone else: insomuch that wise men are often more uneasy at the over civility of these refiners, than they could possibly be in the conversations of peasants or mechanics." (from 'A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding', 1754)

After William Temple's death in 1699, Swift returned to Ireland. He made several trips to London and gained fame with his essays. Throughout the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14), Swift was one of the central characters in the literary and political life of London. From 1695 to 1696 Swift was the vicar of Kilroot. There he met Jane Wairing, with whom he had an affair. For Swift's disappointment, she did not consider him a suitable marriage partner. Between the years 1707 and 1709 Swift was an emissary for the Irish clergy in London. Swift contributed to the 'Bickerstaff Papers' and to the Tattler in 1708-09. He was a cofounder of the Scriblerus Club, which included such member as Pope, Gay, Congreve, and Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford.

In 1710 Swift tried to open a political career among Whigs but changed his party and took over the Tory journal The Examiner. With the accession of George I, the Tories lost political power. Swift withdrew to Ireland. Hester Vanhomrigh, whom Swift had met in 1708, and whom he had tutored, followed him to Ireland after her mother had died. She was 22 years younger than Swift, who nicknamed her Vanessa. In the poem 'Cadenus and Vanessa' from 1713 Swift wrote about the affair: "Each girl, when pleased with what is taught, / Will have the teacher in her thought." In 1723 Swift broke off the relationship; she never recovered form his rejection.

From 1713 to 1742 Swift was the dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral. It is thought that Swift suffered from Ménière's disease or Alzheimer's disease. Many considered him insane - however, from the beginning of his twentieth year he had suffered from deafness. Swift had predicted his mental decay when he was about 50 and had remarked to the poet Edward Young when they were gazing at the withered crown of a tree: "I shall be like that tree, I shall die from the top."

12.1 Introduction to Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation

In this essay, the great Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift (author of Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal") enumerates "the faults and errors" of those who lack the ability to participate in an agreeable conversation.

Compare Swift's thoughts on this "useful and innocent . . . pleasure" with those expressed by Francis Bacon in "Of Discourse," Samuel Johnson in "Conversation," William Cowper in "On Conversation," and H.G. Wells in "Of Conversation: An Apology."

Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation (1713)

I have observed few obvious subjects to have been so seldom, or, at least, so slightly handled as this; and, indeed, I know few so difficult to be treated as it ought, nor yet upon which there seemeth so much to be said.

Most things, pursued by men for the happiness of public or private life, our wit or folly have so refined, that they seldom subsist but in idea; a true friend, a good marriage, a perfect form of government, with some others, require so many ingredients, so good in their several kinds, and so much niceness in mixing them, that for some thousands of years men have despaired of reducing

Notes

their schemes to perfection. But, in conversation, it is, or might be otherwise; for here we are only to avoid a multitude of errors, which, although a matter of some difficulty, may be in every man's power, for want of which it remaineth as mere an idea as the other. Therefore it seemeth to me, that the truest way to understand conversation, is to know the faults and errors to which it is subject, and from thence every man to form maxims to himself whereby it may be regulated, because it requireth few talents to which most men are not born, or at least may not acquire without any great genius or study. For nature hath left every man a capacity of being agreeable, though not of shining in company; and there are an hundred men sufficiently qualified for both, who, by a very few faults, that they might correct in half an hour, are not so much as tolerable.

I was prompted to write my thoughts upon this subject by mere indignation, to reflect that so useful and innocent a pleasure, so fitted for every period and condition of life, and so much in all men's power, should be so much neglected and abused.

And in this discourse it will be necessary to note those errors that are obvious, as well as others which are seldomer observed, since there are few so obvious, or acknowledged, into which most men, some time or other, are not apt to run.

The Folly of Talking Too Much

For instance: Nothing is more generally exploded than the folly of talking too much; yet I rarely remember to have seen five people together, where some one among them hath not been predominant in that kind, to the great constraint and disgust of all the rest. But among such as deal in multitudes of words, none are comparable to the sober deliberate talker, who proceedeth with much thought and caution, maketh his preface, brancheth out into several digressions, findeth a hint that putteth him in mind of another story, which he promiseth to tell you when this is done; cometh back regularly to his subject, cannot readily call to mind some person's name, holding his head, complaineth of his memory; the whole company all this while in suspense; at length says, it is no matter, and so goes on. And, to crown the business, it perhaps proveth at last a story the company hath heard fifty times before; or, at best, some insipid adventure of the relater.

Another general fault in conversation is, that of those who affect to talk of themselves: Some, without any ceremony, will run over the history of their lives; will relate the annals of their diseases, with the several symptoms and circumstances of them; will enumerate the hardships and injustice they have suffered in court, in parliament, in love, or in law. Others are more dexterous, and with great art will lie on the watch to hook in their own praise: They will call a witness to remember they always foretold what would happen in such a case, but none would believe them; they advised such a man from the beginning, and told him the consequences, just as they happened; but he would have his own way. Others make a vanity of telling their faults; they are the strangest men in the world; they cannot dissemble; they own it is a folly; they have lost abundance of advantages by it; but, if you would give them the world, they cannot help it; there is something in their nature that abhors insincerity and constraint; with many other insufferable topics of the same altitude.

Of such mighty importance every man is to himself, and ready to think he is so to others; without once making this easy and obvious reflection, that his affairs can have no more weight with other men, than theirs have with him; and how little that is, he is sensible enough.

Where company hath met, I often have observed two persons discover, by some accident, that they were bred together at the same school or university, after which the rest are condemned to silence, and to listen while these two are refreshing each other's memory with the arch tricks and passages of themselves and their comrades.

I know a great officer of the army, who will sit for some time with a supercilious and impatient silence, full of anger and contempt for those who are talking; at length of a sudden demand audience, decide the matter in a short dogmatical way; then withdraw within himself again, and vouchsafe to talk no more, until his spirits circulate again to the same point.

Notes

Men of Wit

There are some faults in conversation, which none are so subject to as the men of wit, nor ever so much as when they are with each other. If they have opened their mouths, without endeavouring to say a witty thing, they think it is so many words lost: It is a torment to the hearers, as much as to themselves, to see them upon the rack for invention, and in perpetual constraint, with so little success. They must do something extraordinary, in order to acquit themselves, and answer their character, else the standers-by may be disappointed and be apt to think them only like the rest of mortals. I have known two men of wit industriously brought together, in order to entertain the company, where they have made a very ridiculous figure, and provided all the mirth at their own expense.

I know a man of wit, who is never easy but where he can be allowed to dictate and preside: he neither expecteth to be informed or entertained, but to display his own talents. His business is to be good company, and not good conversation; and therefore, he chooseth to frequent those who are content to listen, and profess themselves his admirers. And, indeed, the worst conversation I ever remember to have heard in my life, was that at Will's coffeehouse, where the wits (as they were called) used formerly to assemble; that is to say, five or six men, who had writ plays, or at least prologues, or had share in a miscellany, came thither, and entertained one another with their trifling composures, in so important an air, as if they had been the noblest efforts of human nature, or that the fate of kingdoms depended on them; and they were usually attended with an humble audience of young students from the inns of court, or the universities, who, at due distance, listened to these oracles, and returned home with great contempt for their law and philosophy, their heads filled with trash, under the name of politeness, criticism and *belles letters*.

Pedantry

By these means the poets, for many years past, were all overrun with pedantry. For, as I take it, the word is not properly used; because pedantry is the too frequent or unseasonable obtruding our own knowledge in common discourse, and placing too great a value upon it; by which definition, men of the court or the army may be as guilty of pedantry as a philosopher or a divine; and, it is the same vice in women, when they are over copious upon the subject of their petticoats, or their fans, or their china. For which reason, although it be a piece of prudence, as well as good manners, to put men upon talking on subjects they are best versed in, yet that is a liberty a wise man could hardly take; because, beside the imputation of pedantry, it is what he would never improve by.

The great town is usually provided with some player, mimic or buffoon, who hath a general reception at the good tables; familiar and domestic with persons of the first quality, and usually sent for at every meeting to divert the company; against which I have no objection. You go there as to a farce or a puppet show; your business is only to laugh in season, either out of inclination or civility, while this merry companion is acting his part. It is a business he hath undertaken, and we are to suppose he is paid for his day's work. I only quarrel, when in select and private meetings, where men of wit and learning are invited to pass an evening, this jester should be admitted to run over his circle of tricks, and make the whole company unfit for any other conversation, besides the indignity of confounding men's talents at so shameful a rate.

Raillery

Raillery is the finest part of conversation; but, as it is our usual custom to counterfeit and adulterate whatever is too dear for us, so we have done with this, and turned it all into what is generally called repartee, or being smart; just as when an expensive fashion cometh up, those who are not able to reach it, content themselves with some paltry imitation. It now passeth for raillery to run a man down in discourse, to put him out of countenance, and make him ridiculous, sometimes to expose the defects of his person or understanding; on all which occasions he is obliged not to be angry, to avoid the imputation of not being able to take a jest. It is admirable to observe one who

Notes

is dexterous at this art, singling out a weak adversary, getting the laugh on his side, and then carrying all before him. The French, from whence we borrow the word, have a quite different idea of the thing, and so had we in the politer age of our fathers. Raillery was to say something that at first appeared a reproach or reflection; but, by some turn of wit unexpected and surprising, ended always in a compliment, and to the advantage of the person it was addressed to. And surely one of the best rules in conversation is, never to say a thing which any of the company can reasonably wish we had rather left unsaid; nor can there anything be well more contrary to the ends for which people meet together, than to part unsatisfied with each other or themselves.

Interruptions

There are two faults in conversation, which appear very different, yet arise from the same root, and are equally blameable; I mean, an impatience to interrupt others, and the uneasiness of being interrupted ourselves. The two chief ends of conversation are to entertain and improve those we are among, or to receive those benefits ourselves; which whoever will consider, cannot easily run into either of those two errors; because when any man speaketh in company, it is to be supposed he doth it for his hearers' sake, and not his own; so that common discretion will teach us not to force their attention, if they are not willing to lend it; nor on the other side, to interrupt him who is in possession, because that is in the grossest manner to give the preference to our own good sense.

There are some people, whose good manners will not suffer them to interrupt you; but, what is almost as bad, will discover abundance of impatience, and lie upon the watch until you have done, because they have started something in their own thoughts which they long to be delivered of. Meantime, they are so far from regarding what passes, that their imaginations are wholly turned upon what they have in reserve, for fear it should slip out of their memory; and thus they confine their invention, which might otherwise range over a hundred things full as good, and that might be much more naturally introduced.

There is a sort of rude familiarity, which some people, by practising among their intimates, have introduced into their general conversation, and would have it pass for innocent freedom or humour, which is a dangerous experiment in our northern climate, where all the little decorum and politeness we have are purely forced by art, and are so ready to lapse into barbarity. This, among the Romans, was the raillery of slaves, of which we have many instances in Plautus. It seemeth to have been introduced among us by Cromwell, who, by preferring the scum of the people, made it a court entertainment, of which I have heard many particulars; and, considering all things were turned upside down, it was reasonable and judicious: Although it was a piece of policy found out to ridicule a point of honour in the other extreme, when the smallest word misplaced among gentlemen ended in a duel.

There are some men excellent at telling a story, and provided with a plentiful stock of them, which they can draw out upon occasion in all companies; and, considering how low conversation runs now among us, it is not altogether a contemptible talent; however, it is subject to two unavoidable defects; frequent repetition, and being soon exhausted; so that whoever valueth this gift in himself, hath need of a good memory, and ought frequently to shift his company, that he may not discover the weakness of his fund; for those who are thus endowed, have seldom any other revenue, but live upon the main stock.

Elocution

Great speakers in public, are seldom agreeable in private conversation, whether their faculty be natural, or acquired by practice, and often venturing. Natural elocution, although it may seem a paradox, usually springeth from a barrenness of invention and of words, by which men who have only one stock of notions upon every subject, and one set of phrases to express them in, they swim upon the superfices, and offer themselves on every occasion; therefore, men of much learning, and

Notes

who know the compass of a language, are generally the worst talkers on a sudden, until much practice hath inured and emboldened them, because they are confounded with plenty of matter, variety of notions, and of words, which they cannot readily choose, but are perplexed and entangled by too great a choice; which is no disadvantage in private conversation; where, on the other side, the talent of haranguing is, of all others, most insupportable.

Nothing hath spoiled men more for conversation, than the character of being wits, to support which, they never fail of encouraging a number of followers and admirers, who list themselves in their service, wherein they find their accounts on both sides, by pleasing their mutual vanity. This hath given the former such an air of superiority, and made the latter so pragmatical, that neither of them are well to be endured. I say nothing here of the itch of dispute and contradiction, telling of lies, or of those who are troubled with the disease called the wandering of the thoughts, that they are never present in mind at what passeth in discourse; for whoever labours under any of these possessions, is as unfit for conversation as a madman in Bedlam.

I think I have gone over most of the errors in conversation, that have fallen under my notice or memory, except some that are merely personal, and others too gross to need exploding; such as lewd or profane talk; but I pretend only to treat the errors of conversation in general, and not the several subjects of discourse, which would be infinite. Thus we see how human nature is most debased, by the abuse of that faculty, which is held the great distinction between men and brutes; and how little advantage we make of that which might be the greatest, the most lasting, and the most innocent, as well as useful pleasure of life. In default of which, we are forced to take up with those poor amusements of dress and visiting, or the more pernicious ones of play, drink, and vicious amours, whereby the nobility and gentry of both sexes are entirely corrupted both in body and mind, and have lost all notions of love, honour, friendship, generosity; which, under the name of fopperies, have been for some time laughed out of doors.

The Exclusion of Women

This degeneracy of conversation, with the pernicious consequences thereof upon our humours and dispositions, hath been owing, among other causes, to the custom arisen, for sometime past, of excluding women from any share in our society, further than in parties at play, or dancing, or in the pursuit of an amour. I take the highest period of politeness in England (and it is of the same date in France) to have been the peaceable part of King Charles the First's reign; and from what we read of those times, as well as from the accounts I have formerly met with from some who lived in that court, the methods then used for raising and cultivating conversation, were altogether different from ours. Several ladies, whom, we find celebrated by the poets of that age, had assemblies at their houses, where persons of the best understanding, and of both sexes, met to pass the evenings in discoursing upon whatever agreeable subjects were occasionally started; and although we are apt to ridicule the sublime platonic notions they had, or personated in love and friendship, I conceive their refinements were grounded upon reason, and that a little grain of the romance is no ill ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious and low. If there were no other use in the conversation of ladies, it is sufficient that it would lay a restraint upon those odious topics of immodesty and indecencies, into which the rudeness of our northern genius is so apt to fall. And, therefore, it is observable in those sprightly gentlemen about the town, who are so very dexterous at entertaining a vizard mask in the park or the playhouse, that, in the company of ladies of virtue and honour, they are silent and disconcerted, and out of their element.

There are some people who think they sufficiently acquit themselves and entertain their company with relating of facts of no consequence, nor at all out of the road of such common incidents as happen every day; and this I have observed more frequently among the Scots than any other nation, who are very careful not to omit the minutest circumstances of time or place; which kind

Notes

of discourse, if it were not a little relieved by the uncouth terms and phrases, as well as accent and gesture, peculiar to that country, would be hardly tolerable. It is not a fault in company to talk much; but to continue it long is certainly one; for, if the majority of those who are got together be naturally silent or cautious, the conversation will flag, unless it be often renewed by one among them, who can start new subjects, provided he doth not dwell upon them, but leaveth room for answers and replies.

Self Assessment

1. Fill in the blanks:

(*i*) ..... Swift tried to open a political career among Whigs but changed his party and took over the Tory journal *The Examiner.*

(*a*) 1710 (*b*) 1715

(*c*) 1718 (*d*) 1719

(*ii*) There are ..... faults in conversation

(*a*) Three (*b*) Two

(*c*) Four (*d*) Five

(*iii*) ..... "*Of Conversation: An Apology.*" was written by

(*a*) Bacon (*b*) H.G. Wells

(*c*) Swift (*d*) Addissen

12.2 Summary

- Irish author and journalist, dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral (Dublin) from 1713, the foremost prose satirist in English language. Swift became insane in his last years, but until his death he was known as Dublin's foremost citizen. Swift's most famous works is *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where the stories of Gulliver's experiences among dwarfs and giants are best known. Swift gave to these journeys an air of authenticity and realism and many contemporary readers believed them to be true.
- Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin. His father, Jonathan Swift Sr., a lawyer and an English civil servant, died seven month's before his son was born. Abigail Erick, Swift's mother, was left without private income to support her family. Swift was taken or "stolen" to England by his nurse, and at the age of four he was sent back to Ireland. Swift's mother returned to England, and she left her son to her wealthy brother-in-law, Uncle Godwin.
- In 1695 Swift was ordained in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), Dublin. While in staying in Moor Park, Swift also was the teacher of a young girl, Esther Johnson, whom he called Stella.
- In 1710 Swift tried to open a political career among Whigs but changed his party and took over the Tory journal The Examiner. With the accession of George I, the Tories lost political power. Swift withdrew to Ireland. Hester Vanhomrigh, whom Swift had met in 1708, and whom he had tutored, followed him to Ireland after her mother had died. She was 22 years younger than Swift, who nicknamed her Vanessa. In the poem 'Cadenus and Vanessa' from 1713 Swift wrote about the affair: "Each girl, when pleased with what is taught, / Will have the teacher in her thought." In 1723 Swift broke off the relationship; she never recovered form his rejection.
- In this essay, the great Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift (author of Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal") enumerates "the faults and errors" of those who lack the ability to participate in an agreeable conversation.

Notes

- Compare Swift's thoughts on this "useful and innocent . . . pleasure" with those expressed by Francis Bacon in "Of Discourse," Samuel Johnson in "Conversation," William Cowper in "On Conversation," and H.G. Wells in "Of Conversation: An Apology."

12.3 Key-Words

1. Elocution : Elocution is the study of formal speaking in pronunciation, grammar, style, and tone
2. Vizard mask : a mask for hiding the face

12.4 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on Swift's Life and Works.
2. Briefly describe the essay "Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation".

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*b*)

12.5 Further Readings



1. Biber, D., Johannsen, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., and Finegan, E. (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman
2. Boas, F. (1911) *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40
3. Carter, R. (1986) *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistics Perspectives*. London: Routledge
4. Cohen, D. (1980) *On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace* USC/ISI IEN 137 April 1, 1980 URL: http://khavrinen.lcs.mit.edu/wollman/ien-137.txt
5. Castle, T. J. (1999) Why the Houyhnhnms don't write: Swift, Satire and the fear of the text. In Wood, N. (1999) *Jonathan Swift*. Harlow: Longman
6. Chomsky, N. (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Corson, D. (1985)
6. *The Lexical Bar*. Oxford: Pergamon Cruden A. (1796) *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*
7. Eliot, T.S. (1923) *Ulysses, Order and Myth" in Selected Essays 1917-1932* (1932; rev. ed., 1950) London: Faber and Faber.
8. Francis, W.N. (1992) Language Corpora B.C. Paper Presented at the Nobel Symposium on Corpus Linguistics, Stockholm, August 4-8, 1991. In Svartvik, J. (Ed.) *Directions in Corpus Linguistics*. Berlin and New York: Moutin

Notes

Unit 13: Swift–Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
13.1 Critical Appreciation
13.2 Summary
13.3 Key-Words
13.4 Review Questions
13.5 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to

- Discuss about Swift
- Critically examine the Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation

Introduction

Jonathan Swift was an author, journalist, and political activist best known for his satirical novel *Gulliver's Travels* and for his satirical essay on the Irish famine, "A Modest Proposal."

Born of English parents in Dublin, Ireland, Swift studied at Kilkenny Grammar School and at Trinity College in Dublin. The abdication of King James II drove him to England. During his time in England, Swift realized his great talent for satire and wrote *A Tale of a Tub* and "The Battle of the Books," published in 1704. Swift also decided upon a career in the clergy. When he returned to Ireland, Swift became a member of the Anglican clergy, ordained in the Church of Ireland.

During the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14), Swift visited London several times, making a name for himself as a talented essayist. He began his political career as a part of the Whig political party but in 1710 switched sides, becoming a Tory and taking over the Tory journal *The Examiner*. Swift was disgusted by the Whigs' aversion to the Anglican Church and could not stand for the party's desire to do away with the Test Act, which kept many non-Anglicans from holding offices in government. Swift focused his time as a Tory on supporting their cause by writing lengthy pamphlets and essays on religion and politics, continuing to satirize those with different views. In 1713 Swift was offered the deanship of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. When Queen Anne died in 1714, the Tories came under fire, so Swift lost favor in London and greater England. He begrudgingly resigned himself to living full-time in Ireland.

In 1724 Swift led the Irish people in their resistance against the English, who continued to oppress them. He wrote many public letters and political pieces with the purpose of rallying the people. One of his most famous essays, "A Modest Proposal," satirically suggests that the Irish solve their problems of starvation and overpopulation by eating their young. Swift also engaged in extensive commentary on religion, though these works are not much read today. Even though Swift's identity was widely known by the citizens of Dublin, no one came forward to report him when a 300-pound reward was offered for his arrest.

Notes

Swift is also known for *Gulliver's Travels*, a book of fantasy, satire, and political allegory, much like his other, shorter works. He wrote *Gulliver's Travels* in 1725, and it was published in 1726. The book was a great success throughout the British Empire, and it contributed to Swift's fame and legitimacy as a writer and social commentator.

For the majority of his life, Swift was a victim of Meniere's disease, which affects balance and hearing and causes nausea and dizziness. When Swift was about 72 years old, his disease began to keep him from his duties and social life. He became withdrawn and deeply depressed. Swift died in October 1745. He was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he had worked as dean. Swift was a great friend of Alexander Pope, a fellow satirist best known for "Rape of the Lock." In a letter to Pope, Swift once called himself a misanthrope, but it seems more likely that he was simply frustrated by people who chose not to use the logic and reason they possessed.

13.1 Critical Appreciation

The full-text of "Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation," an essay by Jonathan Swift on the use of language. This plain text version was taken from Gulliver's Travels and Other Works by Jonathan Swift.

In the spring of 2002, I read Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for the first time as an adult. Soon after, while following a brief electronic discussion on the CORPORA mailing list about the historical background of corpus linguistics, I realized that Swift could arguably be proposed as an illustrious forerunner of this new way of studying language. The main justification for my proposal is that Swift's writings abound in allusions to a dimension of language which makes the corpus linguistics enterprise possible. Swift, centuries before the advent of the mainframe and personal computer, shows in his only novel, and indeed throughout his work, an awareness of the physical dimension of language and an appreciation of language as phonic or graphic substance. In this paper I would therefore like to nominate Jonathan Swift as a major precursor of corpus linguistics. Indeed, had he not been such a devoted anti-papist, I might suggest he be canonized as patron saint of all those students of language who compile corpora to further their study.

Background

By the spring of 2002, the field of corpus linguistics, after some years of struggle to establish itself as a legitimate way of doing linguistics followed by a period of demarcation and self-vindication, had attained a degree of self-confidence within the language sciences. Some corpus linguists (Francis, 1992) had earlier begun to take stock and to examine the historical background of this sub-discipline.

A discussion began on its longest-standing and most prestigious mailing list, CORPORA, held at Bergen University in Norway, and various proposals were made for key texts, seminal works and landmarks in the intellectual pre-history of this suddenly fashionable school of linguistics. Rightly enough, key texts from the 1970s (McH Sinclair, 1970) were proposed as being seminal or formative. Pre-computer-age marvels of calculation and generalization were cited, most notably Markov (1912) and Zipf (1936), who, with their laborious 'manual' computations, paved the way for present-day researchers in Language Engineering who still extract Zipf distributions and Markov models from corpora. Herculean feats of manual concordancing were mentioned - for example, Cruden's *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments* (1796).

