

ENGLISH

Soban Singh Jeena University, Almora, Uttarakhand

Introduction to English Prose

Course Code-UGENG-CC101

Year-I

Semester-I

Paper-I

Unit-V



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Modern English Prose-I

1.1 Course Introduction:

In this Unit, we are going to study Modern English essays by three essayists, namely, G. K. Chesterton, A. G. Gardiner, and Robert Lynd. We will read G. K. Chesterton's essay "The Worship of the Wealthy" criticizes about the middle-class mentality to worship the rich and influential men. Chesterton says that it is ingrained in human nature to shower excessive and absurd praises to propitiate them or for their petty personal interests. A. G. Gardiner's biographical essay "George Bernard Shaw" sheds life on the ideals of G. B. Shaw and his position as an iconoclast. He also crops up some humorous anecdotes as well. Gardiner's second essay "A Fellow Traveller" deals with the themes of uncertainty, freedom, control, generosity, appearance, equality, and modesty. At last, Robert Lynd's essay "In Praise of Mistakes" wants to say that we should take mistakes of the great writers lightly. Their mistakes do not lessen the quality of their works, rather those make a room for amusement for the readers.

1.2 Course Outcome:

After reading these four different kinds of essays of the Modern period, the readers will get a fair idea of each essayist's nature and writing style. The students will learn about G. K. Chesterton, A. G. Gardiner, and Robert Lynd, their essays and their respective prose style. The readers will know about some important and humorous anecdotes through the essays. "Points to Ponder" and "Further Study" sections will help them in their in-depth study and further reading respectively.

1.3 G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936): An Introduction

The noted British essayist G. K. Chesterton was born in London in 1874. He was educated at St. Paul's School; later he obtained degree of English Literature from the University College London. He chose to be a writer, but he started his career as a journalist. As a journalist, he wrote essays on social criticism.

Chesterton was a multifarious genius as he wrote around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 7000 essays, and several plays. He was a literary and social critic, historian, playwright, novelist, Catholic theologian, apologist, debater, and mystery writer. Chesterton's writings never fail to display wit and a sense of humour. He employed paradox, while making grave comments on the world, government, politics, economics, philosophy, theology, and many other topics. He wrote a large number of essays: "With over 7,000 essays to his name, G. K. Chesterton is one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century" (chesterton.org np).

His writing has been praised by Ernest Hemingway, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Agatha Christie, Kingsley Amis, W.H. Auden, and Anthony Burgess, to name a few.

Important Works:

- i) *The Man Who Was Thursday* (a novel)—published in 1908.
- ii) "Lepanto" (from *The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton*, 1927)
- iii) "The Rolling English Road" (from *The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton*, 1927)

- iv) “The Secret People” (1907)
- v) “A Ballade of Suicide” (1915)
- vi) “The Ballad of the White Horse” (1911)
- vii) *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1906)
- viii) *Twelve Types* (1902)
- xi) *Heretics* (1905)
- x) *What’s Wrong with the World* (1910)

1.4 “The Worship of the Wealthy”: Summary and Analysis

Summary:

In the essay “The Worship of the Wealthy” (taken from his book *All Things Considered*, 1908) by the famous British essayist G. K. Chesterton, we have the theme of flattery. Chesterton starts the essay “The Worship of The Wealthy” with this line: “There has crept, I notice, into our literature and journalism a new way of flattering the wealthy and the great”. This essay looks like a prophesy that he made before 1936. Through this, the essayist points out the pseudo-journalistic ideals of the modern media and press. The reader realizes from the beginning of the essay that Chesterton is exploring the theme of flattery and his hesitancy to show flattery to those who are wealthy.

Chesterton also feels that journalists go to extremes when it comes to flattering the wealthy. It displeases him that some journalists feel the necessity to praise the wealthy when the reality is that they may not have done very much and most likely inherited their wealth. It is not

on merit that flattery is being given but rather an illusion of greatness is being created by the media. There is a sense of pure artificiality in the way that the journalists address the wealthy when they are writing some columns about them. It is as though they attempt to disconnect the wealthy from others to make them out to be something that they are not in actuality.

