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1

THE ART AND CRAFT OF CREATIVE WRITING

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this course on Creative Writing. Writing is an art and more so creative writing—which is an expression of your creative urge. This course will not only stimulate your creativity but will also help you to cultivate your writing skills.

Let's begin with a very fundamental question that keeps cropping up the moment one sees a course like this on the curriculum. **CAN CREATIVE WRITING BE TAUGHT?** Is it a subject that one can teach? Does it work?

I would answer –more **YES** than **NO**.

It may be said that the creative impulse is inborn, but certain aspects of creative writing can most certainly be taught. The grammar of the trade, the building of the climax, the exact place where the ending should come –such technicalities **CAN** be taught. And even the so called creative impulse – the spark can be developed and honed to a large extent. And this will be demonstrated to you as you go along this course.

Also the same question – Can creative writing be taught? — can be answered in the form of another question: **DOES IT MATTER?**

Because even if it does not work— there are certain benefits which come to the surface in the very course of its failure. These are a process of sharing, of drawing out, of learning, which are the true aims of education. There are no obscure codes and formulas for creative writing. It's like learning/teaching an instrument. Some students will always be better and faster at learning, some will have more will power and discipline. But all of them would improve if they applied themselves and were willing to work. Perhaps the ones with talent and discipline would go faster and further – but the ones without talent but who are hard working and disciplined would be a close second.

Our University has been running a diploma programme in Creative Writing in English for more than three decades – and very successfully, I may add. The USP of this course is that each Unit was written by practising creative writers and, therefore, each sentence rings true and is extremely valuable. This generic elective course (BEGG-174) has been adopted, in part, from the original course. However, with new changes taking place in all fields, many parts of the original course have been modified/updated/changed specially in the case of New Media, where a quantum leap in terms of new knowledge has taken place. Therefore, this course reflects the contemporary milieu in terms of its content.

This course consists of 4 Blocks of 4 Units each. The break up is as follows:

Block 1: The Art and Craft of Creative Writing

Unit 1: What is Creative Writing?

Unit 2: General Principles of Creative Writing

Unit 3: Structure of Material

Unit 4: Ensuring Readability

Block 2: Modes of Creative Writing

Unit 1: Feature Writing

Unit 2: Short Story Writing

Unit 3: Writing Poetry

Unit 4: Imagery, Symbols, and Language

Block 3: Writing for the Media

Unit 1: Radio

Unit 2: TV

Unit 3: Understanding New Media

Unit 4: Writing for New Media

Block 4: Preparing for Publication

Unit 1: Preparing a Manuscript

Unit 2: Re Writing and Editing

Unit 3: Ethics in Publishing

Unit 4: Publishing

You will find a number of Check Your Progress exercises interspersed at various points in the Units. These will stimulate you to **think, write** and **do**. Answers to these exercises are given at the end of each Unit to help you along the way.

At the end of the day Creative Writing may be challenging but it can be great fun.

Good Luck with your course.

BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first Block of our course on Creative Writing. This Block consists of 4 Units.

Unit 1 is entitled **What is Creative Writing?** In this Unit we take you through some fundamental norms of writing creatively. We also address certain key issues like whether creative writing can be taught and how it can be distinguished from non-creative writing. We also provide certain tips that you can follow in order to begin writing creatively.

Unit 2 entitled **General Principles of Creative Writing** addresses issues like how to achieve clarity, transparency, directness and authenticity in your writing. These are all indispensable qualities which impart value to your work.

Unit 3 is entitled **Structure of Material** and we have spoken about how to find ideas and themes for writing. We have also stressed the importance of having an interesting beginning – a plausible climax and an appropriate ending in your writings.

And last but not the least **Unit 4** is entitled **Ensuring Readability**. As the name implies, we give you tips on how to achieve readability –which is a writer's ultimate goal.

The Check Your Progress exercises in all these Units should enable you to assess your progress at different stages.

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UNIT 1 WHAT IS CREATIVE WRITING?

Structure

- 1.0 Aims and Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 What is Creative Writing?
- 1.3 Aspects of Creative Writing
 - 1.3.1 Content
 - 1.3.2 Form
 - 1.3.3 Structure
 - 1.3.4 Style
- 1.4 Can Creative Writing be Taught?
- 1.5 Guidelines for Creative Writing
 - 1.5.1 Read in order to write
 - 1.5.2 Allow your experience to ripen
 - 1.5.3 Write about your experience differently
 - 1.5.4 Start with your diary
 - 1.5.5 Visualization, outline and design
 - 1.5.6 Some do's and don'ts
 - 1.5.7 Learn to be your own critic
 - 1.5.8 Seek others' opinions
- 1.6 Genuineness of the Creative Impulse
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Writing is an art, and more so creative writing, which is an expression of your creative urge.

You will find this course not only informative but it will also stimulate your creative impulse. This course not only discusses the various aspects of creative writing, but also helps you mould yourself into a writer.

In this first Unit, certain fundamental ideas are discussed. We start by defining creative writing and go on to the assumption that writing is a social act, and that man writes because he must share with others what he thinks and feels.

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- answer the most fundamental question i.e. whether creative writing can be taught,
- distinguish between creative and non-creative writing,
- follow the tips that we will provide to begin writing in a creative manner.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal. Once his primary needs such as food, shelter and clothing are met, it becomes necessary for him to fulfil the social need of communication. He must communicate with other human beings not only to seek and impart information, but also to share with them his experiences, his joys and sorrows. The signals man makes through speech, action or artistic creation, all have this common purpose—to be understood by others.

Why does one write? There could be some easy yet inadequate answers to this question, such as money, vanity, or drive for fame. All these might be true to some extent. But, basically and more importantly, the answer lies in the urge of the writer to communicate a thought or a feeling—that is, to express himself. As T.S. Eliot has said, ‘You write because you feel the need to free yourself of something’. This means that it is a psychological and aesthetic compulsion. It also becomes a social need when you write about and for other people, so as to be able to establish a bond with them. As for the reader, when he goes through the work of a master, he will be entering a new world, with its unique social situations, characters and emotions.

1.2 WHAT IS CREATIVE WRITING?

All writing can be broadly classified into two categories; (a) creative and (b) non-creative. Let us first consider the non-creative writing. It deals with ideas, its purpose is to inform and it adds to your information and widens your knowledge. Books on history, religion and science, etc., belong to this category. In order to achieve this purpose of informing, a writer would have to be analytical in his approach, and present his arguments methodically and lucidly so that his writing is easy to comprehend.

On the other hand, creative writing is almost a spiritual activity. Its purpose is not to inform, but to reveal. A highly creative writer meditates on either concrete things of the world, or on abstract thoughts like love or divinity, and pours out his feelings in his writing. Or, bringing his unique imagination into play, he may interact with life around and write about social situations and events, so as to enlighten, uplift and transport, in a manner all his own—as in the novel or short story. You can sense his individual vision in his writings.

Although, on the basis of the subject-matter, all writings can be divided into creative and non-creative, it is not unusual that a highly imaginative writer can produce a non-creative work in a creative manner. And such a work uplifts even as it informs. Conversely, in the hands of an ordinary writer, even a novel or a short story can make very dull reading, duller than any non-creative work.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Why does one try to communicate with others?

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- ii) Distinguish between creative and non-creative writing. Can the distinction be maintained in all cases?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

1.3 ASPECTS OF CREATIVE WRITING

Every literary work, big or small, essentially consists of four aspects:

1.3.1 Content

The essence of content is experience. Experience is what one acquires from the life around, through one's senses, by observing things that happen. No writer can possibly write in a vacuum. He would have seen life around him in its various situations, happy and sad, harsh and poignant, and he would have made mental notes of everything. When, suddenly, it occurs to him to write a story with a certain event as its centre, with a particular set of characters and the right elements, which he had once accumulated in his mind and which have in the meanwhile undergone a strange transformation within him, will begin tumbling out of their own accord and take a new life on paper. Even when one invents a story, its elements would somewhere resemble the real. Otherwise, the writing will lack credibility and authenticity. A well-written work should always give the reader the feeling that it is real; it should never make him say, 'Oh, how could this ever happen!' Hence, it is necessary for a writer to keep his eyes and ears open and closely observe the life around so as to be able to stock those images for use in the future.

1.3.2 Form

Form has two meanings: Firstly, literary form and secondly, structural form.

For literary form, the content itself generally decides what form it should take. Whether a particular insight should come out as a story or a novel, or its nature and quality are such that nothing but a poem expresses it fully, is not generally decided consciously. It comes on its own with the idea of writing itself. Occasionally, the writer may be in a dilemma and has to decide, taking all factors into consideration, which form to choose.

1.3.3 Structure

As for its structural sense, the guiding principle should be easy communication for easy comprehension. In order to achieve a good structure, the writer should first of all order his material, that is, decide –(a) how much of what should be in the work, and (b) in what order. Logic, commonsense and experience, drawn from one's wide reading, will help here. Just as a 500-page novel cannot be managed with only two characters, an eight-page story cannot have two dozen characters, unless the writer is a genius. One cannot go on describing the locale of the story for seven pages, reserving all the action and its denouement to the

last page. As for the order, the Aristotelian ‘beginning-middle-and-end’ is a time-tested sequence. But a gifted writer can always make variations. Literary tradition has provided us with several acceptable models; but if the writer is innovative he can create newer models. It is important to bear in mind, however, that ultimately structure is only a means to an end, and one should choose only that in which the content comes through best.

In its totality, a piece of writing is like a work of architecture, where every stone is well-cut and fits into the other as if the two are one piece. Nothing in it should stick out. The total structure should make an aesthetically satisfying whole. The stone metaphor above applies to every single element of writing—first the word, then the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter and finally the book itself. Each word in a sentence should work like the right musical note, and each sentence like a bar and the book as a whole, like a symphony, harmonious in its total orchestration.

1.3.4 Style

Then comes style. It is possible that two works written on the same subject, or with the same theme, should both be structurally satisfying, yet stylistically one may be better than the other. Style is a manner of expressing one’s thoughts and feelings in words. It is the result of long-cultivated awareness of words and sentences, of the way a writer connects one sentence with another. For one writer, ‘succour’ may be acceptable, while ‘help’ may be more appropriate. ‘Procrastination’ is tongue-twisting, while ‘delay’ is more expressive. For many, more than two adjectives at a time may be bad writing, but for a poet like Walt Whitman, a chain of them was normal. Style is a very personal thing; it identifies the writer.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What are the essential aspects of a literary work? Does content mean only the transcription of actual experience?

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- ii) What does ‘structure’ mean?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

1.4 CAN CREATIVE WRITING BE TAUGHT?

Writing is not something which “Do it Yourself” books can teach entirely. No one can fully teach another how to become a writer. What you get from others or,

for that matter, from this Unit are only a few guidelines based on experience. Having said that, we must add that the art of writing creatively is not a nebulous activity available to some anointed few. It is not mysterious and unteachable. Story is teachable, style too is teachable, just as tone and theme are.

The arguments for and against about whether creative writing is a subject that can be taught have gone on endlessly. According to Hanif Kureishi, the author of *My Son the Fanatic* and *Buddha of Suburbia*, creative writing courses are a waste of time as he feels that most of his students show no talent and cannot tell a story. On the other end of the scale we have someone like William Faulkner who feels that talent does not matter so much. The important qualities to become a creative writer are an innate curiosity to wonder, to ponder over why a certain thing happens. And if one has those qualities, talent becomes secondary.

Again, there are those who believe that teaching basic music scales to someone cannot turn them into a Mozart or teaching someone basic drawing won't turn a student into an M.F Hussain. And then there are others who advocate that studying works by Masters and imitating them while learning craft techniques allows students to develop their skills. So like any other art form—be it painting, music, sculpture, choreography—creative writing CAN be taught. Granted that you can teach it within the limits of a person's potential. But how can we know the potential of a student unless we start teaching them?

So when we are teaching creative writing, we are actually teaching:

CRAFT: What makes a good story? What part does narration play? What is the importance of characterization? How important is plot, atmosphere and what are the basic elements of a story?

TECHNIQUE: how does one control words, grammar, rhyme, prosody, structure?

PROCESS: how to recognize ideas and how to look for them. Eventually, what to do with them?

