

Course Material

Department of English and Modern European Languages

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B.A. (Hons.) English Semester-II

**Paper III: Prose (A) (Code: Eng- 203)
Unit-I Theory of Prose**

Types of Prose, Types of Prose Style, Autobiography/Biography and Memoir, Travelogue, Periodical Essay, Formal Essay, Familiar Essay, Poetic Prose (Euphuism), Prose of Thought

Dear Students,

Below you can find handouts on Travelogue, Periodical Essay, Formal Essay, and Familiar Essay.

You can prepare your answers for the exam with their aid.

With this, your course for Unit-I Theory of Prose stands completed.

All the best!

Travelogue

Travelogue is a piece of writing giving an eye -witness account of travel to different cultures and peoples.

It is a varied genre of great antiquity to which many famous, more or less professional or 'full-time' writers have contributed, but which has also been enriched by a number of occasional writers. For the most part these have been diplomats, scholars, missionaries, soldiers of fortune, doctors, explorers and sailors.

The genre subsumes works of exploration and adventure as well as guides and accounts of sojourns in foreign lands.

Some of the earliest records of travels come from Egypt; for instance, an anonymous 14th c. BC record known as *The Journeying of the Master of the Captains of Egypt*. From China we have early accounts of travels in India by Fa-Hian (c. ad 399–414), and by Shaman Hwui-Li (c. ad 630) of journeys in the Far East.

A notable Arabian traveller was Ibn Battutah (1304–78), who for twenty-eight

years travelled round the Far East, India, Africa, South Russia, Egypt, Spain and elsewhere and who in 1354 compiled a copious description of his journeyings.

These are only a handful of the many who, in Classical times, in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period, explored the then known world and opened up the unknown.

From the 16th c. onwards the Near East, the Middle East and the Far East, Asia and parts of Africa were increasingly explored and colonized by the Europeans, and the world of the Americas was gradually charted. As the world became more navigable, so travel books of every kind proliferated.

In the last half of the 16th c. a number of accounts of exploratory journeys began to appear. A notable example is Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1598). In the 18th c. travel became easier (hence the popularity of the Grand Tour, *q.v.*) and thus there is a steadily increasing number of works. The following are a few of the more notable instances: Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721); Defoe's *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6); Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters . . . During Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa* (1763–7); Smollett's *Travels in France and Italy* (1766); Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*; plus many other works by European writers.

Early in the 19th c. Alexander von Humboldt, the great German explorer, geographer, botanist and mineralogist, began to publish the voluminous accounts of his global travels. Between 1808 and 1827 he published thirty-five volumes, finally gathered together under the title *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent*.

In the 19th and 20th c. there was a positive flood of one sort and another which shows no signs of abating. Since the Second World War, 'armchair' travelling has become an occupation for many people; and, as travelling has become easier and easier, so people read more books about the places they have heard of, have been to or are going to.

Here follow just a few of some of the outstanding works of the last 200-odd years: Nikolai Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveller* (1801), translated into English in 1957; Lamartine's *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages pendant un voyage en Orient* (1835); Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839); Sir Henry Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone (1872) and Through the Dark Continent (1878)*; Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (1897); Edith Durham's *High Albania* (1909); Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1942); Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* (1958), which he followed with *Slowly Down the Ganges* (1966) and *The Big Red Train Ride* (1978); V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* (1964),

which he followed with *A Turn in the South* (1989); Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1978) and *The Songlines* (1987); Pico Iyer's *Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-so-Far East* (1988); Bill Bryson's *Neither Here nor There: Travels in Europe* (1991)

This selection suggests the remarkable richness and variety of travel literature.

may include illustrative material, such as maps or pictures, but usually these elements are secondary to the main prose narrative, and a much smaller proportion of the text is given over to them.

The narrative offered by a travelogue will almost invariably be a retrospective, first-person account of the author's own experience of a journey, or of an unfamiliar place or people. What is more, the personal or subjective aspect of that narrative is often very pronounced, as we are made keenly aware not just of the places being visited, but also of the author's response to that place, and his or her impressions, thoughts and feelings.

This emphasis on an autobiographical narrative, and the author's personal experience of another people or place, again distinguishes travelogues from guidebooks

it should be noted that this is a form of writing that admits of enormous diversity, even as it conforms, more or less, to the definition just given of it. In the first place, and most obviously, travelogues may vary greatly in the destinations they describe and the itineraries they recount;

More significantly, however, modern travelogues also exhibit a remarkable range in terms of style and tone, form and structure, the personae adopted, the degree of 'literary' aspiration, and in much else besides.

The genre admits of both very serious and very humorous writing, and tonally can encompass everything from earnest polemic to inconsequential whimsy, from poetic lyricism to crude farce. It also spans the complete spectrum of what one might term 'highbrow', 'middle-brow' and 'low-brow' writing.

