



# FROM THE DILIGENT CRAFTS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM TO THE PROPOSITIONS OF TEXTUALITY: A PRACTICAL EVALUATION OF THE SHIFTING OF INTERPRETATIONS OF STYLE IN ENGLISH PROSE

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## ABSTRACT

*Like poetry and drama, the beauty and variety of essays is of immense value. To be precise, there is no dearth of this beauty and variety in the scores of very impressive and high quality English essayists/prose writings present with us from time to time. They have left with us indelible imprints of stylish languages and interesting subject matters ranging from society and culture to the topics of intellectual and political debate; and also from individual perceptions to daily life incidents. In this way, the greatest ever known authors like Bacon, Addison, Steele, Swift, Dr. Johnson, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Carlyle, Lamb, Dickens, Lynd, Gardiner, Shaw, Orwell, Vonnegut, and a lot more have established their unique identities through their essays. The present paper attempts at making a critical chronological survey of the uniqueness of style of such essayists and the mechanics that embeds their writings from time to time. It is observed that the rhetorical analysis of the classical days is slowly substituted by personal styles such as Baconian or Middle style or Johnsonese or Carlylese. Further, this trend takes a substantial turn by adopting textual criticism parameters in the hands of textual critics of the Modern Age those who are more or less guided by 'close reading' and/or adopt structuralist parameters of the analysis of texts. Then, the changing notions and perceptions of critical faculties of literary as well linguistic scholars lead to focus on the textuality of the texts. Some adopt the poststructuralist parameters of interpreting the fact and style of such an age old sub-genre of prose. This marks a shift in paradigm from individual to general leading to generating multiple meanings through interdisciplinary approaches.*

**Index Terms:** English essayists, rhetorical, Baconian, Middle style, Johnsonese, Carlylese, structuralist, poststructuralist

## I. INTRODUCTION

Prose writings include varieties of sub-genres ranging from user's manual to academic books; and from nonfictional prose, literary essays, critical and theoretical essays, short stories, fictitious narratives to biographical writings. This thrust of this paper is however mostly on the essays and factual story narratives

written by well-known litterateurs in English. The aim is to present evidentially the journey of style of writing of such essays and narratives from the renaissance starrers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626) to the postmodern champion Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007).

The focus on the style of essays and story narratives is of modern origin. Although earlier there were seminal authors like Philip Sidney (1554-1586), John Dryden (1631-1700), Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and Matthew Arnold (1822-1882), there focus was mostly on poetry and plays. In the classical era, focus was on the effective use of rhetorical devices to influence the audience through speech and writings. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) talks of four modes of persuasion. They are: Logos (reasonable argument with evidence); Pathos (emotional appeal); Ethos (presenting the credibility of the author/speaker); and Kairos (suitable context and environment). In the rhetorical analysis, analyses were made on the use of sonic devices, word repetitions, word relations, discourse features such as amplification and *aporia*, and how effectively irony and imagery have been used. Critical focus on the style of writing of essays and narratives in diverse forms emerged in the modern age. In the meantime, it is normally observed that the trend of author-centric or retrospective criticism had been substituted by text-centric or introspective criticism mostly influenced by linguistic criticism or more prevalently stylistic analysis of texts and was tending towards more advanced forms of analysis in the light of the reader-centric or prospective criticism in line with the postmodernist and poststructuralist trends.

The present paper attempts at a synchronic, descriptive, textual, stylistic and qualitative analysis of the prose style foregrounded in English non-fictional prose writings taking into consideration the data available so far.

## II. THE NOTIONS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

The notions of textual criticism gain momentum in the hands of the New Critics those who emerge in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While interpreting poetry, some critics and scholars develop critical evaluation of prose or essays by examining the effectiveness of the use of words and expressions in them; to focus on the purpose of foregrounding of certain textual elements as well as linguistically deviational features; and the use of rhetoric in such writings too. The names of a few well-known scholars in the field come into focus. One of them is Hugh Walker (1855-1939). His seminal book *English Essay and Essayists* (1915) is a landmark in the interpretation of style of English essayists. Herbert Edward Read (1893-1968) wrote *English Prose Style* in 1966. This book deals with figures of speech associated with words like: epithets and metaphors; analysis of sentences; and essentials for writing a paragraph and essay. Then, in the second part of the book that is 'rhetoric,' it deals with the style of prose such as exposition, narrative techniques, how to put fantastic elements; invention and intelligence, character portrayal; eloquence and tradition. One critic T.W. Hunt (?) has written a monograph titled *The Prose Style of Jonathan Swift* (1970). Marjorie Boulton (1924-2017) has attempted to make a linguistic analysis of prose in his *Anatomy of Prose* (1954) too. The much popular writers of History of English Literature like Edward Albert, David Daiches, William J. Long and some others have contributed a lot in this dimension. As is evident, such modern critics as well as linguists have interpreted the essays written by scores of very impressive and stylist authors ranging from Francis Bacon (1561-1626) to E.M. Foster (1879-1970) and Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007). Within the domain of literary writings, there is a point for varying definition and emphasis. Sometimes the term has been applied to the linguistic habits of a particular writer (for example, the style of Bacon, or Johnson or Dickens, Proust, etc.). Sometimes, style in prose refers to the way language is used in a particular genre, period, school of writing or some combination of these such as: 'euphuistic style' of the Elizabethan Age (i.e. excessive use of alliteration, antithesis and mythological similes), 'epistolary style' or 'early eighteenth-century style', etc.