HOW TO READ: the difference between merely reading and studying in order to learn a craft.

POWER OF WORDS: the effect of words, the rhythm, the finer nuances – in fact the magical quality of words.

Therefore, to say that creative writing cannot be taught would be a fundamentally flawed position to take. The question perhaps is not “Can it be taught?” but the question should be How **well** can it be taught?

1.5 GUIDELINES FOR CREATIVE WRITING

1.5.1 Read in order to write

For anyone who aspires to become a writer, the first requirement is to be a good reader. One can learn a lot from reading the best in all literatures. Perhaps, there is no one in the world who has become a writer without having read a single word of what others have written. When we talk of reading, we do not mean reading casually for entertainment, or because there is nothing better to do. What

really matters is reading critically, analyzing for oneself every detail of the work, asking questions at every step as to why the writer has devised his plot in a particular manner, or has made the characters act the way they do, and whether it could have been done in any other way. Long years of close reading in this manner builds up a writer's equipment. It increases his vocabulary. It often provides ready answers to the questions which crop up in the process of writing.

1.5.2 Allow your experience to ripen

The experience, which you draw from the life around you, should not be put on paper as it is. That would make it a mere matter-of-fact, hackneyed piece of journalism. You should learn to make that experience your own, by internalising it. You should allow it to gestate within your mind, in the process of which you may reject a few details and add a few others from similar experiences. This kind of gestation will also make it personal, intimate and authentic. Hence, it is not desirable to rush for pen and paper as soon as there is a desire to write. We have used the word 'gestation'. The act of writing is like giving birth to something. It should come of its own, after it is ripe enough and when it can no longer wait. It serves no purpose to wrench it out by force.

1.5.3 Write about your experience differently

Before writing about anything, you should ask yourself whether it is something trite which others have already written about or something new. If it is new, there is nothing like it. It is not that a writer can always hit upon new things to write about. Life does not have a new theme to offer everyday to everyone. It is the same birth, the same hunger, the same love and the same death always. But though the themes are few and limited, their variations are unlimited. Here lies the scope for an imaginative mind. You will have to ask yourself whether you can write about the same old thing differently, bringing your own insights and perceptions into it.

1.5.4 Start with your diary

Before launching out on more ambitious projects like short stories and novels, it is best to start with your own diary and reminiscences. A few months of consistent writing of the diary, for your private reading, will give you confidence to undertake more difficult types of writing later on.

1.5.5 Visualisation, outline and design

Once you have the basic idea of what you want to write, and you are convinced that it will make a fairly good literary work, keep thinking about all its aspects, such as the theme, plot, situations, characters, dialogues, etc. Jot down every small detail that occurs to you. Then put down everything sequentially and prepare an outline to show how it will start, develop and end. Before finally putting pen to paper, you should have a clear picture in your mind of the entire work. This is called visualization.

There are many gifted writers who, at the time of starting, have only a vague idea of what they are going to write. But as they proceed, the unconscious mind takes over and the writing takes very different turns and twists to produce interesting results. This method may not be advisable for the beginner.

The beginning and the end of a work are vital as in a musical piece. The first few pages are like a leash and you should be able to hold the readers with it and lead them on. In fact, there are some readers who, if they do not find the first few paragraphs interesting enough, would just put down the book.

1.5.6 Some do's and don't's

- i) If there is any one single quality which distinguishes most great works, it is clarity—clarity of thought and clarity of expression. Your writing should not be dense or dull, but should shine like a mirror.
- ii) Precision is another such quality—precision both in respect of your thoughts and the words you use to express them. Take your words seriously. Do not waste them. When you use a word, make sure of its precise meaning. Tools like the dictionary, thesaurus, etc., will help you to understand the correct meaning of words and their usages.
- iii) Do not overwrite. The days of ornate prose are over. It is possible to achieve miracles even with simple sentences. No wonder, the Bible is still considered a model of good writing.
- iv) Similarly, avoid being pompous. Don't be very flippant either. Choose your words and expressions according to the mood of your work.
- (v) Also avoid archaisms, i.e., words no longer in vogue, slang, clichés and jargon. Write, as it comes to you, effortlessly.
- vi) Length, i.e. how much to write, is yet another important factor. The length will be determined by the scope of your subject. If you are clear in your mind about what you want to say, the end will come where it should.
- vii) Do not try to explain too much. Leave something to the reader's imagination also.
- viii) Let your writing be sprightly. A touch of humour, if it is not against the basic mood of your work, is always welcome.

1.5.7 Learn to be your own critic

After you have written a piece, read it aloud to yourself to test it on your ears. You will find several false notes, both in your statements and expressions. You will be surprised that quite a few things which you found exciting when you first put them on paper now seem banal. Remove them mercilessly. Every writer should learn to be his or her own critic.

Once your first draft is ready, put it aside till such time as it is out of your mind. It may have to be for a week, a fortnight, or a month, or even more. Now read it again. You will then see it in a fresh light. At places, it may even make you wonder how you could have been so silly as to write certain things. There will be more work for you, and the typed pages will be filled with corrections. But you should not be dismayed.

1.5.8 Seek others' opinions

For every writer, it is important to build up a close circle of creative writers and discriminating readers who are on the same wave-length and who can read through

his/her manuscript patiently and give an honest, unbiased opinion about it. It is necessary to shed one's shyness to be able to show one's work to others and also curb one's ego to consider their criticism, however drastic it might be. But, in the end, it will be good for the work. If even after all this, a work fails to pass muster, better forget about it rather than hunt for a publisher. The world will not be the poorer by that one work which failed to come off. You can always make it up with your next work.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Did you ever feel the urge to unburden yourself of any experience, pleasant or unpleasant, in your life? Write about it in not more than 200 words. (See the hints given at the end of this Unit).

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1.6 GENUINENESS OF THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

You should make sure that your creative impulse is genuine. Assuming that the impulse has troubled you on the emotional plane, as it often does, the question you should ask of yourself is charming and overwhelming as it may have been at the given moment, was it not rather a transient and hence a superficial emotion? Just as an auntie of the neighbourhood bursts into tears at the sight of a puppy in distress or a bride leaving her mother's home? Could it have happened that you were taken in by the setting or the atmosphere? In a certain romantic atmosphere of moon and faraway music and what have you, you found the dialogue of an old couple particularly cute, and you thought you could write a poem on the theme of 'Love in the Night'. Or while passing through a slum you were moved by the sight of a young, good looking mother being harassed by a brood of unkempt and potbellied children, and you thought you could write a story on the theme of 'Roses in the Dust' etc. It may well be that you can write a powerful piece on either. But let the confidence grow in you over a period of time, after you have satisfied yourself that (i) such emotive reactions have been fairly recurrent with you in similar situations, and (ii) you can identify reasonably well with the old couple or the young mother in the course of their lives.

Distancing is necessary for creative effort. Conversely, do not trust the impulse for **immediate** action, if it is much too intense, being acutely personal. Here one remembers the famous phrase of Wordsworth, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' as the base of poetry. Let the storm settle into a calm surface; it is only then that you can write on it effectively. Truman Capote, a contemporary fiction writer of repute, writes in a similar vein 'I have to exhaust the emotion before I feel clinical enough to analyse and project it...My own theory is that the writer should have dried his tears long, long before setting out to evoke similar reactions in a reader'.

What he means to say is that insofar as the emotional stimulus is concerned, a certain distancing is necessary for creative effort. To cite an example: you have lost a loved one. You are naturally overwhelmed with grief and, being a writer, you wish to release yourself in verse or prose. You may surely do so for therapeutic reasons, just as you could release yourself in a flood of tears. But the best results in terms of literary merit can be achieved only when you can look upon the event from a distance—thanks to the passage of time, among other things—and can call upon other people to share those intenser moments with you. Your literary piece would then be both authentic in terms of emotional experience, and objective in terms of expressed thought, the ideal combination that any writer could devoutly wish for.

Do not misjudge the stirrings of an abiding motivation for a creative impulse. Suppose you are strongly motivated, by temperament and conviction, to expose the evils of social justice. Undoubtedly such motivation would govern your outlook on the human condition, and you would smell injustice in a situation, which to some others may be no more than a curiosity in terms of interpersonal conflict. There is nothing inherently wrong in such coloration that is bound to creep into the works of a motivated writer (the motivation covered could well be cultural, philosophical or any other). But what is important is that the genesis should indeed be a creative impulse to start with, which could later be wedded to the motivation, and not vice-versa. As a writer you should consider the impulse as creative only when you react to a situation primarily because it is interesting from the human angle, and only additionally because of its social implications.

The late Bhagabati Panigrahi, a noted writer who was also one of the founders of the Communist Party in Orissa, wrote a story named 'Shikhar' which has acquired considerable fame and has also been turned into a movie entitled 'Mrigaya' by Mrinal Sen. Here the theme, obviously, is of social injustice—the oppression of poor tribals by the moneyed henchmen of an alien administration. But one imagines that Bhagabati Panigrahi must have been impelled to write the story when he came across, through his observation-cum-imagination, a character such as Ghinua, a simple tribal who could never understand till his death, by hanging, the strange logic that he did not deserve an award more than any average hunter, for having chopped off the head of a well-known oppressor and presenting it to the local Commissioner. It is the bizarre simplicity of truth embodied in the personality of the character that lends particular charm to the story and not the well-known fact of social injustice in the colonial times.

And so, look for the seeds of an illuminating circumstance in human terms—absurd, funny, or tragic—as the case may be, in the impulse you have had to write a certain story or poem and you could consider later whether it would also serve your cherished motivation.

A story with a motivation written into it should indeed be richer, for it gives an extra dimension to the story. But let it not appear that the characters have been directed to 'prove' the truth of the motivation; for that may be self-defeating. On the other hand, give them the importance of being human and the freedom that goes with it. Freedom to love, weep, howl, fight and act in all sorts of funny and foolish ways, in situations that may be called socially evil, and you will see how your motivation shines through the intensely human narrative.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) How will you distinguish a creative impulse from an emotional reaction?

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- ii) Why is distancing from the object necessary in any creative writing?

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- iii) Explain the connection between the creative impulse and motivation.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

1.7 SUMMING UP

- Man tries to fulfill not only his primary needs like food, clothing and shelter, but also his social need of communication with others so as to share his experiences.
- One writes primarily to express oneself and not necessarily for money and fame.
- Writings are of two types non-creative and creative the former to **inform** and the latter to **reveal**.
- The three essential aspects of a literary work are **content, form** and **structure**. **Style** is the way in which the work is expressed—the manipulation of language. But whatever is written must be credible and authentic.
- Writing cannot be learnt but can only be cultivated, and for this, critical reading is necessary.

- The art of writing is like giving birth in that it is preceded by a period of gestation of ideas, etc.
- There are some do's and don'ts. Clarity of thought and precision of expression are necessary. Overwriting and over-elaboration should be avoided. A touch of humour always enlivens the writing.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- Man, being a social animal, has an innate compulsion to communicate with other human beings, not only to inform them or know anything from them, but also to share his experiences with them—his joys and sorrows. It is a means for overcoming loneliness and for fulfilling his social urges.
- Non-creative writing **informs** while creative writing **reveals**. The distinction between the two becomes blurred when a non-creative writing is expressed in poetic language and moves the reader as any creative writing does.

Check Your Progress 2

- Form and content. No, if it is a mere transcription of actual experience, it becomes journalistic writing. The facts, whether 'real' or 'invented', undergo transformation in the writer's mind before they are presented in the form of a story, a novel or a poem. Only then will they interest and move others.
- Structure means the ordering of the story material, as in architecture. It applies to every element—plot, character and language.

Check Your Progress 3

Hints: Since this is a very subjective question we are not giving you a ready-made answer- only a few directions:

- Write in the first person 'I' form.
- Your vocabulary should include a large number of words and phrases describing your feelings, thoughts and emotions.
- You can use abbreviations, slang and figures of speech.

Check Your Progress 4

- An emotional reaction to a scene or incident, however strong, is a passing phase, unless it continues to recur in similar situations and disturbs you deeply. A genuine creative impulse is distinguishable by a persistent emotional turmoil as well as a capacity for identification with the object
- Distancing is necessary to get away from excessive personal involvement, in order to control the overflow of emotion. Creativity needs a measure of calm and detachment.
- Every creative impulse has a deeper and more pervasive human perspective than motivation which constitutes a strong sense of purpose in a writer. In any great writing, motivation does not dominate the creative impulse but only subserves it.