On a daily basis, on television we see the so-called apolitical interviews and fake news which are used for influence of certain political parties. The media have grown so big that it's now almost impossible to stop them because the common mass also craves for fake news and gossips. Chesterton then compares the methods used by the old flatterer and the new flatterer. Chesterton says that the old flatterer took for granted that the king was an ordinary man, and wanted to make him look extraordinary. The courtiers praised their king that he almost resembled the shining sun at noonday, that they had to shade their eyes when he entered the court. Further, they would say that they could not breathe without him as if the king was oxygen itself. They further showered eulogy on him by stating that he is one who conquered all continents with his single sword.

The newer and cleverer flatterer takes for granted that he is extraordinary, and tries to prove that therefore even ordinary things about him will be of interest. The modern people have devised a much more poisonous kind of praise. The modern method of flattery is to take the prince or rich man to give a credible picture of his type of personality by enormously exaggerating his natural qualities. The newer and cleverer flatterer takes for granted that he is already extraordinary (as if he were an alien), and therefore even ordinary things about him into look extraordinarily flattering. Thus, Chesterton has tried to give his paradoxical instances how poor and common people are always flattering the rich and the great for the personal gains and benefits.

The media has propagated this agenda of portraying a powerful person to be simple, modest, and honourable by showcasing their daily routines in gossip columns and make the readers feel that the person who has been portrayed is a really simple or modest person. Even after watching the a-political interviews given by some celebrities like Bollywood actors, the viewers think it to be extraordinary. The media make a buzz out of it and the news goes viral and even the readers become impressed. The media makes a simple thing to look extraordinary. Chesterton is also vexed at how a journalist might absurdly describe the physical appearance of someone who might be wealthy. It is sketched when there is no need for it to be sketched. According to Chesterton these words like simple, quiet, modest, and humble lose their significance by their indiscriminate use. He does not consider it to be apt at all. He thinks that most of the time these words are being used out of context. Through this usage of these words insignificantly and in a countless manner, the media deteriorates their meanings. Chesterton thinks that the media over-glorify a person to the point that it is utterly unrealistic.

Analysis:

The essay “The Worship of the Wealthy” (1908) is an excellent example of social criticism. The scintillating wit and paradoxical style sparkle with the glow of glamour and novelty make the common reader peep through his paradoxical style and wit in describing day to day incidents which are left unnoticed. The first thing that we can learn about Chesterton through this essay is that Chesterton is logical in his argumentation style. He does not argue by way of emotions, but appeals to people’s logic, cognition, and sensibilities.

This brings us to the second point – Chesterton does not play to the gallery, but sticks to whatever he thinks are his belief and ideology.

He is also someone who is too much concerned about the form, as equally, as he worries about the content. The way in which he argues a point is as important as the content of his argument.

Fourthly, he is plucky too and expresses opinions point blank with no vacillation about what other rebuttals could be. He is prepared to launch a caustic attack and does without an iota of hesitation.

Apart from this, he also makes use of humor and sarcasm when he is attacking someone else's thoughts or arguments. But despite all this, he is balanced and logically deconstructs the arguments of his opponents, instead of destroying them vitriolic way.

We should also acknowledge the fact that empowering the righteous way of journalism is the only way. The media should be given its liberty back, its liberty of asking questions and its liberty of asking answers than producing this pseudo-journalism and using words like saint, pure, priest etc. in places where the words are insignificant. Chesterton might also be suggesting that ordinary people should not fall for the words of the journalists as the wealthy, apart from their wealth, are no different from them. Most of the journalists lack any type of originality. Journalism should be informative and at times entertaining.