It is observed that the predecessors of Richard Hooker (1554-1600) like Thomas More (1478-1535), Roger Ascham (1515-1668), and John Lily (1553-1606) have been considered as the writers with prose style. To be specific, Thomas More has "a vigorous, perspicuous, and above all such an evidently thoughtful style." (Fletcher 7). Similarly, John Lily was the master of euphuism and Lily has "...the extraordinary richness of his language, and certain distinct steps which he took towards what is called a 'periodic' style."

(Fletcher 8). Francis Bacon is said to have reformed the English prose style by introducing short and concise sentences and a master of antithesis. There is no parenthesis in his writings. The sentences have pithy jottings and there is lucidity. Rhythm and coherence are clearly noticed in all his essays. Altogether, Baconian style is named as aphoristic with an adherence to Latinism. The themes of his essays are related to worldly wisdom. One can notice the presence of more of graces of alliteration and antithesis. A passage from one of his essays can be taken for example and analysis.

“WHAT is truth? Said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer. Certainly there be, that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief; affecting free-will in thinking, as well as in acting. And though the sects of philosophers of that kind be gone, yet there remain certain discoursing wits, which are of the same veins, though there be not so much blood in them, as was in those of the ancients. But it is not only the difficulty and labor, which men take in finding out of truth, nor again, that when it is found, it imposeth upon men’s thoughts, that doth bring lies in favor; but a natural, though corrupt love, of the lie itself.” (‘Of Truth,’ *Bacon’s Essays*)

In the extract, in the beginning, there is an open-ended question followed by reverse statements on the thrust of the topic. There are clauses frequently marked by pauses tending to look for logics to establish the fact in response to the question asked in the beginning. Francis Bacon argues on the basis of evidential examination by highlighting a revival of “old secular knowledge” often a point of discussion of scholars like Kautilya and Winternitz. He rejected fables, myths and other narratives as highly inaccurate by developing a rhetorical scientific approach.

The Elizabethan pamphleteers like Thomas Nash (1567-1601) and Robert Greene (1560-92) maintain “buoyancy and vigour with quaint mixture of truculence and petulance.” (Albert, 103). Similarly, John Dryden (1631-1700) has not only directness and lucidity, but also balanced critical judgment. He has introduced “antithetic style” in prose. The extract illustrated below can be a piece of example.

“To begin, then with Shakespeare, he was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not labouriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too.” (Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi, VIRG., Ecl., i. 26)

The Restoration Period prose writers are known as character-writers; writers of poetical prose; or pamphleteers following ephemeral journalism. What’s more, the essayists of the Augustan age are more influenced by eloquence like their predecessors. Very often, some of their writings are autobiographical (For example, Richard Steele); may have provinciality (For example, Joseph Addison). Some writings have frequent Greek references and therefore such writings are called as attic or Asiatic. Attic is ascetic, brief and witty concise style whereas Asiatic is more decorative and florid. Writers like Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) are associated with Attic prose style following the arguments of Cicero (Ref. to *Treatise of Rhetoric*). Attic style is austere, formal and traditional whereas Asiatic is bombastic, emotional, and colored with word play. “Addisonian or middle style is never slipshod or obscure or unmelodious because he chooses the words carefully for their meaning and music.”(Jain). His style matches the subject matter. His specialization in character sketches can be obtained from the following extract.

“I am the more at ease in Sir Roger’s family, because it consists of sober and staid persons; for as the knight is the best master in the world, he seldom changes his servants and as he is beloved by all about him, his servants never care for leaving him: by this means his domestics are all in years, and grown old with their master. You would take his valet de chambre for his

brother; his butler is grey-headed; his groom is one of the gravest men that I have ever seen; and his coachman has the looks of a privy-councillor. You see the goodness of the master even in the old house-dog; and in a gray pad, that is kept in the stable with great care and tenderness out of regard to his past services, though he has been useless for several years.”

(‘Sir Roger at Home,’ *Coverley Papers*)

The sketch of characters is simple, realistic, introducing step by step with mild humour with all modesty. This type of prose is “...pure without scrupulosity and exact without apparent elaboration. It is always equable and always easy. There is no room for glowing words or pointed sentences.” (Jain). He is of the opinion that the prose of Addison is thus suitable for miscellaneous purpose. It is suitable for newspaper and political work, for history and for biography. This style can be compared with the style of Swift and Defoe. Addison’s contemporary essayist Richard Steele’s essays are characterised by unconstrained sentences, the fresh and have almost colloquial vocabulary.

