

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF CONTENT, LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN THE
ESSAYS OF CHARLES LAMB AND ROBERT LYND: WITH A SPECIAL
REFERENCE OF DREAM CHILDREN – A REVERIE AND A
DISAPPOINTED MAN**

Deepawali Joshi
Contract Faculty (English)
M.B.P.G. College,
Haldwani, Nainital (U.K.)

Abstract

In this research paper it intends to analyze the essay Dream Children –A Reverie by Charles Lamb and A Disappointed Man by Robert Lynd one by one, keeping in focus the aspect of ‘content’, ‘language’ and ‘style’, which integrate to give literary form to the essays. The perspective of the study is ‘reader response’, as it is in the act of the reading, a reader realizes the virtual dimensions of the visible, verbal text of a creative writing. Among the ‘trio’ of literary communication the reader has come to gain much significance in modern times.

Key Words: Nostalgic, self-portraiture, consensus, dichotomizing, negative capability, menagerie, disillusionment, reflectiveness

In western literary tradition one could find the “germs” of the “essay” in Plato, Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch respectively. Never-the-less, one has to wait till the sixteenth century to see the emergence of the genre “essay” as it is known in modern times. The credit of initiating and innovating authentic literary essay goes to the French writer Montaigne, who is known to have taken pride in declaring that he himself is the main subject of his essays. He made his prose composition a vehicle of self-expression or self-portraiture. In England Sir Francis Bacon is acknowledged to have transplanted the genre “essay” approximately 20 years after Montaigne. By common consensus, Bacon is called ‘the father of English essays’. However, some critics subscribe to the view that English essay took a wrong turn in Baconian practice. By composing impersonal, objective and subject-focused essays he is believed to have moved essay –writing on a divergent track. However, there is no denying the fact this “homespun philosopher”, as Bacon was popularity known by the native English gave “essay” a firm rooting on the English soil.

Horace’s *dulc et utile* concept endeavored to synthesize aesthetic pleasure and instructional functions of a work of literature. This notion clicked into the mind of Sir Philip Sidney to adopt and adapt this idea to formulate his arguments in defense of literature. He by dichotomizing a literary work of art argued that literature teaches through its subject-matter, while it pleases through its manner. Thus, he made literary communication a delightful mode of teaching. On the spur of compulsion of defense of literature Sidney builds his arguments on the

theoretical split between content and form, yet convinced of the fact that the bird of literary creativity can soar and hover in the sky on the coordinate efforts of its two wings.

On the strength of the above discussion, a reader may broadly perceive a work of literature a fusion or interface of the two aspects: what is said and how that something is said. The former statement means the content or subject matter and the latter to that of the form, style and manner of presenting that subject, more precisely, the expression side of literature.

Prasad has recounted two ways of enjoying a work of literature. He says, “Literature – poetry, drama and fiction – can be enjoyed in two ways: haphazardly as a lay man enjoys it, and methodically as a trained man does. In the one case the impression of its worth is vague, in the other it is fully accounted for “(An Introduction to English Criticism)”. Apparently, the second method, which Prasad prescribes the approach of an ideal reader leading her/him to realize the potencies of a work of literature and gain thereby, aesthetic pleasure. This literary enterprise of reading, in popular expression, becomes a sort of “adventure of a soul among master pieces”.

In this research paper, accordingly 2 essays have randomly been selected from the H.N.B.G.U., publication entitled Selections in English Prose, prescribed for B.A I in partial fulfillment of the requirement of three years Bachelor degree course in Arts. The essays so chosen are as under:

1. Charles Lamb – Dream Children – A Reverie
2. Robert Lynd – A Disappointed Man

As per design of the study, in this research paper it intends to analyze the essay one by one, keeping in focus the aspect of ‘content’, ‘language’ and ‘style’, which integrate to give literary form to the essays. The perspective of the study is ‘reader response’, as it is in the act of the reading, a reader realizes the virtual dimensions of the visible, verbal text of a creative writing. Among the ‘trio’ of literary communication the reader has come to gain much significance in modern times.