William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns* (1993), for example, which recounts a year spent in Delhi,

Travelogues often intersect with essay writing, as in V. S. Naipaul's *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1976), whose trip in India became the occasion for extended observations on a nation and people. This is similarly the case in Rebecca West's work on Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941)

Purpose

Travelogue is a detailed socio-political study of the physical world and exotic cultures the writer visits. For this kind of writing an

intrinsic quality of honesty and curiosity is required in the Travelogue writer. He should be a truthful follower of what he discerns. He must be a good analyzer who can distinguish between facts and fiction. He identifies the familiar things as well as the unusual and striking. This enhances his understanding of the world. It also enhances the knowledge of the reader about the people and places. All this makes his account interesting.

The travel-writing also needs to be a powerful narrative. Often it is made interesting with anecdotes and tale-telling. The writer usually begins with his departure from his native place and concludes with a return to it. He talks about the fruitfulness of his journey in terms of some intellectual and spiritual gain. Sometimes travelogues are full of physical descriptions and observations exhibiting the writer's literary skills.

Blanton Casey writes:

“What we have come to expect today as travel literature contains a balance of these two elements: impersonal and personal.... The reverberations between observer and observed, between self and the world, allow the writer to celebrate the local while contemplating the universal a conscious commitment to represent the strange and exotic in ways that both familiarize and distance the foreign; a writerly concern with language and literature.”

The author's purpose determines the form and pattern of his writing. For example, the purpose of Columbus in *Voyages (Nuova Raccolta Colombiana)* was to explore the physical world only. The discovery of a new land interested him. He had nothing to do with the expression of thoughts and opinions. We cannot find fault with him for writing what he wanted to and for not writing what he never intended to. We must consider whether he has accomplished his purpose or not. If that is done, the account is successful. In addition, if it has literary graces, the lovers of literature may like it.

The personal qualities of the author count much for his popularity. If he is a chauvinist in his account, his compatriots may perhaps like it but the people about whom he writes, would detest him. If his attitude is softened with sympathy, if he is receptive to the exotic beauty and if, where necessary, mildly critical of what calls for criticism, in short, if he is balanced, judicious and well-meaning, he would be appreciated both by the people of his country and the people of the country he writes about. In a good work of travel literature the author befriends the reader. The latter has the feeling while reading that he is not following the former but keeping him company wherever he goes. The two like each other and they jointly become the explorers of the country already known before or

unknown and discover new things together as it were.

Norman Douglas is quite right when he writes:
“The reader of a good travel book is entitled not only to an exterior voyage, to descriptions of scenery and so forth, but to an interior, a sentimental or temperamental voyage, which takes place side by side with that outer one. The writer should possess a brain worth exploring; some philosophy of life... and the courage to proclaim it and put it to the test.”

See also Wikipedia entry on Travelogue.

Periodical Essay

A periodical essay is an **essay** (that is, a short work of nonfiction) published in a magazine or journal--in particular, an essay that appears as part of a series.

The 18th century is considered the great age of the periodical essay in English. Notable periodical essayists of the 18th century include Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith.

The Periodical Essay in the Eighteenth Century

Introduction:

The periodical essay and the novel are the two important gifts of “our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century” to English literature. The latter was destined to have a long and variegated career over the centuries, but the former was fated to be born with the eighteenth century and to die with it.

This shows how it was a true mirror of the age. A. R. Humphrey observes in this connection: “If any literary form is the particular creation and the particular mirror of the Augustan Age in England, it is the periodical essay.” Generally speaking, it is very difficult to date precisely the appearance of a new literary genre. For example, nobody can say with perfect certainty as to when the first novel, or the first comedy or the first short story came to be written in England or elsewhere. We often talk of “fathers” in literature: for instance, Fielding is called the father of English novel, Chaucer the father of English poetry, and so forth. But that is done, more often than not in a loose and very unprecise sense. This difficulty in dating a genre, however, does not arise in a few cases--that of the periodical essay included. The periodical essay was literally invented by Steele on April 12, 1709, the day he launched his *Taller*. Before *The Taller* there had been periodicals and there had been essays, but there had been no periodical essays. The

example of *The Taller* was followed by a large number of writers of the eighteenth century till its very end, when with the change of sensibility, the periodical essay disappeared along with numerous other accompaniments of the age. Throughout the century there was a deluge of periodical essays.

The periodical essay remained the most popular, if not the dominant, literary form. Men as different as Pope, Swift, Dr. Johnson, and Goldsmith found the periodical essay an eligible medium. As a matter of fact it was, unlike the novel for example, the only literary form which was patronised without exception by all the major writers of the century. It is hard to name a single first-rate writer of the century who did not write something for a periodical paper. Mrs. Jane H. Jack says: "From the days of Queen Anne—who had *The Spectator* taken in with her breakfast—to the time of the French Revolution and even beyond, periodical essays on the lines laid down by Steele and Addison flooded the country and met the eye in every bookseller's shop and coffee-house." Before tracing the history of the periodical essay in the eighteenth century and assigning causes for its phenomenal popularity, let us consider what exactly a periodical essay is.