I promptly posted a proposal of Jonathan Swift as precursor of corpus linguistics and then the thread came to an end. This may have been due to the divagation inherent in my mailing or because I arrived when attention was already shifting to other issues: that particular conversation had run its course. Indeed many practitioners of corpus linguistics perhaps thought it was time to return to more pressing workaday matters and leave the history for another time. In the rest of this paper, I would like to develop the idea I posted to the CORPORA debate.

Textual Bases for my Claim

Notes

The realization that Swift had been aware of aspects of language which linguists have only come to grapple with recently first came to me when reading *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) (henceforth *Gulliver*), especially Part III, Ch 5, where the author describes a machine which generates books of "philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics and theology without the least assistance from genius or study". Gulliver gullibly observes that "everyone knew how laborious the usual method is of attaining to arts and sciences". The professor of the Academy of Lagado who invented this engine (worked by 40 pupils who cranked handles and transcribed the output) told Gulliver that he had emptied the whole vocabulary into the frame and made the strictest computation of the general proportion there is in books between the number of particles, nouns, and verbs, and other parts of speech. Chalker, in his endnotes to the 1967 Penguin Classic Edition of *Gulliver*, suggests that this Professor might be based on John Peters, who published a pamphlet, *Artificial Versifying: A New Way to Make Latin Verses* (1678), which was lampooned by Steele in *The Spectator* No 220:

This virtuoso, being a mathematician, has according to his taste, thrown the art of poetry into a short problem, and contrived tables by which anyone without knowing a word of grammar or sense may, to his great comfort, be able to compose, or rather to erect, Latin verses.

Swift may also have been thinking of the work on artificial languages done by George Dalgarno (1661) in *Ars Signorum* and Bishop John Wilkins (1668) in his *An Essay Toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. If he was poking fun at Dalgarno's and Wilkins's ill-fated schemes to generate knowledge by inventing a new universal language of science, Swift showed himself to be aware of the mechanics of such knowledge-generation through the patterns of language. As in much of Swift's satire, it is often difficult to situate where Swift himself stands on the issue he is subjecting to irony, parody and other literary devices. The insouciance of Gulliver when faced with the marvellous scientific riches of Lagado might lead the unsuspecting reader to think that Swift, as author, was against the new science. His subtle deployment of the dual standpoints of author and narrator creates a hall of mirrors to puzzle readers.

There are a number of examples in Swift's other works where he seems almost to savour the bodily or physical aspect of words and language. For example, in the introduction to Section One of *Tale of a Tub* (1704), he characterizes words as Bodies of much weight and gravity, as is manifest from those deep impressions they make and leave upon us; and therefore must be delivered from a due altitude, or else they will neither carry a good aim, nor fall with sufficient force.

Swift, in the same section, then dwells on books as substantial entities or indeed as living beings to be marshalled in a battle between three institutions, Grub Street (representing the journalists), Gresham (the Royal Society) and Will's Café (the poets):

I am informed, our two rivals have lately made an offer of to enter into the lists with united forces, and challenge us to a comparison of books, both as to weight and number … Where can they find scales of capacity enough for the first; or an arithmetician of capacity enough for the second? Allowing the word and the book to become flesh comes through often in his work:

When I am reading a book, whether wise or silly, it see meth to me to be alive and talking to me ("Thoughts on various subjects"). Hammond (1999) observes how Swiftian irony works by "materializing the abstract or by literalizing the figurative" often through the use of pun.

In the first page of his brief *A Critical essay upon the faculties of the human mind* (1708), where Swift apes a serious essay, we find a *reductio ad adsurdum* of Epicurus's cosmogony:

How can the Epicurean's opinion be true, that the universe was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms: which I will no more believe, than that the accidental jumbling of the letters of the alphabet, could fall by chance into a most ingenious and learned treatise of philosophy.

It is the rhetorical aside about the stochastic generation of text which is interesting here in the way it presages the professors in the School of Languages at the Academy of Lagado. Swift is laughing

Notes

at such an idea, but as in *Gulliver* and all his best writing, he allows the reader the pleasure (sometimes the horror) of imagining "yes, but what if … ?". He is perhaps the greatest virtuoso of thought experiments, the kind beloved of philosophers.

Rationale for this Conversation between the Centuries, or a Voyage to Glubbdubdrib

Swift himself would no doubt have smiled at his name being cited in a discussion of the pre-history of a new approach to a human science and my contribution to the debate. Bringing a writer from the eighteenth century face-to-face with a new way of doing linguistics in the twentieth and twenty-first century might seem odd, but some examples from recent intellectual history might help show that Swift's ideas continue to have an impact on moral, political and philosophical issues long after his death.

It seems somehow appropriate that his satire on the political wranglings of his own day, the war between the Lilliputians and the Blefuscans should be immortalized in the world of computer architecture. Swift's distinctions and terms in Book I of *Gulliver* came to be used in informatics to characterize the distinct approaches of little-endians and big-endians. Danny Cohen (1980), in his pivotal paper "On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace", uses the Lilliput-Blefuscu controversy as a template to analyse, and seek a solution for, a major ideological confrontation within software engineering.

Another justification for my introduction of Swift into the intellectual genealogy of corpus linguistics can be found in present-day Swiftian scholarship. In his work *God, Gulliver and Genocide*, Rawson (2001) attempts to show the relevance of ideas expressed in Book IV of *Gulliver* to the great moral quandary of recent history, genocide and, most notably, the Holocaust. Swift's Houyhnhnms' apologia for wiping the Yahoos off the face of the earth prefigured uncannily the Nazi rationale for their 'final solution'. Rawson affirms that Swift betrays a harsh proleptic awareness of the later scenarios of oppression with their complacencies and self-deception as well as outright lying … A volatile combination of 'meaning it, not meaning it, and not not meaning it' enters into play, which varies with every example, may not ever be fully definable, and flirts elusively with its own literal content.

This analysis uncovers for us some of the layers of complexity lying in this innocuous tale of rational horses and lascivious Yahoos and the jury of critics is still out on whether Swift favoured one more than the other, or repudiated both. On such a multilayered reading, it is easier to sympathise with T.S. Eliot's (1923) affirmation, in an essay on Joyce's *Ulysses*, that Swift's vision of the country of the Houyhnhnms was "one of the greatest triumphs that the human soul has ever achieved".

One final argument for bringing Swift into dialogue with modern linguistics derives from Swift himself and that haunting section of Book III of *Gulliver* where the hero, after his voyage to Glubbdubdrib, has the chance to dialogue with long-deceased thinkers such as Aristotle and Descartes. Perhaps we might emulate Gulliver and ask to commune for twenty-four hours with Swift himself.

Corpus Linguistics and What the Dean Might Supply

Corpus linguistics has been practised for longer than the short lifetime of the computer. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, an urgent task for American linguists was the creation of corpora of Amerindian languages threatened with extinction (Boas, 1911) and workers in the empiricist/behaviourist tradition insisted that a scientific theory of language should reject all data that are not directly observable or physically measurable (Bloomfield, 1935: 33). For these scholars, the corpus was the *sine qua non* of scientific description (Leech, 1991: 73).

The temporary fall from grace of behaviourist linguistics was the result of a paradigm shift within linguistics heralded by the publication of Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. One of the

Notes

criticisms which Chomsky made of a corpus-based approach was that it modelled the wrong aspect of language - performance instead of competence. Spoken or written language as observed and captured in corpora is always imperfect due to tiredness, laziness, absentmindedness, carelessness and so on. The object of study of Chomsky's programme was the knowledge or competence underlying such performance data. What must the brain be like to account for the learning and production of language? This critique of empirical data is intimately linked to the theory which undergirds the whole Chomskian programme: namely, his modern version of Cartesianism. Chomsky, having stressed the creativity of language production in his overthrow of behaviourism, averred that no corpus could be a representative sample of the innumerable sentences of a language: the corpus would always be skewed. Even in the 1960s, a rearguard of linguists worked unashamedly with computer corpus collections of attested naturally-occurring language data, i.e., performance data (Kucera & Francis, 1967). This was flagrant empiricism against the prevalent rationalist tide and so we are right back in the Glubbdubdribrian world of Locke, Berkeley, and Hobbes pitted against Descartes and Spinoza, all of whose major works sat in Swift's study (Lefanu, 1988).

The mainframe and personal computer can be viewed as observation instruments which might revolutionize the science of linguistics as the telescope and the microscope revolutionized astronomy and medicine (Stubbs, 1996: 231). Swift's fascination with astronomical speculations is well-documented (Nicholson and Mohler, 1968) and is playfully depicted in the Laputans' fear of comets (*Gulliver* Book 3). In the Laputans, he did after all predict, although perhaps fortuitously, the second moon of Mars more than 150 years before its discovery in 1877.

Two leading corpus linguists, Sinclair and Renouf (1988), point out the relentless efficiency of the computer when used to observe language:

retrieval systems, unlike human beings, miss nothing if properly instructed - no usage can be overlooked because it is too ordinary or too familiar ... The human mind, contrary to popular belief, is not well organized for isolating consciously what is central and typical in the language; anything unusual is sharply perceived, but the humdrum everyday events are appreciated subliminally. (Sinclair & Renouf, 1988: 151)

In the final section of this paper, I would like to give the reader a glimpse of what the computer can tell us about Swift's language as revealed in the work of Milic (1967).

We have inherited a set of dualisms from our forebears - for instance, mind/body, l*angue/parole* and competence/performance. A novel attempt to sit on the fence over one of these dichotomies is provided by Partington (1998: 145) when he suggests that a corpus is neither performance nor competence but supplants the differentiation between the two concepts. The concept of competence, the ideal speaker's knowledge of the language, raises certain philosophical problems because claims about 'ideal knowledge' are not falsifiable by any evidence. The individuality of performance needs to be transcended:

information about particular communicative events by itself is of limited, we might even say purely anecdotal value. By and large, we are not methodologically justified in interpreting the significance of a particular linguistic event unless we can compare it with other similar events. The corpus can provide "background information" against which particular events can be seen. (Partington, 1998: 146)

Swift showed awareness of this force towards dichotomization when he described the language professors at the Academy of Lagado (*Gulliver* Book III) who sought to abolish words and replace them with things. This passage and others (for instance, the Houyhnhnms' having no need to write) have led some critics to impute grammaphobia or a deep distrust of the written word to Swift (Castle, 1999: 239). Edward Said paints a more complex picture when he suggests rather that

Notes

Swift seems to have been very sensitive to the differences between writing and speaking … Each activity can take two forms, which we may call correct on the one hand and debased on the other (Said, 1999: 32).

Satire and Thought Experiments

The power and vehemence of Swift's irony is world-renowned. In the voyage to Laputa in Book III of *Gulliver*, he excoriates the more extravagant antics of the scientists of his day as reported in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*. Most of the incredible schemes ridiculed in the Grand Academy of Lagado visited by Gulliver in his voyage to Laputa have been traced to real experiments carried out by members of the Royal Society, whose premises, at Gresham College, Swift himself had visited in 1710. One of the features of Swift's deployment of irony to achieve his satire, which certain critics have remarked (e.g., Leavis, 1952), is that while his target suffers so also does the positive side he wishes to defend. In perhaps his most celebrated satire, *A Modest Proposal*, the English are depicted as cannibalising the Irish, but the Irish peasantry are not spared and come across as cannibals themselves and somehow complicitous in their own indigence. As Leavis (1952: 73-87) expresses it:

The continuous and unpredictable movement of the attack, which turns this way and that … inexhaustibly surprising-making again an odd contrast with the sustained and level gravity of the tone. If Swift does for a moment appear to settle down to a formula it is only in order to betray; to induce a trust in the solid ground before opening the pitfall.

Another feature of such a balancing act is that to be effective the ironic praise he heaps on his quarry must be convincing. Swift was able to 'get inside' his adversary. In the passage about the machine to generate philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics and theology, discussed in Section 3 above, Swift shows that he had thought through the construction of word frequency counts and the analysis of language according to the proportion of nouns, verbs and other parts of speech. It is only in recent years that linguists have been able to discuss the relative frequency of parts of speech with much degree of certainty and the recent literature of corpus linguistics (e.g., Biber, 1999) discusses the proportion of verbs to nouns in different registers, viz. conversation, news reportage, academic writing and fiction.

Even Swift's closest friends (Pope, Steele and Arbuthnot, the latter himself a scientist) were surprised by the viciousness of his attack on the scientists of his day. Perhaps as in all his celebrated satires the author's position lies somewhere in the middle (or nowhere?) and he merely covers his tracks by his scatter-gun use of irony, well described by Leavis above. In modern parlance, might Swift be described as the first linguistic terrorist?

Regardless of how this last question is answered, there is little doubt that Swift deliberately hid himself in many of his famous satires so that, for instance, we are still not sure if he thought all men or only the Irish were Yahoos, or whether he thought we should strive to become Houyhnhnms (rational animals), or whether he saw both Yahoo and Houyhnhnm as undesirable and lamentable states of being. This technique, by a stretch of the imagination, could be compared to the philosophical dialogues beloved of his friend George Berkeley, or of Plato. The use to which Danny Cohen (1980), as discussed above, put the Lilliputian and Blefuscan satire from Book I of *Gulliver* shows the power which such thought experiments can generate. The difference between Swift's satires and Berkeley's and Plato's dialogues is that they enable Swift to efface himself completely from the debate.

Swift's One Published and Signed Work on Language

Contradiction is not far away in the work of Swift. When we come to examine the work which most openly presents Swift's view of language, *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), we find him advocating the appointment of a society, along the lines of

Notes

the French Academy, charged with discovering "some method …for ascertaining and fixing our language for ever". Swift thought highly of his proposal and it is one of the very few works that he signed. He laments the degeneration of the English language from the period when it "received most improvement", i.e., the Elizabethan-Jacobean era:

The persons who are to undertake this work … Beside the grammar part wherein we are allowed to be very defective they will observe many gross improprieties, which, however authorized by practice, and grown familiar, ought to be discarded. They will find many words that deserve to be utterly thrown out of our language, many more to be corrected, and perhaps not a few long since antiquated which ought to be restored on account of their energy and sound. (Swift, 1712: 14-15)

Once again we see Swift dwelling on words as physical entities or at any rate, as events, but his naïveté about language change is surprising and might seem to undermine my attempt to have him promoted to the position of Dean of corpus linguistics. He is propounding a reductionist theory of language. He appears to think it possible to freeze language and prevent it changing or evolving. When we see Swift lamenting the degradation of the English language since the time when it had flourished most (Elizabethan times), and when he talks of the barbarisms and affectations, he is looking at the wordstock, the language as a whole. There is a sense in which he sees words and language in all their physicality and substantiality. He uses core words in an almost physical way.

Johnson's rejoinder to Swift's wild *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* is typically harsh and grudging to his forebear but would still find much sympathy today:

When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided … [who] shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay.

Simplistic as Swift's call for an English Academy might seem, this *Proposal* has other facets: it is Swift's aesthetic/artistic manifesto. He was not just being a "Tory anarchist", as Orwell (1968) suggests. He was, as Wordsworth would do later in the *Prelude*, limiting his lexicon and phrasicon to the core vocabulary of the language. Swift's Dublin publisher, Faulkner, recounts, in the preface of the first edition of his *Works* (1735), how Swift asked him to read aloud, in the presence of two men-servants, his proofs "which, if they did not comprehend, he would alter and amend, until they understood it perfectly well". We can understand from this that Swift had a firm grasp of the concept of core vocabulary as posited by Carter (1986) and was fully aware that non-possession of Graeco-Roman lexis might exclude those unfortunate enough not to have had a classical education (Corson, 1985) from understanding written texts. I surmise that he might even have viewed Ogden's *Basic English* (1930) as a blueprint for the implementation of his *Proposal*. His intentions were aesthetic, political, and moral and, although he might have been placing difficult restrictions on himself, the resulting prose and poetry bears an unmistakable stamp. Indeed, Sykes Davies underlines the importance of core vocabulary in achieving irony:

Flatness of language, commonplaceness, can itself serve as a key of de-coding of ironic messages, especially when it is brought into vivid contrast with the opposing qualities of violence and outrageousness of expression.

Milic (1967) maintains that Swift the writer and Swift the rhetorician were two different persons. His recommendations about usage were never fully implemented in his own work.

The Dean and Corpora

Said (1999), as discussed above, mentioned Swift's two models of conversation, correct as described in *Hints towards an Essay on conversation* (1710-1712) and debased as in *A Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation according to the most polite mode and method now used at Court and in the best companies of England* (henceforth, *Polite Conversation* (1738)). The first of these two works would

Notes

seem to pave the way for a great deal of twentieth-century work on speech act theory, ethno methodology and conversation analysis.

I consulted both works when I began to research prefabricated language (prefabs) in the teaching of English for Specific Purposes for my Ph.D, hoping to find intellectual precedents for my work. The layers of irony became more apparent to me as I saw that the latter work could be a primer for, or a wry comment on, the Lexical Approach to language teaching (Lewis, 1993).

Swift had already drawn attention, through the professor of Lagado Academy, to the importance of prefabs in building or reconstituting text. He takes up prefabs again in *Polite Conversation*, this playful work which was the result of a lifetime of cataloguing examples of linguistic abuse. As such, it can therefore be viewed as a continuation of the project outlined in *Proposal to correct the English Tongue*. He was collecting clichés in order to extirpate them. He describes how he built up a collection of fashionable sayings over 12 years of field work:

I determined to spend 5 mornings, to dine 4 times, pass three afternoons, and six evenings every week in the houses of the most polite families ... I always kept a large table-book in my pocket; and as soon as I left the company I immediately entered the choicest expressions.

He then spent a further 16 years "digesting it into a method".

Having worked as a corpus linguist, I found Swift's jovial account of how he accumulated his data startlingly like the way a corpus is built, discounting his hyperbole in the number of years he allocated to the research. He talks of the need for a further sixteen years' investigation. Finally he sat on his work for a further six or seven years, observing: I have not been able to add above nine valuable sentences to enrich my collection; from whence I conclude that what remains will amount only to a trifle.

Nowadays, Swift's collection of smart chat might contain in the blurb that it was based on the author's own corpus which was more than 30 years in the making. There is little doubt that Swift's observation that the more observations he made, the fewer new phrases he uncovered will strike a chord with modern lexicographers using computer corpora or indeed the World Wide Web as their corpus to uncover neologisms. The author of *Polite Conversation*, chortling behind one of his many heteronyms, Simon Wagstaff Esq., may have been imaginatively prefiguring work done more than 250 years after his death by applied linguists such as Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), Lewis (1993), and Willis and Willis (1988, 1998), who recommend using chunks of language rather than words as the curricular basis of language teaching.

The Spider Gets Webbed

In the final section of my paper I would like to give a brief report on corpus linguistic findings applied to Swift's own work. It is only appropriate that this eminent precursor should have been one of the first authors to be subjected to a major computer corpus study, and Milic (1967: 15), in one of the earliest book-length computerised analyses of a single writer's style, claims to have been impressed by the Professor of Lagado (*Gulliver* Book III):[the] language frame (so reminiscent of a computer programmed to 'generate' English sentences) struck me as the perception of a man to whom the mysterious relation between symbol and thing was intuitively clear.

Milic (1990) created a special reference corpus or historical corpus called "The Century of Prose Corpus" or the Augustan Corpus. Part A consists of samples from the work of twenty major prose writers of the period. Part B incorporates samples of prose compositions written between 1680 and 1780. This represents the journalists, scholars, men of letters, popular fiction writers, educationalists and others who produced the typical works against which the noteworthy authors of the period can be compared. Swift's use of sentence-initial connectives proved to be one of the most distinctive features of his prose. I include this table in order to give the reader a taste of the riches of Milic (1967) and hope I will not be accused of virtuoso sleight of hand or the spurious wiles of a projector.

Notes

In the Swift 2,000-word sample, 678 begin with a connective and 354 of these are with *and, but* or *for* (*but* is his favourite). Milic observes that Swift does not use *and, but*, or *or* in the customary way to impart the logical connection between sentences, but rather as a neutral connective, that is a word which shows a connection without specifying the nature of that connection. Milic points out that in English if a sentence does not begin with the subject (a noun or nominal) but begins with a connective, it is safe to assume that the next word will be a nominal or determiner. Not so in Swift. Almost a third of the times, Swift defers the subject to interject a further connective or transitional word (e.g., *But although, And first, but then, but at present*). According to Milic, two effects of this idiolectal use of connectives by Swift is to involve the reader more in the text and to create the illusion of greater clarity and simplicity (Milic, 1967: 136).

Sadly, space does not permit us to follow this analysis which takes us to the King James version of the Bible among other places. Milic discovers and attempts to explain many other interesting features of Swift's style (e.g., his lists), testing and often proving vacuous many of the claims made about Swift's style in the centuries since his death.

Self-Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) ..... Swift led the Irish people in their resistance against the English, who continued to oppress them.

(*a*) 1724 (*b*) 1725

(*c*) 1730 (*d*) 1710

(*ii*) ..... *Gulliver's Travels* in 1725, and it was published in 1726 by

(*a*) Swift (*b*) Bacon

(*c*) Addisson (*d*) Steele

(*iii*) ..... observes how Swiftian irony works by "materializing the abstract or by literalizing the figurative" often through the use of pun.

(*a*) Bacon (*b*) Steele

(*c*) Addisson (*d*) Hammond

(*iv*) ..... Swift was offered the deanship of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

(*a*) 1715 (*b*) 1714

(*c*) 1713 (*d*) 1720

13.2 Summary

- In this Unit, I have looked at some of the ideas of Jonathan Swift and their possible implications for the historical background of corpus linguistics. Although Swift is always playful and elusive, I think he shows a genuine fascination with the physical and quantificational side of language. In my own work on phraseology, I continue to learn from his works, especially his *Hints towards an Essay on conversation* (1710-1712) and *Polite Conversation* (1738) - but above all from Gulliver, that compendious treatise on human nature. I suggest he be posthumously consecrated as the Bishop of Balnibarbi and Grammarian-in-chief of Glubbdubrib. Or have I been taken in by one of the greatest hoaxers of all time?

13.3 Key-Words

1. Genuine fascination : The act of taking on or displaying an attitude or mode of behavior not natural to oneself or not genuinely felt.
2. Virtuoso : an experimenter or investigator especially in the arts and sciences, one skilled in or having a taste for the fine arts.

