



# ALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY

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KARAIKUDI – 630 003



# ONLINE PROGRAMMES

**M.A. [English]**

**I - Semester**

205212

**PROSE**

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## INTRODUCTION

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In simplest terms, prose can be defined as the most basic form of written language, applying common grammatical structure and natural flow of speech rather than rhythmic structure that is seen in poetry. Its simplicity and loosely defined arrangement has led to its usage in the majority of spoken dialogues, factual discourse as well as contemporary and imaginary writing. Prose is used in essays, novels, short stories, newspaper reports, magazine columns, etc.

Some common types of prose are:

- **Nonfictional Prose:** A literary work that is mainly based on fact, though it may contain fictional elements in certain cases. Examples include biographies and essays.
- **Fictional Prose:** A literary work that is wholly or partly imagined or theoretical. Examples are novels.
- **Heroic Prose:** A literary work that may be written down or recited, and which employs many of the formulaic expressions found in oral tradition. Examples are legends and tales.
- **Prose Poetry:** A literary work that exhibits poetic quality – using emotional effects and heightened imagery – but which are written in prose instead of verse.

This book, *Prose*, is divided into fourteen units. Each unit begins with an Introduction and Objectives. They introduce the reader to the text and provide an overview of important concepts and topics. ‘Check Your Progress’ questions are interspersed within the text for ensuring that the concepts have been understood well. Each unit ends with a Summary, followed by a list of Key Words and Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions. Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises encourage the recollection of information as well as the application of concepts. Further Reading lists the names of other books that can be referred to, for similar topics.

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**BLOCK - I**  
**PROSE I-IV**

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*Francis Bacon*

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**UNIT 1 FRANCIS BACON**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561 near Strand in London. He was an author, jurist, politician, orator, scientist and philosopher. His scientific understanding helped him to write essays that prove to be as much relevant today as they were in those times. Bacon held several influential positions

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in his life. According to Bacon, he had three goals in life, to find truth, serve his country and serve his church. Some of his works contradict his goals. His works *Of Truth*, *Of Revenge*, *Of Superstition*, *Of Ambition* serve a detailed account of his take on truth, revenge, superstition and ambition.

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### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and major works of the author, Francis Bacon
- Understand the summary of his works *Of Truth*, *Of Revenge*, *Of Superstition*, *Of Ambition*
- Know the theme of his essays
- Learn about the historical backgrounds of these essays

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### 1.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561. He was of poor health throughout his life, yet it does not appear to have had an impact on his intellect. Francis Bacon was born near the Strand in London. Due to his health issues, young Francis Bacon was educated at home during his early childhood by his parents, Sir Nicholas Bacon and Anne Cooke Bacon. His parents hired John Walsall, a graduate of Oxford University to tutor him. Francis Bacon is said to have studied Latin as well as English, according to the medieval curriculum of the times.

Besides being an author, Bacon was also a jurist, politician, orator, scientist and philosopher. After being educated at home during his early childhood, Francis Bacon enrolled at Trinity College in the year 1573 at the age of 12 years along with his older brother Anthony Bacon. At Trinity College in Cambridge, Francis Bacon studied under the personal care of Dr. John Whitgit. Dr. Whitgit was later to become the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Francis Bacon met Queen Elizabeth for the first time at Cambridge. Queen Elizabeth was greatly impressed by his intellect, and used to, throughout her life, refer him as “the young lord keeper”.

As a result of his education, Francis Bacon came to the conclusion that the methods and outcomes of science as was then prevalent were completely wrong. Francis Bacon idolized the philosopher Aristotle, but despite that idolization, he did not agree with the philosophy as established by Aristotle. Bacon thought and believed that the philosophy of Aristotle was without any objectives or purpose and completely barren.

Some time towards the end of the year 1576, Francis Bacon left Britain to travel to France with Sir Amias Paulet, who was then the British ambassador

to Paris. However, Anthony Bacon continued his education in England. France was at that time being ruled by Henry III. The political environment and government policies prevalent in France at the time had a lasting impression on the young Francis Bacon. Along with Sir Paulet perhaps, Francis Bacon spent the next three years travelling widely across Europe.

It appears that Francis Bacon worked as an assistant or intern with Sir Paulet, undertaking various routine diplomatic assignments. But those years and travels proved extremely valuable and educative for the young Francis Bacon. He learned governance, languages as well as civil law. On different occasions, his work required Francis Bacon to deliver diplomatic letters to England, not just to eminent politicians of the time, but also to Queen Elizabeth.

Francis Bacon's father Sir Nicholas died suddenly in the year 1579. After this, Bacon decided to return to England. Sir Nicholas had apparently set aside a substantial amount of money for Francis Bacon who was his youngest son. But before he could buy his son the estate, Sir Nicholas had died. This meant that Francis Bacon received, in actuality only about one fifth of the amount his father had set up for him in trust. The young Bacon had apparently borrowed money, and this left him in debt. In order to pay his dues and earn a living, Francis Bacon took up a job at Gray's Inn as a resident lawyer. However, his mother Lady Anne had to support him with a separate grant.

Later, Francis Bacon remarked that he had three goals in his life: to find truth, serve his country and serve his church. Francis Bacon began his political career as a Member of Parliament for Bossiney in Cornwall district in the year 1581. He became a member of the Puritan church, and began writing in support of the Puritan clergy, criticizing the English church for its oppression of the Puritan church and its clergy.

Francis Bacon began to rise quickly in his political and judicial life after James I ascended to the throne of England. It began with his knighthood in 1603, later being appointed as Attorney General and Lord Chancellor. Biographers claimed that Francis Bacon was given these favors by the king because of their illicit romance. Homosexuality in those days was entirely illegal, because the country was still predominantly controlled by the church. Francis Bacon was a fervent Anglican, and in that capacity had written that he had an imaginary island, where masculine love, as it was then referred to, would never be touched. Perhaps in an effort to keep that part of his life private he even got married to Anne Barnham, the daughter of a wealthy nobleman. At the time of marriage, Francis Bacon was 45 years old, while his bride Anne Barnham, was just 16 years old.

Although Francis Bacon claimed that their marriage was full of love, and Anne Barnham, who outlived him too claimed that she had been the love

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of life, biographers have casted doubts on those claims. This was perhaps because of the immense favours Francis Bacon had continued to receive from King James I during his public career. In his capacity as Attorney General, Francis Bacon was known to be almost cruel, resorting to torture, in his cases of prosecution. But he was constantly plagued with rumours that he took bribes from those litigants whom he ruled in favour of. These favours were to pile up, and come together shortly after he was made Lord Chancellor.

After King James made him Lord Chancellor, his income suddenly increased but his debts, which had begun when he very young and at college, continued to mount. His lifestyle appeared to have been lavish. One would wonder, however, if he had paid the young men who found favour with him in sexual matters.

After he was made Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon was charged with 23 counts of bribe taken in return for legal favours. In a public admittance of guilt, however, he claimed to the parliamentary committee that went to his house to question him, that although he admitted to his guilt, his hands and heart were clean. Significantly, he also wrote to Buckingham Palace and the king that his heart and hands were clean, and had always been so. He was charged with bribery, and was asked to pay 40,000 pounds as fine. He was also confined to prison, which was then housed in the Tower of London.

Significantly, King James I intervened, and Francis Bacon was released from prison after just a few days. King James also paid the full amount of the fine, which was perhaps one of the reasons, the biographers in later years claimed that King James I had favoured Francis Bacon to such an extent because they had been involved in an illegal romantic relationship. In spite of this, he had been termed incapable of holding public office, and so his public career came to an abrupt end in the year 1621.

Biographers also claimed that although Francis Bacon himself had written that masculine love, as it was then referred to, was a sin and he would always remain far from it. Biographers also claimed that his older brother Anthony Bacon, had also been accused of beggary, which was then another term for homosexuality.

It was after his public career ended in such disgrace that Francis Bacon devoted his life entirely to study and research, writing many articles and essays on his philosophies and analytical thinking. As far as his writing was concerned, Francis Bacon appears to have been as good an editor as he was a writer. Although his work contained short sentences that conveyed multiple means and thoughts to his audience, he became known for the shortness or brevity of his sentences. Most of his writing later became a model for younger writers. His philosophies and studies seemed to have led him to write mostly on the wisdom of focusing on science as a basis for life. It is contrary to his personal claim of being a devout Anglican, because as a scientist, his writing also questioned the authenticity of God.

Among his essays, we are focusing on four of the most well known of them, and it is important to note that they are all inter-linked. These are *Of Truth*, *Of Ambition*, *Of Revenge* and *Of Superstition*.

Francis Bacon

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Francis Bacon born?
2. What were the other qualifications of Francis Bacon besides being an author?

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## 1.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAYS

### 1.3.1 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Truth*

We will begin this section with a brief summary of the essay titled *Of Truth* written by Francis Bacon.

This essay is based on Francis Bacon's study and critical analysis of the term 'truth', and its connotation with human beings. It explores the obsession of human beings with truth, and their aversion to lies. According to Francis Bacon, truth was multi faceted, and different people could view a single fact from multiple and different angles and opinions.

This concept of truth is said to have pioneered the way future generations would perceive truth. Different people view the same things differently. While some would call something true, because they had actually witnessed it happening, others may view the same thing as a lie because they had not been there, or had not witnessed it.

The concept of truth seems to have plagued the writer Francis Bacon throughout his life, perhaps because as a public figure, he was feeling the pressure to always speak the truth. Analysing his life, however, it could be concluded that Francis Bacon had not thought of himself as a very truthful person, having had to go to great lengths to hide the two most important facts of his life. These two facts that Francis Bacon always felt the need to hide from public view and debate were his orientation, and his urge to take bribe in return for legal and social favours from the people who approached and depended on him for justice.

The concept of truth is usually a difficult one to analyse, because it could be said to not just hold multiple meanings, but also multiple origins and outcomes. Perhaps Bacon's search for truth began with his obsession to remain with the Anglican Church. Although he did a lot of research on scientific issues, he also publicly did not disclaim the presence of God. This contrariness is something which plagues most human beings even in modern times.

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### 1.3.2 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Ambition*

The central theme of the essay titled *Of Ambition* by the author Francis Bacon appears to be the concept of ambition or the desire to excel and be the best that is possessed by the male gender, or those who call themselves men. According to Francis Bacon, man is driven by his nature to excel in his chosen profession or career.

Francis Bacon was a philosopher of repute of his times, but it appears that in his essays he focused only on the male gender. In this essay titled *Of Ambition*, Francis Bacon also argues that man is always obsessed and driven by his ambition to be master of his personal space and freedom. It is obvious that this theory was developed by Francis Bacon based on his personal life and career.

Francis Bacon further theorised that a man who was driven by his ambition, and was capable of achieving that ambition could do so through his own hard work and an obsessed determination. This was also based on his personal life, because until Bacon came in contact with the new monarch of England King James I, he had been unable to achieve his ambition to rise in his public career.

Francis Bacon argued that only men had the vision and the ambition to achieve their ambition of not just creating their own personal space and freedom, but also to achieve their ambition of excelling in their chosen professions or careers. According to Francis Bacon, even a security guard in a prison or a palace could rise to create his own army if only he had the vision and the ambition to do so.

Yet, in spite of his conviction that man could achieve his ambition if he had the obsession and the drive to do so, Francis Bacon was also of the opinion that just achieving his ambition did not mean the man would be successful. According to Francis Bacon, a man who had achieved his ambition and achieved excellence in his career or profession was also open to being under constant public scrutiny and judgment.

People who scrutinized or judged such a successful man were strengthened by the support and help of a group of like-minded people around them. This type of scrutiny or judgment could lead to jealousy and the desire for revenge. This theory obviously leads one to the next essay in this unit, *Of Revenge*.

### 1.3.3 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Revenge*

The central theme of this essay titled *Of Revenge* by the author Francis Bacon is the natural desire to seek the wild justice of personal revenge, that would always remain at odds with, and pose a challenge to, the rule of law in a nation or a society. Francis Bacon connected the desire for revenge with the delay in receiving justice from the nation or the society a man lives in.

Francis Bacon claimed that the desire for personal revenge was a dangerous quality, because it arose when a man with great ambition was thwarted on his way or journey to achieving fulfillment of that ambition, he could want to extract revenge on the person who had caused him to fail in his pursuit of success.

This meant that the way Francis Bacon perceived it, revenge was a natural reaction of man, who had great ambition, and who was proceeding or progressing on his way to fulfilling that ambition, but was thwarted or deterred in that progress towards fulfilling that ambition. In other words, Francis Bacon claimed that when a man was prevented from progressing on his way to fulfilling his ambition he became dangerous, because his mind and his heart would then become filled with the desire for revenge.

All his essays were written between the years 1612 and 1625, and were based on his personal experiences as Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England, which positions he held during the reign of King James I. Francis Bacon's observation of man and behavioral patterns also appear to have been ignited and impacted by his personal experiences and personal responses to various situations and events that took place in his own life.

The main purpose of writing this essay titled *Of Revenge* was perhaps to analyze the desire for personal revenge, and a thwarted man's reaction or response to specific situations and events in his life, that would prevent him from progressing on his way to achieving or fulfilling his fierce ambition in his career or profession. Yet, it appears that Francis Bacon recognized that different people would perceive this natural desire for revenge in different ways because different men perceived success in different lights. This meant that a man with ambition, who was working independently towards fulfilling his ambition would be driven by an obsessive passionate desire for success. This man would be more dangerous, because his desire for personal revenge could be wild, uncontrolled and fierce.

On the other hand, a man who was being favoured by someone in authority, such as a prince or king, to progress on his chosen path to success through various appointments of power in his chosen career or profession, would be less likely to be uncontrolled in his desire for revenge. This was because the man in authority, such as a prince or a king, would always be present there to calm him down, and temper his wild streak, balance it with a third person.

#### **1.3.4 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Superstition***

The central theme of the essay titled *Of Superstition* written by the author Francis Bacon was the concept of superstition, which the author was of the opinion led to disbelief in God and His teachings. Francis Bacon was a devout Anglican, and he had obviously set some high principles for himself.

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It is true that superstition is born out of an actual belief in God. Francis Bacon believed that idol worship was wrong, and although God existed, no one had seen his actual form, so no one could possibly make idols to represent him. This thought and perception could also have been a result of his inclination and love of science. Francis Bacon, besides being a writer, had also been a philosopher and scientist. It is an established fact that scientists question everything, including the existence of God, because no one has actually seen God, or can claim to have seen God.

Scientists ask for proof of everything, and this is why they do so much research before making any claims. As a philosopher, too, Francis Bacon obviously used to think and analyze about life and human nature. Believing in superstitions is a human characteristic that many who claim to be religious also believe in. This means that people who are claiming to be deeply religious are most often equally superstitious.

It is true that many people who claim to be deeply religious are also deeply superstitious, and this stems from the fact that they make idols and images that they claim are God. Francis Bacon, on the other hand, obviously questioned the reason for people worshipping idols and images. For most people of his times, Francis Bacon would have appeared to be an enigma, because in reality he was a devout Anglican.

One of the goals he had set for himself as a young man had been to serve God and the church. As an Anglican, Francis Bacon had obviously researched and analyzed the presence of God. Although Francis Bacon did no question or debate on the existence of God, he obviously questioned and debated the intense need of human beings to be able to worship God only if they placed an idol or an image of God before them.

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## 1.4 THEME

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### 1.4.1 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Truth*

The central theme of the essay titled *Of Truth* written by the author Francis Bacon is the lifelong quest of all human beings for the truth as they believe it to be and perceive it to be. Truth is a multi-faceted aspect of human life. It is something that prevails in different areas of life. The universal truth that is present in the world is that the universe exists and will always continue to do so. The creation of the universe and human life is also a truth that no human being can ignore. The writer Francis Bacon seems to have searched for truth all the time.

Perhaps the irony is that people usually go to great lengths to hide certain truths about themselves from public scrutiny or public analysis. This is because if the world around were to arrive at the real truth, the person

concerned would be termed as a great liar. The author Francis Bacon has explored the human quest for truth in this essay. The author also appears to have explored the reverse side of all truths, which is usually a bunch of lies as the world would choose to look at it. Even among siblings who may have grown up together, the perception and analysis of truth may not match one another's.

The author has appeared to have analysed this concept in this essay of his titled *Of Truth*, allowing and leading his audience to think about the truth they perceive and wonder if what they perceive as the truth is actually considered to be the truth by those around them.

The central concept of the essay titled *Of Truth* appears to be, like all his other essays, to be based on his philosophical forays and research, and the theories he built and developed based on those philosophical studies. The manner in which each individual human perceives truth would also depend on their personal goals in life, their ambitions, and the manner in which they approach those goals and ambitions, or rather the routes they take in order to reach those goals or ambitions. This concept of truth leads us to the next essay in this section.

#### **1.4.2 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Ambition***

The central theme of the essay titled *Of Ambition*, written by the author Francis Bacon, is the ambition and obsession of man to achieve success and reach great heights in his chosen career or profession. This theme, as mentioned elsewhere earlier, refers obviously to the personal life and experiences of the author Francis Bacon himself. As a writer, Francis Bacon obviously chose examples to illustrate his points or theory in all his essays. Keeping to his practice, Francis Bacon seems to have chosen the example of a security guard.

According to Francis Bacon, even a simple security guard, if he had the vision, and the ambition, could create his own personal army. Francis Bacon believed apparently that only the male of the human species had the vision, and the ambition, to achieve success and reach the greatest heights in his chosen profession or career. The theme *Of Ambition* would reveal to the discerning audience that once again, this theory of Francis Bacon was also based on his personal life and experiences.

Francis Bacon says that a man who is unable to achieve his ambition or his goal could do so by choosing his passion or ticket to achieve that goal or ambition. Until the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Francis Bacon was unable to reach the heights of success he desired and was obsessed about, either as a jurist or in his public career as a statesman. It was only after King James I came to power that Francis Bacon began to rise quickly in his profession and public career. Therefore, it is obvious that Francis Bacon had alluded to King James I when he had asserted that a man who was unable to achieve his

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ambition or goal on his own could become successful if he chose his passion or ticket to that success and fortune.

From an early age, Francis Bacon had been driven by an obsession and determination to rise to great heights of success and fortune as a statesman, clergyman and a jurist. However, in spite of constant intervention and influence by his powerful uncle, he had been unable to achieve that success or fortune.

In this essay titled *Of Ambition*, the author Francis Bacon describes ambition as being confined to men, who he asserts have the vision and the ambition to achieve any ambition or goal that they may set their heart and mind upon. Only a man had the determination and the drive to achieve his ambition or goal. But obviously he meant only a certain type of man, because he went on to state that for other men, they could choose their ticket or their passion to help them achieve their goal and their ambition.

Once again, taking a leaf out of his own life, the writer Francis Bacon, asserted that merely achieving one's goal or ambition would not necessarily mean becoming successful. Francis Bacon wrote that singular accomplishment would always leave a man open to jealousy and revenge, especially if his opponents, critics or judges had a group of people that could strengthen their cause and their jealousy and desire for revenge. This will take us to the next essay in this unit, titled *Of Revenge*.

### 1.4.3 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Revenge*

The central theme of the essay titled *Of Revenge* by the author Francis Bacon was the natural desire of a man who received delayed justice, or delayed success. Francis Bacon believed that a man who was driven by his ambitions to excel at, and become successful in his chosen profession or career should be allowed to fulfill his ambitions without hampering or thwarting his progress.

A man with ambition who was hampered or prevented from fulfilling his dream, or his ambition, would naturally react or respond to that prevention of success. Francis Bacon believed and argued that revenge is the natural reaction or response of men who were prevented from doing something they desired. This desire for revenge could make them dangerous, because the desire for wild justice, or personal revenge, was something that did not respect the rule of law in the society or country, nor did it acknowledge and accept that rule of law.

Francis Bacon analyzed and theorized that the desire for revenge was present in every man but the degree of intensity of that desire for revenge could vary from individual to individual. This was because revenge or the desire for revenge was the natural reaction or response of men to events or people who prevented them from progressing on their way to fulfilling their ambition, or were forced to achieve delayed success.

Men who are filled with ambition often believe that success, fame or fortune that is delayed cannot be termed true success, fame or fortune, because the entire purpose of that achievement would be lost if not achieved at a specific moment in life.

This was perhaps the reason Francis Bacon believed that the intensity of the desire for revenge could vary from individual to individual, depending on their concept of success and ambition.

#### 1.4.4 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Superstition*

The basic and main theme of the essay titled *Of Superstition* written by Francis Bacon was the inherent human nature to worship only what they are able to see and touch. During his times, the Roman Catholic Church had great power over people, including across England. The Roman Catholic Church also believed in worshipping idols.

Most people who worship idols are superstitious. The inherent and basic point is that people who worship idols believe that if they pray to those idols and make offerings to them, their prayers will be answered and their wishes granted.

On the other hand, although Francis Bacon never questioned the existence of God, he believed that idols could not be worshipped because no one actually knew what God looked like.

#### Check Your Progress

3. What is the main theme of the essay *Of Truth*?
4. What is the main argument of the essay *Of Ambition* ?
5. Mention the main theme of the essay *Of Revenge*?

## 1.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

We will critically analyse some of Bacon's essays.

### 1.5.1 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Truth*

In the essay titled *Of Truth*, the author Francis Bacon gives the example of Pilate, who had been the governor at the Roman Empire during the reign of Julius Caesar. One day, when asked about the existence of Jesus Christ, Pilate had apparently asked in jest, "What is truth?" and left the place without waiting for the response.

According to the author, truth is not something that just comes upon a person out of nowhere. On the contrary, people need to work very hard and over long periods of time in order to arrive at the truth. Most people do not like to work hard even for short periods of time, so obviously they would

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hate to work hard for the lengths of time that are required to arrive at the truth in any area.

Most human beings also hate the truth because arriving at the truth in one area would mean they would need to give their full allegiance to that truth after that, and not attempt to move away from it at any time. Adhering to the truth in a certain area or on a certain fact obviously means it will confine them, or restrict the personal freedom of choices of those people, in those specific areas of life.

The author Francis Bacon went on to write that truth is like a bright day, illuminated by the bright sun, that reveals parts of the self to human beings. People usually like only the brightness of day because daylight allows them to look at only the visible aspects of their character or self. People do not like the darkness of night, because in the darkness they will be unable to see the dark sides, or the dark elements that make up their life. Therefore, it follows that truth is like a pearl, which is only what appears to be, a simple pearl, when viewed in the daylight. The pearl does not force them to consider how that pearl had been created in the first place, and how difficult and painful it would have been to that oyster to create that pearl.

In this context, the author Francis Bacon, claims that ‘a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.’ As with most writers, the essays that the author Francis Bacon wrote also had connections with his own life. Human beings, it may be noted, tell lies usually when they wish to hide something in their own life, or some aspect of their personalities or character that they believe needs to be hidden from public scrutiny or judgment.

Perhaps the most bitter truth in the life of the author himself was that he was involved in an illicit romantic relationship with the King James I. For the writer, perhaps this was unacceptable, because Francis Bacon as an admittedly devout Anglican, who believed that ‘masculine love’ as it was then known, was wrong and sinful. In an attempt to hide this truth, Francis Bacon, at the age of 45 years, had married Anne Barnham who was then a child of 16 years of age.

Besides favouring Francis Bacon sexually, it was obvious that King James I also favoured him in his career, promoting him with quick succession. It appears to have suited the writer Francis Bacon to accept the king’s sexual favours, because he was smart enough to understand that these sexual favours would quickly lead the king to promote Francis Bacon both in his political and legal careers, as well as in the church. It is to be remembered that Francis Bacon had claimed that he had three goals in his life, the most important of which had been to serve his country, and to serve his church.

### **1.5.2 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Ambition***

The essay titled *Of Ambition* reflects the personal life and perceptions of Francis Bacon. Being placed after the essay titled *Of Truth*, it is significant

due to the fact that it is interlinked to the first essay by the author. The central theme of this essay is the author's observation and analysis of the human characteristic of ambition, which is present in most human beings. The author, Francis Bacon had according to his biographers, devoted his life after the year 1621 to study or research and writing.

Francis Bacon had primarily been a statesman, scientist, philosopher, jurist and orator, as well as a writer. Most of his writings therefore, were either based on his philosophical observations or his experiences as a statesman and jurist. It is a known fact that all writers and poets are influenced by their personal lives and experiences in their writings. It is the same with Francis Bacon.

Francis Bacon had been a deeply ambitious man from an early age, and throughout the reign of Queen Elizabeth, had made repeated efforts at becoming elevated in both his legal as well as his political careers. Although he had achieved some level of success, it was apparent that he had not achieved the status, respect or fortune that he separately desired to possess. It was not until King James I became monarch of England that Francis Bacon was able to attain the heights of fame and fortune he so craved.

In this essay titled *Of Ambition*, Francis Bacon writes, "So ambitious men, if they find the way open for their rising, and still get forward, they are rather busy than dangerous; but if they be checked in their desires, they become secretly discontent, and look upon men and matters with an evil eye, and are best pleased, when things go backward; which is the worst property in a servant of a prince, or state."

In these lines, Francis Bacon has referred to the most common human characteristic. According to Francis Bacon, a man who was driven by his ambition, like a man possessed by demons almost, he would use every path or track to fulfill his ambition or achieve his goal. Nothing, it may seem, can deter or stop his progress on his way to achieving full glory. Yet, if he was ever thwarted, the man would stumble, and more seriously, his stumbling or fall would make him almost dangerous because a man, who is thwarted in his progress towards success, becomes almost evil and so dangerous. This will only result in his seeking revenge at some point in the future. According to Francis Bacon, ambitious men who were allowed to proceed unhindered towards fulfilling their ambitions would only be a benefit to their state and to their prince or king.

Francis Bacon goes on to write, "Therefore it is good for princess, if they use ambitious men, to handle it, so as they will be still progressive and not retrograde; which, because it cannot be without inconvenience, it is good not to use such natures at all." It is obvious that in these lines, Francis Bacon was alluding to his own relationship with King James I. According to the writer, such ambitious men needed to be employed by men in authority, such as princesses or kings, because only men in authority would know and

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understand how to handle and shape such men with great ambitions. Men in authority would understand their nature and their ambitions, and lead them through their search for success, without the danger of forcing the men with ambitions to regress instead of progress. Because a man who regressed, or was not allowed to fulfill his ambitions would become vengeful and evil in his intentions.

Elsewhere in the same essay titled, Francis Bacon writes, “For when the way of pleasuring, and displeasuring, lieth by the favorite, it is impossible any other should be overgreat. Another means to curb them, is to balance them by others, as proud as they. But then there must be some middle counsellors, to keep things steady; for without that ballast, the ship will roll too much.”

In these lines, Francis Bacon says if the person in authority takes favours or gives favors from the men with ambition, it should be made sure that there has to be only one person who is being favoured. Here the connotation or reference of the word pleasuring or displeasuring appears to be sexual favours.

### 1.5.3 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Revenge*

The central theme of the essay is the natural desire of man to seek personal justice, or revenge, when he is prevented from proceeding towards the fulfillment of his ambition in terms of profession, career or even his personal life. According to Francis Bacon, this failure to achieve success could sometimes be just delayed.

Francis Bacon believed that the desire for personal justice or revenge was therefore also related to delayed success because most people perceive delayed success as being no success at all. They believe ambition drives all people, and individual ambitions are intended to be fulfilled at specific moments in their life. So when that success is delayed for whatever reason by someone else, it fails to appease or satisfy those seeking it.

Such people become dangerous, because they begin to nurse a secret and mean desire for personal justice or revenge that could turn violent at any moment, without recognizing or respecting the law or rule of law in society of nation. Let us look at and try to analyze what Francis Bacon actually wrote about revenge.

“Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man’s nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong putteth the law out of office. Certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior; for it is a prince’s part to pardon.”

It is important to remember that Francis Bacon had been a reputed and respected Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England under the patronage of King James I. So it is obvious that he understood the dangers of letting a man seek revenge unhindered. Francis Bacon believed that while

a man began seeking personal justice, a wild justice as a means of personal revenge, this revenge could often turn violent and vindictive. Such revenge would always be at variance with, or contradict, the rule of law in the country. Such revenge never recognized or respected the rule of law of the country. But because of the dangers of violence, it was necessary for the rule of law to put an end to such act of revenge, or prevent such violent revenge. Because a man who succeeded in his first act of revenge without being brought to book, would naturally begin to believe that nothing could stop him, or the rule of law could not prevent him from seeking personal justice, because it did not concern the country. This belief would make him bolder, and he would continue to take further revenge, with the possibility that each successive act of revenge becoming more violent and vindictive than the one before it. This is because the desire for revenge, once ignited, only keeps increasing in its intensity and does not stop until it devours the entire society. At that point, it could only be the prince or the king who could pardon the man seeking revenge, because as the monarch, only he could overrule the law of land in the country.

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Francis Bacon goes on to write, “And Solomon, I am sure, saith, “It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence.” That which is past is gone, and irrevocable; and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come; therefore they do but trifle with themselves that labor in past matters.”

Referring to the teachings of the Bible, Francis Bacon says that he agrees with the wisdom of Solomon, who says in the Bible that wise men allow past incidents to remain where they belong – in the past because wise men always believe that the present and the future hold greater joys and greater things to soothe men, than the events or sorrows of the past. It is only foolish men who will forever harp on or concern themselves with events that happened in the past, because they have nothing better to do in the present or the future.

How relevant these thoughts or theories are in the present, when people are constantly seeking to take revenge on someone or the other, wasting away their lives, and their precious present and future! Francis Bacon goes on to add:

“Here is no man doth a wrong for the wrong’s sake; but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honor, or the like. Therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me? And if any man should do wrong merely out of ill-nature, why, yet it is but like the thorn or briar, which prick and scratch, because they can do no other.”

Here, Francis Bacon states that man by himself will not do something wrong just because he likes that wrong. He usually does something wrong because he wants to gain something that will enhance his life. This means that the man loves himself, and wants the best for himself, and believes that doing that specific wrong, he can make himself happy and satisfied. In that context, no one has the right to judge that man for doing that wrong,

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because he loves himself more than those who are judging him for that wrong. Moreover, someone who does something wrong because he is a bad man, or has it in his nature to do wrong, should be looked upon as a thorn or a briar bush, that scratches you, because that is in their nature, and they know nothing better than that.

Elsewhere, Francis Bacon has referred to someone who takes revenge openly as being generous. In these lines, the writer says there are some people who prefer to take revenge openly, letting their victim know who is hurting them, and the reason for that act of revenge. This, according to Francis Bacon, is being generous, because when the person understands that the mean act is actually an act of revenge for something they had done themselves to the perpetrator. This is therefore generous on the part of the person taking revenge, because this way they allow the person to understand, repent and mend their ways. According to Francis Bacon, this is more acceptable because of the openness of the act of revenge, because openness denotes clean heart.

On the other hand, says Francis Bacon, a person who is secretive and do things without warning, or behind the back is more like the arrow that flies under cover of the darkness of night, so that the person being hurt does not know who is hurting them or what they have done to deserve that mean act of hurt.

Francis Bacon had gone on to write, thus:

“Cosmus, duke of Florence, had a desperate saying against perfidious or neglecting friends, as if those wrongs were unpardonable; “You shall read (saith he) that we are commanded to forgive our enemies; but you never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends.”

In these lines, Francis Bacon says that Comus, who had been the Duke of Florence, had said something about friends who hurt us, under cover of darkness, or stabbed us in the back. Comus had said that the Bible commands us to forgive our enemies, but no one tells us to forgive our friends, because friends are actually supposed and expected to be kind, generous and supportive of us.

Francis Bacon says that when Job was suffering, and God had taken everything away from him, including all his wealth, his children and his friends, had said that when we are willing an happy to take the good that God has given us, why and how can we not take the evil too that he gives us? In the same way, when our friends do good for us, we are happy, so why should we become sad when the same friends do something bad to us.

Because friends usually keep their revenge private, only letting us know in private why they are hurting us. This sort of private revenge is far better, according to Francis Bacon, than the public revenge of public figures and personalities such as kings and princesses.

#### 1.5.4 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Superstition*

Francis Bacon

Besides being a writer and orator, Francis Bacon had also been a scientist and philosopher. In fact he had been a philosopher, scientist, statesman and jurist much before he had actually started writing as a profession. This means that much before he actually began writing, his mind had always been deeply engaged in analyzing the human being, the human psyche and nature.

Francis Bacon believed that God existed, and was a devout Anglican. What had bothered him, perhaps, was that people used to worship idols, believing that those idols were what answered their prayers and granted them their wishes. Francis Bacon believed that God had no form, and did not like people worshipping things that they themselves had created

Francis Bacon began the essay with the words, “It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion, as is unworthy of him. For the one is unbelief, the other is contumely; and certainly superstition is the reproach of the Deity. Plutarch saith well to that purpose: Surely (saith he) I had rather a great deal, men should say, there was no such man at all, as Plutarch, than that they should say, that there was one Plutarch, that would eat his children as soon as they were born; as the poets speak of Saturn. And as the contumely is greater towards God, so the danger is greater towards men.”

