

# Course Material

## Department of English and Modern European Languages

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

**Paper III: Prose (A) (Code: Eng- 203)**

**Unit-I Theory of Prose**

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

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Dear Students, Hello.

In my lectures I've discussed the topics highlighted above. I'm providing below course material for the topics that remain to be taught in the class.

In case you have any doubts you can contact me on phone or send queries to my email.

All the best!

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### Autobiography

An autobiography is an account of a person's life written or otherwise recorded by that person.

The word *autobiography* literally means SELF (auto), LIFE (bio), WRITING (graph). Or, in other words, an autobiography is the story of someone's life written or otherwise told by that person.

The word "autobiography" was first used by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical *The Monthly Review*. He used it in a negative sense and considered it as ostentatious and "pedantic". In present sense, The Romantic poet Robert Southey gave it the modern sense in 1809. However, the first-person autobiographical writing originates in ancient times and was always a mode of self-expression.

In antiquity such works were called *apologia*, whose purpose was to write about one's life as a kind of either exemplum or to give justification of some sort about one's life and actions. It was never meant to provide and record any kind of self-documentation.

Autobiographical works can take many forms, from the intimate writings made during life that were not necessarily intended for publication (including letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, and reminiscences) to a formal book-length autobiography.

## Difference between Autobiography and Memoir

In an autobiography, the author attempts to capture important elements of his life. He not only deals with his career, and growth as a person, he also uses emotions and facts related to family life, relationships, education, travels, sexuality, and any types of inner struggles. A memoir is a record of memories, and particular events that have taken place in the author's life. In fact, it is the telling of a story or an event from his life; an account that does not tell the full record of a life.

## Purpose

Through autobiography, authors can speak directly to their readers, and to their descendants. The function of the autobiography is to leave a legacy for its readers. By writing an autobiography, the individual shares his triumphs and defeats, and lessons learned, allowing readers to relate and feel motivated by inspirational stories. Life stories bridge the gap between peoples of differing ages and backgrounds, forging connections between old and new generations.

## The emergence of autobiography

There are but few and scattered examples of autobiographical literature in antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the 2nd century BCE the Chinese classical historian Sima Qian included a brief account of himself in the *Shiji* ("Historical Records").

It may be stretching a point to include, from the 1st century BCE, the letters of Cicero (or, in the early Christian era, the letters of Saint Paul), as it is usually done. But Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, written about 400 CE, stands out as unique: though Augustine put Christianity at the centre of his narrative and considered his description of his own life to be merely incidental, he produced a powerful personal account, stretching from youth to adulthood, of his religious conversion.

*Confessions* has much in common with what came to be known as autobiography in its modern, Western sense, which can be considered to have emerged in Europe during the Renaissance, in the 15th century. One of the first examples was produced in England by Margery Kempe, a religious mystic of Norfolk. In her old age Kempe dictated an account of her bustling, far-faring life, which, however concerned with religious experience, reveals her personality.

One of the first full-scale formal autobiographies was written a generation later by a celebrated humanist publicist of the age, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, after he was elevated to the papacy, in 1458, as Pius II. In the first book of his autobiography—misleadingly named *Commentarii*, in evident imitation of Caesar—Pius II traces his career up to becoming Pope; the succeeding 11 books (and a fragment of a 12th, which breaks off a few months before his death in 1464) present a panorama of the age.

The autobiography of the Italian physician and astrologer Gironimo Cardano and the adventures of the goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini in Italy of the 16th century; the uninhibited autobiography of the English historian and diplomat Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in the early 17th; and Colley Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian* in the early 18th—these are representative examples of biographical literature from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment.

The latter period itself produced three works that are especially notable for their very different reflections of the spirit of the times as well as of the personalities of their authors: the urbane autobiography of Edward Gibbon, the great historian; the plainspoken, vigorous success story of an American who possessed all talents, Benjamin Franklin; and the introspection of a revolutionary Swiss-born political and social theorist, the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau—the latter leading to two autobiographical explorations in poetry during the Romantic period in

England, William Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, cantos III and IV. Stendhal's autobiographical writings of the 1830s, *The Life of Henry Brulard* and *Memoirs of an Egotist*, are both avowedly influenced by Rousseau. An English example is William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* (1823), a painful examination of the writer's love-life.

### **Types of autobiography**

An autobiography may be placed into one of four very broad types: thematic, religious, intellectual, and fictionalized.

The first grouping includes books with such diverse purposes as *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (1920) .

Religious autobiography claims a number of great works, ranging from Augustine and Kempe to the autobiographical chapters of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Apologia* in the 19th century.

That century and the early 20th saw the creation of several intellectual autobiographies, including the severely analytical *Autobiography* of the philosopher John Stuart Mill and *The Education of Henry Adams*.