Notes

13.4 Review Questions

1. Discuss the satire Swift used in his works.
2. Critically examine 'Hints towards an Essay on Conversation'.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*a*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*d*) (*iv*) (*c*)

13.5 Further Readings



1. Biber, D., Johannsen, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., and Finegan, E. (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman
2. Boas, F. (1911) *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40
3. Carter, R. (1986) *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistics Perspectives*. London: Routledge
4. Cohen, D. (1980) *On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace* USC/ISI IEN 137 April 1, 1980 URL:http://khavrinen.lcs.mit.edu/wollman/ien-137.txt
5. Castle, T. J. (1999) Why the Houyhnhnms don't write: Swift, Satire and the fear of the text. In Wood, N. (1999) *Jonathan Swift*. Harlow: Longman
6. Chomsky, N. (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Corson, D. (1985) *The Lexical Bar*. Oxford: Pergamon
7. Cruden A. (1796) *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments* Eliot, T.S. (1923) *Ulysses, Order and Myth" in Selected Essays 1917-1932* (1932; rev. ed., 1950) London: Faber and Faber.
8. Francis, W.N. (1992) Language Corpora B.C. Paper Presented at the Nobel Symposium on Corpus Linguistics, Stockholm, August 4-8, 1991. In Svartvik, J. (Ed.) *Directions in Corpus Linguistics*. Berlin and New York: Moutin

Notes

Unit 14: Swift: Thoughts on Various Subjects: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
14.1 Textual Introduction
14.2 Thoughts on Various Subjects
14.3 Summary
14.4 Key-Words
14.5 Review Questions
14.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to

- Discuss Swift's Major Works
- Explain Swift's views on Thoughts on various Subjects

Introduction

Jonathan Swift was an Anglo-Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer (first for the Whigs, then for the Tories), poet and cleric who became Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. He is remembered for works such as Gulliver's Travels, A Modest Proposal, A Journal to Stella, Drapier's Letters, The Battle of the Books, An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity, and A Tale of a Tub. Swift is probably the foremost prose satirist in the English language, and is less well known for his poetry. Swift originally published all of his works under pseudonyms—such as Lemuel Gulliver, Isaac Bickerstaff, M.B. Drapier—or anonymously. He is also known for being a master of two styles of satire: the Horatian and Juvenalian styles.

Biography

Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin, Ireland. He was the second child and only son of Jonathan Swift (1640-1667) and his wife Abigail Erick (or Herrick), of Frisby-on-the-Wreake. His father, a native of Goodrich, Herefordshire, accompanied his brothers to Ireland to seek their fortunes in law after their Royalist father's estate was brought to ruin during the English Civil War. Swift's father died at Dublin before he was born, and his mother returned to England. He was left in the care of his influential uncle, Godwin, a close friend and confidante of Sir John Temple, whose son later employed Swift as his secretary.

Swift's family had several interesting literary connections: His grandmother, Elizabeth (Dryden) Swift, was the niece of Sir Erasmus Dryden, grandfather of the poet John Dryden. The same grandmother's aunt, Katherine (Throckmorton) Dryden, was a first cousin of the wife of Sir Walter Raleigh. His great-great grandmother, Margaret (Godwin) Swift, was the sister of Francis Godwin, author of The Man in the Moone which influenced parts of Swift's Gulliver's Travels. His uncle, Thomas Swift, married a daughter of the poet and playwright Sir William Davenant, a godson of William Shakespeare.

Notes

His uncle Godwin Swift (1628-1695) a benefactor, he took primary responsibility for the young Jonathan, sending him with one of his cousins to Kilkenny College (also attended by the philosopher George Berkeley). In 1682 he attended Dublin University (Trinity College, Dublin), financed by Godwin's son, Willoughby, from where he received his B.A. in 1686, and developed his friendship with William Congreve. Swift was studying for his Master's degree when political troubles in Ireland surrounding the Glorious Revolution forced him to leave for England in 1688, where his mother helped him get a position as secretary and personal assistant of Sir William Temple at Moor Park, Farnham. Temple was an English diplomat who, having arranged the Triple Alliance of 1668, retired from public service to his country estate to tend his gardens and write his memoirs. Gaining the confidence of his employer, Swift "was often trusted with matters of great importance." Within three years of their acquaintance, Temple had introduced his secretary to William III, and sent him to London to urge the King to consent to a bill for triennial Parliaments. When Swift took up his residence at Moor Park, he met Esther Johnson, then eight years old, the fatherless daughter of one of the household servants. Swift acted as her tutor and mentor, giving her the nickname "Stella", and the two maintained a close but ambiguous relationship for the rest of Esther's life.

Swift left Temple in 1690 for Ireland because of his health, but returned to Moor Park the following year. The illness, fits of vertigo or giddiness—now known to be Ménière's disease—would continue to plague Swift throughout his life. During this second stay with Temple, Swift received his M.A. from Hart Hall, Oxford in 1692. Then, apparently despairing of gaining a better position through Temple's patronage, Swift left Moor Park to become an ordained priest in the Established Church of Ireland and in 1694 he was appointed to the prebend of Kilroot in the Diocese of Connor, with his parish located at Kilroot, near Carrickfergus in County Antrim.

Swift appears to have been miserable in his new position, being isolated in a small, remote community far from the centres of power and influence. While at Kilroot, however, Swift may well have become romantically involved with Jane Waring. A letter from him survives, offering to remain if she would marry him and promising to leave and never return to Ireland if she refused. She presumably refused, because Swift left his post and returned to England and Temple's service at Moor Park in 1696, and he remained there until Temple's death. There he was employed in helping to prepare Temple's memoirs and correspondence for publication. During this time Swift wrote The Battle of the Books, a satire responding to critics of Temple's Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning (1690). Battle was however not published until 1704.

On 27 January 1699 Temple died. Swift stayed on briefly in England to complete the editing of Temple's memoirs, and perhaps in the hope that recognition of his work might earn him a suitable position in England. However, Swift's work made enemies of some of Temple's family and friends who objected to indiscretions included in the memoirs. His next move was to approach King William directly, based on his imagined connection through Temple and a belief that he had been promised a position. This failed so miserably that he accepted the lesser post of secretary and chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley, one of the Lords Justices of Ireland. However, when he reached Ireland he found that the secretaryship had already been given to another. But he soon obtained the living of Laracor, Agher, and Rathbeggan, and the prebend of Dunlavin in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

At Laracor, a mile or two from Trim, County Meath, and twenty miles (32 km) from Dublin, Swift ministered to a congregation of about fifteen people, and had abundant leisure for cultivating his garden, making a canal (after the Dutch fashion of Moor Park), planting willows, and rebuilding the vicarage. As chaplain to Lord Berkeley, he spent much of his time in Dublin and traveled to London frequently over the next ten years. In 1701, Swift published, anonymously, a political pamphlet, A Discourse on the Contests and Dissentions in Athens and Rome.

Notes

Writer

In February 1702, Swift received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Trinity College, Dublin. That spring he traveled to England and returned to Ireland in October, accompanied by Esther Johnson—now twenty years old—and his friend Rebecca Dingley, another member of William Temple's household. There is a great mystery and controversy over Swift's relationship with Esther Johnson nicknamed "Stella". Many hold that they were secretly married in 1716.

During his visits to England in these years Swift published A Tale of a Tub and The Battle of the Books (1704) and began to gain a reputation as a writer. This led to close, lifelong friendships with Pope, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot, forming the core of the Martinus Scriblerus Club (founded in 1713).

Swift became increasingly active politically in these years. From 1707 to 1709 and again in 1710, Swift was in London, unsuccessfully urging upon the Whig administration of Lord Godolphin the claims of the Irish clergy to the First-Fruits and Twentieths ("Queen Anne's Bounty"), which brought in about £2,500 a year, already granted to their brethren in England. He found the opposition Tory leadership more sympathetic to his cause and Swift was recruited to support their cause as editor of the Examiner when they came to power in 1710. In 1711, Swift published the political pamphlet "The Conduct of the Allies," attacking the Whig government for its inability to end the prolonged war with France. The incoming Tory government conducted secret (and illegal) negotiations with France, resulting in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) ending the War of the Spanish Succession.

Swift was part of the inner circle of the Tory government, and often acted as mediator between Henry St. John (Viscount Bolingbroke) the secretary of state for foreign affairs (1710–15) and Robert Harley (Earl of Oxford) lord treasurer and prime minister (1711–1714). Swift recorded his experiences and thoughts during this difficult time in a long series of letters to Esther Johnson, later collected and published as The Journal to Stella. The animosity between the two Tory leaders eventually led to the dismissal of Harley in 1714. With the death of Queen Anne and accession of George I that year, the Whigs returned to power and the Tory leaders were tried for treason for conducting secret negotiations with France.

Also during these years in London, Swift became acquainted with the Vanhomrigh family and became involved with one of the daughters, Esther, yet another fatherless young woman and another ambiguous relationship to confuse Swift's biographers. Swift furnished Esther with the nickname "Vanessa" and she features as one of the main characters in his poem Cadenus and Vanessa. The poem and their correspondence suggests that Esther was infatuated with Swift, and that he may have reciprocated her affections, only to regret this and then try to break off the relationship. Esther followed Swift to Ireland in 1714, where there appears to have been a confrontation, possibly involving Esther Johnson. Esther Vanhomrigh died in 1723 at the age of 35. Another lady with whom he had a close but less intense relationship was Anne Long, a toast of the Kit-Cat Club.

Maturity

Before the fall of the Tory government, Swift hoped that his services would be rewarded with a church appointment in England. However, Queen Anne appeared to have taken a dislike to Swift and thwarted these efforts. The best position his friends could secure for him was the Deanery of St. Patrick's, Dublin. With the return of the Whigs, Swift's best move was to leave England and he returned to Ireland in disappointment, a virtual exile, to live "like a rat in a hole".

Once in Ireland, however, Swift began to turn his pamphleteering skills in support of Irish causes, producing some of his most memorable works: Proposal for Universal Use of Irish Manufacture (1720), Drapier's Letters (1724), and A Modest Proposal (1729), earning him the status of an Irish patriot. Also during these years, he began writing his masterpiece, Travels into Several Remote

Notes

Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships, better known as Gulliver's Travels. Much of the material reflects his political experiences of the preceding decade. For instance, the episode in which the giant Gulliver puts out the Lilliputian palace fire by urinating on it can be seen as a metaphor for the Tories' illegal peace treaty; having done a good thing in an unfortunate manner. In 1726 he paid a long-deferred visit to London, taking with him the manuscript of Gulliver's Travels. During his visit he stayed with his old friends Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot and John Gay, who helped him arrange for the anonymous publication of his book. First published in November 1726, it was an immediate hit, with a total of three printings that year and another in early 1727. French, German, and Dutch translations appeared in 1727, and pirated copies were printed in Ireland.

Swift returned to England one more time in 1727 and stayed with Alexander Pope once again. The visit was cut short when Swift received word that Esther Johnson was dying and rushed back home to be with her. On 28 January 1728, Esther Johnson died; Swift had prayed at her bedside, even composing prayers for her comfort. Swift could not bear to be present at the end, but on the night of her death he began to write his The Death of Mrs. Johnson. He was too ill to attend the funeral at St. Patrick's. Many years later, a lock of hair, assumed to be Esther Johnson's, was found in his desk, wrapped in a paper bearing the words, "Only a woman's hair."

Death became a frequent feature in Swift's life from this point. In 1731 he wrote Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, his own obituary published in 1739. In 1732, his good friend and collaborator John Gay died. In 1735, John Arbuthnot, another friend from his days in London, died. In 1738 Swift began to show signs of illness, and in 1742 he appears to have suffered a stroke, losing the ability to speak and realizing his worst fears of becoming mentally disabled. ("I shall be like that tree," he once said, "I shall die at the top.") To protect him from unscrupulous hangers on, who had begun to prey on the great man, his closest companions had him declared of "unsound mind and memory." However, it was long believed by many that Swift was really insane at this point. In his book Literature and Western Man, author J.B. Priestley even cites the final chapters of Gulliver's Travels as proof of Swift's approaching "insanity".

In part VIII of his series, The Story of Civilization, Will Durant describes the final years of Swift's life as such: "Definite symptoms of madness appeared in 1738. In 1741 guardians were appointed to take care of his affairs and watch lest in his outbursts of violence he should do himself harm. In 1742 he suffered great pain from the inflammation of his left eye, which swelled to the size of an egg; five attendants had to restrain him from tearing out his eye. He went a whole year without uttering a word."

In 1744, Alexander Pope died. On October 19 1745, Swift also died. After being laid out in public view for the people of Dublin to pay their last respects, he was buried in his own cathedral by Esther Johnson's side, in accordance with his wishes. The bulk of his fortune (twelve thousand pounds) was left to found a hospital for the mentally ill, originally known as St. Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles, which opened in 1757, and which still exists as a psychiatric hospital.

Major Prose Works

Swift's first major prose work, A Tale of a Tub, demonstrates many of the themes and stylistic techniques he would employ in his later work. It is at once wildly playful and funny while being pointed and harshly critical of its targets. In its main thread, the Tale recounts the exploits of three sons, representing the main threads of Christianity, who receive a bequest from their father of a coat each, with the added instructions to make no alterations whatsoever. However, the sons soon find that their coats have fallen out of current fashion, and begin to look for loopholes in their father's will that will let them make the needed alterations. As each finds his own means of getting around their father's admonition, they struggle with each other for power and dominance. Inserted into this story, in alternating chapters, the narrator includes a series of whimsical "digressions" on various subjects.

Notes

In 1690, Sir William Temple, Swift's patron, published An Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning a defense of classical writing (see Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns) holding up the Epistles of Phalaris as an example. William Wotton responded to Temple with Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning (1694) showing that the Epistles were a later forgery. A response by the supporters of the Ancients was then made by Charles Boyle (later the 4th Earl of Orrery and father of Swift's first biographer). A further retort on the Modern side came from Richard Bentley, one of the pre-eminent scholars of the day, in his essay Dissertation upon the Epistles of Phalaris (1699). However, the final words on the topic belong to Swift in his Battle of the Books (1697, published 1704) in which he makes a humorous defense on behalf of Temple and the cause of the Ancients.

In 1708, a cobbler named John Partridge published a popular almanac of astrological predictions. Because Partridge falsely determined the deaths of several church officials, Swift attacked Partridge in Predictions For The Ensuing Year by Isaac Bickerstaff, a parody predicting that Partridge would die on March 29. Swift followed up with a pamphlet issued on March 30 claiming that Partridge had in fact died, which was widely believed despite Partridge's statements to the contrary. According to other sources, Richard Steele uses the personae of Isaac Bickerstaff and was the one who wrote about the "death" of John Partridge and published it in The Spectator, not Jonathan Swift.

Drapier's Letters (1724) was a series of pamphlets against the monopoly granted by the English government to William Wood to provide the Irish with copper coinage. It was widely believed that Wood would need to flood Ireland with debased coinage in order make a profit. In these "letters" Swift posed as a shop-keeper—a draper—in order to criticize the plan. Swift's writing was so effective in undermining opinion in the project that a reward was offered by the government to anyone disclosing the true identity of the author. Though hardly a secret (on returning to Dublin after one of his trips to England, Swift was greeted with a banner, "Welcome Home, Drapier") no one turned Swift in. The government eventually resorted to hiring none other than Sir Isaac Newton to certify the soundness of Wood's coinage to counter Swift's accusations. In "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (1739) Swift recalled this as one of his best achievements. Gulliver's Travels, a large portion of which Swift wrote at Woodbrook House in County Laois, was published in 1726. It is regarded as his masterpiece. As with his other writings, the Travels was published under a pseudonym, the fictional Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon and later a sea captain. Some of the correspondence between printer Benj. Motte and Gulliver's also-fictional cousin negotiating the book's publication has survived. Though it has often been mistakenly thought of and published in bowdlerized form as a children's book, it is a great and sophisticated satire of human nature based on Swift's experience of his times. Gulliver's Travels is an anatomy of human nature, a sardonic looking-glass, often criticized for its apparent misanthropy. It asks its readers to refute it, to deny that it has adequately characterized human nature and society. Each of the four books—recounting four voyages to mostly-fictional exotic lands—has a different theme, but all are attempts to deflate human pride. Critics hail the work as a satiric reflection on the shortcomings of Enlightenment thought.

In 1729, Swift published A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland Being a Burden on Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick, a satire in which the narrator, with intentionally grotesque arguments, recommends that Ireland's poor escape their poverty by selling their children as food to the rich: "I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food..." Following the satirical form, he introduces the reforms he is actually suggesting by deriding them:

Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients...taxing our absentees...using [nothing] except what is of our own growth and manufacture...rejecting...foreign luxury...introducing a vein of

Notes

parsimony, prudence and temperance...learning to love our country...quitting our animosities and factions...teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy towards their tenants....Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, 'till he hath at least some glympse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them into practice.

Legacy

John Ruskin named him as one of the three people in history who were the most influential for him. Swift crater, a crater on Mars's moon Deimos, is named after Jonathan Swift, who predicted the existence of the moons of Mars.

14.1 Textual Introduction

Having first appeared in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* of 1711, here numbered [1] to [46], *Various Thoughts* was reprinted, with the addition of [47] to [97] and the variant title *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse: The First Volume* in 1727. Swift had offered to send this incremental installment to Pope in December 1726: "I have some few of those things I call thoughts moral and diverting; if you please I will send the best I can pick from them, to add to the new volume."1 Pope's response must have been encouraging, and the augmented *Various Thoughts* duly appeared in the first volume of the Pope-Swift *Miscellanies* published on 24 June in the following year.2 Both installments were reprinted in Faulkner's *Works* of 1735. Finally, *Further Thoughts on Various Subjects* were added in 1745. For the Historical Introduction, readers are referred to *Various Thoughts, Moral and Diverting*.

14.2 Thoughts on Various Subjects

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another. Reflect on things past as wars, negotiations, factions, etc. We enter so little into those interests, that we wonder how men could possibly be so busy and concerned for things so transitory; look on the present times, we find the same humour, yet wonder not at all.

A wise man endeavours, by considering all circumstances, to make conjectures and form conclusions; but the smallest accident intervening (and in the course of affairs it is impossible to foresee all) does often produce such turns and changes, that at last he is just as much in doubt of events as the most ignorant and inexperienced person.

Positiveness is a good quality for preachers and orators, because he that would obtrude his thoughts and reasons upon a multitude, will convince others the more, as he appears convinced himself. How is it possible to expect that mankind will take advice, when they will not so much as take warning?

I forget whether Advice be among the lost things which Aristo says are to be found in the moon; that and Time ought to have been there. No preacher is listened to but Time, which gives us the same train and turn of thought that older people have tried in vain to put into our heads before.

When we desire or solicit anything, our minds run wholly on the good side or circumstances of it; when it is obtained, our minds run wholly on the bad ones. In a glass-house the workmen often fling in a small quantity of fresh coals, which seems to disturb the fire, but very much enlivens it. This seems to allude to a gentle stirring of the passions, that the mind may not languish.

Religion seems to have grown an infant with age, and requires miracles to nurse it, as it had in its infancy. All fits of pleasure are balanced by an equal degree of pain or languor; it is like spending this year part of the next year's revenue.

The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted in the former.

Notes

Would a writer know how to behave himself with relation to posterity, let him consider in old books what he finds that he is glad to know, and what omissions he most laments.

Whatever the poets pretend, it is plain they give immortality to none but themselves; it is Homer and Virgil we reverence and admire, not Achilles or Æneas. With historians it is quite the contrary; our thoughts are taken up with the actions, persons, and events we read, and we little regard the authors. When a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign; that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.

Men who possess all the advantages of life, are in a state where there are many accidents to disorder and discompose, but few to please them. It is unwise to punish cowards with ignominy, for if they had regarded that they would not have been cowards; death is their proper punishment, because they fear it most.

The greatest inventions were produced in the times of ignorance, as the use of the compass, gunpowder, and printing, and by the dullest nation, as the Germans. One argument to prove that the common relations of ghosts and spectres are generally false, may be drawn from the opinion held that spirits are never seen by more than one person at a time; that is to say, it seldom happens to above one person in a company to be possessed with any high degree of spleen or melancholy.

I am apt to think that, in the day of Judgment, there will be small allowance given to the wise for their want of morals, nor to the ignorant for their want of faith, because both are without excuse. This renders the advantages equal of ignorance and knowledge. But, some scruples in the wise, and some vices in the ignorant, will perhaps be forgiven upon the strength of temptation to each. The value of several circumstances in story lessens very much by distance of time, though some minute circumstances are very valuable; and it requires great judgment in a writer to distinguish.

It is grown a word of course for writers to say, "This critical age," as divines say, "This sinful age." It is pleasant to observe how free the present age is in laying taxes on the next. Future Ages Shall Talk of This; This Shall Be Famous To All Posterity. Whereas their time and thoughts will be taken up about present things, as ours are now.

The chameleon, who is said to feed upon nothing but air, hath, of all animals, the nimblest tongue. When a man is made a spiritual peer he loses his surname; when a temporal, his Christian name. It is in disputes as in armies, where the weaker side sets up false lights, and makes a great noise, to make the enemy believe them more numerous and strong than they really are.

Some men, under the notions of weeding out prejudices, eradicate virtue, honesty, and religion. In all well-instituted commonwealths, care has been taken to limit men's possessions; which is done for many reasons, and among the rest, for one which perhaps is not often considered: that when bounds are set to men's desires, after they have acquired as much as the laws will permit them, their private interest is at an end, and they have nothing to do but to take care of the public.

There are but three ways for a man to revenge himself of the censure of the world: to despise it, to return the like, or to endeavour to live so as to avoid it. The first of these is usually pretended, the last is almost impossible; the universal practice is for the second.

I never heard a finer piece of satire against lawyers than that of astrologers, when they pretend by rules of art to tell when a suit will end, and whether to the advantage of the plaintiff or defendant; thus making the matter depend entirely upon the influence of the stars, without the least regard to the merits of the cause.

The expression in Apocrypha about Tobit and his dog following him I have often heard ridiculed, yet Homer has the same words of Telemachus more than once; and Virgil says something like it of Evander. And I take the book of Tobit to be partly poetical.

I have known some men possessed of good qualities, which were very serviceable to others, but useless to themselves; like a sun-dial on the front of a house, to inform the neighbours and passengers, but not the owner within.

Notes

If a man would register all his opinions upon love, politics, religion, learning, etc., beginning from his youth and so go on to old age, what a bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions would appear at last! What they do in heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not we are told expressly: that they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.

It is a miserable thing to live in suspense; it is the life of a spider. The Stoical scheme of supplying our wants by lopping off our desires, is like cutting off our feet when we want shoes.

Physicians ought not to give their judgment of religion, for the same reason that butchers are not admitted to be jurors upon life and death. The reason why so few marriages are happy, is, because young ladies spend their time in making nets, not in making cages.

If a man will observe as he walks the streets, I believe he will find the merriest countenances in mourning coaches. Nothing more unqualifies a man to act with prudence than a misfortune that is attended with shame and guilt.

The power of fortune is confessed only by the miserable; for the happy impute all their success to prudence or merit. Ambition often puts men upon doing the meanest offices; so climbing is performed in the same posture with creeping. Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.

Although men are accused for not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength. It is, in men as in soils, where sometimes there is a vein of gold which the owner knows not of.

Satire is reckoned the easiest of all wit, but I take it to be otherwise in very bad times: for it is as hard to satirise well a man of distinguished vices, as to praise well a man of distinguished virtues. It is easy enough to do either to people of moderate characters.

Invention is the talent of youth, and judgment of age; so that our judgment grows harder to please, when we have fewer things to offer it: this goes through the whole commerce of life. When we are old, our friends find it difficult to please us, and are less concerned whether we be pleased or no. No wise man ever wished to be younger.

An idle reason lessens the weight of the good ones you gave before. The motives of the best actions will not bear too strict an inquiry. It is allowed that the cause of most actions, good or bad, may he resolved into the love of ourselves; but the self-love of some men inclines them to please others, and the self-love of others is wholly employed in pleasing themselves. This makes the great distinction between virtue and vice. Religion is the best motive of all actions, yet religion is allowed to be the highest instance of self-love.

Old men view best at a distance with the eyes of their understanding as well as with those of nature. Some people take more care to hide their wisdom than their folly.