Dream Children – a reverie is an essay by Charles Lamb, ‘who is called the prince of English essays’ and wrote under his pen-name Elia. This essay is a superb specimen of personal or subjective essay, which has blended ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, on the one hand, and interfaces, is a sort of day-dream or fantasy, in which we find the author becoming a big nostalgic about his early life in the past and remembers his dear and near relations. The author is imaginatively and emotively transported to the nostalgic world of his past, and his day dream trance is broken when the essayist reaches the end of his essay, which articulates in the words, “.....and immediately awakening, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side- but John (or James Elia) was gone for ever” (36). These concluding lines contain a blending of humour and pathos.

As far the **expression** side of the essay ‘Dream Children- a reverie’ is concerned, it can safely be said that here we have a superb example of poetic –prose. This is to be noted that Lamb started his literary career as a poet, but he could not achieve the desired success in poetic enterprise, therefore, he was impelled to switch over to prose compositions especially, essays in which he succeeded tremendously and came to earn the title prince of the English essayists, Lamb’s style is known for exquisite humour, which arises out of whimsical use of puns, word play, conceits, frequent archaisms and metaphors. The following examples are which highlight various literary features of Lamb’s style:

Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle and granddame, whom they never saw. (33)

*Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother field once and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dances-here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted, the best dancer,(34)
having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular use to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Caesars who had been Emperors of Rome till the old marble heads seem to live again or I to be turned into marble with them...(ibid)*

The above specimen throw light on various features of Lamb's writings: The first specimen shows that Lamb possessed psychological insight of child psychology; The second example shows how observant Lamb was, he could make out the sense and attitude out an individual through her/his non-verbal behavior. The example 3 gives us a hint about the hyper sensitive disposition of the essayist. He possessed the attribute called 'negative capability', which in simple words mean to imaginatively and emotively negate one's self and assume other self.

Lamb was able to establish 'empathetic bond' between himself and the person, place or thing which he described. Lamb contained in ample measure the very faculty of 'negative Capability', which he found in Shakespeare in amplitude. The following are other examples underscoring various literary features of Lamb as an essayist:

....or in watching the days that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in the silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent frisking. (35)

The above extract shows how Lamb plays with the sound stratum of the word and is able to reinforce the very sense of expression. In the fish pond the agile movement of the small fish dace is reinforced by the alliterative sound of the letter 'd' 'r' 'n' 't' and similarly the slow and sulky movement of the mocking fish pike is communicated by manipulating the sound potential of the words, he used to describe its movement in the pond.

Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. (35)

The above extract gives an amusing example generating humour. Here we see the two (dream) kids of the author attracted towards taking a relish of the bunch of grapes, which the boy has stolen unobserved by the father, but when the father declares that he was an obedient boy in his childhood and did not like to pluck and relish the fruits in the garden without permission, the very comment of the father inwardly compels them to mend themselves and become obedient like their fathers. Therefore, as a gesture of amendment John deposit the stolen bunch of grapes back to the plate. This aspect of child psychology is demonstrated by the author through the non-verbal behavior of his kids John and little Alice.

Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W-n; and much as children could understand, I explain to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial, meant in maidens(36)

The above extract touches the heart of the readers, as it is nostalgic, highly emotive and shows how deeply Lamb was attached to Mrs. Ann Simmons, whom he courted for seven years, who refused his love and married to some Mr. Bartrum. This is one of the example of pathos, along with a couple of other examples in this essay. In Lamb's essay we find the high incidence of the expression 'I' 'me' 'my' and 'you' and his habit of arresting his opinions and speculations

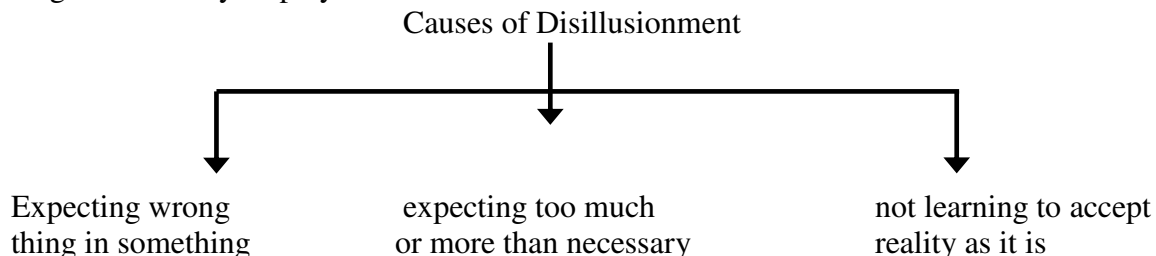
in the first person, this is a characteristic example of ‘egotism’, which the ‘personal’ or ‘subjective’ essayists end to possess.

