PREFACE

With its grounding in the "guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Equality, Affordability and Accountability," the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisions flexible curricular structures and creative combinations for studies across disciplines. Accordingly, the UGC has revised the CBCS with a new Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) to further empower the flexible choice based credit system with a multidisciplinary approach and multiple/ lateral entry-exit options. It is held that this entire exercise shall leverage the potential of higher education in three-fold ways - learner's personal enlightenment; her/his constructive public engagement; productive social contribution. Cumulatively therefore, all academic endeavours taken up under the NEP 2020 framework are aimed at synergising individual attainments towards the enhancement of our national goals.

In this epochal moment of a paradigmatic transformation in the higher education scenario, the role of an Open University is crucial, not just in terms of improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) but also in upholding the qualitative parameters. It is time to acknowledge that the implementation of the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF), National Credit Framework (NCrF) and its syncing with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) are best optimised in the arena of Open and Distance Learning that is truly seamless in its horizons. As one of the largest Open Universities in Eastern India that has been accredited with 'A' grade by NAAC in 2021, has ranked second among Open Universities in the NIRF in 2024, and attained the much required UGC 12B status, Netaji Subhas Open University is committed to both quantity and quality in its mission to spread higher education. It was therefore imperative upon us to embrace NEP 2020, bring in dynamic revisions to our Undergraduate syllabi, and formulate these Self Learning Materials anew. Our new offering is synchronised with the CCFUP in integrating domain specific knowledge with multidisciplinary fields, honing of skills that are relevant to each domain, enhancement of abilities, and of course deep-diving into Indian Knowledge Systems.

Self Learning Materials (SLM's) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. It is with a futuristic thought that we now offer our learners the choice of print or e-slm's. From our mandate of offering quality higher education in the mother tongue, and from the logistic viewpoint of balancing scholastic needs, we strive to bring out learning materials in Bengali and English. All our faculty members are constantly engaged in this academic exercise that combines subject specific academic research with educational pedagogy. We are privileged in that the expertise of academics across institutions on a national level also comes together to augment our own faculty strength in developing these learning materials. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders whose participatory zeal in the teaching-learning process based on these study materials will enable us to only get better. On the whole it has been a very challenging task, and I congratulate everyone in the preparation of these SLM's.

I wish the venture all success.

Professor. Indrajit Lahiri

Vice-Chancellor

NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Netaji Subhas
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Course : Introduction to Literary Criticism
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Module–I : Literary Criticism: Historical Overview

Module–II : Literary Criticism from the Renaissance to the Neoclassical Period

Module 1:

Literary Criticism: Historical Overview

Unit - 1 ❑ Introduction to Literary Criticism

Structure

1.1.1. Objectives

Dear learners, the objective of this unit is to trace the origin and development of Literary Criticism, and to equip you with the basic knowledge about the major concepts in the field. This will enable you to properly understand the critical essays included in your syllabus. We will explore some fundamental questions such as: What is literary criticism? Why should we study literary criticism? How can we apply it to reading literary texts? How will the texts prescribed in your syllabus help you in understanding the literary texts you will have to study during the course and beyond?

1.1.2. Introduction

This may be your first serious encounter with the term 'literary criticism.' You have been

reading literary pieces for a long time but you have not systematically studied the principles and strategies of criticising literary works., so this new concept may be difficult for you to grasp. Hence it will be our efforts in this unit to familiarise you with the ideas and practices of literary criticism. If acquired systematically, this will sensitise you to the finer aspects of literary craft and will prepare you to appreciate the literary works you are going to read in the undergraduate course and even later.

You will find some parallelism between this course on Introduction to Literary Criticism (6CC-EG-03) and Introduction to Literature and Language (5CC-EG-01), both of which deal with history. While the latter traces the history of the English language and literature, the former explores the history of one of the genres of literature – criticism or the critical aspects followed during the entire history of literature. If you look at the module and unit titles of both the papers, you will perceive a common method: to follow the history chronologically, following it century-wise, keeping in mind the widely accepted nomenclatures of literary periodisation, and often using them. More than that, our argument there (5CC-EG-01) was that the English literature, right from the beginning went through multiple cultural influences from across the world and in the end embodies multicultural traditions. The same is true of English literary criticism which received its sustenance from classical European criticism which nourished it all along its journey. Modern European and American criticism too influenced it greatly as did the Oriental philosophical traditions.

1.1.3. What is Literary Criticism

'Criticism' is a genre of literature. It has been defined in many ways . Mostly, it is described as the art of interpretation, commentary, exposition, and judgment. The term comes from the Greek word *kritikos* and the Latin word *criticus*. As an established genre, literary criticism addresses several interlinked questions. In his editorial Preface to Harry Blamires' *A History of Literary Criticism*, A. Norman Jeffares observes:

The study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote? What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background? Was the writer accepting or rejecting the literary conventions of the time, or developing them, or creating entirely new kinds of literary expression? Are there interactions between literature and the art, music or architecture of its period? Was the writer affected by contemporaries or isolated?

Habib too catalogues some similar issues that literary criticism as a genre considers:

We need to know why a text was written, for whom it was written, what religious or

moral or political purposes motivated it, as well as its historical and cultural circumstances. Then, indeed, we can move on to the issues of its style, its language, its structure, and its deployment of rhetorical and literary techniques. (Habib 1-2).

These are some of the questions that shape the contours of a critic's response to a literary text. A critic therefore is expected to have a comprehensive idea not only about a specific text and its author but also about the historical context and socio-cultural background against which s/he produces his or her work and the ideology that motivates his or her intellectual and creative faculties.

English literary criticism has its roots in classical European, primarily Greek and Roman, critical treatises and medieval criticism. So pervasive was this influence that "[i]n the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers were still hotly debating how far the authority of the ancients ought to determine literary practice" (Blamires 1). It is because of this profound impact on British writers that we include classical European critics such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus in the syllabuses of our universities. Philip Sidney (1554-1586) is considered to be the first great poet-critic in England. John Dryden (1659-1700), however, is considered to be the 'father of English criticism' which in the meantime evolved as a more modern and systematic genre. Dryden was the first person to use the term 'criticism' to refer to any formal discussion of a literary piece. You will gain more knowledge about Dryden in Unit 7, Module 2, which is on John Dryden's – "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," (an extract). In that unit you will discover Dryden, a canonical poet, as a literary critic and learn about his approach to the tradition of literary criticism.

Criticism acts as a lens for understanding a piece of literature deeply. As a student of literature, we should be trained as ones skilled in understanding the literary tools and rhetorical devices employed by creative writers. Equipped with such a skill, one is capable of explaining a literary piece in a more insightful manner than a common reader. This is where literary criticism comes into play. It will enable you comprehend the art and science of fictional and non-fictional works. As a learner of English and Cultural Studies, it is important to understand the role of a critic and his or her function.

Now, let me explain who a critic actually is. A critic is someone who can provide a logical analysis and critical judgment of a literary piece; s/he is a reader who is trained in the tools of judgment. The dictionary definition of a critic is that s/he is "a person who judges the merits of literary or artistic works, especially one who does so professionally,"

In this context, you should also be familiar with the term 'theory' and try to find out whether the two terms – 'criticism' and 'theory' – are interchangeable or they should be differentiated. Although in this paper, you will not be introduced to theories in detail, we need to understand their differences. Literary criticism is usually based on the analysis of a text against the historical and cultural background of the age when s/he wrote. 'Theory,'

more appropriately 'Literary Theory,' is more discursive and interdisciplinary in approach. We will study theories in detail at the postgraduate level. However, in Module 1, Unit 5, titled "From Literary Criticism to Literary Theory," you will learn about the basic theories and how criticism progresses towards theory. It will sensitise you to the differences between criticism and literary theory and their relationship. For a better understanding regarding this, you are recommended to go to the links provided in the Open Access Audio-Visual E-Resources as provided below in the Activities section below. All these links are suggested so that you can listen to the contents and understanding the concepts clearly.

Activities:

1. Go to the following open access audio-visual e-resources for Listening:

a Literary Theory and Literary Criticism introduction: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiqTvv3BjE8&list=PL9QS4mSP_yrYMLBm7ykk5Y7M_P6qQ2765

b. Introduction to literary criticism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8K9RkWWGmg&list=PL9fwy3NUQKwau8iW0Un7B0Fm120eJDzpc

c. Introduction to Theory of Literature with Paul H. Fryhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YY4CTSQ8nY&list=PLD00D35CBC75941BD

d. Introduction - Introduction to Literary Theory - Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay https:/www.youtube.comwatch?v=RAoQgPI5nC0&list=PLFW6lRTa1g80RBOL0DJDdQkkB49xPJNgQ

e. Literary Criticism NPTEL Course https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJK-jEp3QA4&list=PLyqSpQzTE6M-B9N5rT2ava_4opC8Qfka2

1.1.4. Function of Literary Criticism

Literary criticism entails a multifaceted approach, connecting readers with writers and texts within the social context. The three key components – reader, writer, and text – are pivotal in constructing meaning and establishing relationships among them. Criticism serves not only to discern varied perspectives but also to unlock deeper meanings from within the text. Acting as a tool, criticism allows readers to delve into the complexities of texts, uncovering layers of meaning, themes, and symbolism. It serves as a catalyst for intellectual discourse, stimulating dialogues and debates about literature's significance and relevance. It offers insights into the human condition, societal values, and the creative process, encouraging readers to critically engage with texts, challenge assumptions, and cultivate nuanced interpretations. Ultimately, criticism enhances our enjoyment of literature by reveals its artistry. Through the course of negotiating various strands of opinions, readers

and learners form their own opinions about different aspects of literature and the strategies of understanding them. Literary criticism fosters critical skills and refines our ability to engage with literature on a richer level.

1.1.5. Future Prospects of Literary Criticism

The future and scope of literary criticism are indeed boundless. The domain of literary studies is no longer confined to literary texts. The meaning of the word 'text' has received wider ramifications. While traditionalists may insist that text pertains only to written words, modern readers and learners are more inclusive in bringing non-literary pieces of cultural works such as films, advertisements, paintings and performances within the semantic boundary of the term. Hence the scope of literary criticism has become wider and more challenging.

With the advent of digital media and acceleration of global connectivity, the scope of literary criticism expands to encompass diverse voices, cultures, and perspectives, erasing the boundaries of the discipline which existed previously. Consequently, literary critics navigate interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from fields such as psychology, sociology, and cultural studies to enrich their analyses. This was almost impossible even a decade or so ago.

The prospect of literary criticism lies in its ability to adapt to these interdisciplinary approaches, embrace diversity, and foster critical dialogue. This ensures its continued relevance in shaping our understanding of literature and its role in society. As learners, it is crucial for us to engage in reading widely, thinking critically, and trying to comprehend the world more comprehensively.

1.1.6. An Overview of the Course

It is certain that by going through this course, you will acquire the ability to understand criticism better for analysing and interpreting literature as an advanced reader. It is important to keep in mind the function of criticism and the role of a critic, who should not be biased by personal attachments and orientations and will be able to judge an author or a text objectively and without prejudice. Both as a reader and as a critic, our role is to interpret the text without biases. Now this section provides an overview of the course.

This course delves into the world of literary criticism and traces the trajectory of its journey. Module 1 provides a historical framework, tracing the evolution of criticism from the ancient times to the 20th century. Ancient Europe is the birth place of Western criticism

and therefore it is quite natural that this module should provide you critical information about the classical critics and explain the significance of their works. Plato (427-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), Horace (65 BC- 8 BC) and Longinus (213 AD-273 AD). Undergraduate and postgraduate syllabuses of English literature usually include selective works by the classical critics mentioned above. We too will discuss them and will study Aristotle in detail. The Module, however, does not only provide a historical overview of criticism, but also introduces key terms (imitation, tragic flaw, etc.) and critical ideas, thus helping the learners to familiarise themselves with the major traditions of European and British literary criticism.

Module 2 then zooms on the Renaissance and Neoclassical period, traces the development of criticism during these periods and examines the critical perspectives of three key figures – Philip Sidney, John Dryden, and Samuel Johnson (Units 6-8). They left a permanent mark on the history of English criticism. Their ideas and influences still shape the modern thinkers. More details can be found in these Units (6 to 8).

Modules 3 explores Romantic and Victorian criticism (e.g., Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Arnold) and Module 4 then takes up Modern Literary Criticism (Woolf, Eliot, Richards, and Brooks) (Units 9-16). Here, learners will gain knowledge of movements like Romanticism, Victorianism, and Modernism. While you might have read the literary works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Arnold, Woolf, and Eliot, here you will learn about their roles as critics rather than literary writers.

1.1.7. Summing Up

In this unit, we have discussed the definition and function of criticism and briefly traced the trajectories of its journey. It has analysed its early beginnings in classical Europe, its development in Medieval Europe and its energetic journey in England. Literary criticism is a robust intellectual activity that embraces not only literature but also its sister arts such as painting, performance and films. Hence, the scope of literary criticism has been envisaged as wide and fascinating.

1.1.8. Self-Assessment Questions

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Explain the evolution of literary criticism from ancient times to the modern era, highlighting key developments and shifts in approaches.
2. Discuss the role of literary criticism in shaping our understanding of literature and

its relevance in contemporary society.

3. Analyse the relationship between literary criticism and literary theory, exploring how they intersect and diverge in their approaches to interpreting texts.

Mid-Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What are the main functions of literary criticism, and how do they contribute to our understanding of literature?
2. Describe the role the key figures such as Aristotle, Sidney, Dryden, and Woolf played in the history of literary criticism..
3. How does literary criticism adapt to changing cultural and technological landscapes, and what challenges does it face in the digital age?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Define literary criticism and explain its primary objectives.
2. Name three influential literary critics and briefly describe their contributions to the field.
3. Discuss the difference between literary criticism and literary theory in one sentence.
4. Provide two examples of interdisciplinary approaches used in literary criticism.

1.1.9 Suggested Readings

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 11th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester UP, 2009.
- Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Routledge, 2016.
- Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 6th ed., Pearson, 2014.
- Dryden, John. "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy." Edited by Mark R. Jr. Wills, Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Blackwell, 2008.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. Faber and Faber, 1920.
- Leitch, Thomas M. *What is Literary Criticism?* Blackwell Publishing, 2001.
- Leitch, Vincent B., et al., editors. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and*

Criticism. 3rd ed., Norton, 2018.

- Richter, David H. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.
- Richter, David H. *Theories of Criticism: Readings in Literary Theory*. Longman, 2011.
- Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan, editors. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge, 2015.

Unit - 2 ❑ Classical Literary Criticism 1 – An Overview

Structure

1.2.1. Objectives

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarise learners with the identified beginnings of classical literary criticism. The history of ancient literary criticism dates back to 7th or 8th century BCE. Accordingly, the Unit will acquaint learners with major European figures who contributed to this genre during the classical period. We will keep Aristotle out of this discussion since the next Unit is devoted to his *Poetics*, which will remain a seminal text in your understanding of Tragedy as a literary form. You will also be introduced to major critical terms and concepts that came into use during the time, and how they paved the way for succeeding generations of authors and literary critics.

1.2.2. Introduction

From the introductory Unit of this Course you will have gathered some idea about the

why and what of literary criticism. So you know by now that 'criticism' as an activity is actually ingrained in the process of literary composition itself, for any literary artist subjects himself or herself and his or her upcoming work to certain judgments about theme, form, technique, audience appreciation and other things. The same is applicable to the earliest available records of the performance or enactment of poetry by the rhapsode (a professional recite of poems) in ancient Greece. The rhapsode would perform verse written by somebody else and so he was a kind of intermediary between the original composer and the audience. This, as M.A. R Habib rightly notes, "must have been a highly self-conscious and interpretative (art)" (9), that shows once again how closely composition and its critical evaluation are linked. In this sense, Habib traces the beginnings of literary criticism in ancient Greece to almost 800 years before Christ's birth, and its continuities can be traced in the Hellenistic period that witnessed the dissemination of Greek culture beyond Greece in Rome and even the Middle East. It is the systematic collection and documentation of such tracts that are not just literary but also cultural in nature that has given rise to the body of Classical Literary Criticism. English literary criticism that first began to be systematically seen after the Renaissance owes much of its grounding to these sources.

1.2.3. The Beginnings of Classical Literary Criticism

The first thing that we need to understand is that literary criticism as an institutionalised field of study as we know it today did not exist in the classical period. It was not a separate discipline by any stretch of imagination. The beginnings of 'criticism' are perhaps to be traced in the judgments of plays in the Greek festival of drama which was held in the city of Dionysia in honour of Dionysus, the god of the wine. The word 'criticism' itself came from the Greek word 'krites,' meaning to judge. So in a way, it was actually the evaluation of plays that were performed, using certain parameters by which they would be ranked and accordingly awarded. Literary historians are of the view that criticism did not come after the creation of a work, it was a simultaneous process. Hence, ancient literary criticism was not the work or creation of literary critics as such, the poets, dramatists and wise men themselves helped to formulate and develop notions of literary criticism through their evaluation of plays performed on festive occasions. However, it is important to understand in brief the politico-historical and resultant intellectual contexts against which all this was being done.

It is important to keep in mind first and foremost that philosophers, social thinkers and incidentally literary critics like Plato and his disciple Aristotle were essentially deliberating on the contemporary socio-political scenario in their works. While we are used to hearing that city states like Athens were democracies, we need to realise that these were hardly

representative democracies in the modern sense of the term. Rather, the onus of decision making was only upon adult male citizens, while a vast majority that included women, resident aliens and slaves were not part of it at all. Much of the writings of the period that we refer to as literary criticism today, for example Plato's *Republic* where he (in)famously chastises poets as inculcating lies and being twice removed from realities were actually tracts in search of a more equitable social system. In the backdrop of such convoluted politico-historical contexts, Habib identifies at least three developments that impacted the nature of literature and its criticism, as also philosophy and rhetoric. These were

1. The evolution of the *polis* or the city-state, a political structure that was believed to enable man to achieve his full potential, and was therefore considered a remarkable differentiating factor between the advanced Greeks and the barbarian non-Greeks.
2. The predominance of Athens with its open-minded socio-cultural ecosystem that was supposed to foster the democratic spirit.
3. The development of a certain level of literary ideals and standards among the elite sections of various city-states of Greece that Habib calls pan-Hellenism. Such pan-Hellenism is held to have led to the standardisation of poetry as manifesting important facets of culture, and its nomenclature as classics began to evolve.

It is in this evolving light of circumstances that we can place the emerging importance of texts of literary criticism. This placement also requires an understanding of the intellectual currents of the time, specifically the 5th century Athenian trend of the sophistic (secular, humanistic and relativistic understanding of the social order) and its attendant current of rhetoric (the art of persuasive public speaking that was the essence of the democratic spirit). Together, these posed a challenge to much of what Plato was saying, and from there sprang the pattern of arguments and counter-arguments to arrive at a synthesis. This brief discussion will tell you how literary criticism, though not an organised field of study, was still ingrained in the very cultural atmosphere of classical Greece. Its eventual spread to Rome in the second century BCE, and the spread of Hellenism after the death of Alexander the Great (Aristotle's illustrious pupil) who had conquered the vast Persian Empire paved the way for the gradual dissemination of classical literary criticism outside Greece.

1.2.4. Early Texts of Literary Criticism

The first ever existing notion of 'literary criticism' so to say, came from Homer and Hesiod. While the former believed in the principle of pleasure or gratification, the latter

insisted on the instructional function or edification. It would hence take some more time for literary critics to talk of the combination of both functions as the essence of poetry. It needs to be made clear that the term 'poetry' in the classical understanding was an inclusive one that meant all kinds of verse, and not just poetry as a genre that we understand it today. Habib however traces the "first recorded instances of literary criticism … to dramatic festivals in ancient Athens, which were organized as contests, requiring an official judgment as to which author had produced the best drama." (10) He gives the example of Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* (first performed 405 BC) that stands on the idea that there are no good poets left and therefore a search must be conducted from amongst the dead. Well, this is unthinkable in our time, but then that is how the beginnings are to be understood.