Anthony Henley's farmer, dying of an asthma, said, "Well, if I can get this breath once OUT, I'll take care it never got in again." The humour of exploding many things under the name of trifles, fopperies, and only imaginary goods, is a very false proof either of wisdom or magnanimity, and a great check to virtuous actions. For instance, with regard to fame, there is in most people a reluctance and unwillingness to be forgotten. We observe, even among the vulgar, how fond they are to have an inscription over their grave. It requires but little philosophy to discover and observe that there is no intrinsic value in all this; however, if it be founded in our nature as an incitement to virtue, it ought not to be ridiculed.

Complaint is the largest tribute heaven receives, and the sincerest part of our devotion. The common fluency of speech in many men, and most women, is owing to a scarcity of matter, and a scarcity of words; for whoever is a master of language, and hath a mind full of ideas, will be apt, in speaking, to hesitate upon the choice of both; whereas common speakers have only one set of ideas, and one set of words to clothe them in, and these are always ready at the mouth. So people come faster out of a church when it is almost empty, than when a crowd is at the door.

Notes

Few are qualified to shine in company; but it is in most men's power to be agreeable. The reason, therefore, why conversation runs so low at present, is not the defect of understanding, but pride, vanity, ill-nature, affectation, singularity, positiveness, or some other vice, the effect of a wrong education.

To be vain is rather a mark of humility than pride. Vain men delight in telling what honours have been done them, what great company they have kept, and the like, by which they plainly confess that these honours were more than their due, and such as their friends would not believe if they had not been told: whereas a man truly proud thinks the greatest honours below his merit, and consequently scorns to boast. I therefore deliver it as a maxim, that whoever desires the character of a proud man, ought to conceal his vanity.

Law, in a free country, is, or ought to be, the determination of the majority of those who have property in land. One argument used to the disadvantage of Providence I take to be a very strong one in its defence. It is objected that storms and tempests, unfruitful seasons, serpents, spiders, flies, and other noxious or troublesome animals, with many more instances of the like kind, discover an imperfection in nature, because human life would be much easier without them; but the design of Providence may clearly be perceived in this proceeding. The motions of the sun and moon — in short, the whole system of the universe, as far as philosophers have been able to discover and observe, are in the utmost degree of regularity and perfection; but wherever God hath left to man the power of interposing a remedy by thought or labour, there he hath placed things in a state of imperfection, on purpose to stir up human industry, without which life would stagnate, or, indeed, rather, could not subsist at all: *Curis Accuunt Mortalia Corda* ["Inciting the human heart by anxiety"-Virgil].

Praise is the daughter of present power. How inconsistent is man with himself! I have known several persons of great fame for wisdom in public affairs and counsels governed by foolish servants. I have known great Ministers, distinguished for wit and learning, who preferred none but dunces. I have known men of great valour cowards to their wives. I have known men of the greatest cunning perpetually cheated.

I knew three great Ministers, who could exactly compute and settle the accounts of a kingdom, but were wholly ignorant of their own economy. The preaching of divines helps to preserve well-inclined men in the course of virtue, but seldom or never reclaims the vicious.

Princes usually make wiser choices than the servants whom they trust for the disposal of places: I have known a prince, more than once, choose an able Minister, but I never observed that Minister to use his credit in the disposal of an employment to a person whom he thought the fittest for it. One of the greatest in this age owned and excused the matter from the violence of parties and the unreasonableness of friends.

Small causes are sufficient to make a man uneasy when great ones are not in the way. For want of a block he will stumble at a straw. Dignity, high station, or great riches, are in some sort necessary to old men, in order to keep the younger at a distance, who are otherwise too apt to insult them upon the score of their age. Every man desires to live long; but no man would be old.

Love of flattery in most men proceeds from the mean opinion they have of themselves; in women from the contrary. If books and laws continue to increase as they have done for fifty years past, I am in some concern for future ages how any man will be learned, or any man a lawyer. Kings are commonly said to have LONG HANDS; I wish they had as LONG EARS.

Princes in their infancy, childhood, and youth are said to discover prodigious parts and wit, to speak things that surprise and astonish. Strange, so many hopeful princes, and so many shameful kings! If they happen to die young, they would have been prodigies of wisdom and virtue. If they live, they are often prodigies indeed, but of another sort.

Notes

Politics, as the word is commonly understood, are nothing but corruptions, and consequently of no use to a good king or a good ministry; for which reason Courts are so overrun with politics. A nice man is a man of nasty ideas.

Apollo was held the god of physic and sender of diseases. Both wore originally the same trade, and still continue. Old men and comets have been reverenced for the same reason: their long beards, and pretences to foretell events.

A person was asked at court, what he thought of an ambassador and his train, who were all embroidery and lace, full of bows, cringes, and gestures; he said, it was Solomon's importation, gold and apes. Most sorts of diversion in men, children, and other animals, is an imitation of fighting.

Augustus meeting an ass with a lucky name foretold himself good fortune. I meet many asses, but none of them have lucky names. If a man makes me keep my distance, the comfort is he keeps his at the same time.

Who can deny that all men are violent lovers of truth when we see them so positive in their errors, which they will maintain out of their zeal to truth, although they contradict themselves every day of their lives? That was excellently observed, say I, when I read a passage in an author, where his opinion agrees with mine. When we differ, there I pronounce him to be mistaken.

Very few men, properly speaking, live at present, but are providing to live another time. Laws penned with the utmost care and exactness, and in the vulgar language, are often perverted to wrong meanings; then why should we wonder that the Bible is so? Although men are accused for not knowing their weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength.

A man seeing a wasp creeping into a vial filled with honey, that was hung on a fruit tree, said thus: "Why, thou scottish animal, art thou mad to go into that vial, where you see many hundred of your kind there dying in it before you?" "The reproach is just," answered the wasp, "but not from you men, who are so far from taking example by other people's follies, that you will not take warning by your own. If after falling several times into this vial, and escaping by chance, I should fall in again, I should then but resemble you."

An old miser kept a tame jackdaw, that used to steal pieces of money, and hide them in a hole, which the cat observing, asked why he would hoard up those round shining things that he could make no use of? "Why," said the jackdaw, "my master has a whole chest full, and makes no more use of them than I."

Men are content to be laughed at for their wit, but not for their folly. If the men of wit and genius would resolve never to complain in their works of critics and detractors, the next age would not know that they ever had any.

After all the maxims and systems of trade and commerce, a stander- by would think the affairs of the world were most ridiculously contrived. There are few countries which, if well cultivated, would not support double the number of their inhabitants, and yet fewer where one-third of the people are not extremely stinted even in the necessaries of life. I send out twenty barrels of corn, which would maintain a family in bread for a year, and I bring back in return a vessel of wine, which half a dozen good follows would drink in less than a month, at the expense of their health and reason. A man would have but few spectators, if he offered to show for three pence how he could thrust a red-hot iron into a barrel of gunpowder, and it should not take fire.

Self-Assessment

1. Fill in the blanks:

(*i*) *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* published in ..... .

(*ii*) Swift had offered to send this incremental installment to Pope in December ..... .

Notes

(*iii*) In ....., a cobbler named John Partridge published a popular almanac of astrological predictions.

(*iv*) In ....., Sir William Temple, Swift's patron, published An Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning a defense of classical writing.

14.3 Summary

- Jonathan Swift was an Anglo-Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer (first for the Whigs, then for the Tories), poet and cleric who became Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. He is remembered for works such as Gulliver's Travels, A Modest Proposal, A Journal to Stella, Drapier's Letters, The Battle of the Books, An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity, and A Tale of a Tub. Swift is probably the foremost prose satirist in the English language, and is less well known for his poetry.
- Swift's family had several interesting literary connections: His grandmother, Elizabeth (Dryden) Swift, was the niece of Sir Erasmus Dryden, grandfather of the poet John Dryden. The same grandmother's aunt, Katherine (Throckmorton) Dryden, was a first cousin of the wife of Sir Walter Raleigh. His great-great grandmother, Margaret (Godwin) Swift, was the sister of Francis Godwin, author of The Man in the Moone which influenced parts of Swift's Gulliver's Travels. His uncle, Thomas Swift, married a daughter of the poet and playwright Sir William Davenant, a godson of William Shakespeare.
- Swift left Temple in 1690 for Ireland because of his health, but returned to Moor Park the following year. The illness, fits of vertigo or giddiness—now known to be Ménière's disease—would continue to plague Swift throughout his life. During this second stay with Temple, Swift received his M.A. from Hart Hall, Oxford in 1692. Then, apparently despairing of gaining a better position through Temple's patronage, Swift left Moor Park to become an ordained priest in the Established Church of Ireland and in 1694 he was appointed to the prebend of Kilroot in the Diocese of Connor, with his parish located at Kilroot, near Carrickfergus in County Antrim.
- Swift appears to have been miserable in his new position, being isolated in a small, remote community far from the centres of power and influence. While at Kilroot, however, Swift may well have become romantically involved with Jane Waring.
- Swift became increasingly active politically in these years. From 1707 to 1709 and again in 1710, Swift was in London, unsuccessfully urging upon the Whig administration of Lord Godolphin the claims of the Irish clergy to the First-Fruits and Twentieths ("Queen Anne's Bounty"), which brought in about £2,500 a year, already granted to their brethren in England.
- Swift's first major prose work, A Tale of a Tub, demonstrates many of the themes and stylistic techniques he would employ in his later work. It is at once wildly playful and funny while being pointed and harshly critical of its targets. In its main thread, the Tale recounts the exploits of three sons, representing the main threads of Christianity, who receive a bequest from their father of a coat each, with the added instructions to make no alterations whatsoever.

14.4. Key-Words

1. Affectation : writing that is artificial and designed to impress.
2. Singularity : a measure or probability distribution whose support has zero Lebesgue (or other) measure
3. Positiveness : Characterized by or displaying certainty, acceptance, or affirmation: a positive answer; positive criticism.

Notes

14.5 Review Questions

1. Explain Swift as a satirist.
2. Give an introduction to Swift's Thoughts on Various Subjects.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1711 (*ii*) 1726 (*iii*) 1708 (*iv*) 1690

14.6 Further Readings



1. Biber, D., Johannsen, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., and Finegan, E. (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman
2. Boas, F. (1911) *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40
4. Carter, R. (1986) *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistics Perspectives*. London: Routledge
5. Cohen, D. (1980) *On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace* USC/ISI IEN 137 April 1, 1980 URL: http://khavrinen.lcs.mit.edu/wollman/ien-137.txt
6. Castle, T. J. (1999) Why the Houyhnhnms don't write: Swift, Satire and the fear of the text. In Wood, N. (1999) *Jonathan Swift*. Harlow: Longman
7. Chomsky, N. (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT
8. Corson, D. (1985) *The Lexical Bar*. Oxford: Pergamon
9. Cruden A. (1796) *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*
10. Eliot, T.S. (1923) *Ulysses, Order and Myth" in Selected Essays 1917-1932* (1932; rev. ed., 1950) London: Faber and Faber.
11. Francis, W.N. (1992) Language Corpora B.C. Paper Presented at the Nobel Symposium on Corpus Linguistics, Stockholm, August 4-8, 1991. In Svartvik, J. (Ed.) *Directions in Corpus Linguistics*. Berlin and New York: Moutin

Notes

Unit 15: Swift: Thoughts on Various Subjects: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
15.1 Critical Appreciation
15.2 Summary
15.3 Key-Words
15.4 Review Questions
15.5 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to

- Analyse Swift's Major Works
- Make a critical appreciation on Thoughts on various Subjects

Introduction

Jonathan Swift engages scholars and students a like with the outstanding range of his writing. Whether one reads his political pamphlets, journalistic pieces, allusive satires on religious and political topics, intimate and direct letters, or entertaining and pungently ironic poetry, his intelligence, wit, and creativity shine clearly through. The memorable prose pieces of Gulliver's Travels,

"A Tale of a Tub, " Battle of the Books," and "A Modest Proposal" remain at the forefront of any discussion concerning satire, irony, the mock-epic, the errors of human nature, the value of classical traditions, and literary portraits of starvation and poverty. While his works provide important insights on the events, persons, and society of his own day, they also offer artful commentaries on enduring issues. During the 19th century, many readers believed Swift crossed over into uncontrolled anger for the sake of being outrageous, embraced a rebelliousness that was dangerous to the common good, and exhibited "an incipient disorder of the mind" (as Sir Walter Scott described it) in writing his so-called scatological poems. But in our time, readers and critics alike have come to realize and accept that Swift's powerful imagination places him in the ranks of Rabelais, Sterne, Joyce, and even Borges. His allusiveness and inventiveness remain the hall-marks of his work and must be interpreted in the fullest range possible.

Critical Companion to Jonathan Swift is a guide to Swift's works and to the images, events, and people surrounding them, as well as to the critics and biographers who have commented on his writing..

15.1 Critical Appreciation

Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting is the title of a satirical essay by Jonathan Swift. It also has appeared under the title ***Thoughts on Various Subjects***. It consists of a series of short epigrams or apothegms with no particular connections between them.

Notes

It contains the quotation "When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." which is the source for the title of *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole.

Other typical quotes include:

- "The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted in the former."
- "Whatever the poets pretend, it is plain they give immortality to none but themselves; it is Homer and Virgil we reverence and admire, not Achilles or Aeneas. With historians it is quite the contrary; our thoughts are taken up with the actions, persons, and events we read, and we little regard the authors."
- "When a man is made a spiritual peer he loses his surname; when a temporal, his Christian name."
- "If a man would register all his opinions upon love, politics, religion, learning, etc., beginning from his youth and so go on to old age, what a bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions would appear at last!"
- "What they do in heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not we are told expressly: that they neither marry, nor are given in marriage."

Jonathan Swift wrote "Thoughts on Various Subject, Moral and Diverting" in this work was the profound epigraph: "When a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." Ostensibly, John Kennedy Toole derived the title of his book, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, from Swift's quotation. Furthermore, the major purpose of the book is to further this philosophical musing of Swift's mind. However, *A Confederacy of Dunces* is a fictional book; therefore, to accomplish his purpose Toole realized that he must utilize his astute sense of use of rhetorical elements. Consequently, *A Confederacy of Dunces* is saturated with the six elements of rhetoric: persona, appeal to the audience, proper treatment and recognition of subject matter, context, intention, and genre. The prolific and powerful rhetorical elements utilized by John Kennedy Toole in *A Confederacy of Dunces* prodigiously contribute to the impact of the novel; the rhetorical elements execute Toole's purpose.

Thoughts on Various Subjects from Miscellanies (1711-1726)

- We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.
- Every man desires to live long, but no man would be old.
- A nice man is a man of nasty ideas.
- **Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.**
- What they do in heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not we are told expressly: that they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.
- The Stoical scheme of supplying our wants by lopping off our desires, is like cutting off our feet when we want shoes.
- The power of fortune is confessed only by the miserable; for the happy impute all their success to prudence or merit.
- The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted in the former.
- Positiveness is a good quality for preachers and orators, because he that would obtrude his thoughts and reasons upon a multitude, will convince others the more, as he appears convinced himself. Politics, as the word is commonly understood, are nothing but corruptions, and consequently of no use to a good king or a good ministry; for which reason Courts are so overrun with politics.

Notes

- Men are contented to be laughed at for their wit, but not for their folly.
- Although men are accused of not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength. It is in men as in soils, where sometimes there is a vein of gold, which the owner knows not of.
- Ambition often puts men upon doing the meanest offices; so climbing is performed in the same posture with creeping.
- Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.
- Invention is the talent of youth, and judgment of age…
- I never wonder to see men wicked, but I often wonder to see them not ashamed.
- No wise man ever wished to be younger.
- The Bulk of mankind is as well equipped for flying as thinking.
- Complaint is the largest tribute heaven receives, and the sincerest part of our devotion.
- When a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign; that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.
- The two maxims of any great man at court are always to keep his countenance and never to keep his word.

On the Style of Jonathan Swift

In [Swift's] works, he has given very different specimens both of sentiment and expression. His "Tale of a Tub" has little resemblance to his other pieces. It exhibits a vehemence and rapidity of mind, a copiousness of images, and vivacity of diction, such as he afterwards never possessed, or never exerted. It is of a mode so distinct and peculiar, that it must be considered by itself; what is true of that, is not true of any thing else which he has written.

In his other works is found an equable tenor of easy language, which rather trickles than flows. His delight was in simplicity. That he has in his works no metaphor, as has been said, is not true; but his few metaphors seem to be received rather by necessity than choice. He studied purity; and though perhaps all his strictures are not exact, yet it is not often that solecisms can be found; and whoever depends on his authority may generally conclude himself safe. His sentences are never too much dilated or contracted; and it will not be easy to find any embarrassment in the complication of his clauses, any inconsequence in his connections, or abruptness in his transitions.

His style was well suited to his thoughts, which are never subtilised by nice disquisitions, decorated by sparkling conceits, elevated by ambitious sentences, or variegated by far-sought learning. He pays no court to the passions; he excites neither surprise nor admiration; he always understands himself, and his readers always understand him: the peruser of Swift wants little previous knowledge; it will be sufficient that he is acquainted with common words and common things; he is neither required to mount elevations nor to explore profundities; his passage is always on a level, along solid ground, without asperities, without obstruction.

This easy and safe conveyance of meaning it was Swift's desire to attain, and for having attained he deserves praise, though perhaps not the highest praise. For purposes merely didactic, when something is to be told that was not known before, it is the best mode, but against that inattention by which known truths are suffered to lie neglected it makes no provision; it instructs, but does not persuade.

Self-Assessment

1. Fill in the blanks:

(*i*) Swift was born in ..... .

(*ii*) Stella was the nickname of Swift's ..... .

(*iii*) Swift left Temple in ..... .

Notes

15.2 Summary

- Jonathan Swift engages scholars and students a like with the outstanding range of his writing. Whether one reads his political pamphlets, journalistic pieces, allusive satires on religious and political topics, intimate and direct letters, or entertaining and pungently ironic poetry, his intelligence, wit, and creativity shine clearly through. The memorable prose pieces of Gulliver's Travels,
- "A Tale of a Tub, " Battle of the Books," and "A Modest Proposal" remain at the forefront of any discussion concerning satire, irony, the mock-epic, the errors of human nature, the value of classical traditions, and literary portraits of starvation and poverty.
- ***Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting*** is the title of a satirical essay by Jonathan Swift. It also has appeared under the title ***Thoughts on Various Subjects***. It consists of a series of short epigrams or apothegms with no particular connections between them.
- Jonathan Swift wrote "Thoughts on Various Subject, Moral and Diverting" in this work was the profound epigraph: "When a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." Ostensibly, John Kennedy Toole derived the title of his book, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, from Swift's quotation. Furthermore, the major purpose of the book is to further this philosophical musing of Swift's mind.
- In [Swift's] works, he has given very different specimens both of sentiment and expression. His "Tale of a Tub" has little resemblance to his other pieces. It exhibits a vehemence and rapidity of mind, a copiousness of images, and vivacity of diction, such as he afterwards never possessed, or never exerted. It is of a mode so distinct and peculiar, that it must be considered by itself; what is true of that, is not true of any thing else which he has written.
- Rhetoricians of all genres utilize the same elements to further their own purpose in writing and oration. Everything in life is an argument; therefore, everyone is obligated to analyze arguments presented and discover maxims to live life by. Miguel de Cervantes once said, "Truth indeed rather alleviates than hurts, and will always bear up against falsehood, as oil does above water.

15.3. Key-Words

1. Eccentricity : In popular usage, eccentricity (also called quirkiness or kookiness) refers to unusual or odd behavior on the part of an individual. This behavior would typically be perceived as unusual or unnecessary, without being demonstrably maladaptive.
2. Irrationality : Irrationality is cognition, thinking, talking or acting without inclusion of rationality. It is more specifically described as an action or opinion given through inadequate use of reason, emotional distress, or cognitive deficiency. The term is used, usually pejoratively, to describe thinking and actions that are, or appear to be, less useful, or more illogical than other more rational alternatives.

15.4 Review Questions

1. Discuss style and genre presented in Swift's works.
2. Critically examine Swifts views on Thoughts on various subjects.

Notes

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Dublin (*ii*) student (*iii*) 1690

15.5 Further Readings



1. Biber, D., Johannsen, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., and Finegan, E. (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman
2. Boas, F. (1911) *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40
3. Carter, R. (1986) *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistics Perspectives*. London: Routledge
4. Cohen, D. (1980) *On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace* USC/ISI IEN 137 April 1, 1980 URL: http://khavrinen.lcs.mit.edu/wollman/ien-137.txt
5. Castle, T. J. (1999) Why the Houyhnhnms don't write: Swift, Satire and the fear of the text. In Wood, N. (1999) *Jonathan Swift*. Harlow: Longman
6. Chomsky, N. (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Corson, D. (1985) *The Lexical Bar*. Oxford: Pergamon Cruden A. (1796) *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments* Eliot, T.S. (1923) *Ulysses, Order and Myth" in Selected Essays 1917-1932* (1932; rev. ed., 1950) London: Faber and Faber.
7. Francis, W.N. (1992) Language Corpora B.C. Paper Presented at the Nobel Symposium on Corpus Linguistics, Stockholm, August 4-8, 1991. In Svartvik, J. (Ed.) *Directions in Corpus Linguistics*. Berlin and New York: Moutin

Notes

Unit 16 : T.S. Eliot: Tradition and Individual Talent: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
16.1 "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
16.2 "The Function of Criticism"
16.3 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot as a Critic
16.4 Summary
16.5 Key-Words
16.6 Review Questions
16.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to :

- Discuss "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the most influential essay Eliot wrote, and "The Function of Criticism" where he talks about the tools of the critic.
- Evaluate his achievement as a critic, and try to gauge his influence on later critics.

Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is probably the best known and most influential English poet of the twentieth century. His work as a critic is equally significant. He was born in St Louis, Missouri; his parents belonged to New England, from a section of society which has been called WASP : White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, that is, part of the mainstream of society which colonized the eastern coast of America. He joined Harvard University in 1906, obtained his M.A. in 1911, and started work on a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley. In 1912 he was appointed an assistant at Harvard, but he was already under the influence of the symbolists, and had started writing poems in the manner of Jules Laforgue. He spent one year (1910-11) in Paris, and in 1914 he joined Merton College, Oxford. He settled in London, and became a member of the Anglican church and a British citizen in 1927, preferring to renounce his American heritage. He left academic pursuits to earn a living, working first in a bank, later as an editor with the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. In 1922 he founded *The Criterion*, a cultural quarterly, and *The Waste Land* was published in the inaugural issue. In 1924 he published *Homage to John Dryden*, which contained studies of Dryden and the metaphysical poets. This was followed by *For Lancelot Andrews* : *Essays on Style and Order* (1928) in which he announced himself to be "classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion." His major books of criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). I am sure you are already familiar with his achievements as a poet and dramatist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

T.S. Eliot's critical output was quite diverse; he wrote theoretical pieces as well as studies of particular authors. In "To Criticize the Critic", a lecture delivered at Leeds University in 1961, Eliot divided his prose writings into three periods. During the first, he was writing for journals

Notes

like *The Egoist*; the main influences on him were Ezra Pound, and Eliot's teacher Irving Babbitt, who had introduced him to the philosophy of Humanism at Harvard. The second period, roughly from 1918 to 1930, was primarily one of regular contributions to the *Athenaeum* and the *Times Literary Supplement*; the third period was one of lectures and addresses, after Eliot had established himself as the leading poet of the age. As he grew older, he produced a lot of social and religious criticism; books like *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) shed light on his literary criticism and poetry. The later writings reveal a certain tiredness, a refusal to take his role as poet-critic seriously. He often suggested in his later lectures that he ought not to be taken too seriously. His second lecture on Milton, delivered in 1947, contradicts his first one, delivered in 1936, which declared that "Milton's poetry could *only* be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatsoever" and accused Milton of "having done damage to the English language from which it has not wholly recovered". His convoluted style of qualification and reservations grows more complex over the years. In the words of George Watson, (he is commenting on Eliot's two lectures on Milton), "Argument advances crabwise." His first book, *The Sacred Wood* : *Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920), containing seminal essays like "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "*Hamlet*", is central to his achievement as a critic. It is this early work which influenced the New Critics.