The allegorical writings of John Bunyan (1628-1688) are said to be based on Biblical model. They are homely, equable and humorous. Similarly, the eminent allegorical writer Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) is said to have personal peculiarities and violations of moral propriety. His prose writings bristle and sparkle at times and possess idiomatic terseness at par with Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). We can obtain the above mentioned data in examining the textual extracts given below.

“This single stick, which you now behold ingloriously lying in that neglected corner, I once knew in a flourishing state in a forest. It was full of sap, full of leaves, and full of boughs; but now in vain does the busy art of man pretend to vie with nature, by tying that withered bundle of twigs to its sapless trunk; it is now at best but the reverse of what it was, a tree turned upside-down, the branches on the earth, and the root in the air; it is now handled by every dirty wench, condemned to do her drudgery, and, by a capricious kind of fate, destined to make other things clean, and be nasty itself; at length, worn to the stumps in the service of the maids, it is either thrown out of doors or condemned to the last use—of kindling a fire. When I behold this I sighed, and said within myself, ‘Surely mortal man is a broomstick!’” (‘A Meditation upon a Broomstick,’ *Battle of Books*)

The flavour of the language of paradox with an extended metaphor of presenting human being as a broomstick is deliberately exercised here while portraying the broom with wit and humour.

While talking about 18<sup>th</sup> century prose, very often the name of Dr. Samuel Johnson comes forward. His essays have rugged, lack of smoothness and finish in his writings. His topics are related to various choices and practices of life and often argumentative. In addition, it is noticed that there is reflection of own personality through individualistic point of views; often logical in approach, lucidity, conversational, humorous, inflated (elaborated artificially), pompous, artificial and verbose (using more words)-Johnsonese. In the extract from his essay ‘Obstructions of Learning,’ these features can be well examined.

“It is common to find young men ardent and diligent in the pursuit of knowledge; but the progress of life very often produces laxity and indifference; and not only those who are at liberty to choose their business and amusements, but those likewise whose professions engage them in literary inquiries, pass the latter part of their time without improvement, and spend the day rather in any other entertainment than that which they might find among their books.

This abatement of the vigour of curiosity is sometimes imputed to the insufficiency of learning. Men are supposed to remit their labours, because they find their labours to have been vain; and to search no longer after truth and wisdom, because they at last despair of finding them.”

(No. 94. 'Obstructions of learning,' 02, Feb 1760 Posted by Samuel Johnson in *The Idler*)

It is noticed that there are periodic sentences (For example, 'In spite of heavy rain, the game continued.' Here, the main point is at the end); and there is use of redundant/ pleonasm. Subsequently, Johnsonese is a term coined referring to the writings having pedantic flavour, rhetorically balanced, full of affectation, and high-sounding words. It was matching the fashion of the 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars. Johnson's essay writing style is didactic and expository in *The Rambler* whereas the simpler narratives prose of much of Rasselas and the more informal discursiveness of his private letters.

The prose writers of the Romantic Revival like William Wordsworth (1770-1850) are varied and celebrated whereas the writings of S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834) possess discursiveness combined with involution to baffle the reader in search of central meaning. It is scrappy and chaotic; large and sprawling—chiefly philosophical and literary. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we come across the essays of Charles Lamb (1775-1834) possesses the power to charm. In the words of Walker, "His imagination conquerors reality; note of autobiographical elements are noticed; essays constitute turn for mystifications. His "whim-whams," as he called them, found their best expression in the quaint words and antique phrases and multiplied and sometimes far-fetched yet never forced comparisons in which he abounds." (Walker, 239). An extract from one of his essays is worth quoting for the purpose of analysis here.

"I like to meet a sweep -- understand me -- not a grown sweeper -- old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive -- but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek -- such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the peep peep of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise?"

I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks -- poor blots -- innocent blacknesses - I reverence these young Africans of our own growth -- these almost clergy imps, who sport. Their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind." ('The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers,' *Essays of Elia*)

Fragments of a sentence uniquely divided by hyphens as discourse linkers with a delicate humanely undertone. "Frequently the poetic element is brought in under the shape of a literary allusion or quotation using witty synonymous epithets which no one could manage more skilfully than Lamb. He drew either from English or from Latin sources, and always with taste." (Cooper, 67)). To a large extent, they are airy, almost elfish.

In the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a series of reviews were popularly circulated as periodicals. *Edinburgh Review* is one such popular reviews. From Edmund Burke's oratorical style, writers diverted their attention towards "review style." William Hazlitt (1778-1830) seems to have trained powers of reasoning and incisive style and pregnancy of expression. Essays are very often equivocal, that is a word or expression capable of having different meanings; double entendre; and ambiguous. Some such writers adopt a diffuse style that is a tendency to dwell too much on trivialities and details. The writings of Robert Southey (1774-1843) writings are characterized by limpid, graceful and easy prose, free from mannerism.