UNIT 2 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVE WRITING

Structure

2.0 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Dimensions of Clarity and Transparency

2.2.1 Decide what you want to make clear

2.2.2 Clarity depends upon proper education

2.2.3 Clarity requires a concrete definition of your subject

2.2.4 Knowing your reader

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2.3 Directness

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2.4.1 The experience barrier: dangerous to cross it

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2.4.4 Total authenticity of locale and culture: R.K. Narayan

2.4.5 Authenticity is the base of even highly imaginative creation: Raja Rao

2.5 Credibility Stems from Authenticity

2.5.1 Authenticity and credibility: A close look at Mulk Raj Anand's "The Lost Child"

2.5.2 How Anand establishes authenticity

2.6 Summing Up

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Through this Unit, our aim is to teach you:

- the importance of the quality of transparency, which imparts value to your work.
- how to achieve directness
- how authenticity can be achieved in your writings and
- how the importance of clarity cannot be over-emphasized because, whatever be the theme of your work, it will not appeal to the reader if it suffers from opaqueness or obscurity.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Readability, clarity, lucidity, or directness (call this quality by whatever name you will), is one of the most important values to be cherished in creative writing,

for all writing is aimed at a reader who must understand what you are saying. Otherwise, communication, which is the purpose of all writing, will not be possible. This fundamental principle of writing is so important that it has been stressed in other Units of your course as well, so that when you write you can aim at meaning, not obscurity, which is unmeaning. You have to remember that to achieve clarity you must know, thoroughly and competently, what you want to be clear about. Until your mastery of the subject is complete you will neither know its broad pattern and its details, nor will you be able to define for yourself what you want to say on the subject. To be able to do so you must have a deep interest in the subject. Creativity can emerge only from this—so also transparency, which is spontaneous and illuminating. Great scientists or great artists have this quality of creative expression; and mere rigidity of academic discipline cannot help anyone to attain it. Clarity relates to the response of your listener, your reader. If your writing fails to communicate, it has no meaning; but clarity is not facile comprehensibility a mere simplicity of statement. It applies to complex and highly sensitive thoughts also, hence the difficulty in achieving clarity. To achieve clarity one has to be a master of language, for it is only by manipulating language skillfully that one can express great and complex thoughts effectively. Such manipulation is called technique, in which the mastery of syntax is as important as a competent use of vocabulary. All this will help you achieve directness and clarity, which make for readability. A subject which can form the matter of creative writing must be interesting: interesting to you and also interesting to the people who are going to read your work. Making things interesting is a skill, and there are exercises which teach you how to do it. These, however, are merely guidelines and cannot teach you creative writing itself. You may succeed in making your writing merely interesting but you know what you are doing, and so does the man at the receiving end. You are, in fact, being just interesting, not creative. You are not actually interested in the subject, but only want to gain an audience. To make your writing creative you have to shape it in such a way that it becomes luminous and acquires the power to move others.

2.2 DIMENSIONS OF CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY

What do you want to be clear about? Who do you want to address? What is it you want to make clear?

2.2.1 Decide what you want to make clear

What you want to make clear is the subject that you have chosen. You cannot be clear about the smallest detail without being clear about the whole field, or the subject of which it is a part. Civil liberties, for example, are concerned with the Constitution, the judiciary, the widespread knowledge of law in society, the expenses of legal action and an abiding faith in the fruits of the judicial system based upon actual experience. The protection of consumers is linked with the entire market condition, and the spending mentality of people in an inflationary situation, where it seems evidently more gainful to spend money immediately.

2.2.2 Clarity depends upon proper education

Clarity depends upon an adequate, competent and relevant knowledge. If you have not mastered your subject, you can only flounder about; and in trying to

clarify, you may make it all the more confusing. Do not try to explain anything which you do not know. Go back to the subject itself, take an all-round and distant view of it, and just as you can see the fields and water and forests in patterns from the air, you will find things falling into a design. Clarity requires not only a little time and distance from the matter you are dealing with, but also demands wide acquaintance with it.

2.2.3 Clarity requires a concrete definition of your subject

Since nobody knows, nor can hope to know everything, clarity needs a distinctive definition of what your subject in hand is. Brash confidence of the 'I know what I want' type is not enough, you have to know what you want to say. If you are presenting routine information it is one thing, but it is quite another thing if you are using it for creative writing, since what is needed here is an identification with the subject. As soon as others know that you are not talking about something they already know, but of something which you know in a special way, they will listen to you.

Similar to 'clarity' is the word 'transparency', which assists us in attaining clarity. Transparency like unmotivated attention is a condition in which an object is viewed without any particular interest in it. Of course, it is a kind of absorption in what you are speaking of, but such concentration usually has a concrete subject when it achieves the condition of clarity. Scientists sometimes attain such transparency when they have acquired mastery of their topic through constant analysis and application.

2.2.4 Knowing your reader

The clarity of writing—because clarity is a result, an effect, not a quality as such—depends upon our knowing clearly who our reader is. The reader decides our choice of language. Every writer has his preferences, and this may, of course, make him choose his readers, but there is no reader absolutely made for the language which is the chosen language of the writer. The writer of the age of Shakespeare knew the love of language his audience had, and made his reader love his language by leading him further in the same direction. T.S. Eliot did not have readers readymade for the language, knowledge, skill and potentiality, and yet he drew upon these. His readers found him difficult, but they loved the difficulty; they knew where he was going and were prepared to go along with him and also had the resources for doing so. One indeed not only seeks one's audience, but also 'creates' it as it were, which is not possible for every writer.

2.2.5 Rigidity may affect clarity

Most subjects, even topics, academically speaking, have a rigid outline—academic disciplines require and produce a certain controlling of the mind, and so far as clarity in creative expression goes, this rigidity hinders and may even damage it.

You yourself are the basis and source of clarity. Clear expression must be free, spontaneous, plastic—sensitive to the relation between you and the people to whom you speak. We seem to be very little concerned about clarity when we express ourselves. We seem to think that it is the importance of the subject matter that will automatically achieve clarity, or that it is the duty of the reader to extract

clarity out of whatever we choose to say, in whichever manner we like. In fact, it is one of the advantages of writing, as different from speech, that questions are not asked of you right there. But never imagine for a moment that because you are writing, questions cannot be asked of you. That kind of feeling or assumption is the enemy of clarity. Some of the best writers are involved with themselves, making their statements, asking their questions, answering them themselves. In such cases, there is no clarity, but only rhetoric, which is confining of expression. Some of the finest creative work may eventually come out of it but this does not usually happen. Complete self-involvement is not a condition in which you can attain clarity within yourself about what you are saying.

2.2.6 Clarity and language

Language, being the medium for a diversity of human communications, has to be individualized every time it is used. That is why dialects, slang and changes of idiom are so essential to creative writing. An abstract standard of language with its prescriptions of correctness and grammar is never enough for creative writing. There is a kind of clarity which correctness and grammar may bring about—but beyond that we need a community of expression which binds all of us together and mobilizes the entire resources of the language. Aristotle, in his definition of the classic style, defines it as thinking the thoughts of the wise and speaking the language of the common people. Wise thoughts need not necessarily be expressed in difficult language. The language used by common people can be extraordinarily rich in expressions. Most people recognize the qualities and potentiality of their speech and are able to use it with a sense of creativity, pleasure and competence. As soon as the writer gets into active touch with the man for whom he wishes to write, he has found the key to clarity—and the response is not only of understanding, but also of that delight in the catholicity of experience, which is the field of art. Then the struggle for clarity is over and a new world of delight opens.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Why is mastery of the subject required for the achievement of clarity?

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- ii) What is transparency?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.)

2.3 DIRECTNESS

There are great examples of directness of language both in life and in literature; in fact, the one leads to the other. But men might have strong convictions and yet

remain inexpressive, tongue-tied. The convictions might thus falter, remain unexpressed, and come out as anything but direct.

Directness, therefore, has to be forged by technique. However simple it may look when achieved, it is the result of continuous exercise, application and refinement. Syntax is the muscle of language, and exercise of syntax brings out the inherent force of the language. A writer has to experiment with the language to discover and adapt its syntax to bring out the compelling force which drives him. Few writers have achieved such creative power with directness in modern times as Ernest Hemingway. "The Killers" is a story one can go over again and again to see what can be done with the bare bones of syntax.

'He must have got mixed up with something in Chicago.'

'I guess so,' said Nick.

'It's a hell of a thing.'

(Then there is a pause during which George takes out a towel and wipes the counter.)

'I wonder what he did?' Nick said.

'Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for.'

'I am going to get out of this town,' Nick said.

'Yes, that is a good thing to do.'

'A hell of a thing', 'a good thing to do' are straight out of the syntactical forms worn bare by constant usage and yet, isolated by the variation in rhythm, surrounded and spaced by silence and laconic speech, they expand with a burden of meaning, a pressure of direct experience that does not bear thinking about.

2.4 AUTHENTICITY

The desire to write—the urge to write, if you will—arises from one's necessity to express oneself. This is how all writing begins. When children start writing, whether it is about an imaginary world, or a real one, it is this compulsion to express what they think and feel that is foremost in their minds. They do not necessarily want others to read what they have written; in fact, some are very secretive about their writing and hide it in cleverly thought-out places. The act of writing itself tells the writer which of his feelings are not sincere, and which are. Writing offers a release to the writer of any age; it is an act of self-expression so powerful in its intensity that those who have felt the urge, exhaust themselves doing it, for the time being, at least; but having done it once, successfully, they must go on performing the same tasks, repeatedly. They find the act of creation sacred, because it is in the process of writing that the writer is confronted with his feelings and ideas more concretely. Moreover, what he cannot bind down with words will escape, and he can bind down only those which have substance, which are authentic, which have intensely lived in his mind. It is at the moment of writing that the writer realizes that only some feelings become true through exact expression, some, which are fleeting, casual and insincere, refuse to be bound in language. In writing, authenticity of emotions is measured by authenticity of expression.

The poet, the short story writer, the novelist, and the dramatist are all trying to express, through different mediums, their vision of life as revealed to them through their experiences, feelings and meditations.

For the writer what authenticity means is that he must himself believe what he wants others to believe. Authenticity, therefore, comprises for the writer, not only emotions but also expression. Every writer keeps trying to achieve perfection in this, although only a few succeed—sometimes after a very long wait. That is why the craft of writing is not an easy one to practice. There are many ways of seeking truth; for the writer, the first step is to ensure that what he wants others to feel he feels himself, that it has become a part of himself.

2.4.1 The experience barrier: dangerous to cross it

There is such a thing as an experience barrier. We are born in one sort of family, live with a particular group of people, have a certain kind of social and cultural inheritance, and go through a limited number of experiences. These present the picture of life as we see it. It is possible, through wide reading, to get to know of other peoples and their lives; yet that kind of knowledge can never be as direct and as deep as the one we have lived ourselves. If, without direct experience, we try to portray an area of reality from which we have been excluded, our creative writing will sound hollow. One common example of this kind of insincerity is seen when writers with a middle-class background are tempted to portray life as lived in the 'high society'—upper class, westernized, amoral and carefree. Similarly, when writers with a pre-eminently rural or urban background, wish to cross their experience barrier and write on urban or rural themes, about which their knowledge is scanty, they fail to convince the reader. Only great writers are able to cross this barrier with the help of their powerful imagination.

2.4.2 Experience barrier between cultures

It is similarly dangerous to write about other cultures without going deeply enough into them. One of the reasons why very few Europeans have written with any measure of understanding, about India is surely that their penetration into our culture has been superficial. It matches some of the superficial observations we tend to make about other cultures; the British, the American, the African, and so forth. In a recent novel, written by a foreigner who has lived long enough in India, a tea party is described, with a lot of amused observation. The Principal of a private coaching institution has invited his staff to a tea party, and among the invitees is a junior member who has come with his pregnant wife. To most of the staff, who are quite poor, the tea party seems to be an opulent affair. There is much dressing in one's finery; everyone talks in a stilted fashion, using Victorian English of a ripe vintage, and many sycophantic compliments are paid to the host. When food is served, everybody tries to be discreet and genteel, with the result that they all eat so little—all, except the pregnant wife of the junior teacher. She is fond of sweets, though in her married life her husband could satisfy this craving fully only once. In any case, either because of her deprivation, or because she is pregnant (this reason is also hinted at), she makes a grab at the sweets and eats them greedily. It is all so funny—the account of the tea party—the writer seems to say; all so funny, yet so sordid.