According to Francis Bacon, it would have been better for people to say that there was no God, than to create idols and images and worship those as being God. He said that worshipping idols made by man is an insult to the powers of God. Francis Bacon, in order to explain this idea, had given the example of Plutarch. Bacon remarked that Plutarch had said that he would prefer to have future generations say that Plutarch had never existed, rather than say that he had existed and had eaten all his children at birth. Francis Bacon surmised therefore that superstition was something that posed greater dangers to men than it did to God because God existed, and did not depend on man for his good reputation. Francis Bacon went on to write,

“Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy, in the minds of men. Therefore theism did never perturb states; for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further: and we see the times inclined to atheism (as the time of Augustus Caesar) were civil times. But superstition hath been the confusion of many states, and bringeth in a new primum mobile, that ravisheth all the spheres of government.”

According to Francis Bacon, atheism allowed a man to think, analyze, to study philosophy and the rest of it, and also ensured that men led moral lives, and had moral values set for themselves. It did not allow man to worship idols, or worship men in authority. Theism, on the other hand, gave rise to superstition, preventing man from thinking or using his reasoning and

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logic, trusting and putting their faith in humans or things made and created by human beings. This theory of Francis Bacon would find relevance in all generations to come, which is where his genius lay.

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### 1.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The author Francis Bacon appears to have been a multi faceted personality. Apart from being an author, he was also a jurist, an orator, a philosopher and a scientist. He also appears to have been primarily a philosopher and scientist. The one thing that describes Francis Bacon, however, was that he was driven throughout his life by a fierce ambition to excel at everything he did.

The one truth that governed the life of the author was his obsession for money, and his obsession to portray himself as a true Anglican, devoid of sin and what he referred to as masculine love. It is important to analyse these two truths about the life of Francis Bacon, because these are two obsessions that appear to have governed every action and thought of his. These the two obsessions led him to decide that he would take any path it required to reach his goals and achieve his ambitions. But sadly, these two obsessions also appeared to have been the reasons for his quick rise, and quicker fall, from public grace and into a life of public disgrace and ignominy.

Considering that these two obsessions governed his entire life, it seems contrary, and a bit disconcerting to read his essays, especially the one titled *Of Truth*. This essay describes Francis Bacon's obsession and search for the truth. While writing that most people hate truth because they do not like to work hard in an effort to find that truth, it speaks a lot about the true character of the writer Francis Bacon when he makes that claim. Francis Bacon appears to have been more obsessed with his public career, which meant he was as obsessed with how people perceived him, or how people thought of him.

Yet it will be obvious to the audience that his obsessive ambition, to reach the top and earn a particular status, was also what would lead to his downfall. He appears to have based this essay titled *Of Truth*, on this truth of his own life, especially because he says that a mixture of a lie does always bring pleasure in life. Yes, his lies, and his obsession, obvious brought pleasure into his life.

#### 1.6.1 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Ambition*

Francis Bacon had been a keen observer of human nature, including his own. He was multi faceted personality, but a man possessed by his ambitions and drive to achieve great heights of success in everything he attempted in life. Although he had been home schooled during his early childhood, Francis Bacon had been a prodigy, entering college at the tender age of 12 years.

It is quite possible that his lifelong physical ailments gave rise to his lifelong ambitions, perhaps in an effort to overcome those ailments. The essay titled *Of Ambition* appears to be very relevant to his own life, because he had been as driven by a demonic ambition to achieve success and fortune as anyone else, and he had been favoured, both sexually as well as politically by the person in authority, the prince or king of those times.

It had been implied throughout his life that Francis Bacon and King James I had been romantically involved in an illicit relationship, but both men had denied the rumours. In fact, Anthony Bacon, the author's older brother, had also been plagued by the accusations of being homosexual. Perhaps his relationship, and his quick rise in his legal and political careers were seen at the time as being a result of his liaison with King James I.

It is quite possible, on the contrary, that King James I had merely seen the ambitions of a man, and helped him progress in his chosen careers. Whatever be the case, Francis Bacon had experienced greater fame and fortune during the reign of King James I than he had previously done during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. King James I had in all probability, merely known how to handle Francis Bacon and his fierce ambitions, and been instrumental in steering him in the right direction. In doing so, King James I had possibly used the brilliance and intellect of Francis Bacon in politics as well as in the legal field.

This is what is meant in modern times as mentoring or guiding, and most people driven by ambition in their chosen careers normally do have mentors or guides, who steer them in the right direction, hone their skills and intellect, and help them achieve success in those careers or professions. By that yardstick, it was probably that King James I had been the one person who had observed and discerned the driving ambition that had possessed Francis Bacon, and appointed him or made use of his specific skills both in the political as well as the legal arena.

### **1.6.2 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Revenge***

One would expect the concept of revenge to be something simple and easily described. Yet the philosopher Francis Bacon in his essay titled *Of Revenge* has turned it into something complex and requiring deeper study and analysis.

According to Francis Bacon, revenge that is taken openly and is above board is always better than revenge taken behind the back like being stabbed in the dark. People who are open and direct are to be trusted more than those who attack us in the darkness of night, or stab us in the back without our knowledge.

Francis Bacon goes on to say that the revenge taken by people who are our friends is always better than public revenge. Friends when they take revenge do it in order that we understand the reason for their act of

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revenge, repent and improve our behavior and actions. They usually keep their revenge private, and confine it to their friends. But when people take revenge from public figures, they do it openly, publicly and in full view of the world around them, in an effort to shame them publicly and cause their public downfall and disgrace.

Here again, it is obvious that Francis Bacon was referring to his own public disgrace and fall from public office in the year 1621, which had been instigated by someone who had been his friend and who had later turned into an enemy. Such friends are always more dangerous, because instead of seeking to make us better people, their only intention is to cause our total destruction.

Francis Bacon was a devout Anglican, and a clergyman. In most of his essays, therefore, it appears that he has given examples lavishly from the Bible. The purpose, therefore, of writing his essays, appear not just to espouse his theories, but to preach a moral point of view to his audience. This is ironic, because as a human being, the personal and private life of Francis Bacon was not and cannot even now be considered as being spotlessly clean and innocent. Francis Bacon, who was accustomed to leading a lavish lifestyle, remained in constant debt throughout his entire life. While it is not a sin perhaps to be in debt itself, what matters is that in an effort to repay those debts, it would appear; Francis Bacon had consistently taking bribes from the litigants whose cases he tried as a judge.

Another aspect of the life of Francis Bacon that appeared to trouble the people who knew him intimately was perhaps his rumored illicit liaison with King James I. For his part, Francis Bacon had consistently said that masculine love, as he referred to it, was far from his life and that his heart and hands were absolutely clean of all sin.

Obviously, for those around him, who had been searching for avenues to hurt and damage his public career, these aspects offered the needed grist for the mill, and it had all come together in the year 1621, when he had faced public trial while he had been Lord Chancellor of England. This obvious act of revenge had been unexpected for Francis Bacon, and it had obviously broken his spirit. Yet to all extents, he displayed no signs of breaking down in the years to come, devoting his time to study, research and writing.

### **1.6.3 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Superstition***

Being a devout Anglican had not stopped Francis Bacon from being a scientist and a philosopher. This shows his audience how great his true genius was. Being the one had never appeared to deter the man from all the others. He was truly a multi-faceted personality, and perhaps had lived too soon for people to actually appreciate and accept his genius.

Francis Bacon believed that man claimed to believe in God, but his actions belied that belief. According to him, this type of belief made people believe that human beings or a man in authority wielded more power over other men than God himself. Such people believed that a king was as great as, or greater than, God himself. Francis Bacon's argument seemed to be that although God exists, he does not need man, whom he himself created, to give credence to his reputation or his existence. But man needed God for his existence.

As a philosopher, Francis Bacon had obviously questioned the effort and time people spent on petty things such as worshipping idols or putting their faith in other human beings. Bacon believed that on the other hand, atheism would give the same man more time to actually use his intellect, thinking capacity, philosophy and study.

## NOTES

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### 1.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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It is important to know the historical background of the time the essay was written.

#### 1.7.1 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Truth*

Francis Bacon was a philosopher, jurist, scientist, orator and writer. Throughout his life, he appears to have been searching for the meaning of the term 'truth'. Francis Bacon appears to have devoted a considerable amount of time from his early years to study truth, life and love.

Until the year 1621, Francis Bacon had focused more on his career in public life as a statesman and jurist. Throughout his entire life, he was plagued by both poor health and the curse of debt. In the year 1621, in spite of the royal patronage of the then monarch of England King James I, Francis Bacon's public life and career came to an abrupt end on being charged with 23 separate counts of bribery and corruption.

It was only after this that Francis Bacon began devoting his entire life and time on study, or research, and writing. In the year 1625, Bacon wrote the final edition or compilation of his essays, titled *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*. The essay titled *Of Truth* was the first one in this final edition.

In this essay titled *Of Truth*, Francis Bacon has explored the fundamental question of whether it would be worse for man to lie to himself, or to others. This obviously led him to the next question, of whether even when man had possession of the truth, he could lie to those around him.

His life and personal experiences led the writer Francis Bacon to argue, and perhaps conclude, that human beings had the natural tendency or inclination to lie to others, and that this urge arose from the fact that all

human beings actually loved the lie itself, more than speaking the lie to others or to themselves.

### 1.7.2 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Ambition*

#### NOTES

While the essay titled *Of Truth* was the first essay in the final edition of essays written by the author Francis Bacon in the year 1625, this essay titled *Of Ambition* came much later in the same edition.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Francis Bacon had used powerful people to gain various public official positions. All those efforts had been in vain, because although he had been appointed to various positions in the legal and political spheres, Francis Bacon had never really seemed to have achieved the heights of fame and fortune that he had actually desired.

On one occasion, Queen Elizabeth had called a parliamentary enquiry into a plot by the Roman Catholic Church which she believed had been plotting against her. Around this time, Francis Bacon had ruled against a triple tax that had been levied on the Roman Catholic Church. Due to this open show of rebellion, perhaps, Queen Elizabeth had subsequently snubbed Francis Bacon when he had applied for various positions of power in both politics as well as in the legal field.

However, Francis Bacon's ambitions never left him, and he continued to be driven by a fierce urge to excel. Towards this end, he had married Anne Barnham, the daughter of a wealthy nobleman. At the time of their marriage, Francis Bacon had been 45 years of age, while Anne Barnham had been 15 years old. However, this marriage too did not appear to have done much for either his quest for power or his quest for fortune. Francis Bacon had been plagued by debt throughout his life.

It was King James I, who rose to the throne of England after Queen Elizabeth, who recognized Francis Bacon's fierce ambition, and appointed him to various public offices. Yet, it would appear that even the king's patronage or support did not save Francis Bacon from public dishonor and disgrace after being appointed Lord Chancellor in the year 1621. This brought his public career to an abrupt end, following which Francis Bacon turned his attention to research, study and writing. For the most part, he appears to have focused on writing down his theories on his philosophical analyses of various aspects of man and his inherent nature.

The final edition of those essays was published in the year 1625, and the essay titled *Of Ambition* had been part of that edition.

### 1.7.3 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Revenge*

Francis Bacon had written three versions of his essays, and the essays that have been included in this unit are all taken from the third and final edition

of his collection of essays titled *The Essays*. The first essay in this edition is the essay titled *Of Truth*, perhaps the journey of a man's life begins with his understanding of and question for truth. This essay titled *Of Revenge* comes later in the same collection, which was published in the year 162.

In fact his essays were all written between the years 1612 and 1625, and were compiled into a collection called *Essays or Counsels*. According to Francis Bacon, these essays were not just intended to be a form of self-expression, but as a form of self-interest.

Francis Bacon believed that a man of ambition should be given full freedom to fulfill that ambition, because when he is thwarted or prevented from fulfilling his ambition, he can become dangerous, with mean and vengeful thoughts, eager to take revenge on the people who had thwarted or prevented him from proceeding and progressing on his way to fulfilling his ambition. This notion or concept of the writer appears to have governed and become the base of all his essays and in fact could be said to become the central theme of all his essays as well.

Francis Bacon appeared to have been influenced by his own personal experiences as an Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England prior to the year 1621. His studies of human nature were also to a great extent influenced by his personal experiences as a man in public positions of power and authority. Francis Bacon had claimed that a man seeking the wild justice of personal revenge would always remain the fundamental and constant challenge to the rule of law, or to the legal system of the country.

#### **1.7.4 Francis Bacon: Essay titled *Of Superstition***

Francis Bacon had written all of his essays between the years 1612 and 1625. In the year 1625, Francis Bacon had published his third, and final version of his essays. The first essay in this edition had been titled *Of Truth*, and the present essay, titled *Of Superstition*, had also been included in this edition.

Although on the face of it, this essay may not appear to be directly linked to the others in this unit, it is important to understand its relevance. Like all the other essays he wrote, Francis Bacon had spent his entire life, studying human beings and their behavioral patterns and tendencies. All his literary work, in fact was based on his studies and observations. In that context, this essay too is based on his personal observations and studies of human beings, whose basic tendency is usually to idolize other human beings, and to be able to worship only something they can see and touch.

## **NOTES**

NOTES

**Check Your Progress**

6. What were the two obsessions of Francis Bacon's life?
7. What does the essay *Of Superstition* cover?

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**1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561.
2. Besides being an author, Bacon was also a jurist, politician, orator, scientist and philosopher.
3. The essay *Of Truth* is based on Francis Bacon's study and critical analysis of the term 'truth', and its connotation with human beings.
4. The main argument of the essay *Of Ambition* is that man is always obsessed and driven by his ambition to be master of his personal space and freedom.
5. The main theme of the essay *Of Revenge* is the natural desire to seek the wild justice of personal revenge.
6. The two obsessions of Francis Bacon's life were obsession for money, and his obsession to portray himself as a true Anglican.
7. The essay *Of Superstition* studies of human beings, whose basic tendency is to idolize other human beings, and to be able to worship only something they can see and touch.

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**1.9 SUMMARY**

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- Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561. He was of poor health throughout his life, yet it does not appear to have had an impact on his intellect.
- Besides being an author, Bacon was also a jurist, politician, orator, scientist and philosopher.
- Francis Bacon met Queen Elizabeth for the first time at Cambridge. Queen Elizabeth was greatly impressed by his intellect, and used to, throughout her life, refer him as "the young lord keeper".
- Francis Bacon began to rise quickly in his political and judicial life after James I ascended to the throne of England.
- After he was made Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon was charged with 23 counts of bribe taken in return for legal favours.
- The essay titled *Of Truth* written by Francis Bacon is based on Francis Bacon's study and critical analysis of the term 'truth', and its

connotation with human beings. It explores the obsession of human beings with truth, and their aversion to lies.

- The central theme of the essay titled *Of Ambition* by the author Francis Bacon appears to be the concept of ambition or the desire to excel and be the best that is possessed by the male gender, or those who call themselves men.
- The central theme of this essay titled *Of Revenge* by the author Francis Bacon is the natural desire to seek the wild justice of personal revenge, that would always remain at odds with, and pose a challenge to, the rule of law in a nation or a society.
- The central theme of the essay titled *Of Superstition* written by the author Francis Bacon was the concept of superstition, which the author was of the opinion led to disbelief in God and His teachings.
- According to the author, truth is not something that just comes upon a person out of nowhere. On the contrary, people need to work very hard and over long periods of time in order to arrive at the truth.
- The essay titled *Of Ambition* reflects the personal life and perceptions of Francis Bacon.
- Francis Bacon believed that the desire for personal justice or revenge was therefore also related to delayed success because most people perceive delayed success as being no success at all.

## NOTES

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### 1.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Philosopher:** A philosopher is someone who practices philosophy, which involves rational inquiry into areas that are outside either theology or science. The term “philosopher” comes from the Ancient Greek philosophos meaning “lover of wisdom”.
- **Essay:** An essay is, generally, a piece of writing that gives the author’s own argument — but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of a paper, an article, a pamphlet, and a short story.
- **Monarch:** A monarch is a sovereign head of state, especially a king, queen, or emperor.

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### 1.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a summary of the essay *Of Revenge*.
2. Comment on the early years of Francis Bacon’s life.

3. What was Francis Bacon's perception about truth?
4. Who is capable of achieving their ambition as per Francis Bacon?
5. Write a summary of the essay *Of Revenge*.

## NOTES

### Long Answer Questions

1. Comment on the life of Francis Bacon. What was the role of King James I in Bacon's life?
2. What are the major themes of the essays *Of Revenge* and *Of Superstition*? Discuss.
3. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Of Truth*.
4. Atheism allowed a man to think, analyze, to study philosophy and the rest of it'. Comment on the statement with reference to the text.
5. What are the issues being raised in the essay *Of Ambition*? Discuss.

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## 1.12 FURTHER READINGS

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 2 SAMUEL JOHNSON

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 About the Author
- 2.3 Summary and Theme
  - 2.3.1 Summary
  - 2.3.2 Theme
- 2.4 Critical Appreciation: *The Life Of Milton*
- 2.5 Issues and Analysis
- 2.6 Historical Background
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.8 Summary
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.11 Further Readings

### NOTES

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Samuel Johnson was born on September 18, 1709, Lichfield, Staffordshire England. He was an English critic, biographer, essayist, poet, and lexicographer, and regarded as one of the greatest figures of 18th-century life and letters. According to Johnson, literary biographies were “mournful narratives,” and he believed that he lived “a life radically wretched.” Yet his career can be seen as a literary success story of the sickly boy who by talent, tenacity, and intelligence became the foremost literary figure and the most formidable conversationalist of his time. The disparity between his circumstances and achievement gives his life its especial interest.

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## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss about Samuel Johnson as an author
- Understand the central theme of *The Life of Milton*
- Know about major works of Samuel Johnson
- Analyze the work *The Life of Milton*

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## 2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Samuel Johnson was born on September 18, 1709. He was an English biographer, poet, essayist, critic and lexicographer among other things.

## NOTES

Samuel Johnson is famous for immortalizing what is now referred to as biographical art in literature. Among his most famous works is his biographies of the English poets, titled *The Lives of Poets*, written in three volumes, between the years 1779 and 1781.

Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire. After completing his school education, he enrolled in Pembroke College in Oxford, but was forced to drop out after just a year because of financial problems. He then relocated to London, where he began teaching. After some time, he began writing for *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

Around this time, Samuel Johnson also began to write other literary works, which included two poems titled *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and *London*, a biography titled *The Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, and a play titled *Irene*. Perhaps this biography could be said to be a forerunner of his later collection of biographies of poets.

Samuel Johnson published *A Dictionary of the English Language* in the year 1755. This dictionary could be said to have been a milestone in English literature, and still finds relevance in the study of the English Language in modern times.

Samuel Johnson's father Michael Johnson had been a modest bookseller. His mother Sarah Johnson had conceived Samuel Johnson when she was 40 years old. Due to the late pregnancy, a private midwife and a surgeon had to be present at the birth, which had taken place, like most births in those times, at their home. Samuel Johnson had not, as is normal and natural, cried at birth, and continued to cause concern during his early infancy due to poor health. Samuel Johnson turned out to be a child prodigy, and having learned to read at the age of three years, was taught to read the *Common Book of Prayers* by his mother. At the age of four years, Samuel Johnson began attending a local school, and later at the age of 7 years, began attending the Lichfield Grammar School. He made rapid academic progress, and made friends with Edmund Hector and John Taylor who remained his lifelong friends.

At school, he started getting tics, which were not diagnosed because of lack of knowledge perhaps, but which after his death were identified as the Tourette syndrome. Samuel Johnson continued to display his brilliance, and was promoted to the middle school at the age of nine years.

Although Samuel Johnson was able to complete his school education, he found it difficult to continue his college education, because his father had been in debt. His mother Sarah Johnson had helped Samuel begun his education with readings from the book of prayer, and Samuel Johnson remained a devout Anglican throughout his life.

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## 2.3 SUMMARY AND THEME

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Let us analyse the summary and theme of Johnson's essay.

### 2.3.1 Summary

The central theme of *The Life of Milton* is the life and works of the famous English poet named John Milton. Samuel Johnson had begun to write biographies of famous literary personalities from an early age, and he continued to do so in his later years as well.

*The Life of Milton*, like all the other biographies in the collection titled *The Lives of Poets*, was written after much research and study. Besides writing about his personal life, Samuel Johnson has also critiqued the poet John Milton's poetry. It is to be remembered that Samuel Johnson, among other roles, was also a critic, and in this capacity, has critiqued the poetry of the poets he has included in his collection of biographies *The Lives of Poets*.

Samuel Johnson has begun his interpretation of the works of the poet John Milton with his criticism of John Milton's earliest poems which had been compiled under the titled Juvenile Productions.

### 2.3.2 Theme

The biography of John Milton, by Samuel Johnson could be said to be more a critique of the poet's works than a rendition of his life and times. It is to be remembered that Samuel Johnson, who had been a multi-faceted personality of great intellect, had been a critic and in that capacity, had compiled his interpretation of the lives and works of English poets. So in that context, it could be surmised that the central theme of the biography *The Life of Milton* was not just confined to a detailed account of Milton's life but a critique of his works particularly his poems.

Samuel Johnson himself had been a poet, as well as a lexicographer, having begun his career with *A Dictionary of the English Language*. Samuel Johnson had been a multi-faceted personality, and one of the roles he had essayed had been that of a literary critic. In that capacity, he had obviously studied the works of the poets and on similar lines he had included detailed criticisms of the poetry written by John Milton in his work *The Life of Milton*.

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## 2.4 CRITICAL APPRECIATION: *THE LIFE OF MILTON*

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There have been many versions of biographies written by many people about the life and works of the poet John Milton. But most of them have been merely an unbiased and uncritical interpretation and narrative. However, according to Samuel Johnson, the entire purpose of his biographies of English poets

## NOTES

## NOTES

was not actually to be gentle and merely appreciative, but equally critical of their work. In this context, Samuel Johnson says, “The life of Milton has been already written in so many forms, and with such minute inquiry, that I might, perhaps, more properly have contented myself with the addition of a few notes on Mr. Fenton’s elegant Abridgment, but that a new narrative was thought necessary to the uniformity of this edition.”

Samuel Johnson appears to have believed that biographies needed to be as much critical as appreciative. He opined that if he had to be as uncritical and gentle as the other biographers, then he could just have quoted from the earlier versions, and not contributed anything of his own. This would not have served any purpose, because it would not have matched the rest of his biographies.

Samuel Johnson, although he began his biography of the poet John Milton with these somewhat cryptic lines, has described the early life of John Milton in some detail. Johnson has also represented the family background of John Milton and its influence on the life and works of the poet.

Writing about the works of John Milton, Samuel Johnson has divided these into different parts, or acts, obviously dividing the entire work according to the year of publication. John Milton was skilled in Latin, more than English. It is to be remembered that those were the years when Latin was the language of communication and expression, and was the medium of education.

Although, people later used English as the language to write in, it is, therefore, quite possible that for most people, including John Milton, English would have been an almost alien language, although it should have officially been their first language. This is perhaps the reason why John Milton, and others like him, would have had difficulty using the right words in their literary work.

Samuel Johnson wrote of John Milton, that the latter had appeared to have written many of his poems by the time he turned 18. From the poems he had written, it would also have appeared that by this age, he had written a great deal of Latin literature. Although, there were many Latin writers of prose during the reign of Queen Elizabeth who had tried writing poetry and failed, It is surprising, according to Samuel Johnson, that Milton, at the age of 18 years, had accomplished what the older authors had not.

In that context, Samuel Johnson’s critique of John Milton’s poetry does appear to be perhaps more critical of the fact that Milton had been pretty young when he had written his poetry.

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Samuel Johnson born?
2. Mention any two famous literary works of Samuel Johnson.
3. When was *A Dictionary of the English Language* published?

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## 2.5 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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Samuel Johnson had written his collection of biographies of English poets during the latter part of his life, and the biography of the poet John Milton had been one of the poets Johnson had written about. *The Life of Milton*, appears to be as much critiquing the literary work of the poet as it is of Milton's personal life and ancestry. It is true that the study of the life of a writer or poet is completely necessary and relevant to critiquing their literary work. The study of the life of John Milton would reveal that he had written most of his poems by the age of 18.

Perhaps this is the reason why other biographers of the poet had used a gentler tone while critiquing his literary work. From his work, it is apparent that the young poet had read many Latin authors and studied them by that age. Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, appears to have been rather skeptical of this accomplishment of the poet.

The medium of education during the time of John Milton, and even during the time of Samuel Johnson, had been Latin, and not English, because the Roman Catholic Church had been wielding a great deal of power over England during that era. Samuel Johnson himself had begun to read by the time he was three years old. It was a time when many people arranged tutors at homes for their children in their early childhoods, and perhaps because of that, most of them inculcated a habit of reading from a very early age.

Notwithstanding the tone of his critique, however, it is to be appreciated that Samuel Johnson had devoted a lot of time and effort to the study of the life and works of so many poets and compiled all of them into three volumes. Obviously, it had been a massive endeavor, and as Johnson himself had written in the opening paragraph of this biography, all the biographies had been actually critiquing, and not merely writing about the life and work of each poet.

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## 2.6 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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John Milton had been a poet, writer of prose and a historian, but perhaps he is better remembered as having been a poet of repute and stature. Samuel Johnson, in his biography of John Milton, had focused only on the poet John Milton, because his collection of biographies had only poets of a specific era. Obviously it had taken Samuel Johnson considerable time to have researched, studied and then written about each of the poets. The biography of John Milton had been written during the year 1780.

The collection of biographies itself had been so vast that they had to be divided or compiled into three volumes in order to be published. The entire collection had been titled *The Lives of Poets*.

## NOTES

NOTES

**Check Your Progress**

4. What is the central theme of the biography *The Life of Milton*?
5. According to Samuel Johnson, what was the purpose of his biographies of English poets?

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**2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. Samuel Johnson was born on September 18, 1709.
2. Two famous literary works of Samuel Johnson are *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and *London*.
3. *A Dictionary of the English Language* was published in the year 1755.
4. The central theme of the biography *The Life of Milton* was not just confined to a detailed account of Milton's life but a critique of his works particularly his poems.
5. According to Samuel Johnson, the entire purpose of his biographies of English poets was not actually to be gentle and merely appreciative, but equally critical of their work.

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**2.8 SUMMARY**

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- Samuel Johnson was born on September 18, 1709. He was an English biographer, poet, essayist, critic and lexicographer among other things.
- Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire. After completing his school education, he enrolled in Pembroke College in Oxford, but was forced to drop out after just a year because of financial problems.
- Samuel Johnson published *A Dictionary of the English Language* in the year 1755.
- Although Samuel Johnson was able to complete his school education, he found it difficult to continue his college education, because his father had been in debt.
- The central theme of *The Life of Milton* is the life and works of the famous English poet named John Milton.
- *The Life of Milton*, like all the other biographies in the collection titled *The Lives of Poets*, was written after much research and study. Besides writing about his personal life, Samuel Johnson has also critiqued the poet John Milton's poetry.
- The biography of John Milton, by Samuel Johnson could be said to be more a critique of the poet's works than a rendition of his life and times.

- Samuel Johnson had been a multi-faceted personality, and one of the roles he had essayed had been that of a literary critic.
- Samuel Johnson appears to have believed that biographies needed to be as much critical as appreciative.
- John Milton had been a poet, writer of prose and a historian, but perhaps he is better remembered as having been a poet of repute and stature.
- Samuel Johnson, in his biography of John Milton, had focused only on the poet John Milton, because his collection of biographies had only of poets of a specific era.

## NOTES

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### 2.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Biography:** A biography is a detailed description of a person's life. It involves more than just the basic facts like education, work, relationships, and death; it portrays a person's experience of these life events.
- **Critic:** A person who judges the merits of literary or artistic works, especially one who does so professionally is called a critic.
- **Lexicographer:** A person who compiles dictionaries is called a lexicographer.
- **Poetry:** Literary work in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm is called poetry.

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### 2.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a summary of *The Life of Milton*.
2. What did Samuel Johnson think about biographies?
3. Write a historical background to *The Life of Milton*.
4. How successful was Samuel Johnson as a lexicographer?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Write a detailed note on the life of Samuel Johnson.
2. Discuss the main theme of *The Life of Milton*.
3. Write a critical appreciation of *The Life of Milton*.
4. What are the major issues raised in *The Life of Milton*? Discuss.

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## 2.11 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

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## UNIT 3 JOSEPH ADDISON AND RICHARD STEELE

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Joseph Addison and  
Richard Steele

### NOTES

#### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 About the Authors
- 3.3 Summary of the Essay
- 3.4 Theme and Critical Appreciation
  - 3.4.1 Theme
  - 3.4.2 Critical Appreciation
- 3.5 Issues and Analysis
- 3.6 Historical Background
- 3.7 Answers To Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 Key Words
- 3.10 Self Assessment Questions
- 3.11 Further Readings

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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Joseph Addison and Richard Steele introduced the collaborative journalism for which they are now best remembered—the essay series *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712). Both of them were born just a few weeks apart. Addison and Steele knew each other from the age of thirteen, and they also overlapped at Oxford, although they attended different colleges. They crossed paths again in London in the early part of the eighteenth century. Both Richard and Joseph had political and literary ambitions. By all accounts, Addison and Steele had very different personalities. Addison had many friends and seems to have been brilliant at getting influential people to support and help him. But his personal demeanor was serious and he wrote ambitious poems and the century's most significant verse tragedy, *Cato*. Steele was more a journalist at heart, and his plays are all comedies. Both the playwrights came together to introduce the series *The Spectator*.

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### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life and works of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele
- Discuss the narrative of *The Coverley Papers*
- Learn about the issues highlighted in *The Coverley Papers*
- Know about the theme and summary of *The Coverley Papers*

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## 3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### NOTES

Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele were both born in the year 1672. However, neither their families nor they knew each other until the two young men had reached the age of 13 years. After completing their school education, both Joseph Addison as well as Richard Steele attended different colleges at Oxford. Joseph Addison attended the Queens and Magdalen College, while Richard Steele attended the Christ Church and Morton College. This is perhaps where they met and became friends with each other.

Having returned to London after graduating from college, both began working as journalists. Although Joseph Addison and Richard Steele displayed entirely different personalities, they were both politically ambitious.

Joseph Addison was a serious and studious sort of person, but he was skilled in public relations. Addison found it easy to make friends, and people usually helped and supported him in his political and writing careers. Richard Steele on the other hand was a quieter person, and more interested and passionate about journalism.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were both playwrights, but both wrote plays that were at contrast with each other. While Joseph Addison wrote tragedies, Richard Steele wrote comedies. The one comedy that Addison attempted did not become famous or successful. Joseph Addison was better known for the play *Cato*, a tragedy which he wrote in the year 1713. This was a tragedy, and became a great hit. It continued to be produced and performed almost until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sadly, it is no longer remembered in theatrical circles.

Although Richard Steele gained success as a writer of comedies, he appeared to be reticent and withdrawn. Steele did not appear to be adept at public relations, and few people appeared to befriend, help or support him in any manner. On the contrary, he began to be ridiculed among the journalistic fraternity because he appeared to be in constant debt. The contrast in their natures and personalities could be attributed to their backgrounds.

Richard Steele came of Irish parents who lived in Dublin. Although he entered Christ Church and Morton College at Oxford, he was unable to complete his graduation due to financial problems. Upon returning to London, he joined the army, and simultaneously began writing poetry and plays.

After leaving his military service, Richard Steele found a job at the court, while also becoming the editor of the *London Gazette*, which was then the official national newspaper.

It should be remembered that the English people did not accept Irish people, and it was obvious that Richard Steele continued to face racial bias through his life. This racism obviously shaped his personality, making it

difficult to make friends. It is also to be noted that his family had remained in Dublin, and Richard Steele did not have the support and guidance of a family in London during the early years of his career.

On the other hand, Joseph's family was pretty well-connected, and belonged to the Church of England. This church was at that time the official and state Church of England. This fact obviously helped Joseph Addison gain the support and backing he needed as a young man just beginning his career.

Joseph Addison completed his college education, and was then sent on a tour of the Continent by the government. He later became a member of parliament.

However, both Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were journalists at heart, and collaborated on two significant collections of essays.

In the year 1709, Richard Steele left the *London Gazette* and started his own journal *The Tatler*. This turned out to be an innovative venture, because the journal was published three times a week, and concentrated on non-political content such as fashion, theatrical reviews and social events. Joseph Addison and other friends contributed to this journal, but the novelty soon wore off, and the journal folded up some time during the year 1711.

However, both Joseph Addison and Richard Steele together started the new journal *The Spectator* in partnership. It was at this point that Joseph Addison began showing his merit as a serious writer. He began contributing more articles and essays. This journal was published six days a week.

The content was more literary and became as popular as its predecessor had been. Around this time, the government increased its levy on paper, and *The Spectator* was forced to close down in the year 1712.

## NOTES

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### 3.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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*The Spectator* was written from the perspective of the fictional social observer and narrator named Mr. Spectator. The essay titled *The Coverley Papers* was published every day, in a serialized format. The essay was a detailed description of the life and unrequited love life of a fictional character called Sir Roger de Coverley. The narrative describes the life of a middle-aged man having considerable social stature who has been a bachelor all his life.

When the narrative begins, the main protagonist named Sir Roger De Coverley is shown to be middle-aged, who has considerable wealth and is also politically inclined. Mr Coverley becomes enamored of a lady who obviously never returned his love.

