

ENGLISH

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Introduction to English Prose

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Modern English Prose-II

1.1 Course Introduction:

In this Unit, we are going to study modern prose. We are going to read essays by Max Beerbohm, Aldous Huxley, and J. B. Priestly. Max Beerbohm's essay "Speed" is very much relevant in our present day that believes in high speed in every walk of life, Aldous Huxley's "English Snobbery" deals with the abominable snobbish attitude of the English people and the journalists of gossip columns, and J. B. Priestley's "Lectures" discusses in a humorous way the difficulty for a writer to lecture on his/her book.

1.2 Course Outcome:

After reading these three different kinds of essays, the readers will get a fair idea of each essayist's nature and writing style. The students will learn about Max Beerbohm, Aldous Huxley, and J. B. Priestley, their essays and their respective prose style. "Points to Ponder" and "Further Study" sections will help them in their in-depth study and further reading respectively.

1.3 Max Beerbohm (1872—1956): An Introduction

Sir Max Beerbohm (1872—1956) was an English humorist, caricaturist, writer, dandy, and wit. His sophisticated drawings and parodies “were unique in capturing, usually without malice, whatever was pretentious, affected, or absurd in his famous and fashionable contemporaries” (Encyclopaedia Britannica np). He was called by G. B. Shaw “the incomparable Max”.

A younger half brother of the actor-producer Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, he was accustomed to fashionable society from his boyhood. While still an undergraduate at Merton College, Oxford, he published witty essays in the famous *Yellow Book*. In 1895 he travelled to the United States as press agent for Beerbohm Tree’s theatrical company. His first literary collection, *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, and his first book of caricatures, *Caricatures of Twenty-five Gentlemen*, appeared in 1896. In 1898 he took over from Shaw the position of a drama critic of the *Saturday Review*. His charming fable *The Happy Hypocrite* appeared in 1897 and his only novel, *Zuleika Dobson*, a burlesque of Oxford life, was published in 1911. *The Christmas Garland* (1912) is a collection of Christmas stories that mirror the stylistic faults of a number of well-known writers, notably Henry James. His collection of stories, *Seven Men* (1919), is also a masterpiece.

In 1942, on the occasion of Beerbohm’s seventieth birthday, the Maximilian Society was created by a London drama critic in his honour. It had approximately seventy notable members, including J. B. Priestley, Walter de la Mare, William Rothenstein, Siegfried Sassoon, Leonard Woolf, John Betjeman, E. M. Forster, and Graham Greene, and planned to add one more member on each of Beerbohm’s successive birthdays. In their first ever meeting an opulent dinner was held in his honour, and he was gifted with seventy bottles of wine by the members.

He died at the Villa Chiara, a private hospital in Rapallo, Italy, in 1956. Beerbohm was cremated in Genoa and his ashes were interred in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1956.

Important Works:

i) *A Defence of Cosmetics* (1896)

ii) *The Happy Hypocrite* (1897)

iii) *More* (1899)

iv) *Yet Again* (1909)

v) *Zuleika Dobson; or, An Oxford Love Story* (1911)

vi) *A Christmas Garland, Woven by Max Beerbohm* (1912)

vii) *Seven Men* (1919)

viii) *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of Him and of His Art* (1920, ed. Max Beerbohm)

ix) *A Peep into the Past* (1923)

x) *The Dreadful Dragon of Hay Hill* (1928)

1.4 “Speed”: Analysis

In the essay “Speed” (1896), the English essayist Max Beerbohm narrates the various incidents which affected his life – as a consequence of speed, and its effect in the day to day affairs of the common man. While exploring the aspects of speed in its context, he pleads for a more humane outlook towards life.

At the beginning of his essay, Beerbohm cites the poem of William Ernest Henley, whose light of fame shone fiercely in the 1890s. In the very early days of motor cars, young Mr. Alfred Harmsworth, who was one of Henley’s great admirers, took him out for a long drive in to the country. The Mercedes was for him a glorious revelation, prompting him to write a fine poem which the author has used as an epigraph to the essay.