2.4.3 How cross-cultural raids can violate norms of decency

To an Indian reader of the story it is, however, obvious that the account of the tea party is indescribably cruel, and since fun is made of deprived people—the little education, the lack of money and social status—it is in bad taste. The author does not see (because the author has not penetrated into the culture of the characters ridiculed), that behind much of what seems to be funny lies inescapable servitude and poverty. A person of breeding (not to speak of true culture) does not make fun of misfortune. The moral, therefore, is that unless the writer can truly say that he has gone deep enough into another culture to be able to understand it, he should not attempt any cross-cultural raids.

2.4.4 Total authenticity of locale and culture: R.K. Narayan

One Indian writer who never allows this to happen in his novels and short stories is R.K. Narayan. His stories are all set in and around Malgudi, a small imaginary town in Karnataka. Geographical reality is pronounced in all of them, as is the reality of persons, their occupations, hopes and failures, amusements, and their daily life. So truthful is Narayan about the people living in this small town, so authentic is his portrayal of their manners of speech, their education and their attitudes of mind, that very soon after beginning to read the second story by Narayan, one feels that one has actually lived in Malgudi all one's life. Narayan has found all his material in this small town. Narayan's stories ring true because his authentic voice comes from the authentic experience that he portrays.

2.4.5 Authenticity is the base of even highly imaginative creation: Raja Rao

Even when a writer wishes to transform his material into a highly imaginative narrative, he must first ensure the authenticity of his material. Once he has done that, he can fashion the material into the realistic, fantastic, symbolic or any other mode that he likes. Take, for instance, Raja Rao's story, 'The Cow of the Barricades' (included in the *Policeman and the Rose*, O.U.P), in which the story of the cow, Gauri, and her participation in the Mahatma's non-violent movement is narrated. Not only is Gauri created authentically, bit by bit, before our eyes, but so are the human characters—the Master, his disciples, and even the red men. Raja Rao creates this authentic world so carefully, that when at the end of the story he invests Gauri with the conscious purpose of a martyr walking sedately towards her willed death, we find it totally credible.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Does a writer's range become limited if he expresses only what he has himself experienced?

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- ii) How does the experience barrier operate?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

2.5 CREDIBILITY STEMS FROM AUTHENTICITY

Credibility thus emerges from authenticity. In that sense, credibility is not an absolute idea; it relates to the degree of authenticity that the writer has been able to achieve. A factually correct event may appear to be incredible in writing, if the author has failed to give it life, i.e., authenticity. We all know what suffering is, yet in some writing the account of suffering leaves us untouched, whereas in some others we find it deeply moving. The difference between the first and second kind lies entirely in the element of authenticity—the successful establishment in writing of the true voice of feeling.

2.5.1 Authenticity and credibility: A close look at Mulk Raj Anand's "The Lost Child"

Let us now examine a short story titled "The Lost Child", written by Mulk Raj Anand, a story that aptly illustrates what we have so far said about authenticity and credibility. Fortunately for us, Anand himself provides a background to the story. He was doing research in Philosophy in London, and he found his work very hard.

I could not master the whole of European thought quickly. I did not know Greek or Latin or German or French. I was advised by my Professor to be honest and accept the fact that I did not know very much. But I struggled all the same, late into the nights, read huge tomes and brooded. But the more I read the more I felt lost. Then I remembered some words of Guru Nanak, who had once said: 'We are all children lost in the world fair.' I went to sleep brooding on these words.

In the early hours of the morning, I recalled that I had been physically lost in a fair at the age of six in Kaleshwar village, on the banks of the Beas river in Kangra valley. I had strayed away from my parents, looking at a juggler's tricks and was crying for my mother and father when I could not find them. All the things I had wanted my parents to buy for me, the balloon, the sweets, the flowers, I did not want any more. I only cried out: 'I want my mother ! I want my father!' Someone picked me up and tried to console me, but I was inconsolable and cried, 'I want my mother! I want my father!'

I wrote that experience of my childhood in the early morning. As I had had the experience of being actually lost, the narrative was **authentic** and true to my experience. Only I did not put it down in terms of myself. But I, unconsciously, wrote about a child, any child, who may get lost in the way as I had got lost.

2.5.2 How Anand establishes authenticity

Anand says that the story was authentic because he had the experience of getting lost. However, it is not the same thing to have an experience and to be able to write about it in an authentic voice. Mere experience does not give a writer an

authentic tone in writing. It has to be created skillfully. Anand first establishes the setting: the season, the place, the people, the many ways of travelling to the fair, then introduces the child with these words. “One little boy ran between his parents’ legs brimming over with life and laughter. The joyous morning gave greetings and unashamed invitations to all to come away into the fields, full of flowers and songs.” The child is full of life and a sense of wonder; all his five senses are fully alive and stimulated. He is happily possessed of the faculty of being totally absorbed in the sensation of the moment to the complete forgetfulness of his surroundings. On the way to the fair, he and his parents enter a footpath in a field.

It was a flowering mustard field, pale like melting gold, as it swept across miles and miles of even land a river of liquid light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying at places into broad, rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver light. Where it ended, on one side stood a cluster of low mud-walled houses thrown into relief by a dense crowd of yellow-robed men and women, from which arose a high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking squeaking, roaring, humming noises, sweeping across the groves to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Siva’s mad laughter. The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the shrill joy and wonder of this vast glory and feeling that they, too, wore the evidence of this pure delight in their faces, he left the footpath and plunged headlong into the field, prancing like a young colt, his small feet chiming with the fitful gusts of wind that came rich with the fragrance of more distant fields.

This excerpt from the story is a little long, but it serves to illustrate an important point. Anand, in his writing, rarely indulges in poetic flights. If he does so here, it is with the specific object of establishing the authenticity of the child’s world, the child’s natural ability to absorb, entirely, the world around him. The child is enchanted by the dragonflies bustling to the fair. “Come, child, come”—this exhortation has to be repeated by his parents to drag him away from what engages him at the moment; a banyan tree, a shower of young flowers, cooing doves; and when the fair ground is reached: sweetmeat-sellers, flower-sellers, the balloon man, a juggler and finally the roundabout in full swing.

It is there that he loses his parents. At once, the world changes for him; panic-stricken, he now runs about in all directions, till defeated, ‘his cries suppressed into sobs.’ The bright, vibrant world of a moment before, now becomes a sinister one — heavy men, with flashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders knock him to and fro with their brutal paws, until he starts shrieking for his father and mother. He is lifted up in the arms of a kindly man who, to soothe him, offers him each delight the child has craved for earlier. But now he wants none of these, he only asks for his mother and father. The story ends with the man offering his last allurements on the list—sweets. But the child now only wants his parents.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) How does Mulk Raj Anand establish authenticity in his story?

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit)

2.6 SUMMING UP

- Clarity and directness are the most important qualities of creative writing. To achieve clarity you must have mastery over your chosen subject, i.e., you must distance yourself, think over the matter and get well acquainted with it. Making things interesting to all concerned is a skill which can be learnt. But it is not enough for creative writing which has the power to move others and to make things luminous.
- Authenticity of emotion leads to authenticity of expression and if rendered imaginatively can exemplify any experience.
- Experience barriers between cultures can be difficult to cross while writing—though not insurmountable.

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Without mastering one's subject one might fumble or make it more confusing. A writer needs to be clear about the smallest detail of the subject to be able to project it accurately. This would enable the writer to hold the attention of the reader.
- ii) Transparency is associated with clarity. It involves concentration on the subject without which it cannot be achieved. A writer should closely observe every small detail in order to make his writing clear and transparent.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) It does become limited to a certain extent. But experience can be lived vicariously without the writer having actually undergone it.
- ii) If the experience has not been felt by the author it can make the rendering superficial.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Anand establishes authenticity in his story because he had lived through the experience himself—though that is not the sole criteria of achieving authenticity. Skill is also required to achieve the desired effect of authenticity.

UNIT 3 STRUCTURE OF MATERIAL

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Criteria for Selection of Themes
 - 3.2.1 Themes for short stories
 - 3.2.2 Themes for poetry
- 3.3 The Importance of Opening
 - 3.3.1 False starts
 - 3.3.2 Different genres and conventions
 - 3.3.3 Planned narratives and openings
 - 3.3.4 The opening in the novel
 - 3.3.5 General hints and suggestion
- 3.4 Building a Climax
 - 3.4.1 Climax and resolution: An example
- 3.5 Appropriate Endings
 - 3.5.1 Single endings
 - 3.5.2 Endings in formula stories
- 3.6 Summing Up
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit seeks to guide you in your attempt to begin writing. We teach you how to provide a coherent structure to your work. By the end of this Unit you will have learnt how to:

- get your themes and develop them
- begin your writing by providing a suitable beginning
- build a climax which is a place of heightened intensity
- bring your writing to a neat conclusion.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The choice of themes for a possible short story or a poem is rarely deliberate; it is mostly spontaneous. That is, themes occur to you as you go about your daily work, and you begin to feel that it will be a good idea to put pen to paper and write on the theme that has come your way. But does each such impulse get transformed into a short story/poem? No. Quite often the impulse withers away, in spite of the brilliant promise it offered you at one point of time. And in quite a few cases, while you do start writing it out at the earliest opportunity, and with enthusiasm unbounded, you are compelled to leave it off mid-way. It's all the

same whether you tear it up in disgust or treasure the aborted mess, hoping to do something about it at some future date. Then, again, there would be that odd one you complete somehow or the other, in a determined sweep and add to your tally, but you are never satisfied with the way it has turned out, and suffer the feeling that the theme that occurred to you was not particularly bright, and you should have better left it alone. These are the common occupational hazards that a writer has to put up with.

If you have a story in mind, you should take particular care to marshal the facts—authentic and recognizable details of the locale, the atmosphere, the historical or social background if that be relevant, as also of the character(s) you have decided to summon for your purpose. Focus on the concrete facts of perception which would make the reader alive to the ‘reality’ of the story, even though you would be mixing them up cleverly with loads of imaginative fiction.

Take, for example, R.K. Narayan’s *Malgudi*. There is indeed no such town in India or elsewhere. But we seem to find our own small town (for those of us who are familiar with one, in present living or nostalgic memory) talking to us in numerous ripples of events, peopled, as it is, not merely by recognizable men, women and children, but by temples, hospitals, markets, goats, donkeys, and what have you. The writer has brought them close to us, no less by the care he has taken to study and organize the authentic factual details for his story, than by the other charms of his story-telling genius.

The importance of fact-finding is less, but only relatively so, in a poem. Subjectivity has no doubt been, traditionally, a distinctive feature in poetry. Nevertheless, thanks to the value placed on realism in modern literary thought, poems are considered to be richer and hence more acceptable, if they are seen to be in response to concrete scenes and situations of life in our times, as a reader would recognize them. For example the tourist and the beggar-woman following him gazing together at a Mithuna sculpture in the temple-walls of Konarak, the body of a child floating down the river in the aftermath of a bloody riot, the poor fish in the marketplace staring in awe and wonder, as it were, at the amplitude of the rich housewife closing in on ‘him’ for the bargain....etc. Won’t the poem be more picturesque and powerful if you could convey authentic details of the Konarak sculpture, a river bank that was indeed witness to a bloody riot in recent memory, or the sights and sounds of a typical fish-market? And then what about longer poems rooted in history or mythology? Can you trust your creative impulse to yield a worthwhile poem unless you arm yourself sufficiently with factual details of the locale, atmosphere and character(s) relevant (or supposedly relevant, in a mythological piece) to the situation you have in mind?