Critical texts found so far were however produced in more intellectual contexts – Plutarch's *How to Study Poetry* was an instruction to his pupils about how to read poetry. Longinus' *On the Sublime* was also a work of methods on how to be a great poet, how to create a sublime work of art, specifically poetry. Plato's *Republic* carries the same significance even though it was not directly addressed to the genre of poetry. Most of such dialogues, treatises, extracts, letters, poems addressing critical concerns did not have titles and, in several cases, it was very difficult to find the name of the author or the person associated with that particular text. Another notable thing about the works of ancient literary criticism is that not all of them were written in prose, some such as Horace's *Ars Poetica* were written in the form of poetry as well. Such criticism was not even published or circulated in the public domain, it was privately circulated via letters and lectures among students or friends. Interestingly, all of the literary critics were philosophers who tried to explain the content, function, style and aesthetics of literature; none of them looked at it purely from the point of view of a literary critic. Poetry was the primary form in those days; therefore, majority of the literary criticism were about poetry, with the exception of Aristotle who wrote on dramatic forms because they were very popular during the period.

As already mentioned earlier, poetry was of prime importance in the ancient period. Therefore, majority of the criticism and concepts that had been found, was regarding poetry. And to repeat what has been said, deliberations on poetry must be seen as including epics and dramatic verses alike. At first, there were Homer and Hesiod, the first of the poets who formulated ideas about the function of poetry. However, they argued on the value of poetry in terms of pleasure and instruction. Subsequently, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle continued to extend these notions and offer new ones. Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BC) in his several books repeatedly observed that he wanted to banish poets from his ideal republic on the ground of morality and reality. He believed that the poetic depiction was unreal and its imitative value was far away from reality. However,

Aristotle (384 B.C. to 322 B.C.) opposed Plato's thoughts on poetry and defended the mimetic value of poetry. This discussion will be taken up at length in the next Unit.

Horace's (65 BC to 8 BC) *Ars Poetica* was a kind of an instruction on how to write poetry. In that he discussed several aspects of poetry such as its form, style, content and a proper systematic way to write poetry for those who aspired to be a poet. Longinus, an unknown writer from the first century, wrote *On the Sublime*, and provided views on aesthetics of poetry. The sublimity of poetry was an essential aspect because poetry was associated with gods, therefore it had to be grand and sublime. There was Plutarch (46 AD to 119 AD), the great Greek Platonist philosopher whose essay on *How to Study Poetry* is basically written with the objective of training young minds for learning to read poetry as a vehicle that can eventually assist them in grappling with philosophy. Demetrius, an anonymous writer probably belonging to the first century, wrote *On Style,* which was mostly based on Aristotle's views of poetry and rhetoric. This particular work focused upon poetry's style and described at length the various meter, rhythm and content a poem contains. Therefore, as we can see, the most of literary criticism that had been found, were primarily regarding poetry, not much substantial work upon prose had been found from the ancient era in any part of the world.

1.2.5. Ancient Literary & Critical Terms

Ancient Greek and Roman scholars and philosophers used various literary and critical terms . These can be categorized under the following heads:

a) Technical Terms – *Iambic trimeter*, *Dactylic hexameter* (mostly used by Homer & Virgil), *Elegiac distich* (elegiac couplet), *Aeolic verse* (mostly used in Greek lyric poetry in their metrical construction), *Choliambic verse* (also known as limping iambs or scazons or halting iambic), *Ionic* (four syllable metrical unit), *Anacreontics* (eight syllable line, mostly used by Greek poet Anacreon in his poems dealing with love and wine), *Anapestic* (it consists of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable), *Trochaic septenarius* or *trochaic tetrameter catalectic* (one of two major forms of poetic meter used in Greek literature), *Dochmiac* (used in ancient Greek tragedy to express extreme agitation or distress), *Galliambic* (the meter was used for songs sung by galli, eunuch devotees of goddess Cybele), *Monometer* (consisting of single metrical foot), such meters, foots and verse form were mostly used and originated from ancient Greek and Roman literature.

b) Forms–*Dithyramb* (songs sung in honor of Dionysus), *Epic poetry* or *Heroic poetry*, *Lyric poetry*, *Elegiac couplet*, *Ode* (Pindar's odes are famous examples), *Irony* (mostly the dramatic situational irony was used), *Monologue* (one character expressing his thoughts), *Homeric hymns* (named after Homer who used the epic meter – dactylic hexameter in his thirty-three anonymous poems), there were several forms used mostly in poetry and dramatic representations on stage.

c) Genre –*Mythology*, *Prose* (short story, epistles, commentaries, essays, philosophical prose, novel and so on), *Epic poetry* (mostly famous and originated in ancient Greek with the hands of Homer), *Lyric poetry*, *Tragedy*, *Comedy*, *Satyr*, *Pastoral poetry*, *Dialogues*, *Epistolary poems* and so on.

d) Other Literary and Critical terms – Several terms were coined and used by Greek philosophers and by the men of literature in the ancient Greek and Roman period. Terms such as *Mimesis* (imitation), *Farce*, *Iambic pentameter* (heroic couplet), *Irony, Lyric, Plot, Ode, Rhyme, Rhythm, Style, Metrical feet, Prosody, Satire, Symbol, Theme, Tragedy, Comedy, Tragicomedy, Epic poetry, Catharsis* (purgation of emotion), *Hamartia* (tragic flaw in the tragic character), *Peripetia* (reversal of situation in the fate of the tragic character), *Anagnorisis* (recognition of the situation), *Fate*, *Sublime* (the sublimity in poetry which makes it to draw greater emotion) and so many other terms which we use today came from the classical period.

1.2.6. Select Texts – A Brief View

➢ **Plato's *Republic***

As mentioned earlier, Plato's *Republic* was not primarily a treatise or book directly written for the purpose of discussion on poetry. It was a book of philosophy where he wanted to establish his views on the establishment of an ideal republic. But there are some passages in *The Republic* and some of his other books which commented on the value and usage of poetry. Plato opposed poetry because he thought that poetry applied false principles and remains far from reality. He considered that the *mimetic* (imitative) value of poetry was unable to provide us the real truth. Plato was a robust moralist, hence he deemed poetry as immoral because of its falsehood. He strongly believed that philosophy deals with truth whereas poetry deals with illusion, therefore he disapproves poetry and neglects its aesthetic aspects. He believed that truth was more important than pleasure. Therefore, in Book X of *The Republic*, he pointed out that poetry drags us backward from

reality. In Book II of *The Republic* Plato condemns poetry because to him poetry nurtures evil habits and vices among people because the heroes, gods and great figures were often found to be immoral, full of lust, cruel, cunning, unreal. Therefore, he opposed poetry on the ground that it holds the possibility of inculcating immoral views in the children distracting them from reality. Hence his criticism of poetry was primarily on three aspects – education, philosophical point of view and lastly moral point of view. However, later day critics pointed out that Plato was a good poet himself and the usage of poetic diction in several passages of his writing indicated the same. We must still keep in mind that reading Plato's views in isolation can land us into a skewed understanding, so it is important to refer to his shaping influence on his most illustrious disciple Aristotle.

- **Aristotle's *Poetics***

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato and joined his academy and left only after the death of Plato. However, unlike his master Plato, he had distinct views about poetry. Although little is known about Aristotle's life, the fragments of his works that had survived the destruction of time provides an insight into his thoughts about poetry. His *Poetics*, which is the text that we are principally concerned with, runs into twenty-six small chapters and among them the first four chapters and the twenty fifth chapter deal with poetry. His primary views on poetry centres around the concept of *mimesis* (imitation for ideal representation) and the universal appeal of poetry. Aristotle, unlike Plato, believed in the *mimetic* aspect of poetry as he conceived imitation as a natural phenomenon. By differentiating historians from poets, he pointed out that the historians only deal with particular facts whereas poets in general deal with the universal things. While Aristotle does not explicitly mention edification as any function of poetry, his term *catharsis* (loosely interpreted as tragic pleasure) is complex and it requires a layered understanding that we shall try in the next Unit.

In his *Poetics*, he also highlighted the emotional appeal of the poetry. For example, in tragedy he upholds *Catharsis* (purgation of emotion) as being of utmost importance, it being capable of arousing pity and fear. He has also talked about the concepts of tragic hero, diction, and six elements of tragedy:

1. Mythos – plot
2. Ethos – character
3. Dianoia – thought
4. Lexis – diction

5. Melos – melody

6. Opsis –spectacle

Aristotle was the first person to consider the poet as a maker and creator. He distinguishes poetic genres in three distinguished ways, (a) Matter (language, rhythm and melody); (b) Subject (tragedy, comedy, satyr, lyric poetry, epic and so on); (c) Method (using a narrator for indirect speech in cases of epic poetry and other narratives, in the case of tragedy and comedy the author uses direct speech from the character themselves).

➢ **Horace's *Ars Poetica***

The *Ars Poetica* or *The Epistle to the Pisos* was a long poem by the Roman poet Horace. In this epistolary poem, he focused on the art or skill of creating or writing a poem, story, play and even a painting. Since the word 'ars' basically meant craft, so Horace was talking about the craft of writing poetry. In this, he brings forth the idea that poets, story tellers, dramatists and even the painters have the freedom to create whatever they want. In a nuanced way, he institutes a difference between what is thus created and what is 'real.' However, the most important didactic advice Horace provided in his poem was regarding form and structure of tragedy and comedy. He advised the poets to embrace criticism and revise their works if needed, carry a gentle attitude towards their creation and those who will receive them. He further advised that poets must take inspiration from nature for the long-lasting effect of the art. This poem of Horace is divided in three parts –

a) **Poesis** – In this segment of the poem, he advises the poet as creator to recognise his own strengths and weaknesses, and to create new words and situations as would befit the poetic tradition and the particular genre.

b) **Poema** – In this segment of the poem, Horace discussed the form and structure of poetry such as, mood, tone, consistency, originality, organisation of a story, style and meter. The aspect of decorum is central to Horace's advice.

c) **Poets** – Here he describes the role, responsibility, creativity and the difference between a good poet and a bad poet.

➢ **Longinus' *On the Sublime***

This work is a fragment of the original work, and its conclusion is lost. Like the previous one, this too is written in an epistolary form and is addressed to a person named Terentianus. Originally this work examined fifty writers of Longinus' time. Longinus believed in the idea of greater joy, and a flight from reality with the help of a mode of writing that would prove enjoyable with its sublimity. This essentially refers to the scope of transportation

to a state of extreme joy, if we put it very simply. Longinus is the person who formed and coined several terms and notions regarding the sublimity. To him lofty words, lofty tone, grand narrative and a proper mode of expression were necessary to attain the sublime. Therefore, in a way he not only pointed out the greatness of art but also provided methods and procedures through which such state can be achieved. For this he also compared great works with feeble works and pointed out that the sublimity is something which can be only attained by the innate genius and a particular skill learned from nature alone. However, without the moral excellence of a writer such works cannot attain any sublime effect upon the reader. Longinus also commented that in order to reach greater height and achieve higher emotion, one must follow the norms and structure of aesthetics, but if the genius of the poet allows him to deviate from that, that particular aspect might be deemed as greatness of the poet.

1.2.7. The Impact of Ancient Literary Criticism

The importance of such literary criticism is such that since the Middle Ages, more precisely, right after the Renaissance, the establishment of printing press and beginning of significant literary activities after the dark age of literature, such ancient literary thoughts and concepts of literature became a vital ground on which literature took its shape, structure and influence. Therefore, the literature, specifically in the European context, was so influenced by ancient literary criticism that the majority of the writers predominantly used such notions and applied such structures upon their poems, epics, tragedy, comedy and so on. When we talk of 'Humanism' as an aspect of the Renaissance, we are in essence going back to its roots in classical literary criticism. When we designate the eighteenth century as the Neoclassical Period in English literature, we are equally drawing upon an understanding of classical literary criticism. To discuss various forms of writing, or canonical texts or even departures from the canon, our focal points are basically drawn from the reservoirs of classical literary criticism. In the twentieth century, as one moves from criticism to theory, the points of departure essentially use the same frames of reference, whether in terms of genre or ideology or even the discourse-counter discourse patterns.

1.2.8. Summing Up

Hence, we have seen that the birth of the literary criticism took place in the 7th or 8th century BCE. Two early literary critics were Homer and Hesiod, the great ancient poets of Greece. After that several philosophers looked into the philosophical aspects and literary

aspects of literature. Literary critics were born out of an eagerness to understand art forms such as epic, lyric poems, tragedy, comedy and so on. Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch were not all men of literature, rather they were philosophers who provided valuable insights into the workings of literature. However, it needs to be remembered that philosophy was an umbrella term at that time because it included art, literature, society, theology, administration and every other branch of existing knowledge at that time. It is indeed very important to know about the ancient ancestors of modern-day literary criticism.

1.2.9. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What are the key elements of Ancient Classical Literary Criticism? Discuss.
2. What are the types of literary criticism in the ancient times? Mention some literary critics and their views.
3. Write a note on Aristotle as a literary critic?
4. Write a note on the development of ancient classical literary criticism?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a note on Plato's view of poetry.
2. What are the key elements of poetry as introduced by Aristotle? Explain.
3. Write a note on the elements of classical comedies and its chief characteristics.
4. Write a note on the views of Longinus regarding poetry?
5. How far does the ancient literary criticism influence the modern-day literary criticism? Explain.
6. What is the grand style of poetry as described by Longinus?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Why is ancient Greece important in terms of defining literary criticism?
2. Why did Plato want to banish poets from his ideal republic?
3. Write a note on the origin of ancient literary criticism?

4. What is hamartia, catharsis, anagnorisis, peripeteia? Discuss briefly.

5. Write a note on Plutarch's *How to Study Poetry*?

6. What, according to Longinus, are the ways through which a poet can achieve sublimity in poetry?

1.2.10. Suggested Readings

- Atkins, J. W. H. *Literary Criticism in Antiquity: A Sketch of Its Development*. 2 vols. Cambridge UP 1934.
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- Ford, A. *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece*. Princeton UP, 2002.
- Grube, G. M. A. *The Greek and Roman Critics*. U of Toronto P, 1965.
- Habib, M. A. R. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*. Blackwell, 2008.
- Halliwell, S. *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus*. OUP, 2011.
- Hunter, R. *Critical Moments in Classical Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Kennedy, G. A., ed. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Vol. 1, *Classical Criticism*. Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Russell, D. A. "Literary Criticism in Antiquity." In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Digital edition. Edited by S. Goldberg. Oxford UP, 2016.
- Gordon Michael. *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Second Edition. John Hopkins UP, 2004.

Unit-3 ❑ Classical Literary Criticism 2 - Aristotle's Poetics

Structure

1.3.1. Objectives

In the two previous Units, you have gathered a fair idea of the scope and nature of Classical Literary Criticism. In this Unit, we will introduce you to Aristotle and specifically

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to his text *Poetics*, which can rightly be considered the fount of all critical thought surrounding drama. This is not to say that the *Poetics* talks only of drama, Aristotle dwells at length also on other literary modes like the epic, and even on other epistemes like History. For the purpose of your course however, the discussion here will majorly centre on different aspects of the understanding of Tragedy as a literary genre. Our objective here is to equip you with the basic critical understanding of the ways and means of reading tragic drama, and as you go along with the Honours programme, you will find that this Aristotelian model becomes the main frame for all discussion of drama.

1.3.2. Introduction

To talk of Greek Tragedy is to perforce talk of its understanding with the aid of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise that remains our primary window of approaching classical drama. The *World History Encyclopedia* introduces Aristotle as "a Greek philosopher who pioneered systematic, scientific examination in literally every area of human knowledge and was known, in his time, as 'the man who knew everything' and later simply as 'The Philosopher', needing no further qualification as his fame was so widespread." In this Unit, our purpose will be to acquaint you with the essentials of his understanding of classical Tragedy that in turn will enable you to comprehend Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King* in its right perspective. While the expanse and purpose of *Poetics* goes much beyond the parameters of the discussion we will take up here, it will still initiate you on the lines of critical understanding that are necessary to place the Sophoclean play in perspective. By the end of this Unit, you will be equipped to get along with Sophocles, and also to apply, with help from your counsellor, Aristotelian insights to contextualise the evolutionary trends of English drama that you will come across in the entire syllabus for this programme.

1.3.3. Aristotle – A Bio-brief

Aristotle (384-322 BC), son of Nicomachus who was the court physician of Macedonia, was born in Stagira, and lived there till he moved to Plato's Academy in Athens around the age of 17. While he is variously known as a Greek philosopher, 'The First Teacher' (in the Arab world), and simply as 'The Philosopher' in the Western world, it is indeed difficult to pin down on any one of these, owing to his diverse learning. The one score years that Aristotle spent with Plato were by common consent, the most productive phase of his learning, his deference for and critical opposition with his teacher being remarkable not just to the advancement of learning, but also firmly grounding the tradition of healthy debates. Historians and experts of classical literature are of the opinion that the softening of Plato's

initial position in his later writings is largely the result of these sustained encores with his most gifted student. The Roman philosopher Cicero (from whom the Ciceronian style of writing derives) is famously supposed to have said that while Plato's prose resembled silver, Aristotle's was "a flowing river of gold" (www.history.com).

Following the death of Plato in 347 BC, Aristotle is said to have left Athens and settled on the coast of Asia Minor (islands of the Greek archipelago) where he took up pioneering research in marine biology. While at the Academy, however, Aristotle had commenced his career as a teacher, having been entrusted with subjects like Rhetoric and Dialogue. Five years hence, Aristotle was to become tutor to Alexander the Great in Macedonia, and historians have traced the former's influence in the activities of the conqueror even amidst his exploits around the world.

By 335 BC however, Aristotle was back in Athens where he converted the Lyceum, formerly a wrestling school, into a place of learning that soon became the choice destination of learners from across Greece. Aristotle is said to have composed about 200 works in disciplines as diverse as biology, cosmology, philosophy, ethics, politics – in other words, on every possible branch of human knowledge that was conceivable in his time! Scholars have customarily tended to divide his existing works into four broad categories that give us an idea of the range of learning:

1. The 'Organon' being a set of writings that deals with philosophical and scientific investigations.
2. Theoretical works that deal with the broad spectrum of biology, cosmology, physics and even metaphysics.
3. The so-called practical works like *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, their aspect of practicality deriving from investigations into human nature as seen through the levels of the individual, the family and society
4. Works like *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* that examine human productivity as evidenced in art, and its salutary impact on life at large. (Catalogue sourced from www.history.com)

By common scholarly consent, the most important of Aristotle's treatises thus include *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *De Anima* (On the Soul) and *Poetics*. If this vast range of studies incorporated in a single man surprises you, then you need to understand that Aristotle's was not a compartmentalised or fragmented approach to learning, he was rather pervaded by a natural curiosity about everything that concerned the human situation in its largest possible expanse. We must credit him for trying to make this vast horizontal learning comprehensible and meaningful by interpreting it all through the

lens of a broad philosophical understanding. It is equally interesting to note that none of these were penned as written treatises for publication, rather it was all delivered as lectures at the Lyceum that were taken down by his illustrious students like Theophrastus who have been instrumental in its dissemination. As an interesting trivia, Aristotle is said to have had this habit of moving back and forth as he lectured, and this has earned the Lyceum the name 'Peripatetic School,' from the Greek word *peripatetikos*, which would mean 'walking around.'

1.3.4. Introduction to *Poetics*

As laid out at the beginning of this Unit, our concern here is with the text of *Poetics*. While we will be discussing most important concepts that Aristotle took up for discussion in *Poetics*, you must understand that this crystallisation is not a substitute for reading the text in its English translation.