1.5 Let's Sum It Up:

The essay "The Worship of the Wealthy" is about how he journalists and literary people falsely praising the people those who are wealthy and great. The author also gives some examples how the poor and the common mass praise the wealthy persons. The author says that he noticed in literature and journalism that this type of utter falsehood is silently percolating through the

common human souls and a vicious habit has been nurtured by them to praise the wealthy people. The common people flatter a rich man for their personal gains.

1.6 References:

Nayar, M. G., ed. *A Galaxy of English Essayists: From Bacon to Beerbohm*. Trinity Press, 1986.

“The Essayist”. Society of G. K. Chesterton. <https://www.chesterton.org/category/discover-chesterton/chestertons-selected-works/the-essayist/> accessed on 4 Dec 2022.

1.7 Points to Ponder:

- i) The essay “The Worship of the Wealthy” is taken from Chesterton’s book *All Things Considered* (1908).
- ii) In this essay, we have the main theme of flattery.
- iii) Apart from being an essayist, Chesterton was a literary and social critic, historian, playwright, novelist, Catholic theologian, debater, and a writer of detective stories.

1.8 Model Questions:

- i) What is Chesterton’s stance towards flattery in his essay “The Worship of the Wealthy”?
- ii) Write a note on Chesterton’s wit and humour from your reading of his essays.
- iii) How does Chesterton criticize the English people in respect of their eulogy for the rich?

1.9 Further Study:

Ahlquist, Dale. *Common Sense 101: Lessons from G.K. Chesterton*. Ignatius Press, 2006.

---. *G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense*. Ignatius Press, 2003.

---. *Knight of the Holy Ghost: A Short History of G. K. Chesterton*. Ignatius Press, 2019.

2.1 A. G. Gardiner (1865 –1946): An Introduction

Alfred George Gardiner (1865 –1946) was an English journalist, editor, and author. His essays, written under the pseudonym “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.

Gardiner was born in Chelmsford, England. He was the son of Henry James Gardiner, a cabinet-maker and alcoholic, and his wife, Susanna Taylor. As a boy he worked at the *Chelmsford Chronicle* and the *Bournemouth Directory*. He joined the daily magazine *Northern Daily Telegraph* in 1887 which had been founded the year before by Thomas Purvis Ritzema. In 1899, he was appointed the editor of the *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*.

In 1902 Ritzema was named general manager of the *Daily News*. Needing an editor, he turned to his young protégé to fill the role. The choice soon proved to be a great success; under Gardiner’s able direction, it became one of the leading liberal journals of its day, as he improved its content of both the news and literary matters while rebelling against social injustices. After he joined the newspaper as an editor, the circulation of it increased exponentially.

From 1915 he started contributing to the literary magazine named *The Star* under the pseudonym Alpha of the Plough. At that time *The Star* had several anonymous essayists whose pseudonyms were the names of different stars in constellations. Requested to choose the name of a star as a pseudonym, he chose the name of the brightest (Alpha) star in the constellation “the Plough”. His essays are elegant, graceful, and humorous at the same breath. His uniqueness lay in his ability to teach the basic truths of life in an easy, candid, and amusing manner. The collections *Pillars of Society*, *Pebbles on the Shore*, *Many Furrows* and *Leaves in the Wind* are some of his well-known creative works.

Gardiner's essays are not only meant for entertainments but also for social and moral purposes. Like Shaw, he was a social reformer focusing on human follies and vices. He presents his ideas in a sugar coated pill, with the coating of fun and delight. He never preaches but makes the readers involve in the debate. He writes with great charm and ease and his prose has the qualities of a good talk. He enlivens his essays by incorporating stories and anecdotes and by his subtle use of humour and light satire. Satire is evident in all his essays and he harmlessly satirizes only the worries of the world.

Gardiner wrote essays with simple words, simple phrases, and simple sentences that had a magical blow for the readers. His direct and silver-tongued English are accompanied by simplicity. His style and lively approaches to explore the comedy of errors in common life are the societal reflections of the then war-ridden English society.