In those days, cars were not the things they are at present. In those days, cars did not have wind-screens and in fine dry weather, air directly went to the lungs with the utmost force. According to Beerbohm, by the discovery of the Mercedes, travelling time has been decreased and we got more personal time to ourselves. Henley wrote poems on various subjects like the British Empire, and the Tory party. And here was a new god for him – speed, because, he believed in the idea of Progress.

In a sense, men have always worshipped speed. Speed has always been acknowledged to be great thing of fun and frolic. The Marathon race was a very popular institution. So were the Roman chariot races. Coaches seem, indeed, to have been God’s blessings to all novelists and essayists. There was magic in them. They are not romantic to us alone: they were so to their contemporaries.

It would appear that in industry there is little scope for emotion. A man on a horse, a man sailing a boat in a great gale, strikes a chord in us and is a promising subject for literary art. But the man in the aero-plane or in the motor-boat or in the motor-car is somehow less inspiring.

On the other hand, mental speed has always been admired, like speed of limb. Father Newman wrote his lovely *Apologia* in eight weeks, and Samuel Johnson his fine *Ressalas* in the evenings of one week. Edward Gibbon wrote the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in six months, and Christopher Wren designed St. Paul's Cathedral in twenty-five minutes. The massive speed of transport that is now at our disposal had duly accelerated the function of our brains.

The author has an impression that most people do talk and eat, much faster than when they were young. Most of the people he happens to meet now are employed somewhere, and after luncheon must hurry back to the places they came from. But the author would rather sigh for strolling home, well-satisfied, along the un-crowded pavements and across the quite safe roads.

Roads are painful and terrible issues nowadays. They are places for motorists only. A motoristic friend of the author made a complaint about the careless behaviour of pedestrians who were stupid. The author tried to appeal to reason. He says, "...after all, we were on the roads for many, many centuries before you came along in your splendid car. And remember, it isn't we that are threatening to kill you. It is you that are threatening to kill us" (Nayar 188).

Beerbohm laments, "When the children of this generation, brought up in fear, shall have become adults, what sort of nervous ailments will their progeny have, one wonders?" (Nayar 188). He also apprehends that very old people and very young people are mainly the victims who are annually slaughtered upon our roads. The essayist suggests that we should set a good

example to posterity. He also proposes that a driver convicted of dangerous driving gets a more severe punishment. Beerbohm thinks that the cause of all trouble is speed itself: “The main root of the mischief is that great fetish of ours—Speed” (Nayar 189).

1.5 Let’s Sum It Up:

Speed is the fetish of all the people of the 20th and 21st century. We have become slaves to excessive speed. It might save some time for us, but it also has its negative aspects. Excessive speed by the motorcyclists and car drivers claim many innocent lives annually. Beerbohm suggests that a driver convicted of rash driving, should face harsh penal actions.

1.6 References:

“Max Beerbohm”. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Max-Beerbohm>. accessed on 11 Dec 2022.

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

1.7 Points to Ponder:

- i) Speed is the main root of the mischief in our fast life.
- ii) The rapidity of transport that is now at our disposal has duly accelerated the pace at which our brains work.

1.8 Model Questions:

- i) What is the relevance of Max Beerbohm's essay "Speed" in the present context?
- ii) Why does Beerbohm think Speed to be the new god?
- iii) Why is this surge of craze for speed, according to Beerbohm? What are the repercussions of speed of the vehicles?
- iv) Do you think that Beerbohm is entirely against speed of any kind in every walk of life? Give reasons.

1.9 Further Reading:

Beerbohm, Max. *The Incomparable Max: A Collection of Writings of Sir Max Beerbohm*, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1962.

