

I B.A. English

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Unit –II Prose

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The Art of Story – Telling

- Richard Steele

Richard Steele and Joseph Addison are the pioneers of English essays. Steele started the *Tatler* and afterwards the *Spectator* and finally the *Guardian*. By founding and editing the *Tatler*, Richard Steele single handedly invented the concept of the periodical essay. This new genre, with its accessible language and collective themes, was a response to a through change in British society, and the reading public.

Richard Steele's essay, *The Art of Story - Telling* was published in *The Guardian*.

It is rather curious that while Steele named his essay *The Art of Story - Telling* he makes an incidental comment that story telling is not an art but what we call a knack. But Steele calls his essay *The Art of Story - Telling*. The point is that the word art contains two meanings. First, it denotes a product of creative imagination and in this sense a painting of Picasso is as much as work of art as a sonnet of Shakespeare. But the second meaning of the word denotes human skill as opposed to nature. Steele sees the word 'art' in the title of his essay, keeping the first meaning of it in mind. But when he says, 'story telling is therefore not an art but knack', he has recourse to the second meaning of the word. In fact it is taken for granted that art is

the manifestation of man's innate power, his genius; it follows that art is not opposed to nature, for genius itself is a gift of nature.

According to Steele, storytelling involves a faculty of nature; unless one is naturally gifted, one will not be cut a smart figure as a story teller.

Steele starts with the assumption that when a man lacks creative imagination, he cannot be a successful story teller. In this connection, he refers to Tom Lizard and his brother Will, the Templar. The former has the good fortune of having a 'knack' for storytelling, the result is that wherever he relates a story he enlivens it with humour and dramatic charm and it is quite an easy job for him to entertain his listeners immensely. On the other hand his brother, Will, the Templar is, in no sense, a man of genius. The secret of success in impressing the listener is not known to him. Nevertheless, he goes to entertain people by telling a story. But as he starts his story, he only fumbles. The reality is that since the man is not naturally cut out for being a story teller, his attempt to please his friends by narrating stories goes in vain. So Steele illustrates the point that story telling is not an art but a knack.

Though a genius alone is entitled to shine as a story teller, there are some salient features that characterize what may be called 'the art of storytelling'. That is to say, even if a story teller is gifted with genius, he cannot function without genius discipline. The method of good story telling is discussed category wise in the remaining part of Steele's essay.

First, storytelling has something dramatic inherent in it. Hence the story cannot avoid conversation. Next, for the sake of economy, the narrative should not be obscure and quizzier. Next, the story teller cannot do without giving appropriates of humour to his narrative. Besides, the story teller should move his limbs dramatically along with reflecting various impressions on his face according to the moods and sentiments of the character with which he identifies himself.

The second point is that the story teller should relate his expedition by extracting the essential and rejecting the redundant. He must throw light on the pleasing aspects of life, setting aside the disagreeable parts. In fact, the story teller must not be unduly serious and grave. Humour is the soul of good story telling.

Thirdly, the story teller ought to avoid the practice of heavy digressions. Fourthly, the beginning of story is highly important. He must not indulge in long introduction. After all, obscurity is not what a story teller should prefer. Lastly the story should end normally, giving a jerk of surprise to the listeners.

Hence Steele calls story telling an art and adds the traits a story teller should have in order to impress the listener. The great charm of Steele's essay is its naturalness. The conversational tone of Steele's essays reflects the growing demands for learned discussion in an informal accessible language.