Important Works:

i) *Prophets, Priests, and Kings* (1908)

ii) *Pillars of Society* (1913)

iii) *The War Lords* (1915)

iv) *Pebbles on the Shore* (1916)

v) *Windfalls* (1920)

vi) *Leaves in the Wind* (1920)

vii) *The Anglo-American Future* (1920)

viii) *What I saw in Germany: letters from Germany and Austria* (1920)

ix) *Portraits and Portents* (1926)

x) *Certain People of Importance* (1929)

2.2 “George Bernard Shaw”: Analysis

In the essay “George Bernard Shaw”, Gardiner reflects his thoughts on the ideas, nature, and qualities of G. B. Shaw. In the course of the essay, Gardiner crops up some incidents from Shaw’s life to bring up his point home. Gardiner mentions that once Shaw delivered a lecture at a gathering without a title. When Gardiner asked him about the title, he retorted that at the end of his lecture, he would mention that. Shaw’s speeches are reflective of wit and good sense. He also preferred to answer unreasonable questions of the audience.

Gardiner thought Shaw to be keen as a razor as his body and mind moved very fast. He also mentioned Shaw as ‘hurricane on two legs’. Shaw thought English society to be a jerry-built society, i.e., badly built with cheap quality materials. He criticizes the English people and society. His bitter comments are like sharp stings of a scorpion. Gardiner then tells the readers that Shaw was a very self-disciplined man. He had a strong aversion to meat. He would never dine with men who eat meat like savages. He declined many dinner offers on this ground. He once even declined the dinner offer of Lady Randolph Churchill, mother of Winston Churchill. He also did not like smoking and drinking.

Shaw was also vehement about the loathsome habits of society. He criticized the merciless greed of the English people for the waste and chaos everywhere. He thought religion to be an organized hypocrisy. He thought that religion is like a fog in the mind; it blurs the vision of realities. He also opined that justice is based on revenge, science is based on vivisection, and empire is based on violence.

Shaw asked the fashionable audience to burn the palaces of fashion and commerce instead of gathering for amusement. He had a rare gift of being unpleasant; he has the courage to be unkind and unpleasant to others. He did not stab people at their backs because he did not believe in false polite behavior. He enjoyed giving pain to others for their own good.

As Shaw was an iconoclast, he broke down everything that was fake and false. He confronts the readers with naked realities. Gardiner says that Shaw is like an elderly spinster with a fierce passion for order. Shaw could not tolerate the English people at all as he believed that the English people are dull, unimaginative, incompetent, fraud, hypocrite, deceptive, excessively flattering, self-assertive, and selfish.

The Gardiner makes a comparison between Shaw and Swift. Shaw did not hate men like Swift. Shaw only scorned at their follies, sentimentalities, and superstitions. Shaw had no reverence and had no respect for the reverence of others. Shaw was a radiant daylight but it was chilling. On the other hand, Swift had a morbid mind. Gardiner comments that whereas Swift had a terrible smile of foreshadowed insanity, Shaw had a smile of sardonic sanity.

Shaw thought that the English men's pride and exclusiveness should be destroyed. Shaw accepted Plato's idea of 'pull down the walls', as limitations of wall shelters restricted family feelings, and harbours avarice, selfishness, and greed. Shaw was careless about a beautiful home

but wanted a beautiful city. He was indifferent about his wife's diamonds, but wanted to see his charwomen and seamstress to be well-dressed.

To Shaw, poverty and illness were punishable crimes. To him, money was the driving force in the world. He thought money to be representative of honour, health, strength, generosity, and beauty. Want of money is representative of illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness, and ugliness. Shaw commented "Flee from poverty, which is the root of sin" (Nayar 171). He thought that if poor people were given penal servitude instead of sympathy, there would soon be a change for the better in the society.

Shaw used to preach his sermons in extravagant satire. For this, he is the most charming and engaging figure in the English-speaking world. Though he had both fortune and fame, he remained unchanged. He was a gentleman of fortune, but he lived upon his wits. According to Gardiner, Shaw is a man of irony, wit, jest, and diabolical self-composure.