Similarly, the corpus of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) belongs to the genres of history, the critical essay, social commentary, biography, fiction, and poetry. His innovative writing style, known as Carlylese, mostly allured by Victorian literature and gives vent to the techniques of postmodern literature. Carlylese is marked by the use of "certain literary, rhetorical and grammatical devices, including apostrophe, apposition, archaism, exclamation, imperative mood, inversion, parallelism, portmanteau, present tense, neologisms,

metaphor, personification, and repetition.” (Cooper, 78). A few lines from his ‘On Heroes’ can be taken as a sample for analysis.

“We have undertaken to discourse here for a little on Great Men, their manner of appearance in our world's business, how they have shaped themselves in the world's history, what ideas men formed of them, what work they did;—on Heroes, namely, and on their reception and performance; what I call Hero-worship and the Heroic in human affairs. Too evidently this is a large topic; deserving quite other treatment than we can expect to give it at present. A large topic; indeed, an illimitable one; wide as Universal History itself. For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these. Too clearly it is a topic we shall do no justice to in this place!” [Lectures on Heroes. Lecture I. The Hero as Divinity. Paganism: Scandinavian Mythology. May 5, 1840.]]

The discourse features of Carlyle are marked by pauses with fragmented phrases and sentences in which he introduces the topic in a climatic order of facts and finally puts logical emphasis on the key words adopting capitalization as a graphological discourse feature.

The essays of T.B. Macaulay (1800-1859) have a sort of craving for antithesis, and epigram distorts his essays. Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) is known for his thin jocularly; “exceedingly tranquil contemplative in his sentences...extraordinarily felicitous... through sparing metaphor” and designated as the master of the “abstract school of style.” (Fletcher 26). Macaulay’s tone is metallic, voice is louder, and insistent, a mystic, a qua essayist—a representative of the concrete school style whereas John Ruskin (1819-1900) merges both letter and essay and follows grandiose manner. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) is characterised by eloquent apostrophe, sarcasm, urbanity and most intimate sort; Walter Bagehot’s epigrammatic sayings, Whiggism and “intermingling of lofty with the sordid, the ethereal with the grossly mundane are quite remarkable.” (Cooper, 89). A piece of writing of De Quincey can be taken here to examine his unique style of prose:

“Some twenty or more years before I matriculated at Oxford, Mr. Palmer, M.P. for Bath, had accomplished two things, very hard to do on our little planet, the Earth, however cheap they may happen to be held by the eccentric people in comets: he had invented mail-coaches, and he had married the daughter of a duke. He was, therefore, just twice as great a man as Galileo, who certainly invented (or discovered) the satellites of Jupiter, those very next things extant to mail-coaches in the two capital points of speed and keeping time, but who did not marry the daughter of a duke.” (De Quincey’s “The English Mail Coach”)

The humorous undertone of the subjective expressions is apparently noticed in the above extract displaying brevity and involvement in contemporary higher social issues.

One eminent biographer of the Victorian age Giles Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) excels in his narrative techniques. He is said to have established the style of modern biography. The following extract can be taken as an example:

“Everyone knows the popular conception of Florence Nightingale. The saintly, self-sacrificing woman, the delicate maiden of high degree who threw aside the pleasures of a life of ease to succour the afflicted, the Lady with the Lamp, gliding through the horrors of the hospital at Scutari, and consecrating with the radiance of her goodness the dying soldier's couch—the vision is familiar to all. But the truth was different. The Miss Nightingale of fact was not as facile fancy painted her. She worked in another fashion, and towards another end; she moved under the stress of an impetus which finds no place in the popular imagination? A Demon possessed her. Now demons, whatever else they may be, are full of interest. And so it happens that in the real Miss Nightingale there was more that was interesting than in the legendary one; there was also less that was agreeable.”

(“Florence Nightingale,” *Eminent Victorians*)

The presence of keenness of observation, ready wit, elegance and precision of expression with mild irony can be observed here.

There are scores of prose writers in the modern age those who excel in their respective prose styles. To focus on George Orwell (1903-1950) as an essayist is worthwhile. He is known to be a writer of lucid prose. In addition, his fables are characterized by apologue since he uses animals or objects to persuade audience. He was of the opinion that prose writers should adopt the following six rules:

- i. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ii. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- iii. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- iv. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- v. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- vi. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous. (*Politics and the English Language*, 1946)

To focus on the style of prose of Orwell, we can read the following extract:

“Considering how likely we all are to be blown to pieces by it within the next five years, the atomic bomb has not roused so much discussion as might have been expected. The newspapers have published numerous diagrams, not very helpful to the average man, of protons and neutrons doing their stuff, and there has been much reiteration of the useless statement that the bomb ‘ought to be put under international control.’ But curiously little has been said, at any rate in print, about the question that is of most urgent interest to all of us, namely: ‘How difficult are these things to manufacture?’