What is a Periodical Essay?

What is called the periodical essay was first of all given by Steele as *The Taller*. Nothing of this type had before him been attempted in England or even elsewhere. However, to attempt a definition of the periodical essay is neither easy nor helpful. George Sherburn in *A Literary History of England*, edited by Albert C. Baugh, avers in this connexion: "Rigorous definition of this peculiarly eighteenth century type of publication is not very helpful...The periodical essay has been aptly described as dealing with morals and manners, but it might in fact deal with anything that pleased its author.

Reasons for the Popularity:

The periodical essay found a spectacular response in the eighteenth century on account of various reasons. Fundamentally this new genre was in perfect harmony with the spirit of the age. It sensitively combined the tastes of the different classes of readers with the result that it appealed to all—though particularly to the resurgent middle classes. In the eighteenth century there was a phenomenal spurt in literacy, which expanded widely the circle of readers. They welcomed the periodical essay as it was "light" literature. The brevity of the periodical essay, its common sense approach, and its tendency to dilute morality and philosophy for popular consumption paid rich dividends. To a great extent, the periodical essayist assumed the office of the clergyman and taught the masses the lesson of elegance and refinement, though not of morality of the psalm-singing kind. The periodical paper was particularly welcome as it was not a dry, high-brown, or hoity-toity affair like the professional sermon, in spite of being highly instructive in nature. In most cases the periodical essayist did not "speak from the clouds" but communicated with the reader with an almost buttonholing familiarity. The avoidance of politics (though not by all the periodical essayists yet by a good many of them) also contributed towards their popularity. Again, the periodical essayists made it a point to cater for the female taste and give due consideration to the female point of view. That won for them many female readers too. All these factors were responsible for the universal acceptance of the periodical essay in eighteenth-century England:

The History of the Periodical Essay

“The Tatler”:

It was Steele's *Tatler* which began the deluge of the periodical essays which followed. The first issue of *The Tatler* appeared on April 12, 1709. At that time Addison, Steele's bosom friend, was functioning as Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in that country. Steele had not informed Addison of his design, but if he desired to write in secret he was not lucky; a single month detected him, and Addison's first contribution appeared on May 26. Though Addison contributed to *The Tatler* much less than Steele, yet he soon overshadowed his friend. Of the 271 numbers, 188 are Steele's and 42 Addison's; 36 of them were written by both jointly. The rest were penned by others like Tickell and Budgell. Steele spoke of himself as “a distressed prince who calls in a powerful neighbour to his aid,” and added: “I was undone by my auxiliary [Addison]: when I had once called him in, I could not subsist without *him*.” *The Tatler* appeared thrice a week—on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, that is, the days on which the post went to the country. As regards the aim of the paper, we may quote the words of Steele in the dedication to the first collected volume (1710): “The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, affectation, and recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse and our behaviour.” All the material of *The Tatler* was purported by Steele to be based upon discussions in the four famous coffee-houses, and was divided as follows:

- (i) “All accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment”—White's Chocolate-house.
- (ii) Poetry—Will's Coffee-house.
- (iii) Learning—the Grecian.
- (iv) Foreign and domestic news—St. James' Coffee-house.
- (v) “What else I shall on any other subject offer”—“My own apartment”

The chief importance of *The Tatler* lies in its social and moral criticism which had a tangibly salubrious effect on the times. Both Addison and Steele did good work each in his own way. Addison was a much more refined and correct writer than Steele whom Macaulay aptly calls “a scholar among rakes and a rake among scholars.” Addison's prose is, according to Dr. Johnson, a model of “the middle style.” And this is his famous suggestion: “Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.” Steele, on the contrary, was a thing of moods and moments. His writing has a look of spontaneity and human warmth which Addison's lacks. Comparing Steele and Addison, George Sherburn maintains “Steele's prose never attained the elegant ease and correctness of Addison's, and yet it is probable that his tendency to warm to a subject and to write intimately and personally, as the reader's friend, contributed much to the success of the paper. Addison's best essays are the result of his slightly chilly insight into the typical mental attitudes of his day.” Later critics are apt to place Steele higher than Addison. Thus Leigh-Hunt, for instance, affirms that he prefers “Steele with all his faults” to “Addison with all his essays.”