The emphasis, as above, on ‘homework’ is derived from the compulsion, in literary parlance, of the circumstance, that while a creative impulse is derived from (a) experience, (b) observation, and (c) imagination, the three ingredients are hardly ever matched in ideal proportions in the mental equipage of a writer. Hence the need to deepen the experience, sharpen the observations and avoid overdoing the imagination, by taking upon oneself, for the time being, the role of a researcher, and thus provide the genesis of a theme, that will hold, for a story or a poem.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are the three factors involved in creativity?

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- ii) Attempt to combine these three factors by writing a small piece on the death of a dear friend.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

3.2 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THEMES

While the guidelines indicated above would apply to the genesis of creative effort in general, it will be advisable to apply some separate and additional criteria in the case of short stories and poems.

3.2.1 Themes for short stories

A theme may pass the tests referred to above and you may have made the necessary preparations, but it is still possible that it does not lend itself to the format of a short story, though it could be excellent material for a piece of journalistic feature-writing. So before starting to work on these (a) you should satisfy yourself that it is suitable for being converted into a story i.e. a tale that begins with a promise, can normally sustain a conflict or complication on its way, and ends with a certain revelation; and (b) you should be fairly confident that it will say, or appear to say, something 'new' about the human condition, howsoever limited the framework of your experience or observation may be.

Thus, for example, the antics of the **bandarwallah** (monkeyman), sporting a flowing white beard and indulging in toothless chatter, who seeks to entertain the children of the neighbourhood with the performance of his monkey, much less interesting than his own, may have prompted you to write something on the funny, yet sad situation. Apparently, it would make for a delightfully moving feature article. But could it also be brought within the format of a short story? Yes,—if you could, through your further observation and imagination, weave the outlines of a tale around the fascinating character. Possibly you could connect the mirth of his toothless grin to the ebullience of his youth, and his pathetic dedication to the trade, hardly popular in a city, of playing the monkey, to a fierce sense of independence that seeks to defy the fates which have been chasing the sunlight out of his life one by one. So what seems pitiful and ridiculous too, could well be a story in bravery. Or could it be his way of taking it out on his family, a cranky old man pitted against his practical third generation? Whatever it is, you have to connect it with a tale, the brief story of his life or one outside it

and so ‘reveal’ the essence of his character at the end. See if your theme can yield such a tale. And having assured yourself that you can make it, on with your story, and best of luck.

This example refers to a so-called ‘character-story’. But there are many other ways of telling a story, derived from the twin prerequisites referred to above, and there are several other cognate considerations that go into the writing of a story.

3.2.2 Themes for poetry

While the writer’s statement in a short story comes through by traversing a certain distance, the statement in a poem has to grip the reader’s thought and imagination in an instant. This being so, it is of utmost importance before writing a poem on a well-chosen theme, that you should be committed totally, right at the beginning, to what you are going to say and how. That is, to the basic thought-content and the tone (fearful, angry, excited, reflective or whatever) that you wish to adopt. The words will come later. You may have to chop and hew them any number of times. But your sights must be pretty clear at the outset, on the ‘what and how’ of your poem-to-be, which would determine the overall nature of the impact you wish to create in the mind of the reader

Let us take for example the theme of being lost in the woods on an evening when the darkness is setting in—a traditional yet fascinating theme which has a fable-like charm about it that has enticed poets through the ages, from the immortal Dante in his ‘The Divine Comedy’ to the modern poet of today, anxious to seize upon an image which would be rich in possibilities in terms of the various kinds of response that it tends to evoke. There is a fatal charm about such themes, and they can tie you up in knots, if you are not careful enough to start with.

In a poem the thought-content and the tone often tend to coalesce; the verbal, seeking to express a thought, would merge into the non-verbal, i.e. the pervasive mystical experience of the poem which can only be expressed symbolically. In its totality it may be, as most modern poems are, a complex phenomenon in awareness, that you wish to share with the reader. Even so, it is necessary for your poetic craft that you should commit yourself to the quintessence of your statement in the mould of an overall emotion, before you begin. Losing yourself in the woods while the daylight is fading, slowly but inevitably, would give rise to a variety of emotions, depending on your mood, life-situation, world-view or whatever—fear, as of a child; a sense of adventure reaching out to the mystery; expectancy, hoping to find somebody from this ‘deep and dark’ of our dreams; surrender akin to divine consciousness, etc. it is not unlikely that you have been taken in by the multi-faceted charm of the situation, and your reactions are chaotic. But you should weld them into a dominant outlook of the mind, one of the many indicated above. And then bind yourself to it. It is only then that you can formulate the ‘what and how’ of your statement in fairly clear terms, which will yield the appropriate images and metaphors, and then, move on to the opening lines.

This is not to say that you have to do without the truths of a complex reaction. But let the complexity be derived from or opposed if need be (in a point-counterpoint syndrome, if you can make it) to the dominant outlook, as you move along. Do not mistake your chaotic and criss-crossed reactions for complexity, and allow the words to find their own bearings. That might land you with confused

images and mixed metaphors, a failing which cannot be saved always by the plea of subjectivity or the vaunted obscurity of the modern consciousness.

3.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF OPENING

In all types of creative writing, the first thing that teases the writer is the question of ‘opening’. That is to say, he has to face the problem of finding a suitable answer to the question: ‘How do I strike the right note at the start?’ He must solve it, if he is going to be able to continue at all, even when he happens to be an experienced artist. Naturally, then, the apprentice would be even more put to the test, for though certain helpful suggestions could, at times, lead him into the right street, no set rules or formulae could make him achieve the desired effect. There is a kind of mystery about the whole creative process, and the opening of a narrative is a part of that mystery. There is, as Oscar Wilde put it, pain at ‘the birth of a star’, and each new poem or play, story or novel, essay or biography, presents that problem. There is distress and despair when the blank paper seems to mock one’s efforts, or, soon enough, becomes a pitiful scrawl of writing and scratching.

However, there is nothing to worry about, for any genuine engagement with human reality and any true impulse to create, will eventually produce the desired effect. It is chiefly a matter of trust, application and insight.

3.3.1 False starts

False starts are really a part of the creative process, and need not cause undue anxiety. Even the greatest writers, as their diaries, manuscripts and letters, etc. show, have had to battle their way through, after a series of agonizing and awkward starts. What is important then, is the ability of the writer to act as his own critic, and see if he has been able to put across clearly and economically the ideas his imagination is struggling to organize. Indeed, to secure the right note, and the right tone, he may have to labour over the first few lines or even paragraphs. Maybe the scene or the idea will have to be written down in more than one narrative form, and from more than one angle, to test which of these modes suits him best in that particular case. And once the imagination is beginning to tick, as it were, the narrative often finds its own rhythm, and begins to take off under its own steam. **Revision**, then, is a part of one’s **vision** of things, and must not be taken as a sign of failure

3.3.2 Different genres and conventions

Obviously, there cannot be any standard advice with regards to the opening of a narrative. Each kind, poetry, drama, fiction, etc., has its own peculiar requirements. Even now, daring experiments can only be made within the norms of each kind of writing. What may be an apt opening in a narrative poem may sound awkward in a novel or a short story. In other words, the opening of a narrative is organically linked to the requirements of the type.

Clearly, what has been suggested above applies chiefly to different forms of fiction—the novel, the novella, the tale or the short story—and is not intended to cover drama and poetry, though the question of opening is, in its own way, important in those genres also. True, a poem may begin with a startling line that makes the reader sit up, but we are not talking of openings here in that sense and

context. The opening in our context, is an integral part of the narrative process, and in a lyric or a song or a sonnet, there is hardly a narrative to tell. For the birth of a poem is often a matter of luck, sudden illumination or breakthrough, though even a great poet like W.B. Yeats is known to have prepared a prose version of a contemplated poem, and lifted some lines from it to fit the poetic frame. We are also leaving drama out of this account, for the theatre has its own conventions and constraints and, therefore, a separate statement would be needed for it.

3.3.3 Planned narratives and openings

Some novelists and short story writers plan their narratives very carefully, and go on to prepare a full outline to be fleshed out later. In such cases, the opening is carefully devised so that it becomes a part of the operative vision and structure. It impinges directly or indirectly upon the middle (development and process), and more significantly, upon the ending of the novel or the tale in question. In the hands of a great artist like Henry James such a plan usually, though not always, works well. For, basically, such constraints do not augur well for the health of the tale. Some novelists, therefore, depend a good deal on improvisation en route, and leave the narrative to take its significant form out of its own inner compulsions and energies. One may recall here Thackeray's statement that his characters took him where they liked; he was, so to speak, in their hands. A modern novelist like Saul Bellow, for instance, moves away from the planned, tight structures of his earlier novels (*Dangling Man*, *Seize the Day*, *The Victim*) to the open, relaxed, picaresque, catch-all form in later novels (such as *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King* and *Herzog*). The point we are trying to make is that the opening as a unit of composition may not be fully planned in advance where the novel in particular is concerned. It may even be desirable not to do so.

3.3.4 The opening in the novel

As we have hinted already, it really matters how the first sentence or even the first paragraph or paragraphs begin in a novel, and should the opening be arresting, startling or amusing, it straightaway arouses the reader's interest. Eventually, of course, it is the full body of the novel and its total effect that would tend to measure its value, not a flashy sentence or two at the start. Still, there are some interesting examples of such startling openings, and one of the well-known examples is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Its celebrated opening sentence has already passed into the realm of sayings and aphorisms. 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.'

Again, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* starts thus: 'Happy families are alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' These are good examples, but, as a rule the opening sentence or sentences in a work of longer fiction would hardly be remembered by the reader when he is through with the book. Or, take another opening:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road that a nicens little boy names baby tuckoo....

The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

-James Joyce

The appeal of such an opening is almost purely linguistic, and it has hardly any significant bearing on the theme of the novel, but its 'fairy story' air and its repetitive pattern and slang make it an admirable example of an arresting opening.

A good opening may set the tone as in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*:

What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.

When I think of my condition at the age of fifty five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins—my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music, lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, 'No, no, get back, curse you, let me along!' But how can they let me along? They belong to me. They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.

Now, the two-line opening paragraph has hardly any great merit, but the condensed, capsule second paragraph springs upon the reader all in a rush to whet his appetite, and soon plunges him into the whole man world of this American millionaire. And somehow, amazingly, the high comic tone persists till the end. The opening has done the trick, so to speak. But equally, the raciness of the tone characterizes the tempo of this rambling novel. So, here the opening paragraphs tie up with the opening as a unit of composition in a long narrative.

3.3.5 General hints and suggestions

- i) Try to finalise the title of the story before you plunge into the unknown territory ahead. Generally speaking, a kind of outline is in one's mind, even if not sketched out on paper. The title naturally has to indicate the spirit of the story, and should, therefore, be apt and effective. It may even be ironical or humorous, if such is your intention, and such the nature of your theme. As part of the opening process, the right title will automatically set brakes on your imagination, which may sometimes run away with the situation. Of course, this is not a strict practice, and you may well be obliged at times to write out the full story first, and then ponder over the problem of the title. And here also, you may have to score out several headings before you hit upon the right title.
- ii) In fact, even as the title is being finalized, you have to decide the question of the focus in the proposed work. Is it primarily a study of (a) character, (b) incident or situation, or of (c) mood or atmosphere? Is it again, a specimen of (a) thriller or murder mystery, (b) the supernatural (ghost stories etc.), (c) humour /farce, (d) fantasy/allegory, or (e) science fiction, etc.? The opening of your work will naturally be determined by the type of fiction you plan to write. For instance, a loaded hint or a startling comment or speech in a murder mystery may be just the right thing, and a joke in the case of a humorous narrative or sketch. Never give 'the game' away in the opening itself unless, of course, that is the whole point of your story.
- iii) Avoid a show of artiness as far as possible. A flamboyant but forced opening, even when attractive, will not do in the end. However, a genuinely startling opening gives your narrative a head-on advantage.

Edgar Allan Poe's celebrated statement, made in his review of Hawthorne's *Tales*, seems to sum up the matter. 'If his very first sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step.' says Poe, concerning a story-writer. This should not, however, be taken as the gospel truth or as a 'sure-success' formula, though Poe is right to add that each sentence must logically be linked to the one that precedes and the one that follows. Consider R.K. Narayan's opening sentences of 'Half-a-Rupree Worth'.