Lago, Mary M., Karl Beckson, eds. *Max and Will: Max Beerbohm and William Rothenstein: Their Friendship and Letters 1893-1945*. John Murray Publishers, 1975.

2.1 Aldous Huxley (1894-1963): An Introduction

Aldous Huxley was born in Surrey, England in 1894. Though he is best known for his novels and essays, Huxley also functioned as a critic of social mores, societal norms, and ideals. In his literary oeuvre, here was a journey from humanist concerns to spiritual concerns: “While his earlier concerns might be called “humanist,” ultimately, he became quite interested in “spiritual” subjects such as parapsychology and philosophical mysticism” (New Encyclopaedia np).

His father was a writer, editor, and teacher, and his mother also was a teacher. So, the young Aldous grew up in a family of well-connected, well-known writers and educators. Huxley’s mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, who expressed the moral struggles of the modern age and the retreat of a religion-based culture. Thus Aldous grew up in an atmosphere in which thought on science, religion, and education informed and even dominated his family life.

Huxley’s grandfather, a prominent biologist T. H. Huxley, gained recognition in the nineteenth century as the writer who introduced Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to a wide public and coined the word “agnostic” Huxley’s grandfather’s writing contributed to the growing debate on science and religion in the Victorian era, a theme that would capture the imagination of his grandson, Aldous.

He was educated at Eton, “during which time he became partially blind because of keratitis. He retained enough eyesight to read with difficulty, and he graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1916” (Encyclopaedia Britannica np). Though, surgery corrected some of his vision, but Huxley would suffer from visual complications for the rest of his life. Poor eyesight

prevented his pursuit of his first career choice, medicine, but he threw himself into study of literature, reading with the help of a magnifying glass.

A less formal, but nonetheless important part of Huxley's education was his regular attendance at Lady Ottoline Morrell's get-togethers, which provided many literary, artistic, and political reformers and experimenters the chance to meet and talk. Here Huxley met novelist Virginia Woolf, economist John Maynard Keynes, and critics Bertrand Russell and Clive Bell — some of the most important writers and thinkers of the time. Huxley's early exposure to the ideas of such a diverse and progressive group deeply influenced his world-view and his writing. Huxley returned to Eton to teach. Among his pupils was Eric Blair, who would later write such classics as *1984* and *Animal Farm* under the pseudonym "George Orwell".

From 1919 to 1921, Huxley worked as an editor on the London journal *Athenaeum*, one of the best-known publications of the time. Huxley also contributed to *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* before devoting himself entirely to his own fiction and essay writing in 1924. Huxley's first published work was a collection of his poetry, *The Burning Wheel* (1916), written when he was still in his early twenties. French novelist Marcel Proust praised Huxley's early efforts, and Huxley seemed destined for life as a poet. But with the publication of his first two novels, *Chrome Yellow* (1921) and *Antic Hay* (1923), Huxley emerged as a particularly witty chronicler of modern life among the educated and the pretentious.

Huxley further cemented his reputation as a satirist with the novel *Point Counter Point* (1928), a scathing study of the breakdown of commonly held social values. Huxley followed up with another satire, which would prove to be his most popular work — *Brave New World* (1932). Like his previous novels, *Brave New World* is a "novel of ideas". Through this

novel, Huxley takes the problem of evil much more seriously than in the past. The satirist had begun to evolve into the social philosopher.

After the publication of *Brave New World*, Huxley left England, living with his wife, Maria, first in New Mexico and later in California, where surgery restored much of his vision. In his new home, Huxley became involved in the study and practice of mysticism. We find new philosophical outlook in his novel *Eyeless in Giza* (1936), which promoted pacifism on the eve of World War II. *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939) makes the case for the emptiness of materialism. Gradually, Huxley moved towards mystical writings, far from the tone of his early satire. *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) and *The Doors of Perception* (1954) represent Huxley's non-fictional expression of his interests, including even experimentation with psychedelic drugs.