16.1 "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) clearly expresses Eliot's concepts about poetry and the importance of tradition. Eliot emphasizes the need for critical thinking—"criticism is as inevitable as breathing". He feels that it is unfortunate that the word "tradition" is mentioned only with pejorative implications, as when we call some poet "too traditional." He questions the habit of praising a poet primarily for those elements in his work which are more individual and differentiate him from others. According to T.S. Eliot, even the most "individual" parts of a poet's work may be those which are most alive with the influence of his poetic ancestors. Eliot stresses the objective and intellectual element. The whole of past literature will be "in the bones" of the poet with the true historical sense," a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." No poet has his complete meaning alone. For proper evaluation, you must set a poet, for contrast and comparison, among the dead poets. Eliot envisages a dynamic relationship between past and present writers. "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." An artist can be judged only by the standards of the past; this does not mean the standards of dead critics. It means a judgement when two things, the old and the new, are measured by each other. To some extent, this resembles Matthew Arnold's "touchstone"; the "ideal order" formed by the "existing monuments" provide the standard, a kind of touchstone, for evaluation. As with Arnold's touchstones, Eliot's ideal order is subjective and in need of modification from time to time.

Eliot lays stress on the artist knowing "the mind of Europe — the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind". But he does not mean pedantic knowledge, he means a consciousness of the past, and some persons have a greater sensitivity to this historical awareness. As Eliot states, with epigrammatic brevity, "Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum." Throughout Eliot's poetry and criticism, we find this emphasis on the artist surrendering himself to some larger authority. His later political and religious writings too valorized authority. It is interesting that Eliot always worked within his own cultural space : religion meant Christianity, while literature, culture and history meant exclusively European literature, culture or history. Tradition, for Eliot, means an awareness of the history of Europe, not as dead facts but as an ever-changing yet changeless presence, constantly interacting subconsciously with the individual poet.

Notes

He wants the poet to merge his personality with the tradition. "The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." He suggests the analogy of the catalyst in a scientific laboratory for this process of depersonalization. The mind of the poet is a medium in which experiences can enter into new combinations. When oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. This combination takes place only in the presence of platinum, which is the *catalyst*. But the sulphuric acid shows no trace of platinum, which remains unaffected. The catalyst facilitates the chemical change, but does not participate in it, and remains unchanged. Eliot compares the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum, which will "digest and transmute the passions which are its material". Eliot shifts the critical focus from the poet to the poetry, and declares, "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." Eliot sees the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." He says that concepts like "sublimity", "greatness" or "intensity" of emotion are irrelevant. It is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic fusion takes place, that is important. In this way he rejects the Romantic emphasis on 'genius' and the exceptional mind.

Eliot refutes the idea that poetry is the expression of the personality of the poet. Experiences important for the man may have no place in his poems, and *vice-versa*. The emotions occasioned by events in the personal life of the poet are not important. What matters is the emotion transmuted into poetry, the feelings expressed in the poetry. "Emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him". Eliot says that Wordsworth's formula is wrong. (I am sure you would remember Wordsworth's comments on poetry in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* : "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling : it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility.") For Eliot, poetry is not recollection of feeling, "it is a new thing resulting from the concentration of a very great number of experiences ... it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation." Eliot believes that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." For him, the emotion of art is impersonal, and the artist can achieve this impersonality only by cultivating the historical sense, by being conscious of the tradition.

It is now generally believed that Eliot's idea of tradition is rather narrow in two respects. First, he's talking of simply the poetic tradition and neglects the fact that even the poetic tradition is a complex amalgam of written and oral poetry and the elements that go into them. It was only in later writings that he realised the fact that in the making of verse many elements are involved. In his writings on poetic drama he gives evidence of having broadened his scope.

Second, Eliot is neglecting other traditions that go into social formations. When he later wrote 'Religion and Literature', he gives more scope to non-poetic elements of tradition. On these considerations one can say that he develops his ideas on tradition throughout his literary career — right up to the time he wrote 'Notes Towards a Definition of Culture' in which tradition is more expansive than in his earlier writings.

16.2 "The Function of Criticism"

Early in his career, Eliot had declared, "The poet critic is criticizing poetry in order to create poetry" ("The Perfect Critic", 1920). Eliot's criticism was subsidiary to his creative writing. We can consider him Dryden's successor because his critical work serves the purpose of introducing and justifying his own practice as a poet and playwright. He also shared Dryden's classical leanings. In "The Function of Criticism" (1923), Eliot unambiguously states his views on criticism, and on the methodology it should adopt.

Notes

He begins the essay by repeating his views on tradition expressed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". That essay postulated a certain order of literary masterpieces which constituted tradition. It is only in relation to this tradition that individual artists have their significance. He says that criticism too requires the same sacrifice of the ego.

He defines criticism as "the commentation and exposition of works of art by means of written words." Criticism, unlike literature, is not an autotelic activity, it is dependent on literature. The purpose of criticism is "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." Commenting on the prevailing state of criticism, Eliot bemoans the fact that criticism, "far from being a simple and orderly field of beneficent activity" is a field where critics excel in opposing each other. For Eliot, criticism should be marked by "cooperative labour." "The critic ... should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks ... and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgement." In the New Critics in America, we find a demonstration of this co-operative venture. And much of Leavis's criticism is expressed in terms of friendly debate, as if he were discussing the work with a colleague, and trying to reach a consensus. A collection of his essays has the very apt title, *The Common Pursuit*; the title pays a graceful compliment to Eliot's theory of criticism, and also demonstrates the use of this collaborative method.

Eliot refutes a fellow critic Middleton Murray's suggestion that progress is possible by following the "Inner Voice". He believes that following the "Inner Voice" is only an excuse for "doing as one likes." He feels that Matthew Arnold is among those who value "tradition and the accumulated wisdom of time." According to Eliot, Arnold distinguishes too sharply between the "creative" and "critical", he overlooks the importance of criticism in the work of creativity. Eliot believes that "the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour : the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing : this frightful toil is as much critical as creative." He says "some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior." He believes that the criticism employed by a good writer on his own work "is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism." The vast amount of critical labour may not be apparent, it may have "flashed in the very heat of creation." Just because it is not obvious, and we have no way of knowing what goes on in the mind of the creative artist, we should not assume that this critical activity is absent. Here Eliot is presenting his concept of artistic activity; in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", he had talked about "impersonality" and criticized Wordsworth's concept of poetry as a "spontaneous overflow". Here Eliot attacks the idea that "the great artist is an unconscious artist". Art does not arise just from inspiration; a lot of effort has to go into perfecting it, "expunging, correcting, testing".

According to Eliot, "The critical activity finds its highest, its true fulfilment in a kind of union with creation in the labour of the artist." It follows that creative artists would be the best critics. He admits that at one time he believed that "the *only* critics worth reading are the critics who practised and practised well, the art of which they wrote." He says that what gives the practitioner's criticism its special force is his "highly developed sense of fact." The best critics can make nebulous feelings into something "precise, tractable, under control."

Eliot then considers the importance of interpretation. A critic may feel that he has the true understanding of a work, but there is no way of confirming this interpretation. Eliot feels that such interpretations are of no use; far more useful would be to put the reader in possession of facts about the work to enable him to respond to it fully. "Interpretation is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed."

Eliot has already said that criticism is a common pursuit. Now he tells us how to go about it. "Comparison and analysis, I have said before, and Remy de Gourmont has said before me, are the chief tools of the critic." But one must know what to compare and what to analyze, we should not

Notes

reduce it to a mechanical exercise, counting the "number of times giraffes are mentioned in the English novel." He is against interpreters who can find things in the poem which are not there. He uses the metaphor of medical dissection to emphasize his point : "Comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place." The text is compared to the dead body on the operation table; when an interpreter puts ideas of his own making into the reading of the poem, he is compared to a doctor bringing in parts from outside when conducting a post mortem. Eliot feels that anything which produces "a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art" is better. With a trace of wit, he states, "We assume, of course, that we are masters and not servants of facts, and that we know that the discovery of Shakespeare's laundry bills would not be of much use to us." But he adds that we should reserve judgement on the futility of research, it is possible that some genius may appear in the future who would make good use of even trivial facts. He feels that "facts cannot corrupt taste", but impressionistic criticism, expressing opinion or fancy (he suggests Coleridge's comments on *Hamlet* as an example) can be harmful. He ends the essay by warning us against an ever present danger of criticism : "the multiplication of critical books and essays may create .. a vicious taste for reading about works of art instead of reading the works themselves, it may supply opinion instead of educating taste."

Eliot anchors criticism squarely in the text and is wary of opinionated views. In this respect Eliot echoes some contemporary theorists who believe that a text is animated by the reader and the critic only facilitates the exercise.

16.3 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot as a Critic

Eliot's influence as a poet and critic has done a lot to establish a climate favorable to objective criticism, eschewing the nebulous impressionism of the preceding age. His best critical writing analyzes and clarifies the theoretical and technical problems which had a bearing on his writing of poetry. He made an important contribution to ideas concerning the integrity of poetry, the process of poetic composition, the importance of tradition to the maturing of the individual talent, the relation of the past and the present, and the fusion of feeling and thought. Eliot as a critic can be considered a successor of Matthew Arnold, because he assumed the role of a guardian of culture; like Arnold, he laid stress on impartiality, and proper evaluation of a poet. And like Arnold, he became a legislator of literary culture, as his later writings testify.

The earlier Eliot staunchly defended the autonomy of art, arguing against linking up art and religion or art and morality. But later he started believing in the importance of the poet's beliefs. R, n, Wellek points out that Eliot "advocated a double standard of criticism : artistic on the one hand and moral-philosophical-theological on the other." Eliot declared (in *Essays Ancient and Modern*, 1936) "In an age like our own ... it is the more necessary ... to scrutinize works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."

Many fellow critics have expressed their dissatisfaction with Eliot's criticism, in spite of its great influence. Yvor Winters categorically states, "Eliot is a theorist who has repeatedly contradicted himself on every important issue that he has touched... many of them [the contradictions] occur within the same book or even within the same essay." F.R. Leavis grants Eliot's eminence as a poet, but feels that his criticism falls short of the "consciousness that one thinks of as necessary to the great creative writer." According to Leavis, "some of the ideas, attitudes, and valuations put into currency by Eliot were arbitrary." He says that "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is

Notes

"notable for its ambiguities, its logical inconsequence, its pseudo-precisions, its fallaciousness, and the aplomb of its equivocations and its specious cogency". He attacks the "falseness" of Eliot's doctrine of impersonality, and says that it is designed to eliminate the conception of the artist as an individual distinguished by his openness to life.

Lack of clarity is another common charge. W.K. Wimsatt says of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" :

This celebrated early essay, despite its forceful suggestiveness, the smoothness and fullness of its definition of the poet's impersonality was a highly ambiguous statement. Therein, no doubt, consisted something of its pregnancy. In this essay as poet and critic Eliot is saying two things about three ideas (man, poet and poem) and saying them simultaneously. He is saying that a poet ought to depersonalize his raw experience, transcend the immediacy of the suffering man. At the same time, he is saying that the reader ought to read the poem impersonally, as an achieved expression, not personally, with attendant inquiries into the sufferings, the motives of the man behind the poem. The idea 'poet' as Eliot employs it in this essay is sometimes the antithesis of 'man' and sometimes the antithesis of 'poem'.

The attempt to minimize the role of the poet's personality leads to confusion, as two views of the mind emerge from this essay. The mind is presented as an agent of change, it is an active force which transmutes experience, Eliot refers to "the mind which creates". But it is also referred to as a catalyst, which facilitates change without itself changing. His further statement only confuses the issue further, when he says, "the more perfect the artist the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."

In many places there is a gap between his theoretical formulations and his practical criticism. He insisted that critics should not indulge in interpretation or judgement : "The critic must not coerce, and he must not make judgements of worse or better" (*The Sacred Wood*,). But his best essays, whether on the metaphysical poets, Marvell or Milton, make clear value judgements. Even the concept of a tradition implies an hierarchy, for it is the best works which make up the tradition that Eliot considers so important.

Self-Assessment

1. Fill in the blanks:

(*i*) The Perfect Critic appeared in ..... .

(*ii*) The Function of Criticism was published in ..... .

16.4 Summary

- T.S. Eliot's critical pronouncements stimulated a revaluation of various literary reputations. He brought about the re-appraisal of metaphysical poetry and sixteenth and seventeenth century drama. His successful practice as a poet gave special weight to his pronouncement as a critic. His later prose writing gives more attention to society and culture, and the literary essays and lectures of the later part of his life tend to be more conventional than his early work. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" presents a view of the great artist as part of tradition. Eliot refutes the concept of poetry as an expression of emotion, and lays stress on its impersonality. He used the phrase "the objective correlative" to describe how emotion can be represented in literature. "The Metaphysical Poets" presented the concept of a "dissociation of sensibility", and declared that "poets in our civilization ... must be difficult"; these comments shed as much light on Eliot's own poetry as on the process of literary creation. His essay, "The Function of Criticism", discusses the tools, like "comparison and analysis" which have been used by most New Critics in their analysis of literary texts.

Notes

16.5 Key-Words

Autotelic	:	having or being a purpose in itself, not dependent on other things for its intention or usefulness.
Bacon	:	Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Elizabethan man of letters. His Essays and The Advancement of Learning are good examples of early English prose.
Catalyst	:	in chemistry, a substance that without itself undergoing any change, starts a reaction or increases the rate of a reaction; metaphorically, a person or thing that causes change.
Epigrammatic	:	having the quality of an epigram, a short witty poem, proverb or expression.
Hobbes	:	Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), author of Leviathan, one of the earliest books of political economy.
Iconoclast	:	literally, a person who breaks religious images used in worship. Now the word is more commonly used for its metaphorical meaning, a person who attacks cherished beliefs or established reputations.

16.6 Review Questions

1. How far do you agree with Eliot's view that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality ?
2. Discuss Eliot's view of the relationship between the individual poet and the tradition.
3. Write a short note on Eliot's concept of history.
4. Write short notes on
   (*a*) dissociation of sensibility
   (*b*) objective correlative.
5. Write a critical commentary on Eliot's essay, "The Metaphysical Poets."

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1920 (*ii*) 1923

16.7 Further Readings



1. Kermode, Frank. "Dissociation of Sensibility : Modern Symbolist Readings of Literary History" from *The Romantic Image* (1957). Reprinted in *Literary Criticism*: *A Reading*. Ed. B. Das and J.M. Mohanty. Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1985.
2. Wellek, Rene. *A History of Modern Criticism* 1750-1950 Vol. V. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1986.
3. Wimsatt, W.K. "Genesis : A Fallacy Revisited." Reprinted in *On Literary Intention*: *Critical Essays*. Ed. David Newton-de Molina. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1976.

Notes

Unit 17: Eliot-Tradition And Individual Talent: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
17.1 The Concept of Tradition and Individual Talent
17.2 Text—Tradition and Individual Talent
17.3 Analysis
17.4 Summary
17.5 Key-Words
17.6 Review Questions
17.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit, Students will to be able to:

- Generate awareness amongst the learners about T. S. Eliot's position as a Critic.
- Enable the learners to understand in detail the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" as one of his most famous critical outputs.

Introduction

T. S. Eliot as a Critic' Besides being a poet, playwright and publisher, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was one of the most seminal critics of his time. Carlo Linati, his Italian critic, found his poetry to be 'irrational, incomprehensible… a magnificent puzzle', and in his poetic endeavors 'a deliberate critical purpose'. Also in his literary criticism Eliot's personality has found its full expression. Thus Eliot's literary criticism can be seen as expression of his poetic credo. As one of the seminal critics of the twentieth century; Eliot shows a disinterested endeavour of critical faculty and intelligence in analyzing a work of art. For the sake a systematic discussion, his critical works may be grouped under the following headings:

1. theoretical criticism dealing with the principles of literature,
2. descriptive and practical criticism dealing with the works of individual writers and evaluation of their achievements, and
3. theological essays.

'Tradition and Individual Talent' has been one of his extraordinarily influential critical works. It was first published in 1922 in Sacred Woods, and was subsequently included in the 'Selected Essays' (1917-1932). In this essay, Eliot has primarily dealt with his concepts of

1. Historical Sense, and Tradition
2. Interdependence of the past and the present
3. Impersonality in art in general and poetry in particular

17.1 The Concept of Tradition and Individual Talent

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Tradition means a belief, principle or way of acting which people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long

Notes

time, or all of these beliefs, etc. in a particular society or group. Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes 'Tradition' an 'inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom)'. Eliot commences the essay with the general attitude towards 'Tradition'. He points out that every nation and race has its creative and critical turn of mind, and emphasises the need for critical thinking. 'We might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing.'In 'Tradition and Individual Talent', Eliot introduces the idea of Tradition. Interestingly enough, Eliot's contemporaries and commentators either derided the idea as irrelevant, conservative and backward-looking stance or appreciated the idea and read it in connection with Matthew Arnold's historical criticism of texts popularly known as 'touchstone' method. In this section we will first make an attempt to summarize Eliot's concept of tradition and then will seek to critique it for a comprehensive understanding of the texts.

At the very outset, Eliot makes it clear that he is using the term tradition as an adjective to explain the relationship of a poem or a work to the works of dead poets and artists. He regrets that in our appreciation of authors we hardly include their connections with those living and dead. Also our critical apparatus is significantly limited to the language in which the work is produced. A work produced in a different language can be considered for a better appreciation of the work. In this connection, he notices "our tendency to insist…those aspects" of a writer's work in which "he least resembles anyone else". Thus, our appreciation of the writer is derived from exhumation of the uniqueness of the work. In the process, the interpretation of the work focuses on identifying the writer's difference from his predecessors. Eliot critiques this tendency in literary appreciation and favours inclusion of work or parts of work of dead poets and predecessors.

Although Eliot attaches greater importance to the idea of tradition, he rejects the idea of tradition in the name of 'Blind or Timid Adherence' to successful compositions of the past. By subscribing to the idea of tradition, Eliot does not mean sacrificing novelty nor does he mean slavish repetitions of stylistic and structural features. By the term 'Tradition', he comes up with something 'of much wider significance". By 'Tradition', he does not refer to a legacy of writers which can be handed down from a generation to another generation. It has nothing to do with the idea of inheritance; rather it regrets a great deal of endeavour. He further argues, "It involves... The historical sense... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past but its presence; … This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional." By this statement, Eliot wants to emphasize that the writer or the poet must develop a sense of the pastness of the past and always seeks to examine the poem or the work in its relation to the works of the dead writers or the poets. To substantiate his point of view, Eliot says, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and the artists." As he says this, he is perfectly aware of Matthew Arnold's notion of historical criticism and therefore distances himself from such the Arnoldian critical stance. He identifies his approach to literary appreciation "as a principle of aesthetics and thereby distinguishes it from Arnold's "Historical Criticism". Thus, Eliot offers an organic theory and practice of literary criticism. In this, he treats tradition not as a legacy but as an invention of anyone who is ready to create his or her literary pantheon, depending on his literary tastes and positions. This means that the development of the writer will depend on his or her ability to build such private spaces for continual negotiation and even struggle with illustrious antecedents, and strong influences. Harold Bloom terms the state of struggle as "The anxiety of influence", and he derides Eliot for suggesting a complex, an elusive relationship between the tradition and the individual, and goes on to develop his own theory of influence.

The Concept of 'Impersonality'

In the second part of the essay Eliot argues that "Honest Criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry". This hints at the actual beginning of 'New

Notes

Criticism' where the focus will shift from author to the text. Eliot here defines the poet's responsibility. The poet is not supposed to compose poetry which is full of his personal emotions. He must subscribe himself to something more valuable, i.e., what others have composed in the past. Thus, Eliot emphasizes objectivity in poetry. Eliot believes that some sort of 'physical distancing', to use Bullough's term, is necessary for successful composition. He also mentions that the poet has to merge his personality with the tradition:"The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." The mind of the poet is a medium in which experiences can enter new combinations. He exemplifies this process as when oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. This combination takes place only in the presence of platinum, which acts as the catalyst. But the sulphuric acid shows no trace of platinum, and remains unaffected. The catalyst facilitates the chemical change, but does not participate in the chemical reaction, and remains unchanged. Eliot compares the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum, which will "digest and transmute the passions which are its material". He suggests the analogy of a catalyst's role in a chemical process in a scientific laboratory for this process of depersonalization. Eliot sees the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." He says that concepts like "sublimity", "greatness" or "intensity" of emotion are irrelevant. It is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic process takes place, that is important. In this way he dissociates the notion on the artistic process from an added emphasis on 'genius' and the exceptional mind.

Eliot refutes the idea that poetry is the expression of poet's personality. Experiences in the life of the man may have no place in his poems, and vice-versa. The emotions occasioned by events in the personal life of the poet are not important. What matters is the emotion transmuted into poetry, the feelings expressed in the poetry. "Emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him". Eliot critiques Wordsworth's definition of poetry in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility."For Eliot, poetry is not recollection of feeling, "it is a new thing resulting from the concentration of a very great number of experiences . . . it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation." Eliot defines that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." For him, the emotion of art is impersonal, and the artist can achieve this impersonality only by and being conscious of the tradition, He is talking about the poetic tradition and neglects the fact that even the poetic tradition is a complex mixture of written and oral poetry and the elements that go into them. It was only in his later writings that he realized that in poetic composition many elements are involved. In his poetic dramas, he sought to brodent his scope. Eliot has also ignored other traditions that go into social formations. In 'Religion and Literature', he has dealt with the non-poetic elements of tradition at length. He kept on developing his notion of tradition right up to the time he wrote 'Notes towards a definition on culture'.

Creative writer has artistic sensibility. He observes the world like any common men. But his vision observes the world quite differently. He can perceive from life-experience what common man cannot see at all. This experience and observation get imaginative colours with the help of artistic sensibility. He creates a world of imaginative reality. His world is more beautiful and artistic than the real world. He is naturally gifted to create the work which has power to move or transport the reader. He gets his raw material from the life. He is critic of life.

17.2 Text—Tradition and Individual Talent

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to "the tradition" or to "a tradition"; at most, we employ the adjective

Notes

in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is "traditional" or even "too traditional." Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archæological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archæology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are "more critical" than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

Notes

In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other.

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route,* which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

Some one said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know. I am alive to a usual objection to what is clearly part of my programme for the *métier* of poetry. The objection is that the doctrine requires a ridiculous amount of erudition (pedantry), a claim which can be rejected by appeal to the lives of poets in any pantheon. It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I shall, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book knowledge

Notes

but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. In the last article I tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this Impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of "personality," not being necessarily more interesting, or having "more to say," but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations. The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely. Canto XV of the *Inferno* (Brunetto Latini) is a working up of the emotion evident in the situation; but the effect, though single as that of any work of art, is obtained by considerable complexity of detail. The last quatrain gives an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which "came," which did not develop simply out of what precedes, but which was probably in suspension in the poet's mind until the proper combination arrived for it to add itself to. The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of "sublimity" misses the mark. For it is not the "greatness," the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. The episode of Paolo and Francesca employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of. It is no more intense, furthermore, than Canto XXVI, the voyage of Ulysses, which has not the direct dependence upon an emotion. Great variety is possible in the process of transmution of emotion: the murder of Agamemnon, or the agony of Othello, gives an artistic effect apparently closer to a possible original than the scenes from Dante. In the *Agamemnon,* the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in *Othello* to the emotion of the protagonist himself. But the difference between art and the event is always absolute; the combination which is the murder of Agamemnon is probably as complex as that which is the voyage of Ulysses. In either case there has been a fusion of elements. The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together.