Primarily, we must keep in mind that Aristotle's treatise has an argumentative discourse pattern wherein he refutes his teacher Plato's ideas on the nature of poetry and poetic truth, why poetry cannot be relegated simply to the domain of an imitative art as opposed to other more useful arts, and to that effect what is it about poetry that gives it superiority over disciplines like history or even philosophy. This makes the *Poetics* a very demanding critical text but one that is immensely rewarding in terms of being one of the earliest theoretical deliberations of dramatic theory through a philosophic perception of literature and aesthetics. You might be wondering why we talk so much on poetry while we are statedly to discuss Tragedy as an art form. It needs to be made clear in this context that in classical literary aesthetics, the term poetry was used more comprehensively than we understand it now, since verse was by and large the medium of composition. So when we use the term poetry in the context of Aristotle's deliberations, please understand that tragedy too is a form of poetic utterance.

Aristotle's *Poetics* runs into 26 chapters, and while all of those that do not need to figure in our present discussion, let us nonetheless have an overview of the content of each. This will enable you to understand the logical manner in which the treatise is thought out. **The sections in bold demarcates specific portions that are important for you at this point of time**:

Chapter-wise Content Outline of Aristotle's Poetics (Sourced from www.the philosophy.com). Based on The Poetics of Aristotle, ed. S. H. Butcher, 3rd Edn., 1902. (You will be able to access Buther's text in the following link: https://dn790008.ca.archive.org/0/items/poeticstranslate00arisuoft/poeticstranslate00arisuoft.pdf

Chapter No.	Outline of Content	Comment/ Significance
1	**Defining the purpose of poetry as imitation**	Medium, Object, Manner/Mode of imitation & inherent distinction from Plato's understanding
2	Purpose of imitation in balanced representation of humanity	Formulating thereby the basic difference between Tragedy and Comedy; placing them with regard to other arts
3	Methods of imitation – Telling and Showing	Persists with the various modes of artistic imitation; logically moving towards a definition of Tragedy
4	Poetry as literary product – based on imitation, and reflective of human propensity	Classifications into Tragedy and Comedy, the gradual evolution of forms
5	Epic, Tragedy and Comedy; Significance of span of time being encompassed through action	Formulates systematic differences/ parallels between Epic and Tragedy in particular, assigns specific subject matter to each type
6	**Definition of Tragedy**	Distinctly classifies the constituent elements of Tragedy; addresses the primacy of Plot over all else
7	**Developing the plot from the story; the principle of Organic Unity**	Ideas of wholeness (internal connection between parts) & magnitude (external expanse); concepts of necessity and probability; reversal of fortunes as outcome(s)

8	**Organic Unity further explained and clarified – the unit of imitation**	Unity is presupposed of the action that is shown, not of the life of the protagonist
9	Difference between Poetry and History	Binaries of universal/ particular; why Poetry offers a higher level of truth; understanding the importance of causal connection; the philosophical dimension of imitation; the episodic plot
10	**Simple and Complex Plots**	Significance of Reversal of Intention and Recognition
11	**Reversal and Recognition further explained in the light of the evocation of Tragic Pleasure**	Connecting turns of the Plot to the arousal of Pity and Fear
12	The quantitative parts of Tragedy/ tragic action	Prologue, Episode, Exodos, Parodos, Stasimon
13	Inclusions and Exclusions in Plot; securing the specific effect of Tragedy	Singular intentions of the plot, the nature of the ideal protagonist of Tragedy, the final end being the evocation of Pity and Fear
14	The internal arrangement of situations – the knotting of the plot	How proper conditions for imitation alone can contribute to desired emotions of Pity and Fear
15	**The four criteria required of a 'character' in Tragedy –**	Gravitates towards defining the expected attributes of a Tragic

	Goodness, Propriety, Verisimilitude (true to life), Consistency	Hero, so as to strike the twin emotions of Pity and Fear in the audience through a mimetic representation (imitation) of the trajectory of her/his life
16	Four types of Recognition –By signs, Invented at will by the (tragic) poet, By memory when the sight of some object awakens a feeling, By Reasoning	Related to the unfolding of the Plot, once again by causal connection and true to principles of imitation
17	The emphasis is on showing rather than telling	Since plot is all about action, all that which can be 'shown' in keeping with classical decorum should be presented on stage
18	**Complication and Unravelling/ *Denouement*.** Accordingly, the 4 Kinds of Tragedy – Simple, Complex, Pathetic, Ethical	2 phases of the plot - node and outcome; Choral odes as part of organic whole
19	Diction and Thought	While Thought is to be produced by dramatic speech composed according to rules of Rhetoric, Diction belongs to the domain of delivery rather than of poetic art
20	Diction/ Language	Analysis of parts of speech and grammar; Butcher considers this a probable interpolation
21	Poetic Diction	Modes of speech admissible in poetry, with special emphasis on metaphor

22	Poetic Diction continued	The appropriateness of vocabulary in Tragedy
23	On Epic poetry	Relative analysis of Epic, History and Tragedy
24	Epic Poetry continued	Relative points between Epic and Tragedy
25	**Poetic Truth vis-à-vis common reality**	Defence of poetry, rebuttal of Plato
26	Epic and Tragedy compared on truth quotient	The superiority of Tragedy

As stated above, while the highlighted sections of *The Poetics* form the core of your curricular understanding for this Course, it is important that you have a comprehensive view of the ideas that Aristotle deals with in all the 26 chapters.

1.3.5. The Concept of Mimesis (Imitation)

You must have noticed in the section above that in the context of *The Poetics*, Aristotle repeatedly talks of 'imitation,' which is the nearest English equivalent to the Greek term *mimesis*. Before we get into any kind of theoretical discussion, we need to understand what exactly he means by 'imitation,' how it is different from our common usage of the term, and why it is important in the context of Tragedy. It is around this very term that the differences of opinion between Plato and Aristotle have primarily centered, and it is the key idea around which the entire purpose of Tragedy evolves. It is important to remember that for all the different branches of knowledge that Aristotle pursued, he was broadly a philosopher and commentator on life in general; so we need to understand his conception of poetry in its relation to life at large.

In Chapter 4 of *Poetics*, Aristotle rightly points out that the instinct for imitation is ingrained in human beings since childhood; in fact, he goes on to say that we learn our first lessons through the instinctive habit of imitation. In his understanding therefore, imitation is not a compartmentalised act of life applicable only to poetic pursuits, but one of the verities of life itself. In that sense, Tragedy by virtue of being basically an imitation, is not to be understood simply as an extraneous or artificial poetic pursuit; it is the representation of life itself, albeit idealised. While we will deliberate on this at length, it might be pointed out here that this holistic understanding of the concept of imitation is the corner-stone of the

difference of opinions between Plato and Aristotle with regard to the nature of imitation and poetic truth thereof, though both scholars recognised it as a vital component of art and aesthetics.

➢ **The Platonic view of Imitation**

In Plato's metaphysical understanding, the material world appears temporal and mutable, hence devoid of any autonomous value but for the extent to which permanent and immutable ideas are manifest in the material world in the form of representations of the transcendental. By inference, poetry, which exists in a tangible form in the material world, is only worthwhile in that it represents transcendental ideas but can never become truth in itself. This is best explained by his analogy of the bed, itself a metaphor from Socrates, in Book 10 of *The Republic*. We can understand this in the following stages:

Stage 1 – The idea of a bed (the original), which exists only in nature, for a Platonic idea typically exists prior to and independent of the natural. It is the **original reality**.

Stage 2 – The bed that the carpenter makes, by virtue of his art being **useful art**, is then a copy of the original bed, hence it becomes **once removed from** (the idea) **reality**.

Stage 3 – The bed described by the poet or the painter (whose art is necessarily **imitative**) is then an imitation of the carpenter's bed, hence **twice removed from reality**.

We need to understand the short and the long of why Plato says or believes so, in order to understand why and how Aristotle's understanding differs from his teacher's. There are two things to grasp in this regard:

1. As stated earlier, Plato conceives of the material world as inherently only a channel for realizing his idea of the metaphysical, and hence devoid of any autonomous value. The metaphysical in this case is the original reality/ idea, which exists above and beyond the useful and imitative arts into which Plato classifies all human activity.

2. In a more topical sense, we must remember that Plato's texts are not inherently on the subject of art and aesthetics as Aristotle's *Poetics* is. While *The Republic* chiefly concerns evolving Greek polity in terms of how the ideal republic should be constituted, *Ion* (which also has references to imitation) is a debate over whether a poet's performance is a result of skills or divine possession.

With Plato therefore, the task of unraveling truths befalls not on the poet, whose medium is chiefly rhetoric; but on the philosopher who by the superiority of his discipline, is able to thrash out the original/ metaphysical reality from mere imitations. Poetry thus

becomes a copy of a copy, and poets stand to be banished from the ideal republic since they can only mislead citizens with their flowery lies!

➢ **The Aristotelian understanding of Imitation**

In striking contrast to Plato and even his teacher Socrates, Aristotle was an empiricist. This is to say that he was not just a reductive materialist, for he thought of the body as "the matter," and also perceived the psyche as "the form of each living animal" (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). As the first of the moderns, he could not therefore have subscribed to the Platonic view of material existence as simply valueless in itself; so he recognised imitation not as mere copying but as a representation of the ideal that is crystallised in human consciousness. In his perception, human beings are essentially mimetic, hence the urge to create works of art that reflect and represent reality forms the core of his theory of imitation and thereby of the *Poetics*.

If we revive the analogy of the bed to understand Aristotle's concept of imitation, he would say that the poet, instead of copying from the carpenter, actually perfects the idea of the bed into an ideal representation. For him however, medium, object and the manner of imitation are of paramount importance. He does away with any distinction between useful and imitative arts, and states that epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, the music of a flute or lyre – are all modes of imitation. For Aristotle, imitation is not just visual or auditory similarity, the medium rather is a mimetic representation of the emotions one feels while going through the experience. This is his way of connecting mind with matter. Significantly, while Plato found greater likeness between poetry and painting, Aristotle saw greater resemblance between poetry and music, though the objective and manner of imitation is different in each form of art. The key distinction he institutes with Plato in respect of imitation is that in Aristotle's view, imitation involves the faculty of creative imagination, so that the end result is by no means a mere copy of the original, rather a crystallisation of its essence. This gives to art the dimension of universality, whether of a philosophical approach to life or in terms of its appeal to the emotions. Logically, therefore, the purpose of imitative art is pleasure, though this means a mix of edification and gratification.

The idea of verisimilitude or likeness is central to Aristotle's concept of imitation. In the case of Tragedy in particular, it is the similarity of the protagonist's fortunes, seen from a distance, that gives spectators the tragic feel. You would at this stage definitely wonder that when there are troubles enough in life, why should one need to witness a tragic spectacle to imbibe a feeling of suffering. It is here that we require a profound understanding, for Aristotle makes imitation or mimesis a key factor behind drawing lessons from Tragedy, which in the ultimate analysis, produces a therapeutic effect. We will come to more of this in subsequent sections. In fact, the full understanding of imitation can emerge only when we

place it in the context of Aristotle's definition of Tragedy.

1.3.6. Definition and Constituents of Tragedy

Aristotle's definition of Tragedy is a long and serious one, let us understand it in detail so that we are able to place all its constituents and processes in the right perspective. Having outlined the contours of Comedy, the differences between Tragedy and Epic, and after deliberating on the aspect of imitation in earlier chapters, in Chapter 6 of *Poetics*, he writes

> Tragedy, then, is **an imitation of an action** that is **serious**, **complete**, and **of a certain magnitude**; **in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament**, the several kinds being **found in separate parts of the play** in the **form of action, not of narrative**; through **pity and fear** effecting the **proper purgation** of these emotions. (Butcher 23)

The highlighted portions of this definition denote the key terms that we will subsequently discuss. Immediately following the definition, he further goes on to clarify:

> By 'language embellished, I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony,' and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song. (Butcher 23)

If we break down the definition into its key points, the following are what merit specific attention:

- ✓ **Tragedy is an imitation of an action**. This is to be understood in the light of the discussion on imitation that has preceded. Since imitation in Aristotle means artistic recreation, its use in defining Tragedy is to be understood as idealized representation. This does not mean anything unworldly, or improbable; but only such turn of events as can have a causal connection between them. By saying so, Aristotle is stressing not just on the importance of the plot and structure, but also on the philosophical intent of Tragedy/ Poetry, which is quite at variance and logically so, from Plato.
- ✓ Both the action and its imitation in Tragedy are **serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude** (justifiable length). Clearly the emphasis here is on what kind of action can constitute the crux of Tragedy, on the concept of organic unity, and on the realistic length to which the action must unfold so as to accommodate all the movements of the plot.
- ✓ The use of **language** in Tragedy is such that **it is embellished** (added/ decorated) with **aesthetically pleasing devices**. As a set of constituents, there are certain aspects that are therefore additional to the primary constituents. We will

discuss them in the following sub-section.

✓ Such devices are spread out in **different parts of the play**. A tragic play can therefore be divided into several parts that together constitute the whole.

✓ **Action is of prime importance in Tragedy**, so even language is used to explain action, not just narration (as in Epic). So it is *mimetic* in the sense that the tragic action shows rather than tells, unlike the epic mode which is *diegetic* in that there is often an invisible or all-knowing narrator who probes into the minds of characters from a distance.

✓ The purpose of Tragedy is to bring out fears that are latent in members of the audience, and by **purging the excess of fear**, to effect a tranquil state of mind. Obviously, this is sought to be done by projecting the fortunes of the tragic protagonist in ways that must find some resemblance with the psychic understanding of the audience. This is the principle of tragic pleasure, also called ***catharsis***, which in the ultimate analysis gives a therapeutic purpose to Tragedy/ Poetry. The audience is taught to **pity** the unjust fortunes of the protagonist, as also to **fear** for one like themselves.

➢ **The Constituent Elements of Tragedy**

In the same chapter, Aristotle lists the six constituent elements of Tragedy and explains them in brief in the order of importance.

1. Plot, which holds the kernel of the action, is according to him the first principle and the soul of Tragedy.

2. Character, which holds second place, is entrusted the task of unfolding of the plot.

3. Thought is the manifestation of what the characters think and feel, and is accordingly reflected in their actions. Hence it combines both speech and action. Aristotle admirably calls it "the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances."

4. Diction, which is the expression of the meaning in words, has according to Aristotle, the same meaning whether in verse or in prose. It is broadly the medium of language/ expression through which characters reveal their thought or feelings. It is however incumbent that the proper diction be followed for Tragedy, which is supposed to be distinctly different from that of Comedy.

5. Of the embellishments/ adornments that diction takes, one is **Song**, to which Aristotle accords the chief place in the decoration of the diction.

6. As the other form of embellishment comes **Spectacle**, which has an emotional attraction of its own, but is perceived as the least artistic and seemingly

connected least with the art of poetry. Cumulatively, it includes stage décor and the theatrical effects that are presented on stage, and since Aristotle is of the opinion that the power of Tragedy can be felt even apart from representation and actors, he attributes the production of spectacular effects more to the stage machinist than the poet. We must understand that by 'representation', he does not mean to compromise with the action itself, but presumably alludes to paraphernalia like scenes of torture, use of dress and colour, stage setting and the like.

Of the six constituents, the relationship between Plot and Character has traditionally produced the most confusion in understanding, so let us address this first before moving on to other things in greater detail.

1.3.7. Plot and Character

We know by now that Aristotle perceives Tragedy as an imitation of an action which is an image of human life, which consists of a mode of action and not merely a mental quality. He calls this mode of action, the Plot, which is supposed to mean a compendious expression for external incidents and internal mental processes and motives, all of which work in cohesion and of course in accordance with the laws of probability and necessity. Character, according to Aristotle, does determine human qualities, but it is primarily by virtue of their actions that people are either happy or sad. Hence character, with its two facets *ethos* (character as human entity) and *dianoia* (thought process) is imperatively contained within the plot, since 'action' in Aristotelian terms springs from inward power that manifests itself through external doings. Humphrey House explains this in terms of the tendency to do good or bad remaining inherently unrealised, and having the possibility of being manifest only through action. This action also includes two vital turns of the plot that are necessary for the emotional impact of tragedy to unfold – *Peripeteia* (reversal of intention) and *Anagnorisis* (recognition). We will take you through an understanding of these terms in due course.

Having laid out before you the Aristotelian perception of Plot and Character, we will now first see from the relevant passage in *Poetics* what the confusion is all about, and then place it in perspective. In Chapter 6 once again, Aristotle, in emphasising upon the paramount importance of the structure of incidents, writes:

Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in a subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (Butcher 27)

We must realise that in talking of the possibility of tragedy without character but not without action, Aristotle voices the belief that personages do not reveal their characters by themselves; their moral bent impels them to act in a particular manner. Clearly, he does not

subscribe to the modern critics who hold the view that character lies in *a priori* thought, or that action must stand in relation to certain mental states. Since Aristotle realises character through action, he can well subordinate its individual entity to the plot, the latter being an all-pervasive whole.

So when you read that Aristotle says that the plot is the first principle – the soul of Tragedy, and that character holds the second place, you should not be confused or misled by the plethora of arguments that exist in this regard.

1.3.8. Dramatic Unity

Now that you have a fair idea of the primacy of the Plot in Aristotelian conception, we proceed to an understanding of what it is that makes the Plot so important. For understanding the structure of the Plot, we have to go back to the early part of the definition where Aristotle says that apart from being serious in nature, the action must also be a **complete whole** and have a certain **magnitude**.

Why exactly are wholeness and magnitude important, and how do they contribute to the impact of tragedy?

By **wholeness**, Aristotle means that the action must have a well-defined beginning such that nothing that is necessary for the fable should exist outside of it when the play begins. Thus there should be nothing in the beginning of a play that might follow from some other causal necessity; everything in it must have a natural existence. Similarly, there should be a conclusive ending where all ends following causally are tied up neatly, and nothing at all should be left out of it. This beginning and ending must be connected by a well-defined middle. You can now use this understanding of wholeness to examine for yourselves if the plot of Sophocles' tragic play *Oedipus the King* conforms to the Aristotelian prescription.

On the question of **magnitude**, Aristotle's view is that it is not just enough for a beautiful object (and he considers Tragedy one such object) to be an aggregate of several parts, it must also have a certain magnitude (length/ dimension) that determines its beauty and order. He does not however particularly lay down any specific length, but only outlines the governing principles – something that can be grasped in a single viewing, and a length that can easily be committed to memory. Far from laying down a specific number of Acts or Scenes for a play, Aristotle in fact says that it is not the business of artistic theory to mention any limit of length. All the same, there is something far more important that he prescribes in this regard: "… the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the laws of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad." (Butcher 33)

Once again, we need to highlight that imitation for Aristotle is not mere copying, but imaginative recreation; and imagination is not something that can just run wild, it is strictly

governed by the farthest philosophical expanse of causal connection. You can also see for yourselves how, in defining the plot, he actually fuses vital ingredients of the understanding of character, which as the prime agent of the plot, is responsible for its unraveling.

Our understanding of the twin concepts of **necessity** and **probability** will further reveal why Aristotle gives precedence to plot over character. Having broached these concepts in Chapter 7, he clarifies in Chapter 8 that unity of plot does not mean unity of the hero, for there can be multifarious incidents in the life of a person that do not and cannot necessarily form the subject of a single Tragedy. It is therefore the function of the plot to select events from the life of a person who is to be the protagonist of a particular play, and the rationale behind such selection is governed by incidents that have between them a necessary and a probable connection. You can understand this by the fact that Sophocles has as many as 3 plays in the Oedipus cycle, each of them dealing with different aspects of the life of Oedipus. Imagine a situation where all these episodes were put into a single play and if that were to be your syllabus! So, necessity and probability are important factors in deciding not just the length of a play but also the dramatic or organic unity between its several parts. In this context we can also understand why in Aristotle's understanding, poetry is superior to history; while the latter gives an account of what has happened, the former deals with what may happen. Once again, this 'may' include only those parts of the action that can be strung together by the principles of necessity and probability, that we may cumulatively call causal connection. It is this basic understanding that lies beyond Aristotle's claim of poetry being the highest form of philosophy, a discipline where logical connection is the buzzword. To put it simply, while poetry deals with universal truths, the staple of history is only the particular. This connects us to the classical understanding of the poet as maker, not just a maker of verses but of plausible plots. To that extent, even history can be the subject of poetry (as we often find in Shakespeare's History Plays), but it is the task of the poet to choose only those events of history for a single plot that can be woven together by a causal connection. It is only when tragic action can be strung together in a cause-effect relationship that it gives rise to the cathartic impact which is the desired end of Tragedy.