Huxley won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction from the University of Edinburgh in 1939 for his novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. In 1959, he received the Award of Merit and Gold Medal from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and accepted an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the University of California. The year before his death, he received the Companion of Literature from the British Royal Society of Literature.

In Los Angeles, "Huxley wrote screenplays for film versions of fictional classics such as *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. He also continued writing fiction, notably *Ape and Essence* (1948), a futuristic fiction set in Los Angeles after a nuclear war" (Cliffs Notes np). With *Grey Eminence* (1941) and *The Devils of Loudon* (1952), Huxley looked backward to historical events to examine what he believed to be the hypocrisy of organized

religion. In addition to his fiction and screenplays, the planning and writing of biographies, essays, and other works of non-fiction occupied him constantly during these years.

Huxley's last novel, *Island* (1962), returns to the theme of the future he once explored so memorably in *Brave New World*. The later novel, in which Huxley tried to create a positive vision of the future, failed to come up to readers' expectations. *Brave New World Revisited*, a series of essays addressing the themes of his early novel, represents a more successful rethinking of future (and present) social challenges.

Huxley died of cancer in California in 1963. Although his novels — especially *Brave New World* — still enjoyed great popularity, Huxley's death received little notice in the media at the time. The nation's shock over the assassination of President John F. Kennedy overshadowed news of the writer's death.

Important Works:

i) *Chrome Yellow* (1921)

ii) *Antic Hay* (1923)

iii) *Those Barren Leaves* (1925)

iv) *Point Counter Point* (1928)

v) *Brave New World* (1932)

vi) *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936)

vii) *Ape and Essence* (1948)

viii) *Limbo* (1920)

ix) *Jacob's Hands; A Fable* (Late 1930s)

x) *The Burning Wheel* (1916)

2.2 “English Snobbery”: Summary and Analysis

Summary:

In the essay “English Snobbery” (1945), written by Aldous Huxley, we do not find any moral principle, but it familiarizes with a new subject in applicable to many people in the world.

There are all kinds of people and all kinds of snobberies so that there is nothing in the world about which people cannot be snobbish. It is almost impossible to get a leprosy snob as none wants to be a leper. There in a good number of people who are disease snobs. There are examples of young men and women who are T. B. Snobs. They think that it would be quite romantic if he dies of tuberculosis while they are in the prime of their youth, as did Keats. T. B. Snobs are not as romantic as they imagine.

There are rich people who seem to conceive the idea that they suffer from many diseases. Consequently, they run to many doctors to cure their imaginary diseases. They are hypochondriac. The author comments that these snobs have no diseases, but over-eating. They eat more than they can digest and so they feel that they are suffering from many ailments.

The author identifies many new fashions in snobberies also. Old snobberies become out of vogue and in its place, there comes new ones. In the previous period, people used to be snobbish about their family and ancestry. But now, that trend is declining. New culture snobbery has emerged, though it is resisted by subalterns. Quite recently, there is booze snobbery and mostly youths from 15 to 70 are found drunk in private parties. France is known for fine wines and its fine flavour. But the low class people influenced others and so the taste for fine wine is being replaced by strong alcoholic drinks.

One cannot say that modernity snobbery is a new phenomenon as it existed in the past also. Modernity snobs discard old things and purchase the new arrivals in the market. These new things are created by machines. These snobs are the best friends of the modern industry. The factory owners manufacture latest things that cannot last for long period. This modernity snobbery is much prevalent in our times.

Huxley points out yet another snobbery that is art snobbery. These art snobs can be categorized into two types. They are Platonic, and un-Platonic. The platonic snobs admire artistic work but never purchase art objects. But the un-Platonic snob buys the artistic work in order to keep it as a status symbol. For them it is a commodity which shows their finer artistic tastes. These snobs are modernity snobs as well. They boast themselves as patrons of modern art. Without understanding the value of the art object, they simply possess them. In a way, these modern snobs are a great source of revenue for the fine art painters.