*The Coverley Papers*, because they were based on the love life of a middle aged man of noble stock, and social and financially well connected, were immediately successful. In contrast to the content that had appeared

## NOTES

in their earlier venture titled *The Tatler*; the content in the new publication focused more on the life and escapade of a man, that too a man who was middle-aged, and a bachelor. The content in *The Tatler* had focused on providing readers, especially women, information on fashion, reviews of theater.

Due to this sharp contrast, the readers of *The Spectator* instantly became fascinated with the love life of Sir Roger de Coverley. Apart from this, the narrative appeared to describe the apparent lengths to which a man is willing to go when he becomes enamored of a woman who completely appears to ignore him, and live her own life in total bliss.

### Check Your Progress

1. Mention any one play written by Joseph Addison.
2. What was the name of the newspaper of which Richard Steele was the editor?
3. Name the journal that Richard Steele and Joseph Addison started in partnership.

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## 3.4 THEME AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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Let us discuss the theme and critical appreciation of the essay.

### 3.4.1 Theme

The essay presents a detailed description of the life and especially love life of a middle-aged English nobleman of considerable wealth and social status. Roger de Coverley appears to have been so rich that he apparently did not need to work for his living. Instead he spent his time pining for his lady love.

### 3.4.2 Critical Appreciation

In the year 1711, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele introduced to the readers of *The Spectator* to the Club and its members. The Club was supposedly headed by Sir Roger de Coverley, a gentleman of some noble lineage, having considerable means.

At first, the creators of this fictitious character had portrayed him to have been a gentleman who had often dined with nobility, but had remained a bachelor. The conceptualization was so brilliant for those times, that readers believed that Sir Roger de Coverley was a real life character.

The entire narrative had been presented in the first person, from the perspective of another imaginary person named Mr. Spectator – showing him to be the person after whom the journal was named.

Moving sharply away from the usual political news or social and fashion reviews, this style of narrative was something that fascinated and almost bewitched the readers. Also, up until then, writers had largely focused on women, and ladylike meanderings, their party scene, fashion reviews, as well as theater and other entertainment gossip. But then these people were all real life characters.

On the other hand, the character of Sir Roger de Coverley was presented so craftily, that although fictional, to readers he appeared real. On another level, it had been perhaps the first time that readers were able to read gossip about a gentleman, especially a man of nobility. His antics at The Club, and his wooing of his lady love, also provided the 18<sup>th</sup> century readers amusement and room for further speculation, especially about how it would end.

## NOTES

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### 3.5 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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In the year 1711, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele began publishing *The Spectator*. To begin with, it was but a one page paper, seemingly depicting the life of a gentleman of noble descent, named Sir Roger de Coverley.

This gentleman was presented as a middle-aged, but allusions were made to his rakish past. This should not be surprising, because most gentlemen of noble descent used to be rakes in those times.

The Club, which had also apparently been started and maintained by this Sir Roger de Coverley, too did not present anything out of the ordinary because most men of noble origins usually attended some club or the other.

In that context, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele had been presenting nothing new. Plenty of young men – and old – experienced unrequited love, and pined for some woman or the other. Perhaps the only thing that made Sir Roger de Coverley, and *The Spectator* stand out and make any sort of impact on the audience could have been the fact that the middle class citizenry of those times were thrilled to get a glimpse of the social and romantic escapades of a gentleman who was seemingly of noble descent. Gentlemen descended from noble lineage obviously did not wear their heart on their sleeve. They were expected to behave in a more respectable manner and with more decorum.

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### 3.6 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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*The Spectator* had been started by Joseph Addison and his partner Richard Steele in the year 1711. It was published immediately after the closure of *The Tatler*, which was originally launched by Richard Steele.

Joseph Addison had also contributed his essays to *The Tatler*, but how much he enjoyed that genre of writing is not clear. When *The Tatler*

## NOTES

wrapped up in the year 1711, it was Joseph Addison who took the initiative and launched *The Spectator*.

Joseph Addison planned and conceived *The Spectator*, and perhaps in a bold and innovative move, decided to introduce the fictional character of Sir Roger de Coverley to their audience. Because Sir Roger de Coverley had apparently been a man of noble descent and considerable wealth and leisure, he was shown to have started The Club. So the audience was also introduced to the other members of The Club.

### Check Your Progress

4. What does the narrative of *The Coverley Papers* describe?
5. When was *The Spectator* introduced to the readers?

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### 3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. The play *Cato* is written by Joseph Addison.
2. Richard Steele was the editor of the newspaper the *London Gazette*.
3. The journal that Richard Steele and Joseph Addison started in partnership was *The Spectator*.
4. The narrative of *The Coverley Papers* describes the life of a middle-aged man having considerable social stature who has been a bachelor all his life.
5. *The Spectator* was introduced to the readers in the year 1711.

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### 3.8 SUMMARY

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- Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele were both born in the year 1672. However, neither their families nor they knew each other until the two young men had reached the age of 13 years.
- Having returned to London after graduating from college, both began working as journalists.
- Joseph Addison was a serious and studious sort of person, but he was skilled in public relations.
- Addison found it easy to make friends, and people usually helped and supported him in his political and writing careers.
- *The Spectator* was written from the perspective of the fictional social observer and narrator named Mr. Spectator. The essay titled *The Coverley Papers* was published every day, in a serialized format.

- The narrative describes the life of a middle-aged man having considerable social stature who has been a bachelor all his life.
- *The Coverley Papers*, because they were based on the love life of a middle aged man of noble stock, and social and financially well connected, were immediately successful.
- The entire narrative of *Coverley Papers* had been presented in the first person, from the perspective of another imaginary person named Mr. Spectator – showing him to be the person after whom the journal was named.

## NOTES

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### 3.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Playwright:** A playwright or dramatist is a person who writes plays.
- **Tragedy:** A tragedy is a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.
- **Comedy:** A comedy is a play characterized by its humorous or satirical tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents, in which the characters ultimately triumph over adversity.
- **Racism:** Racism refers to a prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

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### 3.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. How did Joseph Addison and Richard Steele meet each other?
2. What was the main narrative of *The Coverley Papers*?
3. What was the main reason of the success of *The Coverley Papers*?
4. Write a summary of *The Coverley Papers*.

#### Long Answer Questions

1. 'The writing style and context of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele was at sharp context'. Discuss?
2. Discuss the life and works of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison in detail.
3. Write a critical appreciation of *The Coverley Papers*.
4. Analyze the main character of the narrative *The Coverley Papers*.

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### 3.11 FURTHER READINGS

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#### NOTES

Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States:  
Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 4 CHARLES LAMB-I

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### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 About the Author
- 4.3 Summary of the Essay
- 4.4 Theme
- 4.5 Critical Appreciation
  - 4.5.1 *New Year's Eve*
  - 4.5.2 *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*
  - 4.5.3 *The South-Sea House*
- 4.6 Issues and Analysis
  - 4.6.1 *New Year's Eve*
  - 4.6.2 *The South Sea House*
  - 4.6.3 *The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers*
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.8 Summary
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.11 Further Readings

### NOTES

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## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Charles Lamb is best known for his work *Essays to Elia*. Lamb went to school at Christ's Hospital, where he studied until 1789. In 1792 Lamb found employment as a clerk at East India House and he remained there until 1825. The first appearance of Charles Lamb in print was through his collections by Coleridge and by Charles Lloyd. *A Tale of Rosamund Gray*, a prose romance, appeared in 1798, and in 1802 he published *John Woodvil*, a poetic tragedy. In 1807, Charles Lamb and his sister published *Tales of Shakespeare*.

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## 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of Charles Lamb as an author
- Learn about his major essays and other works
- Discuss the themes of *A Praise of Chimney Sweepers*, *South Sea House* and *New Year's Eve*
- Know about the major issues highlighted in these essays

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## 4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Charles Lamb was an English essayist, historian and poet. He was born on February 10, 1775. At the center of a renowned literary circle of his time, Charles Lamb had been close friends with literary figures as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Charles Lamb may be best remembered for his collection for children titled *Tales from Shakespeare*, and his collection of essays titled *Essays of Elia*.

Charles Lamb was born to Elizabeth Field and John Lamb. His parents had seven children, four of whom died in infancy. Of the remaining, Charles Lamb was the youngest.

Charles Lamb's father John Lamb had been trained to be a lawyer's clerk, and worked as an assistant to a barrister called Samuel Sath. As a toddler, Charles Lamb appears to have been brought up by his mother's sister Aunt Hety. His sister Mary taught him to read and write while he was still very young.

After working at various small positions for some years, Charles Lamb finally joined the Accountants Office of the British East India Company on April 5, 1792, where he continued to work until he retired with a pension 25 years later.

During all these years, Charles Lamb continued to write about his experiences. Charles Lamb was in Hertfordshire in the year 1792 when he met a young woman, Ann Simmons. Although the young couple fell in love and Charles Lamb wooed her for many years, there is no proof to show how their romance ended.

Some of the essays that Charles Lamb wrote while wooing Ann Simmons included *Dream Children* and *New Year's Eve*. Although Charles Lamb himself appears to have been consistent and persuasive in his wooing of the young woman, Ann Simmons finally married a silversmith.

It has been chronicled that both Charles Lamb and his sister Mary experienced brief periods of mental health issues for which they had to be treated at specific mental health facilities in the year 1792.

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## 4.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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The primary theme of the essay titled *New Year's Eve* by Charles Lamb displays the disillusionment and sadness of someone who has to bid farewell to the passage of the old year. Although the coming of the New Year fills people with hope and joy, Charles Lamb comes across as having experienced so many disillusionments over the past years that he has ceased to hope for any joy or happiness. In fact, Charles Lamb appears to be completely without

hope at the coming of the New Year. Usually, the bells tolling in churches across cities to ring out the old and ring in the new appear to be either sad or joyful. However, according to Charles Lamb, he is so accustomed to broken dreams and lost hopes that he does not appear to be impressed or influenced by the ringing bells.

The essay titled *The South Sea House* was written decades after Charles Lamb had worked at this facility, and perhaps because of the sensitivity of the location and experience, Charles Lamb had decided to write the essay under a pseudonym, Elia. Elia had been the last name of an Italian man, who had also worked at the same facility with Charles Lamb. The essay had been the first in the collection titled *Essays of Elia*. The essay, as well as the name had been so popular with his audiences that the name had remained intact, being used to write all his essays.

*The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* had been dedicated to the chimney sweepers who had inhabited and cleaned chimneys across London during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Those were centuries when London was dotted with factories that had huge chimneys that used to be filled with soot from the open fireplaces and ovens. All homes also had open fireplaces that helped residents, Londoners, keep warm during the bitter winters. Those were times when central heating had not been invented in the world. Chimney sweepers were professional cleaners who cleared the chimneys of the accumulated soot, carrying long brooms which had been the trademark of chimney sweepers. Charles Lamb appears to have dedicated this essay to this ilk of the labor class, who had cleaned chimneys for centuries.

## NOTES

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### 4.4 THEME

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The central theme of the essay titled *New Year's Eve* by the essayist Charles Lamb appears to be the futility of hoping for good things, or better things, on the coming of a New Year. According to old custom, the old, including lost hopes and broken dreams – are bidden adieu and the New Year is welcomed with renewed hope and new dreams. On the contrary, Charles Lamb is obviously referring to his love for Ann Simmons, who he wooed for many years, entirely unsuccessfully, because that young lady appears to have finally married a silversmith.

The South Sea House had been a sort of club, where men usually met every evening, to talk about business and trade, striking deals and transacting business at various levels. According to reports, the building still stands, due to the strong brick and mortar constructions of those times. Apparently there are wide porticos and huge rooms where the men used to sit, talking and drinking. It appears that Charles Lamb used to frequent this club, and perhaps this is where he learned about possible employment with the English

## NOTES

East India Company. The East India Company had obviously opened job opportunities for most young men in England, offering them permanent employment, with job security and the promise of pension upon retirement. The South Sea House had also been where Charles Lamb had first met an Italian trader with the last name Elia. The name Elia had been first used by Charles Lamb to write this essay titled *The South Sea House*. Audiences had found both the essay as well as the pseudonym so endearing that Charles Lamb had continued to use the pseudonym while writing subsequent essays.

The central theme of the essay titled *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* by the essayist Charles Lamb, was the chimney sweepers who cleaned chimneys across London for centuries. Most of these chimney sweepers were children, because older men would not have been able to clean these chimneys effectively. These chimneys used to be narrow, while the fireplaces used to be huge. The narrow chimneys allowed only the slimmest, or the thinnest, of children to be able to clean them properly. Most children in Britain were accustomed to seeing these chimney sweepers do their job, and most of them did not pay much attention to them.

### Check Your Progress

1. Mention any two renowned works of Charles Lamb.
2. What is the primary theme of the essay *New Year's Eve*?

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## 4.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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Let us study the critical appreciation of the essays.

### 4.5.1 *New Year's Eve*

The essay titled *New Year's Eve* was written by the English essayist Charles Lamb. He begins the essay with the words that a new year is like a birthday. It allows people to look back upon the year that has just gone by, weigh the disappointments with the joys and figure out what could have been better, or what could have been handled differently. However, Charles Lamb reflects that his past experiences have been so bad that he is now left with no hope, no new dreams, no new hopes. The essayist appears to be so completely broken-hearted that he is left with nothing to dream about or nothing to hope for. Charles Lamb describes the tolling of the bells as sounding different at the ringing out of the old and ringing in of the new. Although the bells are the same, Charles Lamb describes the sound as being different, one sounding sad and forlorn, the other sounding joyful and exuberant. For himself, the essayist claims that he has nothing left to hope for, and nothing left to dream about. Past years have proved to him that new year actually bring nothing new. The writer is obviously alluding to his unsuccessful wooing of Ann

Simmons. It appears that the young lady had initially shown some interest in the essayist, but later seems to have changed her mind and decided she did not love him. Charles Lamb had met her in Hertfordshire while nursing a sick relative, and probably fallen in love with the young lady. However, after an initial period of courtship, it appears that Ann Simmons had a mind of her own, and rejected Charles Lamb in favor of a silversmith.

## NOTES

### 4.5.2 *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*

The essay titled *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* had been written by Charles Lamb and dedicated to the chimney sweepers who lived and helped keep England clean during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when central heating, and electricity itself, had not as yet been invented. Those were years when the world had not yet witnessed the invention of electric fires or central heating. People were obviously forced to depend on open fires lit by charcoal that caused the accumulation of black, grimy soot that needed to be cleared every day.

Charles Lamb appears to have had a soft heart when he wrote this essay, praising the work of the young chimney sweepers. Most people of his generation usually took the presence of these chimney sweepers for granted. This soft heart was perhaps also due to the fact that Charles Lamb had been a child who had been largely observant and withdrawn. He had also been the youngest among three or four children who had all been much older than he. Although his sister Mary appears to have taught him to read and write, it is obvious he had no real playmates, with whom he could play childish games, imagining like all children.

### 4.5.3 *The South-Sea House*

The essay titled *The South Sea House* was written by the essayist Charles Lamb decades after he had ceased to go to the club. The building is so old that it is not being used in these times. But the brick and mortar structure is so strong that it is still existent in central London. The essayist Charles Lamb has used the essay to describe a way of life led by bachelors and tradesmen, who used the premises to meet friends and business acquaintances, discuss business transactions and trade deals that crossed borders. Charles Lamb describes the ambience and charm of both, exterior structure as well as the interiors, where men from across the world used to meet regularly, discussing trade and sharing news. This also appeared to have been the place most young men learned of new opportunities for work and trade. When the English East India Company had been first set up to do business with India, it had provided employment to most of the young men in the country. Obviously, the South Sea House had been where Charles Lamb had also first heard of these opportunities, subsequently finding employment with the company. Like most Englishmen, Charles Lamb also appears to have found permanent employment, working there until his retirement with a pension. What helps

this essay stand out, however, is Lamb's description of the exterior structure, the interiors, the ambience and the camaraderie between men from different countries and backgrounds.

## NOTES

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### 4.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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Let us discuss the issues and analysis of the essays.

#### 4.6.1 *New Year's Eve*

The essay titled *New Year's Eve* alludes to the unrequited love Charles Lamb expressed for Ann Simmons. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were the era of the essay, and most writers of those times wrote essays. The difference between essays and short stories appears to have been that essays spoke of true events, while short stories were fictional. *The New Year's Eve* referred to the unrequited love between Charles Lamb and Ann Simmons. For a young lady of her times, Ann Simmons appears to have been a feminist, with a strong will and voice. Although initially she did appear to have shown an interest in the essayist, she seems to have changed her mind later, and decided she did not love him enough to marry him. Although Ann Simmons is said to have married a silversmith, not much is on record to show whether Charles Lamb found someone else. The essay depicts the sadness of broken dreams and lost hopes, and the futility of ringing in the New Year, when there was nothing left to hope for or dream about. Charles Lamb describes the New Year to be something like a man's second birthday, when one could reflect about what had just gone by, and ruminate about what was to come. While most people celebrated the coming of the New Year, Charles Lamb appears to have had nothing to celebrate about, and nothing to be joyful or hopeful about.

#### 4.6.2 *The South Sea House*

Charles Lamb had written this essay decades after he had stopped visiting the club. The South Sea House had obviously been a sort of clubhouse, where men had used to gather every evening, to drink together and discuss business transactions and trade deals. In spite of the fact that much time had elapsed since he had used to visit the place, the interiors, exteriors and the ambience had obviously been so powerful, that he had never forgotten any of it even after such a long gap. Charles Lamb also describes the men in kind terms, remembering perhaps that on the whole they had all tried to help one another close business transactions, strike trade deals, explore new ventures, and for most young people of those times, find a source of permanent income through employment with the English East India Company that had been just set up by the British government to do business with India. The style of writing is conventional as is the hallmark of all essays written by Charles Lamb, yet the

personal touch never leaves the narrative. Perhaps the use of the pseudonym Elia had been intentional, to provide a subtle personality to the narrative.

Charles Lamb-I

### 4.6.3 *The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers*

The essay had been set, like most of his other essays, by the essayist Charles Lamb against the backdrop of London during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tone of the narrative is pretty conventional, which had been the predominant writing style adopted by most writers of those times. In spite of this, however, Charles Lamb manages to maintain a touch of the personal pathos, distinguishing the narrative as an essay. The point to be remembered about essays is that writers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries used essays to talk about personal experiences. So essays were narratives of true life incidents and events, while short stories were purely fiction. Those were times electricity, the electric fireplace and central heating had not yet been invented. People used to build huge fireplaces in their homes, lighting coal fires mostly, particularly in one central room, where the entire family used to gather every evening in an effort to keep warm and protect themselves from the bitter English winters. Although chimney sweepers used to be a common sight in those days, few writers actually dedicated entire essays to their hard work and contribution to society. It is quite possible that as a young boy, Charles Lamb would have had opportunities to make friends with one or more chimney sweepers, especially considering that he had been taught at home by his older sister Mary Lamb, and he had been the youngest child born almost 11 years after Mary.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

3. What was the pseudonym of Charles Lamb that he picked for *The South Sea House*?
4. What was the main theme of the essay titled *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* by Charles Lamb?

## 4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Two renowned works of Charles Lamb are *Tales from Shakespeare*, and his collection of essays titled *Essays of Elie*.
2. The primary theme of the essay titled *New Year's Eve* by Charles Lamb displays the disillusionment and sadness of someone who has to bid farewell to the passage of the old year.
3. The pseudonym of Charles Lamb that he picked for *The South Sea House* was Elia.

4. The central theme of the essay titled *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* by the essayist Charles Lamb, was the chimney sweepers who cleaned chimneys across London for centuries.

## NOTES

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### 4.8 SUMMARY

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- Charles Lamb was an English essayist, historian and poet. He was born on February 10, 1775.
- At the center of a renowned literary circle of his time, Charles Lamb had been close friends with literary figures as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- Charles Lamb was born to Elizabeth Field and John Lamb. His parents had seven children, four of whom died in infancy.
- After working at various small positions for some years, Charles Lamb finally joined the Accountants Office of the British East India Company on April 5, 1792, where he continued to work until he retired with a pension 25 years later.
- Some of the essays that Charles Lamb wrote while wooing Ann Simmons included *Dream Children* and *New Year's Eve*.
- The primary theme of the essay titled *New Year's Eve* by Charles Lamb displays the disillusionment and sadness of someone who has to bid farewell to the passage of the old year.
- The central theme of the essay titled *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* by the essayist Charles Lamb, was the chimney sweepers who cleaned chimneys across London for centuries.
- The essay titled *The South Sea House* was written by the essayist Charles Lamb decades after he had ceased to go to the club. The building is so old that it is not being used in these times.

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### 4.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Play:** A play is a form of literature written by a playwright, usually consisting of dialogue between characters, intended for theatrical performance rather than just reading.
- **Feminist:** A feminist is a person advocating social, political, legal, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.
- **Historian:** A historian is a person who studies and writes about the past, and is regarded as an authority on it.

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## 4.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Charles Lamb as an author.
2. What are the major contributions of Charles Lamb in the field of literature?
3. What is the central theme of the essay *New Year's Eve*?
4. What makes the essay *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* different from the other two essays mentioned in the unit?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Write the summary of following essays:
  - *New Year's Eve*
  - *The South Sea House*
2. What is the central theme of *New Year's Eve* and *The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers*?
3. Write a critical appreciation of *The South Sea House*.
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers*?

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## 4.11 FURTHER READINGS

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

### NOTES

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## BLOCK - II

### PROSE V-VIII

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#### NOTES

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## UNIT 5 CHARLES LAMB-II

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### Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Summary- *Dream Children: A Reverie*
- 5.3 Theme
- 5.4 Critical Appreciation- *Dream Children: A Reverie*
- 5.5 Issues And Analysis
- 5.6 Historical Background
- 5.7 Answers To Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.8 Summary
- 5.9 Key Words
- 5.10 Self Assessment Questions
- 5.11 Further Readings

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### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

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Charles Lamb is best known for his work *Essays to Elia*. Lamb went to school at Christ's Hospital, where he studied until 1789. In 1792 Lamb found employment as a clerk at East India House and he remained there until 1825. The first appearance of Charles Lamb in print was through his collections by Coleridge and by Charles Lloyd. *A Tale of Rosamund Gray*, a prose romance, appeared in 1798, and in 1802 he published John Woodvil, a poetic tragedy. In 1807, Charles Lamb and his sister published *Tales of Shakespeare*

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### 5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the main theme of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*
- Understand the life of Charles Lamb and his major works
- Know about the theme of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*
- Learn about the historical background of the essay

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### 5.2 SUMMARY- *DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE*

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Charles Lamb had apparently met a young lady named Ann Simmons at the house of a relative who he had gone to take care of during a sickness.

Initially, the young lady showed some interest in the young Charles Lamb, but those feelings never strengthened and matured into anything more than a passing fancy for young Ann Simmons. Charles Lamb, on the other hand had apparently pursued Ann Simmons for years. He had also dedicated some essays to his lost love for Ann Simmons. These essays had included *New Year's Eve* and *Dream Children: A Reverie*.

The essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* describes how the essayist Charles Lamb is sitting in his house with his children, and talking about old times, when his grandmother Alice Field had been alive. Charles Lamb tells his children that his grandmother Alice Field was given the charge of a house which was much larger than the house they were currently living in. His grandmother Alice Field had been a very religious old lady, and was able to recite verses from the Old and New Testament by rote.

The essayist Charles Lamb, first goes on to add that after his old grandmother Alice Field had died, many people came to attend her funeral. Charles Lamb tells his children that his old grandmother Alice Field had been so good to everyone she met and knew, that she was very popular with all the people living in the surrounding countryside.

Charles Lamb further tells his children through this essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*, that the huge house she lived in had lots of old ornaments and fittings, which belonged to the rich man who owned the house. So after her death, the rich man had all the fittings and old ornaments packed and shipped to the old fashionable mansion he now lived in. But sadly, all of it had not fitted into the mansion he now lived in. Upon hearing this, Charles Lamb's son John smiled knowingly, because all of them had been aware that even attempting to fit all those beautiful ornaments and fittings into the other mansion was such a foolish act doomed to failure from the word go.

The description given by Charles Lamb is so realistic and tangible, that readers would be forced to believe that the essayist Charles Lamb actually interacted and shared all this information with his children. Yet, there have been reports that Charles Lamb had only dreamt about having those children with Ann Simmons, who he was never able to actually marry.

It appears as though Charles Lamb had left it to his audience to think and find out whether the children mentioned in the essay were real life children, or only existed in his imagination. According to records that exist in literary history, the children mentioned in the essay only existed in Charles Lamb's dreams that is why he had titled this essay *Dream Children*. This dream had persisted in his heart because he loved Ann Simmons with such intensity that he had never ever really forgotten her and more than that, he could apparently never believe that he had been unable to marry her.

## NOTES

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### 5.3 THEME

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#### NOTES

The main theme of the essay is regret and loss. In the essay, Charles Lamb appears to have been sitting in his own house, years after the death of his grandmother Alice Field, talking to his children, and telling them how it used to be when his grandmother, old Alice Field was alive. Charles Lamb is seen telling his children that his grandmother used to live in a huge house, bigger than the house they were currently living in.

Although, the house his grandmother lived in did not belong to her, but had been given to her by its actual owner, a rich man, to care for in his absence. The owner of the house preferred to live in a fashionable mansion. In the essay, Lamb told his children about the tragic incidents that took place in the house of the grandmother Field. The tragic story was carved out in a wood upon a chimney piece. However, on day the owner of the house got the wooden piece replaced with a marble one and the story was lost. This left his old grandmother Alice Field disheartened and angry.

This story-telling session appears to be a common one, one of many regular interactions. However, there are no actual records to show whether Charles Lamb had ever married and had children of his own, because all records that exist talk about how he pursued Ann Simmons for years and how she had never returned his feelings, and how instead, she had married a local silversmith. In fact the tragedy that has been made mention of in this essay, the one that Charles Lamb tells his children his grandmother Alice Field had seen fit to have etched into the wood paneling over the fireplace, was in all certainty this love story. The love story had probably appeared to both Charles Lamb and his old grandmother Alice Field as a tragedy, because Ann Simmons had rejected Charles Lamb's attention and love, in favor of someone else.

The critics who have individually reviewed his works, have believed and commented that Charles Lamb had dedicated his essays titled *Dream Children: A Reverie* and *New Year's Eve* to Ann Simmons. After reading both of these essays, it is difficult to ignore the skill and genius of Charles Lamb as an essayist. It is difficult to imagine or identify whether the children he has spoken of in this essay are real or just a part of his dreams. The entire narrative appears to have actually taken place between the essayist Charles Lamb and his children. The fact that Charles Lamb decided to use the *Dream Children* for this essay gives rise to the doubt in the minds of his audience about the existence of those children. Had they really existed? Had they remained in his dreams? Had he planned to have those children with Ann Simmons?

**Check Your Progress**

1. What was the name of the lady love of Charles Lamb?
2. What is the main theme of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*?

**NOTES**

#### **5.4 CRITICAL APPRECIATION- *DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE***

*Dream Children: A Reverie* was one of the essays written by Charles Lamb during the year 1823 under the pseudonym Elia. The essay had been published in numerous magazines in London. Charles Lamb had happened to choose the name Elia, possibly to remember an old Italian acquaintance he had met during his visits to the South Sea House, a club house that used to be frequented by bachelors during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This essay like most of his other essays, was written in the first person, from the perspective of this gentleman called Elia. The narrative is almost dream-like in its narrative style, describing his relationship with his children, and his old grandmother Alice Field who he had cared for during her illness. The essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*, like most of his other essays, is filled with subtle humor, pathos, and a nostalgia for times that had gone by long ago, and perhaps for things that might have been.

In the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*, Charles Lamb is shown talking to his children – are they real, or part of a dream? – about his old grandmother, Alice Field. He asserts that Alice Field had been very religious. Everyone in her neighborhood knew that she had been very religious because she used to recite verses from the Bible verbatim, by rote. She had been a very good woman, and had been popular in her entire neighborhood. How would all that have ever been possible, unless she had actually been so religious? She had been so good, and so religious, that everyone in the entire neighborhood had attended her funeral. How could they have missed it? After all, she had been so religious, and so good.

The essay *Dream Children* begins with Charles Lamb shown regaling his young children with tales from his childhood, tales that centered around his old grandmother Alice Field. Charles' grandmother used to take care of a huge house so well. The owner of the house had been rich, and had left her to take care of the house in his absence. The owner had been rich, but had probably thought the huge house was rather old fashioned. Instead, he had been so rich he could afford to live in a larger, fashionable mansion.

Charles Lamb, in his youth had spent some time taking care of his sick and old grandmother Alice Field. Had it not been strange, that she had been taking such good care of that huge old house, while needing someone to take

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care of her while she was sick? So, during the time Charles Lamb had been taking care of his old grandmother Alice Field, something had happened that had instantly been termed a tragedy. Charles Lamb had met a young girl, Ann Simmons while caring for his grandmother Alice Field. He had become instantly besotted with her, and had started pursuing her relentlessly over a long period of time. But that young lady had appeared to have had a mind of her own. For, Ann had decided she did not care for Charles Lamb. She had rejected his overtures and his attention and his love, choosing instead to marry a local silversmith.

After she had married a silversmith, Alice Field, as also the then young Charles Lamb had termed his broken dream and hope, a tragedy. Alice Field had been so devastated that her young grandson had been turned down, that she had the entire tale etched into the wooden paneling over the huge fireplace. Obviously, the old lady had not thought it necessary to have taken permission from the rich owner before doing so.

That rich owner of the huge house had removed the wooden paneling with the tragic love story etched into it, and replaced it with marble paneling. Old Alice Field had been so very angry at this audacity of the rich owner, but maybe she had never been able to etch that tragic love story into the marble paneling.

Charles Lamb goes on to tell his children how his old grandmother had been so good and popular in her entire neighborhood that everyone in her entire neighborhood had turned up to attend her funeral. She had been so very popular because she was very religious and extremely good to others.

After her death, all the ornaments and fittings in the old huge house had to be packed and shipped to the rich owner to be fitted instead into his fashionable mansion. Charles Lamb is seen telling his children, very indignantly, that the ornaments and fittings had been so beautiful and so plentiful, that they had not fitted into the new and fashionable mansion that the rich owner had then lived in.

The satire, the subtle humor, displayed by Charles Lamb through this essay is so beautiful and brilliant, that it is sure to have left lasting impact on the hearts and minds of his audience. The referral to the tragic love story reveals his anguish at what he had obviously lost, and nostalgia for what might have been – marriage to Ann Simmons, and making children with her. This brings his audience back to the perennial question – are the children mentioned in the essay real, or only a part of his dream, and part of his imagination?

Charles Lamb has left it to his audience to draw their own conclusion. And yet, this essay, like all his other essays, has been termed an essay, as against a short story, indicating that it is an anecdote from his personal life, an event that needed to be shared with his audience because of its impact on his heart and mind.

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## 5.5 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The title *Dream Children: A Reverie* appears to have been chosen with intention because from the beginning to the ending, the entire narrative appears to have a dream-like feel to it. Charles Lamb used humor, satire, pathos and nostalgia to express himself and convey his intended meaning to his audience.

Written under the pseudonym Elia, the essay like all his other essays mirrored his personal experiences from real life. In fact, they appeared to be so personal that no one would believe they were not real. Charles Lamb displays his genius and skill at narrative.

Charles Lamb talks about the tragedy in his life, his love for Ann Simmons that had been rejected in favor of someone else. He is shown describing the entire episode to his children. How did those children happen to be there, when he had never been married to Ann Simmons? This and other essays do not mention a wife. It is not clear whether Charles Lamb ever married anyone else. Yet he has spoken of his children so realistically, that his audience will be left believing that the children really existed.

The narrative style is a reflection of the brilliance and narrative skills of Charles Lamb. Charles Lamb is shown narrating his love story to his children. He had dreamt of having those children with his lost love Ann Simmons. This style of writing is so beautiful and unique that his audiences will be left thinking about both the style and the content long after reading the essay.

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## 5.6 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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This essay had been written sometime, probably, in the early 1800s. This had also been part of a collection of essays written by Charles Lamb which he had had published in *The London Gazette* and numerous other magazines in London in the year 1823. As a young man, Charles Lamb had spent some weeks nursing his sick old grandmother Alice Field. While there, he had met a young lady Ann Simmons and been smitten by her. Subsequently, Charles Lamb had joined the British East India Company, where he had worked until his retirement with a pension after some 25 years of service. Charles Lamb had continued to write even after he had joined the British East India Company, publishing in various London magazines, including the *London Gazette*.

Before joining the British East India Company, Charles Lamb used to visit a club called The South Sea House. This club had been frequented by bachelors, mostly, who discussed business transactions and trade deals. Many of the men also used to exchange and share information about prospective opportunities for young men just starting out in life. After the setting up of the British East India Company in India, most of these young men found

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employment with the new venture, many of whom moved to India to work there, until they retired in the distant future. It had been the same with Charles Lamb.

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Although this job offered Charles Lamb security and a steady source of income, he had never stopped writing and getting published back home in London. The narrative of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* does not mention where it is set, it does not mention whether the house he speaks of in the essay existed in India or in London.