1.3.9. Simple and Complex Plot - *Peripeteia*, *Anagnorisis*

A brief recap first of what we have learnt so far about Plot.

- It is the kernel of the entire tragic action – the "arrangement of the incidents" as Aristotle says.
- It involves action, not just narration.
- It is the most vital constituent element of Tragedy, in which are contained all other elements, including Character.

- Events of the plot are bound by causal connection, as warranted by the logical laws of necessity and probability.
- Plot has a well-defined beginning, a connected middle, and a coherent ending that culminates all action.

In Chapter 10, Aristotle classifies plots into **Simple** and **Complex**, on the straight logic that actions in real life, of which the plot of Tragedy is a mimetic representation, show a similar distinction. It is therefore imperative that like Plot itself, its various kinds must also be understood not just in terms of form but as reflection of the larger panorama of life itself.

What then is the basis of this distinction?

A plot is considered to be simple when the change of fortunes of the protagonist takes place without any reversal of intention or even recognition. Conversely, a complex plot is one in which similar change of fortunes is accompanied by reversal or recognition, or in fact both. It goes without saying that either or both of these should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that whatever follows comes as necessary or probable result of the action that has preceded.

Let us now understand what exactly Aristotle means by the terms 'Reversal' and 'Recognition', which he takes up in Chapter 11.

➢ **Reversal of Intention (*Peripeteia*) and Recognition (*Anagnorisis*)**

By reversal of intention, Aristotle implies a change by which the action comes to have just the opposite impact from what was desired, but such reversal is perforce subject to tenable conditions of necessity or probability. A classic example of this is found in your syllabised text, *Oedipus the King*; where the messenger from Corinth comes supposedly to liberate Oedipus from alarms about his mother's identity but inadvertently produces quite the opposite impact by revealing his origins. In this connection you need to understand the vital difference between the possible (which exists in the realm of the knowable) and the probable (which exists outside the domain of what appears to be knowable, but can happen all the same). *Peripeteia* is therefore can therefore be understood as the tragic effects of human efforts that produce results diametrically opposed to its intentions. As an explication of the ironies of human blindness (beyond the physical) it is a vital component of the complex plot of a Tragedy.

Recognition is a stage that is inevitably connected to the reversal of intentions, and follows from it. Butcher translates it to imply "a change (of state) from ignorance (of material facts hitherto unknown) to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortunes." Thus, while *peripeteia* is the working in blindness of one's imminent defeat, *anagnorisis* brings the awakening of the truth. In Tragedy, *anagnorisis* most often comes after the catastrophe has taken place, and

it serves to reveal and culminate the full impact of the tragic action.

✓ **Activity:**

With help from your counsellor, try and compare Euripedes' play *The Trojan Women* with Sophocles' syllabised play, to understand the differences between simple and complex plots.

1.3.10. Tragic Hero

As we have mentioned earlier, the tragic hero or the protagonist in a Tragedy is the character upon whom the human component of the play is enacted. It follows therefore that s/he carries the burden of the tragic flaw that brings about downfall, and is also the agent through whom the cathartic emotions of pity and fear are communicated to the audience. In a nutshell, the tragic hero must be understood in a dual perception – as the **playwright's objective creation** and also as the one who goes on to become the **subjective alter-ego of the audience**.

Since character is secondary to plot, we must first take note of the what kinds of situations Aristotle advises playwright (Chapter 13) to refrain from in conceiving their tragic protagonists:

- A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, for such a situation would be rather odious and it would inspire neither pity nor fear.
- A bad man must not be seen passing from misery to happiness, that would by no stretch of imagination lead to a tragic situation.
- An extremely bad man should not be seen falling from happiness to misery. Such a spectacle might arouse human feelings/responses, but that would definitely not be pity or fear, which is the objective of Tragedy.

What then should the tragic hero be like? Or how can we conceptualise the tragic hero on Aristotelian terms? In the same chapter, he gives the following prescriptions about the tragic hero:

- An **intermediate** kind of a personage
- A man **not pre-eminently virtuous and just**, or, a **paragon of virtue**
- His/her misfortune will come about **not because of any vice or depravity**, but by some **error of judgement** that leads to *hamartia* (**Tragic Flaw**). *Hamartia* is explained as an error or a miscalculation that may arise from ignorance of material facts, haste, voluntary but not deliberate action and such situations. (Notice that you can apply all of these to the case of Oedipus)

● In classical tragedy more often than not, ***hubris*** (pride) has **a role in accentuating *hamartia.*** Think for yourself how *hubris* acts to amplify the working of *hamartia* in Oedipus.

Based on the above formulations, Aristotle's 4-point prescription of **the qualities of an ideal tragic character** can be summarised in a tabular form so that it becomes easy to comprehend:

Quality	Significance
Goodness	Humphry House feels that this is not to be seen merely as having moral implications, but as possessing virtues like courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, gentleness, truthfulness, friendliness and even wit. Cumulatively, one gathers that Aristotle implies worthiness as a human being, and the possessor of good intentions.
Appropriateness	A character should conform to expectations that are normally made of her/his age, class, position in society, vocation. This is because a character is simultaneously an individual and a type, hence expectations should not be belied. There is in this also the implication of the mimetic presentation of a character corresponding to source material in myth/ history/ legend.
Likeness/ Verisimilitude	The character must spring out of the mould of common life, he should be identifiable with the audience in the sense of being one like ourselves and yet better than the average run of humanity so that his fortunes can affect those of the community. It is necessary for the audience to be able to strike a resemblance with the protagonist's motivations and actions, so that the cathartic emotions of pity and fear may be affected.
Consistency	Unless there is some motivation to the contrary, a character is expected to show uniformity of behavioural patterns throughout the tragic spectacle. Aristotle even goes to the extent of indicating that if waywardness in the sense of

	inconsistency is the mark of a character, then such inconsistency should be a consistent pattern all along. In other words, a logical coherence should be discernible between thought and its manifestation in action.

1.3.11. Role of Chorus

Originally meaning 'dance' in Greek, the chorus was a group of performers at religious festivals, and in course of time they gave birth to Tragedy as performance, and they remained a relevant part for a long time. In the early phase of Greek drama, the chorus would appear just after the Prologue and remain present for most part of the play, seeing, hearing and commenting on the significance of the action that was unfolding. It could have as many as 50 people till Aeschylus' plays reduced it to 12, and with Sophocles we again find about 15 people enacting the chorus. Of this important aspect of Greek tragedy, Aristotle does not say much in *Poetics*, but like much else, the little that he says in Chapter 18 carries importance. In Aristotle's view, the chorus should be considered as one of the actors, obviously not in terms of its numbers but as a significant presence within the action. He prescribes the choral presence as an integral part of the whole and as co-sharer in the action, preferring in this the model of Sophocles over that of Euripides. As a close observer of Greek drama festivals which in fact forms the basis of *Poetics*, Aristotle would surely have noted that the chorus in plays by Euripides seemed to exhibit less of a collective character compared to those in plays by Sophocles. This view has been held by later critics as well, H. D. F. Kitto in fact going so far as to say that the chorus in *Medea* is a total failure on account of its irrelevance. In Aristotle's understanding therefore, the role of the chorus is not confined to singing interludes, that would as well make the same set of people replicable in any play for that matter, whatever the context and content.

✓ **Activity:**

With help from your counsellor, write an essay on the role of the chorus in *Oedipus the King*.

1.3.12. *Catharsis*

We now come to the final topic of this Unit, which is about the purpose of Tragedy. Apart from the idea of *mimesis*, little else in the *Poetics* has given rise to as much hair-splitting debate as the concept of *catharsis* as the supposed outcome of watching a tragic play. Such debate stems in a large way from the fact that Aristotle himself made a bare mention of it, most translators apart from Ingram Bywater have not even used the word, preferring the more intelligible term 'purgation.' Purgation is definitely a medical metaphor, implying letting out of excess body fluids that cause disquiet; but when the letting out concerns the

emotional-mental states of pity and fear (mentioned repeatedly by Aristotle), then it is definitely not the physical sense of draining out that he must have meant in the context of defining Tragedy in Chapter 6.

For the present, we will not go into how the definition has evolved over a very long period of time with different scholars, but try to understand it simply as an intended therapeutic effect of Tragedy. Rather than purgation, the widely accepted idea is that of purification – the soothing out of our stresses in real life by witnessing a tragic spectacle that allows us to rise above personal constraints and feel a sense of empathy for humanity at large, embodied in the figure of the tragic protagonist.

Now, how does that work?

We can make sense of this if we perceive the sense of *catharsis* not in isolation but in the light of the discussion that has preceded. The crux of that discussion has hinged on the seminal idea of imitation of action, on the primacy of the plot that is constructed without straining credibility in any way, and on the protagonist as agent of the plot and thereby the audience's point of contact with the execution of the plot. The qualities of the tragic hero outlined in this context are also very important in perspective. The quality of verisimilitude or life-likeness means that as audiences, we look upon a tragic hero as a lot like us, her/ his difference with us only being in the scale of grandeur. But in terms of human propensities, we find ample similarities being reflected, the difference being only that of degree and not of kind. Like a tragic protagonist, most of us are middling kind of personalities, neither all good nor outright bad; what distinguishes a tragic protagonist is the parameter of class – one's stature and fortunes should be such that the rise/ fall can affect a community at large, as with Oedipus. Similarly, the development of the plot of tragedy is so ordained by Aristotle as to ensure that events in the life of the protagonist are realistically strung, giving the feeling that such a fate could befall as well. Finally, the aesthetic distance that Aristotle keeps between the audience and the tragic character ensures that we are always watching her/his fate from a distance – the stage gives an illusion of safety. We call it illusion because in principle, what befalls the tragic hero could come upon us as well, for he is so like us. So we feel pity for one like us, and fear for ourselves – there might I be but for the grace of God. These twin emotions of pity for the protagonist (his fortunes being much more tragic than he merits) and fear for one like ourselves are the intended effects of Tragedy, the witnessing of which leaves us more sobered in life. It is in this intended therapeutic impact of Tragedy that we must place our understanding of *catharsis*.

As you proceed with your study of drama, you will notice how Aristotle's prescriptions in *Poetics*, though a solid beginning, have much evolved through the Elizabethan stage and into modern drama across the world. To Aristotle therefore, we owe our first understanding

of drama, but we must remember that for all his modernity, his theory is also set against a particular milieu. As readers of drama it is upon us to constantly update our knowledge of Aristotle in the light of subsequent revelations.

1.3.13. Summing Up

- *Poetics* as one of the earliest theorisations on classical drama
- Imitation as the soul of poetry/ art; (remember the differences between Plato and Aristotle in this regard)
- The constituent elements of Tragedy
- Plot as having prime importance in drama, even character as secondary to it
- Dramatic Unity ensures coherence and philosophical approach
- Simple and Complex Plots
- Qualities of the tragic hero – the role of *hamartia* and *hubris*
- *Catharsis* as the desired end of Tragedy

1.3.14. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What do you understand by mimesis? Why is it such an important component of Tragedy in Aristotle's understanding?
2. Analyse Aristotle's definition of Tragedy and point out the significance of each sub-section in it.
3. Why do you think Aristotle attaches the greatest importance to Plot in Tragedy? Is it logical to say that even Character is subservient to Plot?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What are the constituent elements of Tragedy? How are they connected to each other?
2. Explain with textual examples how *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* affect the course of a tragic play.
3. What is the desired end of Tragedy and why is it so important?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. In *Poetics*, what does Aristotle say about the chorus?

2. Why is spectacle given the least importance among the constituent elements of Tragedy?
3. State and briefly explain the qualities that according to Aristotle are necessary in a tragic hero.

1.3.15. Suggested Reading

- Barnes, Jonathan, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*. CUP, 1995.
- Butcher, Samuel Henry, editor. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Translated by Samuel Henry Butcher. 3rd edition. Macmillan,1902.
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- Lucas, F. L. *Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics.* Hogarth Press, 1957.

Unit-4 ❑ Literary Criticism from the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century

Structure

1.4.1. Objectives

After completing the Unit, the students will be able to

- understand what is meant by the terms 'Renaissance,' 'Classicism,' and 'Neoclassicism;'

  know the historical, literary and cultural contexts of the emergence of English literary criticism;
- identify the sources of literary-critical ideas of the period under discussion;
- be aware of the main issues of English literary criticism of the period; and
- recognise the major practitioners of English literary criticism of the period.

1.4.2. Introduction

The sixteenth century saw the beginning of literary criticism in English. Since then till the late eighteenth century, quite a few trends were discernible in English literary criticism. The sixteenth-century English literary treatises like Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* (1553) and Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570) put emphasis on how to teach poets invention, arrangement of words and figures of speech and other rhetorical skills. Ascham also attempts to interpret great poetry as imitation. Their approach to criticism was prescriptive in nature. In the late sixteenth century Sir Philip Sidney in his *The Defence of Poesie* or *An Apology for Poetry* (published in 1595, by two publishers with two different titles; written probably in 1585) had to refute the vicious attacks of the Puritan impeachment of poetry as immoral, as a 'school of abuse' or corruption; his defence was greatly influenced by the ideas of Aristotle as interpreted by the Latin and Italian translations of and commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, and the Latin *Ars Poetica* of the Roman poet and critic Horace. Sidney asserted that poetry was superior to philosophy and history, both of which claimed to be the best teacher of virtue and contributor to knowledge. Since then no systematic defence or apology for poetry was necessary, as there was no more the 'Puritan-Platonic impeachments' of poetry.

During the Restoration Period (1660-1700) the centre of influence shifted to the French Neoclassic dramatists and critics. John Dryden was primarily engaged in the debate on the relative merits of the Ancients and Moderns, and the relative merits of French drama and the English drama. In the eighteenth century the neoclassic ideals and rules were getting static and rigid until Dr Johnson brought a new flexibility in the proper understanding of the neoclassical rules and an ability to reinterpret and amend them to suit his own ideas.

Overall, it is observed that Neoclassicism had a lesser impact in England, as noted in the criticism of Dryden, Pope and Dr Johnson. Shakespeare's work was a great contributor to this flexibility in approach, for Shakespeare broke all the rules and yet his genius triumphed over formal imperfections. None of these neoclassical critics including Ben Jonson could deny the greatness of Shakespeare. Finally, towards the end of the 18th century neoclassicism declined and the Romantic ideals entered the field of literary criticism.

In this Unit, we shall endeavour to discuss the literary-historical contexts of how these trends emerged in England. However, as we have to frequently use the terms Renaissance, classicism, and neoclassicism and the Restoration in course of our discussion, it would, therefore, be useful at the outset to know what these terms signify.

1.4.3. Defining Renaissance, Classicism, Humanism and Neoclassicism

The term **'Renaissance'** consists of a prefix 're-' meaning 'once more, again, afresh (esp. in order to alter or improve or renew)', and a French word 'naissance' (which again is derived from a Latin root) meaning 'birth.' This 'rebirth' primarily signifies the revival of classical Greek and Roman works of literature and philosophy. The word **'Renaissance'** originated and started to be used from the mid-nineteenth century. The first person to use the term was the French historian Jules Michelet. In 1855 he published his seventh volume of the *History of France*, entitled *La Renaissance*. The word entered the English language soon after that. The following meanings given in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) are relevant for our discussion in this Unit: '1a The revival of art and literature under the influence of classical models between the 14th and 16th centuries, begun in Italy; the period of this movement. b. The style of art, architecture, etc., developed in and characteristic of this period.'

The term **classicism** refers to an admiration of the literary works of ancient Greek and Roman literature **('the classics')**, as well as the qualities of these works like formal balance, decorum and restraint, in contrast to the artistic liberties adopted by the practitioners of Romanticism since about 1800. The 'classics' or the **classical** writings refer to the works of the great Greek writers like Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, and Aristotle, and the ancient Roman writers like Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Seneca, Juvenal and so on. So the term **Renaissance** refers to both the phenomenon of the revival of classical writings and the historical period when this revival took place in Europe, which is, roughly, the late fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. It indicates a break with the Middle Ages (the period between the fall of Rome in the 5th century and the Renaissance). Moreover, Renaissance also signifies the new relations with the countries

beyond Europe, in Asia, Africa and America through exploration, trade, and political exploitation.

In this context we may mention another nineteenth-century term **'humanism'** which was an important intellectual and cultural movement of the Renaissance led by men like Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Erasmus, Sir Thomas More and others . A **humanist** is an admirer of Greek and Roman classical models of literature outside the studies of Christian Scriptures. Humanism also involves the development of technologies aimed at engagement with the physical world and systems of collective life based on principles outside the claims of theological arguments. Along with the revival of the classical learning, the Renaissance humanists developed a notion of human dignity leading to a more positive image of 'man' than the medieval ascetic Christianity. Man was regarded as a source of infinite possibilities. The famous speech of Hamlet is often regarded as an expression of the Renaissance perception of the infinite potentialities of man: 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals' (2.2. 286-289).

Neoclassicism advocates that the writers and critics should follow the rules and examples of the classical Greek and Roman authors. It promotes the belief that classical values like restraint, order, correctness and decorum should be maintained while writing poetry or drama. Correctness refers to the belief that rules practiced and perfected in classical literary genres like epic, tragedy, comedy, elegy, eclogue or pastoral poem, satire and so on must be strictly imitated by modern writers, too. Decorum signifies that style and subject matter should match: serious subjects should be treated in serious manner, in both diction and tone. Neoclassicism also supports the maxim of the Roman poet and critic Horace that art and literature must both delight and teach. Neoclassicism is often opposed to Romanticism, because it champions general truths rather than the Romantic preference of individual insights and visions.

The **'Neoclassical'** period in English literary history usually refers to the period from 1660 to 1780 or 1784, the year in which Dr Samuel Johnson died. During this period literary theory and practice in England (excluding the novel) were greatly influenced by not only the rules and precedents of the classical Greek and Roman writers, but also by those of the contemporary French poets and dramatists like Boileau, Corneille and Racine. The English neoclassical critics as well as poets and dramatists had great respect for classical rules and models, but some of them like Dryden and Samuel Johnson also made allowances for the creative novelty introduced by natural geniuses like Shakespeare.

1.4.4. The Renaissance: Historical Contexts

You may wonder how this **revival of the classical knowledge** happened in Western Europe. It may be useful to have an understanding of the historical process of the rise and decline of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, and then their revival in the 15th-16th centuries leading to the Renaissance. Let us briefly discuss this historical process.

1.4.4.1. The Greek Civilisation

The Greek civilization reached its peak in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the classical Greek tragedies and comedies, and the philosophical and scientific writings of Plato and Aristotle, were written between 800 and 300 BC. After reaching the peak, the Greek civilisation began to decline during the second century BC. Finally Greece was conquered by Rome in 146 BC. So the Greek peninsula, particularly cities like Athens and Sparta, no longer remained the centre of political or cultural importance after that event.

1.4.4.2. The Western Roman Empire

From the second century BC, the Roman Empire gradually became very powerful and extended from Britain in the West to Palestine in the East. The Roman emperor Constantine established the city of Constantinople (the present-day Istanbul) in 330 CE to strengthen the Roman influence in the Eastern part of the Empire. In 395 CE, the division of the vast Roman Empire into the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire was formalised after the death of Emperor Theodosius.