Shaw was a revolutionary of his times. His dramas were the dramas of ideas. He brought English drama into close contact with harsh realities. He became a playwright to preach his extremely unorthodox sermon. With the barest minimum props, little imagination, and a slight instinct for character, Shaw made the contemporary English drama a vehicle of ideas.

Shaw never complimented anyone except himself. In the Fabian society, he expresses his displeasure whenever he listens to the boring speech of anyone. He is very candid about his remarks: "It clears the air. It tears away the cloak of shams and confronts us with the naked realities" (Nayar 169). He loves to be feared, like that of an old maiden. Shaw is more assertive of his opinions. He thinks that his life belongs to the whole mankind. It is evident in his fine

words: “I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live” (Nayar 174).

Shaw denounced conventional morality. He had an enthusiasm for humanity. He thought that sickness of the mind is caused by the false and vicious social system. According to Gardiner, Shaw is the tonic of his time—very bitter to taste but very stimulating. Behind his scornful smile, he had a sensitive heart. But he was ashamed to reveal his sensitive heart to others. Gardiner ends the essay with a quote of Shaw himself.

2.3 Let’s Sum It Up:

Shaw used to preach his sermons in extravagant satire. For this, he is the most charming and engaging figure in the English-speaking world. Shaw was a revolutionary of his times. According to Gardiner, Shaw is the tonic of his time—very bitter to taste but very stimulating.

2.4 References:

Nayar, M. G., ed. *A Galaxy of English Essayists: From Bacon to Beerbohm*. Trinity Press, 1986.

2.5 Points to Ponder:

- i) Gardiner’s essay “George Bernard Shaw” is taken from his book *Prophets, Priests, and Kings* (1908) -- a series of short pen-sketches of noted personalities.
- ii) A.G. Gardiner’s essay on G. B. Shaw is very illuminating and informative. He brings out all the positive and negative aspects of Shaw. It is a psychological study of a genius who has many unique qualities.
- iii) Gardiner used the pseudonym “Alpha of the Plough” for career in journalism.

2.6 Model Questions:

- i) How did Shaw denounce conventional morality, according to Gardiner?
- ii) What was Shaw's view on poverty, as you find in Gardiner's essay "George Bernard Shaw"?

2.7 Further Study:

Black, Clementina. *Sweated Industry and the Minimum Wage*. Duckworth & Co., 2011.

3.1 "A Fellow Traveller": Analysis

Gardiner is travelling in a train. When all the other passengers got down from the train, he thought that he was all alone in the carriage. Gardiner is unsure of when the mosquito came into the train carriage. He does not know if the mosquito arrived before him or after him. Though he becomes aware of his presence and at first is irritated that the mosquito is flying around the carriage. What is also interesting to note is that Gardiner talks of the freedom one feels when one is all alone in a train carriage yet initially he does not want to give the mosquito the same freedom. It is only after Gardiner realizes that he cannot control the mosquito that modesty and generosity occur. It is shown as Gardiner refuses to kill the mosquito. It might be because previously Gardiner admitted defeat when it comes to killing the mosquito. It is only then that Gardiner shows the mosquito any magnanimity or generosity.

What also invites interest about the story is the fact that prior to noticing the mosquito, Gardiner did not take advantage of the freedom he already had. It is possible that Gardiner is suggesting that a man gets too much busy in life to think about taking advantage of freedom or to reflect on the simple things in life, like availing of the opportunity to explore the benefits of

having a train carriage to oneself. Rather Gardiner allows for himself to be disturbed sufficiently by the mosquito that he tries his very best to kill the mosquito. It is as though the mosquito has infiltrated in Gardiner's personal space. Gardiner does not like it and he will he permit it till he admits defeat. The fact that one of the articles in the newspaper that Gardiner is reading is called "Peace Traps" might also have some symbolic connotation as Gardiner has already declared peace with the mosquito, yet he knows that still he has the perfect opportunity to kill it. The other article in the paper "The Modesty of Mr. Hughes" also carries a special meaning as Gardiner himself is being modest when he admits defeat with the mosquito.