“The Spectator”:

Without any warning to his readers, Steele suddenly wound up *The Tatler* on January 2, 1711. But two months later—on March 1, 1711—*The Spectator* began its memorable career of 555 numbers up to December 6, 1712. Whereas *The Tatler* had appeared only three times a week, *The Spectator* appeared daily, excepting Sundays. The new paper became tremendously popular among English men and women belonging to all walks of life. The best of all the periodical

essays, it is an important human document concerning the morals and manners, thoughts and ideas, of the English society of the age of Queen Anne. Addison's fame chiefly rests on *The Spectator* papers. As A. R. Humphreys puts it: "Were it not for his essays, Addison's literary reputation would be insignificant; into them, diluted and sweetened for popular consumption, went his classical and modern reading, his study of philosophy and natural science, reflections culled from French critics, and indeed] anything that might make learning "polite". A particularly happy feature of *The Spectator* was its envisagement of a club consisting of representatives from diverse walks of life. Among them Sir Roger de Coverley, and eccentric but thoroughly lovable Tory baronet, is one of the immortal creations of English literature. *The Spectator* drew a large female readership as many of the papers were for and about women. Though both Addison and Steele were Whigs, yet in *The Spectator* they kept up a fairly neutral political poise and, in fact, did their best to expose the error of the political fanaticism of both the Tories and Whigs. Further, *The Spectator* evinced much interest in trade and, consequently, endeared itself to the up-and-coming trading community which had its representative in The Spectator Club—the rich Sir Andrew Freeport. However, much of the charm of *The Spectator* lay in its style—humorous, ironical, but elegant and polished. The chief importance of *The Spectator* for the modern reader lies in its humour. As A. R. Humphrey reminds us, *The Spectator* papers are important much more historically than aesthetically. The modern reader, "if led to expect more than a charming humour and vivacity, is likely to feel cheated."

"The Guardian" and Other Papers before Dr. Johnson:

The tremendous popularity of *The Toiler* and *The Spectator* prompted many imitations. Among them may be mentioned *The Tory Teller*, *The Female Tatler*, *Tit for Tatt*, and *The North Teller*. The best of all was Steele's own *Guardian* which had a run of 175 numbers, from March 12 to October 1, 1713. It was, like *The Spectator*, a daily. "If," says George Sherburn, "The Spectator had not existed, The Guardian might outrank all periodicals of this kind, but it is shaded by its predecessor, and the fact that Addison—busy with his tragedy *Cato*—had no part in the early numbers certainly diminished its interest." Another factor which diminished its interest was its open indulgence in political affairs. Apart from Steele and Addison it included contributions from Berkeley and Gay. *The Englishmen*, the successor of *The Guardian*, was even more politically biased. Steele's *Lover* (40 numbers) and Addison's *Freeholder* (55 numbers) followed *The Englishman*. Even to name the works of other periodical essayists would be difficult, so large is their number. "None of them," to quote Sherburn, "approached with any consistency the excellency of these (the periodical papers produced by Steele and Addison)."

Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, and Others:

In the second half of the eighteenth century the periodical essay showed a tendency to cease as an independent publication and to get incorporated into the newspaper as just another feature. The series of about a hundred papers of Dr. Johnson, called *The Idler*, for example, was contributed to newspaper, *The Universal Chronicle*, and appeared between April 15, 1758 and April 5, 1760. These papers are lighter and shorter than those published in the periodical paper *The Rambler*. *The Rambler* appeared twice a week, between March 20, 1750 and March 14, 1752, and ran to 208 numbers. Dr. Johnson as a periodical essayist was much more serious in purpose than Steele and Addison had been. His lack of humour and unrelieved gravity coupled with his ponderous English make his *Rambler* papers quite heavy reading. The lack of popularity of *The Rambler* can easily be ascribed to this very fact.

In the end, let us consider the work of Oliver Goldsmith who from 1757 to 1772 contributed to no fewer than ten periodicals, including *The Monthly Review*. His own *Bee* (1759) ran to only eight weekly numbers. *The Citizen of the World* (1762)—Goldsmith his best work—is

a collection of essays which originally appeared in *The Public Ledger* as “Chinese Letters” (1760-61). Goldsmith’s essays are rich in human details, a quivering sentimentalism, and candidness of spirit. His prose style is, likewise, quite attractive; he avoids bitterness, coarseness, pedantry, and stiff wit. His style, in the words of George Sherburn, “lacks the boldness of the aristocratic manner, and it escapes the tendency of his generation to follow Johnson into excessive heaviness of diction and balanced formality of sentence structure...It is precisely for this lack of formality and for his graceful and sensitive ease, fluency, and vividness that we value his style.

More Notes

Introduction:

The periodical essay was a new literary form that emerged during the early part of the eighteenth century. Periodical essays typically appeared in affordable publications that came out regularly, usually two or three times a week, and were only one or two pages in length. Unlike other publications of the time that consisted of a medley of information and news, essay periodicals were comprised of a single essay on a specific topic or theme, usually having to do with the conduct or manners. They were often narrated by a persona or a group of personas, commonly referred to as a “club.” (DeMaria 529)

For the most part, readers of the periodical essay were the educated middle class individuals who held learning in high esteem but were not scholars or intellectuals. Women were a growing part of this audience and periodical editors often tried to appeal to them in their publications. (Shevelov 27-29)

The *Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712) were the most successful and influential single-essay periodicals of the eighteenth century but there are other periodicals that helped shape this literary genre.