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which

Notes

impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

I will quote a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention in the light—or darkness—of these observations:And now methinks I could e'en chide myselfFor doating on her beauty, though her deathShall be revenged after no common action.Does the silkworm expend her yellow labourFor thee? For thee does she undo herself?Are lordships sold to maintain ladyshipsFor the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?Why does yon fellow falsify highways,And put his life between the judge's lips,To refine such a thing—keeps horse and menTo beat their valours for her?…In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not "recollected," and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is "tranquil" only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him "personal." Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

Notes

17.3 Analysis

Tradition and Individual Talent" is the essay of lasting significance in the history of modern criticism. The essay brought into being two principal aspects of Eliot's critical domain – tradition and impersonality in art and poetry, that rated over the realm of criticism. The essay also brings forth Eliot's views on the inter–relation between traditional and individual talent. The essay brought into being the new approach with poets of everlasting significance and it also provided the parameters for the assessment of the genius and the shortcomings of the masters but contributed to the history of English Literature. The idea of tradition with all its magnificence, has a meaning beyond the conventional sense of term. It begins with a historical sense and goes on acquiring new dimensions along political and cultural dimension, and this creates a system of axes for the assessment of the worth and genius of a poet.The idea of Eliot's theory of tradition is based on the inevitable phenomenon of the continuity of the values during the process called civilization. Eliot beings with a description that makes tradition a term of abuse and develops to a metaphor of unquestionable authenticity. 'Seldom perhaps', he says, 'does the word appear except in a phrase of censure'. He further says :*You can hardly make the word aggreable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology.*The above quoted lines from one of the most celebrated critical endeavours make it clear that Eliot aims at developing a new concept and structuring a new approach to the very phenomenon called poetry. Eliot, after beginning with the seemingly derogatory implications of the term imparts a new meaning and magnificence to the term when he identifies tradition with historical sense. The identification discussed above makes it clear that the tradition according to Eliot is something more than mere conglomeration of dead works. The identification of tradition with historical sense serves to ratify the stature of tradition in assessing the works and function of pets and poetry. He elaborates the idea of historical sense and says : *and the historical sense invokes a perception not only of the partners of the past but also of its presence : The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.*Eliot in the above quoted line puts forth a dynamic manifestation of tradition which shapes the minds of different poets of different generation. Eliot also inkles that the poet's conformity into tradition is an act of rigorous intellectual efforts that constitute a poet in him. Eliot further defines the idea of historical sense and says : *The historical sense which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal, and of timeless and temporal together, is what makes a writer tradition. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acute by conscious of his place in time of his contemporaneity* .The excerpt from the essay makes it clear that Eliot pus the whole term in a much wider context than it is otherwise used before. Eliot takes tradition to be an embodiment of values and beliefs shared by a race which leads to the idea that there is a process of natural selection and rejection. The values and the belief that die with the passage of time are subject to rejection. The values and beliefs that constitute the tradition are living one with capacity of mutual interaction. The old and the new interpenetrate and this interpenetration results into a new order defined in terms of the simultaneous existence of the values of the past and the present. The survival of past ratifies the presentness of it. The simultaneous existence of the past and the present, of the old and the new. It is, thus, evident that the poet is guided chiefly by the dynamics of the tradition. Eliot further elaborates: *No poet, no artist has a complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation in the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him from contrast and comparison among the dead.*

Eliot reaffirms that the poet, in order to survive as a poet must invite close contrast and comparison with the dead poets. Unless, a poet is capable of doing that he ceases to matter in the history of poetry. Richard Shusterman rightly observes that the 'enduring demands preserved in a tradition make it capable of functioning as a synchronize structural system'. Raman Selden observes that 'the standard theories of literature often combine these apparently disparate modes of thinking'.

Notes

It is remarkable that these apparently disparate modes of thinking are disciplined by values. The relation between the new work of art and the tradition is another very complex idea enshrined in the essay. It is, however, true that the complete meaning of the poet is realized through his relationship with the tradition but the importance of individual talent cannot be set aside in a discussion on the Eliot's poetics. It is again noteworthy that the tradition and individual talent are not at a sharp contrast with each other but they are mutually complimentary. Eliot conceives tradition and individual talent as unifiable and show that the two have an equally important role to play in poetic creation. The views of Jean Michael Rabate capture our attention. He commenting on the function of historical sense in the caste of an individual talent says : *This requires that the "bones" belong to the individual who recomposes simultaneity at every moment without losing a combination of the timeless and the merely temporal.*[7]Individual talent is needed to acquire the sense of tradition. Eliot lays good emphasis on the idea of interactivity between the tradition and individual talent. If the individual talent needs to acquire tradition, then the individual talent in turn modifies tradition. Eliot ratifies the dynamic nature of tradition. *The existing monument form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this in conformity between the old and the new*.The above quoted lines make clear the cyclic interdependence between tradition and individual talent. Shusterman's view again oblige inclusion, 'Old and new elements', he points out, 'derive their meaning from their reciprocal relations of contrast and coherence, in a larger whole of tradition which they themselves constitute as parts'. It is evident from the views of Shusterman that tradition is not anything fixed or static but it is something dynamic and everchanging. Every new participation in the tradition results into restructuring of the same tradition with different emphasis. It is constantly growing and changing and becoming different from what it has been earlier. The past directs the present and is modified by the present. This is an apt revelation of the traditional capabilities of a poet. The past helps us understand the present and the present throws light on the past. The new work of art is judged by the standards set by the past. It is in the light of the past alone that an individual talent can be. This is the way Eliot subtly reconciles the tradition and the individual talent. Eliot's views on tradition paves way for the theorization of the impersonality in art and poetry. Divergent views about Eliot's theory of objectivity have been discussed but it is observed that critics tend to generalize the theory to a common experience. It is noticeable that the impersonality that Eliot discusses in his criticism does not imply a mechanical objectivity of a hoarding painter, but, it owes its genesis to the personality that emerges out of the creative personality of the poet. It is understandable that Eliot denies an outright and blind adherence to some peculiar faiths and belief but an emancipation from what is very personal on peculiar. He says : ..... the poet has not a personality to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experience combine in a peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.It is clear from the above quotation that Eliot lays heavy stress on the two different aspect of a creator what he is as an individual and at the same time what he is as a creator; It is an easy inference from the above equation that Eliot's to his critical theories discards the emotion of strictly personal significance and centers his ideals on the transformation of what is personal but something of universal significance.The above quoted excerpts from "Tradition and Individual Talent" put forth a belligerently anti romantic view of poetry which lays emphasis on poetry and discards the very idea of the personality of the poet. It is obligatory to remember Aristotle as this point of time who, against all odds takes 'plot' to be the 'soul of the tragedy' and claims that 'there can be tragedy than a character but not without a plot'.[11] Eliot in these lines discovers a new possibility of a universal meaning, which free from the whims and eccentricities of the poet and

Notes

has a wider significance. The comparison made out by Eliot between the mind of the poet and the catalyst in a chemical reaction further confirms the point of view. He says : When the two gases, previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place, only if the platinum is present, nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected.[12]The analogy that Eliot puts forth makes it clear that the poetry is something entirely different from what is the personal identity of the poet. This is principally the reason that Eliot, all along the length and breadth of his critical writings, makes frequent use of terms like 'transmate', 'transform', 'digest', etc. He further suggests : ... but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

Tradition and Individual Talent

Critical commentary manifesto of eliot's critical creed. The essay " tradition and individual talent" was first published in 1919 in the times literary supplement, as a critical article. The essay may be regarded as an unofficial manifesto of eliot's critical creed, for it contains all those critical priciples from which his criticism has been derived ever slince. The seed which have been sown here come to fryition in his subsequent essays. It is a declaration of eliot's critical creed and these principles are the basis of all his subsequent criticism. Its Three Parts.

The Eassay is Divided Into Three Parts

The first part gives us eliot's concept of tradition, and in the second part is developed his theory of the impersonality of poetry. The short third part is in the nature of a conclusion, or summing up of the whole discussion.

Tradition : Ways on which it can be acquired For eliot, tradition is a matter of much wider significance. Tradition in the ture sence of the trem cannot be inherited, it can only be obtained by hard labour. This this labour is the labours of the knowing the past writers. It is the critical labour of shifting the good and useful. Tradition can be obtained only by those who have the histroical sense.

The historical sense involves a preception " not only of the pastness of the part, but also of ots presense. One who has the histroic sense feels that the whole of the literture of europ from romar down to his own day, including the literature of his own century, forms one continuous literary tradition.

He realises thea past exists in present, and the past and present form one simultaneous order. This historica sense is the sense of timeless and the temporal, as well as of the timeless and the temporal together. It is this historic sense which makes a writer traditional. A writer with the sense of tradition is fully conscius of his own genration, of his place in the present, but he is also acutely conseious of his relationship with the writer of the past.

Dynamic Conception Of Tradition : Emphasising future the value of tradition, eliot points out that no writers has his value and significance in isolation to judge the work of a poet or an artist, we must compare and contrast his work with the work of poet and aritist in the past. Such comparison and contrast is essential for forming an idea a new the real worth and significance of a new writer and his work. Eilot's conception of tradition is a dynamic one.

According to his view, tradition is not anything fixed and ststic, it is constantly changing, growing and becoming different from what it is a writer in the present must seek gudinece from the past, he must conform to the literary tradition, but just as the past directs and gudies the present, so the present alters and modifies the past when a ne work of art is created, if it is a really new and original the whole literary tradition is modified though ever so silghtly.

Notes

Its Function :- The work of a poet in the present is to be compared and contrasted with works of the past, and judged by the standards of the past. But this judgement dose not mean determining good or bad it dose not mean deciding whether the present work is better or worse then works of the past an author in the present is certainly only to be judged by the priciples and standard of the past the comparison is to be made for knowing the facts, all he facts, about the new work of art. The comparison is made for the purposes of analysis, and for forming a better understanding of the new.

The past helps us to understand the present, and he throws light on the past. It is this way along that we can form an idea of what is really individual and new. It is by comparison along that we can sift the traditional from individual elements in a given work of art.

Sence of Tradition : Eliot now explains future what he means by a sense of tradition. The sense of tradition dose not mean that the poet should try to know the past as whole,take it to be lump or mass without any discrimination. Such a ciurse is impossinle as well as undersirable.

A sense of tradition in the real sense means consciusness, " of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinquished reputation" In other words, to know the tradition, the poet must judge critically what are the main trands and what are not. He must cnfine himself to the main trands to the exclusion of all that is incidental or topical.

The poet must also realise that art never improves, though its ,aterial is never the same. The great works of art never lose their significance, for there is no qualitative improvement in art. There may be refinment, there may be development. But from the point of view of the artist there is no improvement.

Impresonality of Poetry :- The artist must continually surrender himself to something which is more valueable then himeself , i.e. the ilteraly tradition. he must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past. he must continue to acuire the sense of tradition throughout his career in the beginning, his self, his individuality, may assert itslef , but as power mature there must be greater and greater extinction of personality.he must acaurie greater and greater objectivity his emotions and passion must be deper sonalised: he must be as impresonal and objective as a sceintifist. the presonality of the artist is not important : the important thing is his sense of 'tradition' a good poem is a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.

Thus the poet's personality is merely a medium, having the same significance as catalytic agent, or a recepatabtacle in whice chemical reactions take place. that is why the poet hold that , " honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is driect not upon the poet but uopn the poetry."

The Poetics Process :- In the second part of the essay eliot develops furture his theory of the impersonality of poetry. He compares ths mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of a chemical reaction, hust as chemical reactions take place in the presence of a catalyst along, so also the poet's mind is the catalytic agent for combining different emotions into something new suppose there is a jar containing oxygen and sulphre dioxide. These two gases combine to form sulphureous acid when a fine filament of platinum is introduced into the jar. The Combination takes place only in the presence of the place of platium, but the metal ifself dose not undergo any change, it remains insert, neutural and un affected. The mind of the poet is like the cataytic agent. It is necessary for combinations of emotions and experiences to take place, but itself dose not undergo any change during the process of poetic combination.

In the case of a young and immature poet, his mind , his personal emotions and experincess, may find some experssion in his composition, but ,says eliot," the more perfact the artist, the more completely separste in him will be the man suffer and the mind which creates".T.s. eliot here distinguisher between emotions and feeling , but he dose not state what this difference is . " Nowhere else in his writings"says a.g. george, "is this distinction maintained: nither dose he adeauately distinguish between the meaning of the two words" The distinction should , therefore, be ignored more as it has bearing on his impersonal theory of poetry.

Notes

Poetry as Orgnasation:-Eliot next compares the poet's mind to a jar or receptable in which are stored numberless feeling, emotions etc. Which remain there is an organised and chaotic form till "all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together". Thus poetry is organisation rather then inspiration imperssion and experience which are important in for the man way find no place in his poetry, and those which become important in the poetry amy have no significance for the man.

Eliot's rejects words woth's theory of poetry. Having its origin "emotions recollected in tranquality". And points out that in the process of poetic composition there is neither emotion, nor recollection for tranquality. In the poetic process there is only concentration of a number of experincess, and anew thing results from concentration. And this process of concentration is neither conscious nor deliberate : it is a passice one.

The difference between a good and a bad poet is that a bad is conscious and unconscious where he should be conscious. It is this consciouness of the wrong kind which makes a poem personal, whereas mature art must be impersonal, but eliot dose not tell us when a poet should be conscious, and when not. The point has been left vague and interminate.

Poetry As Escape from Personality :- Eliot conclude: "poetry is not a turing loose of emotion, but as escape from emotion: it is not the expression of personality,but an escape from personality".

Thus, eloit dose not deny personality or emotion to the poet only , the must depersonalise his emotions. There should be exitinotion of his personality this impersonamlity can be achived only when the poet surrenders himself completely to the work that is to be done and the poet can know what is to be done , only if he acquires a sense of traditon, the historic sense, which makes him conscious, not only of the present, but alos of the present movement of the past, not only of what is dead, but of what is already living.

Self-Assessment

1. Choose the correct option:

1. "Honest Criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry". Can be elucidate as .....
   (*a*) Only the poets can make honest criticism and sensitive appreciation of his own poetry.
   (*b*) Sincere criticism has to focus on the poet's personality which would in turn lead him to neglect his poetic contribution.
   (*c*) The focus of literary criticism has to shift from author to the text. The poet is not supposed to compose poetry which is full of his personal emotions.
   (*d*) None of the above
2. Eliot's attention shifts in the second section from ..... to .....
   (*a*) Tradition, individual talent
   (*b*) The author, the text
   (*c*) Individual talent, tradition
   (*d*) The text, author
3. According to Eliot the emotion of art is .....
   (*a*) Impersonal
   (*b*) Personal
   (*c*) Inaccurate
   (*d*) Spontaneous
4. Eliot has not completed his notion of tradition in this essay; he develops it further in …….
   (*a*) 'Notes towards a definition on culture'.

Notes

(*b*) 'Hamlet and His Problems'

(*c*) 'A Note on Twentieth Century Literature'

(*d*) None of the Above

5. T. S. Eliot defines poetry as ……

(*a*) "The spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility.

(*b*) "Not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."

(*c*) "A metrical composition which is a blissful blend of emotions and intellect.

(*d*) None of the above

17.4 Summary

- Thus, Eliot denounces the romantic criticism of the nineteenth century (particularly Wordsworth's theory of poetry); second, it underlines the importance of 'tradition' and examines the correlation between 'tradition' and 'individual talent' and finally, it announces the death of the author (i.e., the empirical author, the author in the biographical sense of term) and shifts the focus from the author to the text.
- Tradition and Individual Talent" is one of the more well known works that T. S. Eliot has produced in his critic capacity. It formulates Elliot's conception of the relationship between the poet and the literary tradition which precedes him.
- In "Tradition and Individual Talent" Eliot presents his conception of tradition and the definition of the poet and poetry in relation to it. He wishes to correct for the fact that, as he perceives it, "in English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence."
- Eliot posits that, though the English tradition generally upholds the belief that art progresses through change - a separation from tradition, literary advancements are instead recognized only when they conform to the tradition.Eliot, a classicist, felt that the true incorporation of tradition into literature was unrecognised, that tradition, a word that "seldom…..appear in phase of censure", was actually a thus-far unrealized element of literary criticism.
- For Eliot, the term "tradition" is imbued with a special and complex character. It represents a "simultaneous order," by which Eliot means a historical timelessness – a fusion of past and present – and, at the same time, a sense of present temporality. A poet must embody "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer," while, simultaneously, expressing his contemporary environment. Eliot challenges our common perception that a poet's greatness and individuality lies in his departure from his predecessors. Rather, Eliot argues that "the most individual parts of his (the poet) work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Eliot claims that this "historical sense," that is, not only a resemblance to traditional works, but an awareness and understanding of their relation to his poetry.
- But, this fidelity to tradition does not require the great poet to forfeit novelty in an act of surrender to repetition. Rather, Eliot has a much more dynamic and progressive conception of the poetic process. Novelty is possible, and only possible, through tapping into tradition. When a poet engages in the creation of new work, he realizes an aesthetic "ideal order," as it has been established by the literary tradition that has come before him. As such, the act of artistic creation does not take place in a vacuum. The introduction of a new work alters the cohesion of this existing order, and causes a readjustment of the old in order to accommodate the new. Thus, the inclusion of the new work alters the way in which the past is seen,

Notes

elements of the past that are noted and realized. In Eliot's own words: "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it." Eliot refers to this organic tradition, this developing canon, as the "mind of Europe." The private mind is subsumed by this more massive one.

- Despite the title of the essay, Eliot never directly mentions the word talent once. Instead, he seems to focus solely on the "tradition" aspect of his essay. This implies that the "Individual Talent" mentioned here is not what is conventionally considered to be talent, but instead, in Eliot's definition, it is in fact the ability to connect with Tradition (Eliot's definition), and create something which has the merit to become a part of it.
- The implications here separate Eliot's idea of talent from the conventional definition (just as his idea of Tradition is separate from the conventional definition), one so far from it, perhaps, that he chooses never to directly label it as talent. Whereas the conventional definition of talent, especially in the arts, is a genius that one is born with. Not so for Eliot. Instead, talent is acquired through a careful study of poetry, claiming that Tradition, "cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour." Eliot asserts that it is absolutely necessary for the poet to be studied, to have an understanding of the poets before him, and to be well versed enough that he can understand and incorporate the "mind of Europe" into his poetry. But the poet's study is unique – it is knowledge which "does not encroach," and which does not "deaden or pervert poetic sensibility." It is, to put it most simply, a poetic knowledge – knowledge observed through a poetic lens. This ideal implies that knowledge gleaned by a poet is not knowledge of facts, but knowledge which leads to a greater understanding of the mind of Europe. As Eliot explains, "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum."
- Such is the essence of Eliot's widely influential argument. It is an argument that has given shape to large portions of subsequent literary critical awareness. Many more recent students of literature have taken their cues from this essay and other essays by Eliot. And Eliot's presence can be felt even in works that travel in other directions. For example, the basic tension between the individual writer and traditions, between the poet and his forbears, is read quite differently in Harold Bloom's "The anxiety of Influence:A Theory of poetry".
- In short, Eliot's essay has been, in a current critical term, a seminal essay. That is, much has grown from the terrain cultivated by Eliot's spade in this work.

17.5 Key-Words

1. Plutarch : The Greek historian Plutarch (c. 46-114 A.D.) wrote about important Greeks and Romans in his Parallel Lives. He started with contemporary historical figures like Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony, and went back to mythical figures like Theseus, in ancient Athens, and Romulus, founder of Rome. Shakespeare's Roman plays were inspired by his reading of Plutarch's Lives, translated into English by North.
2. Valorized : to valorize is to raise the value of something, to invest it with special significance.

17.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss T. S. Eliot as a Critic.
2. Briefly discribe the essay tradition and individual talent.
3. What is Eliot's definition of criticism ? What guidelines does he give for the practice of criticism?
4. Does Eliot's critical practice conform to the guidelines he has given for the critic ?

Notes

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*c*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*d*) (*iv*) (*b*) (*v*) (*a*)

17.7 Further Readings



1. Eliot, T. S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 1922, Print.
2. IGNOU eGyankosh, Study Material. Web.
3. Jovanovich, Harcourt Brace., Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. By Adams, Hazard, Uni. Of California, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1971, 783-791, ISBN – 0-15-516142-3. Print.
4. Nagarajan, M. S., English Literary Criticism and Theory, An Introductory History, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2006, 105-116. Print.
5. Prasad, Birjadish., A Short History of English Poetry. Macmillan India Limited, 1971, 121-124, ISBN – 033390 316 1, Print.
6. Praz, Mario., T. S. Eliot as a Critic, The Sewanee Review, Vol. 74, No. 1, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) (Winter, 1966), pp. 256-271, The Johns Hopkins University Press,2nd June, 2012. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27541397>

Notes

Unit 18: G.K. Chesterton-On Lying In Bed: Introduction and Detailed Study

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
18.1 Text—On Lying in Bed
18.2 Summary
18.3 Key-Words
18.4 Review Questions
18.5 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of G.K. Chesterton
- Introduce the essay On Lying in Bed

Introduction

G. K. Chesterton was one of the dominating figures of the London literary scene in the early twentieth century. Not only did he get into lively discussions with anyone who would debate him, including his friend, frequent verbal sparring partner, and noted Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, but he wrote about seemingly every topic, in every genre, from journalism to plays, poetry to crime novels. "He said something about everything and he said it better than anyone else," declared Dale Ahlquist, president of the American Chester Society, on the society's Web site. Most of Chesterton's literary output was nonfiction, including thousands of columns for various periodicals, but today he is best remembered for his fictional work—a mystery series about Father Brown, a Catholic priest and amateur detective.

Chesterton began his literary career as a manuscript reader for a London publishing house, but he soon moved into writing art criticism. When his friends formed a journal, the Speaker, Chesterton contributed a series of articles, and soon began writing for the London Daily News and Bookman as well. Before long, people were taking notice of his work. Ian Boyd explained in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, "He belonged to that category of writer which used to be called the man of letters, and like the typical man of letters he wrote journalism which included a wide variety of literary forms and literature which possessed many of the characteristics of journalism."



Did u know? Chesterton's first published books were of poetry, seemingly a far cry from his column-writing. But Boyd noticed a "close connection between his poetry and his everyday journalism."

Boyd concluded: "In this sense, T. S. Eliot's description of Chesterton's poetry as 'first-rate journalistic balladry' turns out to have been particularly perceptive, since it is a reminder about

Notes

the essential character of all Chesterton's work. In his verse, as in all his writings, his first aim was to comment on the political and social questions of the day."

Chesterton's first novel, the manuscript of which was discovered in a steamer trunk in 1989, was published for the first time in 2001. Basil Howe was written in 1893, shortly after Chesterton graduated from school. Although, as critics noted, the book is clearly the work of an inexperienced, unformed writer, it shows hints of Chesterton's future style—including the witticisms for which he would later become famous—and provides insights into his frame of mind during this stage in his life. It has long been known that Chesterton underwent a period of philosophical soul-searching during his young adulthood that was so intense that some of his friends thought he was losing his mind, and Basil Howe is assumed to have been written during that time. "Those familiar with Chesterton's teenage years will see much of the author in" the book, Mark Knight commented in English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920, although he cautioned against reading the book as autobiography rather than as a novel.