The essay next in order is ‘ A Disappointed Man’ by Robert Lynd, who is ranked with Lamb and Lucas, and is said to possess the quality of investing even the common place topics with significance and of transforming even the simplest experiences with an aerie delicacy and romantic gloss. His essays are saturated with modesty and infinite leisure. In his life he enjoyed the broad and endeavoring appeal and the very features are reflected in his creative writing as well. It is mainly in the twinkling humour joining hand with irony, where lies spice of his essays. He wrote essays depicting his views on life and the modern world. His essays reveal his critical insight, sense of humour and deep knowledge of things. The present essay has been taken from his prose volume Shudder to Think.

In the essay “A Disappointed Man”, Lynd has taken up a topic which we all realize but are unable to express. In reality, all of us have been disappointed sometime or the other to see a thing contrary to our common expectation. One should learn that, “*The eye is more realistic than the imagination, and realism is usually the way of disillusionments*” (77). He has advised that a man has to face his disappointment when he sees a gap between his imagination and the reality of a thing. So we should learn to accept thing as they are, because “*Too great anticipation is often the enemy of pleasure*” (78). Everybody has his own dreamland.

The dreamland of one person may not look attractive to another person who has his own dreamland. When the blind man received his eye sight by the miracle of remarkable operation, he thanked the doctors and the almighty God who bring back his joys of life. Eyes are the most wonderful bliss of God. A man with gifted eyes can see the glorious and wonderful world. When he was blind he imagined everything to be beautiful, as in the romane of imagination, he glossed everything with charm and beauty. But when he encountered the reality after regaining the gift of sight, he was shocked as the persons, places, things and landscape in actually fell far short of their romanticized images, which he hither to nurtured in his mind.

Now we come to the **expression** side of the essay. Using the mathematical sign within the statements the essence of essay can be represented thus: Actual < ideal/ expected; reality < imagination; or the reverse imagination > reality. The cause of disillusionment may be diagrammatically displayed as under:



A typical feature of Robert Lynd’s style of writing arrests the reader’s attention when he notices how the essayist develops an argument using skillfully illustration of exception, how he reabsorbs those exceptions, and closes down with a neat, swift stroke that shows no temporizing hand. His style is simple and less elaborate conforming to his personality type. It also contains ingredients of reflectiveness, sympathy and lack of mannerism, employment of concrete words, homely illustrations, and deftness in constructing phrases variety in syntactical structure, modulation and delicate rhythm of speech. Lynd likes to compose epigrammatic sentences. He has twinkling humour with witticism besides, the sense of balance, which are the essential

qualities of his style. The following extracts from the essay demonstrates the above features of Lynd's prose style:

Human beings were of a different shape and appearance from those with which his imagination had endowed them.....the gift of sight brought him merely disillusionment. (76)

Most of us have experience the same sense of disillusionment when we have for the first time seen with our eyes something that we had hither to idealized in our imagination. (ibid)

The lion in the cage at the menagerie seem to be only about one third size of the lion of my dreams. And he bore few marks of regality. Life in a cage in a travelling menagerie, does not I fancy, conduce to kingliness of bearing. (ibid)

The eye is more realistic than the imagination, and realism is usually the way of disillusionments. (77)

The fact is that other people's beautiful things and places are often to the rest of us the most disappointing thing and places on earth who as ever wanted to live in anybody else's Utopia? (79)

To recapitulate what has been discussed in the research paper it is clear that a "reader" is the third component of the triumvirs (the other two being the "author" and the "text", and that it is in the "act of reading" that a literary text is realized or actualized. Both the essays are capable of arresting reader's attention because they possess the following features.

The essayists based contents of their essays on their own thinking, feeling and experience, and expressed them in their own language. The essays possess organic unity and coherence. Careful planning is inherent behind their structural organicity. The essayist's deftly used the devices of linking words and linking phrases, which assist to connect the strings of sentences together, thereby giving coherence to the structure and sense, syntactically and semantically.

