



## **VULGARITY IN LITERATURE according to ALDOUS HUXLEY**

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### **Abstract**

There are certain terms currently used by men of letters which are not quite clear to most of the readers. Sometimes we are not absolutely certain about the meanings of the words which they are using at a particular time. Huxley ridicules the idea of holding a conference to discuss methods of suppression of obscene literature, without defining the word 'obscene'.

Similarly the word 'vulgar' has been used by some literary critics, without understanding the meaning of the word. In fact, 'vulgar' is used in different senses. It is merely a term of abuse, if we call a man vulgar. Actually we mean to convey our dislike or disapproval of the man. Sometimes a man is called vulgar, if his behavior does not befit the society to which he belongs. But standards of judgment in matters of behavior vary from society to society and sometimes even in the same society from one class to another. And no one can deny that the social climate of a particular people keeps on changing all the time.

**Keywords:** vulgarity, literature, Aldous Huxley, excessive emotions & protestations, Dickens

### **Introduction**

Huxley is a talented literary critic. He has an analytical turn of mind, with a penetrating insight. He condemns excessive ornamentation or loud protestations, and calls these trends as highly vulgar. What he says is clear and categorical. He speaks out his mind confidently. He is not a mere traditionalist. His remarks are subjective. Huxley's criticism is spiced with wit and humour. There is a tone of mockery running through his essay.

A certain man may be vulgar in an intrinsic sense, and therefore rightly called a nature's non-gentlemen. He is no better than an Indian untouchable. Yet, he is vain and arrogant, and tries to mix with men superior to him. This is the hall-mark of his vulgarity-this pretentiousness in any field is low in itself.



### **Vulgarity in different spheres of life and literature**

There is a vulgarity in the spheres of morals, a vulgarity of emotions and intellect, and vulgarity even of the spirit. This shows that a man may belong to a higher class in one sphere of life, and yet be low in another. A man, for instance, may be intellectually very refined, but emotionally extremely vulgar. These are instances of personal vulgarity. In literature we come across numerous characters who exhibit emotional and intellectual vulgarity. Such characters are drawn from life, and gave a picture of realism.

### **Professional Vulgarity**

Some literary writers exhibit themselves in a grotesque manner, such exhibitionism is always vulgar. Some budding writers, becoming self-conscious are thus greatly discouraged, and they do not see the light of the day. Thomas Grey laments them as “mute inglorious Miltons”. But the really great writer, courageously and boldly, comes formed into the open, and wins applause caring little for the charge of vulgarity if any.

### **Old nations of vulgarity in literature**

There was a time when all references to the human body and its functions were regarded as vulgar. In France, even a mention of the word ‘handkerchief’ in a literary work was thought to be vulgar, because a handkerchief implied the blowing of a nose, and the blowing of a nose was considered to be one of the unpleasant bodily necessities. Thus the body and its functions were banished from this sphere of French Art. The classical French tragedies avoided all reference to bodily functions and thus adopted an ascetic code.

Huxley rightly condemns this stoic view of literature. He says that any literary writing that refuses to take cognizance of the human body would undoubtedly appear to be anemic and unreal. You cannot escape from the essential facts of life. Not only the blowing of noses, not even the grosser functions like excreting and copulation can be tabooed in realistic expression of literature.

### **Huxley’s view of vulgarity in literature**

According to Huxley, vulgarity in literature means an excessive ornamentation. All obvious or deliberate effort to produce certain artificial effects are vulgar. They have a jarring effect on a discerning reader. A true artist would avoid all gaudy images and extraneous jewels. Vulgarity means a lack of good taste. Any writer who tries merely to show off his talents for producing certain artificial effects when he has in fact nothing valuable to say is certainly vulgar. It is like a person who suddenly comes into possession of considerable wealth and makes an indecent display of it.

An example of this form of vulgarity in literature is provided by most of poetry written by Edgar Allen Poe. Poe makes his poetry too poetical. He behaves like a man wearing a diamond ring on every finger. There is too much of musicality in Poe’s poetry. His tactless and artistic use of proper names to produce rhyming effects is indeed very vulgar.



### **The vulgarity of excessive sentiment and protestations**

Sometimes a writer makes an excessive display of some emotions, which are not quite deep-seated. Worse than that is the case of a writer who fabricates emotions in order to make a loud protestation. Such artificialities are extreme examples of vulgarity. Huxley denounces an Italian poet D'Annunzio, who in his writings make much ado about nothing

Also, Huxley mentions a novel, "Seraphita" by the French writer Balzac as a case of too much vulgar protestation about matters which the writer knows very little. Balzac blunders in trying to express mystical emotions without adequate intuitions.

Charles Dickens is another such writer whom Huxley accuses of emotional vulgarity. In his novel, "the old curiosity-shop", Dickens gives an excessively sentimental account of misfortunes and death of Little Nell. Charles Dickens had an overflowing heart. Whenever he becomes emotional he stops using his intelligence. Whenever he is in the melting mood, he seizes to see the reality, and his emotions just overflow.

Huxley's comments on Balzac and Dickens are perfectly sound. There is no denying the fact that Dickens's pathos are highly exaggerated. This amounts to vulgarity of excessive emotions. As compared to Dickens's account of Little Nell's death, Dostoevsky's account of the death of the child in his novel "Brothers Karamazov" is deeply moving. That is so because Dostoevsky gives us plenty of factual details, while the emotion-blinded Dickens takes almost no notice of what goes on in Little Nell's neighborhood during the child's last days. Dickens gives the readers nothing else, but the sufferings of an innocent child. He heightens the reader's emotions excessively.

### **Conclusion**

Aldous Huxley exposes the false notions of vulgarity in literature. He satirizes the literary man's vulgarity in failing to distinguish between the genuine and the bogus ones. However, Huxley is never pungent. His satire is mixed with appropriate humour. He takes pleasure in poking fun at various celebrated writers referring to vulgarity in literature.

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