With the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 CE, the Western Roman Empire disintegrated and collapsed in the early fifth century, leading to the emergence of Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and other Western nation-states. Although literary writings in the European vernacular languages in these countries began to flourish, the Latin language still maintained its domination as the medium of religious education in all the countries of Western Europe till the fourteenth century. Under the influence of the conservative Christian theologians the study of the pagan Greek literature and scientific writings of Plato and other ancient Greek thinkers were neglected in the West during the Middle Ages; instead, religious studies were encouraged. The Church and its many rituals dominated the life of the ordinary people in the West during the medieval period, usually regarded as a 'dark age.'

1.4.4.3. The Eastern Roman Empire or the Byzantine Empire

However, the Eastern Roman Empire or the Byzantine Empire consisted of then culturally advanced countries and regions like Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. There were strong centres of Greek philosophical and scientific traditions in Alexandria,

Constantinople, and Antioch. Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, in his book *Origins of the Greek Nation: The Byzantine Period, 1204-1461* explains that the Greek civilisation was "deeply rooted in the East' and the 'artistic and intellectual life of the Empire was predominantly Greek….An overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire spoke the Greek language" (18). The elements of Greek civilisation continued to flourish till the early fifteenth century. In some monasteries the ancient Greek philosophy, literature and scientific writings were studied, and preserved in the libraries of Alexandria and other Byzantine cities. Later many of these Greek manuscripts, particularly philosophical, mathematical, medical and other scientific writings, were preserved in various libraries like *Bayt al-hikma* (House of Wisdom) at Baghdad, *Dar al-kutub* (House of Books) at Basra, and *Dar al-ilm* (House of Learning) at Cairo. Many Christian and Muslim translators translated these works either through the intermediary of Syriac or directly from Greek under the patronage of the Muslim Caliphs (Louis Gardet 581-82). The Arabic versions of the Greek texts were translated into Latin in Spain, particularly in Catalonia, Barcelona and Toledo, and taken to Western Europe, particularly Italy (F. Gabrieli 851-54). Thus some of the writings of Plato, Aristotle and other Greek scholars were already known in the West through these Arabic and Latin translations, although they did not possess the original Greek texts. F. Grabrieli, Professor at the University of Rome, refers to a passage of the thirteenth-century scholar Roger Bacon and comments: "And it is a fact that during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Greek philosophy was studied in the West on the basis of Arab re-elaborations, rather than through direct transmission and translation" (858).

1.4.4.4. The Renaissance in Italy and in Western Europe

After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Byzantine Empire disintegrated and the Greek-speaking scholars from there moved to Italy, taking the original Greek manuscripts with them. Through this process the original Greek and the ancient Latin texts were rediscovered in Italy in the late fifteenth century. This recovery and enthusiastic study of the classical texts led to what is now called the Renaissance. Then these texts also became available in France and Germany. The wave of the new ideas reached England also. Emile Legouis narrates how "some young Englishmen were attracted to Italy by the desire to learn Greek, knowledge of which had been carried thither by refugees after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. They were eager to see the manuscripts of the masterpieces these fugitive Greeks had saved and brought with them, and in quest of this revelation they journeyed to Florence, Bologna, Padua, Venice, and Rome." Consequently, there was 'an efflorescence of humanism' in England (201-02).

1.4.5. The Classical Literary Heritage in Latin Translation

The beginning of literary criticism in England was inspired by the rediscovery, critical editions, and translations of the Greek and Latin classical works of criticism in Italy in the early sixteenth century. The invention of printing press in Germany around 1450 was the most important technological and cultural innovation of the Renaissance. Humanism was quick to see the practical possibilities of the printing technology. By 1480 printing presses were successfully established in all the major cities of Germany, France, the Netherlands, England, Spain, Hungary, and Poland (48). The multiplication of copies of these writings helped their wide circulation and availability among scholars in England and other Western European countries. George Saintsbury is of the view that if the Italians had not taken up this work 'vigorously,' English literary criticism would have lacked the stimulus to begin (2). We may take a quick look at how Aristotle and other Latin critics came to exert their influence on European literary criticism.

The *Ars Poetica* of Horace was popular throughout the Middle Ages (roughly from 500 AD to a little before 1500 AD) because it defined the aim of poetry as the combination of 'utile et dulce' (to teach and delight). Although Aristotle's philosophical works were translated and studied in the Middle Ages, his *Poetics* was not much known. There was a Latin translation of *Poetics* based on an abridged Arabic translation by Averroes (Ibn Rushd) who wrote a commentary on the *Poetics* in Arabic along with an abridged Arabic translation. There were Latin translations of this abridged Arabic version, but these remained completely neglected in Europe during the Middle Ages (Wimsatt, Jr. and Brooks 155-56; Daniel Javitch 55). After the recovery of the original Greek manuscript of the *Poetics* from the Byzantine scholars who migrated to Italy in the late fifteenth century (after the fall of Constantinople in 1453), the critical editing, translation into both Latin and Italian, and printing of the *Poetics* started there. In his commentary on the *Poetics*, Averroes interpreted 'tragedy as the art of praise (aiming to incite virtue) and … comedy as the art of blame (aiming to castigate vice)'. Such an interpretation of Aristotle's poetics 'conformed more easily with the existing notions about the rhetorical methods and moral aims of poetry' (Daniel Javitch 54). So Averroes' commentary was re-printed and co-existed along with George Valla's Latin translation of the *Poetics* in Venice in 1498. The Aldine Press at Venice, started by Aldus Manutius, a Humanist scholar, printed the Greek text of the *Poetics* in 1508. Still, according to Daniel Javitch, the *Poetics* had little relevance for the readers and it made little impact because it dealt with ancient Greek literary works. Indeed, it became more intelligible to the Italians when the ancient Greek tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides were translated in 1536 (Javitch 55). In the mid-sixteenth century the Italian humanists made Aristotle's *Poetics* 'a central and traditional text of ancient poetic theory'

(Javitch 53). Francisco Robortello brought out the first critical edition of the *Poetics* with a Latin commentary in 1548 and the first edition of Longinus' *Peri Hupsous* (On the Sublime) in 1554. Apart from the *Poetics*, the works of Homer and Plato were also printed by Aldine Press during this period. Besides the Greek classical texts, the Latin works of Quintilian (the *Institutio Oratoria*) and Horace (*Epistola ad Pisones*, later called *Ars Poetica*), Girolamo Vida (*De Arte Poetica*, 1520) etc were also edited and published. These Latin, and later Italian, commentaries made Aristotle more accessible and intelligible.

1.4.6. Renaissance Literary Criticism in Italian

There was also an efflorescence of literary critical works in vernacular Italian. Bernardo Segni published the first Italian translation of the *Poetics* in 1555. Two powerful Italian treatises on poetics, *Poetices Libri Septem* by the French-Italian scholar Julius Caesar Scaliger and *L'Arte Poetica* by Antonio Minturno were published in 1561 and 1564 respectively. Lodovico Castelvetro made a great contribution to popularise Aristotle's ideas through his translation and commentary of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Italian entitled *Poetica D'Aristotele Vulgarizzata et Sposta* (1570). There were also defences of vernacular Italian form or style written by epic poets like Cinthio and Tasso. Mazzoni published two discourses in defence of Dante's *Divina Commedia* in 1572 and 1587.

1.4.7. The Influence of Latin and Italian Literary Criticism on Renaissance English Critics

All these works influenced the English literary criticism of the Renaissance including writings of Sir Philip Sidney, the most important English critic of this period. Indeed, the Renaissance literary criticism in English was more indebted to the Italian commentaries on Aristotle and Plato than their original writings. Sir Philip Sidney's manuscript was published simultaneously by two printers under two titles *The Defence of Poesie* and *An Apology for Poetrie* in 1595. Philip Sidney may not have direct familiarity with Aristotle's *Poetics*, as Wimsatt and Brooks say: "It is certain that he read little Greek, and it appears likely to us that he was better acquainted with contemporary interpretations of classical criticism than with the latter itself" (169). It is said that many passages in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* have been borrowed from Minturno, Scaliger and Castelvetro. Although Wimsatt and Brooks feel that the spirit of Sidney's criticism is 'not very sternly classical,' the sources of his 'Defence' of poetry are classical (174).

M H Abrams says that *The Apology for Poetry* is an example of what he calls pragmatic criticism, because it is more concerned with the effects of poetry on the audience. He looks at Aristotle with the prism of the sixteenth century Italian critics, and particularly of Horace. Like Horace, Sidney emphasises that the end poetry is to teach and delight. Like Horace, Sidney also endorses the classical notion of decorum or literary propriety or organic unity in any work of art, and that is why he does not approve of the mingling of tragedy and comedy as it violates the principle of decorum.

Unlike Sidney, Ben Jonson reveals 'a far more severe classicism' (174). His critical works chiefly consist of a close translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* and a collection of prose observations called *Timber, or Discoveries*, derived from various writers like Quintilian, Seneca, Cicero, and others. He gave a new and increased prestige to the rules formulated by the Italians. He believes that imitation of ancient writers can help a writer to form his own style and can produce something like the original.

1.4.8. The English Neoclassical Literary Criticism, 1660-1780s

During the **Restoration period** (1660-1700) the French classicism came to exert more powerful influence on English literary criticism than the Italian critical ideas. We all know that the term **'Restoration'** refers to the re-establishment of monarchy in England in 1660. The quarrel between King Charles I and the Parliament led to the Civil War which began in 1642 and ended in 1649 with the beheading of the King. The King's son fled to France. The House of Commons abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords. Oliver Cromwell became the Lord Protector. After the death of Cromwell in 1658, his weak son succeeded him, but the members of the Parliament were dissatisfied and in 1660 Charles I's son was declared king as Charles II, who returned to England after years of exile in France. This event is called the **Restoration**.

As Charles II remained exiled in France for many years, he and his followers there were greatly influenced by French manners and tastes, including literary tastes. As Wimsatt, Jr. and Brooks explains: "in the Frenchified courtly literary circle of Restoration England, 1660-1688, the most effective outside influence was contemporary French classicism – the spirit which reached its zenith in the dramas of Corneille and Racine" (182).

The neoclassic attitude found its greatest expression in Boileau, with his deification of 'Nature' and 'Good Sense' in general, and his thousand prescriptions and prohibitions in particular. This movement exercised great influence in England. Dryden may be taken "as partly expressing, partly resisting and revolting from" the ideas of Boileau (1669) and his contemporaries.

As the most important critic of the Neoclassical Age, Dryden accepts the general principles of Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. His most important work of literary criticism *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in the form a dialogue among four persons, deals with, among other things, the question of the relative merits of the ancient and the modern drama and the comparison of the French drama and the English drama.

He also emphasises that literature should both instruct and give pleasure. For instance, he describes a play as a "just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject for the delight and instruction of mankind" (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 13). David Daiches explains that here "instruction is not moral instruction, but instruction in the facts of human nature."

Dryden undertakes detailed criticism of Chaucer, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare, which are the earliest examples of both descriptive criticism and practical criticism in English. For him criticism is not primarily finding fault of writers, but "a process … of noting those excellences which should delight a reasonable reader." The quarrel between relative merits of the ancients and moderns originated in Italy, and then it moved to France. Dryden possibly got this idea of the debate from the Italian and French critics. As Saintsbury says, the 'Ancient and Modern' quarrel started in Italy, but it acquired a European position when it was restarted in France (103). However, Dryden does not take any extreme view on any tradition of drama, but in an impartial manner analyses the relative merits and defects of ancient classical drama, the French plays and the English plays. His discussion reveals great critical insight and a balanced view on all those traditions of drama. He never blindly adheres to the neoclassical rules. He defends Shakespeare's mixing of the comic element in tragedy by arguing that it provides the audience with relief from tragic tension. He says that Shakespeare "of all the modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul" (48). For him, Ben Jonson was "the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit.…I admire him [Ben Jonson], but I love Shakespeare" (51).

It is believed that the neoclassical or Augustan tradition of English criticism became more and more hardened and static during the post-Restoration period. The ideals of wit, good sense, a desire for neatness and correctness in style were strictly followed and the lyrical note was completely avoided. Literary criticism achieved a new flexibility with the intervention of Dr Samuel Johnson. He was not a bind follower of theory – he distrusted 'rigid and abstract theorizing', as M H Abrams says (19). He understood and assimilated neoclassicism and then tried to re-interpret its ideas and rules according to his own ideas and needs. But his belief in rationalism and reason did not allow him to be merely subjective. He defends Shakespeare against charges of failing to adhere to the neoclassical doctrine of the dramatic unities of time, place, and action. He also questions the need for

purity of dramatic genre. In defending Shakespearian tragicomedy against detractors, he asserts that "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." Both in *Preface to Shakespeare* ('that monument of neoclassic criticism', Abrams 19) and *Lives of the Poets*, Dr Johnson provides specimens of practical criticism, as he believes that the excellence of the work can reveal the power and excellence of the author. Abrams says, "In his systematic appraisal of the works [of Shakespeare] themselves we find that mimesis retains for Johnson a measure of authority as criterion."

1.4.9. Summing Up

In this Unit we have attempted to explain the historical context of the emergence of European Renaissance. The cultural and literary-critical significances of the terms like 'Renaissance', 'classicism' and 'neoclassicism' have also been elucidated. The recovery, translations and commentaries and interpretations in Latin of the works of Plato, Aristotle, and the critical works of Horace and other Roman authors promoted a great deal of literary criticism in sixteenth-century Italy. Particularly the Italian commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* and the critical ideas in France influenced the early works of literary criticism in English like *The Apology for Poetry* by Philip Sidney and *Timber, or Discoveries* by Ben Jonson. But the ideas of the ancient Greek and Roman classical authors and those of the sixteenth-century Italy and France continued to exert their influence on the neoclassical critics of both the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries in England. Of course, the major English neoclassical critics like Dryden and Samuel Johnson were not blind followers of theory; they had their own views and which made their works valuable in their own right and not merely carbon copies of ancient classical criticism.

1.4.10. Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions

1. How would you define the term "Renaissance"? Identify the main trends of literary criticism from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century.
2. Discuss the historical process of the revival of classical learning in Western Europe.
3. Write a short essay on influence of Latin and Italian literary criticism on Renaissance English critics.
4. Explain the term 'Neoclassicism.' Discuss the chief characteristics of English neoclassical criticism.

Short-answer type questions

1. Briefly discuss Humanism as an intellectual movement.
2. Explain how ancient Greek civilization lost its intellectual and cultural importance.
3. Write a brief note on Renaissance literary criticism in vernacular Italian language.
4. How did the invention of printing press help in the dissemination of literary criticism?

Short-answer type questions

1. Why does Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* have an alternative title?
2. How would you describe a humanist?
3. When was Greece conquered by Rome?
4. Who was Lodovico Castelvetro?

1.4.11. Suggested Readings

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Unit-5 ❑ Literary Criticism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: An Overview

Structure

1.5.1. Objectives

This Unit has the following objectives:

- ✓ To analyse the material conditions and historical factors that shaped literary criticism in the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;
- ✓ To understand the impact of the broad philosophical movements and concepts in Europe on the English literary criticism of the early nineteenth century;
- ✓ To provide an overview of the major trends and features in English literary criticism in the long nineteenth century;
- ✓ To examine the socio-political condition of Victorian England and its effect on Victorian literary criticism;
- ✓ To consider how gender influenced literary criticism in the long nineteenth century;
- ✓ To analyse the process of institutionalising literary criticism and its overall impact;
- ✓ To survey major schools of literary criticism in the early twentieth century.

1.5.2. Introduction

In the long nineteenth century, the terms 'literary' and 'criticism,' as individual terms, assumed new meaning. As a composite term 'literary criticism' in England moved from the pages of literary journals and periodicals to the corridors of universities. By the mid-nineteenth century the function of criticism extended beyond evaluating literary works and creating good taste – it assumed significance in the creation and preservation of culture. By the end of the century the same assumptions were being questioned. In the early twentieth century two seemingly contradictory processes were happening in the field of literature, more specifically English literature – on one hand, its progressive institutionalisation, and on the other/, formal experiments undertaken by the avant-gardists and modernists in general, disrupting and reshaping institutional ideas about literature. Around the same time literary criticism started historicising itself through books such as George Saintsbury's *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (1900-4), parts of which were later excerpted to form a *History of English Criticism* (1911). Clearly criticism was by now conscious of its own historical significance.

1.5.3. The Legacy of the Enlightenment: Importance of Kant and German Idealism

The eighteenth century is usually characterised as the Age of Reason. But this is only a partial definition. The hallmark of European Enlightenment is critical reasoning. Criticism, as an act and as an aptitude, is at the core of the Enlightenment spirit, but its relation with traditional reasoning can be complicated. On one hand, the Enlightenment is associated with mechanical reasoning. On the other hand, it is also the time when reason looked inward, 'critiqued' itself, questioned its own boundaries. These two aspects produced different, often contradictory, results. This duality of the Enlightenment was reflected in the domain of letters. According to Jon Klancher, until the beginning of the nineteenth century critics and reviewers worked within two closely related categories – 'polite literature' and the 'republic of letters.' 'Polite literature' consisted of historiography, natural philosophy, moral philosophy as well as poetry, drama etc. with the significant exclusion of the new genre of the novel. The 'Republic of Letters' defined an 'elusive, often deliberately mysterious domain' (Klancher 296) – basically an intellectual community that transcended national boundaries. By the end of the eighteenth century, the cardinal features of early eighteenth-century literary criticism such as neoclassicism that demanded perfect imitation of classical models, cultivation of taste, decorum etc. made way for a different kind of critical sensibility. Also, the more public function of literature changed into a role that is both personal and universal.

If this last bit seems contradictory (How can something personal be universal as well?), then you are not the first person to notice it. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) addressed this conundrum in his three *Critiques* - *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In his 'Third Critique', i.e., *Critique of Judgement*, Kant's focus is primarily aesthetic judgment. According to him, aesthetic judgment is paradoxical since it is a subjective judgment, therefore particular (What I consider beautiful depends on my taste), but it commands an authority that seems universal (When I say something is beautiful, I make it as a general statement). Kant argued that our aesthetic judgments are closely linked to the transcendental component of our mind that helps us arrange the immediate data received from different components of a particular work of art (analytic judgement in Kantian terms) but also steers us beyond our immediate context towards some common emotions (synthetic judgment).

The significance of Kant's critique is that after Kant the human mind could no longer be conceived as a mere recorder of external events nor could it be defined only as an instrument of logical reasoning. Human consciousness has contradictory elements but there is more to it than mere sum total of those elements. Drawing from Kant German Idealist

thinkers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) tried to expand the understanding of the human subject (that is the conscious human being) and tried to ascertain how subjects form ideas and what is their relation to the objective world.

1.5.4. German Romanticism and the Emergence of the 'Literary'

Kant did not offer critical inputs about a particular form or genre or work of art nor did he give value judgment about good or bad art; instead, what he proposed was "a systematic philosophy of the aesthetic" (Simpson 75). Till that point aesthetics was treated as subservient to metaphysics: a mere vessel for philosophical thoughts. But with Kant aesthetics became a domain separate from philosophy –- a domain important enough for philosophy to concern itself with.

The German Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries translated this notion of a philosophy of aesthetics into a philosophy of literature. The 'literary' started to be seen as a source of knowledge which is different from metaphysics and required a whole new philosophical framework, effectively a 'philosophy of literature' (Nancy 18-19). The German Romantics proposed the literary to be the 'third term' that can unite the creative and the critical and, in the process, can present even the unpresentable or the absolute.