Such information as we — that is, the big public — possess on this subject has come to us in a rather indirect way, apropos of President Truman's decision not to hand over certain secrets to the USSR. Some months ago, when the bomb was still only a rumour, there was a widespread belief that splitting the atom was merely a problem for the physicists, and that when they had solved it a new and devastating weapon would be within reach of almost everybody. (At any moment, so the rumour went, some lonely lunatic in a laboratory might blow civilization to smithereens, as easily as touching off a firework.)” (‘You and the Atom Bomb,’ First published: *Tribune*. — GB, London. — October 19, 1945)

Orwell's writing introduces one of the most sensitive issues of the modern age called the World War very lightly with a mild undertone of irony. Often factual and informative, Orwell feels like giving

parenthetical remarks for his topics of discussion and jumps into the seriousness of the topic. George Bernard Shaw (1856-195) always uses his work to make,

“staunch social commentary. He was a Fabian socialist and sought to draw awareness to important social problems. His work is often comedic and clever, which he was careful to do as a way to sneak his message into an entertaining and enthralling expression. He continuously engages his audience intellectually and provides stimulating dialogue and plot lines. They are also heavy with monologues and the characters often engage with each other in intellectual debates.” ([www.ultius.com](http://www.ultius.com)).

He seeks, not just to entertain, but to educate while doing so. Following is an extract to see his excellence in the art of delineating prose style:

“LET us imagine a community of a thousand persons, organized for the perpetuation of the species on the basis of the British family as we know it at present. Seven hundred of them, we will suppose, find the British family arrangement quite good enough for them. Two hundred and ninety-nine find it a failure, but must put up with it since they are in a minority. The remaining person occupies a position to be explained presently. The 299 failures will not have the courage to face the fact that they are irremediable failures, since they cannot prevent the 700 satisfied ones from coercing them into conformity with the marriage law. They will accordingly try to persuade themselves that, whatever their own particular domestic arrangements may be, the family is a beautiful and holy natural institution.”

(The Sources of Idealism) ([www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Best/ShawIdealism.htm](http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Best/ShawIdealism.htm))

While discussing the stylistic features of English essayists, the much anthologized authors like A.G. Gardiner, Robert Lynd and G.K. Chesterton cannot be ignored. A.G. Gardiner (1865-1946) essays are uniformly elegant, graceful and humorous. His uniqueness lay in his ability to teach the basic truths of life in an easy and amusing manner.

“A friend of mine calling to see me the other day and observing my faithful Airedale—  
"Quilp" by name--whose tail was in a state of violent emotion at the prospect of a walk, remarked that when the new taxes came in I should have to pay a guinea for the privilege of keeping that dog. I said I hoped that Mr. McKenna would do nothing so foolish. In fact, I said, I am sure he will do nothing so foolish. I know him well, and I have always found Him a sensible man. Let him, said I, tax us all fairly according to our incomes, but why should he interfere with the way in which we spend the money that he leaves us? Why should he deny the friendship of that most friendly animal the dog to a poor man and make it the exclusive possession of the well-to-do?” (“All about a Dog”)

The essays of Robert Lynd (1879- 1949) reveal his personality, his humour, his light-heartedness, his philosophical, reflective and retrospective moods. In his essays we find unity of thought, felicity of diction, spontaneity of utterance and conversational ease. The words used in his essays are colloquial. G.K. Chesterton’s joyous argumentativeness; and buffoon intoxicated by his own flow of wit and paradox. John Steinbeck (1902-1968) tried to find an organic means of expression for each book that he wrote. He considered his work to be experimental. He intentionally used a documentary style.