The Beginnings of the Periodical Essay:

While the periodical essay emerged during the eighteenth century and reached its peak in publications like the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, its roots can be traced back to the late seventeenth century. An important forerunner to the *Spectator* is John Dunton’s *Athenian Mercury*, which played a key role in the development of the periodical essay. (DeMaria 529-530)

The *Athenian Mercury* began publication in 1691 with the purpose of ‘resolving weekly all the most nice and curious questions propos’d by the ingenious.’ It did not publish essays. Instead it followed a question and answer or “advice column” format and is one of the first periodicals to solicit questions from its audience. Readers submitted questions anonymously and their candid inquiries were answered by a collection of “experts” known as the Athenian Society or simply the “Athenians.” (Graham 19) Dunton hinted that the Athenian Society was made up of a group of learned individuals, but in reality the society only consisted of three people who were not necessarily “authorities.” Their identities remained a secret, however, and this is one of the first instances of a periodical using a fictional social group or club to answer questions or narrate. (Hunter 13-15)

Each issue of the Athenian Mercury would answer anywhere from eight to fifteen questions on topics ranging from love, marriage and relationships to medicine, superstitions and the paranormal. Dunton received so many questions from female readers that he decided to devote the first Tuesday of every month to questions from women. (Berry 18-19) Examples of the questions submitted to the Athenians include:

Why the Sea is salt? (Athenian Gazette vol. 1 no.2), Whence proceeds weeping and laughing from the same cause? (Athenian Gazette vol.1 no.3) Whether most Persons do not Marry too young? (Athenian Gazette vol. 1, no. 13) and Whether it be proper for Women to be Learned? (Athenian Gazette vol. 1, no. 18)

As these sample questions demonstrate, the Athenian Mercury was focused on the social and cultural concerns of individuals. These subjects tapped into the reading public's desire for knowledge, instructive information, and for something new and as a result, the Athenian Mercury was a huge success. (Hunter 14-15) Several features of the Athenian Mercury, such as its epistolary format and its creation of a fictional club, would be continued by another influential periodical published during the eighteenth century, Daniel Defoe's *The Review*. (DeMaria 529-531)

Originally known as *A Weekly Review of the Affairs of France; Purg'd from the Errors and Partiality of Newswriters and Petty Statesmen of All sides*, the *Review* began publication in 1704 as an eight page weekly. The title, length and frequency of the periodical changed in subsequent issues until it eventually became a triweekly periodical entitled the *Review*. (Defoe, *Secord xvii-xviii*)

Most issues of the *Review* consisted of a single essay, usually covering a political topic, which was followed by questions-and-answers section called the *Mercure Scandal: or Advice from the Scandal Club*, translated out of French. Defoe eventually replaced the translated out of French with *A Weekly History of Nonsense, Impertinency, Vice and Debauchery*. (DeMaria 531) In this section, a fictional group known as the "Scandal Club" answered readers' questions on a variety of subjects including drinking, gambling, love and the treatment of women. The advice column component of the *Review* was so popular among readers that Defoe began publishing a twenty-eight page monthly supplement devoted entirely to readers' questions. By May 1705 Defoe dropped the *Advice from the Scandal Club* from the *Review* and began publishing the questions-and-answers separately in a publication entitled the *Little Review*. (Graham 48-49)

With their advice column elements, the *Advice from the Scandal Club* and the *Little Review* were obvious imitators of the *Athenian Mercury*. However, the questions and answers in Defoe's periodicals were longer and mostly written as letters and this type of prose writing would eventually evolve into the single essay format of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. (Graham 50) Like other periodicals of the time, the *Advice from the Scandal Club* and the *Little Review* addressed questions of behavior and conduct but Defoe's tone was more satirical and he would often mock the stuffiness of the *Athenian Mercury* in his essays. Defoe's periodicals were also less mannerly and he often placed ads for products like remedies for venereal disease within their pages. (DeMaria 532)

The Tatler (1709-1711) and The Spectator (1711-1712)

The single-essay made its first appearance in The Tatler, which began publication in 1709. Created by Richard Steele, the purpose of The Tatler was to “offer something, whereby such worth members of the public may be instructed, after their reading, what to think..” and to “have something of which may be of entertainment to the fair sex..” (Tatler, April 12, 1709) Steele was the creator but other significant writers of the time, including Joseph Addison and Jonathan Swift, were also contributors.