Finally, somewhat analogous to the novel as biography is the autobiography thinly disguised as, or transformed into, the novel. This group includes such works as Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), George Santayana's *The Last Puritan* (1935), and the novels of Thomas Wolfe.

In all of these works can be detected elements of all four types; the most outstanding autobiographies often ride roughshod over these distinctions.

Autobiography can also be classified as :

### **Spiritual autobiography**

Spiritual autobiography is an account of an author's struggle or journey towards God, followed by conversion a religious conversion, often interrupted by moments of regression.

The author re-frames his or her life as a demonstration of divine intention through encounters with the Divine. The earliest example of a spiritual autobiography is Augustine's *Confessions*.

Mahatma Gandhi's *An Autobiography or My Experiments with Truth* is another example.

### **Political autobiography**

Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

### **Intellectual autobiography**

#### **Bertrand Russell – My Intellectual Development**

Sartre, Jean-Paul -*Les Mots*.

### **Artistic autobiography**

Cellini, Benvenuto ([1558–66] 1995). *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini; written by himself*.

Woolf, Virginia (1985). *Moments of Being*.

### **Ethnic autobiography**

Dust Tracks on a Road by Zora Neale Hurston

### **Feminist autobiography**

*The Prime of Life* (1960)

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**See also the Wikipedia entry on Autobiography**

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## **Biography**

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A biography of someone is an account of their life, written by someone else. The word biography comes from the Greek words *bios*, meaning “life” and *-graphia*, meaning “writing.”

A biography is a description of a real person’s life, including factual details as well as stories from the person’s life. Biographies usually include information about the subject’s personality and motivations, and other kinds of intimate details excluded in a general overview or profile of a person’s life. The vast majority of biography examples are written about people who are or were famous, such as politicians, actors, athletes, and so on. However, some biographies can be written about people who lived incredible lives, but were not necessarily well-known.

A biography can be labelled “authorized” if the person being written about, or his or her family members, have given permission for a certain author to write the biography.

**Biography** is a form of literature, commonly considered nonfictional, the subject of which is the life of an individual. One of the oldest forms of literary expression, it seeks to re-create in words the life of a human being—as understood from the historical or personal perspective of the author—by drawing upon all available evidence, including that retained in memory as well as written, oral, and pictorial material.

Biography is sometimes regarded as a branch of history, and earlier biographical writings—such as the 15th-century *Mémoires* of the French councillor of state, Philippe de Commynes, or George Cavendish’s 16th-century life of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey—have often been treated as historical material rather than as literary works in their own right.

Biography emerged gradually as a distinctive form of letters. Some entries in ancient Chinese chronicles included biographical sketches; embedded in the Roman historian Tacitus's *Annals* is the most famous biography of the emperor Tiberius. But Sir Winston Churchill's magnificent life of his ancestor John Churchill, first duke of Marlborough, can be read as a history (written from a special point of view) of Britain and much of Europe during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14).

Yet there is general recognition today that history and biography are quite distinct forms of literature. History usually deals in generalizations about a period of time (for example, the Renaissance), about a group of people in time (the English colonies in North America), about an institution (monasticism during the Middle Ages). Biography more typically focuses upon a single human being and deals in the particulars of that person's life.

Both biography and history, however, are often concerned with the past, and it is in the hunting down, evaluating, and selection of sources that they are akin. In this sense biography can be regarded as a craft rather than an art: techniques of research and general rules for testing evidence can be learned by anyone and thus need involve comparatively little of that personal commitment associated with art

Biographies usually take the form of a narrative, proceeding chronologically through the stages of a person's life. American author Cynthia Ozick notes in her essay "Justice (Again) to Edith Wharton" that a good biography is like a novel, wherein it believes in the idea of a life as "a triumphal or tragic story with a shape, a story that begins at birth, moves on to a middle part, and ends with the death of the protagonist."

Biographies are distinct from creative non-fiction such as memoir in that biographies are specifically about one person's full life story -- from birth to death -- while creative non-fiction is allowed to focus on a variety of subjects, or in the case of memoirs certain aspects of an individual's life.

A biographer in pursuit of an individual long dead is usually hampered by a lack of sources: it is often impossible to check or verify what written evidence there is; there are no witnesses to cross-examine. No method has yet been developed by which to overcome such problems. Each life, however, presents its own opportunities as well as specific difficulties to the biographer: the ingenuity with which the biographer handles gaps in the record—by providing information, for example, about the age that casts light upon the subject—has much to do with the quality of the resulting work.

James Boswell knew comparatively little about Samuel Johnson's earlier years; it is one of the greatnesses of his *Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D.* (1791) that he succeeded, without inventing matter or deceiving the reader, in giving the sense of a life progressively unfolding. Another masterpiece of reconstruction in the face of little evidence is A.J.A. Symons' biography of the English author and eccentric Frederick William Rolfe, *The Quest for Corvo* (1934).