Rather than embarrassing himself any further, Gardiner offers (or, rather has to offer) the mosquito a type of equality. The two passengers are deemed equals in his eyes; so, Gardiner decides not to kill the mosquito. Though some critics might suggest that Gardiner has in some way humanized the mosquito. In the end, Gardiner is not only modest enough to admit defeat but that he also displays the ability to be kind towards another living creature of the earth.

It is also interesting that Gardiner after he admits defeat, shifts from a position of viewing the mosquito as an adversary to a fellow companion or traveller. There is a complete one eighty degree turn in Gardiner's appraisal of the mosquito and no longer is the mosquito viewed as being something that is troublesome. This might be important as Gardiner could be suggesting that first appearances might not necessarily be always correct. Just as one may judge an individual based upon their appearance and be wrong so too has Gardiner misjudged the mosquito. If anything, Gardiner could be using the mosquito as a symbol for another human passenger and how when in a confined space (the train carriage) an individual might strike up a conversation with one person but perhaps due to appearance refrain from doing so with another.

Not only has Gardiner admitted defeat when it comes to the mosquito's presence but he has also allowed the carriage to remain under the control of the mosquito. The mosquito, unlike Gardiner, is allowed to take advantage of its environment and act to its own will. In reality the mosquito is able to express the freedom that Gardiner himself refrained from doing when he thought he was alone in the carriage. It is one of the morals of the essay.

An individual should, when an opportunity crops up, make full utilization of the freedom that they see in front of their eyes. Perhaps he should act as the mosquito does and remain free from obstruction or societal views. The result of doing so will be that an individual will be able to express themselves to their own liking without being hindered by the constraints that society may impose on the individual. It may be better to live free while one can, for the opportunity may not always present itself with regular frequency.

3.2 Let's Sum It Up:

The essay "A Fellow Traveller" (taken from his collection *Leaves in the Wind*, 1919) by the famous English essayist A.G. Gardiner, we have the themes of uncertainty, freedom, control, generosity, appearance, equality, and modesty. The reader realizes from the beginning of the essay that Gardiner may be exploring the theme of uncertainty.

3.3 References:

Nayar, M. G., ed. *A Galaxy of English Essayists: From Bacon to Beerbohm*. Trinity Press, 1986.

3.4 Points to Ponder:

i) A. G. Gardiner was a journalist of repute and essays are marked by the characteristics of journalism.

ii) Like journalistic essays, the essays of Gardiner are causal in appearance. Yet, each essay of Gardiner is a source of pure pleasure to the readers.

3.5 Model Questions:

i) Write a note on the didactic note as you find in Gardiner's essay "A Fellow Traveller".

ii) What kind of humorous elements do you find in Gardiner's essay "A Fellow Traveller".

iii) What are the main themes of Gardiner's essay "A Fellow Traveller"?

iv) How do the narrator and the mosquito exercise their respective freedom in the train carriage?

3.6 Further Study:

Gardiner, A.G. *Prophets, Priests and Kings*. J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914.

Koss, Stephen. *Fleet Street Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News*. Penguin, 1846.

4.1 Robert Lynd (1879–1949): An Introduction

Robert Wilson Lynd (1879–1949) was an Irish writer, editor of poetry, urbane literary essayist, socialist, and Irish nationalist. He was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1879. His father was Robert John Lynd who was a Presbyterian minister. It is to be noted that Lynd's paternal great-grandfather emigrated from Scotland to Ireland. Lynd was educated at Royal Belfast Academical Institution, where he befriended James Winder Good and Paul Henry and studied at Queen's University. Lynd had a long line of Presbyterian clergy in the family. Lynd's family had a long tradition of clerics as Lynd's maternal grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather had all been Presbyterian clergymen by profession.