### Check Your Progress

3. What was the pseudonym under which Charles Lamb published the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*?
4. Mention the name of the magazine in which the essay *Dream: A Reverie* appeared.

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## 5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. The name of the lady love of Charles Lamb was Ann Simmons.
2. The main theme of the essay is regret and loss.
3. The pseudonym under which Charles Lamb published the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* was Elia.
4. The essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* appeared in the magazine *The London Gazette*.

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## 5.8 SUMMARY

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- Charles Lamb had apparently met a young lady named Ann Simmons at the house of a relative who he had gone to take care of during a sickness.
- The essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* describes how the essayist Charles Lamb is sitting in his house with his children, and talking about old times, when his grandmother Alice Field had been alive.
- The main theme of the essay is regret and loss.
- In the essay, Charles Lamb appears to have been sitting in his own house, years after the death of his grandmother Alice Field, talking to his children, and telling them how it used to be when his grandmother, old Alice Field was alive.

- The critics who have individually reviewed Charles' works, have believed and commented that Charles Lamb had dedicated his essays titled *Dream Children: A Reverie* and *New Year's Eve* to Ann Simmons.
- *Dream Children: A Reverie* was one of the essays written by Charles Lamb during the year 1823 under the pseudonym Elia.
- The essay *Dream Children* begins with Charles Lamb shown regaling his young children with tales from his childhood, tales that centered around his old grandmother Alice Field.
- The title *Dream Children: A Reverie* appears to have been chosen with intention because from the beginning to the ending, the entire narrative appears to have a dream-like feel to it

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### 5.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Pathos:** Pathos is a quality of an experience in life, or a work of art, that stirs up emotions of pity, sympathy, and sorrow.
- **Satire:** The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues is called satire.
- **Humour:** The quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech is called humour.

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### 5.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a summary of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*.
2. What was the role of Charles Lamb's grandmother in the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*.
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*?
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Comment on the early life and works of Charles Lamb?
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*.
3. What is the historical background of the essay *Dream Children: A Reverie*? Discuss in detail.
4. '*Dream Children: A Reverie* is a story of regret and loss'. Comment on the statement with reference to the text.

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## 5.11 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 6 THOMAS CARLYLE

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### Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 About the Author
- 6.3 Summary of the Essay
- 6.4 Theme
- 6.5 Critical Appreciation
- 6.6 Issues and Analysis
- 6.7 Historical Background
- 6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.9 Summary
- 6.10 Key Words
- 6.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.12 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish historian and essayist, whose major works include *The French Revolution*, 3 vol., *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, and *The History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great*. Carlyle was the second son of James Carlyle, the eldest child of his second marriage. James Carlyle was a mason by trade and, later, a small farmer, a man of profound Calvinist convictions whose character and way of life had a profound and lasting influence on his son. Carlyle was equally devoted to his mother as well as to his eight brothers and sisters, and his strong affection for his family never diminished.

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### 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of Thomas Carlyle as an author
- Discuss his major works
- Know the theme of his essay *Dante and Shakespeare*
- Learn the theme and summary of the essay

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### 6.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Thomas Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795 at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire in Scotland. He was an essayist, philosopher, mathematician, teacher and

## NOTES

historian. Thomas Carlyle's primary style of writing was pure satire. Besides all this, Thomas Carlyle was also a translator. As a professor, Thomas Carlyle had given many lectures, and after one such lecture, he had written the essay titled *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic History*. This essay claimed that history of the world, as people know it, is only a chronicle of the lives of the so-called great men in history.

In the year 1837, Thomas Carlyle wrote his book titled *The French Revolution: A History*. This book turned out to be so revolutionary, that it later inspired Charles Dickens to write his famous novel titled *A Tale of Two Cities* in the year 1859. Thomas Carlyle also contributed to the Edinburgh Encyclopedia regularly. One controversial article published in the year 1849 was *Occasional Discours on the Negro Question*. Thomas Carlyle returned to the University of Edinburgh between 1819 and 1821, during which he went through a period of crisis in faith. This experience resulted in his work *Sartor Resartus*, translated to *The Tailor Retailored*. This work plummeted him to instant recognition.

Thomas Carlyle married Jane Welsh who was herself a famous literary figure. This marriage did not seem to deter him from forming other liaisons, however, especially with Margaret Kirkpatrick, the daughter of a British official, and with an Indian princess. The relationship with the Indian princess did not turn into marriage because of the prevalent social environment in India at the time.

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### 6.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, lecturer and historian. The essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*, had been the content of one of his lectures. The central theme of this lecture had been the reverence and respect that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned through their works. While Thomas Carlyle believed that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned the status of heroes, heroes in actual history were actually anything but heroes. Thomas Carlyle believed obviously that Dante had been the father of the Italian language, and in that capacity needed to be placed on a pedestal, and William Shakespeare had earned the same status during the modern ages. This spoke volumes for the quality and content of the work produced by both Dante and Shakespeare. Significantly, Thomas Carlyle had been a historian himself, but in that capacity and context, believed that figures in history did not qualify to be called heroes. On the contrary, Thomas Carlyle believed perhaps that literary figures deserved to be known as heroes, because they had contributed to the literary history of their nations, and had not harmed anyone. Figures in history did not deserve to be categorized as heroes, because there had been much bloodshed, destruction and devastation because of them.

**Check Your Progress**

1. When was Thomas Carlyle born?
2. When did Thomas Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution: A History*?

**NOTES****6.4 THEME**

The central theme of this essay is the comparison of the works of Dante and Shakespeare, and the suggestion that both Dante and William Shakespeare should be placed on a pedestal. Thomas Carlyle had essayed multiple roles, and besides being a renowned essayist and historian himself, he had also been a teacher or lecturer.

As a historian, Thomas Carlyle had concluded and opined that figures in history who the world considered heroes had done nothing to deserve and receive that hero-worship. On the contrary, Thomas Carlyle appears to have been convinced that the real heroes of this world were poets and literary figures such as Dante and Shakespeare. While Dante is known to this day as the father of the Italian language, William Shakespeare had put English on the world map as a language of poets of the modern ages.

**6.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

Thomas Carlyle had apparently liked the concept of heroes, having heroes in life, heroes who had leadership qualities. In his book titled *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History*, Thomas Carlyle had lamented the fact that the history of the world had no real heroes, men and women who could be hero worshipped.

According to Thomas Carlyle, the actions of men and women made them heroes, who would be worthy of being hero-worshipped. Like most people, Thomas Carlyle too appears to have looked for people who he could hero-worship and place on a pedestal. The essayist appears to have been disappointed that history of the world, as the world knows it, has produced only a few real heroes.

On the other hand, while speaking of both Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare, during one of his lectures, Thomas Carlyle spoke very highly of both of them. According to Thomas Carlyle, Dante Alighieri had been the Father of the Italian language, contributing to the development and placement of the Italian language on the world map during the middle ages. In the same vein, Thomas Carlyle spoke very highly of the English poet William Shakespeare.

According to Thomas Carlyle, through his poetry, the English poet had managed to put English on the world map in the modern ages. Thomas Carlyle,

## NOTES

during the lecture, opined that through his poetry, William Shakespeare had earned the same status as Homer and Dante Alighieri. Carlyle said that what Homer had been to Greece, and Dante Alighieri to Italy, William Shakespeare had been to England.

Thomas Carlyle says that the “sovereign” English poet, William Shakespeare with his “perennial singing voice” and his “seeing eye” had been assigned the job of recording the changing times across Europe. Thomas Carlyle was of the view, perhaps, that the world today recognizes and identifies William Shakespeare as a poet precisely because of the poetic manner in which he presented the entire process of deer-tealing. It appears as though Thomas Carlyle never ran out of superlatives while describing and eulogizing the brilliance of William Shakespeare as a poet. Thomas Carlyle has used words such as “placid of joyous strength”, “true and clear, like a tranquil, unfathomable sea”, “priceless”, “calmness of depth”, and “a great soul”.

Thomas Carlyle has gone on to compare William Shakespeare to a tranquil, immaculately built house, that makes people forget the rude and disorderly quarry that it had originally built from.

Thomas Carlyle thought that William Shakespeare had been such a fine human being that people could just read his poetry to be able to forget the troubles of this world. It is a known fact that writers and artists usually use their work as a reflection of their true nature and qualities. In that context, the poetry of William Shakespeare is truly calming and inspiring to his audience even to this day and generation, that he himself must have been a man of great strength of character, and depth of knowledge that he helped him earn his position on the same pedestal as Homer and Dante Alighieri.

Thomas Carlyle had been a romantic personality. He abhorred violence and cruelty displayed by so called “heroic” figures in history, figures that are hero-worshipped for their actions, actions that had actually destroyed and devastated. Perhaps Carlyle had thought that people such as Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare were true heroes, worthier of hero-worship than the so-called heroic figures in history, because they had contributed to the growth and development of their nations and their national languages.

Creative work usually manages to soothe and calm its audience. The poetry of William Shakespeare too is gentle, romantic, inspiring, and offering hope and joy to his audience. His poetry shows his audience that love has the power to conquer all kinds of brutalities, that it has the strength and depth to survive anything and everything. The poetry of William Shakespeare helps his audience believe that true love actually exists, that all of us, can find true love.

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## 6.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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In his essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare*, the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle has compared both of them to Homer, putting all

three of them on the same pedestal. Perhaps Carlyle felt that true love is represented by such human characteristics as calmness and placidity of nature and strength of character, depth of thinking, and so on. Thomas Carlyle had himself been a very romantic person, who believed that marriage need not stop a person from seeking and finding love beyond that relationship.

In his personal life, too, Thomas Carlyle had found romance and love more than once beyond marriage. The most famous of his romantic liaisons had been with an Indian princess. In fact, he had even wanted to marry this Indian princess. William Dalrymple, commenting on this liaison, has said that his feelings had been reciprocated, but the couple was unable to marry because of the social environment and circumstances prevalent in India during those times.

His own romantic nature had contributed to this eulogy of William Shakespeare as a poet. While recording the changing times across Europe, William Shakespeare had seen only the love and romance that had survived and prevailed down the centuries everywhere he went. His “seeing eye” had refused to see the destruction, the hopelessness and sorrow, the anguish and depression. Instead, the great poet William Shakespeare had been able to see only love, romance, hope and pride. William Shakespeare had been able to see only the possibility of progress and development, the survival of love, true love, against all odds and obstacles. How truly beautiful and sensitive a person’s soul must be to be able to see only hope, love and progress and change looming on the horizon.

Thomas Carlyle has claimed that intellectual and scientific essays and articles by scientist like Sir Francis Bacon would appear earthly when compared to the poetry of William Shakespeare. This could be taken to imply that William Shakespeare’s poetry is more divine than of this world. Through the entire essay appears entirely unable to control is hero worship of both these great men.

The essayist Thomas Carlyle describes William Shakespeare as having had more virtue than even he possibly had been aware of. According to Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the greatest skill that William Shakespeare had possessed, had perhaps been his ability to connect and combine the intellect with the moral characteristic of man. Thomas Carlyle has referred to this, in his essay, as having been Shakespeare’s “unconscious intellect”.

In his lecture on this topic, Thomas Carlyle had quoted Novalis, who had rightfully perhaps asserted that “those dramas of his are products of nature too, as deep as nature as himself”. Thomas Carlyle believes that the art, the creative work, of William Shakespeare had been drawn from the depth of his heart, his nature, and so shone from the depth of that pure nature. Carlyle has described William Shakespeare’s art as having had nothing of the artifice, or fake, about it. This means Carlyle had believed that William Shakespeare had possessed such purity that it had automatically been reflected in all of his work. But this is true of all creative and artistic people. All of their work reflects, at the end of the day, the artist’s true nature and intentions.

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## 6.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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### NOTES

The essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare*, was first delivered as lecture. This lecture had first been delivered on May 12, 1840, by the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle.

According to Thomas Carlyle, in old times, people used to consider prophets as their heroes, and worshipped them. Thomas Carlyle perhaps believed that all human beings actually thrived on their need to hero-worship someone or the other. When people hero-worship someone, the object of their hero-worship is obviously another human being, a human being they believe has been endowed with specific qualities they themselves do not possess. The object of that hero-worship is someone they can see, who is living, and of this earth. In his lecture, he stressed that in old times, people usually hero-worshipped the Divinity, or the prophets, because the prophets represented the God they were not able to see or interact with.

Instead, people generally moved on to hero-worshipping people who possessed qualities, skills or knowledge they themselves did not, or that they themselves were unable to possess maybe. Thomas Carlyle believed that poets belonged to all ages. While the prophets and heroes in history had only belonged to their own ages because of their questionable actions, Thomas Carlyle believed that poets had produced works that belonged to all generations, that people from future generations too could possess and benefit from their works. According to Thomas Carlyle, poets were created and nurtured by nature, shaped by nature so entirely, that their souls and their hearts had been born of nature, shaped by nature, pristine, pure and virtuous.

The background to this essay, therefore, appeared to have been Thomas Carlyle's own conviction that poets belonged to nature, created and nurtured by nature, at moments chosen by nature, so that their work and their impact would have the impact and effectiveness desired by nature. Yet Thomas Carlyle believed, the poets such as Dante and Shakespeare had been so in tune with nature, that they themselves had been entirely unaware of that bonding with nature. Thomas Carlyle believed that poets such as Shakespeare and Dante had possessed nature's heart and soul, pure and virtuous, but that purity and virtuosity had been hidden from them. That purity and virtuosity of soul and heart had shaped their creativity and art, and they had been so engrossed in that creativity and art that they had probably never stopped to think about what they create at all.

### Check Your Progress

3. What is the central theme of the essay, *The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare*?
4. Who was the Father of Italian language?

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## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Thomas Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795.
2. Thomas Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution: A History* in 1837.
3. The central theme of the essay had been the reverence and respect that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned through their works.
4. Dante was the father of the Italian language.

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## 6.9 SUMMARY

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- Thomas Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795 at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire in Scotland.
- He was an essayist, philosopher, mathematician, teacher and historian. Thomas Carlyle's primary style of writing was pure satire.
- In the year 1837, Thomas Carlyle wrote his book titled *The French Revolution: A History*.
- Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, lecturer and historian. The essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*, had been the content of one of his lectures.
- The central theme of this lecture had been the reverence and respect that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned through their works.
- As a historian, Thomas Carlyle had concluded and opined that figures in history who the world considered heroes had done nothing to deserve and receive that hero-worship.
- In his book titled *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History*, Thomas Carlyle had lamented the fact that the history of the world had no real heroes, men and women who could be hero worshipped.
- In his essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare*, the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle has compared both of them to Homer, putting all three of them on the same pedestal.
- The essay titled *The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare*, was first delivered as lecture. This lecture had first been delivered on May 12, 1840, by the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle.

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## 6.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Romance:** Romance is a type of fiction, comprising idealized love, chivalry, obsessive association with somebody or some idea, and mysterious adventures.

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- **The French Revolution:** The French Revolution was a period of far-reaching social and political upheaval in France and its colonies that lasted from 1789 until 1799.
- **Chronicle:** A factual written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence is called chronicle.

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### 6.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life and works of Thomas Carlyle.
2. Write a summary of the essay *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*.
3. What were Carlyle's thoughts on hero-worship?
4. What is the central theme of the essay *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*?
2. What was the argument that Carlyle gave in favour of poets being the heroes of the society? Discuss.
3. Write a historical background to the essay *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*.
4. Discuss the issues that Thomas Carlyle has raised through his essay *The Hero as a Poet: Dante; Shakespeare*.

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### 6.12 FURTHER READINGS

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- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.
- Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 7 GEORGE ORWELL

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### Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 About the Author
- 7.3 Summary of the Essay
- 7.4 Theme
- 7.5 Critical Appreciation
- 7.6 Issues and Analysis
- 7.7 Historical Background
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.9 Summary
- 7.10 Key Words
- 7.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.12 Further Readings

### NOTES

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## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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George Orwell, pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair, was born on June 25, 1903, in Motihari, Bengal, India. He was an English novelist, essayist, and critic famous for his novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen-Eighty Four*. Born Eric Arthur Blair, Orwell never entirely abandoned his original name. The change in name corresponded to a profound shift in Orwell's lifestyle, in which he changed from a pillar of the British imperial establishment into a literary and political rebel.

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## 7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and major works of George Orwell
- Understand the theme of his essay *Why I Write*
- Learn the historical background to this essay
- Know about the issues that Orwell raised through this essay

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## 7.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair on June 25, 1903. He was an English essayist, novelist, and critic. George Orwell had been a vociferous critic of fascism, and Stalinism, and wrote prolifically in favor of democratic socialism. The most famous of his novels had been *1984*, in which he had predicted that the world ended in the year 1984.

## NOTES

George Orwell had gained fame on account of his writing style. His work could be instantly identified by its lucid and descriptive prose, and an awareness of social injustice and oppression. He was an open and fearless critic of totalitarianism and fascism, and believed that the only thing that could save the world was social democracy.

Besides being an essayist and a novelist, George Orwell had also been a journalist and literary critic. The name George Orwell instantly brings to mind his two most famous novels, *Animal Farm* published in the year 1945, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* published in the year 1949.

Besides his works of fiction and poetry, George Orwell had also gained fame for his works of non-fiction. In the year 1937, he had published *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which chronicled his experiences of working class life and tribulations in the north of England. The following year in 1938, George Orwell published *Homage to Catalonia*, which had been a tribute to his experiences of having participated in the Spanish Civil War. Besides such serious works of non-fiction, George Orwell had also been known for his numerous essays. The topics of his essays had ranged across culture, language, literature and politics. Although George Orwell died in the year 1950, the *Time Magazine*, in the year 200, has ranked him second on a list of titled The 50 Greatest British Writers since 1945.

George Orwell was born in Motihari, Bihar, in the then British India. His great grandfather Charles Blair had been a wealthy, landed gentleman, earning an income as a landlord in absentia in far flung Jamaica. Charles Blair had married into British nobility, and daughter of an Earl. George Orwell's grandfather Richard Blair had worked in the Opium Department in the Indian Civil Services. George Orwell's mother, Ida, had also grown up in Burma, where her French father had been engaged in speculative trading ventures.

It is important to look at this aristocratic background of George Orwell. Because of the wealthy lifestyle, it is significant that his novels, especially *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*, as also his various works of non-fiction and essays had in a way renounced his background and supported the working class.

The house in Bihar, India, where George Orwell was born is today considered a protected monument of historical importance. George Orwell's mother Ida Blair relocated to England in the year 1904 with her children, where she began living in Oxfordshire. It was here that Ida Blair brought up her daughters and son Eric Blair, or George Orwell. Sometime during the year 1907, the family spent some time with George Orwell's father Richard Blair. After this brief visit, it was until the year 1912 that the family did not meet Richard Blair.

Sometime before the First World War, the family moved from Henley-on-Thames to Shiplake, also in Oxfordshire. This was where George Orwell

first met the Buddicom family, remaining close friends with them for years, especially their daughter Jacintha. Jacintha and George Orwell spent a great deal of time reading and writing poetry. Both young people dreamt of a time when they would become famous writers. It was with the Buddicom family that George Orwell discovered other interests such as bird-watching, fishing and shooting. Ida Blair had wanted her son to receive a public school education, but could not afford the fees. So her brother referred them to a Roman Catholic convent when he was five years old, where he was able to earn a scholarship. It was at this convent school that George Orwell first met Cyril Connolly, who was also to become a writer. Years later, as professional adults, Connolly, who was then the editor of the *Horizon*, published a number of essays written by George Orwell. As a schoolboy, George Orwell published his first two poems.

## NOTES

George Orwell enrolled at Wellington in the spring of 1916, but the following term joined Eton as a King's Scholar. He was later to report to Jacintha that Wellington had been 'beastly', but he had been happy at Eton. In spite of this he did not complete the full course, dropping out in 1921. The following year, in 1922, George Orwell sailed to Burma to join the Indian Imperial Police in Rangoon. George Orwell remained in Rangoon until 1924, when he was posted to the Spanish Civil War. He did not appear to have made any friends in Rangoon, being considered an outsider, spending most of his time alone reading or, surprisingly, attending church. His experiences in Burma inspired him to write his novel titled *Burmese Days* which was published in the year 1934, and his essays titled *A Hanging*, published in the year 1931, and *Shooting an Elephant* published in the year 1936.

George Orwell could be said to have had multiple facets to his character and life. At his parents' house in Southwold, he spent time quietly, reading and writing. In the End of London, George Orwell spent time with the so-called down and out populace, known as Button. Apart from all this, George Orwell also taught at a private school for boys, who were the children of wealthy tradespeople and businessmen.

Upon his return to Greenwich after the Spanish Civil War, George Orwell became unpopular because of his direct views on the civil war. George Orwell who had earlier published *The Road to Wigan Pier*, began to be attacked by the Communist Party, which claimed that in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell had said the working classes smell.

In 1947, George Orwell was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He met Sonia Bowell and they got engaged in 1949 just before he had to be admitted to the King George Hospital. Sonia Bowell began caring for him. Around this time, George Orwell called a meeting with his accountant, who later claimed that during the meeting George Orwell had given him charge of his company GOP Ltd. Yet there had been no independent witness of this meeting. The fact that Sonia Bowell had also begun caring for him so diligently also did

not appear to find favor with all his old friends. George Orwell died early on the morning of January 21, 1950.

## NOTES

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### 7.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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In his essay titled *Why I Write*, George Orwell explained that he had begun to write as a child. While living in Southwold at his parental house, George Orwell had been known to family and friends as a respectable gentleman, mostly of leisure, spending most of his time reading and writing. Yet, George Orwell was also known to intersperse those times with periods when he spent among the working class, the so-called down and out, living in the East End of London. Those experiences obviously gave him much inspiration and food for thought. In any case, such spells spent among the working class gave rise to masterpieces.

As a writer, George Orwell believed he had a responsibility to narrate and report his experiences. Much of his writing reflected his open criticisms of fascism, Stalinism, and the oppression of the working class. George Orwell used his writings, it would appear, to criticize totalitarianism and the reign of the upper classes. Through his entire life, George Orwell remained a strong supporter of socialist democracy, claiming that that was the only route to success and social progress.

His novel titled *Animal Farm* described a time when the animals on a farm, where they were being treated cruelly and unjustly, being domesticated and put to work, would one day rise up against their human oppressors. George Orwell's novel titled *Nineteen Eighty-four*, would appear to have been the result of his disillusionment and disgust at the effects of communism, fascism, and the spread of Stalinism.

His years spent in Burma, or hobnobbing with the working class in the East End of London were two places he could have contracted tuberculosis. However, he had not been diagnosed with tuberculosis until the year 1947, when it had probably been too late for a complete cure. The illness spread rapidly, and George Orwell had succumbed to his illness in January 1950. It was while he had been in hospital that George Orwell continued to write, focusing more on essays such as *Why I Write*.

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### 7.4 THEME

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The central theme of the essay titled *Why I Write* by the essayist and novelist George Orwell is an explanation of why he writes. With George Orwell, especially, he had started to write as a child. As a child, George Orwell began to write to describe scenes he witnessed around him and in his neighborhood.

Like most children, George Orwell also appears to have begun writing stories from his imagination.

These are sentiments that are echoed and reciprocated by most other writers anyway. Some of the earliest writing experiences of George Orwell were at Shiplake, where he made friends with Jacintha, and they both used to read poetry and write their own poetry.

Although George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair, and had begun to write as a child, it was not until almost a year before he died, in the year 1949, that he had written this essay titled *Why I write*. In this essay, George Orwell had claimed, that when he had been a child growing up in England, all he had wanted to do was to tell stories. Then, he discovered the charm of poetry, and began writing poems of his own. While still at school, he had begun to have his poetry published in the local literary magazines of those times. According to George Orwell, even as a child, all he ever wanted to do had been to become famous as a writer.

More importantly, George Orwell felt convinced that as a writer he had the responsibility of making a difference in society. Those were the times when communism had been at its peak, and fascism and Stalinism had been spreading across Europe. George Orwell had used his writings to express his criticism of these social and political elements that had begun to destroy lives and societies in England as well.

His work in Rangoon as part of the Indian Imperial Police was the beginning of his tilt towards political writing and critical commentary. Although George Orwell, had become engaged in various political events that were taking place across the world including Europe, he never stopped writing. The reason he continued to write had been solely to tell the world what he had been witnessing and participating in. George Orwell had believed that as thinking, aware human beings, people needed to exercise their power of commenting on the increasingly fascist political scenario of those times, and more significantly, he had believed that people who had the ability to write were also able to change the political and social environment in the world.

Having grown up in the English countryside, he had developed a concern for both animals as well as the working classes. George Orwell used his writing to bitterly criticize communism, fascism and the then powerful Stalinism. His experiences as a member of the upper classes probably made him a bitter critic of totalitarianism. He had believed that the working classes had needed a voice and social status. One of the reasons why he had decided to write had been to speak out against the existing political environment prevalent in Europe during that period. George Orwell had been an ardent supporter of social democracy, and had hoped that he could use his writing to influence his generation, as well as all future generations.

## NOTES

## NOTES

As a matter of fact, his writings reveal that George Orwell had been a socially and politically aware and sensitive person, who had been convinced that he needed to use his writing skills and content to strive to make a positive impact on the social and political climate that was then prevailing in Europe.

However, his continued experiences in world events, such as the Spanish Civil War, made him entirely disillusioned, more with human nature and attitudes than with anything else. Very often, wherever he had been at the time, George Orwell had felt the outsider, spending his time either reading and writing or attending church services.

The essay titled *Why I Write* had been written just before he had died, but it had been written to convey to his audience that he had begun to write, and had continued to write, and would continue to write his whole life, because he had been convinced that as a writer he had possessed the power and the concern to try to make an impact on his audience, to try and make them as concerned about the social and political climate then prevailing around them.

Through his writings, such as *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell had revealed an innate compassion and concern for the working classes in England. Using his writings to bring their plight and oppression to public knowledge.

The essay *Why I Write* had possibly been George Orwell's expression of his concern and affinity for the working classes. It was obviously this concern that had shaped his political conviction and belief that social democracy was the only possible political form of governance that would help the world progress and flourish. Yet, his disillusionment and anguish at the prevailing political situation had inspired his novel titled *Nineteen Eighty-four*, in which he had predicted that the world would end in the year 1984, considering the path it had then been treading, through communism, fascism, totalitarianism, and Stalinism.

### Check Your Progress

1. When was George Orwell born?
2. What was the original name of George Orwell?

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## 7.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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From the essay *Why I Write*, it would appear that George Orwell had decided when still a child, that he would grow up and write. Most people make such plans as children about what they would want to do when they grow up, but somewhere between being children and becoming adults, change their minds and end up doing something entirely contrary to those childish dreams. But with George Orwell, here is what he had to say, "From a very early age,

perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books.”

These are the opening lines of the essay *Why I Write*. It would appear that like most young children, he had nurtured dreams of being a writer when he grew up. As an adolescent, according to George Orwell, he decided that maybe he should be doing something else, and probably give up those childish dreams. According to him, for four years, maybe, he tried doing something else. But obviously, through the entire period, he never forgot those dreams, and what is more, he never stopped feeling that he was “outraging his true nature”. It appears that he never stopped feeling that he was going against his true nature, his true calling. By the time he turned 20 years of age, he had decided that he should soon be settling down to his true nature, and his true calling: that of writing books. Obviously, George Orwell had never actually changed his mind about what he would do as a grown-up. He continued to write until his death because he felt, and was convinced, that if he actually did anything else, it would be going against his true nature and his true calling. During the years he spent playing with his childhood friend Jacintha, too, George Orwell had dreamt about becoming famous as a writer.

People who actually read about George Orwell, or about his writings, should be able to fathom that he always had a sense of humor, and he possessed the rare quality of being able to laugh at himself.

According to George Orwell, he had been a lonely child, and all lonely children start talking to imaginary people. Like most lonely children who develop this habit, he became unpopular among other kids of his age. Obviously they all thought he was mad. Also, like most children that age, at the age of four or five years, George Orwell wrote a poem about a tiger, it was not the subject that had been like other kids, but the fact that it was a poem that altogether resembled one that had been written by Blake. Perhaps it is to his mother’s credit that she wrote it down, giving him credit for its creativity and never laughed at him.

At any rate, George Orwell says that the kind of serious writing he produced during those early years barely filled six pages. It is not difficult to understand that although those early writings were nothing significant in retrospect, George Orwell was confident and convinced that all he wanted to do as a grown up was to write books. The newspapers of those times were more encouraging of children who aspired to be writers and poets, publishing their work without criticism. It would appear that from his early childhood, George Orwell had been politically inclined, writing a patriotic poem at the outbreak of the first world war, and later when Kitchener had died.

George Orwell continues to laugh at himself. Quoting from *Paradise Lost*, which he first discovered when he was 16 years old, this is what he says,

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## NOTES

“As a 16-year old, to have discovered that poets and writers had the liberty to change spellings to suit the context, or play with words also to suit the context, must certainly have sent shivers down his backbone. Obviously, in hindsight, changing spellings or playing with words may not have produced the same effect. Yet the influence of *Paradise Lost* must have remained with George Orwell because he says that his first novel, titled *Burmese Days*, published when he was about 30 years old, had used the same kind of word play – possibly without conscious thought. But then this is something that happens with most writers or poets: what they read as children always has a lasting impact on their psyche, and generally influences their first few writing samples.”

This essay *Why I Write* was written by George Orwell, in order to let his audience understand why he wrote what he wrote, and why he wrote how he wrote. All writers are influenced by their early childhood, or events that take place through their early years. If one were to read about this later life events, it would be obvious that George Orwell never actually stopped feeling isolated, or looked upon as an outsider. He never stopped finding solace and comfort in reading and writing. It is important to understand that to a large extent, most writers are driven by the same motives, the degree of intensity and placement of those motives able to change to suit the context or the time the writer is living in. This analysis is not just about why George Orwell used to write. Drawing upon his own experiences, George Orwell appears to have made this analysis about practically all writers, across all generations.

According to George Orwell, these motives had to include:

1. **Sheer egoism** – The ego and self conviction that they need to write because they are the best, and people need to find out exactly how great they are.
2. **Aesthetic enthusiasm** – The next thing that appears to drive all writers is aesthetic enthusiasm, the enthusiasm that is driven by their conviction that they have been endowed with an aesthetic sense of beauty and style of narrative, that simply must be put to use.
3. **Historical impulse** – According to George Orwell, this is the inherent desire that all writers are endowed with, the desire to find out true facts, and present them to their audience, to all future generations.
4. **Political purpose** – Once again, George Orwell reveals his sense of humor, and his ability to laugh at himself. According to him, all writers actually have the ability to use the word political in every context, on many occasions, at the drop of a hat or the wink of an eyelid. The word ‘political’ is one that all writers love to use, perhaps because it makes them feel important.

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## 7.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The essay *Why I Write* was written by George Orwell, to explain to his audience why he wrote, or rather why he continued to write. The opening paragraph, and much of the rest of it, describe his early childhood years, his loneliness, and his childish habit of making up stories. Most of those stories had been in the form of fibs. At any rate, that habit of his, of making up stories, had convinced him that he would grow up and write books.

According to George Orwell, he had stopped thinking about writing between the ages 17 and 20 years, but the loneliness and habit of making up stories had never left him. And it is a good thing that he that never changed, because otherwise the world would have been poorer without some of his masterpieces.

After describing at some length his early childhood and adolescent years, George Orwell explains that he had described those years and experiences because they played an important role in shaping and having an impact writers. According to George Orwell, audiences need to understand why writers write, what they do, and why they write the way they do. He says he had been growing up in tumultuous times. In spite of that, it is rare to find writers today who would do as much justice to the events of their generation as George Orwell did to his own generation.

However, the motives that George Orwell has listed as driving writers are completely present even to this generation. Because most writers, however their writing may be, are convinced that they are the best, and that the world needs to acknowledge them as such.

The greatest quality that George Orwell had possessed had been his ability to laugh at himself. It is difficult to find writers who have this ability. Most writers do not know how to laugh at themselves. They also do not know how to accept the fact that others may want to laugh at them. Most writers believe that they are the best. On the contrary, Orwell does not appear to have learned how to judge people and their intentions. He appears to have trusted people freely, without misgivings. This innocence of heart and spirit were perhaps what drove and inspired his writing.

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## 7.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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George Orwell wrote this essay during the year 1949, probably a few months before his death due to tuberculosis. To some observers, the timing of this essay may appear to be a little strange. Because at the time of writing this essay, George Orwell was about 46 years old, while he had been writing.

### NOTES

## NOTES

At the time of writing this essay, George Orwell was in hospital, being treated for tuberculosis. Perhaps he was aware of his impending death, and had wanted his audience, all future generations, understand why he had become a writer. Reading this essay audiences will be struck by his writing style, how he played with words, and the length of his paragraphs. George Orwell believed that paragraphs had to be governed by their content. If the content was strong enough, the interest of audience would remain unbroken.

The essay titled *Why I Write* had been written by George Orwell to help his audience understand why he had been writing as he had. In this essay George Orwell has explained that each generation shapes the writers of that generation. The events taking place in the world, or their social environment are some of the factors that help shape writers. The fact that George Orwell had been a lonely child, given to making up stories, found an echo in most of his writing work. His lonely childhood had perhaps helped him write a masterpiece such as *Animal Farm*.