As for the value of snobberies, it depends largely on the attitude of its practitioners. If they consider that the entire world is but an illusion, then all snobberies are meaningless. It depends upon one's attitude. But many people strike a fine balance between these two extremes.

Those who value some snobberies as good, can promote such snobberies. Every snob is a promoter of one snobbery or the other.

Analysis:

Huxley was an intellectual and a pioneer of modern thought and philosophy. Some people pick up snobberies, make lists of them the way ornithologists do with birds. Huxley was one such. He identified the 19th-century adolescent “Consumption Snobbery” as the desire “to fade away in the flower of youth” in romantic emulation of the gloomy poet John Keats.

The English are creative people who invented soccer and other popular games. They also invented snobbery, which is also a game, and some people live or die by it. G. B. Shaw called snobbery the great strength of the English nation, but didn’t explain why. Huxley says that the English are accomplished snobs. They know when to take up a snobbery and, more importantly, when to drop it. Americans aren’t entirely competent snobs. Moreover, some Americans still think golf separates them from the hoi polloi or cell phones.

Death and disease snobberies have not faded, not in Baltimore at least. There is a mention of one of the authors who is most popular with young girls. She writes novels about teenagers in which the main character almost always dies, or has a serious illness. There is no end to the snobberies. There are opera snobs (they complain about surtitles) and jazz snobs (they complain when the musician gets too close to the melody).

There are radio snobs and television snobs (they never watch). There are even adoption snobs (is this the season for Chinese babies or Brazilian?). Art snobbery endures. It’s usually an expression of culture snobbery, but sometimes of possession snobbery, if the snob in question is rich enough to buy the stuff.

Snobberies come and go. People can be snobs about the oddest things, ignorance, for instance. Snobbery is evidence of social and economic vitality. Preoccupation with fashions in clothes, cars, mates, mannerisms, language or personal style may seem like lunatic obsessions, but they are not entirely negative. Money lavishly spent for the empty purpose of raising oneself above one's neighbors helps all: it costs money to keep up; it creates jobs.

Small towns don't like snobbery. They don't like individuality either. Huxley thinks that wherever there is a privileged class, there is bound to be snobbery. He opines that "For the rich and the titled, snobbery is not a superfluous luxury, but a necessity;" (Nayar 140).

2.3 Let's Sum It Up:

Huxley talks of the various kinds of snobs. Some people meticulously pick up snobberies, make lists of them the way bird-watchers do with birds. The English are creative people who invented soccer and other popular games. They also invented snobbery, which is also a game, though some people live or die by it. G. B. Shaw called snobbery the great strength of the English nation, but didn't explain why.

2.4 References:

"Aldous Huxley". https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Aldous_Huxley. Accessed on 11 Dec 2022.

"Brave New World". <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/b/brave-new-world/aldous-huxley-biography/> Accessed on 11 Dec 2022.

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

2.5 Points to Ponder:

- i) Huxley says that the English are accomplished snobs.
- ii) Americans aren't entirely competent snobs. Moreover, some Americans still think golf separates them from the hoi polloi or cell phones.

2.6 Model Questions:

- i) How does Huxley describe different kinds of snobs in his essay "English Snobbery"?
- ii) Why does Huxley think that the English are the best snobs in the world?

2.7 Further Study:

Huxley, Aldous. *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. Harper Perennial, 2004.

---. *Huxley and God: Essays*. Crossroad, 2003.

Sawyer, Dana. *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*. Crossroad, 2005.

3.1 J. B. Priestly (1894-1984): An Introduction

The novelist, playwright, and broadcaster J. B. Priestley was born in Bradford, Yorkshire in 1894. His father, Jonathan, was a pioneering schoolmaster, his mother, Emma, had been a mill girl. Emma died when he was very young, but fortunately his stepmother, Amy, was very kind to him. He enjoyed the rich cultural and social life at his family. Many of his finest novels, plays and memoirs draw on his feelings about this vanished time, particularly “Bright Day” (1946), in which a disillusioned scriptwriter looks back at his golden Bradford adolescence.