A group of philosophers including August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1765-1845), Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, better known by his pen name Novalis (1772-1801), Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), who held meetings in Jena between 1798 and 1804 and came to be known as the Jena Circle started defining the term Romantic in various ways – Novalis defined it as antithetical to Classical, Friedrich Schlegel associated the term with both 'progressive' and 'universal.' The two Schlegel brothers, writing in the journal of the circle titled *Athenaeum* laid down the philosophical foundations of Romanticism. In *Athenaeum Fragment 116* Friedrich Schlegel wrote that the 'mission' of Romantic poetry, among other things, was to "fill and saturate the forms of art with solid cultural material of every kind" (Schlegel 2009, 900). Walter Benjamin posits Friedrich Schlegel as the founder of what he calls the 'Romantic theory of criticism' (Benjamin 118).

This exalted stature given to poetry would resonate among the Romantics not only in Germany but in other countries, particularly England. However, the German Romantics were not only redefining poetry but, in the process, giving criticism new functionality. Walter Benjamin points out that 'criticism' and 'critical' are easily the two most recurring terms in the writings of the German Romantics. He argues that while the Romantics used the term 'kritik' in multiple senses they moved criticism beyond its narrow meaning; criticism became

"the esoteric, cardinal concept of the Romantic school" (Benjamin 142). The main functions of literary criticism in the eighteenth century were analytical (examining various components of a literary work), evaluative (assessing the value, aesthetic or moral, of a work of literature) and classificatory (dividing various types of literature or different variations within a type in order to place them historically). But Romantic criticism ventured into what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe terms "the theoretical construction of art" (Lacoue-Labarthe103). In the short piece titled "Concerning the Essence of Critique" (1804) Friedrich Schlegel proposed the 'concept of critique' in following terms:

We should think of critique as a middle term between history and philosophy, one that shall join both, and in which both are to be united to form a new, third term. Without philosophical spirit, such a critique cannot thrive—everyone agrees on this—nor without historical knowledge. (Schlegel,"Concerning the Essence of Critique" 276)

You can see criticism was no longer seen as anchored to an existing literary work. It was not conceived as a bridge between a literary work and the reader or the market anymore; rather between history and philosophy. You can also see how its function was to synthesise two metaphysical categories to arrive at something new. The act of Romantic criticism consisted of "waiting for the work" (Lacoue-Labarthe 101), i.e. it took upon itself the role of constructing a new definition of art, of the artistic subject and the relation between art and life. In undertaking this function Romantic criticism came quite close to what we understand today as 'theory.'

1.5.5. English Romanticism and Literary Criticism

The canon of English Romantic criticism has some of the most important creative writers of the early nineteenth century, both poets and prose writers; such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Charles Lamb (1775-1834), William Hazlitt (1778-1830), Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) and others. However, you might want to keep two things in mind when you approach the Romantic 'canon,' be it that of poets or critics. None of the writers usually associated with English Romanticism actually used the term; it was first used by the Victorians. And the construction of any such canon is always a political act (you might have noticed that the influential Romantic critics that have been listed so far are all white men. No woman has been mentioned even though we will see in a later section that there were many women writers and critics at the time). Also, there seems to be a class-uniformity in the composition of the canon as almost all the critics enlisted came from educated middle-class backgrounds. The importance given to these few fixed names provides only a partial picture of the Romantic Age as it does not take into

account the vigorous critical, cultural and political activities among the English working classes, women and other marginalised groups.

The historian Eric Hobsbawm names the period between 1789 and 1848 the 'Age of Revolutions.' He deliberately chooses two momentous events to demarcate this period – the French Revolution of 1789 and the February Revolution of 1848. In-between there were revolutionary activities in Germany and Italy. In England these were the initial years of the Industrial Revolution. The French Revolution's promise of freedom and rights resonated among the industrial workers, the miners, the peasants dispossessed by industrialisation, agricultural labourers, Irish nationalist groups – in short, a large section of the poor and marginalised of British society. The state responded in a heavy-handed manner. In 1795, Parliament passed the Treasonable Practices Act, which made criticism of the government a crime. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 forbade workers to associate for the purposes of collective bargaining; to put it plainly workers could not unionise. An elaborate system of spying and surveillance was installed to infiltrate liberal and radical groups. There were popular demonstrations of protest such as those of the Luddites who attacked and broke machinery to show their discontent with mechanisation. Food riots happened across the country. And then there was the Peterloo massacre of 1819 – a peaceful gathering of mill workers at St. Peter's Field near Manchester so alarmed the local gentry that they unleashed a drunken militia on the protesters, killing many, including women and children.

The philosophical and critical interventions of the Romantics can be read against this charged political context. The search for transcendental categories was imperative when the irreconcilable divisions within a class society came out in the open and reached a point of implosion. René Wellek sees in German, English and French Romanticisms the 'endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious' (Wellek, "Romanticism re-examined" 133). Romantic creative and critical output may seem a register of this split but was also a way to cope with the split by overcoming it in the domain of the literary.

The critics of the Romantic age were not impervious to recognising the ideological role of poetry in providing cultural legitimacy to dominant power. Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866), a poet, novelist, and a critic wrote the essay "Four Ages of Poetry" which was published in *Literary Miscellany* in 1820. It was a satirical essay in which he took a dig at the tall and exalted claims of poets, reminding them that poetry originated to sing praises of powerful men. Peacock's essay put in place a picture of progress and regress, prompting Shelley to launch an impassioned defence of poetry as the foundation of language as well as its last resort when all genres have been exhausted in his famous essay "Defence of Poetry" (1821). This sense of exhaustion emerged from a haunting prospect of impending decline.

English Romantic criticism, like its German counterpart, was inclined towards a whole new philosophy of poetry. According to Rene Wellek, Romantic criticism can be conceived in two broad senses – a revolt against neoclassicism with a view of poetry centred on the expression of emotions and an attempt to establish "a dialectical and symbolistic view of poetry" (Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* 126). The first strain can be associated with Wordsworth and the second with Coleridge, the two friends who collaborated to bring out *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), usually considered the text that started the Romantic age in English literature.

One of the signature features of Romantic criticism and in a broader sense Romantic poetics was the call to return to Nature. There was the obvious influence of Rousseau's celebration of nature as a state of pure, uncorrupted, instinctive existence. Then there was the German Strum-und-Drang (Storm and Stress) movement of the 1770s that had called for raw expression of human nature against "the false embellishment of art and rhetoric" (Schneider 94). Before we move further, we must remember that returning to nature might mean different things when used in the context of different Romantic critics. It was not a shared template. This stance was associated mainly with Wordsworth and it was both valorised and criticised by his contemporary critics. In "Four Ages of Poetry" Thomas Love Peacock mockingly stated, "The descriptive poetry of the present day has been called by its cultivators a return to nature. Nothing is more impertinent than this pretension. Poetry cannot travel out of the regions of its birth, the uncultivated lands of semi-civilized men."

However, broadly speaking, for the English Romantics returning to nature meant giving full expression to human nature and asserting its union with physical nature. Nature is "the prime genial artist," to quote Coleridge (899) and the true poet as "nature humanized" (899). Industrialisation was already changing the natural landscape of England; in a way it was Romantic criticism's recognition of man's alienation from nature as well as its proposition of literature as the domain where this disconnect could be overcome.

Romantic criticism took off from the Kantian understanding of aesthetic judgment in which form and content are organically integrated to produce an altogether new effect. For Coleridge such an effect can be achieved when poetry moves away from mechanical to organic form, in the first instance "on any given material we impress a pre-determined form" whereas the organic form "is innate, it shapes, as it develops, from within" (899).

What then is the nature of aesthetic experience for the reader? In *Biographia Literaria* (1817) Coleridge said that the reader should not be driven by "the mechanical impulse of curiosity…to arrive at the final solution", rather "by the attractions of the journey itself" (899) – a journey that necessarily takes place in language. This statement is indicative of how Romantic criticism radically redefined the nature and function of poetic language. For

the Romantics language was neither a mere descriptive medium to mirror an external reality nor was it a tool of ornamentation. In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984) Paul de Man credits the Romantics of making poetic language figurative, metaphorical and ambiguous – qualities that will be explored later by the Symbolist and Modernist poets.

This finally leads us to the concept of Imagination as a new epistemological category (epistemology is a part of philosophy that answers the question relating to how knowledge is produced. Imagination is an epistemological category because it helps to produce knowledge about reality). But the knowledge that it helps produce is neither purely rational (logical thinking based on cause and effect) nor purely empirical (only about the material world). Romantic critics defined Imagination as cognitive (something related to the thinking mind) as well as embodied (Imagination is triggered with physical sensations), something that can transform particular experiences into universal ones, enabling the poet "to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds" that would still move his auditors "who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence and why," exalts Shelley in "A Defence of Poetry" (903). Imagination, then, becomes the anchor in the Romantic critic's quest for a theory of literature.

1.5.6. Criticism as 'Profession': Changing Role of Literary Journals and the Market

While the Romantic literary critics were formulating a new concept of poetry, they were churning out more identifiable forms of literary criticism such as book reviews in periodicals of various kinds. The 'profession' of literary criticism in England in the nineteenth century developed in two different and apparently contradictory routes. On one hand was periodical literature – prodigious in quantity catering to an expanding reading market. On the other hand was the academic critic – either trying to uphold social order and moral values or engaged in analysing literary features to establish authenticity of literary genres. We will be discussing all these trends and will also see that they might have converged at certain points.

Much of what was 'polite literature' in the previous century continued in the nineteenth century in the pages of periodicals. Writing in the periodical press started bringing good money and was considered to be respectable. It constituted what Klancher calls the "polite marketplace of ideas' (302). If a book was selected for review by the periodicals, it was deemed important by a middle-class reading public which looked for an anchor in an increasingly diversified book market. *Edinburgh Review*, founded in 1802 and edited by Francis Jeffrey is often considered the first modern periodical. *Quarterly*, *Westminster Quarterly*, *New Monthly Magazine*, *The London Magazine* were some of the other

quarterly or monthly periodicals and magazines. Reviews published in most early nineteenth century journals and periodicals were deliberately anonymous – anonymity was argued to be a necessary precondition and protection for voicing free and fair opinion. Instead, they spoke in a collective voice, employing the collective pronoun 'we' (Shattock 23). Joanne Shattock argues that the condition of anonymity gave considerable power to the editors since it was they who stood for the authority of their reviews and could alter the works of their contributors with impunity.

The abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers in 1855 increased the number of dailies and weeklies significantly. The plenty in numbers drove up competition among the periodicals. A diversified market now had to be categorised and literary criticism had an important role to play. From the 1850s the term 'higher journalism' started to be used to describe a few niche journals, their respectability in turn attached to the status of their 'critics' – men with university degrees who had adjunct careers in politics, church, bar, civil service etc. Shattock opines that "[t]he role of 'the critic', as distinct from that of the reviewer or the journalist," started to take shape by the mid-century – "Criticism, in the eyes of its practitioners, was becoming a specialized and a more professional activity" (21-22). The *Academy* established in 1869 first as "A Weekly Review of Literature, Science, and Art" and then as "A Weekly Review of Literature and Life" set out "to promote scholarly standards of criticism across a spectrum of disciplines, with the universities both its target audience and initially the main source of its contributors" (21). Departing from the prevalent custom of anonymity of authorship, the *Academy* started publishing names of its contributors. The domain of periodicals was now divided between the critic and the reviewer, the academician and the general man of letters, the professional and the amateur. Consequently, a domain that was 'non-hierarchichal' and 'non-specialized,' according to Marilyn Butler, was now hierarchised between high and low journalism (Butler 126).

1.5.7 Institutionalisation of Literary Studies and Literary Criticism

By the mid-nineteenth century literary criticism was firmly ensconced as a 'profession,' partly due to the abundance of periodical literature, and partly due to its accommodation in the university system. M.A.R. Habib in his introduction to *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* writes, "In the nineteenth century, literary criticism first developed into an autonomous, professional discipline in the universities" (1). This development ran parallel to the development of English Studies as an academic discipline. D.J. Palmer traces the working-class origins of the English Studies starting with provisions for lectures in English literatures at Mechanics' Institutes, beginning with the ones in London in 1823 and extension lecture programmes. Subsequently, as English Studies rose in academia in the

form of designated chairs and professorships in universities its working class origins were strategically erased. The inculcation of English literature in academic spaces and curricula provided institutional legitimacy to the study of English literary texts. It ensured a steady flow of university graduates who worked as 'professional,' specialist critics.

But English literary criticism in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not only an offshoot of university education; criticism also played a constitutive role in institutionalising English education. English education initiated among marginal sections of English society had a specific ideological function. Chris Baldick detected both a Utilitarian and Evangelical drive in establishing English literature as an academic discipline, deemed fit for the purpose of instructing the working classes, the colonial subjects and women (Baldick 61). English literary criticism of the nineteenth century performed twin roles to establish English literature as the reservoir of national heritage – formulating a history of English literature as a continuous history of a discrete English identity and by generally defining culture as the touchstone of national character. Many literary critics of the mid-nineteenth century were also educationists. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was an inspector of schools. Davis Masson was the Chair of English Language and Literature at University College, during whose tenure the study of English language and literature became established in 1859 as an integral part of the syllabus. But he was also a critic who wrote reviews of contemporary writers such as Dickens and Thackeray. However, much of his critical work involved tracing the history of English literature, grouping and classifying literary works, evaluating authors, in short making it fit for curricular purpose. In the process the rather humble origins of English education were erased and it was turned into a 'respectable' academic discipline – fit for refined gentlemen, performing not just the utilitarian function of educating the poor but a higher critical function of setting and maintaining cultural order.

1.5.8. The Victorian Condition and Literary Criticism

In England the political rights of the post-industrial-revolution middle-class were ensured through various reform acts, the process seemingly completed with the Reform Act of 1831. The political emancipation of the Non-Conformists and Catholics – religious groups that faced discrimination and persecution till the eighteenth century – happened in 1828 and 1829 respectively. This was the time of the consolidation of the bourgeois political order. However, the growing demands to expand those rights among the industrial working-classes met with brutal suppression from the state and created much tension in the cultural sphere. The 1840s were often called the Hungry Forties as the English ruling classes lived under fears of insurrection as they saw socialist uprisings all over Europe. It was felt that the People's Charter of 1848, the result of the decades-long Chartist

movement, could not achieve the goal of political empowerment of common people, including voting rights for all. The Reform League, established in 1865 pressed for universal suffrage for all adult male regardless of income, property, religion, race or other factors (Womens' voting rights still had a long way to go; however, women's suffrage movement will gain momentum by the end of the nineteenth century). They rallied around the slogan of "One Man, One Vote" popularised by the International Workmen's Association. The political agitations compelled the liberal government of the time to place the Reform Bill of 1866 in parliament. Even this much watered down bill was defeated, leading to large scale protests. When protesting crowds gathered in London's Hyde Park they were stopped by the police leading to Hyde Park riots.

Literary Criticism of the mid-nineteenth century not only responded to the political atmosphere of the times but set the contours of discourses. One of the raging debates of the Victorian age was around the 'Condition of England Question' – a phrase used for the first time by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) in his book *Chartism* (1840) where he described Chartism as "the most ominous of all practical matters whatever" (Carlyle 5). He dealt with the question whether the condition of the English working classes or their disposition is wrong. The anxiety about an assertive working class and its radical potential in reshaping the socio-political status quo is quite apparent in Carlyle's polemics. This is an anxiety that the political conservative Carlyle shared with comparatively liberal thinkers, including Matthew Arnold.

In such a fraught and volatile socio-economic scenario the function of literary criticism gets redefined. The critics took it to be their great calling to locate and articulate what they thought to be the burning problems of their time. In his seminal text *Past and Present* (1843) Carlyle identified two essential problems of his time – a lack of spiritual unity or brotherhood of men, and the invisibility of great leaders to reform English society. The relation between literature and criticism too was reoriented. For the longest time literary criticism played somewhat of a derivative role to creative literature, its primary task being critically analysing and evaluating literature. It took a philosophical turn with the Romantics. However, in his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present time" Matthew Arnold argued that rather than analysing or theorising criticism plays a proactive role in the creative act itself – criticism actually prepares the conditions for creation as "[i]t tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail" (Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* 6). Setting norms and order to maintain standards was not only a literary quest, it was an ideological response to concrete material and political developments. There was a general consensus among most conservative and liberal thinkers about the contradictory nature of post-industrialisation English society – unprecedented material progress and a spiritual decadence, resulting in the lack of any workable philosophical or critical models. Literary critics started looking

for models in continental Europe. The influence of German philosophers such as Kant, Fichte and Goethe on Thomas Carlyle was more direct in books such as *Life of Friedrich Schiller* (1823-24) and more thematic and stylistic in *Sartor Resartus* (1836). For Arnold Europe, particularly France, provided models for national institutes and Germany for national culture as platforms that were inclusive and moderate enough to accommodate warring factions of Victorian society, yet could set boundaries and hierarchies to decide who is included and who is not.

The most significant ideological function of literary criticism was to provide cultural explanation and resolutions to conflicts arising out of material inequalities. We have seen that from the beginning of the nineteenth century literature became a more elastic term, so did criticism. Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865) for example covered a gamut of areas – from religion to philosophy, from paganism to medieval Christianity. Consequently, literature and criticism became entry points into the broader domain of 'culture.' The functions that Arnold ascribed to literary criticism were expanded in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). This helped him to arrive at an expansive definition of culture. Culture, for Arnold, was no longer a handful of art forms or a combination of practices, gestures or social behaviour. He proposed culture to be an active principle and an overall approach to life. While articulating the middle-class anxieties about social 'anarchy,' basically the fear of losing political dominance to a resurgent and combative working class as well as about the spiritual degeneration resulting out of crass materialism Arnold recommended "culture as the great help out of our present difficulties, culture being a pursuit of our total perfection…." (5).

Throughout the nineteenth century literary criticism established a close association between literature and the formation of a national identity. In 1818 an anonymous essay titled "Of a National Character in Literature" was published in conservative magazine *Blackwood's.* It argued that the literature of a people reflected their minds. William Ellery Channing, another nineteenth century critic, wrote in 1830 "stating what we mean by national literature. We mean the expression of a nation's mind in writing. . .." (Wright 98). Arnold, on the other hand, defined national culture not as a static identity but as a flow or a stream that gets regularly renewed by new ideas. Criticism was an important component of nineteenth century debates about nations that gradually consolidated into discourses of nationalism.

1.5.9. Literary Criticism and Consolidation of Literary Genres

Unlike eighteenth century criticism that evaluated literary genres in terms of their conformity to classical models, Romantic literary criticism in the nineteenth century

examined genres from a more aesthetic perspective. Rather than adhering to neo-classical rules, the emphasis shifted to originality. The German thinkers of the late eighteenth century laid the groundwork for later discussions on genres. Tilottama Rajam argues that the transition from 'the Enlightenment to German idealism' can be read as a shift 'from a pragmatic to a philosophical' theory of genres (226).

Rajam detects another critical current in Romanticism that developed a morphological understanding of genres. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), the late eighteenth century German philosopher, related the concept of genres to 'germ' and 'root' alluding to its evolving rather than static character. In his *Aesthetics* (1835), Hegel described genre within a system that integrated theory and history. He classified the arts according to a sequence of historical stages of art, from the 'symbolic' (allegorical) in ancient India and Egypt, to the 'classical' (union of content and form) in the Greeks, to the 'Romantic' as a new division of content and form marked by subjectivity and the dissolution of outer form (Monte 481-82).

Theories of genres such as poetry and the novel developed and consolidated from the 1830s. Leigh Hunt in his essay "What is Poetry" published in 1844 established what Steven Monte calls an 'expressive hierarchy' of feeling, thought and wit in literary creation. According to Monte, it quickly turned into a 'generic hierarchy' of epic, serious drama, non-serious drama, the pastoral, the lyric and contemplative poetry (481-82). Walter Bagehot divided all literary art into three principal modes – 'the pure,' 'the ornate' and 'the grotesque' – they are often, rather indiscriminately, associated with classical, romantic and medieval. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) in his arguments about genre in essays such as "The Philosophy of Composition" combined Romantic emphasis on expression and originality with neo-classical thrust on purity of forms.