### III. PRACTICAL CRITICISM: AN INTROSPECTIVE APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF LITERARY TEXTS

The air of practical criticism in the early part of the modern age heralds a change in approach of the interpretation of prose. Following this ideology, Marjorie Boulton makes the following comments in his *Anatomy of Prose* (1954). According to him, while dealing with a prose text, at first we have to examine if it is formal or informal. Then, he is of the opinion that clarity is the supreme virtue of prose. The elements of coherence and cohesion hold important role in this. In addition, while interpreting, one must if the literary text in prose is a narrative or descriptive or argumentative or dramatic or informative. Some writings are contemplative (i.e. meditative or speculative or fantasy); can be subjective or objective; sometimes wordy or not. The topics can be abstract or concrete; or may have realism or romance or even unreal subject matters. See if it has parallelism or structural equivalence (for example, “a wise son maketh a glad father; but the foolish is the heaviness of his mother/Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death”). While critically examining text configuration, he says that essays can have ornate style; may be replete with archaism. Rhetoric in prose can have repetitions as a stylistic feature which can be further divided into palilogia (As in Isaiah 38: 19: “the living, the living, he shall praise thee.”); anadiplosis (For example, “She opened a café, a café that ruined her financially.”); epistrophe (Abraham Lincoln’s “... and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”), symploce (Example: “For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.”); epanalepsis (Example: “Nothing is worse than doing nothing.”), epanodos (For example, “Love is right because there is only one right love.”), polyoptoton (Example: blood and bleed/ Who shall watch the watchman?); and aposiopesis (Example in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*: “Tis deepest winter in Lord Timon’s purse.” i.e. one may reach deep enough, and find a little.); antistasis (Example: “He that composes himself is wiser than that he composes a book”); diacope (1. Shakespeare: to be or not to be 2. Tolstoy: Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.); gradatio (Martin Luther King, Jr: Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don’t know each other; they don’t know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated.). In order to see the effect of repetition, an extract of prose narrative of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) can be taken as a sample:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.” (*A Tale of Two Cities*)

An essay can have rhetorical questions. There may be surprise ending and represent playful ways of colloquialism. They may have literalism (literal representation in literature or art), antiquarianism (collects and presents a wide range of information on the past, preferring a thematic structure rather than a chronological or analytical one) or Latinate (relating to origin in Latin such as acumen, avarice, bibulous, etc.) and sententious or verbose i.e. giving strong opinions. There will be superfluous epithets as well.

Following the trends of the formalists and structuralists, textual criticism gains ground more scientifically leading to formation of stylistic analysis. According to Leech and Short,

“The word ‘style’ has a fairly uncontroversial meaning. It refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on. Style constitutes the linguistic features of a text. To clarify this, we may adopt the distinction of Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) between *langue* and *parole*, *langue* being

the code or system of rules common to speakers of a language (such as English), and *parole* being the particular uses of this system, or selections from this system, that speakers or writers make on this or that occasion. One may say, for example, that certain English expressions belong to the official style of weather forecasting ('bright intervals', 'scattered showers', etc.), while other expressions ('lovely day', 'a bit chilly', etc.) belong to the style of everyday conversational remarks about the weather. Style, then, pertains to *parole*: it is selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a style. This definition does not take us very far. (Leech & Short, 75).

In addition to the semiotic components, the semantic and syntactic components of a text are analyzed following all the possible linear as well as non-linear interpretations in binary mode leading to meaning making in terms of signifier and signified; and syntagmatic and paradigmatic configurations of text are considered in which both the formal and functional properties of language such as graphological set-up, sound-meaning relationship, unique features of discourse such as speech act analysis and utility of Grice's Maxims which are critically examined.

Take for example, the extracts from Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*: As suggested in the first four lines in the passage is that Florence Nightingale is a popular text or the signifier bearing lots of semiotic, semantic and pragmatic notions in socio-cultural and literary contexts—almost synonymous to self-less service. This constitutes the *langue* of the text. Further, she has been portrayed in the linear form that is both paradigmatically and syntagmatically as 'saintly,' 'self-sacrificing,' and 'the delicate maiden of high degree.' The words and phrases are rhythmic and alliterative to reflect her personality. Thus, the semiotic notion of the *parole* is nicely presented metaphorically in substantiating the meaning by emphasizing the fact that she happens to be an example of a noble personality. But, in the later part that is in the last five lines, the idea is reversed adopting the binary features as the author wants to divert the attention of the reader towards something intricate in her life. There is a shifting of foregrounding of 'Miss Nightingale' from 'facile fancy' to possession of a 'Demon.' The familiar idea regarding her personality is led to some of the unfamiliar facts through the art of debunking. While working with formalists and functionalists,

"...of the many functional classifications of language that have been proposed in this, three have had some currency in literary studies. The oldest of the three is that of I.A. Richards, who in *Practical Criticism* (1929) distinguishes four types of function, and four kinds of meaning: sense, feeling, tone, and intention." (www. mafiadoc.com).

Roman Jakobson's (1961) scheme is based on a more systematic theory of language, and distinguishes six functions [referential (sharing information in an objective way); emotive (refers to emotions, feelings, desires and moods); conative (communication aiming at creating certain response); phatic (small talk or discourse beginners); poetic (refers to aesthetic function that is rhetorical language); and metalinguistic (language spoken about language)], each corresponding to one essential aspect of the discourse situation. More recently still, Halliday's functional model of language acknowledges three major functions, which he calls 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual'. More recently, French writer Roland Barthes has referred to the 'transparency' of classical writing, and has postulated a mode of 'writing at degree zero', which, 'initiated by Robert Camus's *The Outsider* achieves a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style'.