After his elementary education, Priestley worked in a wool office in the Swan Arcade. His main interest by this time however was writing: his first publication was “Secrets of the Ragtime King” for *London Opinion*, then a series of articles, “Round the Hearth”, for Independent Labour Party publication, *The Bradford Pioneer*. At the outbreak of World War I, he enrolled himself in an army regiment: “When the Great War broke out, Priestley volunteered, joining the Duke of Wellington’s West Yorkshire Regiment. After a year of training in southern England, he was sent to the Front in 1915” (J. B. Priestley Society np). Although he never wrote in great detail about his war experience, it haunted him all through his life.

After the War, Priestley studied at Trinity Hall, Cambridge University, thanks to a very small ex-officer’s grant. He excelled academically, but decided to make a career as a writer. With the exception of a book of poems *The Chapman of Rhymes* (1918), which he later denigrated, he had not been in a position to write much during the War years. He moved to London and wrote essays and book reviews for the *London Mercury* and other periodicals, and published works on literature and a couple of short novels. Collaboration with well-known historical novelist Hugh Walpole on “Farthing Hall” (1929) gave Priestley the financial freedom to write a long picaresque novel, *The Good Companions* (1929). The book won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and earned him an international reputation. His follow-up

novel, the darker, London centred *Angel Pavement* (1930), was also much admired by the readers.

In the 1930s, Priestley started a new career as a dramatist. His plays were impeccably crafted, sometimes experimental and are characterized by pre-War settings and various perspectives on time. His plays include *Dangerous Corner* (1932), the Yorkshire comedy *When we are Married* (1938), *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), and, his most famous play, *An Inspector Calls* (1945). The latter combined his fascination with the nature of time with his ideas about society. Priestley's social conscience was awakened by growing social inequalities in the 1930s, which were unforgettably outlined in *English Journey* (1934), in which he raged at the treatment of veterans and the desolation of places like Rusty Lane.

During World War 2, Priestley achieved the peak of his fame and influence in his BBC "Postscripts" broadcasts (1940). However, controversially, he called for social change after the War, so the mistakes made after the previous one and the poor treatment of the returning soldiers would not be repeated.

In the 1950s, Priestley became increasingly politically disillusioned. Priestley was married thrice: to Pat, who died tragically young, to Jane, whom he divorced, and to archaeologist and poet Jacquetta Hawkes. His marriage to Jacquetta was very happy. They worked as collaborators on books such as *Journey down a Rainbow* (1955).

Priestley continued to publish well into the 1970s. He received several honours late in life, including (belatedly) the freedom of the City of Bradford and an honorary degree from Bradford University. He had previously declined both a knighthood but in 1977 accepted the Order of Merit, as this was the gift of the sovereign, not of any political party. He died in 1984.

In recent years, there has been a surge in his popularity, thanks among others to the work of the J. B. Priestley Society and to the impact of the astonishingly successful National Theatre production of his play *An Inspector Calls*.

Important Works:

- i) *The English Comic Characters*, a collection of essays (1925)
- ii) *The Good Companions*, a novel (1929)
- iii) *Angel Pavement*, a novel (1930)
- iv) *An Inspector Calls*, a play (1945)
- v) *When we are Married*, a play (1938)
- vi) *Dangerous Corner*, a play (1932)

- vii) *I Have Been Here Before*, a play (1937)

- viii) *Margin Released – A Writer’s reminiscences*, a non-fiction (1962)
- ix) *Literature and Western Man*, a non-fiction (1960)
- x) *Journey Down a Rainbow*, a non-fiction (1969)

3.2 “Lectures: Summary

Priestley starts the essay “Lectures” by stating that “There is only one thing more foolish than going to hear a lecture and that, of course, is giving a lecture” (Nayar 154). He then expresses his foolishness that he has agreed to give two lectures in near future at an institute. That is, not to say, that he is in great demand as a lecturer. According to him, demand of lectures is always high than the supply.