Lynd began his career as a journalist for the magazine *The Northern Whig* in Belfast. He moved to London in 1901. Firstly he wrote drama criticism, for *Today*, edited by Jerome K. Jerome. He also wrote for the *Daily News* (later the *News Chronicle*), being its literary editor from 1912 to 1947. He used the pseudonym Y.Y. in writing for the *New Statesman*. According to C. H. Rolph's *Kingsley* (1973), Lynd's weekly essay, which ran from 1913 to 1945, was very popular among his readers. Attendance at a performance in London of John Millington Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* aroused his Irish Nationalist sympathies. These were further radicalized by the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14.

Robert Lynd published 30 books during his lifetime. Many of them were selections of essays he wrote for different newspapers and magazines over the course of his journalistic career. Apart from essays, Lynd also wrote political tracts: "It was as an essayist that Robert Lynd achieved international fame. But he also wrote about politics and put the case for Irish nationalism in Ireland a nation" (Boyd np). Lynd wrote in the "Preface" to *James Connolly: Portrait of a Rebel Father* (1935) about James Connolly: "among the sixteen men who were

executed after the failure of the Irish Insurrection of 1916 there was no nobler or more heroic figure than James Connolly” (Robert Lynd Wordpress np). At the request of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, Lynd agreed to write an introduction to a new edition of James Connolly’s *Labour in Irish History*, first published in 1910.

He became a fluent Irish speaker, and Gaelic League member. In Belfast he was a member both of the republican Dungannon Clubs and of the Belfast Socialist Society. He criticized the British sham through his articles: “Robert Lynd remained an Irish nationalist all his life, never missing an opportunity to denounce what he believed to be the hypocrisy of British politicians in their dealings with Ireland” (Boyd np).

He married the writer Sylvia Dryhurst in 1909. They met at a Gaelic League conclave in London. In March 1924, Robert and Sylvia moved to what was to be their long-term married home, the elegant Regency house in the leafy suburb of Hampstead, north-west London. The house had been lived in by various members of Sylvia’s family. James Joyce and his wife Nora Barnacle held their wedding lunch at the Lynds’ house after getting married at Hampstead Town Hall in 1931.

Lynd died in Hampstead in 1949. He is buried in Belfast City Cemetery. Seán MacBride, Minister for External Affairs, attended the funeral as the representative of the government of the Republic of Ireland.

Important Works:

i) *The Mantle of the Emperor* (1906)

- ii) *Rambles in Ireland* (1912)
- iii) *The Book of This and That* (1915)
- iv) *Old and New Masters* (1919)
- v) *The Passion of Labour* (1920)
- vi) *The Pleasures of Ignorance* (1921)
- vii) *Solomon in All His Glory* (1922)
- viii) *The Blue Lion* (1923)
- ix) *The Peal of Bells* (1924)
- x) *The Orange Tree* (1926)

4.2 “In Praise of Mistakes”: Analysis

The famous Irish essayist Robert Lynd’s delightful essay “In Praise of Mistakes” pokes fun at the people who need accuracy in all things. Writers’ mistakes have always given the readers interesting material to laugh about heartily. People often write to newspapers about the frequent mistakes writers commit in their articles and books. Geographical, historical or religious errors may occur in their works but those mistakes seldom make their works unreadable or unenjoyable or degrade their quality. Instead, most often, they make the world merry for they give enough scope for the world to laugh.

One will wonder why writers do not make as many mistakes as they can, so that the world can at least laugh heartily. In this aspect, the case framed by fault-finders against writers is a weak one. If it is presented in any court the writer, Lord Clive, may tell the jury that he wondered why he did not make as many mistakes as he could. Lord Clive was tried in the British Parliament for corruption during his India Service. Actually he told the senators, what he wondered was why he did not dare to snatch away more wealth from the vast treasure houses of the Indian Kings!

Lynd says that it is very difficult to write about something without committing mistakes somewhere. Personally, Lynd is a lover of accuracy but he finds it difficult to write about something without slipping somewhere. He consults an encyclopaedia to avoid errors in writing. He has on many occasions risen and sweated in the very early mornings in fear of mistakes he may have committed in articles which have already gone to press. A modern-day writer who is born in the time of spell checker, auto correct and internet would be totally unfamiliar with such dreadful experiences.