Subbaiah sold rice at the marketgate. In his shop you found, heaped in wicker baskets, all varieties of rice: from pebbly coarse rice to *Delhi Samba*. White as jasmine and slender as a needle. His shop was stuffy and dark but there was no place like it on earth for him....

This beginning foreshadows Subbaiah's end: 'death due to accidental toppling off of rice bags'.

Also, it is important not to prolong the opening, or stretch it out so that it begins to look a thing apart, hanging separately like a bunch of balloons. A good opening should glide comfortably, unobtrusively and economically into the next 'gear'. The germinal idea is to be developed into a certain set length, and you cannot afford to linger over 'effects,' etc.

- iv) Then, there is the question of a writer's prose style. Clearly, you cannot have a separate style for the opening of your narrative to make it look distinctive, but, you should, at all costs, avoid the use of old, tired and weather-beaten similes, 'set' phrases and conventional idioms, which is not to suggest that you may not use such linguistic props in any other part of your novel or story; only in such cases, they would not draw the reader's critical attention so much as they would do in respect of your openings.
- v) Personal style in tune with your world-view, if visible at the start, like a 'signature tune' in radio and TV, can win you an attentive audience. Hemingway's celebrated style is one obvious example, though a young apprentice would do well not to imitate it, but to understand its rightness. Its artful simplicity and bareness, if used as mere ploys, can end up as parody and artiness.

Nick stood up. He was all right. He looked up the track at the lights of the caboose going out of sight around the curve. There was water on both sides of the track, then tamarack swamp.

(Ernest Hemingway: 'The Battle')

3.4 BUILDING A CLIMAX

Climax is an intense and crucial point of the story which precipitates a crisis. A crisis is the culmination of tension and conflict which heads towards an inevitable resolution.

In a narration of imaginative content, the climax is a happening of heightened intensity, but well along the progression of the events or happenings narrated already. The climax leads to a resolution of the crisis contained in the story. The resolution may or may not be on the anticipated lines, but it never fails to be

convincing. Climax in both a short story and a novel performs the same function. It brings matters to a head, so to say. The different strands of the narrative suddenly acquire a new meaning and significance. It also reveals the direction in which to look for the 'message' of the story, if the author had intended one. Even otherwise, it reveals the unconscious intent of the author much more tangibly than the other earlier details. Climax assumes great importance in the sociological analysis of a writer's works. His leanings, affiliations, and his personal vision of the world, get revealed in far clearer terms in his climax than in the other segments of the story. The story given below will illustrate to you the art of building a climax, its nature and function.

3.4.1 Climax and resolution: An example

Malcolm Scott is an embittered young Englishman. He comes to India with some happy expectations but has not quite foreseen the hazards he would experience by way of the climate of the country, the general living conditions, the quality of assistance he must be content with in running his home, and so on. India looks an awful place to live in, and the Indians primitive and lacking in refinement. Of course he is not aware that a different culture can have a totally different, but equally valid, value system. His personal miscalculations and prejudices prevent him from seeing that the people he comes to rule over had a culture centuries before his own ancestors did. He cannot understand their tact and sophistication when they, as village elders, receive him as an official and even bribe him unobtrusively! He is not aware of the fact that he has a clerk who is intelligent enough to master five languages. Once he goes on an inspection tour of a few villages. He takes his young wife along, and their lodging for a few days has to be an inspection bungalow—the only roofed structure in a landscape of acres of fields and open land. On this tour his contempt for Indians takes the form of thoughtless mischief, and he lifts the saree of a woman bathing in a pond, just to know whether the 'animal' was a male or a female.....

The story moves towards its climax

From now on the story rushes towards its climax. Hardly is Scott back in his inspection bungalow than he and his wife notice a strange spectacle—men in ones and twos gathering round the bungalow. Each man carries a stick and stands rock-like. Scott discovers that his servants have slipped out. Now a stone comes crashing in. Scott and his wife know they are threatened but for what they do not know. Their only means of knowing is the clerk who knows five languages. The clerk goes out of the bungalow to enquire. He comes back with the news that the men are from the village the bathing woman comes from, and that they have come to seek an answer for Scott's misdemeanor. Scott at first thinks of shooting his way out of the situation, but the clerk points out the impossibility of such a course of action. Scott promises to pay some money to the woman as compensation. The clerk goes out to the mob to negotiate. The mob, he informs Scott, will have none of the money. Scott has violated a woman of their own. The just penalty is that the same should be done to a woman of Scott's kind. Scott's wife faints. Now the clerk asks not only Scott but his wife also to go out and beg their pardon.

What is a terse narration of a possible situation in colonial India comes to a climax most unexpectedly. Scott teases the woman not with the intent of assaulting

her; he is not in an agitated state of mind when he does it playfully, but in that action he reveals his deep-rooted contempt and racist prejudice towards a subject people. The climax in such stories is rather complicated because it is not easily identifiable. To a discerning reader, however, the indication is subtle and strong.

Resolution of the crisis

They beg pardon on their knees. Scott stays on in the town for another year and a half. He never mentions the inspection bungalow incident to anyone. Nor does he make any more remarks about India or Indians.

The crisis is resolved not by the readily conceivable solution of giving a thrashing to the guilty, but by transferring the outrage from the guilty to the principle underlying the guilt—insulting women, and devising a corresponding punishment. Personal sting and malice is taken out; no wonder Scott takes the punishment as a just retribution. He must have been at peace with his conscience because he continues to live in that region for a year and a half more. It is a conversion, a very radical conversion at that, but the climax brings it out effectively and effortlessly.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What is the nature and function of the climax in a story?

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- ii) In not more than 5 sentences, write another resolution to the story cited above. (150 words)

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

3.5 APPROPRIATE ENDINGS

Our experience of life as well as of literature is in the context of time. Hence the need for beginnings, middles and ends—points around which this experience is organized. Ours is a story-shaped world, and the story can be called a metaphor for reality. Stories, like lives, have an ending and an end. In both, endings and ends confer a sense of finality of accomplishment. However, by ending his stories, the writer does not package life into a neat aesthetic whole, but discovers its rich possibilities in varying contexts. Not a termination, an ending in a story is, in fact, in the nature of a revelation about people and things. ‘Is that so? I never imagined it this way’—are common reactions to ending in stories. The revelation is itself a moral act in that it leads to knowledge about the eccentricities of our behavior, about the deceptions of the world surrounding us, about dimensions hidden from our surface-view of things. As Aristotle argued, the proper function of the ending of a tragedy was to purge the unhealthy emotions of the audience (a moral act), and if it did not do so, the tragedy was not well-formed.

Considering that in constructing their plots, writers determine their beginnings in the light of the endings, it would not be wrong to say, to vary T.S. Eliot's memorable assertion, that 'in my ending is my beginning'. Endings determine the form of the story, the direction it would take in order to lend an experience, coherence and intelligibility. Form is what makes a story easily understandable. Form 'concludes' it even as the experience always remains unlimited.

This is why endings are not closures, for closures involve shutting off of experience, sealing it as it were. On the other hand, endings are only turning points in the flow of experience. Closures come when the subject is exhausted, endings when the subject reveals its inexhaustibility. In Kafka's 'The Trial' the hero is 'too tired to survey all the conclusions arising from the story...'. In quite a few other stories, too, the ending is open, leading to endless possibilities.

Unlike closures, endings provide a resolution of experience, both in artistic and thematic terms. Endings are invitations to further exploration even when they do not seem to say so. This is their deceptive power and their amazing hold on the reader's imagination.

3.5.1 Surprise endings

There are as many kinds of endings as there are short stories and novels, and the possibilities are rich and suggestive. Short stories are noted for their compactness, restricted compass and concentrated effects. Consequently, their endings will be determined by both the nature of the material (an event, a moment, a brief illumination, to mention a few instances), and the manner in which it is treated. Being a complex form of writing, embracing many narrative types, it would be wrong to make generalizations about endings in stories, but a few familiar examples may be given to show their scope and limitation. Our reading experience itself would give us an idea of the types of endings in stories. There are action stories, atmosphere stories, formula stories and many other intermediate types of stories—each with an appropriate ending. Many of the stories in R.K. Narayan's *Lawley Road*, may have no perceptible endings and yet we find them dependent upon some kind of a conclusion.

In such a story, the reading experience is built in the following way: while our expectations fluctuate with the unfolding of the plot, a situation that no one would have expected in the normal course does occur, and surprises us. Such an ending is unique in as much as it is not foreseen in the plot, even though it stays within the range of probability: it is single because once the ending occurs we begin to wonder whether it was not a slight gesture, a single hint, a sudden discourse, that might have caused our surprise.

In this connection, we could examine at some length O'Henry's well-known story, 'The Gift of the Magi'. This story is like a riddle in which our expectations are built up in a certain direction. We watch both husband and wife parting with their most precious possessions in order to give fitting gifts to each other. But at the moment of giving, they discover that the gifts have no value since they would be of little use to either. Our initial reaction is one of being tricked. But only later do we realize the pathos of the situation. By reversing our expectations, we acquire more insight into the working of the human mind and the futility of its sentimental concerns.

Maupassant's story, 'The Diamond Necklace', provides another evidence of a surprise ending accompanied by a sudden reversal of our expectations. As in the O'Henry story, we are brought face to face with a human situation. The fact that the original necklace turns out to be a fake, whereas the replaced one is of genuine diamonds, adds to the irony of the situation.

3.5.2 Ending in formula stories

Formula stories have long enjoyed popularity and critical recognition; but the kind we get to read today demand a minimum of intellectual effort to grasp them. All such stories end on the right note; the girl marries her dream lover, the adventurer finds his treasure and poetic justice never fails.

This class of stories would not be worth critical attention were it not for the fact that a majority of readers are familiar with these. These stories appear in magazines and other popular journals, and work to a neat formula or a readymade pattern. They reflect the reader's own fantasies projected outside. Neither their endings nor the climax of moods and premonitions is surprising in the true sense. Their endings are simply in full accord with our collective desires and sentiments. Every writer of television serials knows this and makes maximum use of the reader's susceptibilities. What makes them appealing is their utter predictability.

To write such stories requires a sharp perception of the reader's psychology, as well as familiarity with the kind of language which embodies our fantasies. A well-defined scheme of ideas and attitudes constitutes the 'plot' of the formula stories. They invite our identification with one or a group of characters (witness our response to the television creations). The narrative, by placing obstacles between desire and eventual fulfillment, makes anticipation of the end, an end in itself. It is by keeping this anticipation alive that formula stories succeed in a large measure. In formula stories, particularly the soap operas which we see on our television screens, the endings are stretched over a period of time so as to leave room for complications. Once the endings come, order is restored and our desire satisfied. A formula story appeals to our desire for order and wholeness, but it attracts more readers than other kinds of stories do, precisely because obstacles are removed, no matter what happens, and just deserts are meted out. This is why these stories have the widest possible audience among uninitiated readers.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Write a note on surprise and formula endings

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(Check your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit.)

3.6 SUMMING UP

To recapitulate;

- The importance of an opening lies in its capacity to arouse the reader's interest and curiosity immediately.

- Climax is a happening of heightened intensity and leads to a resolution. This needs to be convincing to make the experience self-sustaining.
- The endings in formula stories are a projection of the reader's desires and fantasies and are in the form of poetic justice — hence predictable.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Experience, observation and imagination. Unfortunately imagination alone is commissioned to substitute for experience and observation. This invariably leads to shallow writing.
- ii) **Hints:** Write about something that really happened. If that is not possible, then recall some similar incident that you must have heard about. Providing precise details would show your powers of observation.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Build up your answer using the following words: crisis, culmination, conflict, resolution.
- ii) The apology made by Michael Scott is not accepted. Now develop a different approach.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In surprise endings the story ends unexpectedly and no clue is given earlier on. However such endings are entirely within the range of possibility. Formula endings end on a predictable note and the readers get an impression of poetic justice having been meted out.