The essays as analysed possess structural unity in the sense that they all have – a beginning, a body and a conclusion. The essayists employed various possible ways to begin their compositions to captivate interest of their readers and involve them in the act of reading. For example, Lamb begins his essay "Dream Children – A Reverie" by stating a psychological fact about children's disposition and then stretches his imagination to move into the fictional world of a day-dream, blending bit of facts with his fantasy. His opening statement is: "*Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle and granddame, whom they never saw*" (33). Similarly, Lynd builds his essay on the universal trait of disappointment by giving an arresting title "A Disappointed Man" and ends his essay with very philosophical lines: "*The fact is that other people's beautiful things and places are often to the rest of us the most disappointing thing and places on earth who as ever wanted to live in anybody else's Utopia? (79)*."

Like the beginning, the devices used to conclude an essay also varies from subject to subject. In the hands of great essayists the concluding part of their compositions end with suitable and striking notes, strengthening the idea that a good essay is an organic whole. For example, Lamb's essay closes with a striking humorous statement announcing the breach of his "reverie" of day dream in his composition, "Dream Children – A Reverie", *And immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side- But John (James Elia) was gone for ever*" (36). Thus a temporary escape and stay in his nostalgic and romantic world of the past having been over the

author comes back to his present real world, which no individual can escape for longer till he/she survives. The reader is emotively swept off his feet throughout the course of the subjective – essay and moves back to reality with a mixed feeling of pathos and humour.

Similarly, the following diagram presents a simplified view concerning the differences between the two prominent modes of essays:

Personal Essay	Impersonal Essays
Author –Centered ,Self- Portraiture	Subject Centric
Intimacy between author and reader	Distance between author and reader
Informal, confidential tone	Formal, neutral tone
Reader enjoys equal status with the author	Superiority of the author ,positing him on a higher pedestal
High incidence of expressions such as I, Me, My, You	Written in the third person
Fires imagination and emotive appeal ,and hence touches heart like a lyric	Cognitive appeal ,pleases intellectually

The following tabular statement consists of a parallel classification, which as a theoretical format researcher has used to avoid confusion and misconception about the terms humour, wit, satire and irony and as a help in identifying these as literary devices used by the authors in their essays, analysed in the present research paper. This can also facilitate those who wish to use it adequately in their similar studies. The table is displayed in the page following:

Term	Motive or Aim	Province	Method or Means	Audience or Reader
Humour	Discovery	Human Nature	Observation	The sympathetic
Wit	Throwing light	Words and ideas	Surprise	The intellect
Satire	Amusement	Morals and Manners	Accentuation	the self-satisfied
Irony	Exclusiveness	Statement of fact	Mystification	an inner circle

(After Fowler 241)

The above broad division between a ‘personal and impersonal ‘essay is not absolute but relative. A ‘subjective ‘essay is actually ‘subjectively objective’, and an impersonal essay is ‘objectively subjective’. It is also important to note that the most effective English essay is the one which has persuasive appeal and thereby capable to force the reader to a new kind of awareness about things which she/he is used to and takes for granted, and impels us to accepts new ways of perfection. The good reader is an open minded reader who will allow the text to question her/his preconceptions and beliefs and we willing to accept new perceptions and thoughts.

To conclude, we may say that as anything can appear in our dreams so anything can go into an essay. Yet it ‘is not the matter’ of an essay that makes it an essay but what the essayist makes of the matter. The prose selection brings the readers in the contact with some of the finest

specimens of English essays, which not only illuminate and refine the minds of their readers but also develop in them sense and feel for the idiom of the language.

WORKS CITED :

- Deo, S.S. Selections in English Prose. H.N.B. Garhwal University Pub., 2002. (All the references of the text have been cited from this source).
- Fowler, H.W. A Dictionary of Modern Usage. London: Oxford University Press, 1937. (The Tabular Statement is drawn from this source).
- Fukuda, Tsutomu. A Study of Charles Lamb's Essay of Elia. Tokyo: Hokusedia, 1964.
- Horowitz, I.L. Robert and Helen Lynd: International Encyclopedia of the Social Science, Biographical Supplement. D.L. Sills (ed.). New York: Macmillian, 1979.
- Lucas, E.V. ed. The Works of Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb. VII Vols., London: Methuen and Company, 1903-1905
- Prasad, B. An Introduction to English Criticism. (rpt.) Delhi: Macmillan, 1976.