The Tatler was a single-sheet paper that came out three times a week and in the beginning, consisted of short paragraphs on topics related to domestic, foreign and financial events, literature, theater and gossip. Each topic fell under the heading of a specific place, such as a coffee house, where that discussion was most likely to take place. (Mackie 15) Isaac Bickerstaff, the sixty-something fictional editor, narrated The Tatler and his thoughts on miscellaneous subjects were included under the heading “From my own Apartment.” As The Tatler progressed, these popular entries began taking up more and more space until the first issue consisting of a single, “From my own Apartment” essay appeared on July 30, 1709. (DeMaria 534) In an attempt to appeal to his female audience, Steele introduced the character Jenny Distaff, Isaac Bickerstaff’s half sister, and she narrated some of the essays later in the periodical’s run.

The last issue of The Tatler appeared in January 1711 and by the following March, Steele launched a new periodical, The Spectator, with Joseph Addison. The Spectator was published daily and consisted of a single essay on a topic usually having to do with conduct or public behavior and contained no political news. The Spectator was narrated by the fictional persona, Mr. Spectator, with some help from the six members Spectator Club.

While The Tatler introduced the form of the periodical essay, “*The Spectator* perfected it” and firmly established it as a literary genre. The Spectator remained influential even after it ceased publication in 1712. Other eighteenth century periodicals, including Samuel Johnson’s The Idler and The Rambler, copied the periodical essay format. Issues of The Tatler and The Spectator were published in book form and continued to sell for the rest of the century. The popularity of the periodical essay eventually started to wane, however, and essays began appearing more often in periodicals that included other material. By the mid-eighteenth century, periodicals comprised of a single essay eventually disappeared altogether from the market.

Formal Essay

The form of literature known as Essay is traditionally classified as formal and informal.

According to William Holman, a Formal Essay is characterized by "serious purpose, dignity, logical organization, length," whereas the informal essay is characterized by "the personal element (self-revelation, individual tastes and experiences, confidential manner), humor, graceful style, rambling structure, unconventionality or novelty of theme." - A Handbook to Literature

Essays are written for varied purposes. Some of these are: literary criticism, political manifestos, learned arguments, disputations, observations on daily life, recollections, and reflections of the author.

The Formal Essay, according to Aldous Huxley, is written to express ideas that are factual and/or abstract universal. He writes:

- **The objective, the factual, and the concrete particular:** The essayists who write from this perspective "do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme. Their art consists of setting forth, passing judgment upon, and drawing general conclusions from the relevant data".

-**The abstract-universal:** Is the kind written by those essayists 'who do their work in the world of high abstractions', who are never personal and who seldom mention the particular facts of experience.

Some other characteristics of the Formal Essay are:

Author's viewpoint: Usually uses third-person pronoun.

Subject/content/ Sources of evidence: More commonly drawn from shared historical events or literature or other forms of knowledge.

Tone: Tends to be removed from the subject and appears to be objective; tends to hold emotions in check and express concerns through strong arguments and powerful rhetorical devices.

Structure: Follows a structure that focuses on the development of one clear argument at a time to support a clearly stated thesis.

Further definitions and characteristics of the Formal Essay

Jo Ray McCuen-Metherell and Anthony C. Winkler write in their seminal work that 'a formal essay is aphoristic, structured, and serious.'

>.A formal essay is a short, relatively impersonal composition in prose. Also known as an *impersonal essay* or a *Baconian essay* (after the writings of England's first major essayist, Francis Bacon).

In contrast to the *familiar* or *personal* essay, the formal essay is typically used for the discussion of ideas. Its rhetorical purpose is generally to inform or persuade.

"The technique of the formal essay," says William Harmon, "is now practically identical with that of all factual or theoretical prose in which literary effect is secondary." (*A Handbook to Literature*, 2011).

Development

- **"Formal" essays** were introduced in England by [Francis] Bacon, who adopted Montaigne's term. Here the style is objective, compressed, aphoristic, wholly serious. . . . In modern times, the formal essay has become more diversified in subject matter, style, and length until it is better known by such names as article, dissertation, or thesis, and factual presentation rather than style or literary effect has become the basic aim." (L. H. Hornstein, G. D. Percy, and C. S. Brown, *The Reader's Companion to World Literature*, 2nd ed. Signet, 2002)
 - **A Blurred Distinction Between Formal Essays and Informal Essays**
"Francis Bacon and his followers had a more impersonal, magisterial, law-giving, and didactic manner than the skeptical Montaigne. But they should not be viewed as opposites; the distinction between formal and informal essay can be overdone, and most great essayists have crossed the line frequently. The difference is one of degree. [William] Hazlitt was essentially a personal essayist, though he wrote theater and art criticism; Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin were essentially **formal essayists**, though they may have tried a personal essay once in a while. Personality creeps into the most impersonal of writers: it is difficult to read Bacon on friendship or having children, for instance, without suspecting he is talking about autobiographical matters. Dr. Johnson was probably more a moral essayist than a personal one, though his work has such an individual, idiosyncratic stamp that I have persuaded myself to place him in the personal camp. George Orwell seems split fifty-fifty, an essay hermaphrodite who always kept one eye on the subjective and one on the political. . . ."
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"The Victorian era saw a turn toward the **formal essay**, the so-called essay of ideas written by [Thomas] Carlyle, Ruskin, [Matthew] Arnold, Macaulay, Pater. Between Lamb and Beerbohm there was scarcely an English personal essay, with the exception of those by Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas De Quincey. . . ."
 - **Voice in the Impersonal Essay**
"[E]ven when 'I' plays no part in the language of an essay, a firm sense of personality can warm the voice of the **impersonal essay** narrator. When we read Dr. [Samuel] Johnson and Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling, for instance, we feel that we know them as fully developed characters in their own essays, regardless of their not referring personally to themselves."
 - **Crafting the Impersonal "I"**
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- "Unlike the exploratory 'self' of Montaigne, Francis Bacon's impersonal 'I' appears already to have arrived. Even in the comparatively expansive third edition of the *Essays*, Bacon provides few explicit hints as to either the character of the textual voice or the role of the expected reader. . . . [T]he absence of a felt 'self' on the page is a deliberate rhetorical effect: the effort to efface voice in the 'impersonal' essay is a way of evoking a distant but authoritative persona. . . . In the **formal essay**, invisibility must be forged."-- Richard Nordquist, "Voices of the Modern Essay."
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See Wikipedia entry on the Formal Essay.