Similarly, examining George Orwell's passage mentioned above in the light of the New Critics, we can find that the sense is in fact serious relating to the nuclear war and its effects. The tone is ironical and intends to create awareness among people of the world. Three categories of people have been portrayed by the author viz. physicists, political leaders and 'the big public'. In terms of the language functions, the statements in the beginning are referential followed by the critical interpretation of the fact about how the elements of an atom form the lab of physicists are going to be in the hands of 'some lonely lunatic in a

laboratory,' who might 'blow the civilization' like 'touching off a firework.' This tends to be emotive and there is an open ended question put: 'How difficult are these things to manufacture with sharp contrast with 'the rumour went'.

#### IV. INTERSEMIOTIC AND DISCURSIVE FEATURES OF TEXTUALITY

A narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way. Films, plays, comic strips, novels, news reels, diaries, chronicles and treatises of geological history are all narratives in this wider sense. Narratives can therefore be constructed using different varieties of semiotic media: written or spoken language, visual images, gestures and acting, as well as a combination of these. Any semiotic construct, anything made of signs, can be said to be a text. Therefore, we can speak of many kinds of narrative texts: linguistic, theatrical, pictorial, filmic. Any such representation involves a point of view, a selection, a perspective on the represented object, criteria of relevance, and, arguably, an implicit theory of reality. (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/6699252>).

The plot of narrative account in prose can be a back story (story that precedes events in the story, Ex: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*); a Chekhov's gun (remove everything that has no relevance to the story); a Cliffhanger (The narrative ends unresolved); may have Deus ex machina (a god appears and solves everything) or Eucatastrophic (a climactic event through which the protagonist appears to be facing a catastrophic change). It can adopt flashback (or analeptic reference) or flash forward (prolepsis, the events to happen) or foreshadowing (predict, may not happen) or even can be a frame story, or a story within a story (The Panchatantra) using a framing device (i.e. a single action, scene, event, setting, or any element of significance at the beginning and end of a work). It can adopt MacGuffin (A plot device referring to some goal, desired object, or other motivator that the protagonist pursues), or in medias res (Beginning the story in the middle of a sequence of events) or narrative hook (Story opening that "hooks" readers' attention so they will keep reading). There might be plot twist [Unexpected change ("twist") in the direction or expected outcome of the plot]; Poetic justice, or predestination paradox (Time travel paradox where a time traveller is caught in a loop of events that "predestines" them to travel back in time) in the plot. Some narratives may have audience surrogate (i.e. questions the confusions of audience, Harry Potter shifted to Hogwarts' world), author surrogate (i.e. catastrophic system failure as in Jurassic Park); breaking the fourth wall (i.e involving the audience, Spiderman), defamiliarization, first person narrative, second person narrative, third person narrative (limited/omniscient); or magic realism, mutiperspectivity (i.e. a dramatic monologue dramatizes a murder trial).

Textuality consists of all of the attributes that differentiates the communicative content under interpretation as an object of study. It is connected with structuralism and post-structuralism. Textuality is an individual and uncertain skill that will always be read and interpreted in texts in different ways, by different people, and at different times. It is a literary tool that can never be defined like an exact science and that will always be influenced by the writer's life, such as, their upbringing, education, culture, age, religion, gender, and multiple other persuading factors. The seven features are: intentionality (mental states), acceptability (intuitive judgments), situationality (text made relevant to the situation), informativity (communicative value), coherence, cohesion (connectedness manifested in the interpretation of one textual element with another may be as words and expressions), and intertextuality (recursive interplay among the groups of texts as obligatory, optional and accidental). The following extract from one of the essays of Kurt Vonnegut can be taken as an example here:

"Do you know what a twerp is? When I was in Shortridge High School in Indianapolis 65 years ago, a twerp was a guy who stuck a set of false teeth up his butt and bit the buttons off the back seats of taxicabs. (And a snarf was a guy who sniffed the seats of girls' bicycles.) And I consider anybody a twerp who hasn't read the greatest American short story, which is 'Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,' by Ambrose Bierce. It isn't remotely political. It is a flawless example of American genius, like 'Sophisticated Lady' by Duke Ellington or the Franklin stove. I consider anybody a twerp

who hasn't read *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. There can never be a better book than that one on the strengths and vulnerabilities inherent in our form of government. Want a taste of that great book? He says, and he said it 169 years ago, that in no country other than ours has a love of money taken a stronger hold on the affections of men. Okay? The French-Algerian writer Albert Camus, who won a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, wrote, 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.' So there's another barrel of laughs from literature.

Camus died in an automobile accident. His dates? 1913 – 1960 A.D. Do you realize that all great literature – *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Iliad and The Odyssey*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Bible*, and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' – are all about what a bummer it is to be a human being? (Isn't it such a relief to have somebody say that?) ('How to Lose a War,' *A Man without a Country*, Kurt Vonnegut)

The extract starts with a brainstorming question; shifts the event temporally to the past in order to explain better 'twerp' and 'snarf' which is followed by a series of extra-textual references which would definitely lead to a series of discussions with may be Butterfly effect or a kind of Panoptic effect. Like any other postmodern narratives, this too possesses randomness instead of absolute meaning; have playfulness having humour, wordplay and irony; fragmentation that is collage and distortion of time and space; metafictional and intertextual in nature employing pastiche.