### Check Your Progress

3. Mention any two famous works written by George Orwell.
4. What is the central theme of the essay *Why I Write*?

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## 7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. George Orwell was born on June 25, 1903.
2. The original name of George Orwell was Eric Arthur Blaire.
3. Two famous works written by George Orwell are *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.
4. The central theme of the essay titled *Why I Write* is an explanation of why he writes.

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## 7.9 SUMMARY

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- George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair on June 25, 1903. He was an English essayist, novelist, and critic.
- George Orwell had gained fame on account of his writing style.
- His work could be instantly identified by its lucid and descriptive prose, and an awareness of social injustice and oppression.
- Besides being an essayist and a novelist, George Orwell had also been a journalist and literary critic.

- George Orwell was born in Motihari, Bihar, in the then British India.
- In his essay titled *Why I Write*, George Orwell explained that he had begun to write as a child.
- As a writer, George Orwell believed he had a responsibility to narrate and report his experiences.
- Much of his writing reflected his open criticisms of fascism, Stalinism, and the oppression of the working class.
- The central theme of the essay titled *Why I Write* by the essayist and novelist George Orwell is an explanation of why he writes.
- The essay *Why I Write* had possibly been George Orwell's expression of his concern and affinity for the working classes.

## NOTES

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### 7.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Socialism:** Socialism is a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.
- **Fascism:** Fascism is a form of radical authoritarian ultranationalism, characterized by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition and strong regimentation of society and of the economy, which came to prominence in early 20th-century Europe.
- **Prose:** Prose is a form of language that exhibits a natural flow of speech and grammatical structure rather than a regular rhythmic structure as in traditional poetry, where the common unit of verse is based on metre or rhyme.

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### 7.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a summary of the essay *Why I Write*.
2. 'George Orwell was a rebel poet.' Comment on the statement with reference to the text.
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Why I Write*?
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *Why I Write*?

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**Long Answer Questions**

1. Comment on the early life and works of George Orwell. Throw light on some of his other famous works.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Why I Write*.
3. What is the historical background of the essay *Why I Write*? Discuss in detail.
4. How did the political scenario and different political ideologies shaped George Orwell's writings? Discuss.

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**7.12 FURTHER READINGS**

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- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.
- Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 8 WILL DURANT

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### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 About the Author
- 8.3 Summary of the Essay
- 8.4 Theme
- 8.5 Critical Appreciation
- 8.6 Issues and Analysis
- 8.7 Historical Background
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.9 Summary
- 8.10 Key Words
- 8.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.12 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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Will Durant was an American writer, historian, and philosopher. He became best known for his work *The Story of Civilization* (11 volumes) written in collaboration with his wife, Ariel Durant and published between 1935 and 1975. He conceived of philosophy as a total perspective of seeing things. He sought to unify and humanize the great body of historical knowledge, which had grown voluminous and become fragmented into esoteric specialties, and to vitalize it for contemporary application.

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### 8.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of William James Durant as an author
- Discuss the major theme of his work *The Story of Civilization*
- Know the summary and historical background of the essay
- Learn the issues highlighted in the essay

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### 8.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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William James Durant was better known as Will Durant. Will Durant was an American essayist, writer, historian, philosopher and teacher. The most famous of his works is *The Story of Civilization*, which had been written and published in 11 volumes over a period of four decades, between the years

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1935 and 1975. Prior to this, Will Durant had become famous for having popularized the study of philosophy by writing and publishing *The Story of Philosophy* in the year 1926. *The Story of Civilization* had been put together in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant.

William James Durant was born on November 5, 1885 in North Adams, Massachusetts, America. His parents, Joseph Durant and Mary Allard had been French-Canadian Catholics who had come to the United States.

In the year 1900, William James Durant began to receive education at the Jesuit St. Peter's Preparatory School for Boys, and after graduating from there, at the Saint Peters College which was located in New Jersey. Mary Allard began to be convinced that Will Durant would fulfill her hopes of becoming a priest.

In the year 1905, Will Durant began exploring socialist philosophy. But when World War I broke out, young Will Durant began to recognize that all political behaviors and inclinations were inspired by an inherent lust for power. Even before the war broke out however, Will Durant had begun to imbibe a model of self discipline, and had begun to reject the concept of anarchic injustice. Having graduated in the year 1907, Will Durant initially worked as a reporter for the Evening Journal headed by Arthur Brisbane. Later, he began to teach English, Latin, French and geometry at the Seton Hall University in New Jersey.

In the year 1913, Will Durant resigned from the teaching position, and began lecturing at a Presbyterian church. The material that he began to use at this church formed the basis of *The Story of Civilization*. It was in the year 1917 while working towards a doctorate in philosophy at Columbia University that he wrote his first book titled *Philosophy and the Social Problem*. Having received his doctorate the same year, Will Durant began teaching at Columbia University.

In April of the year 1944, leaders from the Christian and Jewish churches approached Will Durant to begin a movement that would raise moral standards. After hearing them out, Will Durant suggested that they should instead start a movement against social intolerance.

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### 8.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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*The Story of Civilization* had been a magnum opus that had taken Will Durant some three decades to complete, that too in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant. The central theme of the entire collection, which contained eleven volumes, was just as the main title suggested – the story of world civilization.

Will Durant had believed that history as is studied and presented to the world can never be considered to be completely accurate, because no one

is capable of knowing what exactly had happened in the past. Will Durant described civilization as being social order that promotes cultural creation.

Going by this premise, however, Will Durant claimed was itself contrary to what it meant. According to his philosophy, social order promoted or allowed cultural creativity to take place. But if social order has to promote anything, that means social order itself is forcing creativity. And if cultural creativity is being forced to take place, then it is to be inferred that it is no longer creativity, but has been forced to happen.

Will Durant believed that civilization is the natural process of evolution and development of the human race. According to him all the events that take place in the world lead to that evolution. And all the events that take place in the world must therefore be connected to each other.

Will Durant considered that the education being provided in public schools to have been at fault or in error. According to him, teachers in public schools taught children that all events that take place in the world are connected, and form a natural chain that leads to the evolution of human civilization. According to his philosophy, however, all events that take place in the world need not necessarily be connected to one another. Sometimes, two completely unrelated and unconnected events could be taking place in unison and simultaneously on opposite ends of the globe.

According to Will Durant, the actual meaning of the word civilization could be the social order that promotes or causes cultural creativity. But Will Durant went on to explain that creativity is inborn, and cannot be promoted. Creativity comes from within human beings, from within the human soul. So, if society, or social order, has to promote cultural creativity, then the creativity within that culture had been forced to take pace. Creativity of any type, and at any level, has to be free, and needs to have the freedom to be exercised. If human beings are to be creative, they need the freedom to be creative. So if social order needs to promote that cultural creativity, then it can no longer be exercising that freedom.

The essay *The Conditions of Civilization* had been written by the philosopher and historian Will Durant as part of the magnum opus titled *The Story of Civilization*. While describing the meaning of the term civilization, Will Durant had said that civilization led to development of the human race, and that development allowed human beings to become creative.

According to Will Durant, civilization of the world had evolved as a result of some specific conditions. Considering all this, it was also difficult to accept the conditions that had been laid down as having resulted in the development or the evolution of world civilization.

## NOTES

NOTES

**Check Your Progress**

1. When was Will Durant born?
2. When was *The Story of Civilization* published?

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**8.4 THEME**

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The central theme of this essay is the concept that life itself is only about creativity. This means that to be creative, human beings need to be alive, or rather to feel themselves as being completely alive, in every sense.

But human beings are usually consumed by fear, fear of the unknown, fear of what could take place on the morrow or the future, fear of their very survival. According to Will Durant, the point that most human beings miss that they need to overcome or abandon their fears and abandon their worries. The next thing that will take place automatically and completely unintentionally, is that as a result of abandoning their fears and their worries, human beings will have plenty of free time, and because they have all that free time, they will learn to be constructive and create something in that extra time. This is perhaps what Will Durant meant when he said “Civilization is social order promoting cultural creativity.”

According to Will Durant, the curricula and syllabi prevailing in most public schools across the United States is entirely warped. It tells teachers to believe that there is a connection between all the subjects being taught in their schools. Teachers are also encouraged to nurture “prodigies”, who are trained to become experts at specific subjects or areas before they graduate out of school.

According to Will Durant, this is again difficult to achieve. Considering that no two subjects are actually related or connected, it becomes difficult to understand why students need to study all those subjects at school, through each year as they progress through school. Students who are being taught to become experts at one specific subject would actually need to be taught just that one subject, would they not?

This means students who are being taught to study multiple subjects at the school level end up becoming overwhelmed with fears, misgivings, worries and insecurities about their grades and their future. Consequently they spend all their time worrying or battling their fears or misgivings, leaving them no time to actually study and become experts, at whatever subject they are expected to become experts at.

So, it may be inferred that the central theme running through this essay is the concept that civilization, or the evolution of the human race can take place in this world only when human beings learn to overcome their fears,

of the unknown, fears of being good at everything they try to do, fear of not becoming experts at whatever, generally all their fears. Another thing that human beings need to understand is that they need to overcome their worries, worries of the morrow, worries about their future, worries about what they will eat or what they will drink or what they will wear, or worries about what they will do to survive and merely exist.

## NOTES

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### 8.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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*The Conditions of Civilization* is part of the magnum opus written by Will Durant in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant. The entire magnum opus had been compiled by the couple into 11 volumes, and had been written between the years 1945 and 1975.

To begin with, according to the philosophy theorized by Will Durant, civilization is social order promoting cultural creativity. This is the opening line of *The Conditions of Civilization*.

According to Will Durant, if social order promotes cultural creativity, then people are being forced to create. Yet, the meaning of life that is to create. Human beings are consumed by fears and worries, which leave them with little free time to create, anyway. So, in that context, it is important to understand the impact of fears and worries. Human beings are always consumed by fears. These fears and worries are inherent and cause chaos and confusion, and more than that, cause mental and physical health problems. In effect, human beings are left with no time to do anything except be afraid and keep worrying.

Will Durant says that people need to learn to overcome their fears and worries, because the moment they get rid of their fears and their worries, they will be left with plenty of free time, which will allow them to pursue their interests or be constructive.

The meaning of life is to create. This means creation helps human beings to feel alive, to understand the meaning of life, to understand the meaning of living, to hope and plan.

Will Durant explains that the true meaning of civilization is to continue evolving and developing. The only way to continue to evolve would be to continue to create throughout one's life. Civilization requires creativity and change to be able to exist and develop, to evolve and progress.

According to Will Durant, there are essentially four elements that contribute to any civilization. These are:

1. **Economic provision:** Human beings need to be creative throughout their entire lives, and to be able to survive, live and to create, every human being needs to have the security of economic provision. This

## NOTES

means all human beings need to be able to afford to live decently because it is not possible to create without the access and assurance of economic support. Economic consideration is the basic and primary condition of any civilization.

2. **Political organization:** For any civilization to be able to survive and flourish, it needs strong political organizations. This means the governments in power should work toward an egalitarian society. Society should not support class or religious barriers. For the most part, most societies support totalitarianism, where the working classes are isolated and not allowed to have a share in the profits. For any civilization to survive and flourish, the governments in power should ensure that every person is being treated equally and has a share in profits. However, this is not the same as supporting communism. On the contrary, this is all about social democracy.
3. **Moral traditions:** For any civilization to survive and flourish, it should support moral traditions. This term may be interpreted in multiple ways. For the most part, it could be interpreted as being endowed with moral consciousness. Human beings should treat one another with respect and abstain from violence and warfare. Moral traditions encourage human beings to live in unison, respecting one another's personal space, and looking out for one another. The societies where people use violence against one another, and do not treat others equally and with respect are not able to survive or flourish.
4. **Pursuit of knowledge:** For any civilization to be able to survive and flourish, every human must be able to access and pursue the attainment of knowledge. Knowledge broadens the perspective. Pursuit of knowledge must be independent, voluntary and remain constant and consistent throughout life.

In this context, public school curricula and classroom syllabi must encourage students to seek information and knowledge independently. In earlier times, educators found it easier to teach children in such a way as to help students gain expertise or skills in one particular subject. In modern times, however, the curricula are so wide that it is difficult for teachers to help students gain expertise or skills in just one subject of the student interest.

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## 8.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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Writers and artists usually produce great works drawing upon their own experiences in life. Will Durant theorized that in order for any civilization to survive, and not just survive but also flourish, human beings from that civilization had to have equal access to knowledge, economic power and creativity. While explaining this theory further, Will Durant had said that all human beings are born with fears and worries.

As human beings grow up, their fears and their worries begin to consume them completely. They are consumed by fears of the unknown, fears of not being able to perform well at school or in academics, fears about not performing well at work or in their careers, fears of almost anything or everything. Human beings also begin to be consumed by their worries, worries about what they will eat, what they will drink, what they will wear, or what they will do.

## NOTES

Will Durant had rightly said that all human beings need to shed their fears and worries because the moment they make themselves free from their consuming fears and worries, they will be left with a great deal of free time from all their other chores and tasks. This free time can immediately be used to do constructive things, and more importantly, to create. According to Will Durant, the meaning of the word life is to be able to create. When human beings are able to create, they begin to live, and they begin to be actually alive, thinking and feeling.

It is important to understand this great man's thought process, because how a writer thinks is always reflected in his or her writing. While describing the four elements that lead to civilization, Will Durant speaks of the need for economic provision, political organization, moral traditions and the pursuit of knowledge. According to him, in any civilization to survive and flourish, the people from that civilization must have access to economic provision or economic power, political organization or equality within their society that is governed by a socially democratic government, moral traditions that ensure that people live without violence or moral oppression, and the pursuit of education that is knowledge. Although these four conditions or elements have been explained in detail, Will Durant has not mentioned or categorized human beings as being either men or women.

His analytical, unbiased and critical thought process was what made Will Durant such a great writer and philosopher. Will Durant has been ranked among the greatest writers of all times.

Will Durant was also convinced that civilizations would survive and flourish if the countries in those civilizations were unbiased and propagated equality, equality between genders, equality between classes and equality among religious groups.

Will Durant had said, "Civilization is social order promoting cultural creativity". Yet he had gone to explain that a society which deems it necessary to promote cultural creativity is not actually giving their citizens the freedom of choice, the freedom to not create if they did not feel the need to do so." This means as a philosopher, Will Durant believed every person had the freedom of choice.

What made Will Durant stand out in the crowd, and his work throughout his life, is that he not just theorized or expounded the need for personal freedom, he also obviously practiced it in his own life.

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## **8.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

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It is important to understand how his writing and his thinking had been shaped and moulded from his early childhood. William James Durant's parents had been French Canadian Catholics, who had fled from Quebec to come settle in the United States. Obviously this immigration had left an indelible mark on young Will Durant. In any such movement, where entire communities or groups of people migrate, flee or emigrate to another country, it is always the children who are the most affected. More importantly, the scars never really leave them.

Although Will's parents had continued to live in the United States for the rest of their lives, it is obvious that their children had faced plenty of prejudices and bias through their lives. Mary Allard had apparently nurtured dreams that her son William James Durant would join the Jesuit church when he grew up. She felt that as a priest, Will Durant would face little or no prejudice and would find security.

Will Durant had started writing with his work *The Story of Philosophy* which had been published in the year 1926. He had written this work in order to make philosophy popular among the generation of his time, so that they would understand and make efforts to bring about changes that were needed in their societies.

William James Durant had always wanted to research and explore world civilizations. The fact that his family had migrated, bringing with them their original cultures to the United States, must have triggered this thought process. While growing up in the United States, Will Durant had felt that dividing the people of the world into different civilizations merely because of the geographic location of where they happened to be born or were living, was an entirely futile and ridiculous decision.

**Check Your Progress**

3. What was the name of Will Durant's wife?
4. What was the central theme of the collection?

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## **8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. William James Durant was born on November 5, 1885.
2. *The Story of Civilization* was published between the years 1935 and 1975.
3. The name of Will Durant's wife was Ariel Durant.

4. The central theme of the entire collection, which contained eleven volumes, was just as the main title suggested – the story of world civilization.

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## 8.9 SUMMARY

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- William James Durant was better known as Will Durant. Will Durant was an American essayist, writer, historian, philosopher and teacher.
- William James Durant was born on November 5, 1885 in North Adams, Massachusetts, America.
- In the year 1905, Will Durant began exploring socialist philosophy. But when World War I broke out, young Will Durant began to recognize that all political behaviors and inclinations were inspired by an inherent lust for power.
- In the year 1913, Will Durant resigned from the teaching position, and began lecturing at a Presbyterian church.
- In April of the year 1944, leaders from the Christian and Jewish churches approached Will Durant to begin a movement that would raise moral standards.
- *The Story of Civilization* had been a magnum opus that had taken Will Durant some three decades to complete, that too in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant.
- The central theme of this essay is the concept that life itself is only about creativity.
- This means that to be creative, human beings need to be alive, or rather to feel themselves as being completely alive, in every sense.
- *The Conditions of Civilization* is part of the magnum opus written by Will Durant in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant.
- Will Durant theorized that in order for any civilization to survive, and not just survive but also flourish, human beings from that civilization had to have equal access to knowledge, economic power and creativity.

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## 8.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Civilization:** The process by which a society or place reaches an advanced stage of social development and organization is called civilization.
- **Magnum Opus:** It refers to a work of art, music, or literature that is regarded as the most important or best work that an artist, composer, or writer has produced.

## NOTES

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## 8.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### NOTES

#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a summary of *The Story of Civilization*.
2. *The Story of Civilization* was written by Will Durant in collaboration with his wife. What inspired them to write this work?
3. What is the central theme of the essay *The Story of Civilization*?
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *The Story of Civilization*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Comment on the early life and works of Will Durant. Throw light on some of his other famous works.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *The Story of Civilization*.
3. What is the historical background of the essay *The Story of Civilization*? Discuss in detail.
4. What is the political significance of *The Story of Civilization*? Discuss.

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## 8.12 FURTHER READINGS

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## BLOCK - III

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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### PROSE IX-XI

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#### NOTES

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## UNIT 9 RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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### Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 About the Author
- 9.3 Summary of the Essay
- 9.4 Theme
- 9.5 Critical Appreciation
- 9.6 Issues and Analysis
- 9.7 Historical Background
- 9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.9 Summary
- 9.10 Key Words
- 9.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.12 Further Readings

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### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

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American poet, essayist, and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts. After studying at Harvard and teaching for a brief time, Emerson entered the ministry. He was appointed to the Old Second Church in his native city, but soon became an unwilling preacher. Unable in conscience to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper after the death of his nineteen-year-old wife of tuberculosis, Emerson resigned his pastorate in 1831.

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### 9.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson as an author
- Discuss the major theme of the essay *Self Reliance*
- Know the summary and historical background of the essay
- Learn about the underlying issues raised in the essay

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## 9.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### NOTES

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts. He was the second son of his parents Ruth Haskins and Rev William Emerson, who had been a Unitarian minister. Ralph Waldo Emerson had been the second child to survive into adulthood.

Ralph Waldo Emerson appeared to gradually move away from the religious beliefs of his family and friends, beginning to believe instead in transcendentalism. His first essay explaining this transcendentalism, named *Nature* was published in the year 1836. Ralph Waldo Emerson had been an American essayist, poet, lecturer and philosopher. He had led the American transcendentalist movement of the mid-1800s, writing dozens of essays on this topic and giving lectures and public speeches on this topic across the United States.

Increasingly, Ralph Waldo Emerson had begun to rebel against the societal pressures of his generation, veering towards individualism. To the extent that he became a champion of individualism during those times. As an essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson had written numerous essays on this topic.

After his essay *Nature* Ralph Waldo Emerson gave his first public speech on the topic of transcendentalism, titled *The American Scholar*, which was widely attended. Among the many well-known people who had attended the speech was Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr, who later referred to it as “The Intellectual Declaration of Independence”.

Like most teachers and lecturers who are also essayists or writers, Ralph Waldo Emerson usually conveyed what he wanted to say, first as lectures or public speeches, and later edited them to make them suitable for publishing. Ralph Waldo published two compilations of his most important essays, titled *Essays First Series* published in the year 1841, and *Essays Second Series* published in the year 1844. These two volumes of his essays contained the most important of his essays titled *Self-Reliance*, *Experience*, *Circles*, *The Over-Soul* and *The Poet*. All these essays, besides the others, revealed the depth of Ralph Emerson’s thinking and his critical analytical mind. They contributed in making the period from mid 1830s to mid 1840s the richest and most productive of Ralph Emerson’s career as a writer and essayist.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote on a wide range of topics and ideas, never actually holding fast to one specific ideology. Some of his most significant topics were individualism, transcendentalism, the ability of the human to achieve anything, the relationship between the human soul and the world around and beyond. Although Ralph Emerson’s essay *Nature* became very popular, it was actually less about nature and more philosophical.

According to Ralph Emerson, “Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and its soul.” Like many philosophers of his generation,

Ralph Emerson rejected the perspective that God is separate from the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the pioneers of the American Romantic movement. His work is said to have had a great impact on the thinkers and writers who came after him. Once in an interview, he was asked how he would describe his work, to which he responded that the central ideology that motivated him was the “infinite of the private man”. He believed that when man was outside of society and lived as an individual there could be absolutely nothing that he could not achieve in this world.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, as mentioned earlier, was the second of five children who survived into adulthood, William, Edward, Robert Bulkeley and Charles, while three other siblings Phebe, Mary Caroline and John Clarke had died in infancy. The Emerson family was of English origin and had arrived in New England only at the beginning of the colonial period. Although the Emerson children were raised for the most part by their mother, one aunt in particular named Mary Moody Emerson was a regular member of the household, becoming a great influence especially on young Ralph Waldo Emerson. She also remained in constant contact with him until she died in the year 1863.

When Ralph Emerson was nine years old, he was enrolled at the Boston Latin School. In the year 1817, when Ralph Emerson was 14 years of age, he was appointed freshman messenger for the president. This meant he had to track and bring absconding students to college, and convey messages to faculty members. After some time, Ralph began making a list of books he was reading, and began a journal in notebooks called *Wide World*. In order to support his college education, he did odd jobs, including as a waiter and a teacher. He was not a remarkable student.

In the year 1826, Ralph Emerson was forced to relocate down south because the cold climate of Massachusetts was causing him serious health problems, finally settling down in St. Augustine in Florida. He began writing poetry and taking walks on the beach. It was here that he made friends with Prince Achile Murat, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. Murat had been two years older than him, they enjoyed discussing government, philosophy, poetry and much more. For the first time in Florida, Ralph Emerson encountered slavery, attending a Bible Society meeting one day while a slave auction took place in the courtyard.

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### 9.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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The essay *Self-Reliance* by the essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson had been first published in his first collection of essays titled *Essays First Series* in the year 1841. As the title itself suggests, the essay explains the importance of human beings to depend on their own instincts and take charge of their own lives.

## NOTES

## NOTES

This essay was his most famous one, reiterating his philosophy of individualism and rejection of succumbing to societal pressures of any kind. However, some critics do not agree with the philosophy that forms the basis of this essay.

Ralph Waldo Emerson never actually spoke on any specific topics, but usually elaborated on his ideas and theories. For instance, he believed that society forced individuals to conform to set rules, which made human beings forget and abandon their inherent individuality. Perhaps he also felt that society compelled individuals to live life against their actual ideologies.

The central theme of the essay demonstrates Ralph Emerson's belief that human beings are best able to function effectively when they live as individuals, by their own set of standards.

Ralph Emerson further stated that individuals needed to exercise self-autonomy of stoicism, the revolution of the philosopher Kant, and the Building of Goethe, but using language that was easy to understand and relate to. Emerson believed that individuals needed to steer away from social conformity and so-called consistency and regularity offered by society, relying instead on their own knowledge and intellect in quaint decisions and taking charge of the direction in which their life was progressing.

On the face of it, this philosophy of individualism may appear to be pretty simple to understand and to follow. But human beings are essentially known as social animals, who are required to conform to social standards, adhere to social rules and follow social tenets to survive and progress. Ralph Emerson himself also lived within that society, teaching, lecturing, giving public speeches and writing. For long periods in his life, Ralph Emerson had also worked as a Pastor in various churches across the United States. These roles are essentially connected to, and aligned to, society and the social structure.

Perhaps the argument that most of the scholars and critics had with this theory of individualism, therefore, had to do with this fact. Because in spite of his theory of individualism, and the need for human beings to take charge of their own lives and to abstain from conforming to social pressures, Ralph Emerson had lived and essayed various roles within that society.

Arguably, all human beings are required to live within a society, because at the end of the day all human beings are inter-dependent, forming an invisible support system. It is therefore significant that Ralph Emerson had also given various sermons on this topic of self-reliance, at the various churches he had worked as Pastor.

After listening to his various speeches, lectures and sermons on this topic of self-reliance, critics and scholars have divided this essay into three parts to make it easier for his audience to understand, identify with and apply to their daily lives. This is in spite of the fact that Ralph Emerson himself

had not thought it important or significant to divide the essay thus. These parts include The value of and barriers to self-reliance, self-reliance and the individual, and self-reliance and society.

Essentially, though, this division of the original essay does not actually take away from Ralph's original message. On the contrary, this division of the original essay only appears to make its meaning less complex and easier for the layman to understand.

## NOTES

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### 9.4 THEME

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The central theme of this essay is Ralph's theory that human beings need to steer away from conforming to society and its pressures as well as the fallacy of consistency and regularity. The essay demonstrates his belief that human beings need to exercise self-autonomy.

Yet perhaps the most important reason that Ralph Emerson began to advocate self-reliance was the fact that human beings find it so easy to accept the opinions and judgments of others – people who have no agency or relevance in their lives whatsoever. Emerson believed that if people wanted to improve themselves, and improve their thinking, then they needed to consider themselves to be individuals, and exercise complete self-autonomy over their lives.

It is quite possible that the earliest Ralph Emerson began ruminating on this theory, and taking it forward to this essay, would have been when he encountered slavery for the first time in his life when he had relocated to Florida to recover from an illness. According to reports, one day as Ralph Waldo Emerson sat attending a sermon at the Bible Society, there had been a slave auction taking place in the courtyard outside. It concerned him terribly that no one in the church thought it necessary to intervene or even to raise an objection. Later, Emerson was to recall that while the congregation was listening to verses about the good tidings, they could hear the auction taking place outside. For the first time in his life, Ralph Emerson encountered other human beings who had absolutely no control over their lives.

“To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost...”

According to Ralph, when people begin to believe in the depths of their hearts that they are capable of achieving anything, everything, then they are able to convince other that they are capable of achieving anything, everything. That is sheer genius, because it means they do not believe in the judgment and opinions of others. Also, when people begin to believe in their innermost heart that they are able to do something, then that thought in due

## NOTES

course of time manifests itself into the outside world as well, which means it becomes reality, no matter what others may have thought or said. Therefore, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, people should never believe what others say or think about them. They should only continue to believe in their ability to achieve anything, and believe that it will become reality one day.

Ralph Emerson lived too by this tenet, and did not allow anyone to judge or opine in his life. He was not a brilliant student at Harvard University, yet he was successful and content in his own life. The theme of this essay stands true and relevant in all generations. People find it easy to believe the judgment and opinions about themselves, giving those others power to control their innermost thoughts and convictions. Instead, it is important for them to believe that if they were to believe in themselves, they would be able to achieve anything and everything. Everyone is capable of thinking and believing in themselves, as individuals, they should never give anyone else the right to make them feel inferior.

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Ralph Waldo Emerson born?
2. Name the first essay of Emerson explaining transcendentalism.

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## 9.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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The essay *Self-Reliance* was first published in the year 1841. Critics, however report that Ralph Emerson had first given a lecture on this topic in as early as the year 1830, and he had been a strong exponent and advocate of the theory of individualism and self-autonomy. Ralph Emerson had himself remained a part of society through his entire life, essaying many roles such as teacher, lecturer, orator, pastor, essayist and poet.

In the matter of individualism and self-autonomy, it is obvious that Ralph Emerson believed in his heart that he could achieve just about anything he set his mind to, and this is precisely what did happen. Because while at Harvard University, Ralph Emerson did not prove himself to be a particularly brilliant student. He appeared to have been average at studies, and remained somewhere midway down the class at graduation. Yet, throughout his entire life, those grades and opinions of others did not appear to have really bothered him, for he went on to do what he wanted, and did it very well as well. Ralph Waldo Emerson had believed he had something to tell others, and to make a change in the society he was living in. And this precisely what he appears to have done. He did this through his lectures, public speeches and the subsequent essays he had had published on the topics of these lectures and speeches. To the extent that to this generation, people are reading his essays, and reading about his life, and are able to change the course of their

thinking and self-belief, and therefore to change the course of their own lives and achievements.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

As has been mentioned in earlier sections, scholars who came after him, have divided this essay into three parts. Their decision to divide this essay in this manner probably stem from the content of the various lectures, sermons and public speeches that Ralph Waldo Emerson gave in the years following its first publication in the year 1831.

## NOTES

Here, we are taking a look at the three divisions to the essay *Self-Reliance*:

1. **The Value of and Barriers to Self-Reliance:** Ralph Emerson opened this essay with the profound words, “To believe in your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, - that is genius.” The term ‘profound’ is intended to show his audiences the depth and the wisdom of the thoughts that were born of his own self-belief. As human beings, people at the individual level usually are governed by what others think about them, or how others judge their thoughts, actions and words. Ralph Emerson believed that individuals needed to be self-reliant in the context of their inmost thoughts and beliefs. An individual is capable of achieving anything. People need to believe that they are capable of achieving anything and everything. To be able to understand the value of this belief, people need to understand that they should begin to think and believe for themselves and in themselves. Human beings need to discard the opinions and judgments that others form about them, This where the idea of self-reliance makes an entry. By the term self-reliance, Ralph Waldo Emerson obviously meant that as individuals, all human beings needed to become self-reliant in what they thought about themselves, or what they believed in their inmost an private hearts about themselves.
2. **Self-Reliance and the Individual:** In this section, Ralph Waldo Emerson has explored the need for all human beings, in the capacity of individuals, to become completely self-reliant. Becoming self-reliant in what they think or what they do is important, because it means they begin to reject what others think or say about them, and begin to think and believe only the best about themselves. This is where individuals begin to form and nurture genuine thoughts and beliefs about themselves, and this is where individuals begin to learn to trust no one else but themselves, about what they are capable of thinking and what they are capable of achieving in the world. At this point, individuals begin to learn to believe in the power of their own private thoughts, and the power of their own beliefs about themselves. Contrary to what many people may surmise, individuals who begin to think the best about themselves in their inmost hearts, and who subsequently begin to believe the best about their abilities to achieve just about anything and everything in the world they set their mind and hearts to.

## NOTES

However, as Ralph Waldo Emerson explains and proves, individuals can and should continue to live in society, be a part of that society, and yet shape their own thinking and beliefs about themselves to think and believe only the best about themselves. Self-reliance in the areas of thinking and believing about the self is very significant and essential for individuals. Because it is only in the capacity of individuals that they can achieve self-reliance in what they think about themselves, and what they believe about their abilities, and how they learn to connect their inmost thoughts, their beliefs about their own abilities to make those thoughts transform into reality, and their abilities to actually work towards making those thoughts and beliefs become reality.

3. **Self-Reliance and Society:** In the previous section, we saw how self-reliance benefits individuals within a society by turning and shaping their thoughts and beliefs about themselves and their abilities to achieve anything they wanted to in the world. We saw how self-reliance is able to thus benefit all individuals living in any society. In this final section, Ralph Waldo Emerson explains how when individuals begin to become self-reliant, they are able to benefit the society they are living in. This is what Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests, “It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.” It is important to understand when individuals become self-reliant in the religion they practice, they stop forcing their views or opinions on others around them, becoming more tolerant, and giving other people the freedom to become self-reliant themselves. According to Ralph Emerson, self-reliance in religion also allows individuals to pray for and by themselves, creating a direct connect between themselves and God. This means individuals who are able to pray on their own, in the privacy of their hearts, are capably of becoming content with their lives, avoiding regret and repentance because they are able to connect directly with their God, avoiding any middlemen to intervene on their behalf.

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## 9.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The essay *Self-Reliance*, had been intended as a tool for Ralph Waldo Emerson to expound and explore his theory of individualism. What also appears to have remained constant throughout all those years is the fact that as a philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson believed fiercely that all human beings needed to remain individuals within a society, and retain their individualism within that society. Being entirely self-reliant would be the only way in which

those individuals could benefit both themselves as well as the society they were living in.

Significantly, Ralph Emerson has used this essay to explain to his audience that individuals could learn to become self-reliant in their religious beliefs and rely only on their own instincts rather than obey blindly what others may be ordering them to. This ideology would appear to have been a contradiction to what Ralph Emerson himself did most of the time as a pastor. It is obvious that churches and pastors usually order their congregations to follow their teachings entirely, even in their private and personal lives, or perhaps more so in their private and personal lives.

However, contrary to most of his contemporaries, Ralph Waldo Emerson rejected the concept that God was a part of this world. Ralph Emerson actually appeared to have preached that members of his congregations needed to become entirely self-reliant in every sphere of their lives. Individuals who were self-reliant, Emerson believed, would learn to rely on their own instincts of what is right and what is wrong.