Familiar Essay

During a period spanning the entire nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, informal and discursive prose became a popular form of instruction and entertainment in England and North America, and the familiar or personal essay emerged as a distinct genre. Best represented by the works of William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, the familiar essay has been explored from both historical and literary perspectives.

The familiar essay is characterized by its brevity and discursive style. As the genre gained critical acceptance, attempts to arrive at a more functional definition of the essay proliferated, resulting in a division of essays into such categories as instructive, aphoristic, historical, literary, and familiar. Modern critics, however, have often found these classifications inaccurate, and many commentators agree that the term "essay," used indiscriminately for centuries in reference to philosophical, religious, political, and personal compositions, almost defies definition.

Sir Francis Bacon is generally credited with introducing and popularizing the essay in the English-speaking world. Influenced by the French essays of Michel de Montaigne, who first used the term "essais" (or "attempts") to describe his prose reflections on commonplace topics and occurrences, Bacon published *Essays, Religious Meditations, Places of Persuasion and Dissuasion* in 1597.

For much of the seventeenth century, essay writing reflected Bacon's aphoristic style and incorporated elements of the commonplace book, the character sketch, and the personal letter. Thus, it gradually became less abstract and more familiar, appealing to a wider audience. The inception of the periodical magazine in the eighteenth century was instrumental to the development of the familiar essay.

Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator*, as well as Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* and Daniel Defoe's *Weekly Review of Affairs in France*, featured prose designed to entertain and instruct the English middle class. In addition to providing guidance in matters of

wardrobe and proper behavior, Addison and Steele's periodical essays discuss such popular subjects as witchcraft and duelling, and satirize the aristocracy. Immensely popular during their time, the early periodical essayists are esteemed for introducing humor and less formal diction into the English essay. In the early nineteenth century, Hazlitt commented that the essays of Addison and Steele "are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation and less like a lecture. Something is left to the imagination of the reader."

The periodical essay was thus modified by Hazlitt, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincey, and other writers, many of them associated with the Romantic movement, who augmented the essay's scope and length, developing a highly personal voice. These writers produced some of the most popular and skillfully rendered prose works in English literature, addressing nearly any topic that came to mind. The typical familiar essay, whatever its theme, seemed to carry the reader into a personal conversation with a writer who was "tolerant, broad-minded, highly cultivated, endowed with the most enlightened views on art, eloquent, humorous, and very human," as Orlo Williams wrote of Hazlitt, adding, "his style is smooth and brilliant, yet he has the charm of seeming intimately conversational."

The familiar essay is different from the personal essay. Where the familiar essay is characterized by its everyday subject matter, the personal essay is defined more by the personality of its writer, which takes precedence over subject.

Familiar essays themselves have traditionally been highly informal in tone, often humorous, valuing lightness of touch above all else. They have been filled with intimate personal observations and reflections, and have emphasized the concrete and tangible, the sensual enjoyment of everyday pleasures. Usually brief, familiar essays have long affected a feeling of careless spontaneity so strong that perhaps no other type of essay is as dependent for its success and popularity on its ability to "present a personality."

Montaigne, who wrote "I confess myself in public," produced essays considered familiar. The first popular familiar essayists, however, appeared in the 18th century, especially in **Joseph Addison's** and **Richard Steele's** *Spectator* (1711–12; 1714) and **Samuel Johnson's** *Rambler* (1750–52) and *Idler* (1758–60). Besides their casual tone, these essays were "familiar" because they induced the reader to join the author at a double level.