Deconstruction of a text happens to be the recent trend in the shifting of the content and style of a text. In fact, it refers to the art of pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions upon which it is founded. The process of deconstruction involves the following steps:

While looking for the assumptions of the construct as well as the context; consider the elements of tension between the spirit and the letter of the text. Look at the formal and functional modalities of the dynamic and static elements of meaning. Consider how the text uses different kinds of words such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, etc categorising them under the domain of our knowledge such as essence, existence, cognition and/or relation.

"In the deconstruction project, every single word is a hypothesis and it aims at making these hypotheses visible. Look for puns and words with double meaning. Hunt for overlooked explanations or definitions. Deconstruction urges a reader to resist the general, common meaning of a text, also known as the "privileged" meaning of a text. Push back against the authority of the author. Resist the temptation to look to the author of a text as the singular expert on the meaning of a given text. Embrace ambiguity, playfulness, and contradictions. Deconstruction resists the idea that language follows a straightforward formula as it creates meaning. Instead, language is strange, funny, disturbing, and paradoxical and does not involve finding the 'one true meaning' of a work of literature." (www.wikihow.com/Deconstruct-a-Text)

The text may have two opposite things at the same time which does not mean that the text is wrong or that you have misread the text: look at the text as presenting a multiplicity of truths, even find jokes, playful puns, disturbing ideas, and paradoxes when you deconstruct a text. A text can be examined in another order so that a kind of linear thinking might obscure other hidden meanings within the text, such as surprising connections and double-meanings. Consider disrupting a linear reading of a text by skimming through it backwards, jumping around from chapter to chapter, and reading certain phrases and sentences in isolation.

Reading a text in a nonlinear fashion can bring it to life in new and unexpected ways. One such possible interpretation is text subversion.

A few lines from Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970) can be taken as an example of this.

“Future shock will not be found in Index Medicus or in any listing of psychological abnormalities.

Yet, unless intelligent steps are taken to combat it, millions of human beings will find themselves increasingly disoriented, progressively incompetent to deal rationally with their environments. The malaise, mass neurosis, irrationality, and free-floating violence already apparent in contemporary life are merely a foretaste of what may lie ahead unless we come to understand and treat this disease. Future shock is a time phenomenon, a product of the greatly accelerated rate of change in society. It arises from the superimposition of a new culture on an old one. It is culture shock in one's own society. But its impact is far worse. For most Peace Corps men, in fact most travellers, have the comforting knowledge that the culture they left behind will be there to return to.

The victim of future shock does not.” (‘The Unprepared Visitor,’ *Future Shock*)

The thesis statement of the extract is in the middle where it says that ‘Future shock is a time phenomenon...’ It is the product of a process to which the human civilization is succumbed to. The content of the passage is in line with many a writings in which the authors have expressed shock over the untoward consequences on human being. It may range from Nostradamus and Einstein to Stephen Hawking. The statements emphasize on both psychology and culture to be the two important interrelated components. In addition, it speaks of ‘the culture left behind’ versus ‘the ‘superimposition of a new culture’ which are contradictory. This can be interpreted in terms of environmental humanities. Here, while focusing on the cultural binaries, deconstructive interpretation argues with a set of dynamic verbs that it is a ‘time phenomenon’ giving us ideas to be up and doing in order to preserve the old culture. The statements are quite assertive of the facts presumed. In terms of reader-response and interpretation of the semiotic elements of the text, interpretation can continue further.

## V. CONCLUSION

Earlier, interpretation of style in prose aimed at analysing the rhetorical elements both in speech and writing. Gradually, the increasing liberty in writing different sub-genres of prose led to developing personal style. From Bacon, this movement expedited with a series of experiments from journalese to philosophical and allegorical writings, and gained momentum from 17<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wit and humour became the point of attraction in some prose writings. Commonplace and daily life incidents and experiences were presented impressively using personal styles. In this context, Adolph (1968) is of the opinion that, “The prose generally shifts from the Elizabethan's expressive artifice to the objective plain style of Restoration.... The great stylistic shift was a product of a utilitarian ethic around which many of the values of the age were integrated. The style shift itself as well as its causes are related to contemporary culture.” The influence of linguistics on literature, i.e. the semiotic interpretations and the readerly perspectives were all set trends leading to meaning making through texts as codes. In addition, the poststructuralist interpretation of such writings emphasize on examining features of textuality which sometimes heightens or even subverts the textual value. The epistemological approach of modernism is extended with the ontological approach of the Postmodernism critics. This is due to the changed nature of the function of literature in modern times.

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