A further difficulty is the unreliability of most collections of papers, letters, and other memorabilia edited before the 20th century.

The biographer writing the life of a person recently dead is often faced with the opposite problem: an abundance of living witnesses and a plethora of materials, which include the subject's papers and letters, sometimes transcriptions of telephone conversations and conferences, as well as the record of interviews granted to the biographer by the subject's friends and associates. Frank Friedel, for example, in creating a biography of the U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, had to wrestle with something like 40 tons of paper. But finally, when writing the life of any person, whether long or recently dead, the biographer's chief responsibility is vigorously to test the authenticity of the collected materials by whatever rules and techniques are available.

When the subject of a biography is still alive and a contributor to the work, the biographer's task is to examine the subject's perspective against multiple, even contradictory sources.

It is the duty of biographers to avoid misrepresenting the subject as well as acknowledging the research sources they used. Writers should, therefore, avoid presenting a personal bias for or against the subject as being objective is key to conveying the person's life story in full detail.

## Emergence and Development

The genre of biography developed out of other forms of historical nonfiction, choosing to focus on one specific person's experience rather than all important players. There are examples of biography all the way back to 44 B.C. when Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos wrote *Excellentium Imperatorum Vitae* ("Lives of those capable of commanding"). The Greek historian Plutarch was also famous for his biographies, creating a series of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans in his book *Parallel Lives*. After the printing press was created, one of the first "bestsellers" was the 1550 famous biography *Lives of the Artists* by Giorgio Vasari. Biography then got very popular in the 18th century with James Boswell's 1791 publication of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*.

At first, biographical writings were regarded merely as a subsection of history with a focus on a particular individual of historical importance. The independent genre of biography as distinct from general history writing, began to emerge in the 18th century and reached its contemporary form at the turn of the 20th century.

The first modern biography, and a work which exerted considerable influence on the evolution of the genre, was James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, a biography of lexicographer and man-of-letters Samuel Johnson published in 1791. While Boswell's personal acquaintance with his subject only began in 1763, when Johnson was 54 years old, Boswell covered the entirety of Johnson's life by means of additional research. Itself an important stage in the development of the modern genre of biography, it has been claimed to be the greatest biography written in the English language.

## Modern biography

The sciences of psychology and sociology were ascendant at the turn of the 20th century and would heavily influence the new century's biographies.<sup>[5]</sup> The demise of the "great man" theory of history was indicative of the emerging mindset. Human behavior would be explained through Darwinian theories. "Sociological" biographies conceived of their subjects' actions as the result of the environment, and tended to downplay individuality. The development of psychoanalysis led to a more penetrating and comprehensive understanding of the biographical subject, and induced biographers to give more emphasis to childhood and adolescence. Clearly these psychological ideas were changing the way biographies were written, as a culture of autobiography developed, in which the telling of one's own story became a form of therapy.<sup>[4]</sup> The conventional concept of heroes and narratives of success disappeared in the obsession with psychological explorations of personality.

British critic Lytton Strachey revolutionized the art of biographical writing with his 1918 work *Eminent Victorians*, consisting of biographies of four leading figures from the Victorian era: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon.<sup>1</sup> Strachey set out to breathe life into the Victorian era for future generations to read. Up until this point, as Strachey remarked in the preface, Victorian biographies had been "as familiar as the *cortège* of the undertaker", and wore the same air of "slow, funereal barbarism." Strachey defied the tradition of "two fat volumes ... of undigested masses of material" and took aim at the four iconic figures. His narrative demolished the myths that had built up around these cherished national heroes, whom he regarded as no better than a "set of mouth bungled hypocrites". The book achieved worldwide fame due to its irreverent and witty style, its concise and factually accurate nature, and its artistic prose.

In the 1920s and '30s, biographical writers sought to capitalize on Strachey's popularity by imitating his style. This new school featured iconoclasts, scientific analysts, and fictional biographers and included Gamaliel Bradford, André Maurois, and Emil Ludwig, among others. Robert Graves (*I, Claudius*, 1934) stood out among those following Strachey's model of "debunking biographies."

The trend in literary biography was accompanied in popular biography by a sort of "celebrity voyeurism", in the early decades of the century. This latter form's appeal to readers was based on curiosity more than morality or patriotism.

In recent years, multimedia biography has become more popular than traditional literary forms, along with documentary biographical films, that are called Biopics.

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**See also the Wikipedia entry on Biography**

**Listen to ["Biography"](#), *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4 discussion with Richard Holmes, Nigel Hamilton and Amanda Foreman (June 22, 2000).**

