

Types of Prose Style

Style has 'traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse'. The style of a certain writer depends on the choice of diction, the types of sentence structure and syntax, and the use of figurative language. In classical literature the style has been usually classified into three main kinds: the high or grand style, the middle or mean style and the low or plain style. Northrop Frye has differentiated between demotic style and hieratic style. A large number of descriptive terms are used to characterize various kinds of prose style such as pure, ornate, lucid, vivid, clear, sober, simple, elegant, and flexible and so on. 'Styles are also classified, writes M.H.Abrams, according to a literary period or tradition ("the metaphysical style", Restoration prose style"); according to an influential text ("biblical style", euphuism); according to an institutional use ("a scientific style", "journalese"); or according to the distinctive practice of an individual author (the "Shakespearian" or "Miltonic style"; Johnsonese).' Besides these, some popularly kinds of styles employed by the eminent prose writers are aphoristic and epigrammatic style, rhetorical style, reflective style, analytical and critical style, picturesque style and many others. Some commonly used types are given here:

Narrative:

Narrative prose is very popular form of prose. It tells 'a story, true or invented in such a way as to make it interesting'. Narrative prose consists of 'accumulation of exciting incidents as in a thriller' or in 'a subtle and detailed portrayal of character and motive. *Madame Bovary*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *War and Peace* are fine examples of narrative prose.

Argumentative:

Argumentative prose style is 'more abstract than narrative' and 'intellectual. The chief function of argumentative prose is to make the reader believe the idea or thought, it contains reasoning and appeals to emotion but never aims at propaganda. Locke's *Essays on Human Understanding*, Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* and writings of Newman and Havelock Ellis are good instances of argumentative prose.

Dramatic:

Realistic dramas are written in prose by many dramatists like Congreve, Sheridan, Goldsmith, J. M. Synge, Ibsen or J.B. Priestley who wrote in a dramatic prose style. According to Marjorie Boulton, "Dramatic prose usually has to resemble ordinary conversation sufficiently closely for us to accept it as an imitation of life, yet it must also have that improvement upon real life that is found in all art."

Informative:

The primary function of informative prose is 'to communicate information'. This sort of prose covers encyclopedias, school and college textbooks, scientific books, newspapers reports, articles, and books of instructions in various arts and crafts.

Contemplative:

Contemplative prose includes the essays 'as found in anthologies, some books of religious meditations, political speculation or fantasy, and some books of descriptive writing' in which one feels oneself delighted 'to read about diverse and unpromising subjects as sausages, pebbles, mice, verbs, or flying saucers'. Francis Bacon, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, R. L. Stevenson, Hilaire Belloc and Robert Lynd have written fine contemplative prose.

In the essays prescribed in the present syllabus one usually comes across the following types of prose style:

The Aphoristic Style:

An aphorism is a pithy and pointed statement of a serious maxim, opinion, or general truth. Aphoristic style contains short, crisp sentences like 'art is long, life is short.' One of the significant elements of an aphoristic statement is that it is complete in its own rhythm, like;

'The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom no clock can measure.'
(*William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)

Bacon is the chief exponent of the aphoristic style in the sphere of English essay. His essays are packed with practical wisdom. They convey the idea without a superfluous word, without even 'the joints and bands of structure', in a very brief and rapid manner as 'Reading maketh a full man; Conference a ready man; And writing an exact man.'

The Colloquial Style:

The Colloquial style consists of words and phrases that are informal and often idiomatic. It is full of the sentences of day-to-day conversation. Steele's prose style has colloquial nature.

The Autobiographical Style:

The events and facts related to the authors' own life are dominant in the autobiographical style. This type is generally found in the personal essays. Lamb's essays are abundant in autobiographical style. *Dream Children* is written in autobiographical style. The most appealing part of the essay is the one where the dream children retreat reminding Lamb of his

bachelorhood; 'We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father.....,'

The Allusive Style:

An allusion is 'a passing reference without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place or event, or to another literary work or passage.' Allusiveness is the character of Stevenson's style. Here is an example from *An Apology for Idlers*: "Colonel Newcome helped to lose his friend's money; Fred Bayham had an ugly trick of borrowing shirts; and yet they were better people to fall among than Mr. Barnes. And though Falstaff was neither sober nor very honest, I think I could name one or two long-faced Barabbases whom the world could better have done without." Lamb's essays replete with allusion and references. As allusions are not explicit, they contain a stock of knowledge that is shared by the author and the particular audience for whom he writes.

The Euphuistic Style:

It is a kind of formal and elaborate prose style which was chiefly popular in the sphere of drama and prose fiction during the 1580's. It was also a style of conversation in the English court circles. It seeks its origin in the prose romance of John Lyly entitled *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. (see Euphuism)