UNIT 4 ENSURING READABILITY

Structure

4.0 Aims and Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Readability — A Writer's Ultimate Goal

4.2.1 Choice of a situation

4.2.2 Direct experience

4.2.3 Make your beginning interesting

4.2.4 Ambiguity and suspense

4.2.5 Minutiae and readability

4.2.6 Language and readability

4.3 Dialogues Help to Ensure Readability

4.3.1 Dialogues in poetry

4.3.2 Dialogues in drama

4.4 How to Conclude

4.5 Summing Up

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn the importance of readability as the ultimate objective of all successful writing. By the end of this unit you will learn that:

- you should make your openings and endings as dramatic and interesting as possible.
- in order to capture and sustain your reader's interest, you may also use ambiguity and suspense.
- a skilful use of little details may also help you to lend an aura of credibility to your writing.
- you should avoid using complex sentences and heavy diction, since stilted language invariably hurts readability.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As a creative writer, you should employ every possible device to make your writing readable. You may recall what Lewis Carroll makes Alice say in the course of her adventures in the Wonderland:

‘What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?’

Well, this casual remark of a little girl seems to sum up ideally the role of ‘pictures’ (i.e., images and symbols) and ‘conversation’ (i.e., dialogues and monologues)

in any form of creative writing. These are the ingredients that enable a writer to seize and hold his reader's attention.

It is important that you keep up the reader's interest from beginning to end. It's like keeping the fire burning—poking, pushing the wood into a steady flame. In other words, each part of your writing must hold on its own—each para, nay, each sentence. This is the mark of a successful writer. If you let the reader's interest flag at any point, your writing will fall apart, the illusion will break, and your reader may turn to something else. A successful writer, therefore, should bring into play all his senses. Let the reader feel as though he is participating in an exciting experience. This was Joseph Conrad's main credo as a writer:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all, to make you see.

If you can make your reader see and hear what you are writing, you would ensure readability—and credibility. You would then be able to carry your reader along as if he were your fellow-traveller. He will then follow you all the way not so much interested in what you are saying but in just enjoying your company. 'To read a writer for me,' says Andre Gide, 'is not merely to get an idea of what he says, but to go off, with him, and travel in his company....' (Andre Gide: *Pretexts*—'Third Imaginary Interview')

4.2 READABILITY—A WRITER'S ULTIMATE GOAL

Let's now examine the concept of readability in the context of creative writing. If a short-story writer, a playwright, a feature-writer or a poet, cannot arrest his reader's interest and sustain it till the end, he has obviously failed. 'Of all the needs a book has, the chief need is that it be readable', observes Anthony Trollope—although paradoxically, his own fiction and miscellaneous writings fall short of this ideal. His writing was often too thin, and he let his reader's interest wander away from the central theme. How very rightly has Emerson stressed the need to keep your reader under your constant spell. 'Books take their place,' he says, 'according to their specific gravity as surely as potatoes in a tub.' So you should always remember that, in order to turn out anything really readable, you must have something exciting to say—not just a vague idea, a half-baked character, a nebulous scene. A story that hasn't yet taken any concrete shape in the writer's mind can never work out successfully. No wonder, if a story or a poem is called an artifact, it's because it's always skillfully structured, as a product of 'human workmanship'.

4.2.1 Choice of a situation

Situations play an important role in ensuring readability. A situation is to a story what flour is to bread. It is not only the substance of the 'stories' of short stories and novels but also the stuff of poetry. One of the earliest poetic outbursts came out of the situation of the sage Valmiki accidentally seeing a hunter kill a bird, letting its spouse suffer the pangs of separation. Epics of all languages have a situation of grave importance as their subject matter, and each epic contains a multiplicity of situations

In the centuries of creative writing in all parts of the world, almost all experiences possible to man have been written about. Although formal writing, until about five hundred years ago, was mostly about larger-than-life men and women, gods and goddesses, alongside there was also creative writing dealing with the ordinary and the lowly. As a matter of fact, though the main characters of the epics and classics of ancient times were gifted or specially blessed heroes and heroines, all the works had accounts of numberless men and women who were very close to ordinary life, almost like any of us today. Languages and cultures of great sophistication laid down special rules for creating characters, and these prescriptions continued to be followed for a fairly long time, and acted as a restraint upon a free choice of situations. That apart, the culture of a land imposes its own restraint on matters of speech and writing. Either consciously or unconsciously, every Indian observes certain taboos, and these eliminate a few more situations from creative writing. But in spite of these restraints, life in India has an abundant variety of situations for an aspiring writer.

Any experience or memory can serve as a situation for creative writing. Broadly speaking, experiences can be grouped under two heads: happy or unhappy. In creative writing, it so happens that some writers have a special leaning towards the one or the other. There can be no value judgement on this selection because a story, or a novel, or a poem, that springs from an unhappy situation need not necessarily be a sorrowful or depressing experience. On the other hand, it can take the reader directly to the heart of the human condition and give him a glimpse of truth. Happy situations convey a feeling of optimism and well-being, and they are an invaluable asset to human imagination and fantasy. Happy situations are, in a sense, the more difficult of the two to handle in a literary work of depth.

Situations can also be classified differently: childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, old age, senility; school, university, place of work; relationship with other men, other women; informal groups and formal groups, weddings, other celebrations, deaths and funerals; society as an amorphous mass or particular representatives of the society; religion, in general, a particular god or deity or a saint or holy place, personal religious experience which may range from ecstasy to acute feelings of remorse or guilt; politics of the land with all the ramifications—social, institutional and personal; law court, court buildings, judges, clerks of the judiciary, lawyers, witnesses, court cases, plaintiff, defendant, accused, sentence, prison, different forms of punishment, execution; existential situations, and situations provoking righteous indignation.

Situations can also be divided into two broad groups—human-interest situations, and those needing interpretations.

4.2.2 Direct Experience

As already stated, in the first instance any situation is good enough for creative elaboration. But it is best to choose only those which have directly affected the author to some extent. It is only then that the necessary involvement to activate the creative process can be generated. A single situation can be the seed for a whole work of creative imagination. It is also possible to take up a chain of interrelated or interconnected situations and weave them into a creative work. The important thing is that the main situation chosen must have, in some substantial manner, affected the writer. Only then will his writing acquire the right of authenticity.

Whether we examine the work of Valmiki or Shakespeare, the great masters took up stories which were already popular or had been recorded in some form or another. They took up an ordinary story and transformed it into a work of art by treating the subject with their vision. Ancient epics contain a large number of situations and deal with a variety of relationships and human feelings. They are ambitious works by exceptionally gifted and skilled men. It is unfortunate that we know so little of the time the epics write about, even more unfortunate that we know so little about the authors, their apprenticeship, and the experiences that shaped their art. Yet, although they might have taken up ready-made situations, they transformed such stories with their personalities—behind which lay a lifetime of intense living, feeling and thinking.

In creative writing, it is good to be ambitious, but one should also be realistic about one's own capability, potential and limitations. There are numerous accounts of how the writers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries wrote their masterpieces. A main characteristic of the writings of these centuries is that the first creations of a writer have generally drawn heavily from actual experiences. The first novel or the first stories are about himself, which is not bad in itself. The writer then has greater control over his or her material; he or she has plenty to choose from; the degree of authenticity is always higher. Childhood experiences offer a bountiful treasure to any aspiring writer. Whether the childhood was a happy one or not, is a matter of subjective judgment, but in any case the person has quite a few significant things of his or her childhood to talk about, discuss, reorder in his or her imagination, and present in interesting, creative work.

4.2.3 Make your beginning interesting

It's always a dramatic beginning that makes your writing readable. So you should work out your beginnings as carefully as possible. Remember that your editor or publisher is a very busy person, with piles of manuscripts waiting for his verdict. Most probably, he may not have the time to read through an entire piece before making his decision. And you are not present in his office to say: 'Please, wait till you get to the third page—that's where I've written something very exciting.' Often, he looks through just the first two or three paragraphs to decide whether he should read any further or not. So, if your opening hasn't done it, you have already lost the game. You will then get a politely phrased rejection slip: 'The editor thanks you for sending him your MS, but he regrets that he is unable to use it.' It is, therefore, essential that you shape your beginnings with discrimination. Let your opening sentence act as a sort of curtain-raiser. Plunge headlong into the thing itself, without beating about the bush. In order to learn how to begin your writing, study carefully as many opening paragraphs as possible of well-known writers—feature-writers, story-writers, poets, etc.

Check Your Progress 1

Read the following examples closely:

- i) Public speaking is a habit-forming activity, like coffee or tobacco; so many have now got into the habit that at present there are more speakers than listeners in our minds. (R.K. Narayan: 'The Need for Silence' from *Next Sunday*)
- ii) I know this is an odd story. I don't understand it myself and if I set it down

in black and white it is only with a faint hope that when I have written it I may get a clearer view of it.....(Somerset Maugham: 'The Kite')

iii) Sir Hasan was surprised at the cordiality of the man's greeting as he looked out from the ferry-boat which was carrying him ashore to Gibraltar from the steamer, (Mulk Raj Anand: 'Appearance and Reality')

iv) I can smell violence in the air
like the lash of coming rain-
mass hatreds drifting grey across the moon

(Keki Daruwalla: 'Ruminations')

Which of the openings given above is the most dramatic—and which the least? Write your comments in about a paragraph each.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

4.2.4 Ambiguity and suspense

Let's now consider two cardinal principles of readability, not only for a successful opening but to ensure the sustained interest of the reader from the beginning to the end.

First, we may consider ambiguity. What does it mean in this context? It just implies that a writer shouldn't give himself away completely in the course of his writing, more particularly in the opening. If your reader has picked up 'the thing itself' right at the start, why should he bother to read on till the end? It's like a detective story-writer who gives away the clue to the murder right in the beginning, letting the reader in on the central mystery. On the other hand, a skillful writer prefers to keep his reader with all sorts of teasing ambiguities, riddles and traps.

And since ambiguity always generates suspense in the reader's mind, he keeps reading on and on. He pauses here and there to comprehend what an understatement might have implied. Did the answer to a question carry three meanings—or more? Did a character's nod signify assent or disagreement? In other words, a successful writer is like a young beautiful girl who never commits herself to her boy-friend, but just leads him on with nods, hums, sighs, smiles and mute whisperings. It's the same guessing game in courtship, as in creative writing.

4.2.5 Minutiae and Readability

An ingenious manipulation of detail is another device to seize and hold a reader's interest. It's seldom the main theme that does it—the palpable story-line, the central argument, the basic tenor. On the other hand, it's often the little details that build up the reader's interest by investing the writing with credibility. Saul Bellow observes that classics will 'interest us in a scene, in a dialogue, a mood, an insight, in language, in the character, in the revelation of a design....' And such feats are often accomplished through a judicious handling of detail. This strategy, however, should never be overdone; a writer must ensure that each

detail, in some way, relates itself to the central vision of the writer. Nothing hurts readability more than irrelevance.

This is, for instance, how Arnost Lustig, a well-known Czechoslovakian story-writer, describes his protagonist looking intently at a young woman, without wasting a single detail. Everything here is grist to the mill.

He narrowed his eyes and saw her clearly like the white summit of some snow-capped mountain. Her brow was smooth, and her skin well-nigh transparent; she had loosely flowing golden hair and an equally fair nape. The violence with which her image kept returning to him frightened him. (Arnost Lustig: 'Stephen and Anne')

Similarly, a writer should try to make the image of his characters come alive through such details as their dress, the tonal modulations of their voice, their gesticulations, etc. only then will the reader be able to conjure up the people behind their words.

4.2.6 Language and Readability

One of the main impediments to easy readability is a language that is opaque loaded with heavy latinised diction, and sentences that groan under involved clauses. Such a style invariably turns the reader away. Even if a story has an interesting plot, a feature-article an exciting subject, it will not come through unless it is written in a lucid and forthright style. There is a great deal of truth in George Orwell's observation that insincerity leads to artificial writing. On the other hand honest feeling and intense imagination always seek expression in a language that is unburdened with ornate diction or prolixity. 'The great enemy of clear language,' says Orwell, 'is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns, as it were instinctively, to long words and exhausted idioms like a cuttle fish, squirting out ink'. ('Politics and the English Language' in *Shooting an Elephant*). And whenever a writer lapses into insincere and ostentatious language, he also loses the reader's sympathy and his attention. For instance, imagine someone condoling with a friend on his mother's death in such clichéd expressions as: 'I have come with a heavy heart to offer you my deepest condolences over your mother's tragic demise...' Such a formal, stylized sharing of grief is most likely to leave the bereaved party cold and unmoved. On the other hand, one is likely to touch a deep chord if one just says: 'I don't know what to say....this must have been a terrible blow to you. I am only reminded of my own mother's loss, two years ago....' And then let silence take over and let the reader fill in the gap himself.