Although best known nowadays for his detective fiction, Chesterton first gained public attention as a journalist and social philosopher; he actually wrote the popular, lucrative Father Brown mysteries in part to bankroll his less financially rewarding work. Questions of religion and morality were prominent in his writings. His book What's Wrong with the World advocated Distributism, a social philosophy that divided property holders into small communities, trying to foster neighborliness. Chesterton viewed Distributism as a counter to Socialism and Capitalism, ideologies that, he felt, reduced people to inhumane units. Stephen Metcalf, writing in the Times Literary Supplement, pointed out that this philosophy, also expounded in the 1904 novel The Napoleon of Notting Hill, more accurately reflects modern society's problems than does George Orwell's classic 1984: "It is not only . . . that Chesterton cared passionately for what ordinary humanity feels and thinks," Metcalf stated. "It is also that he had particular convictions about how one should understand humanity."

Much of Chesterton's work reflected his social concern. Using literary devices such as parable and allegory, he sought to bring about social changes that embodied his religious and political beliefs. His novels, reported Brian Murray in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, "are as frequently called romances, extravaganzas, fantasies, parables, or allegories. For while they are thick with the details of everyday life, Chesterton's hastily written book-length fictions are outlandishly plotted and, in the main, unabashedly didactic."



Chesterton was raised in a theologically liberal family and did not convert to Catholicism until the age of 48, more than a decade after the first Father Brown stories were published.

This didacticism has alienated modern readers from some of Chesterton's fiction. His detective stories, however, remain popular. Chesterton himself was very fond of the detective story and recognized that much of his writing was pedantic and would probably not survive him. "Chesterton assumed that he would never be considered a novelist of enormous importance," asserted Murray; "that, as a writer of fiction, he would always remain best known for the long series of Father Brown stories he began with The Innocence of Father Brown in 1911—stories he sometimes tossed off in a day or two." Loosely based upon Chesterton's friend, the Roman Catholic priest John O'Connor, Father Brown "drops typical Chestertonian quips as he solves ghastly transgressions not with Holmes-sharp logic but by 'getting inside' the criminal mind," according to Murray. Rather than using deductive methods to discover the perpetrator of a crime, Father Brown—whom Chesterton depicted in his Autobiography as "shabby and shapeless [in appearance], his face round and expressionless, his manners clumsy"—bases his conclusions on his knowledge of

Notes

human nature. This knowledge is drawn in part from his experience in the confessional box, but also from his recognition of his own capacity for evil. "The little priest could see," stated Ronald Knox in his introduction to Father Brown: Selected Stories, "not as a psychologist, but as a moralist, into the dark places of the human heart; could guess, therefore, at what point envy, or fear, or resentment would pass the bounds of the normal, and the cords of convention would snap, so that a man was hurried into crime." "To Father Brown," wrote Eric Routley in The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story: A Personal Monograph, "any criminal is a good man gone wrong. He is not an evil man who has cut himself off from the comprehension or sympathy of those who labour to be good." To this end, Brown is not primarily interested in solving the case, but in getting the criminal to confess his sin and repent, thereby saving his soul.

Father Brown remains, in the minds of most readers, Chesterton's greatest creation, although his contribution to the art of mystery writing is also recognized. "If Chesterton had not created Father Brown," Leitch declared, "his detective fiction would rarely be read today, but his place in the historical development of the genre would still be secure." Even in his own day, Chesterton was considered to be the father of the detective tale. As Leitch noted, when the Detection Club was founded in 1928, "Chesterton, not Conan Doyle [creator of Sherlock Holmes] . . . became its first president and served in this capacity until his death." Not only did Chesterton write detective stories, he also wrote several critical essays about the proper form and style of such works.

Under the influence of Chesterton's Father Brown, the mystery story became less a portrait of the detective's personality, and more a puzzle that the detective and the reader could both solve. "Chesterton's determination to provide his audience with all the clues available to his detectives," stated Leitch, "has been so widely imitated as to become the defining characteristic of the formal or golden age period (roughly 1920-1940) in detective fiction. . . . Modern readers, for whom the term whodunit has become synonymous with detective story, forget that the concealment of the criminal's identity as the central mystery of the story is a relatively modern convention." In the end, H. R. F. Keating (himself a prominent mystery writer) concluded in the St. James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writers, "Chesterton's fame rests on the priest with 'the harmless, human name of Brown' and it will endure." *Fellow British essayist Hilaire Belloc said of G.K. Chesterton that the "intellectual side of him has been masked for many and for some hidden by his delight in the exercise of words and especially in the comedy of words. . . . . [His] was a voice from which I learnt continually, from the first day I heard it until the last; acquiring from it discoveries, explanations, definitions which continue to increase my possessions" (*The Observer*, June 21, 1936). Chesterton's frequently anthologized essay "On Lying in Bed" originally appeared in the collection* Tremendous Trifles *(1909).*

18.1 Text—On Lying in Bed

Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. This, however, is not generally a part of the domestic apparatus on the premises. I think myself that the thing might be managed with several pails of Aspinall and a broom. Only if one worked in a really sweeping and masterly way, and laid on the colour in great washes, it might drip down again on one's face in floods of rich and mingled colour like some strange fairy rain; and that would have its disadvantages. I am afraid it would be necessary to stick to black and white in this form of artistic composition. To that purpose, indeed, the white ceiling would be of the greatest possible use; in fact it is the only use I think of a white ceiling being put to.

But for the beautiful experiment of lying in bed I might never have discovered it. For years I have been looking for some blank spaces in a modern house to draw on. Paper is much too small for any really allegorical design; as Cyrano de Bergerac says: "Il me faut des géants." But when I tried to find these fine clear spaces in the modern rooms such as we all live in I was continually disappointed. I found an endless pattern and complication of small objects hung like a curtain of fine links between me and my desire. I examined the walls; I found them to my surprise to be

Notes

already covered with wall-paper, and I found the wall-paper to be already covered with very uninteresting images, all bearing a ridiculous resemblance to each other. I could not understand why one arbitrary symbol (a symbol apparently entirely devoid of any religious or philosophical significance) should thus be sprinkled all over my nice walls like a sort of small-pox. The Bible must be referring to wall-papers, I think, when it says "Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do." I found the Turkey carpet a mass of unmeaning colours, rather like the Turkish Empire, or like the sweetmeat called Turkish delight. I do not exactly know what Turkish delight really is; but I suppose it is Macedonian Massacres. Everywhere that I went forlornly, with my pencil or my paint brush, I found that others had unaccountably been before me, spoiling the walls, the curtains, and the furniture with their childish and barbaric designs.

Nowhere did I find a really clear place for sketching until this occasion when I prolonged beyond the proper limit the process of lying on my back in bed. Then the light of that white heaven broke upon my vision, that breadth of mere white which is indeed almost the definition of Paradise, since it means purity and also means freedom. But alas! like all heavens, now that it is seen it is found to be unattainable; it looks more austere and more distant than the blue sky outside the window. For my proposal to paint on it with the bristly end of a broom has been discouraged—never mind by whom; by a person debarred from all political rights—and even my minor proposal to put the other end of the broom into the kitchen fire and turn it into charcoal has not been conceded. Yet I am certain that it was from persons in my position that all the original inspiration came for covering the ceilings of palaces and cathedrals with a riot of fallen angels or victorious gods. I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realised how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.

The tone now commonly taken towards the practice of lying in bed is hypocritical and unhealthy. Of all the marks of modernity that seem to mean a kind of decadence, there is none more menacing and dangerous than the exultation of very small and secondary matters of conduct at the expense of very great and primary ones, at the expense of eternal public and tragic human morality. If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals it is the modern strengthening of minor morals. Thus it is considered more withering to accuse a man of bad taste than of bad ethics. A playwright can attack the institution of marriage so long as he does not misrepresent the manners of society, and I have met Ibsenite pessimists who thought it wrong to take beer but right to take prussic acid. Especially this is so in matters of hygiene; notably such matters as lying in bed. Instead of being regarded, as it ought to be, as a matter of personal convenience and adjustment, it has come to be regarded by many as if it were a part of essential morals to get up early in the morning. It is upon the whole part of practical wisdom; but there is nothing good about it or bad about its opposite.



Did u know? Cleanliness is not next to godliness nowadays, for cleanliness is made an essential and godliness is regarded as an offence.

Misers get up early in the morning; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before. It is the great peril of our society that all its mechanism may grow more fixed while its spirit grows more fickle. A man's minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible, creative; the things that should be unchangeable are his principles, his ideals. But with us the reverse is true; our views change constantly; but our lunch does not change. Now, I should like men to have strong and rooted conceptions, but as for their lunch, let them have it sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in the top of a tree. Let them argue from the same first principles, but let them do it in a bed, or a boat, or a balloon. This alarming growth of good habits

really means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can misuse, it means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure, sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour. If ever that abrupt appeal is made to us we may fail. A man can get used to getting up at five o'clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burnt for his opinions; the first experiment is commonly fatal. Let us pay a little more attention to these possibilities of the heroic and the unexpected. I daresay that when I get out of this bed I shall do some deed of an almost terrible virtue.

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution to be added. Even for those who can do their work in bed (like journalists), still more for those whose work cannot be done in bed (as, for example, the professional harpooner of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this: if you do lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may get up a hypochondriac.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Chesterton's first published books were of

(*a*) Prose (*b*) Essays

(*c*) Poetry (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) George Bernard Shaw was

(*a*) Irish Playwright (*b*) Germany Playwright

(*c*) British Playwright (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Chesterton's first novel was published in:

(*a*) 2000 (*b*) 2001 (*c*) 2010 (*d*) 1995

(*iv*) The Essay "On Lying in Bed" originally appeared in

(*a*) 1909 (*b*) 1910 (*c*) 1912 (*d*) 1908

18.2 Summary

- In this short essay, G. K. Chesterton is able to display his absolute understanding of human nature. He explains this nature through humor and wit in this particular essay, On Lying in Bed. According to this essay, Chesterton has developed three parts to human nature. The first part is that items that are desired by humans can often be found in unusually normal places. The second part is that humans have begun to aggrandize trivial morals and to debase major morals. The final part to his outlook on human nature is that the lives of humans have become exceedingly mechanical. These are the topics explained by G. K. Chesterton in this essay.
- Chesterton begins his essay by discussing his idea that items longed for by humans can be found in normal places. He does this in the essay by describing his pursuit of a perfect space to paint. He states that he looks on walls, paper, and several other places. His search, however, comes to end in the most normal of places, the ceiling above his bed. In the essay he realizes that he has found his object of desire in a rather ordinary place. In a similar way, people in today's society can find their desires in places that are rather customary. We, however, are not looking for a place to paint. In the many items we covet, many can be found in regular locations. Frequently, we look in unusual places for these items, when they are actually located directly «under our nose.» This shows the first part of the human nature presented by G. K. Chesterton.

Notes

- The second part of Chesterton's essay displays his next theory on human nature. This second theory, that humans promote unimportant values and cheapen important values, is shown by examples in the next part of the essay. He interweaves this theory into the essay again by using the example of lying in bed. He demonstrates that people have begun to believe that lying in bed is worthless, while in fact, it is vital to life to lie in bed at some point.
- Likewise, people in modern society have priorities jumbled. Some people now believe that it is more important to make money than to work hard. They believe that supporting one's self is more important than helping others. If these people would read this essay, they would realize that their values are mixed, and that in the end, they will regret it because they will feel unfulfilled.
- The third and final part of Chesterton's essay deals with his idea that life has become a monotonous task for some people. He shows this by demonstrating that it is more beneficial to lie in bed spontaneously than to lie in bed after examining the pros and cons of it. He states that it can be detrimental to maintain the same routine without surprises.
- Similarly, people today live a mechanical life. This part of human nature can be found even in myself. Often, I find myself repeating the same schedule for weeks. Soon, I realize that my life has become very boring. This essay shows that when something spontaneous is done in my life, it will become more exciting.
- In short, G. K. Chesterton's essay, On Lying in Bed, demonstrates his complete understanding of humans and their nature. He does this by showing the three parts of his theory on human nature. First of all, humans are unable to find items that are in obvious locations. Secondly, people have begun to mix order of priorities. Finally, people live terribly mechanical lives. By showing his theory, people in the modern world are able to read his essay and improve their lives.

18.3 Key-Words

1. Didacticism : Morally Instructive.
2. Hypocritical : A person who pretends to have virtue.

18.4 Review Questions

1. Briefly explain the life and works of G.K. Chesterton.
2. Discuss Chesterton's views On Lying in Bed.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*c*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*b*) (*iv*) (*a*)

18.5 Further Readings



1. Banshi Dhar, G.K. Chesterton and the twentieth century english essays, S. Chand and Company Ltd.
2. Randall Paine, The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterten, Ignatius Press, 2006.

Notes

Unit 19: G.K. Chesterton-On Lying In Bed: Critical Appreciation cum Analysis

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
19.1 Critical Appreciation-On Lying in Bed
19.2 Analysis
19.3 Summary
19.4 Key-Words
19.5 Review Questions
19.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about Chesterton as a Critic.
- Examine Chesterton's essay 'On Lying in Bed.'

Introduction

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was a prolific English critic and author of verse, essays, novels, and short stories. He is probably best known for his series about the priest-detective Father Brown who appeared in 50 stories. Between 1900 and 1936 Chesterton published some one hundred books.

G.K. Chesterton was born in London into a middle-class family on May 29, 1874. He studied at University College and the Slade School of Art (1893-96). Around 1893 he had gone through a crisis of skepticism and depression and during this period he experimented with the Ouija board and grew fascinated with diabolism. In 1895 Chesterton left University College without a degree and worked for the London publisher Redway, and T. Fisher Unwin (1896-1902). Chesterton later renewed his Christian faith; the courtship of his future wife, Frances Blogg, whom he married in 1901 also helped him to pull himself out of his spiritual crisis.

In 1900 appeared Greybeards At Play, Chesterton's first collection of poems. Robert Browning (1903) and Charles Dickens (1906) were literary biographies. The Napoleon Of Notting Hill (1904) was Chesterton's first novel, a political fantasy, in which London is seen as a city of hidden fairytale glitter. In The Man Who Was Thursday (1908) Chesterton depicted fin-de-siècle decadence.



In 1909 Chesterton moved with his wife to Beacons field, a village twenty-five miles west of London, and continued to write, lecture, and travel energetically.

Between 1913 and 1914 Chesterton was a regular contributor for the Daily Herald. In 1914 he suffered a physical and nervous breakdown. After World War I Chesterton became leader of the Distributist movement and later the President of the Distributist League, promoting the idea that

Notes

private property should be divided into smallest possible freeholds and then distributed throughout society..

In 1922 Chesterton was converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, and thereafter he wrote several theologically oriented works, including lives of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas. He received honorary degrees from Edinburgh, Dublin, and Notre Dame universities. Chesterton died on June 14, 1936, at his home in Beaconsfield. The above biography is copyrighted. Do not republish it without permission.

19.1 Critical Appreciation-On Lying in Bed

There is on record the case of a man who, after some fourteen years of robust health, spent a week in bed. His illness was apparently due to a violent cold, but he confessed, on medical cross-examination, that the real and underlying cause was the steady reading of Mr. Chesterton's books for several days on end.

No one will accuse Mr. Chesterton of being an unhealthy writer. On the contrary, he is among the most wholesome writers now alive. He is irresistibly exhilarating, and he inspires his readers with a constant inclination to rise up and shout. Perhaps his danger lies in that very fact, and in the exhaustion of the nerves which such sustained exhilaration is apt to produce. But besides this, he, like so many of our contemporaries, has written such a bewildering quantity of literature on such an amazing variety of subjects, that it is no wonder if sometimes the reader follows panting, through the giddy mazes of the dance. He is the sworn enemy of specialisation, as he explains in his remarkable essay on "The Twelve Men." The subject of the essay is the British jury, and its thesis is that when our civilisation "wants a library to be catalogued, or a solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity." For the judging of a criminal or the propagation of the gospel, it is necessary to procure inexpert people—people who come to their task with a virgin eye, and see not what the expert (who has lost his freshness) sees, but the human facts of the case. So Mr. Chesterton insists upon not being a specialist, takes the world for his parish, and wanders over it at will.

This being so, it is obvious that he cannot possibly remember all that he has said, and must necessarily abound in inconsistencies and even contradictions. Yet that is by no means always unconscious, but is due in many instances to the very complex quality and subtle habit of his mind. Were he by any chance to read this statement he would deny it fiercely, but we would repeat it with perfect calmness, knowing that he would probably have denied any other statement we might have made upon the subject. His subtlety is partly due to the extraordinary rapidity with which his mind leaps from one subject to another, partly to the fact that he is so full of ideas that many of his essays (like Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays) find it next to impossible to get themselves begun. He is so full of matter that he never seems to be able to say what he wants to say, until he has said a dozen other things first.

The present lecture is mainly concerned with his central position, as that is expounded in Heretics and Orthodoxy. Our task is not to criticise, nor even to any considerable extent to characterise his views, but to state them as accurately as we can. It is a remarkable phenomenon of our time that all our literary men are bent on giving us such elaborate and solemnising confessions of their faith. It is an age notorious for its aversion to dogma, and yet here we have Mr. Huxley, Mr. Le Gallienne, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Wells (to mention only a few of many), who in this creedless age proclaim in the market-place, each his own private and brand-new creed.

Yet Mr. Chesterton has perhaps a special right to such a proclamation. He believes in creeds vehemently. And, besides, the spiritual biography of a man whose mental development has been so independent and so interesting as his, must be well worth knowing. Amid the many weird theologies of our time we have met with nothing so startling, so arresting, and so suggestive since Mr. Mallock published his New Republic and his Contemporary Superstitions. There is something common to the two points of view. To some, they come as emancipating and most welcome

Notes

reinforcements, relieving the beleaguered citadel of faith. But others, who differ widely from them both, may yet find in them so much to stimulate thought and to rehabilitate strongholds held precariously, as to awaken both appreciation and gratitude.

Mr. Chesterton's political opinions do not concern us here. It is a curious fact, of which innumerable illustrations may be found in past and present writers, that political radicalism so often goes along with conservative theology, and vice versa. Mr. Chesterton is no exception to the rule. His orthodoxy in matters of faith we shall find to be altogether above suspicion. His radicalism in politics is never long silent. He openly proclaims himself at war with Carlyle's favourite dogma, "The tools to him who can use them." "The worst form of slavery," he tells us, "is that which is called Cæsarism, or the choice of some bold or brilliant man as despot because he is suitable. For that means that men choose a representative, not because he represents them but because he does not." And if it be answered that the worst form of cruelty to a nation or to an individual is that abuse of the principle of equality which is for ever putting incompetent people into false positions, he has his reply ready: "The one specially and peculiarly un-Christian idea is the idea of Carlyle—the idea that the man should rule who feels that he can rule. Whatever else is Christian, this is heathen."

But this, and much else of its kind, although he works it into his general scheme of thinking, is not in any sense an essential part of that scheme. Our subject is his place in the conflict between the paganism and the idealism of the times, and it is a sufficiently large one. But before we come to that, we must consider another matter, which we shall find to be intimately connected with it.

That other matter is his habit of paradox, which is familiar to all his readers. It is a habit of style, but before it became that it was necessarily first a habit of mind, deeply ingrained. He disclaims it so often that we cannot but feel that he protesteth too much. He acknowledges it, and explains that "paradox simply means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief." Whether the explanation is or is not perfectly intelligible, it must occur to every one that a writer who finds it necessary to give so remarkable an explanation can hardly be justified in his astonishment when people of merely average intelligence confess themselves puzzled. His aversion to Walter Pater—almost the only writer whom he appears consistently to treat with disrespect—is largely due to Pater's laborious simplicity of style. But it was a greater than either Walter Pater or Mr. Chesterton who first pointed out that the language which appealed to the understanding of the common man was also that which expressed the highest culture. Mr. Chesterton's habit of paradox will always obscure his meanings for the common man. He has a vast amount to tell him, but much of it he will never understand.

19.2 Analysis

Paradox, when it has become a habit, is always dangerous. Introduced on rare and fitting occasions, it may be powerful and even convincing, but when it is repeated constantly and upon all sorts of subjects, we cannot but dispute its right and question its validity. Its effect is not conviction but vertigo. It is like trying to live in a house constructed so as to be continually turning upside down. After a certain time, during which terror and dizziness alternate, the most indulgent reader is apt to turn round upon the builder of such a house with some asperity. And, after all, the general judgment may be right and Mr. Chesterton wrong.

Upon analysis, his paradox reveals as its chief and most essential element a certain habit of mind which always tends to see and appreciate the reverse of accepted opinions. So much is this the case that it is possible in many instances to anticipate what he will say upon a subject. It is on record that one reader, coming to his chapter on Omar Khayyám, said to himself, "Now he will be saying that Omar is not drunk enough"; and he went on to read, "It is not poetical drinking, which is joyous and instinctive; it is rational drinking, which is as prosaic as an investment, as unsavoury as a dose of camomile." Similarly we are told that Browning is only felt to be obscure because he is too pellucid. Such apparent contradictoriness is everywhere in his work, but along with it goes a curious ingenuity and nimbleness of mind. He cannot think about anything without remembering

Notes

something else, apparently out of all possible connection with it, and instantly discovering some clever idea, the introduction of which will bring the two together. Christianity "is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross."

In all this there are certain familiar mechanisms which constitute almost a routine of manipulation for the manufacture of paradoxes. One such mechanical process is the play with the derivatives of words. Thus he reminds us that the journalist is, in the literal and derivative sense, a journalist, while the missionary is an eternalist. Similarly "lunatic," "evolution," "progress," "reform," are etymologically tortured into the utterance of the most forcible and surprising truths. This curious word-play was a favourite method with Ruskin; and it has the disadvantage in Mr. Chesterton which it had in the earlier critic. It appears too clever to be really sound, although it must be confessed that it frequently has the power of startling us into thoughts that are valuable and suggestive.

Another equally simple process is that of simply reversing sentences and ideas. "A good bush needs no wine." "Shakespeare (in a weak moment, I think) said that all the world is a stage. But Shakespeare acted on the much finer principle that a stage is all the world." Perhaps the most brilliant example that could be quoted is the plea for the combination of gentleness and ferocity in Christian character. When the lion lies down with the lamb, it is constantly assumed that the lion becomes lamblike. "But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion, instead of the lion eating the lamb."

By this process it is possible to attain results which are extraordinarily brilliant in themselves and fruitful in suggestion. It is a process not difficult to learn, but the trouble is that you have to live up to it afterwards, and defend many curious propositions which may have been arrived at by its so simple means. Take, for instance, the sentence about the stage being all the world. That is undeniably clever, and it contains an idea. But it is a haphazard idea, arrived at by a short-cut, and not by the high road of reasonable thinking. Sometimes a truth may be reached by such a short-cut, but such paradoxes are occasionally no better than chartered errors.

Yet even when they are that, it may be said in their favour that they startle us into thought. And truly Mr. Chesterton is invaluable as a quickener and stimulator of the minds of his readers. Moreover, by adopting the method of paradox, he has undoubtedly done one remarkable thing. He has proved what an astonishing number of paradoxical surprises there actually are, lying hidden beneath the apparent commonplace of the world. Every really clever paradox astonishes us not merely with the sense of the cleverness of him who utters it, but with the sense of how many strange coincidences exist around us, and how many sentences, when turned outside in, will yield new and startling truths. However much we may suspect that the performance we are watching is too clever to be trustworthy, yet after all the world does appear to lend itself to such treatment.