Addison's essays in the *Spectator*, as well as most Eighteenth-century essays, are concerned, explicitly and implicitly, with belonging, with membership; the reader is constantly encouraged to recognize kinship, to distinguish himself from one group and ally himself with another. Eighteenth-century familiarity inevitably drew readers into the rhetoric of the essay and induced them to participate in an alliance with the author in a way that essays before that century almost never did.

However, it was in the 19th century—a period of material well-being in England, when there was a leisure class who enjoyed literature, when an education was received by many among the masses—that the familiar essay fully came into its own. The familiar essayist, soothes the pains of the world's tired travel, and does so through

his ability to be whimsical, grave, melancholy, through his love of living and sense of humor over “those ridiculous and pathetic incongruities which are such a necessary part of life.”

The familiar essay reached its zenith with **Charles Lamb**. Though living a melancholy and often tragic life, Lamb created in his essays a narrator “in love with this green earth,” one who hid wisdom under playfulness. His *Essays of Elia* (1823, 1828) includes autobiographical pieces such as “A Chapter on Ears” and “Imperfect Sympathies” (in which he is quick to admit to his prejudices), and humorous or farcical ones such as “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” and “Mrs. Battle’s Opinions on Whist.”

William Hazlitt stands as the other major familiar essayist of early 19th-century England, though his persona was much harsher and crankier than Lamb’s Elia. Hazlitt looked to the exotic, in such essays as “The Indian Jugglers” (1821) and to the contradictory, in such essays as “On the Ignorance of the Learned” (1821) and “On the Pleasure of Hating” (1826). His “On Familiar Style” (1821) is an argument for how precisely and purely a familiar essayist must write.

Contemporary with Lamb and Hazlitt was **Leigh Hunt**, who chose such common subjects as “Getting Up on Cold Mornings” (1820) and “A Few Thoughts on Sleep” (1820).

The second half of the 19th century saw English essayists continue in this vein, such as **Robert Louis Stevenson** (“A Plea for Gas Lamps,” 1878; “An Apology for Idlers,” 1877), **G. K. Chesterton** (“A Defence of Nonsense,” 1911; “A Piece of Chalk,” 1909), and **E.V. Lucas** (“Concerning Clothes,” 1897). In the United States, the tradition was less strong but was still practiced by writers such as Samuel McChord Crothers.

Toward the end of the 19th century, familiar essays often came to be written for their own sake, rather than for the sake of the subject; there was a shift from matter to manner. **Hilaire Belloc**, a prolific familiar essayist, poked fun at these tendencies in the titles to his collections: *On Nothing*, *On Everything*, *On Anything*, *On Something* (1908–11),

Still, as late as 1922, the familiar essay had its host of practitioners, most notably the immensely popular **Max Beerbohm** and the prolific **J.B. Priestley**. It had, too, its fierce defenders, such as the critic **F.R. Schelling**, who wrote in “The Familiar Essay” (in *Appraisements and Asperities*, 1922) “He who loves the essay—especially the familiar essay, as it is called—and letters, is the aristocrat, the Brahmin among readers, because he, among all others, has the taste of the connoisseur for delicate flavor, for fragrance, for aroma...”

But World War I brought out another view. As **Agnes Repplier**—one of the most important familiar essayists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—wrote in “The American Essay in War Time” (1918), “To write essays in these flaming years, one must have a greater power of detachment than had Montaigne or Lamb.”

The familiar essay was dying a slow death from World War I up through at least 1955,

when Clifton Fadiman declared its “digressive and noncommitting” method nearly impossible to practice in “an age of anxiety.” He noted exceptions—**E.B. White, Bernard De Voto, John Mason Brown**—but said they were simply “exerting their delaying action [on] the eclipse of the familiar essay.” The completely “light” familiar essay has been severely marginalized in the last few decades of the 20th century—reserved for newspaper columnists like Erma Bombeck and Dave Barry, as well as for many pieces in the **New Yorker’s** “Talk of the Town” section.

The traditional lightness of the familiar essay, however, has been complemented by a new sense of political awareness. E. B. White helped bring about this evolution, by writing not only primarily **autobiographical essays** such as “Death of a Pig” (1947), but others in which he intertwined his personal stories with calls for one-world government or arguments against racial segregation.

The feminist movement of the 1970s produced writers such as Nora Ephron, a humorist who, in essays such as “A Few Words About Breasts” (1972) took the very personal and commonplace and presented them in the contexts of public issues.

Other recent essayists who have imbued this formerly “dainty” form with commitment and thereby helped regenerate its popularity include **Scott Russell Sanders, Martin Amis, and Fran Lebowitz**. Nowadays the familiar essay is often seen as a form particularly well suited to modern rhetorical purposes, able to reach an otherwise suspicious or uninterested audience through personal discourse, which reunites the appeals of ethos (the force and charm of the writer’s character) and pathos (the emotional engagement of the reader) with the intellectual appeal of *philosophy*.