## NOTES

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### 9.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The essay *Self-Reliance* had been written and first published by the philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson as part of his first volume of essays titled *Essays First Series*. This volume had been first published in the year 1841. Ralph Waldo Emerson appears to have written this essay to explain his theory of individualism and the self.

Later, between the year 1836 and 1827, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave a series of sermons at the Boston Masonic Temple. The topic used to be his philosophy of history. However, none of these sermons were published on an individual basis ever. Specific parts that related to the topic of self-reliance. However, had been included in the essay *Self-Reliance* that finally came to be published in the year 1831 as part of his first volume of essays titled *Essays First Series*.

It becomes important to understand that although Ralph Waldo Emerson had been serving as a pastor, and these sermons had been given in the churches he was then serving at, his views on religion and prayer would have been considered too radical and revolutionary for the church. Such radical views would be considered unseemly to be topics of sermons even in this generation. Obviously, Ralph Waldo received considerable censure and flak for these sermons. Emerson's views on religion and prayer that have been expounded in the essay certainly would have drawn immense flak from his congregation and other clergymen.

Later, Ralph Waldo Emerson pioneered the Transcendental Movement in America, which led to many more lectures and public speeches on

## NOTES

controversial topics. Of these *Self-Reliance* and *Nature* remain the most famous and widely read of all his essays. Some other areas he covered in this and other essays included personal responsibility, individualism and nonconformity to social pressures.

### Check Your Progress

3. When was the essay *Self-Reliance* published?
4. What is the central theme of the essay *Self-Reliance*?

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## 9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803.
2. The first essay of Emerson explaining this transcendentalism was *Nature*.
3. The essay *Self-Reliance* was published in the year 1841.
4. The central theme of the essay *Self-Reliance* is Ralph's theory that human beings need to steer away from conforming to society and its pressures as well as the fallacy of consistency and regularity.

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## 9.9 SUMMARY

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- Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts.
- He was the second son of his parents Ruth Haskins and Rev William Emerson, who had been a Unitarian minister.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson appeared to gradually move away from the religious beliefs of his family and friends, beginning to believe instead in transcendentalism.
- Increasingly, Ralph Waldo Emerson had begun to rebel against the societal pressures of his generation, veering towards individualism.
- After his essay *Nature* Ralph Waldo Emerson gave his first public speech on the topic of transcendentalism, titled *The American Scholar*, which was widely attended.
- The essay *Self-Reliance* by the essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson had been first published in his first collection of essays titled *Essays First Series* in the year 1841.
- The central theme of the essay demonstrates Ralph Emerson's belief that human beings are best able to function effectively when they live as individuals, by their own set of standards.

- The central theme of this essay is It is quite possible that the earliest Ralph Emerson began ruminating on this theory, and taking it forward to this essay, would have been when he encountered slavery for the first time in his life when he had relocated to Florida to recover from an illness.
- Ralph’s theory that human beings need to steer away from conforming to society and its pressures as well as the fallacy of consistency and regularity.
- The essay *Self-Reliance*, had been intended as a tool for Ralph Waldo Emerson to expound and explore his theory of individualism.
- The essay *Self-Reliance* had been written and first published by the philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson as part of his first volume of essays titled *Essays First Series*.

## NOTES

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### 9.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Transcendentalism:** Transcendentalism is an American literary, political, and philosophical movement of the early nineteenth century, centered around Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- **Individualism:** Individualism is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual.
- **American Romantic movement:** American Romanticism was the first full-fledged literary movement that developed in the U.S. It was made up of a group of authors who wrote and published between about 1820 and 1860, when the U.S. was still finding its feet as a new nation.

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### 9.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson as an author.
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson was a proponent of individualism. Comment on the statement with reference to the text.
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Self-Reliance*?
4. State the three divisions of the essay *Self-Reliance* mentioned by the critics.

NOTES

**Long Answer Questions**

1. What are the main propositions of the essay *Self-Reliance*? Discuss.
2. How important society is in the life of an individual? Discuss with reference to Emerson's views on individualism.
3. Write a critical appreciation of *Self-Reliance*.
4. What are the issues highlighted in th essay *Self-Reliance*? Discuss.

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**9.12 FURTHER READINGS**

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 10 HENRY DAVID THOREAU

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### Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 About the Author
- 10.3 Summary of the Essay
- 10.4 Theme
- 10.5 Critical Appreciation
- 10.6 Issues and Analysis
- 10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.8 Summary
- 10.9 Key Words
- 10.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.11 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 10.0 INTRODUCTION

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Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. He began writing nature poetry in the 1840s, with poet Ralph Waldo Emerson as a mentor and friend. In 1845 he began his famous two-year stay on Walden Pond, which he wrote about in his master work, *Walden*. He also became known for his beliefs in transcendentalism and civil disobedience, and was a dedicated abolitionist. One of America's most famous writers, Henry David Thoreau is remembered for his philosophical and naturalist writings.

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### 10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of Henry David Thoreau as an author
- Discuss the major theme of the essay *Civil Disobedience*
- Learn about the issues that this essay deals with
- Know about other major works of Henry David Thoreau

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### 10.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Henry David Thoreau was an American essayist, philosopher, transcendentalist, historian, naturalist, poet, abolitionist, development critic, tax resister, conservationist, author and a surveyor.

His most famous essay has remained the one titled *Civil Disobedience*, which was originally titled resistance to Civil Government, showing

disobedience or dissent to an unjust government. Among his most notable books will always remain the one titled *Walden* which advocated the concept of simple living in natural surroundings.

## NOTES

Henry David Thoreau is best remembered today as an advocate of ecology and environmental history, which are two prominent sources of environmentalism. He is also remembered for his work on philosophy and natural history.

Henry Thoreau possessed a unique style of writing which included personal experience, tales from history, rhetoric, observation of nature and symbolic meanings. His writing revealed a keen eye for practical details, poetic and aesthetic sensibility and a philosophical subtlety. Henry Thoreau's views and philosophy of civil disobedience were to impact and shape such global world leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy and Martin Luther King. He supported John Brown who fought for the abolition of slavery, and attacked and criticized the Fugitive State Law in his public lectures and speeches. Through his public speeches, lectures and essay on the topic of civil disobedience, Henry Thoreau demanded better governance immediately, as against no government at all in spite of the fact that he was often referred to as an anarchist. In this context, Thoreau stated, "That government is best which governs not at all." Obviously, Henry Thoreau believed that in order to be good at it, government needed to be liberal, allowing people personal space and rights and freedom.

Henry David Thoreau was christened David Henry Thoreau and was born on July 12, 1817. His father John Thoreau was a modest pencil maker. Henry Thoreau's paternal grandfather had been born on the British colonial island of Jersey. Asa Dunbar, his maternal grandfather, had led the Harvard University student Butter Rebellion in the year 1766, which is the first ever student revolution in the history of the then colonial America. Rebellion and state disobedience appears to have been hereditary. As mentioned earlier he had been christened David Henry Thoreau after his paternal uncle David Thoreau, and changed his name to Henry David Thoreau after completing college, but never did so legally. Henry David had an older sister Helen, an older brother John and a younger sister Sophia.

Henry Thoreau studied, science, math, classical philosophy and rhetoric at Harvard College between the years 1835 and 1837. At the end of his course, Henry Thoreau was asked to pay five dollars to receive the master's certificate, which he refused. During those years, most college graduates used to pursue careers either law, medicine, the church or business. None of these appealed to Henry Thoreau, so in 1835, he took leave from Harvard to teach a school in Concord. After completing his master's in the year 1837, Henry Thoreau began teaching at the Concord Public School. He was required to use corporal punishment, so after a few years, he resigned from his post. In the year 1838, Henry and John Thoreau opened the Concord

Grammar School, where they introduced many innovative concepts such as nature walks, and visits to local businesses and shops. However, in the year 1842, John cut himself while shaving, which led to tetanus. After this, the Thoreau brothers were forced to close their school. Around this time, Henry had met Ralph Waldo Emerson through a mutual friend. Emerson, who was about 14 years older, began mentoring Henry Thoreau, introducing him to local writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and his son Julian, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and Ellery Channing.

## NOTES

Margaret Fuller, who was at the time the editor of the quarterly journal *The Dial*, began to publish essays and poems contributed by Henry Thoreau on a regular basis. On Ralph Emerson's suggestion, in January of the year 1837, Henry Thoreau had begun to keep journals, and his first essay that got published in *The Dial* on a Russian writer, was an edited journal entry.

Under the influence of the older Ralph Emerson, Henry David Thoreau began to be more interested in nature, and gradually discovering the benefits of living close to nature. He said, I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

It was beautiful and commendable that together with Emerson, Henry Thoreau began to live closer to nature. He had discovered that ecology and environmental balance were issues that needed to be dealt with, and perhaps the terms ecological balance and environmental management were ones which were first introduced during those years. Through his writings, such as the book titled *Walden*, Henry Thoreau had decided to advocate the cause of nature and living among natural surroundings. He believed that unless he lived close to nature, he would not be actually living.

In July of the year 1846, the local tax official met Henry Thoreau and demanded six years of tax arrears. This was known as the poll tax. The United States at the time was involved in the Mexican War, and banning Mexican immigrants from entering the country. Henry Thoreau, who thought the taxes paid by individuals would be used to fund the war, refused to pay up, landing in jail. But the next day he was released from prison, because obviously someone had paid for him. This incident led to his public lecture on the topic the rights and duties of the individual in relation to the Government. This was obviously the beginning of his thoughts on Civil Disobedience.

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### 10.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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#### NOTES

The theme of the essay *Civil Disobedience* written by the American philosopher and essayist Henry David Thoreau was based, essentially, on his personal experiences in July of the year 1848 after which he gave lectures in front of the Concorde Lyceum, or Parliament on the topic of the rights and duties of the individual in relation to the Government. The lecture was his open and direct reaction to his encounter with a government tax official, which resulted in him being imprisoned for one night.

Henry Thoreau was influenced by his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had expounded the theory of individualism and self-autonomy. Emerson's theory had been based on his personal experiences which led him to believe that human beings were essentially individuals, and although they were living in society, they needed to remain individuals and practice self-autonomy. Emerson had maintained that civilization is social order that leads to cultural creativity. Emerson's philosophies on individualism and transcendentalism were to influence the younger Henry Thoreau immensely.

Henry Thoreau himself belonged to a family that was not new or adverse to rebellion and revolt. Henry Thoreau believed that as human beings, individuals needed to live by certain principles. In that context, when confronted by a government tax collector in the year 1848, and asked to pay six years arrears of poll taxes, Henry Thoreau had flatly refused to do so. This had resulted in his imprisonment at the Concord jail. But he had been released the next morning. This skirmish had resulted in the lecture outside the Concorde Lysceum.

Henry Thoreau had obviously believed that the government had no right to force or compel individuals to pay for anything, especially when it concerned going to war with a vulnerable smaller country. Henry Thoreau believed that the government was responsible for good governance, and not impinge on individual freedom, private space and personal rights.

The lecture outside the Concord Lyceum, therefore, was a debate on the rights of individuals and their duties, if any, towards the government. He included several examples of other individuals across the United States who had been targeted by the government for having exercised their personal freedom.

This had been Henry David Thoreau's first of several such public lectures in the years to come. Yet, he had obviously done his research well, while he had also obviously benefited from the several contacts that Emerson had introduced him to. The lecture had attracted a huge audience, and the fact that he had chosen the venue well added to its effectiveness and impact.

Later, Henry David Thoreau had edited the content of the lecture to some extent, and changed its title to just *Civil Disobediene* before getting it published in the print media.

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## 10.4 THEME

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## NOTES

The central theme of the essay had been the rights of individuals in a country, and their possible duties towards the government in power. Through the essay, Henry Thoreau had demanded the immediate formation of a better government – as against the immediate removal of a government altogether.

It had been a while since he had been studying for his master’s degree at the Harvard College that Henry Thoreau first exhibited signs of living by strict principles in his life. When being asked to pay five dollars to receive a degree certificate, Henry Thoreau had insisted that he would rather not receive a master’s degree certificate than have to pay for something that he had earned through his efforts.

On being asked to pay six years arrears in poll taxes, which he learned was to be used to fund the American war in Mexico, Henry Thoreau had flatly refused. This had led to him being imprisoned. But he had been released the next morning, because some relative had apparently paid his taxes instead. This had been the beginning of his civil disobedience. Henry Thoreau had subsequently learnt that the government had targeted many other individuals across the United States who wanted to exercise their freedom and personal rights.

Adding those incidents to his own experience of spending one night at the Concord Jail, Henry David Thoreau had written the essay. The central theme of the essay had begun with the rights of individuals and their duties, if any, towards their government. But Thoreau had expanded on this theme to demand that the present government should be asked to step down, and a better government should be formed with immediate effect. Although Henry Thoreau had specifically demanded that the present government should be changed, and stated that he was not demanding the immediate arbitrary removal of the present government, he had received much criticism for this demand. Many of his critics had stated that the essay had proved that Henry David Thoreau was an arsonist, and that he was only interested in removing the government because had been asked to pay his taxes.

Henry David Thoreau, on the contrary, had used his essay to argue that individuals had every right to live in society with complete freedom, and that the government could not force them to do anything, especially pay for the expenses the government incurred to conduct war on another country.

Henry Thoreau further elaborated on this theme by stating that the government was responsible for the personal freedom of the individuals

living in their country, and could not force them to do something that those individuals believed would invade their personal space and rights.

## NOTES

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### 10.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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According to Henry Thoreau, citizens living in a country were first of all individuals. As individuals, the government could not force them to pay for the wars or atrocities the country was carrying out in other parts of the world. Especially if the individuals did not agree with the government policies on those wars, or for any other policies as well. Henry Thoreau argued that individuals could exercise their rights to put their foot down and not support those wars or policies on immigration and such like. But, the government had certain responsibilities towards those individuals, because they had been voted to power by those individuals. Perhaps Henry Thoreau believed that the government could take taxes from the individuals, but use those taxes to improve the lives of the people living in the country.

Henry Thoreau had earlier been introduced to leading literary figures in Concord by his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, such as Margaret Fuller, Editor of a quarterly journal. With their support, Henry Thoreau had prepared a lecture on the topic of the rights of individuals in a country and chose to deliver the lecture outside the Concord Lyceum, or parliament. Thoreau had included the examples of all the other people who had been similarly targeted by the government, but his own recent experiences had also gained considerable public attention by then. During the lecture, Henry Thoreau had demanded an immediate change of government, a better government. Although there were those who criticized him and claimed that he had demanded that the country did not need a government, Henry Thoreau was clear and firm in his demand for an immediate and better government, insisting that the option was not to have no government at all.

By better government, however, Henry Thoreau obviously intended that the government should recognize the rights and freedom of individuals living within their country, and that the government had no authority to impinge on those rights at any time, or demand that those individuals should obey them without consent. This meant, that Henry Thoreau was strongly advocating that the government should not force the individual to do anything they did not want to. In this context, Henry David Thoreau, reflecting the ideology of his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, was also advocating individualism and self-autonomy or self-governance.

The lecture was first published in 1949 by Margaret Peabody in the journal *Aesthetic Papers* under the title *Resistance to Civil Government*. The essay demonstrated Thoreau's metaphor for the government as a machine, and if the government was unjust, then the citizens or individuals said Thoreau had the duty to offer counter-friction and stop the machine. This was clearly a

demand for change, that individuals had a duty to demand a better government if they were suffering injustice.

Four years after Henry David Thoreau, in the year 1866, the essay was reprinted under the title *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*. It was obvious that Henry Thoreau had advocated, through the essay, that citizens had a duty to offer civil disobedience in the face of injustice from a civil government. This was entirely contrary to the theory of non-resistance demanded by some people. Henry Thoreau believed that individuals had the right to demand a better government and rights from their civil government. In that context, he believed that the civil government had the duty to provide individuals basic rights and freedom of choice. Thoreau believed that individuals should have the freedom whether to support policies ordained by their civil government, and they had the right to resist injustice and atrocities meted out by their civil government. Many people thought that this meant Henry David Thoreau was advocating anarchy. On the contrary, Henry Thoreau was demanding a better government, which would recognize personal rights and freedom of choice of individuals or citizens in their country.

Henry David Thoreau was a strong advocate of individualism, and believed that individuals had the right to practice self-governance. He believed that when the civil government machinery failed to function properly, or developed problems with the machinery, individuals, or citizens had the duty to offer counter friction, or open resistance, to that injustice and demand justice and better governance from the government.

## NOTES

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### 10.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The primary issue with the essay was that it has been reprinted so many times with as many changes in the title. However, for the most part it has always advocated the rights and duties of individuals in relation to the civil government.

It is important to understand what exactly Henry David Thoreau had meant when he said individuals had a duty to offer resistance to their civil government. During those times, many countries across the world were fighting for independence from foreign rule, and many of these countries were advocating a form of non-resistance to gain their freedom. Contrary to this policy, however, Henry David Thoreau was openly beginning to resist all forms of injustice in America, demanding that individuals should exercise their rights and their duties to demand better government and resist the injustice from their government. During times when people across the world were advocating non-resistance, this demand and advocacy for civil disobedience made Henry David Thoreau receive an equal amount of criticism and negative reactions. Considering his theory rationally, it is

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important to note that Henry Thoreau described the civil government as a machine. According to him, when a machine failed to function properly, or developed problems in its functioning, it needed people to set it right, or to make it function well again. Similarly, explained Henry Thoreau, when the government used injustice to silence or subdue its citizens, those individuals had the duty to offer resistance, or counter friction, in order to set the wrongs right, or demand a better government, or a change in the existing government.

Henry David Thoreau believed that the government was not permanent, and needed to be changed when it stopped functioning properly or according to its mandate.

Henry David Thoreau's advocacy and open demand for civil disobedience and resistance to the civil government instantly became a source of inspiration for political leaders across the world, who were at the time fighting to gain independence from foreign rule.

These world leaders included Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King. These world leaders became instantly inspired, using civil disobedience as a tool to fight the injustice and atrocities of their foreign rulers, demanding independence with immediate effect. In India, especially, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi used civil disobedience to garner public support and bring his countrymen together in the war for independence.

But the theory of civil disobedience was also not without its fair share of critics and there were many people who believed that non-resistance or passive aggression would fetch better results. Those were the years of great turmoil across the world, and people who were suffering great injustice were exploring new avenues and ways to find a way out and gain freedom from that injustice. Against that background, the theory advocated by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau for individualism, and the right of individuals to exercise self-governance received a great deal of attention and consideration. Like any new and innovative theories or concepts, this concept of individualism and the right of individuals to self-government, and the duty of individuals to resist injustice became a source of great debate and discussion, gaining equal support and critics.

### Check Your Progress

1. Mention any one famous work of Henry David Thoreau.
2. Who were the leaders inspired by Henry David Thoreau's works?
3. What was the central theme of the essay *The Civil Disobedience*?

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## 10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. *Walden* is one famous work of Henry David Thoreau.
2. Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy and Martin Luther King were the leaders inspired by Henry David Thoreau's works.
3. The central theme of the essay had been the rights of individuals in a country, and their possible duties towards the government in power.

## NOTES

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## 10.8 SUMMARY

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- Henry David Thoreau was an American essayist, philosopher, transcendentalist, historian, naturalist, poet, abolitionist, development critic, tax resister, conservationist, author and a surveyor.
- His most famous essay has remained the one titled *Civil Disobedience*, which was originally titled resistance to Civil Government, showing disobedience or dissent to an unjust government.
- Henry David Thoreau is best remembered today as an advocate of ecology and environmental history, which are two prominent sources of environmentalism.
- Henry Thoreau possessed a unique style of writing which included personal experience, tales from history, rhetoric, observation of nature and symbolic meanings.
- Henry David Thoreau was christened David Henry Thoreau and was born on July 12, 1817. His father John Thoreau was a modest pencil maker.
- Under the influence of the older Ralph Emerson, Henry David Thoreau began to be more interested in nature, and gradually discovering the benefits of living close to nature.
- Henry Thoreau was influenced by his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had expounded the theory of individualism and self-autonomy.
- Henry Thoreau himself belonged to a family that was not new or adverse to rebellion and revolt. Henry Thoreau believed that as human beings, individuals needed to live by certain principles.
- The central theme of the essay had been the rights of individuals in a country, and their possible duties towards the government in power.
- According to Henry Thoreau, citizens living in a country were first of all individuals. As individuals, the government could not force them to pay for the wars or atrocities the country was carrying out in other parts of the world.

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## 10.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Rhetoric:** Rhetoric refers to the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.
- **Abolitionist:** A person who favours the abolition of a practice or institution, especially capital punishment or (formerly) slavery is called an abolitionist.
- **Aesthetics:** Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that explores the nature of art, beauty, and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty.

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## 10.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Thoreau's life as an author.
2. Comment on the role of Ralph Waldo Emerson in Thoreau's life.
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Civil Disobedience*?
4. What led Thoreau write the essay *Civil Disobedience*?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the summary of the essay *Civil Disobedience* in detail.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Civil Disobedience*.
3. What are the issues highlighted in th essay *Civil Disobedience*
4. Throw light on the political thoughts of Thoreau with reference to the text *The Civil Disobedience*.

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## 10.11 FURTHER READINGS

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- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.
- Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 11 NGUGI WA THIONG'O

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### Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 About the Author
- 11.3 Summary of the Essay
- 11.4 Theme
- 11.5 Critical Appreciation
- 11.6 Issues and Analysis
- 11.7 Historical Background
- 11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.9 Summary
- 11.10 Key Words
- 11.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.12 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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Ngugi wa Thiong'o, original name James Thiong'o Ngugi was born on January 5, 1938 in Limuru, Kenya. As he became sensitized to the effects of colonialism in Africa, he adopted his traditional name and wrote in the his native language. Ngugi received bachelor's degrees from Makerere University in 1963 and from Leeds University, Yorkshire, England, in 1964. After doing graduate work at Leeds, he served as a lecturer in English at University College, Nairobi, Kenya, and as a visiting professor of English at Northwestern University.

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### 11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the life of author, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o
- Discuss the theme of the essay *Decolonising the Mind*
- Know about the major issues highlighted in this essay
- Learn the summary of the essay *Decolonising the Mind*

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### 11.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan essayist, novelist, playwright and short story writer. Earlier Ngugi Wa Thiong'o used to write in English, but in recent years has been writing in Gikuyu, the official language of Kenya. Some

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of Thiong'o's most famous work has been written for children. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o primary genres remain literature, social criticism and children's literature. Thiong'o is the founder and editor of the journal *Mutiiri*, which is published in the Gikuyu language.

In the year 1977, Ngugi began a unique and innovative form of theatre, which introduced extempore and audience participation. According to Ngugi, this has managed to liberate the entire theatrical process from the earlier general bourgeois education system. However, in spite of the fact that the project was a commercial success, the dictatorial Kenyan government shut it down just six weeks after it was started, because when ordinary people become educated, they become aware of their rights and demand answers. As a result of this project, Ngugi was imprisoned for more than a year. But he was then adopted by Amnesty International as an artist of conscience. Due to this intervention by an international organization, Ngugi was released from prison. On being released, he fled from Kenya.

Since then Ngugi has been living in the United States, teaching at the Yale University and New York University with a dual professorship in Comparative Literature and Performance Studies. Besides these two, Ngugi has also been teaching at the University of California, Irvine. Ngugi has often been shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was born in Kamiriithu in Kiambu district, in Kenya. He was christened James Nogogi. Ngugi belonged to the Kikuyu clan. The family had been embroiled in the Mau Mau war. Those were the times when entire families used to become involved in the fight for liberation, and Ngugi's family appeared to have been no different. Children used to grow up in environment where it was common to fight for liberation, and those environments used to shape the minds and psyches of the younger generations.

As a child, Ngugi Thiong'o attended the Alliance High School. After completing school, Ngugi Thiong'o enrolled at the Makerere University College situated in Kampala, Uganda. While studying at college, in June 1962, the African Writers Conference was held in Makerere, and Ngugi also went to attend it. Ngugi's play, titled *The Black Hermit* premiered at the conference.

By this time, Ngugi had started writing novels, though none of them had been published as yet. At the conference, the young Ngugi met Chimua Achebe, and requested him to read his manuscripts of his two novels, *The River Between*, and *Weep Not, Child*. Eventually, these two novels were to be published by the Heinemann's African Writers Series. This had been a new project that would be launched that same year in London, in which Achebe would head as its Advocacy Editor. The following year, in 1963, Ngugi received his Bachelors Degree in English from the Makerere University College.

Ngugi's novel titled *Weep Not, Child*, which got published in May of the year 1964 was acclaimed as being the first novel in English to have been published by a writer from East Africa. Perhaps this contributed to the fact that after Ngugi completed his Bachelor's degree, the University of Leeds in England offered him a scholarship to study the Master's program in English. Ngugi Thongo's thus traveled to Leeds. While he was still studying there, his second novel titled *The River Between* got published in the year 1965. This novel *The River Between* was set against the backdrop of the Mau Mau rebellion, and described in detail an unsuccessful and unhappy romantic liaison between a Christian and a non-Christian.

In the year 1967, Ngugi's novel titled *A Grain of Wheat* was published, which proclaimed to the world that Ngugi's had given up English, Christianity, and his Christian name James Nggogi. He changed his name to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, began to write in Gikuyu and Swahili, which were his native languages. Most importantly, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o became a Marxist. In the year 1975, Ngugi helped establish the Kamirithu Community Education and Cultural Center. This center began to be involved in, among other activities, African theatre in the region.

The first play he wrote and produced at this center, titled *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, provoked the then Kenyan vice president to term Ngugi and his play politically incendiary, and Ngugi was immediately arrested and sent to the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. While in prison, Ngugi was to write his first modern play in Gikuyu language titled *Caitani mũtharaba-Inĩ* (*Devil on the Cross*), on prison-issued toilet, on toilet paper issued by the prison authorities.

On being released from prison in December of the year 1978, Ngugi was not given back his post as professor at the Nation University, and his family began to be targeted and harassed due to his open criticism of the dictatorial regime in power at the time. Ngugi and his family were therefore forced to leave and live in exile. It was not until 22 years later, after the then vice president Arap Mot was voted out of power that Ngugi and his family were at last safe enough to return to their original home.

While in exile, Ngugi got engaged in political activities that spoke out against dictatorial regimes, working with the London-based Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners. He began writing for many international publications, working as Writer in Residence at the London-based Borough of Islington.

Ngugi's essays titled *Decolonising the Mind*, *Detained* and *The Politics of Language in African Literature* are considered advocates of the rights of African writers to express themselves in their original native African languages.

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In August of the year 2008, Ngugi and his wife returned to Kenya for a month-long tour. A mob broke into his high security apartment, sexually assaulted his wife, attacked Ngugi and stole many items of value. After this the couple returned to the United States. Ngugi published his first novel in nearly two decades title *Wizard of the Crow* in the year 2006, writing originally in the Gikuyu language, through Random House. Ngugi later translated the novel into English as well.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has received many international prizes and awards for his contribution to literature and related fields. These include the Lotus Prize for Literature in the year 1973, the Mohimo International Prize in Literature in the year 2001, shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize for Literature in the year 2009, the National Book Critic Circle Award for his novel titled *In the House of the Interpreter*, in the year 2012, the Nicolas Guillen Lifetime Achievement Award for Philosophical Literature in the year 2014, and the Park Kyong-ni Prize in the year 2016.

Ngugi has also been the recipient of many honorary degrees from universities across the world. These include the Doctorate of Letters from the University of Auckland in the year 2005, the Doctorate in Literature from the University of Dar as Salaam in the year 2013, a Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Bayreuth in the year 2014, and the Doctorate in Literature from Yale University in the year 2017.

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### 11.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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In the essay titled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, the Kenyan essayist and novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has explored and explained his theory that language exists as culture, and language exists as communication.

Living his childhood years in Kenya, an East African country that long suffered the atrocities of dictatorial governance, influenced his thinking and his writing. Ngugi was raised as James Ngugi, and like most Kenyans at the time, was raised to be a Christian. He received his education in the English Language, and studied his bachelor's degree in English in Kenya. Subsequently, Ngugi had travelled to the University of Leeds to pursue his master's degree in English on a scholarship. Although he never completed the program, the topic of his thesis had apparently changed the course of his life. Ngugi returned to his native Kenya, determined to abandon English and begin writing in his native languages Gikuyu and Swahili.

The essay explores the purpose of language in life. Although language is primarily part of culture, the use of a specific language as a medium of communication and expression becomes a political agenda, sidetracking and ignoring its cultural significance and purpose in society.

For some years, Ngugi had written solely in the English language, becoming the first Kenyan writer to be published in English. This distinction obviously placed Ngugi in the higher echelons of society. However, beginning to work on his thesis, he connected immediately with the subject of his thesis, a Caribbean aygor and his works..

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o believed that English had been forced as a language of communication and expression in most African countries as a result of the British colonization. Besides the language, Ngugi considered Christianity to have been a remnant of the colonial period.

Ngugi began to expound his theory that the African people should abandon both the Christian religion as well as the English language, going back instead to their cultural heritage and roots, learning to express and work through their native African languages.

The titled of this essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* was to instantly become significant, because it was precisely at this time that Ngugi decided to return to his African heritage and language Gikuyu and Swahili, and abandoning all traces of the imperial colonial rule including religion and language.

This became a political rebellion of sorts, because the dictatorial regime in Kenya at the moment had been predominantly Christian, and had been using English as the official political language. Moving away from the Christian faith, and from the English language was a conscious effort on Ngugi's part to decolonize his mind and psyche, and return to his Kenyan ancestry ad heritage. This move was also a blatant endeavor to stop using English and go back to using Gikuyu and Swahili.

Ngugi's simultaneous use of theater in the Gikuyu language was also seen as a form of open rebellion attempting to incite the ordinary people to think, question and revolt against the dictatorial regime then in power. Eventually, this then, was the central concept of the essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What is the official language of Kenya?
2. Mention any two important essays written by Ngugi.

## 11.4 THEME

The central theme running through the entire essay titled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, by the African essayist and writer, is the politicization of language in Kenya and other African countries by dictatorial regimes. While reading this essay, what strikes the

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audience is that in a country like Kenya, using his native Gikuyu for his writing and theater productions only managed to jeopardise Ngugi's life, to the extent that he had to flee and find refuge in the United States.

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On the one hand his native languages are intended to be their cultural heritage, and so he says he decided to switch to the Gikuyu and Swahili languages in both his writing and his theater productions. The ordinary people of Kenya who had not been educated in the English language, had long been oppressed by the dictatorial regime. Because the medium of instruction had earlier been English, the ordinary people had not had access to education, ensuring that they would not be able to become aware, ask questions, or protest against the fascist regime in power. The lack of knowledge had managed to keep the ordinary Kenyan people as oppressed after the end of the colonial rule as they had been during it.

According to Ngugi, the fascist regime in all African countries have been attempting to prevent African literature from becoming accessible to the common people, because they feared that knowledge would motivate them to rebel against the governments.

In Kenya, under the colonial rule, the citizens had suffered a complete form of colonization, just as in most other colonies of the British Empire. In African countries, especially, both religion as well as language had been forced upon citizens by the colonial rulers.

According to Ngugi, therefore, language had become the greatest tool that the fascist governments could use to control every aspect and area of African lives, especially their literature and education. The essayist Ngugi has used the issue of language and its use as a political weapon to subdue and oppress people, as the central theme of this essay, probably in an effort to convey to the outside world the extent to which the citizens were being oppressed in Kenya as well as in other African countries. Language is not just cultural heritage, but it is also a medium of communication and expression. Although writers, playwrights, poets and film makers have long been attempting to use their art to engage the citizens in political activities, the political parties in power have long sought to tighten their leash and prevent them from communicating with the citizens by imprisoning them in high security prisons forcing authors such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o to flee the country to safer countries.

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## 11.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* is essentially a collection of essays written by the Kenyan novelist, essayist, and independent theorist and philosopher. Essentially, all the essays which have been compiled into this collection can be said to have one central theme,

that of language as a tool in every area of life. But more importantly, the use of language by the fascist and dictatorial regime in Kenya and other African countries as a political tool which is used to subdue the media and the ordinary citizens.

Kenya, as many other countries in the world, had at one time been a British colony. The remnants and repercussions of that colonization were the spread of Christianity and English language. The British Imperial Kingdom had spread not just its political umbrella across the entire world, but it had taken its Christian faith and the English language with it. This is how the English language has now become the first language of communication across the world.

Even after gaining independence, none of the old colonial subjects have given up either the Christian faith or the English language. While every country has as many Christians as the original religious groups, the use of English in education, media, and the business and professional spaces is also something that continues to exist. This is what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has to say in one of these essays:

“Does the author choose to work in a local language or a major European one? If the former — how does the work get translated and by whom? What might the translation have done to the work? What kind of semantic processes of abrogation/deformation and appropriation/reformation occur in the work? When a local language lends terms, in what context do they occur? Finally, what does the use of language imply about an implicit theory of resistance?”