In the later part of the nineteenth century the critical contours of the genre of the novel got etched out. Both Poe and later on Henry James (1843–1916) concentrated their critical energy specifically on the genre of the novel. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884) James remarked that only 'a short time ago' the English novel "had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it" and that it is only now beginning to be taken seriously (James 44-45). In "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905), James argued that generic mixture is built into the novel. Surveying various critical positions on the novel between 1830 and 1914, Steven Monte detects certain common traits such as an acknowledgement of the incompleteness of the form as well as affective and epistemological questions.

1.5.10. Women and Literary Criticism in the Nineteenth Century

Literary criticism in the nineteenth century has long been conceived primarily as a male

forte. However, whether women's response to literature was different from men was a debate that prevailed throughout the eighteenth century. The French writer and critic Germaine de Staël argued in *De la littérature* (1800) that contrary to the philosophical excesses of men women remain open to 'humanity, generosity, delicacy' and this makes women uniquely suitable for literature (Kelley 322). Though this line of argument may easily devolve into opinions of contemporary male critics that women should strictly confine themselves to lesser forms such as the novel, seen as lacking philosophical intensity, it indicates a debate that sustained throughout the nineteenth century about the role of passion and reason in women's creativity as well as criticality.

Throughout the nineteenth century women critics played an important part in all aspects of criticism that we have talked about so far – genre criticism, evaluating existing body of literature, formulating literary histories, arguing for or against specific literary positions, charting out national histories based on literary or cultural attributes. Most importantly, women critics inserted women characters and women writers in literary history. In England Elizabeth Inchbald published multiple volumes of *The British Theatre* (1806-1823) where she provided historically grounded analyses of English plays across history, their production and impact. She included and analysed several women playwrights and reviewed their productions. Another important critical work on women's drama, with specific focus on women characters, was Anna Jameson's (1794–1860) *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832). Anna Letitia Barbauld edited the multi-volume *The British Novelists* (1820). In her essay "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-writing" she traced the historical trajectory of the English novel and put her critical weightage behind realism in the novel form.

Harriet Martineau, Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller and George Eliot were the most prominent female literary critics in mid-century Britain and America. Their role as critics was invariably marked by their gender as

The female critic might be considered a freak of nature. She was often characterized as masculine – sometimes as a sincere or grudging tribute to an intellect unusually powerful for a woman, sometimes in recognition of her literary or actual cross-dressing, and sometimes in intrusive analyses revealing more about the gender anxieties of the viewer than the woman herself. (Adams 74) George Sand, the great French critic, was known for her appearance and attire – her trousers and cigars along with her socialist views created her persona as a transgressive woman. Harriet Martineau (1802–76) was known as 'the little deaf woman at Norwich.' As the chief editorial writer for the *London Daily News* from 1852 to 1866, she regularly reviewed books and summed up the careers of writers in memorial notices, later collected as *Biographical Sketches.* Martineau argued that fiction was the form best suited to represent the national life of her time. She identified three levels of fiction: the merely imitative; the descriptive; and that reached by the great

artist or genius (Adams 76) and advocated for literary realism.

George Eliot (1819–80) wrote most of her literary criticism in the 1850s, as the associate editor of the *Westminster Review* and contributor to the *Leader*. In "Woman in France: Madame de Sable" (1854) Eliot assessed the contributions of seventeenth century French women writers and salonists. Through her literary reviews Eliot too set up a hierarchy of authors – the universal geniuses, the contemporary poets and realist novelists and the imitative writers. In essays such as "Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho*!" she listed a few salient features of realism such as keenness of observation and accuracy of description, many of which she practised as a novelist.

Eliot's predecessor and a discernable critical influence on her was Margaret Fuller (1810–50), the American journalist, editor and critic. Fuller was a leading member of the transcendentalist group and edited their journal. Fuller wrote critical essays on American writers. In her essay "American Literature" Fuller puts forth her idea of an American literature based on ingenuity rather than imitation of an existing English model - a literature that reflected both 'national character' and 'national landscape' (Adams 82).

1.5.11. English Literary Criticism and Political and Cultural Movements of *fin de siècle*

The French term fin-de-siècle, literally meaning 'the end of the century,' does not only imply a temporal break between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it conveys a sense of imminent change and the excitement and anxiety associated with it. It was a time when conservative politics gained ground all over Europe with rising nationalism and expanding imperialism. On the other hand, progressive, radical politics spread across Europe, taking shape through an intensifying Communist movement – the brief but momentous event of the Paris Commune in 1871 bearing witness to the revolutionary hopes of the times. How literature and art registered and expressed these turmoils and whether these literary trends should be called 'movements' at all is a different discussion. Here we would focus on how literary criticism of the time responded to the changes, were shaped by them and how often it played a constitutive role in these 'movements.'

Marxist Literary Criticism: Marx's formulations seriously critiqued and completely overhauled concepts of the thinking subject and their consciousness – the two categories that had been central to post-Enlightenment idealist philosophy and aesthetic theories ranging from Transcendentalism to Romanticism. He turned human consciousness into a socially produced and historically contingent phenomenon and connected with the material production of life. However, even as Marx took keen interest in literature and his writings

are strewn in literary references, he did not propose any cogent theory of art, only indicated the dialectical relation of art and material reality. It was Engels who during Marx's lifetime and specially after his death not only organised and popularised Marx's writings but infused new critical rigour and consolidated their concepts into what would come to be termed Marxism by the 1880s. Engels enlarged the scope of their enquiry into the field of aesthetics, so that by the latter part of the nineteenth century there were a growing number of thinkers and critics who started applying a discernible 'Marxist' framework to understand and analyse the relation between life, art and artist. Franz Mehring (1846-1914), the German historian, art critic and Communist, is arguably the first critic to undertake a sustained study in Marxist aesthetics in his journal articles later collected in *The Lessing Legend* (1893).

In England the artist, writer and critic William Morris (1834-1896) claimed in his essay "Art under Plutocracy" (1883) that "art is founded on what I feel quite sure is a truth, and an important one, namely that all art, even the highest, is influenced by the conditions of labour of the mass of mankind, and that any pretensions which may be made for even the highest intellectual art to be independent of these general conditions are futile and vain…." (Morris 108). He opened his essay "Art and Socialism" with the following lines , "My friends, I want you to look into the relations of Art to Commerce" (Morris 1). This line is indicative of Morris' attempt to connect the apparently disparate, even antithetical worlds of art and labour, a cardinal feature of Marxist praxis.

Aestheticism: The phrase *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake") which became the bold slogan for the fin de siècle aesthetes was coined by the French poet, dramatist, critic and novelist Theophile Gautier (1811-1872) in the Preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* written in 1835, technically long before the period that can be conceived as the end of the century. But Baudelaire's critical writings on Poe and Gautier's own critical take on Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* in the mid-nineteenth century laid down the foundations of the artistic stance of Aestheticism. Subsequently, in the 1880s and 1990s *l'art pour l'art* with its implied dissociation of the moral and aesthetic values of art gets associated with the sense of moral exhaustion and artistic sophistication endemic to a moment of transition.

In England, the critical writings of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde are most closely associated with aestheticism. In his essay "Aesthetic Poetry" (1869) Pater writes that while poetry in any case creates "a world in which the forms of things are transfigured," the 'new poetry' that he is talking about "takes possession of that 'transfigured world…and sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or 'earthly paradise.'" In William Morris' poetry Pater saw the "first typical specimen of aesthetic poetry" (https://www.laits.utexas.edu/farrell/documents/Pater_Aesthetic%20Poetry.pdf) characterised by a stylistic finesse that could create a self-contained

beauty of form, invoking a world of art rather than a world outside (William Morris' own critical position on the relation between art and society was quite the opposite, as we have already seen).

Oscar Wilde analysed the phenomenon of aestheticism in his essays "The Critic as Artist" and "The Soul of Man under Socialism." In the first essay he deliberately took a stance contrary to Matthew Arnold. Whereas Arnold in "The Function of Criticism" gives precedence to criticism over creativity since criticism is supposed to render the world as it really is, Wilde inverts the relation and claims that even the critic is an artist as there is no world outside of art to refer to. However, in "The Soul of Man under Socialism" there seems to be a shift in his position as he argues that the artist forces the world towards a self-recognition. However, an awareness of 'decadence' remains central to their formulations.

Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism - These three literary movements had lasting influence on various forms of literary modernism of the twentieth century. In his preface to *The Human Comedy* (1829-48), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), the great French novelist, laid down an ambitious project to attain in literature an almost scientific accuracy of observation and analysis of the real world inspired the Realist school (This concept of Realism was different from the narrative Realism that was practised earlier, concerned mainly with verisimilitude with social reality).

Realism's unflinching commitment to represent all aspects of reality turns it towards Naturalism launched by Emile Zola' essay "The Experimental Novel" where he insisted that the novelist is composed of an observer and an experimenter, not only providing manifest details but also taking "facts from nature and then study their mechanism"

The manifesto of French Symbolism was written by Jean Moreas in 1886. The movement included poets like Jules Laforgue, Henri de Regnier, Gustave Kahn and Stéphane Mallarmé and rejected the notion that poetic language has to refer to an external world. However, the profound impact of French symbolism on modernist poems in Europe as well as in America was mediated by Arthur Symons' critical take in his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). It was Symons who used the term 'decadence' in English literary circles in a systematic way in *Harper's New Magazine* (1893). He argued in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* that Decadence should be seen as a preliminary stage or anticipation of Symbolism and described the Symbolist movement in general as a "revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition."

1.5.12. The 'Modern' Trends in Literary Criticism in the Early Twentieth Century

The process of institutionalisation of English literary studies and literary criticism that started in the nineteenth century was complete by the second decade of the twentieth. The state policy had an increasingly decisive role to play in establishing English studies in academic spaces. The formation of the English Association in 1907 and publication of the report by its chairman, known as the Newbolt Report titled "The Teaching of English in England' in 1921 were important steps in that direction. Gerald Graff writes in his book *Professing Literature* (1987) that in the inter-war period the disciplinary impetus was sharpened by what he called "wartime superpatriotism." Another contributing factor to the shaping of the discipline was the emergence and gradual dominance of American academia in steering global academic discourses.

Due to this incremental academicisation of the discipline of English studies by the early twentieth century we have various 'schools' of literary criticism such as Liberal Humanism, Formalism, Structuralism, Marxism, New Criticism and so on, many of which emerged in the Euro-American university departments. According to Aijaz Ahmad, English Studies during the period between the two World Wars were dominated by four main currents: the 'practical criticism' of I. A. Richards; the 'programmatic criticism' of T.S. Eliot, avant-gardist modernism and the New Criticism that emerged in Vanderbilt and a few other American universities and was led by the likes of John Crow Ransom, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks. These currents often overlapped – New critics imbibed a lot from both Richards and Eliot. The Scrutiny Group, led by F. R. Leavis allied with practical criticism in its insistence on objective criteria for literary analysis; at the same time it located English texts in the broader context of the English social life (Ahmad 46-47).

The establishment of literary criticism as an academic discipline coincided with the publication of various manifestos challenging established ideas and forms of literature – from T. E. Hulme's "Lecture on Modern Poetry" (1908) to the manifestos of Formalism, Dadaism, Surrealism and other European art movements. A closer look would reveal that the establishment and anti-establishment tendencies of modernism were two cultural expressions of an increasingly polarised political milieu, disdain for established liberal democratic order and search for messianic authorities. Thus, the radical formal experimentation of Eliot, the poet could coexist with what Ahmad calls "the conservative, monarchist, quasi-Catholic criticism" of Eliot, the critic. In 1910 Joel Spingarn delivered a lecture at Columbia University which eventually became famous as the manifesto of New Criticism. In the lecture he discards a whole range of critical parameters of literature such

as analysing literature as an art of expression, in terms of genre, style, technique, ethics, "the race, the time, the environment of a poet's work as an element, in criticism" (Spingarn 31). This may sound an awful lot like the slogan of "art for art's sake," but in critical terms it translated into close textual reading, the presumption that the meaning of a text is integrally connected to its structural components rather than its socio-historical context, author's intention or reader's response. These were critical positions that New Criticism shared with Practical and Programmatic Criticism. Consequently, literary criticism offered authoritative interpretations of the text that can be done only by people with specialised training.

On the opposite end of the spectrum Marxist critics such as György Lukács (1885-1971) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) tried placing literature in a historical context. William's influence on English literary criticism was far reaching as he steered literary criticism towards discussions on culture. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977) Williams explored the interrelation between society, economy and culture. In his seminal text *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958) Williams associated Europe's modern understanding of culture with the Industrial Revolution. The concept of 'culture,' he argued, gained ground along with terms such as industry, democracy, class and art, establishing their close connection. Literary criticism expanding into culture was indicative of an academic expansion of English studies into culture studies by the mid-twentieth century and criticism's own turn towards literary theories. In fact, both Lukács and Williams are nowadays known to students of literature as literary theorists rather than critics. In *The Text, the World and the Critic* (1983) Edward Said divides literary criticism as practiced in the 1980s in four major forms – book reviewing and literary journalism, academic literary history descending from nineteenth century specialities such as classical scholarship, philology and cultural history, literary appreciation and interpretation of both academic and non-academic variety and fourth, literary theory (Said 1). Said's schema reveals literary theory's connection with literary criticism as well as its divergence from the latter.

1.5.13. Summing Up

This unit has tried to introduce to you some of the major trends in literary criticism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the process we also tried to learn about important socio-political developments, philosophical movements and cultural debates that impacted literary criticism in the said period. We also explored the relation of literary criticism with academia and the market. We discussed how factors such as class and gender shaped literary criticism both as a vocation and as a discipline. Finally, the unit tried to give an idea about how criticism took a turn towards theory. Hopefully, this unit will help you engage with important literary critics of this period and specific texts written by them.

1.5.14. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. The concept and function of literary criticism remained the same throughout the nineteenth century. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Critically consider how Romantic criticism changed our understanding of literature.
3. Discuss different philosophical influences on English Romantic criticism.
4. What are the salient features of English Romantic criticism? Discuss with suitable references.
5. Critically analyse how Victorian criticism responded to the Victorian social and political condition.
6. Literary criticism in the nineteenth century was shaped by the market and the university. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Critically assess the contribution of women critics to the literary milieu of the nineteenth century.
8. Give a critical account of different trends in the literary criticism of the early twentieth century.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a note on how Romantic criticism departed from neoclassical criticism
2. Write a short-note on the significance of Imagination to English Romantic criticism.
3. Give a brief account of the socio-political context of the emergence of English Romantic criticism
4. Write a short note on the development of the theories of various genres in the nineteenth century.
5. Write a short-note on the aesthete literary critics of England.
6. Comment briefly on Marxist literary criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
7. Write a brief note on the common features of Practical Criticism and New Criticism
8. Comment on the relation between literary criticism and culture studies in the twentieth century.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. What was the *Athenaeum*?
2. Name two critics belonging to the Jena Circle
3. Give names of the three books that constitute Immanuel Kant's *Critiques*.
4. Who was Thomas Love Peacock? Write the title of an important critical essay written by him.
5. What is considered the first modern periodical?
6. What was the *Academy*?
7. Where does the phrase 'Condition of England' appear for the first time?
8. Write the names of two important critical texts by Thomas Carlyle.
9. What is the most significant contribution of Arthur Symons in the history of literary criticism?
10. Who was Harriet Martineau?
11. Who was F. R. Leavis?
12. Who is the pioneer of Programmatic Criticism?

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Module 2:

Literary Criticism from the Renaissance to the Neoclassical Period

Unit-6 ❑ Philip Sidney: Extract from Apologie for Poetry

Structure

2.6.1. Objectives

The objective of this unit is to understand Sir Philip Sidney's multifaceted role in the English Renaissance. We'll explore him not just as a poet, but as a pioneering theorist of literature, particularly poetry. You'll examine his groundbreaking work, "An Apology for Poetry," recognising it as the first significant piece of English literary criticism. By analyzing the literary climate of Elizabethan England, we'll understand the impetus for Sidney's treatise and his role as a literary critic. After reading this unit, you will learn about the influences that shaped his ideas, alongside his own innovative contributions to the field. The unit will further explore the lasting impact of *An Apology for Poetry* on subsequent literary practices, not just in his time but even in the current context. This demonstrates the work's enduring relevance, which is why it's still read and studied today. Through these comprehensive readings, you will gain a clear understanding of Sidney's perspective on literature and poetry. This unit, in turn, will serve as a strong foundation for your future exploration of literary criticism and theory.

2.6.2. Introduction

You have already read about Sidney as a poet, as a multi-faceted literary personality in post Renaissance England. In this Unit you will get to know the same person as a theorist of literature in general and of poetry in particular. As you read through this chapter, do keep in mind that *Apology for Poetry* is the first ever significant work of literary criticism in English *per se*; classical theories that pre-date Sidney are but translations into English! So we shall try to give you a picture of the literary scenario in contemporary England that necessitated the writing of such a treatise; the influences on Sidney and his own innovative thoughts that have gone into the writing of this; and of course its impact on later practitioners. Needless to say, the Unit will also provide you a full-fledged analysis of the text itself. As a learner, you are advised to attain clarity in comprehending the entire perspective, for that will be your touchstone in all subsequent understandings of literary criticism and theory, which are as seminal as your reading of literary texts.

2.6.3. Why the Apology for Poetry?

The first question that should strike you in studying this Unit is why, in the first place, should a poet-theorist write something like an 'Apology'! An 'Apology', as you find it in the title of Sidney's treatise, would mean something like a defence (William Ponsonby's edition in fact has the title 'The Defence of Poesie') or an argument where the author posits his grounds for justifying the importance of poetry. And poetry once again, right from the classical times, would not strictly mean the genre as we understand it today; it would also include theatrical compositions in the poetic mode. Old or Middle English literature did not definitely have the artistic maturity to contemplate any theory of literature; and the early English critics of the Renaissance were more of educators trying to shape both the lexicon and the readerly taste for modern vernacular literature, rather than think about literary criticism or any theorisation as such on whatever existed or was being written. It follows thus that English literature at this point of time was being shaped largely by translations from classical texts and continental influences that were being translated into vernacular in post Renaissance England, and getting printed with great vigour. The zest for translation and advancements in technology with the efforts of the first English printer, William Caxton, thus laid open for the reading public a vast body of continental literature. While literature has directly benefited from this exchange; it must be noted that Renaissance English criticism was basically toying with the Platonic idea of the banishment of poets from his ideal

republic, in a rather puerile manner, leaving out much more of what was said by the classical master(s).

We need to remember that Plato's objection to poetry was based mainly on three grounds – educational, philosophical and moral; that is, none of it had anything to do with artistic or aesthetic appreciation. While much of Plato's formulations in the Republic have been challenged by his own disciple Aristotle, we would do good to remember that the ground realities of 4th century B.C Greece and 16th century England would be as different from each other as chalk and cheese! Plato for one, was a philosopher who was prescribing norms for the making of an ideal republic; so if subsequent generations including Elizabethan England were taking his words out of context and trying to censure literature in an age of emerging secular values, it was indeed short-sightedness. It is in this light that we need to read and evaluate the work of Philip Sidney which, like contemporary Italian critics like Minturno and Castelvetro, was a kind of counterblast to what Saintsbury describes as 'the Puritan-Platonic impeachments of poetry' in his Loci Critici.