Notes

There is, for example, the paradox of the love of the world—"Somehow one must love the world without being worldly."

Again, "Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die." The martyr differs from the suicide in that he cherishes a disdain of death, while the motive of the suicide is a disdain of life. Charity, too, is a paradox, for it means "one of two things—pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people." Similarly Christian humility has a background of unheard-of arrogance, and Christian liberty is possible only to the

most abject bondsmen in the world.

This long consideration of Mr. Chesterton's use of paradox is more relevant to our present subject than it may seem. For, curiously enough, the habit of paradox has been his way of entrance into faith. At the age of sixteen he was a complete agnostic, and it was the reading of Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh which brought him back to orthodox theology. For, as he read, he found that Christianity was attacked on all sides, and for all manner of contradictory reasons; and this discovery led him to the conviction that Christianity must be a very extraordinary thing, abounding in paradox. But he had already discovered the abundant element of paradox in life; and when he analysed the two sets of paradoxes he found them to be precisely the same. So he became a Christian.

It may seem a curious way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who are accustomed to regard the strait gate as of Gothic architecture may be shocked to find a man professing to have entered through this Alhambra-like portal. But it is a lesson we all have to learn sooner or later, that there are at least eleven gates besides our own, and that every man has to enter by that which he finds available. Paradox is the only gate by which Mr. Chesterton could get into any place, and the Kingdom of Heaven is no exception to the rule.

His account of this entrance is characteristic. It is given in the first chapter of his Orthodoxy. There was an English yachtsman who set out upon a voyage, miscalculated his course, and discovered what he thought to be a new island in the South Seas. It transpired afterwards that he had run up his flag on the pavilion of Brighton, and that he had discovered England. That yachtsman is Mr. Chesterton himself. Sailing the great sea of moral and spiritual speculation, he discovered a land of facts and convictions to which his own experience had guided him. On that strange land he ran up his flag, only to make the further and more astonishing discovery that it was the Christian faith at which he had arrived. Nietzsche had preached to him, as to Mr. Bernard Shaw, his great precept, "Follow your own will." But when Mr. Chesterton obeyed he arrived, not at Superman, but at the ordinary old-fashioned morality. That, he found, is what we like best in our deepest hearts, and desire most. So he too "discovered England."

He begins, like Margaret Fuller, with the fundamental principle of accepting the universe. The thing we know best and most directly is human nature in all its breadth. It is indeed the one thing immediately known and knowable. Like R.L. Stevenson, he perceives how tragically and comically astonishing a phenomenon is man. "What a monstrous spectre is this man," says Stevenson, "the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming;—and yet looked at nearlier, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes!" In like manner Mr. Chesterton discovers man—that appalling mass of paradox and contradiction—and it is the supreme discovery in any spiritual search.

Having discovered the fundamental fact of human nature, he at once gives in his allegiance to it. "Our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval. My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty. The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is, the less we should leave it."

There is a splendid courage and heartiness in his complete acceptance of life and the universe. In a time when clever people are so busy criticising life that they are in danger of forgetting that they have to live it, so busy selecting such parts of it as suit their taste that they ignore the fact that the other parts are there, he ignores nothing and wisely accepts instead of criticising. Mr. Bernard Shaw, as we have seen, will consent to tolerate the universe minus the three loyalties to the family, the nation, and God. Mr. Chesterton has no respect whatever for any such mutilated scheme of human life. His view of the institution of the family is full of wholesome common sense. He

Notes

perceives the immense difficulties that beset all family life, and he accepts them with immediate and unflinching loyalty, as essential parts of our human task. His views on patriotism belong to the region of politics and do not concern us here. In regard to religion, he finds the modern school amalgamating everything in characterless masses of generalities. They deny the reality of sin, and in matters of faith generally they have put every question out of focus until the whole picture is blurred and vague. He attacks this way of dealing with religion in one of his most amusing essays, "The Orthodox Barber." The barber has been sarcastic about the new shaving—presumably in reference to M. Gillett's excellent invention. "'It seems you can shave yourself with anything—with a stick or a stone or a pole or a poker' (here I began for the first time to detect a sarcastic intonation) 'or a shovel or a— — ' Here he hesitated for a word, and I, although I knew nothing about the matter, helped him out with suggestions in the same rhetorical vein. 'Or a button-hook,' I said, 'or a blunderbuss or a battering-ram or a piston-rod— —' He resumed, refreshed with this assistance, 'Or a curtain-rod or a candlestick or a— —' 'Cow-catcher,' I suggested eagerly, and we continued in this ecstatic duet for some time. Then I asked him what it was all about, and he told me. He explained the thing eloquently and at length. 'The funny part of it is,' he said, 'that the thing isn't new at all. It's been talked about ever since I was a boy, and long before.'" Mr. Chesterton rejoins in a long and eloquent and most amusing sermon, the following extracts from which are not without far-reaching significance.

"'What you say reminds me in some dark and dreamy fashion of something else. I recall it especially when you tell me, with such evident experience and sincerity, that the new shaving is not really new. My friend, the human race is always trying this dodge of making everything entirely easy; but the difficulty which it shifts off one thing it shifts on to another.... It would be nice if we could be shaved without troubling anybody. It would be nicer still if we could go unshaved without annoying anybody—

"'But, O wise friend, chief Barber of the Strand, Brother, nor you nor I have made the world. Whoever made it, who is wiser, and we hope better than we, made it under strange limitations, and with painful conditions of pleasure.... But every now and then men jump up with the new something or other and say that everything can be had without sacrifice, that bad is good if you are only enlightened, and that there is no real difference between being shaved and not being shaved. The difference, they say, is only a difference of degree; everything is evolutionary and relative. Shavedness is immanent in man.... I have been profoundly interested in what you have told me about the New Shaving. Have you ever heard of a thing called the New Theology?' He smiled and said that he had not."

In contrast with all this, it is Mr. Chesterton's conviction that the facts must be unflinchingly and in their entirety accepted. With characteristic courage he goes straight to the root of the matter and begins with the fact of sin. "If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat." It is as if he said, Here you have direct and unmistakable experience. A man knows his sin as he knows himself. He may explain it in either one way or another way. He may interpret the universe accordingly in terms either of heaven or of hell. But the one unreasonable and impossible thing to do is to deny the experience itself.

It is thus that he treats the question of faith all along the line. If you are going to be a Christian, or even fairly to judge Christianity, you must accept the whole of Christ's teaching, with all its contradictions, paradoxes, and the rest. Some men select his charity, others his social teaching, others his moral relentlessness, and so on, and reject all else. Each one of these aspects of the Christian faith is doubtless very interesting, but none of them by itself is an adequate representation of Christ. "They have torn the soul of Christ into silly strips, labelled egoism and altruism, and they are equally puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness. They have parted His garments among them, and for His vesture they have cast lots; though the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout."

Notes

The characteristic word for Mr. Chesterton and his attitude to life is vitality. He has been seeking for human nature, and he has found it at last in Christian idealism. But having found it, he will allow no compromise in its acceptance. It is life he wants, in such wholeness as to embrace every element of human nature. And he finds that Christianity has quickened and intensified life all along the line. It is the great source of vitality, come that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. He finds an essential joy and riot in creation, a "tense and secret festivity." And Christianity corresponds to that riot. "The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild." It has let loose the wandering, masterless, dangerous virtues, and has insisted that not one or another of them shall run wild, but all of them together. The ideal of wholeness which Matthew Arnold so eloquently advocated, is not a dead mass of theories, but a world of living things. Christ will put a check on none of the really genuine elements in human nature. In Him there is no compromise. His love and His wrath are both burning. All the separate elements of human nature are in full flame, and it is the only ultimate way of peace and safety. The various colours of life must not be mixed but kept distinct. The red and white of passion and purity must not be blended into the insipid pink of a compromising and consistent respectability. They must be kept strong and separate, as in the blazing Cross of St. George on its shield of white. Chaucer's "Daisy" is one of the greatest conceptions in all poetry. It has stood for centuries as the emblem of pure and priceless womanhood, with its petals of snowy white and its heart of gold. Mr. Chesterton once made a discovery that sent him wild with joy—"Then waxed I like the wind because of this, And ran like gospel and apocalypse

From door to door, with wild, anarchic lips, Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.

"The discovery was that "the Daisy has a ring of red." Purity is not the enemy of passion; nor must passion and purity be so toned down and blent with one another, as to give a neutral result. Both must remain, and both in full brilliance, the virgin white and the passionate blood-red ring.

In the present age of reason, the cry is all for tolerance, and for redefinition which will remove sharp contrasts and prove that everything means the same as everything else. In such an age a doctrine like this seems to have a certain barbaric splendour about it, as of a crusader risen from the dead. But Mr. Chesterton is not afraid of the consequences of his opinions. If rationalism opposes his presentation of Christianity, he will ride full tilt against reason. In recent years, from the time of Newman until now, there has been a recurring habit of discounting reason in favour of some other way of approach to truth and life. Certainly Mr. Chesterton's attack on reason is as interesting as any that have gone before it, and it is even more direct. Even on such a question as the problem of poverty he frankly prefers imagination to study. In art he demands instinctiveness, and has a profound suspicion of anybody who is conscious of possessing the artistic temperament. As a guide to truth he always would follow poetry in preference to logic. He is never tired of attacking rationality, and for him anything which is rationalised is destroyed in the process. In one of his most provokingly unanswerable sallies, he insists that the true home of reason is the madhouse. "The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason." When we say that a man is mad, we do not mean that he is unable to conduct a logical argument. On the contrary, any one who knows madmen knows that they are usually most acute and ingeniously consistent in argument. They isolate some one fixed idea, and round that they build up a world that is fiercely and tremendously complete. Every detail fits in, and the world in which they live is not, as is commonly supposed, a world of disconnected and fantastic imaginations, but one of iron-bound and remorseless logic. No task is more humiliating, nor more likely to shake one's sense of security in fundamental convictions, than that of arguing out a thesis with a lunatic.

Further, beneath this rationality there is in the madman a profound belief in himself. Most of us regard with respect those who trust their own judgment more than we find ourselves able to trust

Notes

ours. But not the most confident of them all can equal the unswerving confidence of a madman. Sane people never wholly believe in themselves. They are liable to be influenced by the opinion of others, and are willing to yield to the consensus of opinion of past or present thinkers. The lunatic cares nothing for the views of others. He believes in himself against the world, with a terrific grip of conviction and a faith that nothing can shake.

Mr. Chesterton applies his attack upon rationality to many subjects, with singular ingenuity. In the question of marriage and divorce, for instance, the modern school which would break loose from the ancient bonds can present their case with an apparently unassailable show of rationality. But his reply to them and to all other rationalists is that life is not rational and consistent but paradoxical and contradictory. To make life rational you have to leave out so many elements as to make it shrink from a big world to a little one, which may be complete, but can never be much of a world. Its conception of God may be a complete conception, but its God is not much of a God. But the world of human nature is a vast world, and the God of Christianity is an Infinite God. The huge mysteries of life and death, of love and sacrifice, of the wine of Cana and the Cross of Calvary—these outwit all logic and pass all understanding. So for sane men there comes in a higher authority. You may call it common sense, or mysticism, or faith, as you please. It is the extra element by virtue of which all sane thinking and all religious life are rendered possible. It is the secret spring of vitality alike in human nature and in Christian faith.

At this point it may be permissible to question Mr. Chesterton's use of words in one important point. He appears to fall into the old error of confounding reason with reasoning. Reason is one thing and argument another. It may be impossible to express either human nature or religious faith in a series of syllogistic arguments, and yet both may be reasonable in a higher sense. Reason includes those extra elements to which Mr. Chesterton trusts. It is the synthesis of our whole powers of finding truth. Many things which cannot be proved by reasoning may yet be given in reason—involved in any reasonable view of things as a whole. Thus faith includes reason—it is reason on a larger scale—and it is the only reasonable course for a man to take in a world of mysterious experience. If the matter were stated in that way, Mr. Chesterton would probably assent to it. Put crudely, the fashion of pitting faith against reason and discarding reason in favour of faith, is simply sawing off the branch on which you are sitting. The result is that you must fall to the ground at the feet of the sceptic, who asks, "How can you believe that which you have confessed there is no reason to believe?" We have abundant reason for our belief, and that reason includes those higher intuitions, that practical common sense, and that view of things as a whole, which the argument of the mere logician necessarily ignores.

With this reservation, Mr. Chesterton's position in regard to faith is absolutely unassailable. He is the most vital of our modern idealists, and his peculiar way of thinking himself into his idealism has given to the term a richer and more spacious meaning, which combines excellently the Greek and the Hebrew elements. His great ideal is that of manhood. Be a man, he cries aloud, not an artist, not a reasoner, not any other kind or detail of humanity, but be a man. But then that means, Be a creature whose life swings far out beyond this world and its affairs—swings dangerously between heaven and hell. Eternity is in the heart of every man. The fashionable modern gospel of Pragmatism is telling us to-day that we should not vex ourselves about the ultimate truth of theories, but inquire only as to their value for life here and now, and the practical needs which they serve. But the most practical of all man's needs is his need of some contact with a higher world than that of sense. "To say that a man is an idealist is merely to say that he is a man." In the scale of differences between important and unimportant earthly things, it is the spiritual and not the material that counts. "An ignorance of the other world is boasted by many men of science; but in this matter their defect arises, not from ignorance of the other world, but from ignorance of this world." "The moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and for ever spoilt for all purposes of science. It has become a thing incurably mysterious and infinite; this

mortal has put on immortality."

Here we begin to see the immense value of paradox in the matter of faith. Mr. Chesterton is an optimist, not because he fits into this world, but because he does not fit into it. Pagan optimism is content with the world, and subsists entirely in virtue of its power to fit into it and find it sufficient. This is that optimism of which Browning speaks with scorn— "Tame in earth's paddock as her prize," and which he repudiates in the famous lines, "Then, welcome each rebuff That turns earth's smoothness rough, Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go! Be our joys three parts pain! Strive, and hold cheap the strain; Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

Mr. Chesterton insists that beyond the things which surround us here on the earth there are other things which claim us from beyond. The higher instincts which discover these are not tools to be used for making the most of earthly treasures, but sacred relics to be guarded. He is an idealist who has been out beyond the world. There he has found a whole universe of mysterious but commanding facts, and has discovered that these and these alone can satisfy human nature.

The question must, however, arise, as to the validity of those spiritual claims. How can we be sure that the ideals which claim us from beyond are realities, and not mere dream shapes? There is no answer but this, that if we question the validity of our own convictions and the reality of our most pressing needs, we have simply committed spiritual suicide, and arrived prematurely at the end of all things. With the habit of questioning ultimate convictions Mr. Chesterton has little patience. Modesty, he tells us, has settled in the wrong place. We believe in ourselves and we doubt the truth that is in us. But we ourselves, the crude reality which we actually are, are altogether unreliable; while the vision is always trustworthy. We are for ever changing the vision to suit the world as we find it, whereas we ought to be changing the world to bring it into conformity with the unchanging vision. The very essence of orthodoxy is a profound and reverent conviction of ideals that cannot be changed—ideals which were the first, and shall be the last.

If Mr. Chesterton often strains his readers' powers of attention by rapid and surprising movements among very difficult themes, he certainly has charming ways of relieving the strain. The favourite among all such methods is his reversion to the subject of fairy tales. In "The Dragon's Grandmother" he introduces us to the arch-sceptic who did not believe in them—that fresh-coloured and short-sighted young man who had a curious green tie and a very long neck. It happened that this young man had called on him just when he had flung aside in disgust a heap of the usual modern problem-novels, and fallen back with vehement contentment on Grimm's Fairy Tales. "When he incidentally mentioned that he did not believe in fairy tales, I broke out beyond control. 'Man,' I said, 'who are you that you should not believe in fairy tales? It is much easier to believe in Blue Beard than to believe in you. A blue beard is a misfortune; but there are green ties which are sins. It is far easier to believe in a million fairy tales than to believe in one man who does not like fairy tales. I would rather kiss Grimm instead of a Bible and swear to all his stories as if they were thirty-nine articles than say seriously and out of my heart that there can be such a man as you; that you are not some temptation of the devil or some delusion from the void.'" The reason for this unexpected outbreak is a very deep one. "Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is—what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is—what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tale the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos."In other words, the ideals, the ultimate convictions, are the trustworthy things; the actual experience of life is often matter not for distrust only but for scorn and contempt. And this philosophy Mr. Chesterton learned in the nursery, from that "solemn and star-appointed priestess," his nurse. The fairy tale, and not the problem-novel, is the true presentment of human nature and of life. For, in the first place it preserves in man the faculty most essential to human nature—the

Notes

faculty of wonder, without which no man can live. To regain that faculty is to be born again, out of a false world into a true. The constant repetition of the laws of Nature blunts our spirits to the amazing character of every detail which she reproduces. To catch again the wonder of common things"the hour Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower" is to pass from darkness into light, from falsehood to truth. "All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption: a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead: a piece of clockwork." But that is mere blindness to the mystery and surprise of everything that goes to make up actual human experience. "The repetition in Nature seemed sometimes to be an excited repetition, like that of an angry schoolmaster saying the same thing over and over again. The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent on being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times."

That is one fact, which fairy tales emphasise—the constant demand for wonder in the world, and the appropriateness and rightness of the wondering attitude of mind, as man passes through his lifelong gallery of celestial visions. The second fact is that all such vision is conditional, and "hangs upon a veto. All the dizzy and colossal things conceded depend upon one small thing withheld. All the wild and whirling things that are let loose depend upon one thing which is forbidden." This is the very note of fairyland. "You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, if you do not say the word 'cow'; or you may live happily with the King's daughter, if you do not show her an onion." The conditions may seem arbitrary, but that is not the point. The point is that there always are conditions. The parallel with human life is obvious. Many people in the modern world are eagerly bent on having the reward without fulfilling the condition, but life is not made that way. The whole problem of marriage is a case in point. Its conditions are rigorous, and people on all sides are trying to relax them or to do away with them. Similarly, all along the line, modern society is seeking to live in a freedom which is in the nature of things incompatible with the enjoyment or the prosperity of the human spirit. There is an if in everything. Life is like that, and we cannot alter it. Quarrel with the seemingly arbitrary or unreasonable condition, and the whole fairy palace vanishes. "Life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane."

From all this it is but a step to the consideration of dogma and the orthodox Christian creed. Mr. Chesterton is at war to the knife with vague modernism in all its forms. The eternal verities which produce great convictions are incomparably the most important things for human nature. No "inner light" will serve man's turn, but some outer light, and that only and always. "Christianity came into the world, firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain." This again is human nature. No man can live his life out fully without being mastered by convictions that he cannot challenge, and for whose origin he is not responsible. The most essentially human thing is the sense that these, the supreme conditions of life, are not of man's own arranging, but have been and are imposed upon him.

At almost every point this system may be disputed. Mr. Chesterton, who never shrinks from pressing his theories to their utmost length, scoffs at the modern habit of "saying that such-and-such a creed can be held in one age, but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four." That is precisely what many of us do say. Our powers of dogmatising vary to some extent with our moods, and to a still greater extent with the reception of new light. There are many days on which the dogmas of early morning are impossible and even absurd when considered in the light of evening.

But it is not our task to criticise Mr. Chesterton's faith nor his way of dealing with it. Were we to

Notes

do so, most of us would probably strike a balance. We would find many of his views and statements unconvincing; and yet we would acknowledge that they had the power of forcing the mind to see fresh truth upon which the will must act decisively. The main point in his orthodoxy is unquestionably a most valuable contribution to the general faith of his time and country. That point is the adventure which he narrates under the similitude of the voyage that ended in the discovery of England. He set out to find the empirical truth of human nature and the meaning of human life, as these are to be explored in experience. When he found them, it was infinitely surprising to him to become aware that the system in which his faith had come at last to rest was just Christianity—the only system which could offer any adequate and indeed exact account of human nature. The articles of its creed he recognised as the points of conviction which are absolutely necessary to the understanding of human nature and to the living of human life.

Thus it comes to pass that in the midst of a time resounding with pagan voices old and new, he stands for an unflinching idealism. It is the mark of pagans that they are children of Nature, boasting that Nature is their mother: they are solemnised by that still and unresponsive maternity, or driven into rebellion by discovering that the so-called mother is but a harsh stepmother after all. Mr. Chesterton loves Nature, because Christianity has revealed to him that she is but his sister, child of the same Father. "We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate."

It follows that two worlds are his, as is the case with all true idealists. The modern reversion to paganism is founded on the fundamental error that Christianity is alien to Nature, setting up against her freedom the repellent ideal of asceticism, and frowning upon her beauty with the scowl of the harsh moralist. For Mr. Chesterton the bleakness is all on the side of the pagans, and the beauty with the idealists. They do not look askance at the green earth at all. They gaze upon it with steady eyes, until they are actually looking through it, and discovering the radiance of heaven there, and the sublime brightness of the Eternal Life. The pagan virtues, such as justice and temperance, are painfully reasonable and often sad. The Christian virtues are faith, hope, and charity—each more unreasonable than the last, from the point of view of mere mundane common sense; but they are gay as childhood, and hold the secret of perennial youth and unfading beauty, in a world which upon any other terms than these is hastening to decay.

Self Assessment

1. Choose the correct options:

(*i*) Between 1900 and 1936 Chesterton published

(*a*) 200 books (*b*) 50 books (*c*) 10 books (*d*) 100 books

(*ii*) G.K. Chesterton was born in London on

(*a*) May 29 1874 (*b*) May 28 1874

(*c*) June 29 1874 (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Chesterton was converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in

(*a*) 1921 (*b*) 1922 (*c*) 1931 (*d*) 1911

(*iv*) Daily is written by

(*a*) Chesterton (*b*) Dryden

(*c*) Chaucer (*d*) Bacon

19.3 Summary

- G.K. Chesterton begins his essay in an engaging way — a personal anecdote of his coming to the revelation that the white ceiling above his bed is a perfect, but unattainable canvas for him to paint. Chesterton makes it clear through his musing on the uninspired artwork

Notes

surrounding him in his home in comparison to the beautiful possibilities he sees in his white ceiling that his story of lying in bed is a metaphor for his feelings about society as a whole. He makes the claim that the morals of proper behavior and hygiene adopted by society inhibit creativity. By disregarding those arbitrary values, says Chesterton, people will lead more fulfilling lives.

- Chesterton calls upon the credibility of famous artists such as Michael Angelo when he suggests that great works of genius such as Michael Angelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel were only created because people disregarded expectations, and spent more time metaphorically "lying in bed". Chesterton also employs Logos to make his case when he says that less respectable people such as burglars and misers comply with societal norms and get up early. To make his argument stronger, Chesterton brings up a converse argument; too much time spent in bed could make a person lazy. He ends his essay by refuting this detractor of his claim and saying that one should only occasionally lay in bed, and when one is doing so, they must make no excuse for being there. If this is done, a person will go to bed and wake up "a healthy man".

19.4 Key-Words

1. Exhilaration : The feeling of lively and cheerful joy.
2. Contradictions : Discrepancy inconsistency.

19.5 Review Questions

1. Give a Critical analysis of the essay On Laying in Bed.
2. What did Chesterton try to provide the readers from on Lying in Bed.

Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*d*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*b*) (*iv*) (*c*)

19.6 Further Readings



1. Banshi Dhar, G.K. Chesterton and the twentieth century english essays, S. Chand and Company Ltd.
2. Randall Paine, The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterten, Ignatius Press, 2006.