Lynd thinks that “There is more joy on earth over one error discovered in a good writer than over a hundred impeccable pages” (Nayar 162). It is not the word and its meaning that count; it is the sound of the word that is important and is appealing to human senses. It is the sound of the words that makes a poem pleasing to our senses and ears and imparts beauty to the poem. Poets, Lynd permits them, may use the names of any precious stones or anything else for that matter in their poems even without knowing their meaning, if those sounds are pleasing to ears. A jeweller’s assistant needn’t immediately go to him and correct him. According to Lynd the unpardonable sin in a writer is to write uninterestingly. If a work is interesting, it would be read and enjoyed by all. Mistakes do not matter there. Shakespeare made his multitude of mistakes in

chronology and Walter Scott made the Sun rise on the wrong side of the world in the wrong time. Even then Shakespeare's dramas and Walter Scott's novels and poems are read by millions of people with interest.

Lynd also observes that "A writer's mistakes deserve praise, and fantastic errors are great stimulants". Mistakes made in literature are useful to man in many ways. For example, they make the reader temporarily feel that he is an inch taller than the writer. Mistakes made by the writer are a source of delight to many readers. There is more joy over a single error discovered in a good writer than over a hundred pages of perfect writing. Error-hunters search for errors as meticulously and systematically as gold-hunters search for gold. His *eureka*s are uttered not over immortal phrases but over some tiny mistake in geography, history or grammar.

The famous English weekly '*Punch*' once used to print the names of authors along with the mistakes they made. The writers protested. Lynd is of the opinion that writers needn't protest over such dissections by print media. Lynd thinks that the writers needn't consider it as an attempt to rob them of the credit for making the world happy and laughing. Since they are such useful to mankind, the writers' mistakes deserve praise; even their fantastic mistakes, which are in many, are also thus pardonable. Seeing the mistake and reading the mistake lands the readers safely on the *terra firma* (Lat. solid ground). Lynd's closing observation is that "we shall never have a novelist or writer of the magnitude of Shakespeare till one can make as many mistakes as Shakespeare made".

4.3 Let's Sum It Up:

Writers' mistakes have always given the world interesting material to laugh about. They do not disparage the writer but do prove to the world that they indeed are human beings. Writers'

mistakes are indeed a solace to readers who are taken off with the momentum of the flow of ideas and emotions in the writing and cannot land. Seeing the mistake and reading the mistake lands them safely on the *terra firma*.

4.4 References:

Boyd, Andrew. "Robert Lynd: essayist and Irishman". *Contemporary History*, 11. 2 (2003).

<https://www.historyireland.com/robert-lynd-essayist-and-irishman/> accessed on 5 Dec 2022.

Nayar, M. G., ed. *A Galaxy of English Essayists: From Bacon to Beerbohm*. Trinity Press, 1986.

"Robert Lynd". <https://robertlynd.wordpress.com/> accessed on 11 Dec 2022.

4.5 Points to Ponder:

- i) Robert Lynd is famous for his wit, wisdom, irony, satire, and humour.
- ii) Lynd used the pseudonym Y.Y. in writing for the newspaper *New Statesman*.
- iii) Through Lynd's essays, we find his personality, humour, light-heartedness, philosophical, reflective, and retrospective moods.
- iv) Lynd started his career as a journalist.

4.6 Model Questions:

- i) Write a critical analysis on Lynd's essay "In Praise of Mistakes".
- ii) Consider Robert Lynd as an essayist.

iii) Write a note on humour as you find in Lynd's essay "In Praise of Mistakes".

4.7 Further Study:

Courtney, Roger. *Dissenting Voices: Rediscovering the Irish Progressive Presbyterian Tradition*.

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Lynd, Robert. *Old and New Masters*. Book Jungle, 1919.

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