Check Your Progress 2

Read the following passage closely and answer the questions given at the end.

- i) Mother died today. Or, may be, yesterday. I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: **Your mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Deep sympathy.** Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday (Albert Camus: *The Outsider*)
- ii) It was Sunday. Chance was in the garden. He moved slowly, dragging the green hose from one path to the next, carefully watching the flow of the

water. Very gently he let the stream touch every plant, every flower, every branch of the garden. Plants were like people; they need care to live, to survive their diseases, and to die peacefully.

(Jerzy Kosinski: *Being There*)

- iii) It had a gloomy grandeur, but owed its character almost all to its noble shape and to the fine architectural doors, as high as those of grand frontages, which leading into various rooms, repeated themselves on either side at intervals. They were surmounted with old faded painted escutcheons, and here and there in the spaces between them hung brown pictures, which I noted as speciously bad, in battered and tarnished frames that were yet more desirable than the canvasses themselves.

(Henry James; *The Aspern Papers*)

- iv) The Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa has emerged as a formidable voice, especially after the critically renowned *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* which broke through the barriers of translatorial dilution, to establish its credentials as a veritable **tour de force**. Llosa's newest novel repeats the feat in spite of the patently complex structure and style that constantly threaten to undermine the cogency of the theme. (From a review of *The Real Life of Alajandra Mayta* in *The Indian Express*)

- v) An old woman grabs
hold of your sleeve
and tags along
she wants a fifty paise coin.

(Arun Kolatkar: 'An Old Woman')

- a) Which of the passages quoted above is most readable—and why? Write your comments in one paragraph.

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- b) And now rewrite, in a simpler style, either passage (iii) or (iv).

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

4.3 DIALOGUES HELP TO ENSURE READABILITY

We have a rough idea of what dramatic dialogue means in a drama. There is an exchange of conversation between characters; the conversation is held in the

present, but it embraces the past, and also influences the future course of action. The conversation is caused by some event or statement, by someone involved in the story and the situation. The dialogue is dramatic, because (a) it is rooted in the situation, (b) its substance affects the course of events, and (c) it reveals the personality of the speakers. In that sense, dramatic dialogue can be said to be a product of the past, present and future of an event, a story, and the characters involved in it.

Even outside the limits of drama, in different kinds of narratives, such as short story, novel and narrative poetry, dialogue can play an important role by helping a writer to dramatise ideas, incidents or crises. Dialogue is a useful artistic device to give one's narrative, pace and verisimilitude. Used skillfully, it brings in the feeling of immediacy into the situation, creates the illusion that we are actually witnessing a scene, hearing people talk, getting involved in the situation, getting to know the characters better.

Let us see what all this means. Here is a dialogue from Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (which, if you haven't read, you must – a Penguin edition is easily available):

She said, 'Pinkie, I got to tell you. I wanted to keep you from worrying – but there's got to be someone I don't have to lie to. That wasn't Mum, Pinkie.'
He came slowly up, watching her closely, judging. 'Who was it?'
'It was that woman, The one who used to come to Snow's asking questions.'
'What did she want?'
'She wanted me to go away from here.'
'Why?'
'Pinkie, she **Knows**.'
'Why did you say it was your Mum?'
'I told you—I didn't want you to worry.'

There are two persons in this dialogue. A girl, not very educated ('I got to tell you'), on the defensive and also protective ('I wanted to keep you from worrying'), is making a confession to a boy, who is her friend, perhaps her lover or husband. He is also involved in something serious, perhaps criminal ('she knows'), so that the woman who used to come to Snow's (the name of a teashop), wanted the girl to leave Pinkie. There is a deception, followed by a confession, which however is not taken lightly.

This piece of dialogue is dramatic in that it arises out of a situation and makes the characters come alive. A woman comes to see the girl (Rose), a woman old enough to look like her mother. She knows something, and the girl realizes that the woman's knowledge would worry Pinkie. The woman also thinks that the girl should leave the place, as the place and the company she is keeping, is bad, perhaps dangerous. From this short extract, the reader can get an idea of the central thrust in the story—foolish, protective love, some nasty incident in the past, suspicion and accusation. Through the dialogue, we can identify the characters, reach out to their past, and anticipate their future.

4.3.1 Dialogues in Poetry

Let us take another example, this time from poetry, from Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (Oxford University Press):

‘John....John, calm down, calm down, at least
 Tell me what happened. Did you tease him?’
 ‘Me tease him? That freak climbed the bed
 And urinated near my head
 Enough’s enough! Liz, don’t appease him.
 Have the cat neutered. It’ll cure
 All his aggression, that’s for sure.’

When John’s invective grows too torrid
 (‘I’ll cut them off myself’, et al.)
 Liz exclaims, ‘John, don’t be so horrid.’
 ‘Well, ship him off to Senegal
 Or somewhere—Liz, you’d better do it-
 Or—mark my words—that cat will rue it.’
 ‘Oh, darling, don’t be so annoyed.’
 ‘What should I be then? Overjoyed?’
 ‘Of course not, dear. I’m very sorry.
 Let’s change the sheets. He’s twelve years old.
 He really has a heart of gold.’
 ‘I’ll bet!’ ‘Well, dear, try not to worry.
 As for that other thing, that would
 —At his age—do more harm than good.’
 ‘So what should I do—grin and bear it?’
 ‘Make sure the bedroom door is locked.’

This is humorous dialogue (humorous for the reader, at least) between lovers. The background is very clear. The woman’s cat has urinated on the bed to spite the man; it’s obvious that the cat hates him. The man can hardly contain his anger, and proposes measures, violent and non-violent, to remove the cat menace. It’s also obvious that his mistress is very fond of the cat. The dialogue tells us a lot about the man’s temper, the woman’s amused coolness, and the cat’s personality. One can see that the cat is going to interfere seriously in the lovers’ relationship.

The dialogue is dramatic, not the least because the author has handled the speech so well. One notices the speech rhythm—the short pauses, the exclamations, the questions, the use of parentheses, and the flow of John’s invectives. There are other men, women, and cats in the story (which is in verse), and many other dialogues, but the one quoted here, is the only possible dialogue which could reveal the characters and the situation. It is the inevitability of the dialogue, inevitable because of the situation and the characters, that makes it dramatic. If narrated in the bland third person, the incident, which bears importantly on the story, would have lost its immediacy and closeness to the reader.

4.3.2 Dialogues in Drama

Let us now examine a piece of dramatic dialogue from drama. It’s from John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (Faber):

Cliff : **(quietly)**. Don't let's brawl, boy. It won't do any good.

Jimmy : Why don't we brawl? It's the only thing left I'm any good at.

Cliff : **(to Alison)**. You've let this genuflecting sin jobber win you over, haven't you? She's got your back, hasn't she?

Helena : Oh for heaven's sake, don't be such a bully! You've no right to talk about her mother like that!

Jimmy **(Capable of anything now)**. I've got every right. That old bitch should be dead!

(To Alison). Well? Aren't I right? **Cliff and Helena look at Alison tensely, but she just gazes at her plate.**

I said she's an old bitch, and should be dead! What's the matter with you? Why don't you leap to her defense!

Cliff gets up quickly, and takes his arm.

Cliff Jimmy, don't!

Jimmy pushes him back savagely, and he sits down helplessly, turning his head away onto his hand.

There are four characters here: Jimmy, Cliff, Helena, and the non-speaking Alison, against whom and whose family Jimmy is ranting nastily. There is violence in the air ('don't let's brawl, boy'), which finds expression in the language. Jimmy is one of those angry young men, angry about religion, and angry about the upper classes (besides many other things in life and society, although these do not come up in this excerpt)—both of which are represented by his wife's family. He is in a particularly vile mood, and would like nothing better than an explosion from either Alison or her upper class friend, Helena. Alison does not respond to his raving; Cliff tries to calm him down unsuccessfully; Helena isn't impressed; Jimmy is, therefore, all the more anxious to provoke them, so that they do or say something to match his insanity. He picks on Alison's mother and in particularly coarse language, abuses her. Jimmy doesn't quite succeed; instead of anger, he has provoked indifference in Alison, and in Helena, contempt. Throughout the play, the audience keeps asking. 'What is it that Jimmy is trying to prove?' The dialogue here, in that sense, is a mirror of the play.

Dramatized writing is really one way of achieving effects which could also have been achieved by other modes of narration, except that it is a more direct, a quicker way. It is a more direct way in that we see the characters living the drama of the moment, reacting to it, influencing its course, being shaped by what is happening to them and to others. It is a quicker way, because with the images and sounds of the language in their speech, the characters at once open up the entire world of experiences, ideas, and beliefs in which they are rooted. In their speech they are sharing meanings and experiences, showing a community of culture, or, when they fail to do so, pointing out the differences in the worlds they live in – showing that such a contrast can underline human situations where social, cultural or emotional communication is impossible.

i) What is meant by dramatic dialogue?

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ii) What makes a dialogue dramatic?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

4.4 HOW TO CONCLUDE?

If you have learnt the importance of a dramatic opening in any form of writing, you should also learn how to finish off a piece—a feature article, a story or a poem. In other words, your ending should be worked out with the same meticulous care as your beginning. There are two types of endings; a closed and an open ending.

A closed ending is the type of conclusion that attempts to round off a theme neatly, leaving nothing to the reader's imagination. It's like solving a mathematical problem with authoritarian assertion. This sort of ending may work sometimes in a feature article, a book-review, or an interview story, but it never works in a short story or a poem. A tame ending often reads like this: 'To sum up, therefore...'. 'in brief....' Such conclusions sound too simplistic and dogmatic. Take, for instance, this conclusion from an article on 'India at the Crossroads':

To reiterate, therefore, it is necessary that India, while advancing technologically, should not forsake its great spiritual heritage because her destiny lies in maintaining a balance between science and morality, between change and tradition...

On the other hand we have an open kind of ending. This is the kind of ending that enhances readability because it respects the reader by inviting him to join the creative process. Here the reader works almost as the writer's collaborator since he is free to imagine the story or the poem taking any shape after the 'ending', which in fact, reads like the beginning of another story or a poem. One may here quote T.S. Eliot's famous line: 'In the end is my beginning', since it aptly seems to define the nature of a suggestive ending. Take, for instance, the open ended conclusion of the story titled 'Ariadne' by the famous Russian story-writer Chekhov;

‘I’m beginning to believe in spirits,’ he called to me, looking back. ‘The spirit of Ilarion seems to have uttered a true prophecy. Oh, if only....’

The day after this meeting I left Yalta, and how Shamokhin’s love affair ended I don’t know.

4.5 SUMMING UP

In brief, this Unit has stressed the significance of readability as the cardinal feature of every successful form of writing – a feature article, a story or a poem. A writer should not only make his beginnings and endings interesting, but should also use other devices to capture and sustain the reader’s interest – such as (a) the use of suspense, (b) the use of little details, and (c) simple and forthright language, unencumbered with latinised diction and involved sentence structure.

4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

Hint:

Ask yourself where the author has “plunged headlong into the thing itself.” (I would think its passage four).

Ask yourself which one of the four passages sounds as if the author’s introduction will run on for a while.

In my opinion passage one is the least dramatic. Your answers may differ from mine.

Check Your Progress 2

- a) See in which passage the writers’ personal involvement shows through. I would say (i) is most readable and also (v).
- b) Start off with breaking up the complex sentences, substituting simpler words for the difficult ones. For example take the last sentence from (iii). Break it up into three shorter sentences thus:
 - i) The frontages had old family crests hung above them.
 - ii) Between the crests were hung badly painted and faded brown pictures in battered and tarnished frames.
 - iii) Yet these frames were more attractive than the paintings themselves.

Now do the same for the rest of the sentences.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Dramatic dialogue refers to dramatization of ideas, moods, feelings and opinions in the form of conversation between characters in a literary work.
- ii) Dialogues become dramatic only when their substance is rooted in the situations which give rise to them. They reveal the personalities of the speakers and influence the future action in the plot. In that sense they contribute to the readability of a piece.