Suddenly, the debate about the language of communication and expression became the primary concern. Ngugi was perhaps the first author to have raised this question. Until then, writers had been using a language without much thought about the context and the intended audience. Most writers use a language to write in because they are comfortable using that particular language. They do not actually stop to think about the context, the context of the subject, and the intended audience, who is expected to read their work.

These were pertinent questions, and very relevant in any generation of writers and authors. If writers are using a local language, then they have nothing to worry about because the local people, for whom the work is obviously intended, will be able to read and assimilate the content. But if the writers are choosing a foreign language, usually a European language, then the entire purpose of writing that work will be lost completely. Because only those foreign audiences who are able to read and understand the language will be able to read their work.

So, that means the writing will need to be later translated into the authors's local language, so that the citizens of their countries will be able to

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read and relate to that writing. So once again the quest comes up, who will be assigned the task of translating that writing from the original language into the local one? Usually the translators are chosen by the publishers. The publishers are usually located and based in some foreign country. So this means they will choose a translator who is based in their city of publication. This boils down to the fact that the translators will be alien to the context of the writing, to the background, to the content of the writing and its relevance to the local people of the country of origin of the writers, and will be unable to relate to the content themselves. So will the authors be confident that the translators will do justice to their original piece of writing, or to the contextual meaning, the contextual relevance in the intended background space and scenario?

Ngugi decided to use the local languages to launch his pet theater project, so that the local people in his country and other African countries would be able to relate to the plot of his plays, to relate to the themes and to the context of the plays, relate to the purpose of the content and assimilate it, become aware citizens who were read to work toward changing the direction of their lives.

After his imprisonment and subsequent exile to the United States, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has continued to write in Gikuyu and Swahili. On the occasions when he does write in English, Ngugi makes sure that he himself translates his work, so that he is able to retain the original context, the original flavor, the contextual meaning, and keep the purpose of the original work in place in the translated version as well. Elsewhere in his essays, Ngugi elaborates on the topic of language as a medium of communication.

Language as communication and as culture are the products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world

These views are profound, and relevant to the use of language across all generations and centuries. According to Ngugi, language is something that has a significant place and role in human civilization. Language is a tool that helps people relate to their cultures. Language helps human beings communicate with each other as well as with their cultures. Culture and communication are interrelated, and inter-dependent. Communication begins to attain a significant place in culture because of language. Culture, which is about values and the place of individual human beings in their social strata, helps human beings retain their places in that social environment, and relate to each individual being within that environment.

Many post colonial scholars insist that language is a tool to communicate or express but that it does not actually bear any significance to the culture and to cultural values. However, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is perhaps one of the handful who maintains that language is something that helps connect culture and communication. The common factor that connects the both, communication and culture, is obviously language. Therefore, according to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o communication and culture cannot be isolated from one another, because they are inter-related and inter-dependent. What holds them bound together, and at the same time helps them maintain their places in the larger scheme of things, is language.

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### 11.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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To begin with, it is important to understand the essential context of how Ngugi came to write all these essays on the topic of language. What holds all these essays together is the central topic of language.

Like most countries in the modern world that once used to be a part of the British Empire, Kenya had been divested with a culture that was mostly Christian, where most people were converted to Christianity or Catholicism. The colonial rulers followed a policy of setting up educational institutions in all their colonies, so that the ordinary people could receive an education in English, the language of the royal family in England.

The writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, too had received an education through school and subsequently college in English. For the most part, Ngugi used to communicate in English, that is to say, his language of communication was predominantly English which is actually a European language.

During his childhood years, while he was at school and at the university in Makerere pursuing his bachelor's degree in English Literature, everyone in Kenya, at least those who had the privilege of getting an education, used to communicate primarily in English, using the European language as a first language of communication. However, while using this European language as a language of communication, no one in the country stopped to think about their culture, where they stood in relation to their original culture, or how English was having an influence or an impact on their original culture.

It is a known fact that culture offers people values, history, an opportunity to form their place in the future history of this society, and a place in their society that will help them communicate and develop within that space. The continent of Africa began to, and continued to, give birth to writers, poets, novelists, playwrights and film makers. They belonged to every country within the African continent. Although every country had a local language and culture of their own, they all were able to communicate and connect with each other, only because they were using the European language

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English. During all the years after they all received their independence, that is to say during the post colonial period, everyone in Africa continued to use English as the first language. But the new governments, with the local representatives in power at the helm, had made education extremely costly, so that it would be accessible only to a handful of their citizens. These handful of people who were in a position to receive that education, became the elitist group and the privileged group. It must be remembered that many of the people living in those African countries, in the post colonial period, were first generation English speakers and users. That knowledge made many of them feel privileged, elitist, special and perhaps arrogant. These attitudes would have isolated them and alienated them from those of their countrymen who were unable to access that education because they were unable to pay for it.

The result was, as it always is in such circumstances, that the local cultures in these countries in Africa began to get neglected and sidelined. The new ruling parties intentionally made sure that the common people, the ordinary citizens would not get an education. If when these common people or ordinary citizens get an education that they prove to be the most dangerous to the fascist or dictatorial regimes then in power. Because it is these ordinary citizens, the common people use their education to question, to coordinate and collaborate with each other, to raise their voice in protest, to join hands and form chain reactions, against the atrocities, the oppression, the subjugation of the fascist and dictatorial governments in power. Their education ensures that they get a voice, a position and a space all their own. In Kenya too, the ruling party did not want the common citizens to gain an access to an education. When someone with a voice and a status, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o began to use the local languages to awaken the local people, to raise their awareness, to educate them on their rights and opportunities, it was bound to alert the ruling party, because it was bound to alert them to the dangers they would now face. Because instead of using the European language English for his plays instead of the local Gikuyu and Swahili in a clear rebellion, and with a clear intention of awakening the sleeping dogs so to say.

Language, once again, had proved that it was a powerful medium, that it was able to take the people of Kenya back to their original cultural spaces, their values, their histories, and connect them to their special spaces in the world beyond.

Obviously Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has been living in exile in the United States where he teaches and is a professor, but more significantly, continues to write, for the most part in his native Gikuyu and Swahili. On the few occasions he writes in English, he makes sure to translate his own work into the local Gikuyu and Swahili languages so that the local people are able to access his work, and that his writing is able to have the desired impact on the local people of his country.

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## 11.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* was first published by Heinemann (Education) in the year 1986. It was a book of essays written by the Kenyan essayist, novelist, poet, playwright and theorist. All the essays that were included in this volume of essays were inter-linked by one common theme, that of decolonizing languages in post colonial Kenya as well as in other African countries.

As the title of the volume would suggest, however, it was relevant to much more than just decolonizing language. Colonisation of the African countries, as with other parts of the world, had been about first and foremost decolonizing the human mind. This meant that the entire process of colonization had involved, or had begun with decolonization of the mind, which meant changing the way the human mind functioned, the way the local people thought. This colonization of the mind had been the starting point of colonization of the culture, the language, the very lives of the local people. So this meant that the moment the various colonies across the world gained their independence, the process of decolonization of the mind, the language, the culture and the social structures should have begun. But strangely, this did not happen. Instead, the local governments that took control immediately after gaining independence began to use fascism and dictatorship, ensuring that the local ordinary citizens would not gain access to education.

In order to achieve this, education in the English language had to be made so expensive that it was to remain out of reach of the common and ordinary people. Education remained accessible only to a handful of people, who came to be known as the elitist or bourgeois.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o therefore remained part of the elitist lot of the social structure in Kenya. After completing his bachelor's degree in English, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o received a scholarship from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom to pursue his master's degree in English. So Ngugi travelled to the United Kingdom. The topic of his thesis had been Caribbean literature.

But the moment he embarked on his thesis and dissertation, it transformed his life entirely. He discovered the power of language, and the role of language in almost every sphere of life. He realized that he had to do much more than what he had been doing so far, and immediately abandoned the pursuit of his master's degree. He returned to Kenya, changed his name to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o from his Christian name James Ngugi in a blatant attempt to embrace his original local culture. More significantly he stopped writing and communicating in the European language, English, and began using only his native languages Gikuyu and Swahili.

Taking this rebellion further, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o began a theater project that encouraged audience participation and engagement. This project

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became an instant success, because for the first time, the common ordinary people were being encouraged to participate in theatre, think for themselves, analyse their situations, and question the continued atrocities and oppression they were facing even after the local government had taken over or been voted into power.

Within six months, the government closed this project, obviously because the people in power felt endangered as the ordinary people had begun to think for themselves, and were becoming aware of their real situation. But just closing the theatre project would not keep the government safe. If Ngugi were a free man, he would explore other avenues to engage the ordinary citizens. So the government arrested Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and imprisoned him in their high security prison. But being imprisoned did not appear to subdue Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. He continued to write another new novel, based on his experiences in the prison, writing on toilet paper that had been issued to prisoners by the prison authorities.

After his release from prison however, his family remained constant targets, being harassed by the government. So Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and his family fled to the United States. In the United States, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o set up a foundation to rescue people who were targets of the dictatorial government and made political prisoners.

### Check Your Progress

3. What is the central theme of the essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*?
4. When was the essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* published?

## 11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The official language of Kenya is Gikuyu.
2. Two important essays written by Ngugi are *Detained* and *The Politics of Language in African Literature*.
3. The central theme running through the entire essay titled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* is the politicization of language in Kenya and other African countries by dictatorial regimes.
4. The essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* was published in 1986.

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## 11.9 SUMMARY

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- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan essayist, novelist, playwright and short story writer.
- Earlier Ngugi Wa Thiong'o used to write in English, but in recent years has been writing in Gikuyu, the official language of Kenya.
- In the year 1977, Ngugi began a unique and innovative form of theatre, which introduced extempore and audience participation.
- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was born in Kamiriithu in Kiambu district, in Kenya. He was christened James Nogogi.
- Ngugi's novel titled *Weep Not, Child*, which got published in May of the year 1964 was acclaimed as being the first novel in English to have been published by a writer from East Africa.
- Ngugi's essays titled *Decolonising the Mind, Detained and The Politics of Language in African Literature* are considered advocates of the rights of African writers to express themselves in their original native African languages.
- Ngugi has also been the recipient of many honorary degrees from universities across the world.
- In the essay titled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, the Kenyan essayist and novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has explored and explained his theory that language exists as culture, and language exists as communication.
- The essay explores the purpose of language in life.
- The central theme running through the entire essay titled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, by the African essayist and writer, is the politicization of language in Kenya and other African countries by dictatorial regimes.

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## 11.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Decolonization:** It is a process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country.
- **Theatre:** It refers to a building or outdoor area in which plays and other dramatic performances are given.
- **Thesis:** It refers to a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved.

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## 11.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Ngugi as an author.
2. What was the incident that changed Ngugi's perspective about language and his culture?
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Decolonising the Mind*?
4. What led Ngugi write the essay *Decolonising the Mind*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the summary of the essay *Decolonising the Mind* in detail.
2. What was the contribution of Ngugi in decolonising the mind of African people? Discuss in detail.
3. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Decolonising the Mind*.
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *Decolonising the Mind*.

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## 11.12 FURTHER READING

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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**BLOCK - IV**  
**PROSE XII - XIV**

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*Lord Bertrand Arthur  
William Russell*

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**UNIT 12 LORD BERTRAND ARTHUR  
WILLIAM RUSSELL**

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**NOTES**

**Structure**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 About the Author
- 12.3 Summary of the Essay
- 12.4 Theme
- 12.5 Critical Appreciation
- 12.6 Issues and Analysis
- 12.7 Historical Background
- 12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.9 Summary
- 12.10 Key Words
- 12.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.12 Further Readings

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**12.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872, Trelleck, Monmouthshire, Wales. He was a British philosopher, logician, and social reformer, founding figure in the analytic movement in Anglo-American philosophy, and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. Russell's contributions to logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of mathematics established him as one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century. To the general public, however, he was best known as a campaigner for peace and as a popular writer on social, political, and moral subjects. During a long, productive, and often turbulent life, he published more than 70 books and about 2,000 articles, married four times, became involved in innumerable public controversies, and was honoured and reviled in almost equal measure throughout the world.

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**12.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Understand the life of Bertrand Russell as an author
- Discuss the theme of *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*
- Learn the summary of *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*

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## 12.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lord Bertrand Arthur William Russell was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Russell, and belonged to one of the most illustrious and famous families in the United Kingdom. Lord Bertrand Russell was a writer, historian, philosopher, logician, mathematician, social critic, political activist and Nobel Prize Winner.

Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872 in Montmouthshire. Along with his colleague G. E. Moore, protégé Ludwig Wittgenstein and predecessor Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell is considered to be one of the founders of what is called analytic philosophy. Bertrand Russell was also considered one of the foremost logicians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with A N Whitehead, Bertrand Russell wrote *Principle Mathematica*, which was an attempt to create a logical basis for mathematics.

Bertrand Russell's philosophical essay titled *On Dancing* is a paradigm on philosophy. His work has had an immense influence on artificial intelligence, logic, mathematics, theory, linguistics, computer science and cognitive science. In the field of philosophy, Bertrand Russell has greatly impacted the philosophies of metaphysics, language as well as epistemology. Bertrand Russell was one of the leading anti-war activists of his times, besides championing the cause of anti-imperialism.

Bertrand Russell advocated the cause of preventive nuclear war as well as nuclear disarmament. He considered that war against Adolph Hitler's Nazi Germany had been the lesser of two evils. Bertrand Russell had been imprisoned during the First World War for his pacifist opinions. He criticized the interference of the United States in the Vietnam War. Although Bertrand Russell had claimed that he had never been a pacifist in any profound sense, it is obvious he had been a staunch pacifist, advocating anti-war and anti-nuclear activism. Bertrand Russell had been a fierce critic of Stalin's totalitarianism in Russia. Bertrand Russell received the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1950 for his wide range of significant writing that has consistently championed humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought.

Bertrand Arthur William Russell was born on May 18, 1872 at Ravenscroft, Trellech. His parents Viscount and Viscountess Amberley were radical in their views for their times. They were strong supporters of birth control, a scandalous and taboo topic at the time. Lord Amberley had been an atheist, and in fact had asked the philosopher John Styar Mill to be Bertrand Russell's secular godfather. Although John Mill had died the year after Bertrand Russell was born, his writings had a profound impact on Russell's thoughts and life.

Bertrand Russell's paternal grandfather Earl Russell had served Queen Victoria for two terms, during the 1849s and 1869s as the prime minister of England. The Russell had been politically active for centuries.

Bertrand Russell was the youngest of three children, his brother Frank seven years older and sister Rachel four years older than him. Bertrand Russell's mother died two years after his birth after being diagnosed with diphtheria. In January shortly thereafter, Rachel died. Viscount Amberley died of depression and bronchitis in January 1876. After this, both Frank and Bertrand Russell were placed under the care of their paternal grandparents. In spite of the fact that they were conservative, they treated their grandchildren well. The senior Russells lived at Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park. In the year 1878, Lord Russell died. Although Lady Russell had been pretty conservative, she instilled some liberal views in the children. It was from her that Bertrand Russell learned to fight for social justice, and stand up for his principles. However, during his adolescence it was difficult. The environment at Pembroke Lodge was emotionally repressive, with frequent prayer times. Frank, who was older, rebelled openly, but the younger Bertrand learned to hide his feelings, frequently thinking of suicide. Bertrand Russell was to later write in his autobiography that he was deeply interested in mathematics and religion during those years at Pembroke Lodge, and probably the only deterrent to suicide was the fact that he wanted to discover more about mathematics. At the age of 11 years, Frank introduced Bertrand to the works of Euclid, which transformed his life.

In the year 1890, Bertrand Russell toured the Continent with an American friend Edward Fitzgerald and his family, climbing the Eiffel Tower just after it had been built. In the year 1890, Bertrand Russell began studying *Mathematic Tripos* with a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge under Robert Rumsey Webb, quickly gaining expertise. He graduated in the year 1893 in mathematics and philosophy, with a Fellowship in philosophy.

It was at Trinity College that Bertrand Russell met some people who remained in contact with him, and who helped his future career. These were George Edward Moore, and Alfred North Whitehead. Alfred Whitehead introduced Bertrand Russell to the Cambridge Apostles.

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### 12.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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Lord Bertrand Russell as mentioned earlier, had been a multi-faceted personality. Perhaps the most challenging and significant of those facets to his personality had been the desire to maintain world peace.

During the first world war, Lord Bertrand Russell had made many overtures to intervene and negotiate between the two so-called super powers, the United States and the USSR. The essay titled *Bertrand Russell on Negotiations*, written by Bertrand Russell, had been published in January 1958, and revealed how he had attempted to call for meetings between the

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## NOTES

two leaders, Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States, and Krushchev, the premiere of the USSR.

The central theme of this essay was therefore the expression by Bertrand Russell, the intense desire and need for world peace. Bertrand Russell had been an anti-war activist, rooted for nuclear disarmament in the event that preventive nuclear war became unsuccessful. Bertrand Russell's open and vociferous criticism of war, especially nuclear warfare, had led to his imprisonment during the first world war.

This term of imprisonment had not appeared to have had any major effects on his life, or major upheavels. Even from the prison cell, Bertrand Russell had continued to write and champion the cause of peace, recommending nuclear disarmament and an end to the war.

The letter to the two world leaders Dwight Eisenhower and Krushchev had been published in newspapers, drawing a great deal of publicity and public support. It is reported that Krushchev had responded quickly. The essay reveals how Bertrand Russell criticized the foreign policies and war that had been shaping and motivating both the United States as well as the USSR.

Upon realizing that both the world leaders were intent on going to war with each other, Bertrand Russell realized that a war between the two super powers would not remain a war between just the two countries, but escalate quickly into a world war. Moreover, Bertrand Russell was aware that both countries would use the opportunity to prove their might over the other, especially with regard to nuclear weapons. It would not have been possible for Bertrand Russell to meet either Dwight Eisenhower or Krushchev in person, because both of them were in no mood for negotiations.

Perhaps this was the reason he decided that writing such an open letter to both the world leaders would serve his purpose better and more efficiently. Bertrand Russell had written one common letter to both the world leaders, addressing it simultaneously to both men. The content, therefore, that was contained in the letter had been the same.

It is not certain what reactions Bertrand Russell expected from the two world leaders to the open letter. In the letter, Bertrand Russell had suggested a meeting between the two world leaders Dwight Eisenhower and Krushchev.

Playing the role of a mediator, or a pacifist, was probably not something that Bertrand Russell would have enjoyed. But war was not something he favored in any circumstance. Thus, he decided to negotiate between the two super powers, in a blatant and desperate bid to stop the war in its tracks, so to speak.

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Bertrand Russell born?
2. What was the central theme of the essay *Open Letters to Dwight Eisenhower and Khrushchev*?

Lord Bertrand Arthur  
William Russell

### NOTES

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## 12.4 THEME

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The central theme of the present essay was an open letter written by Lord Bertrand Russell to the two world leaders Dwight Eisenhower, who was the then President of the United States and Khrushchev, the then premier of the USSR. The letter had been a blatant and concerted bid by Bertrand Russell to negotiate peace between the two super powers, who were both on the brink of war with each other. Bertrand Russell had been making a serious effort to negotiate peace and playing the role of a pacifist. Later in his life, Bertrand Russell had claimed that he had not been a pacifist in any profound sense, perhaps to indicate that he had not been as successful in his efforts to maintain peace than he would have wished.

The theme of the letter had therefore been an attempt on the part of Lord Bertrand Russell to initiate peace talks and a meeting between Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States and Khrushchev the then premier of the USSR. It is significant that the United Kingdom had also always been one of the major powers of the world.

It is ironic, however, that as an Imperial power, the United Kingdom had colonized almost the entire world, including countries in Asia, the African continent, as well as North America. It would have appeared ridiculous that at this point in time, someone from the United Kingdom should have been attempting to negotiate peace talks between super powers of the world who were almost on the brink of going to war with each other, completely unconcerned that it would immediately escalate into a world war. But to people who were familiar with Lord Bertrand Russell, and his views on war and nuclear warfare, this would not have appeared so strange or so ridiculous. Bertrand Russell had been an anti-war activist, an anti-Imperialist activist, and a strong and outspoken supporter of nuclear disarmament.

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## 12.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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The open letter, which forms the topic of this essay reveals how Bertrand Russell had made concerted efforts to negotiate for peace and cessation of both war as well as nuclear weapons. This is some of behind-the-scene events that took place as part of the negotiating attempt by Bertrand Russell.

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Lord Bertrand Russell's "Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev" (*New Statesman and Nation*, Nov. 23, 1957), urging a summit meeting to consider "the conditions of co-existence," provided the occasion for Khrushchev's much-publicized response that peace could be served "both by a meeting of representatives of the two powers, the USSR and the United States, and by a wider meeting of representatives of the capitalist and socialist countries." Lord Russell, elaborating his views (*The Observer*, Jan. 5), then went on to propose a cessation of nuclear weapons production, unilaterally by Britain if necessary, and a German settlement providing not only for the neutral zone advocated by George Kennan but a Germany "freed from all alien armed forces and pledged to neutrality in any conflict between East and West."

Bertrand Russell had written the open letter to Dwight Eisenhower and Khrushchev in an attempt to arrange a summit meeting between the two world leaders to chalk out the conditions for co-existence. Bertrand Russell thought that countries could co-exist peacefully, but the conditions for that co-existence had to be created through the concerted and sincere efforts of the leaders of the warring countries, and once those conditions had been created, the two countries would need to make concerted efforts to continue maintaining those conditions, so that peace and co-existence could continue to prevail.

To this letter, Khrushchev had responded, that he was willing to make peace, and peace could be brought about by a meeting of the representatives of the two warring factions, the USSR and the United States. Khrushchev, however, added that the meeting would need to be attended by representatives of the other capitalist and socialist countries of the world. In essence, by leaders of all the countries of the world.

To this, Lord Bertrand Russell responded by attempting to negotiate for nuclear disarmament. Bertrand Russell said he would ensure that Germany would become a neutral one, which would advocate for complete nuclear disarmament. He also assured Khrushchev that Germany would disarm its armed forces, and not just its own armed forces, but also the armed forces of any foreign power that would enter its boundaries.

Essentially what Lord Bertrand Russell was trying to assure the USSR was that Great Britain and Germany would henceforth remain the neutral zone and the peace-makers between the East and the West.

During the first world war, too, Lord Bertrand Russell had made concerted efforts to call for peace and prevent war. But later, he had maintained that war with Hitler and his Nazi Germany had been the lesser of two evils. It was obvious that war with Germany had been necessary, if only to prevent Adolph Hitler from continuing with his holocaust.

The open letter from Lord Bertrand Russell to the two world leaders, Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States and Khrushchev,

the premier of the USSR, had been a concerted effort by Lord Bertrand Russell to end hostilities and call for nuclear disarmament. Perhaps the reason why Bertrand Russell had named Germany as the neutral zone had been significant, because the first world war had been triggered by Germany, and the attempt to make Germany the neutral zone in the present context would have been a vindication of sorts, a retribution.

Lord Bertrand Russell had believed that the world did not need imperialism, or nuclear weapons. On the contrary, he believed that the countries of the world could live peacefully, that they could learn to co-exist peacefully.

## NOTES

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### 12.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The open letter to the two world leaders, President Dwight Eisenhower of the United States and Khrushchev, premier of the USSR had been written and published by Lord Bertrand Russell of Great Britain in newspapers. The letter had drawn immediate global attention and created to an environment that advocated world peace and co-existence.

It should be remembered that Lord Bertrand Russell had grown up in Great Britain, where his family had been prominent and aristocratic. Great Britain had for centuries colonized many countries across the world, including in Asia, Africa, and North America. So he had not been new to the concept of war, or its aftermath and devastation.

On being orphaned at the young age of 4 years, Lord Bertrand Russell and his older brother Frank had been placed under the care and protection of their paternal grandparents.

Bertrand Russell had recalled later that she had maintained a household that had frequent prayers and emotional repression. The older Frank Russell had soon learned to rebel openly. The younger Bertrand Russell had learned to hide his feelings, but had often thought of committing suicide.

Perhaps the only saving grace had been the fact that Lady Russell had taught Bertrand Russell to stand up for his principles in the face of all opposition, and to fight for social justice. These were the two characteristics that remained with Bertrand Russell all his life.

It had been necessary to analyze these childhood years of Bertrand Russell because these years were to shape his entire life and formed the basis for the open letter that is the subject of this essay. Lord Bertrand Russell had believed that the world did not need imperial forces, and that the world could live in harmony and in peace. Bertrand Russell was a staunch anti-war advocate, also advocating the cause of nuclear disarmament. He believed that the countries of this world could learn to co-exist peacefully, without resorting to war to solve international or cross-border problems.

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Towards this end he had maintained that Germany could be developed into a neutral zone between the East and the West, and that there would be no armed forces within the boundaries of Germany. Bertrand Russell had also promised that Germany would help disarm any foreign armies that entered its borders.

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### 12.7 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The open letter to Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States and Khrushchev, the then premier of the USSR had been written by Lord Bertrand Russell of Great Britain. Lord Bertrand Russell was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Russell, and had belonged to an aristocratic and prominent family in Great Britain. His paternal grandfather Lord John Russell had been Earl Russell, and had served as the prime minister of Great Britain for two terms under Queen Victoria.

Lord Bertrand Russell and his older brother Frank Russell were orphaned when Bertrand Russell was just 4 years old. The two Russell children had then been placed under the care and protection of Lord John Russell and his wife.

During the first world war, Lord Bertrand Russell had gone to prison because he had advocated for peace. He later commented that going to war with Hitler and his Nazi Germany had been the lesser of two evils. Having observed two world wars, the aftermath and devastation of war, Lord Bertrand Russell had become a strong anti-war activist, openly and vociferously criticizing war.

#### Check Your Progress

3. Mention a famous work of Bertrand Russell.
4. What was the theme of the letter that Russell wrote to Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States and Krsuschev the then premier of the USSR?

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### 12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872
2. The central theme of the essay was the intense desire and need for world peace.
3. *Principle Mathematica* is a famous work of Bertrand Russell.

4. The theme of the letter had been an attempt on the part of Lord Bertrand Russell to initiate peace talks and a meeting between Dwight Eisenhower, the then President of the United States and Khrushchev the then premier of the USSR.

Lord Bertrand Arthur  
William Russell

## NOTES

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### 12.9 SUMMARY

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- Lord Bertrand Arthur William Russell was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Russell, and belonged to one of the most illustrious and famous families in the United Kingdom.
- Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872 in Montmouthshire. Along with his colleague G. E. Moore, protégé Ludwig Wittgenstein and predecessor Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell is considered to be one of the founders of what is called analytic philosophy.
- Bertrand Russell's philosophical essay titled *On Dancing* is a paradigm on philosophy.
- Bertrand Arthur William Russell was born on May 18, 1872 at Ravenscroft, Trellech. His parents Viscount and Viscountess Amberley were radical in their views for their times.
- In the year 1890, Bertrand Russell toured the Continent with an American friend Edward Fitzgerald and his family, climbing the Eiffel Tower just after it had been built.
- In the year 1890, Bertrand Russell began studying *Mathematic Tripos* with a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge under Robert Rumsey Webb, quickly gaining expertise.
- Lord Bertrand Russell as mentioned earlier, had been a multi-faceted personality. Perhaps the most challenging and significant of those facets to his personality had been the desire to maintain world peace.
- The central theme of this essay was therefore the expression by Bertrand Russell, the intense desire and need for world peace.
- Playing the role of a mediator, or a pacifist, was probably not something that Bertrand Russell would have enjoyed.

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### 12.10 KEY WORDS

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- **Epistemology:** Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge, justification, and the rationality of belief.
- **Philosophy:** Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters such as existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language.

- **Pacifist:** A person who believes that war and violence are unjustifiable is called a pacifist.

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### 12.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Bertrand Russell as an author.
2. What was the political ideology of Bertrand Russell?
3. What is the central theme of the essay *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*?
4. What led Russell write the essay *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the summary of the essay *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev* in detail.
2. The central theme of this essay was therefore the intense desire and need for world peace. Comment on the statement with reference to the text.
3. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*.
4. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev*.

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### 12.12 FURTHER READINGS

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ponty, Merleau Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World*. United States: Northwestern University Press.

Marvell, Andrew. 1873. *Prose*. United Kingdom: Robson & Sons.

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## UNIT 13 STEPHEN BUTLER LEACOCK

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 About the Author
- 13.3 Summary of the Essay
- 13.4 Theme of the Essay
- 13.5 Critical Appreciation
- 13.6 Issues and Analysis
- 13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.8 Summary
- 13.9 Key Words
- 13.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.11 Further Readings

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### 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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Stephen Leacock, in full Stephen Butler Leacock, was born on December 30, 1869. He was an internationally popular Canadian humourist, educator, lecturer, and author of more than 30 books of lighthearted sketches and essays. Leacock immigrated to Canada with his parents at the age of six. He attended Upper Canada College and later received a B.A. degree from the University of Toronto. After teaching for eight years at Upper Canada College, he entered the University of Chicago and was awarded a Ph.D. in 1903.

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### 13.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life of Stephen Butler Leacock as an author
- Understand the theme of the essay *The Financial Career*
- Learn the summary of the essay *The Financial Career*
- Describe the issues covered in this essay

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### 13.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Stephen Butler Leacock was a Canadian writer, humourist, teacher and political scientist. From the year 1915 till the year 1925, Stephen Butler Leacock had been considered the best humourist in the world. The Stephen

## NOTES

Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour had been set up in his honour. For the most part it was people's follies that amused Stephen Leacock the most.

Stephen Butler Leacock was born on December 30, 1869, in the village of Swanmore, near Southampton to the south of England. The Leacock family had made its fortune as plantation owners at Oak Hill which was situated on the Isle of Wight. The family had also founded the famous Leacock Madeira Wine. Stephen Butler Leacock had been the third of 11 children born to Walter Peter and Agnes Leacock.

Walter Peter Leacock and his family migrated to Canada when Stephen Butler was six years old. They settled down on a farm in the village of Sutton in Ontario, on the shores of the Simcoe Lake. The farm was not very successful, and the Leacock family moved to another farm in the town of Georgina situated in York County. However, this second venture too did not appear to be successful. The family was supported by money that used to be sent to them by Stephen Leacock's paternal grandfather. In the fall of the year 1878, Walter Peter Leacock, together with his brother E P Leacock, travelled west to live in Manitoba, leaving his wife and children behind. E P Leacock was later to become the subject of a book titled *My Remarkable Uncle*, written and published by Stephen Leacock in the year 1942.

Stephen Leacock had been an intelligent child. His paternal grandfather enrolled the three oldest Leacock boys, including Stephen, at the elitist Upper Canada College. As was to be expected, perhaps, Stephen Leacock began to top his class, becoming head boy during his final year. Upon graduating in the year 1887, Stephen Leacock returned home to discover that his father had come back during his absence. His father had been an alcoholic years before, and apparently never changed. Soon after Stephen Leacock returned home, his father abandoned his family once more, never to return this time.

In 1878, when he was 17 years old, Stephen Leacock joined the University College at the University of Toronto as a member of the Seta Psi fraternity, on a small scholarship. But he discovered that the scholarship was not sufficient for him to continue his studies, and he dropped out the following year. He then began teaching at the Stratheby University, and later at the Upper Canada College in Toronto. It was at this time that he began attending part time classes, finally earning his degree in the year 1891. It was during those years that he first began publishing his work in *The Valley*, which was the campus newspaper.

Stephen Leacock had never liked teaching, and finally, in the year 1899, he began to study for his doctorate at the University of Chicago, receiving a doctorate in political economy and political science.

Stephen Leacock now relocated from Chicago to Montreal in Quebec, where he became professor of political economy, and chairperson at the Department of Economics and Political Science.

Perhaps because of his upbringing and the problems the family had faced during his childhood, Stephen Leacock appeared to have developed into a patriarchal and social conservative. He was a bitter critic and opponent of giving women the right to vote. During his years at McGill, he had become closely associated with the principal Arthus Curie, who died in the year 1933. Curie's death paved the way for the McGill Board of Governors to forcibly remove Stephen Leacock from his post.

For the most part, Stephen Leacock believed that non Anglo Saxons should not be able to migrate to Canada. Yet he could not seem to make up his mind on this issue. Before World War II broke out, he had written in favour of allowing non-Anglo Saxon immigration, but changing his tune to write against non-Anglo Saxon immigration by the time the war ended.

Stephen Leacock continued to remain confused about many things. Although he was against allowing women to vote, he supported social women's legislation and redistribution of wealth. He also supported the British Empire and the Imperial Federation Movement.

From the beginning of his literary career, Stephen Leacock began writing mainly humour, fiction and short stories. His short story *My Financial Career* was one example of humour written by Stephen Leacock that became immensely popular, to the extent that it had been turned into an animated film. It was obvious that Stephen Leacock had used writing as a means to supplement his income as a younger man, especially until he had managed to gain his doctorate in Political Economy and Political Science.

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### 13.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

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The central theme of the essay *My Financial Career* by the Canadian economist and humourist Stephen Butler Leacock is the common man's innate and inherent distrust of economics, and the continued confusion about what banks are and how they function.

The essay titled *My Financial Career* had been included in Stephen Leacock's first book of essays titled *Literary Lapses*. It had also been made into an animated short story by the film maker Gerard Potterton for the National Film Board of Canada.