Priestley further says that he finds no fun, no glory in delivering lectures. On a funny note, he also confesses that there is no money in lieu of delivering a lecture. He thinks that the world is crazy enough to invite an actress to write articles and invite a writer to deliver lectures: “A world that is silly enough to invite actresses to write articles can hardly be expected to refrain from asking authors to talk in public” (Nayar 154). According to the author, it’s a great absurdity. The author says that the main reason to decline invitation to give lecture is that he does not want to inflict pain upon the listeners. He thinks himself a total failure as a lecturer.

When the author delivers a lecture in a specific town, he begins to despise the very town, the hall, the chairman, the audience, the subject, and himself as well. He says that he has the worst mannerisms as a public speaker. He humorously opines that even if his friends and relatives are paid to attend his lecture they would decline the offer because he is so miserable as a speaker. He also harbours an apprehension that some people would wait outside the lecture hall with guns and when he would come out, they would shoot bullets at him.

He also fears that if he would deliver a lecture before an audience of hundred people, he would lose all his readers. But the funny part of it is that he might even get only twenty people as audience. He candidly confesses that he is good as a writer but very hopeless as a speaker.

He then makes a difference between gentle, dear readers and immobile, senseless listeners. The listeners of his lectures are malicious people who don’t have any better idea to spend their time. They perhaps come to listen to his lectures because they would like to see the author making a complete fool of himself. His listeners, in all probability, are the sons and daughters of the chairman, treasurer, or secretary. They would perhaps discuss why this author’s writings get published, in place of their’s.

He further talks to himself that if his listeners dislike him, he also detests them a lot. He also feels it as an insult if his audience is not interested in his lecture. Anyways, this situation is nonetheless intolerable. According to him, the secret of a good lecturer is that he/she should take delight in his/her own voice. If the speaker takes delight in his/her own voice, the listeners would help but enjoy him too. On the other hand, a bad lecturer murders a lecture by his/her grimaces, awful voice, and the whole appearance like a buffoon. He thinks of stopping the joke of lecturing and curing the citizens of American Middle East. After a decade or two, everybody would forget speakers like him.

He may falter while giving a lecture on a particular subject but he can go on writing about the subject flawlessly and smoothly. He ends the essay by twisting a famous quote of Dr. Samuel Johnson (“To err is human/To forgive divine”), “To—er—is human, to refuse—divine” (Nayar 157).

3.3 Let’s Sum It Up:

Through this essay, Priestley feels no hesitation to declare himself as an awful speaker. He suggests that somebody should give him a pile of blank sheets, a fountain pen, and a portable typewriter so that he can write at will. But if someone offers him a platform, a chairman, a tumbler of water, and a few rows of gaping faces, he will definitely cut a sorry figure, to say the least.

3.4 References:

“J. B. Priestley: The Last Great Man of English Letters”.

<https://jbpriestleysociety.com/biography/> Accessed on 11 Dec 2022.

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

3.5 Points to Ponder:

- i) Writing is one thing, lecturing is a totally different thing.
- ii) Most of the writers do not have a command over delivering a lecture.
- iii) There is nothing to feel ashamed of, if a writer like Priestley fails to deliver a smooth lecture.
- iv) With a high dose of humour, banter, and fun, Priestley belittles himself to the point of being a caricature.

3.6 Model Questions:

- i) Write a note on Priestley's views on lectures, foregrounding his essential sense of humour.
- ii) How does Priestley contrast a successful lecturer with a miserable one?
- iii) How does Priestley describe his own performance as a lecturer? What does this self-abnegation show? Is he really a bad speaker, as he claims him to be?

3.7 Further Reading:

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