Th essay titled *My Financial Career* uses humour to explore the field of economics and finance from the perspective of the common man. Stephen Leacock himself had a passionate and in-depth knowledge and understanding of economics. Yet he understood that for most people economics would present an alient world, far from their lives and beyond their understanding. Perhaps during the era that Stephen Leacock had lived and worked, economics had been such a difficult subject to fathom that most people may have been entirely intimidated by th very mention of the word economy. This lack of

## NOTES

knowledge and understanding obviously would have caused the common man to distrust the banking entity and banking process.

A career in banking or even as an economist at any level would have flummoxed most people. Stephen Leacock was therefore obviously considered to have been extremely smart, because he not just did his doctorate in the field of political economy, but he also subsequently began teaching economy at the McGill University's Department of Economy and Political Science.

Perhaps what kept Stephen Leacock sane around his financial jargon was the fact that he had an innate sense of humour, and was therefore able to view almost everything with humour. His ability to laugh at the follies and confusion of the common man was visible in all his writings. In many cases, this ability to laugh at follies and confusion could also have been looked upon as arrogance because Stephen Butler Leacock had earned his doctorates in both political economy as well as in political science.

Considering that Stephen's family had to face intense financial problems because his father had abandoned his wife and eleven children, to depend upon his paternal grandfather for financial support must have been tough on children having to grow up in such an environment. But the fact that he gained a doctorate in political economy and political science must have seemed a miracle to someone. Perhaps he had felt the urge to laugh at his dreams, his ambitions and his abilities.

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Stephen Leacock born?
2. Mention any one famous work of Stephen Leacock.

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## 13.4 THEME OF THE ESSAY

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The central theme of the essay *My Financial Career*, written by the British Canadian economist and humourist is the perception and relationship of the common man with the term 'economics', the distrust and fear of the common man with economics, and the resulting confusion that is caused by the term economy and the entity of the bank.

Stephen Leacock had believed that the field of economics was entirely alien and intimidating to the common man. For himself, Stephen Leacock had perhaps been intelligent beyond his years. Considering that the family had to face many financial hurdles all through his childhood and adolescence, it is heartening that this level of intelligence only seemed to grow and strengthen as he grew older.

While looking upon the confusion and fear that the common man experiences when confronted with even the mere term economics, it could have been possible that Stephen Leacock had felt a sense of pride or even arrogance at having earned a doctorate in the field of Political Economics. Not just that, he had also become a Professor at the McGill University's Department of Economics and Political Science. Perhaps he had used his humour in his essay titled *My Financial Career* to laugh at the world around him, as much as he may have used it to laugh at himself.

Stephen Leacock analyses his entire career as a professor of Political Economics with humour and disbelief. Just as most people who had financial problems during their childhood years do, Stephen Leacock too perhaps had learned to laugh at the world, and his subsequent achievements with a sense of disbelief and humour.

More significantly, to have been faced with financial problems while growing up, and then mastering a subject such as Economics, and not just to have mastered it, but to have become a professor in the field of Economics, must have appeared hilarious and ridiculous to Stephen Leacock.

In spite of his background, Stephen Leacock had gained a passionate and in-depth knowledge and understanding of the field of economics. His understanding and expertise had been so complete and remarkable for someone so young, that it had probably made Stephen Leacock laugh at himself, his financial career, and the disbelieving and confused world around him.

The essay titled *My Financial Career* written by the British Canadian economist and humourist Stephen Leacock perhaps traces his career, as the title suggests, in the field of economics, from being a student studying for his doctorate in Political Economics, right through to the days when he finally worked as a professor and chairperson at the Department of Economics and Political Science at the McGill University.

During those years, that is to say the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, economics would not have been a very popular subject, especially among the young people. But Stephen Leacock had been smart, perhaps too smart for his age. He had earned his doctorate in Political Economics, and decided to remain connected with the field and the subject of economics. This decision had obviously confused most people who had seen him grow up. Probably the reactions of the people around him and more significantly his own unexpected progress in his chosen career had been a constant and long-standing source of humour for Stephen Leacock.

His humour changed the shape and color of a theme, making it so popular that Gerard Potterton had made it into an animated short story for the National Film Board of Canada, immortalizing it for all generations.

## NOTES

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## 13.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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### NOTES

The essay *My Financial Career* had become instantly successful, for its theme as well as its style of narrative. In fact, the essay had become so popular that it had been converted into an animated short story by Gerard Potterton for the National Film Board of Canada.

The essay *My Financial Career*, like all the other essays in the volume *Literary Lapses*, was based on the complexities of economics, and how the common man perceived this subject. For himself, Stephen Butler Leacock had been smart from childhood, always having been able to top his class at the elitist Upper Canada College, a school that was obviously accessible only to the richest and smartest kids. Stephen Leacock had also become the head boy of this school during his final year at school.

Stephen Butler Leacock's knowledge as well as understanding of economics, a subject that used to be considered insipid and dry, had been amazingly in-depth and thorough for both his age and his times. Stephen Leacock understood and recognized the fact that the field and functions of economics would pose great hurdles to the common man. He recognized that the common man distrusted the very mention of the term economics because of lack of knowledge of how actually it worked or why it was important in life on a day-to-day basis. Stephen Leacock had explored this theme in many of his essays such as *Banks are Living*, besides the present one under discussion *My Financial Career*. The essays focused on the fact that most people found the world of economics and finance obscure, hazy and alien. Most people, according to Stephen Leacock, usually found banks too to be strange and weird, and they deposited their money into accounts only because they were told banks were safe to keep their money, and they could get at it when they needed to. These ordinary people always found the interiors of banks with their maze of rules and regulations scary and intimidating. They did not realize that banks were actually capable of finding out how finance and economics worked, or the economic future of the country.

In the essay, Stephen Leacock described how he went to a bank to open an account, but found everything so frightening and confusing that he had actually managed to close the account that had just been opened in his name.

Stephen Leacock had been an economist and had earned a doctorate in the subject. Yet obviously he could identify on a personal level with ordinary people who found economics and finance totally alien world. Perhaps because they are not able to understand either the subject or how it is capable of helping them and transforming their life, they develop a deep sense of paranoia and distrust of not just the word economics but also its functions and its reach in the day to day scheme of things.

Before he had embarked on his illustrious career in finance as a Professor, and then the chairperson of the Department of Economics and Political Science at the prestigious McGill, Stephen Leacock had identified himself as an ordinary citizen, who had also found the subject of economics confusing and intimidating. He too had found banks alien worlds and demonic to an extent that they used to paralyse him, rendering him incapable of speech or thought.

After having embarked on his financial career, he had obviously looked back on his earlier fears and confusion with a sense of disbelief and amusement. What is to be appreciated about Stephen Butler Leacock had been his ability to laugh at himself, which had been with him since his childhood, and had stayed with him though his life, allowing him to laugh at what he considered the follies of human beings, whether himself or others.

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### 13.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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The main focus of the essay titled *My Financial Career* was the complexity and intricacies of the subject of economics. At various times, Stephen Leacock has described the subject of economics as intimidating, confusing, alien and being akin to a behemoth.

The essay had been written primarily to track his progress in his economic career, or financial career, from being an ordinary citizen to an economist, who had apparently transformed himself from an ignorant common man to the chairperson of the Department of Economics and Political Science.

Usually, when ordinary people transform themselves and their careers to such a great extent as to reach such a prominent society in academics, the people who had known him earlier change their attitude toward them, sometimes being in awe of their rise, sometimes ridiculing them, or just simply cutting all ties with them. Whatever may have been the case with Stephen Leacock, it is obvious that he himself had resorted to humour in any or every situation. Some people lose their temper when confronted with such things, some just learn to laugh. Obviously Stephen Leacock had been one of those people who had learned to laugh at both himself and other people in every and any circumstance. This is a coping mechanism that the mind develops to protect the person from being traumatized or hurt by the remarks and attitudes of other people.

The essay titled *My Financial Career* describes the rise of Stephen Leacock in his main profession as an economist. The essay takes a look at his career graph while throwing everything under a cloak of humour. The narrative is expected to make people laugh at the incidents that would otherwise have made them squirm with discomfort.

## NOTES

There is a passage where the protagonist goes to a bank to open an account, but is so intimidated and confused that it renders him paralyzed. The result is that he is in a daze, managing to close the account before it can actually function.

Stephen Leacock has used his humorous style to show people how banks actually function, what the entire banking institution is expected to do, how powerful the banking institutions are, and how the banking institutions are able to predict what the economic forecast of the country could be.

Stephen Leacock has also used humour to explain what economics is, what the field of economics does and can achieve in society, and how the common man could use economics wisely and easily, without being confused or afraid.

All the essays in the volume titled *Literary Lapses* are focused solely on explaining the various aspects and facets of the field of economics in a humorous way and lighter vein so that the common man is able to read the essay with a smile and a lighter heart, so that he finds it easier to understand and unravel the mysteries of hitherto unknown and alien territory.

In spite of this attempt it soon becomes obvious that the writer Stephen Leacock is adept at laughing at the follies and ignorance of others, especially the ordinary citizens who may not be so well educated. The writer appears to be keener to find ways to laugh at others.

### Check Your Progress

3. What is the central theme of the essay *My Financial Career*?
4. What was the name of the volume in which *My Financial Career* was published?

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## 13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Stephen Butler Leacock was born on December 30, 1869.
2. *The Valley* is one famous work of Stephen Leacock.
3. The central theme of the essay *My Financial Career* is the common man's innate and inherent distrust of economics, and the continued confusion about what banks are and how they function.
4. *My Financial Career* was published in the volume *Literary Lapses*.

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## 13.8 SUMMARY

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- Stephen Butler Leacock was a Canadian writer, humourist, teacher and political scientist.
- Stephen Butler Leacock was born on December 30, 1869, in the village of Swanmore, near Southampton to the south of England.
- Stephen Leacock had been an intelligent child. His paternal grandfather enrolled the three oldest Leacock boys, including Stephen, at the elitist Upper Canada College.
- Stephen Leacock had never liked teaching, and finally, in the year 1899, he began to study for his doctorate at the University of Chicago, receiving a doctorate in political economy and political science.
- The central theme of the essay *My Financial Career* is the common man's innate and inherent distrust of economics, and the continued confusion about what banks are and how they function.
- The essay titled *My Financial Career* had been included in Stephen Leacock's first book of essays titled *Literary Lapses*.
- Stephen Leacock had believed that the field of economics was entirely alien and intimidating to the common man.
- The main focus of the essay titled *My Financial Career* written by the British Canadian economist, essayist and humourist Stephen Butler Leacock was the complexity and intricacies of the subject of economics.

## NOTES

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## 13.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Economics:** The branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth is called economics.
- **Humour:** The quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech is called humour.

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## 13.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Stephen Leacock as an author.
2. What was the political ideology of Stephen Leacock?
3. What is the central theme of the essay *My Financial Career*?
4. What led Stephen Leacock to write an essay on economics?

### Long Answer Questions

#### NOTES

1. Discuss the summary of the essay *My Financial Career* in detail.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *My Financial Career*.
3. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *My Financial Career*?
4. Discuss the significance of the essay *My Financial Career* for ordinary people.

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### 13.11 FURTHER READINGS

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Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.

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# UNIT 14 ROBERT WILSON LYND AND A.G. GARDINER

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*Robert Wilson Lynd and  
A.G. Gardiner*

## NOTES

### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 About the Authors
- 14.3 Summary of the Essays
  - 14.3.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd
  - 14.3.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner
- 14.4 Theme of the Essays
  - 14.4.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd
  - 14.4.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner
- 14.5 Critical Appreciation
  - 14.5.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd
  - 14.5.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner
- 14.6 Issues and Analysis
  - 14.6.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd
  - 14.6.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner
- 14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.8 Summary
- 14.9 Key Words
- 14.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.11 Further Readings

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## 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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Robert Lynd was born in Belfast on 20 April 1879, the second of seven children of a Presbyterian minister, the grandson of a Presbyterian minister and great-grandson of two Presbyterian ministers; later, Robert would recall the Sabbatarianism of his upbringing which condemned whistling - even of religious tunes - and condemned picking fruit as a sin. He was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and later Queen's College, Belfast, where he studied classics graduating in 1899 with a pass degree. He was not especially interested in his studies but interested enough in politics to found the Belfast Socialist Society.

Alfred George Gardiner (1865–1946) was a British journalist, editor and author. His essays, written under the pen-name Alpha of the Plough, are highly regarded. He was also Chairman of the National Anti-Sweating League, an advocacy group which campaigned for a minimum wage in industry.

This unit will discuss an essay each by Lynd and Gardiner.

## NOTES

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### 14.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the themes of essays *Forgetting* and *On Umbrella Morals*
- Discuss the summaries of these essays
- Describe the lives of Robert Lynd and Alfred George as authors
- Know about the historical backgrounds of these essays

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### 14.2 ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Robert Wilson Lynd was an Anglo Irish, or British Irish, essayist, writer, poetry editor and Irish nationalist. Robert Wilson Lynd was born on April 20, 1879 in Belfast, the second of seven children born to Robert John Lynd a Presbyterian pastor, and Sarah Lynd. In fact, Robert Lynd's paternal great-grandfather had migrated to Ireland from his native Scotland.

Robert Wilson Lynd was first enrolled at the Royal Belfast Academical Institute, and thereafter, at Queen's University, Belfast. After graduating from Queen's University, Robert Lynd began to work as a journalist at The Northern Wing in Belfast. In the year 1901, Robert Lynd relocated to London, where he worked as the Drama Critique at *Today* which was being edited by Jerome K Jerome. Robert Lynd also worked as Literary Editor at *The Daily News*.

The Lynd family was inclined towards literature, and the family was closely associated with other writers and artists of those times. Some prominent members of their group include J B Priestley, Hugh Walpole, James Joyce and James Stephens. As a matter of fact, J B Priestley and Hugh Walpole had been the founding members of the Book Society, together with Sylvia Lynd.

Robert Lynd used to use the pseudonym Y Y at the New Statesman, where his weekly essay, or column, ran from the year 1913 till 1943.

Between the years 1912 and 1914, the political scene in Ireland began to turn violent. The attempt to separate Ireland from Home Rule was attracting violence. This continued while the Third Home Rule Bill was being drafted. The thought of violence erupting in Ireland was depressing and appalling to most people, including Robert Wilson Lynd, whose views began to be considered radical.

In April of the year 1909, Robert Wilson Lynd married writer Sylvia Dryhurst. Robert and Sylvia Lynd had two daughters named Marie and Sigle, who were also inclined towards literature and writing.

Alfred George Gardiner was a British essayist, author, editor and journalist. A G Gardiner wrote essays under the pseudonym 'Alpha of the

Plough'. A G Gardiner's writing, especially his essays were highly acclaimed. A G Gardiner was also the Chairman of the advocacy group called National Anti-Sweating League which fought for a minimum wage in industry.

As a boy growing up in Chelmsford, A G Gardiner worked first the Chelmsford Chronicle and later at the Bournemouth Directory. In the year 1886, Thomas Purvis Reitzema started the *Northern Daily Telegraph*. A G Gardiner joined this newspaper the following year in 1887. In the year 1899, A D Gardiner joined the *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph* as its editor.

In the year 1902, A G Gardiner joined the *Daily News* as its editor. Under his supervision, the journal began covering not just news but also literary critiques. Circulation rose almost three-fold.

In the year 1915, A G Gardiner was invited to write essays for *The Star*. Many people were writing essays for this journal under pseudonyms, using names of stars. When A G Gardiner was invited to choose a name based on the name of a star, he came up with Alpha of the Plough. His essays dealt with social injustice and the narrative style was humourous. His essays were popular and highly acclaimed.

Robert Wilson Lynd and  
A.G. Gardiner

## NOTES

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### 14.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAYS

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Let us begin by discussing Lynd's essay.

#### 14.3.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd

The central theme of this essay titled *Forgetting* by the British Irish essayist is the power of the human mind to remember things. Robert Lynd mentions in the essay that he is often amazed by the things that the human mind is able to remember, but more amazed at the things that he claims to have forgotten.

Robert Wilson Lynd has a beautiful and playful style of narrative that can bring a smile to the lips and a shine in the eye of the audience. The actual theme of the present essay may not be something so serious as to require a deep analytical understanding by his audience. Yet it is so satirical and humourous that his audience will find it difficult to forget the essay in a hurry. As writers, after all, this is what most people want, that their audience should not forget wither their work or their names in a hurry!

The essayist Robert Wilson Lund has said in his essay *Forgetting* that he is surprised at what people are able to forget in these modern times, but it should appear to be even more surprising at what the modern man claims to have forgotten. Because when you come to think of it, the things the modern man claims to have forgotten are the very things that he should have remembered, that he should have found difficult to forget.

The essayist Robert Wilson Lynd has used humour to actually make fun of the memory powers of the human mind in these modern times that are controlled so much by technology.

## NOTES

The style of writing is so simple and subtle that the topic of this essay will not hurt or antagonize his audience even if the art of forgetting as Robert Lynd describes it were to match their own characteristics as to almost appear as if the essayist had written about them.

### 14.3.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner

The central theme of the essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner is the theft of his silk umbrella. In fact, it is not just about the theft of his precious silk umbrella. It is more about the kindness or generosity of the thief in leaving behind his old cotton one that was completely falling to pieces.

From the opening line itself, the essayist A G Gardiner displays his dry sense of humour. As is the case with most humourists, too, A G Gardiner displays his ability to direct his humour at himself as much as at others around him.

The essay is basically about the umbrella conscience some people possess. On rainy days, when people cannot leave home without carrying their umbrellas with them, it is always prudent to guard their umbrellas as if it were some hidden treasure. Usually people leave their wet umbrellas in one common place when they enter a shop, or sit at the barber's stand at the street corner for a quick shave.

The essayist A G Gardiner talks about umbrella morals. He appears to be quite astonished at how easy, and perhaps should we say, how normal it is for some people to take someone else's umbrella – always by mistake. After all, have they not left their own umbrella behind in exchange?

By the term 'umbrella morals', the essayist A G Gardiner is perhaps taking a dig at the lack of conscience or morals people display when it comes to umbrellas. Because, one would have thought it would have actually been the easiest thing in the whole wide world to be able to recognize your own umbrella, would it not? So how is it that they always manage to take someone else's umbrella, always by mistake of course.

The theme that runs through the entire essay written by A G Gardiner is about someone taking his silk umbrella, leaving behind his tattered one instead. All by mistake of course.

It is easy for people who have lost their precious umbrellas to moralize about the whole episode, of course. But, as A G Gardiner says, the people who take someone else's umbrella by such a mistake, actually would not have made a mistake at all. After all, the one they take by mistake is always a beautiful new umbrella, while the one they left behind is always an old, sad excuse for one. This is always referred to as umbrella morals. The moral is they are always kind enough to have left behind their own one in exchange for the one they took, by mistake of course.

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## 14.4 THEME OF THE ESSAYS

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Robert Wilson Lynd and  
A.G. Gardiner

Let us discuss the theme of Lynd's essay first.

### 14.4.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd

The central theme of the essay titled *Forgetting* by the British Irish essayist Robert Wilson Lynd is exactly what it says, the ability of the human mind to forget something.

Yet, the essayist explains that he is actually amazed and astonished at the things the human mind is able to remember in these modern times that are dominated by technology. Against the list of things that the human mind is able to remember in the modern age, what is surprising is how people are able to forget things that they should have actually remembered, or have found easy to remember.

The style of narrative is so simple and subtle that his audience will find it difficult to take offence, even if they thought the essay had been directed at them personally, or at someone they knew personally. Of course if they thought it had been directed at someone they knew personally, they would have found it even more humorous.

Robert Wilson Lynd has set out a list of things that he finds people find difficult to forget. According to the essayist, the human mind finds it so easy to remember things that are of absolutely no consequence in their lives. But they are absolutely not able to remember something that is essential or important or significant to their scheme of things.

The theme is so simple and difficult to forget, because this is something that most people find easy to do, forget things they are absolutely forced to remember. After all, the human mind is capable of so much beyond its expectations. Yet when people are forced to remember something, like facts from history or science that they need to remember before a test or interview, they find it so difficult to remember anything of the required subject at the precise moment they are required to elaborate on it.

Yet, his audience will find it difficult to take offence at the theme or the content of this essay *Forgetting*. Obviously it is about someone they know but can never be about them. Is it not?

### 14.4.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner

The central theme of the essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner is the wonderful umbrella morals some people possess.

Why umbrella morals, one would ask. According to A G Gardiner, umbrellas are a precious commodity, especially when it is the monsoon

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season. You see, umbrellas are an essential commodity when it is raining heavily.

A G Gardiner describes umbrellas as being the centre of attention on a rainy day. The essayist appears to invite his audience to imagine this. Why in the whole wide world would anyone want to buy a new beautiful silk umbrella every year, especially when they are able to take one, perhaps at the barber's or grocer's, of course by mistake?

The essayist A G Gardiner uses this essay to inform the person who had taken his precious silk umbrella, by mistake. Of course he knows it was not a mistake. But do such people actually care about so called morals? According to A G Gardiner, perhaps people such as these are always waiting for such opportunities when they can take someone else's umbrella by mistake.

So, in effect, the central theme of the essay titled *On Umbrella Morals*, by the essayist A G Gardiner, is his attempt at telling the person who took his umbrella not to laugh so much,. The essayist wonders whether the original owner of the umbrella he is now carrying, the old, tattered cotton one, and is taking this opportunity to laugh at its new owner scornfully, which is usually the case.

Perhaps the moral of the essay is that A G Gardiner asks owners of new silk umbrellas to mark their umbrellas with their names, addresses and telephone numbers, so that people who take them home by mistake can always return them to their rightful owners.

But, really, would they actually do that, return something they took, by mistake of course?

### Check Your Progress

1. When was Robert Wilson born?
2. What was the pseudonym of A G Gardiner?

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## 14.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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Let us first discuss Lynd's essay.

### 14.5.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd

The essay titled *Forgetting* has been written by British Irish essayist Robert Wilson Lynd. The essay explores the ability or the power of the human memory. The essay draws a contrast between the things that people usually choose to remember, and the things that they choose to forget. Robert Lynd concludes that human beings use their memory power the way they use it to function, or drive their memory power in the direction they want it to move.

For instance, according to Robert Lynd, people do not remember things that they do not like or find unpleasant to remember. Take the case of medicines. Medicines are usually bitter, and most people do not like to take medicines. It could be also because they do not want to be reminded that they are sick and need to take medicines to get better. Most medicines are to be taken either before lunch or dinner. How is it that these people remember to have their lunch or dinner, but always forget to take their medicines? How grateful their doctors and chemists must be! They do not take their medicines, so keep getting worse, and visit their doctors with great regularity and frequency. They also buy more and more medicines, which they probably stack in their medicine cabinets and admire every night before going to bed.

On the other hand, human beings in the modern day use mobile phones. They are able to remember phone numbers and names of people with amazing accuracy. They also remember names of television shows, the character in shows they had watched a decade earlier, athletes and sportspersons because they had found them so attractive, names of actors or musicians.

While they are able to remember the names of people whose telephone numbers too they remember, they are able to forget the names of their tutors, or people who had harmed them in the past.

Robert Lynd finds it amazing that people do not forget to wear any essential item of clothing before they leave home, or to shut the front door behind them, but when required, they do forget their keys, or their wallets.

According to Robert Lynd, another species of human beings who forget things are young athletes and sportspersons. While returning home from their practice sessions, or the sports fields, this species of human beings usually find it difficult to remember to carry their footballs, baseball bats, or gloves, or the stumps, or anything at all related to their sport. So what are they thinking about when they leave the field? Obviously they are thinking about how wonderful the game had been, or the great looking people in the audience who had cheered them, or how well they had played.

Consider the fishermen or anglers. They remember to carry the fish they had just caught, but they always forget the fishing rods behind. What were they thinking of while heading home? Of course they were admiring the great catch of fish or how they were going to cook it when they were back home.

Robert Wilson Lynd has a tongue-in-cheek, satirical perspective of every day events that the normal human beings prefer to either forget or remember as the occasion presents itself. Although he does not seem to have actually used the term, it is called selective memory. But Robert Lynd does say that psychologists have claimed that the human memory is capable of forgetting things that had been unpleasant in the past, and remember those things that had given them pleasure and happiness.

## NOTES

## NOTES

According to Robert Lynd, these special species of people, such as sportspeople, fishermen, people in showbiz, or people who need to take medicines regularly, to his mind, always manage to live in an imaginary world. They always appear to be thinking about something that is of grave concern to mankind, or something that is crucial for national security.

So, let us all try to analyze what we like to remember, and what we want to forget so conveniently.

### 14.5.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner

The essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* was written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner. The central plot that runs through the entire length of the short essay is the author's frustration at the ease with which some rascal carried away his new silk umbrella, and instead left behind their old, tattered, broken, cotton 'by mistake'.

Essentially, A G Gardiner was an editor at various newspapers, but had been invited to write essays for *The Star* under a pseudonym. The journal had had a chain of stringers who were invited to write under pseudonyms. Keeping the name of the journal in context, of course, all their stringers were invited to choose pseudonyms that were names of stars.

Gardiner had a sharp sense of humour, and as most writers do, he had the ability to laugh at himself. He also had the ability to laugh at everyday events that were actually anything but humorous. They used to be everyday events that were intended to cause frustration, anger and some cuss words. But then, A G Gardiner probably realized that the world would be a better place if people could only learn to laugh at things. Obviously, all the stringers who wrote for *The Star* had their own individual styles of writing, and their own basic themes. To the extent that their audiences probably learned to identify each individual writer by their individual writing styles and content, but only by their pseudonyms. This was good, because the present essay *On Umbrella Morals*, opens with a hard hitting paragraph. This is how it goes.

"A sharp shower came on as I walked along the street, but I did not put up my umbrella. The truth is I couldn't put up my umbrella. The frame would not work for one thing, and even if it had worked, I would not have put the thing up, because it was falling to pieces and I would be the laughing stock. The fact is, the umbrella is not my umbrella at all. It is the umbrella of some person who I hope will read these lines. He has got my silk umbrella. I have got the cotton one he left in exchange. I imagine him walking along the street under my umbrella, and throwing a scornful glance at the fellow who was carrying his ugly thing. I dare say the rascal laughed silently as he eyed the fool with his cotton umbrella. He is one of those people who have what I may call an umbrella conscience."

A G Gardiner says that he had lost his own silk umbrella, obviously a new one, probably at the barber's stand at a random street corner. The

umbrella that had been left behind by the original owner was a sad excuse for an umbrella. It had a broken frame, the cotton cloth was almost not there. The umbrella would not open. Of course, its original owner had left it behind in exchange, with such generosity, of course. Who would be kind enough to leave behind their sad versions of umbrellas? In exchange for the new, silk umbrella he had carried away, by mistake of course.

The title of the essay, which is *On Umbrella Morals*, is about the umbrella conscience people have. Of course, they have a conscience, an umbrella conscience at that. When their own umbrellas get too old to stand up to the heavy downpours of the monsoon season, they find it so difficult to identify their own old excuses for umbrellas, instead taking someone else's new one, entirely by mistake.

Of course, upon reaching home, surprisingly not immediately, two steps away, but when they arrive home, they realize they have someone else's umbrella by mistake. But of course it would be futile trying to return to the spot and return it to its rightful owner. He would have left anyway.

So essentially, A G Gardiner had written this essay with the hope that the original owner of the old cotton broken down version of an umbrella, would read it and squirm in discomfort, while his conscience lay heavy within his heart.

## NOTES

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### 14.6 ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

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Let us now discuss the issues in these essays.

#### 14.6.1 *Forgetting*, by Robert Wilson Lynd

The essay titled *Forgetting* was written by the British Irish essayist and literary writer Robert Wilson Lynd. The essay deals with the tendency of the human memory to forget specific things.

Robert Wilson Lynd has quoted psychologists and their studies that state that the human memory is capable to remembering or forgetting those things they want to remember or forget. This in medical jargon is known as selective memory. For instance, there have been known instances where people have chosen to remember people they would want to remember and forgotten the names of people whose faces they were able to remember.

Robert Lynd has described people like young sportspersons who forget their bats or mittens on the sports field after a game. What are they thinking about when they are returning home? Perhaps they are dreaming about the game they just played, or maybe they are thinking about what they are going to do that evening.

## NOTES

Usually, the older generation is accused of forgetting things. But Robert Lynd has only spoken of younger people who forget things, because they are busy imagining something wonderful. Here is one wonderful way human memory usually plays truant. People remember to shut their front door when they leave home, but forget to take their keys. Some young people have been known to go meet friends at a bar or a café, but forget their wallets at home.

Robert Wilson Lynd was a literary writer and an essayist and poet who had a fabulous sense of humour. His style of narrative has been known to be simple, subtle and satirical, often to be aimed at himself. Robert Lynd usually chose themes or plots that were related to simple, everyday events – like this amazing power of human memory. The simplicity and the satire rarely allowed his audience to forget his writing. He often used pseudonyms while writing essays. However, obvious his audience could identify with his unique sense of humour and writing style.

### 14.6.2 *On Umbrella Morals*, by A G Gardiner

This essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* had been written by the essayist A G Gardiner for the journal *The Star*. This was a publication that used to have a number of stringers writing essays for them on different themes.

Each of the essayists had their distinct style of narrative, and focal theme of course. Obviously, A G Gardiner too had his distinctive humourous, satirical style of narrative. What was more all the essayists had been invited by the editor to choose a pseudonym, which was the name of a star. Obviously, keeping the name of the journal in context.

The audiences came to identify all the essayists by their distinctive styles of narrative as well as their themes or plots. None of the essayists ever revealed their true names to their audience. The name A G Gardiner had chosen as a pseudonym was Alpha under The Plough.

In this essay *On Umbrella Morals*, A G Gardiner has taken a frustrated yet humourous dig at a rascal who had carried away his new silk umbrella by mistake, and left behind his old cotton one which was almost non-existent of course. Its frame was broken while the cotton cloth was in actual shreds. Moreover, the umbrella could not even be opened.

The moral, as the title suggests, is that owners of new silk umbrellas should not let go of their umbrellas, even if they were to mark them with their names and addresses, not to mention their phone numbers. How would such identification marks help, when the people who carried them away always did so by mistake, but were kind enough to have left behind their old sorry versions behind.

### Check Your Progress

3. What was the central theme of the essay titled *Forgetting*?
4. What was the central theme of this essay titled *On Umbrella Morals*?

Robert Wilson Lynd and  
A.G. Gardiner

### NOTES

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## 14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Robert Wilson Lynd was born on April 20, 1879.
2. A G Gardiner wrote essays under the pseudonym Alpha of the Plough.
3. The central theme of the essay titled *Forgetting* by the British Irish essayist is the power of the human mind to remember things.
4. The central theme of the essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner is the theft of his silk umbrella.

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## 14.8 SUMMARY

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- Robert Wilson Lynd was an Anglo Irish, or British Irish, essayist, writer, poetry editor and Irish nationalist.
- Robert Wilson Lynd was first enrolled at the Royal Belfast Academical Institute, and thereafter at Queen's University, Belfast.
- Robert Lynd used to use the pseudonym Y Y at the *New Statesman*, where his weekly essay, or column, ran from the year 1913 till 1943.
- In April of the year 1909, Robert Wilson Lynd married writer Sylvia Dryhurst. Robert and Sylvia Lynd had two daughters named Marie and Sigle, who were also inclined towards literature and writing.
- A G Gardiner wrote essays under the pseudonym Alpha of the Plough.
- In the year 1902, A G Gardiner joined the *Daily News* as its editor. Under his supervision, the journal began covering not just news but also literary critiques. Circulation rose almost three-fold.
- The central theme of this essay titled *Forgetting* by the British Irish essayist is the power of the human mind to remember things.
- The essayist Robert Wilson Lynd has used humour to actually make fun of the memory powers of the human mind in these modern times that are controlled so much by technology.
- The central theme of the essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner is the theft of his silk umbrella.

## NOTES

- The essay titled *Forgetting* has been written by British Irish essayist Robert Wilson Lynd. The essay explores the ability or the power of the human memory.
- The essay titled *On Umbrella Morals* was written by the British essayist and editor A G Gardiner. The central plot that runs through the entire length of the short essay is the author's frustration at the ease with which some rascal carried away his new silk umbrella, and instead left behind his old, tattered, broken, cotton by mistake.

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### 14.9 KEY WORDS

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- **Drama:** Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance: a play, opera, mime, ballet, etc, performed in a theatre, or on radio or television.
- **Radical:** A radical is someone who has very extreme views, so you could say that their views are different from the root up.
- **Essay:** An essay is, generally, a piece of writing that gives the author's own argument — but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of a paper, an article, a pamphlet, and a short story.

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### 14.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of A G Gardiner as an author.
2. What led Robert Wilson write essay *Forgetting*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the summary of the essay *On Umbrella Morals* in detail.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the essay *Forgetting*.
3. What are the issues highlighted in the essay *Forgetting*?
4. Discuss the significance of the essay *On Umbrella Morals* in detail.

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### 14.11 FURTHER READINGS

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- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *The Idea of Prose*. New York: SUNY Press.
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