It makes sense to mention at this point that Sidney, unlike many others, did not just rest at refuting Plato, who was basically a philosopher. Rather, he widened the ambits of contemporary understanding of Plato by placing his observations in proper perspective in his Apologie (this was Sidney's original spelling, and poetry was spelt Poetrie). He could do this ably enough perhaps because he was a practising poet himself, and in fact the first of the long line of poet-critics/theorists that English literature was to see in subsequent ages. It is believed that Sidney wrote this treatise around 1580, the immediate provocation being to posit a fitting reply to Stephen Gosson's the School of Abuse (1579) which was dedicated to Sidney. It was first published only in 1595, after Sidney's death in 1586, in two editions. The one by Ponsonby, believed to be the earlier of the two, was called The Defence of Poesy; the other by Olney, An Apologie for Poetry. We follow the latter edition here.

Activity:

Make a point-wise chart of classical theorists and their major tenets. Follow it up with how Renaissance theorists were re-reading and re-interpreting them. This will be vital to your understanding of Elizabethan literature in all its forms. You could refer to the following e-resources for preliminary help in getting the basic concepts clear: http://wikieducator.org/Literary_Criticism

www.youtube.com/ watch?v=Q7K59sHKCTM;

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jGViJIxCyo

2.6.4. German Romanticism and the Emergence of the 'Literary'

We have been talking of Plato and other classical theorists for some time now. How exactly did such thinkers impact Sidney? Or, to put it the other way round, how does Sidney adapt their theories to his present context?

Plato and Sidney: According to Plato's theory of mimesis (imitation), the arts deal with illusion and are a copy of the idea of an original, derived through an illusion. Thus, representation in art is twice removed from reality. As a moralist, Plato (428 BC – 348 BC, Greece) disapproves of poetry because it is immoral, as a philosopher he disapproves of it because it is based on falsehood. He is of the view that philosophy is better than poetry because the philosopher deals with ideas / truths, whereas the poet deals with what appears to him / illusion. He believed that truth of philosophy was more important than the pleasure of poetry. He argued that most of it should be banned from the ideal society that he was trying to espouse. Plato thus differentiates between 'useful' and 'imitative' art – the bed made by the carpenter is a copy of the original idea of a bed and thus useful, though one step removed from the original idea; the painter's bed is a copy of the carpenter's and hence twice removed! Hence the banishment. For Plato, this model could be applied to poetry in the same way, for both painting and poetry would be categorised as imitative arts. All the same, it must also be kept in mind that for him, poetry was not just any form of art, but a 'divinely inspired madness'! Also interesting in this context is Vincent B. Leitch's observation in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (Norton, 2001: 324) that in Plato's age it was presumed "that poets know all crafts, all human affairs". Quite early in Apology, written in a very different Renaissance literary scenario in the context of debates of an aesthetic nature on the object and purpose of poetry; Sidney states that while the 'inside' and 'strength' of Plato's work is philosophy; its 'skin' and 'beauty depended most on poetry'. Very fittingly, Sidney couples Philosophy and History – the earliest branches of knowledge, and asserts, with concrete examples that: "…neither philosopher nor historiographer could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgements, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry …" The master-stroke in this context comes in the Apology when Sidney, referring to Plato's Ion, says that when the classical theorist's words were properly understood in their right light, they would be seen to make a case for and not against poetry! We reproduce for your reading, the lines from Plato that Sidney has in mind. Read them and you will at once realise how carefully the Elizabethan must have read his predecessor before he could make the case for himself:

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed … For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him: no man, while he retains that faculty, has the oracular gift of poetry. Clearly, he talks here of poetry as an inspired creation, in keeping with the ancient Roman notion of poet as vates (diviner, foreseer or prophet), or the Greek word 'poet' which comes of the word poiein (to make). This is hardly the same as poets being liars and poetry being a bunch of lies – the oft quoted myopic understanding of Plato's words when they are taken at face value. Sidney's work encompasses the whole range of literary creativity from the classics to the Romantics, as you will see in the lines that follow.

Aristotle and Sidney: Though a disciple of Plato, yet Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC, Greece) comes across as much more logical and rational in his understanding of the nature and function of Tragedy. He methodically explains mimesis as the wellspring of tragedy, and shows that such imitation of real life actions takes its cue from nature and is therefore semblematic of a higher level of reality. Sidney accepts in principle Aristotle's definition of poetry as mimesis, which he deduces as 'a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture …'. He of course goes on to talk of the purpose of poesy as being 'to teach and delight'; something that shows the direct influence of Horace than of Aristotle. But we shall come to that later. Sidney also abides by the Aristotelian formula of using artistic imitation to transform horrifying elements into poetically delightful presentations. Even his distinction between poetry and history clearly has its basis in Aristotle. Poetry, to Sidney, is 'more philosophical' and 'more studiously serious' than history. However, like most Renaissance critics who drew more upon Horace than on Aristotle, Sidney is markedly more didactic. To this effect, he almost modifies the Aristotelian idea of imitation when he says 'Her (Nature's) world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.' While Aristotle only harped upon the Unity of Action as being the most important in Tragedy, Sidney, under the influence of contemporary critics, is also insistent upon the other two Unities – those of Time and Place. It is in keeping with the spirit of his age once again that Sidney prefers epic over tragedy, the former is superior in his opinion. However, the two are at one in believing that verse is not essential to poetry.

Horace and Sidney: Among Renaissance poets and critics in general and on Sidney in particular, Horace (65 BC – 8 BC, Rome) has been the most pervasive influence, mostly because they were more familiar with Latin than with Greek. It is thus natural that Apology bears distinct traces of the Horatian influence in critical temper, manner and even tone. As mentioned earlier, Sidney enhances the Aristotelian idea of mimesis to stress the twin

functions of poetry – 'to teach and delight', aspects that perfectly square with the Horatian parameters of edification and gratification as the purpose of poetry in his Ars Poetica (Horace, 19 BC). A little later in the Apologie, the same phrase is repeated in an inverted order when Sidney writes: "But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by." (Italics mine) Sidney, you must remember, is remarkably less didactic than many other Elizabethan critics, so this explains his privileging delight over teaching. In any case, the duality between the two elements has always haunted classical rhetoricians and Horace it was who first struck the right balance in this regard. Sidney's reference to the antiquity and universality of poetry is also directly drawn from Horace's picture of the early poet as legislator and vates; an inspired teacher. The Horatian principle of beginning a work in medias res (right in the middle of the heightened action) instead of in ab ovo (from the beginning), also informs Sidney's methods. Earlier actions that shall connect to the main drift may later be incorporated by the cinematic technique of flashback, to ensure the establishment of causal connections. Sidney's use of the word 'decency' absolutely corresponds with the Horatian element of 'decorum' that is a central idea in Ars Poetica. Following Horace, Sidney voices his strong dissent to the mingling of tragedy and comedy and shows his contempt for tragic-comedy which he calls 'mongrel' in nature! English literary criticism would have to wait for the more mature understanding of a Dryden to allow space for acceptance of this new genre.

The Italian Renaissance: Among a host of Italian literary critics who influenced the Elizabethans in general, the influence of Minturno (1500 – 74 AD), Scaliger (1484 – 1558 AD) and Castelvetro (1505 – 71 AD) seems to be the most profound on Sidney. In passages of the Apologie where he describes poetry as the intellectual 'first nurse of nations'; defends poetry with reference to its antiquity and cultivation among people of all nations; or holds the poet a better teacher than philosophers and historians by the feigning of notable images of virtues and vices, Sidney shows a direct debt to Minturno. The element of 'admiration' as an emotion in Sidney's conception of tragedy is utterly un-Aristotelian and is taken from Minturno's De Poeta. In the Orient BlackSwan publication of An Apology For Poetry, the editor Visvanath Chatterjee rightly observes that 'Sidney was also influenced by Minturno when he wrote his Arcadia'. From Scaliger's Poetics, Sidney might have derived his mediated knowledge of Aristotle. The reason for such an assumption is his close affinity to Scaliger when describing the poet as a 'maker', or even in his discussion of the theory of 'imitation'. However, in privileging English as a language that 'giveth us great occasion, being indeed capable of any excellent exercising of it', he

shows independence from the Italian theorist as well; for Scaliger would never have dreamt of attaching any importance to vernaculars.

While Sidney discards Castelvetro's principle of pleasure as the sole end of poetry, he is at one with the Italian theorist in looking at verse as 'but an ornament and no cause to poetry'. Again, Castelvetro it was who stressed on the Unities of Time and Place.

Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse: Literary purists might argue over the propriety of including this text by Sidney's contemporary, published in the autumn of 1579, in the category of influences behind Apologie. But it is widely believed that this was the immediate provocation – an attack on poets and players, dedicated unauthorisedly to Sidney, that led to the penning of the defence that we are now studying. Gosson, a dramatist and a man of the theatre, suddenly turned to a serious view of the evil impact of all that was shown on stage, and wrote strongly against it all. His attack was directed not just against drama, but all kinds of imaginative writing and even music! The motivation behind dedicating his invective 'to the right noble Gentleman, Master Philip Sidney, Eqsuier' is unclear, but there are obvious reasons – both textual and beyond, to conclude that his work did arouse the indignation of Sidney. It is not without reason that in the 1868 reprint of Gosson's text, Arber writes in the introduction: 'It is highly probable, if not absolutely demonstrable, that to Gosson's School of Abuse we are indebted for Sidney's Apologie for Poetrie.'

2.6.5. Brief Summary of Apology for Poetry

Before we come to the text of the selected portion of Apology that has been laid down in your syllabus, it is necessary to provide in a nutshell a summary of the main issues that Sidney takes up in this section of the treatise. It is expected that your counsellor will assist you in relating the points enumerated here with the original text.

The central question here relates to the value and purpose of poetry. How does it compare to other human endeavours in the arts, sciences, and crafts? In particular, how is poetry "better" than philosophy or history? How do the various types of poetry accomplish the goal of delighting and instructing?

- Sidney begins by saying that he has 'just cause to make a pitiful defence of poor poetry' that has been debased from its rightful position and in this, even names of philosophers have been used with much lack of insight. The chagrin he shows is perhaps directed at Gosson's unwarranted remarks, though nowhere in the text does he make any explicit mention of it.

He attributes to poetry the distinction of being the mother of all knowledge – 'the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse' that gradually prepares one to 'feed afterwards of tougher knowledges'. He establishes this fact by referring to classical texts as also to contemporary Italian and English writers.

- Sidney goes on to say that both philosophy and history borrow their metier from poetry. In all nations far and near, it is poets who have always had an abiding influence.

- The Latin words vates (seer) and carmina (from which the modern 'charm' is derived) reveal the intimate connection that exists between poetic ability and prophetic insight. As proof, he cites the oracles of Delphi and prophecies of Sybil that were delivered in verse; just as the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem. Even the Greeks viewed a poet as a maker, the word 'poet' being derived from poiein, which means 'to make'. The English too have followed the same lines.

- While all other human arts are subordinate to nature in that they are bound to follow the paths that nature has laid down for each discipline, poetry alone is empowered to transcend nature – for the poet is 'lifted up with the vigour of his own invention'. Poetry thus transforms all things to loveliness; she transmutes the brazen world of nature into a golden one!

- This is not to say that a poet deviates from truth or plausibility and builds castles in the air; he is in reality the idealist of nature. The poet bases his creation on imitation of the essential, he works upon an idea and therefore his creation transcends particulars and creates paradigms of the universal. He can do this because it is divinely ordained that the poet's creativity is the highest human faculty.

- Almost striking a synergy between Aristotle and Horace, Sidney defines Poesy as 'an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight'. The syllabised portion of Apology ends here. A brief mention follows of some of the key issues in the rest of the treatise. These are not exactly necessary from your examination point of view, nonetheless it is expected that you will go through these to formulate a complete understanding of the text.

Sidney categorises poetry into three kinds – Religious, Philosophical and Historical

There may be further subdivisions on the basis of form and structure– Heroic, Lyric, Tragic, Comic, Satiric, Iambic, Elegiac, Pastoral and so on. In none of these is verse anything more than an 'ornament'; it is never a 'cause to poetry'. Sidney obviously includes all sorts of writing within the realm of the poetic, in this respect enlarging the scope of what

can be called poetry, "verse being but an ornament and no cause to poetry." He posits that many great poets "have never versified", and that some people who have written in verse can't be called poets. This goes back presumably to the aim of poetry, and not the form, as the important matter. One important point he makes is that poetry is the prime example of what separates common utterances from craft, in which "each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject" is chosen.

- Knowledge is not an end in itself, its true purpose lies in virtuous action. This can be achieved only by acquiring true knowledge of the self; that which the Greeks called architectonic. It is poetry alone that can purify the wit, enrich the memory, enhance judgement, enlarge the ambits of learning and thus cumulatively move to perfection the otherwise mundane human soul.

- For all their respective claims to being the principal branch of learning, Philosophy gets too misty as it is surrounded by precepts that are hard to comprehend; History relies too much on the particular truth of things to be able to arrive at general reason. The poet, bridges the gap between the two. He gives a tangible (perfect) picture of what the philosopher leaves to abstraction (for example Aesop's Fables); similarly, he perfects the arbitrarily mixed patterns of history. Hence, Sidney is at one with Aristotle in the view that poetry is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history. Having proven that fiction is as forceful as truth, Sidney further asserts that poetic justice is more conducive to virtue (the true end of all learning) than historical truth and it moves (affects) higher than teaching, which is what philosophy does. The sweet prospect given by poetry makes its teaching attractive. There is in poetry a kind of suavity that is brought about by the delight of imitation (mimesis) and its persuasive quality. These basic facts are then illustrated by different kinds of poetry, and we need to remember that the term 'poetry' is here in an all-inclusive manner.

- The use of rhymes and verses has been a persistent objection raised against the assumption of poetry being the vehicle of a higher truth. While stating that these are not necessary to poetry, Sidney tries to reason why they have often been used: 1. They present language with a rare harmony. 2. Are of great help to memory.

- Sidney then tries to comprehend what the basic objections to poetry have been, and he lists the following and simultaneously offers the answers: 1. There are many other fruitful branches of knowledge on which a man may better spend his time. Ans. To say so is to beg the question! Learning that teaches and moves to virtue is the best. The other branches of knowledge are good, no doubt, but better is definitely better! 2. Poetry is the

mother of lies. Ans. Far from being the falsest art, poetry is the truest, as it lays no pretentions to factual truth. 'He (The poet) nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth'. Unlike the astronomer, the geometrician or even the physician, the poet never makes any circles about our imagination, to create a make believe world of truth about what he writes. For example, none can say that Aesop lied in his tales, for in the first place Aesop never claimed that he wrote anything that was actually true. To lie is to affirm as true, that which is false. What Sidney is in effect saying is that the truths of poetry are not of particulars or of the microcosm, but macrocosmic realities that are exemplary in nature. 3. Poetry is the nurse of abuse that has a lulling effect, driving away men from their courageous and martial natures. Ans. Sidney amplifies in great detail all related allegations and wonders aloud if the effeminising effect has not been the stock abuse against all learning. He talks of different aspects that poetry deals with, both fair and foul, and concludes that it isn't that 'poetry abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth poetry'. A sword can equally be used to attack as also to defend; so it all depends on the perspective. It would be impossible to recall a time when there were no poets and people were all very courageous; rather, poetry has always been the companion of warriors. 4. Plato had banished poets from his commonwealth. Ans. Sidney holds Plato with great reverence, primarily because he considers him the most poetical of all philosophers! So if Plato has 'defile(d) the fountain out of which his flowing streams have proceeded', it is worth examination indeed. Quite in a tongue in cheek manner, he writes that philosophers are natural enemies of poets, for the former pick out of the sweet mysteries of poetry the 'right discerning true points of knowledge' and then cast away their 'guides like ungrateful prentices'! Yet the truth remains that while seven cities wanted Homer to be their citizen, many more banished philosophers as unfit to live among them! Moreover, he questions Plato's logic of banishing poets and allowing women in the commonwealth, for poetical sonnets cannot definitely be more hurtful than the company of women. Having said so, Sidney states that Plato was against the abuse of poetry, not against poetry per se.

- Sidney is however concerned about the general decline in poetry in England and its low repute in contemporary times. He lists as factors behind this, the lack of spirit in the age; the poets having fallen from their vocation and turning into inferior men with mercenary motives; the fact of their not being born poets, and the attendant lack of training and practice. He finds few good poets in England, apart from Chaucer, Sackville, Surrey and Spenser; and laments that but for Gorboduc, most contemporary drama has neither 'honest civility' nor 'skilful poetry'. The nonabidance of the Unities of Place and Time is something that he feels is a serious lapse. This according to Sidney can easily be avoided

by making proper use of the flexibility offered by the very medium of poetry, which aims as verisimilitude rather than exactness.

- Almost Horatian in tone, Sidney prescribes beginning in medias res instead of ab ovo; strictly keep tragedy and comedy apart; not confuse pleasure with laughter in comedy, and to this effect aim at delightful teaching instead of vulgar amusement; address genuine issues like tameness and artificiality of English lyric poetry, or its affected eloquence; be precise in the employment of metaphors.

- In a striking deviation from the Italians, Sidney upholds the capabilities of the English language and reminds how adaptable it is to both ancient and modern systems of versification.

- Thus Apology concludes with a valiant defence and certain very stringent prescriptions, the abidance of which are according to Sidney, necessary for ensuring that Poetry regains its pristine seat as an aesthetic manifestation of human thought and action.

2.6.6. Text (Extract) of Apology for Poetry

Annotated with Para-wise Substance

But since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now scorned skill.

Among the Romans a poet was called vates, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words "vaticinium," and "vaticinari," is manifest; so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge! And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the changeable hitting upon any such verses, great foretokens of their following fortunes were placed. Whereupon grew the word of Sortes Virgilianae; when, by sudden opening Virgil's book, they lighted upon some verse, as it is reported by many, whereof the histories of the Emperors' lives are full. As of Albinus, the governor of our island, who, in his childhood, met with this verse

Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis

and in his age performed it. Although it were a very vain and godless superstition; as also it was, to think spirits were commanded by such verses;

whereupon this word charms, derived of "carmina," cometh, so yet serveth it to show the great reverence those wits were held in; and altogether not without ground, since both the oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies were wholly delivered in verses. For that same exquisite observing of number and measure in words, and that high-flying liberty of conceit proper to the poet, did seem to have some divine force in it.

Vaticinium – Prophecy

Vaticinari – One who foretells

Foretoken – A premonitory sign/ Prediction

Sortes Virgilianae – Virgilian divination

Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis – 'Frantic I seize arms; yet little purpose is there in arms'. Aeneid, Canto II, Line 314

Delphos – The son of Apollo in Greek mythology; Delphi, was named after him.

Famous for the temple of Apollo, located on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus.

Sibylla (Sybil) – Oracular women in ancient Greece, believed to have prophetic powers.

Having spoken of poets as the first philosophers and historians and of the unprecedented respect accorded to poetry even in uncivilised countries, Sidney here turns to have a look at how the classical, known for their first recorded insights into learning among human generations, viewed the aspect of poetry and the vocation of a poet. The Romans believed in the vatic concept of a poet – that is to say, a poet to them was a visionary and a seer who could actually make prophecies about the future. Their greatest poet was Virgil, every verse of whose making was a divination (poetic foretelling) unto itself. Sidney quotes one such from Aeneid, that Decimus Clodius Albinus (a Roman who ruled Britain and laid claim to the Roman Empire) had come across in his childhood. Translated, it means 'Frantic I seize arms; yet little purpose is there in arms'. What Albinus felt about arms or warfare is indeed true, according to Sidney, of all other vocations in life – none other than poetry offers a vision that can transcend the narrow limits of human struggle for existence. Thus it transpires that the practice of reading or writing poetry can actually empower one to foresee life; hence the elevated position of the poet. He further substantiates his claim by stating that the oracles of Delphi and the prophecies of the Sybils were all delivered in verse. As a theoretician of poetry, Sidney feels that to be a true poet one has to have the right manner of expression, the control over metre and the ability to employ the right metaphor(s) to be able to communicate. All of this taken together does elevate poetry to a level higher than that normally reserved for other disciplines, pursuits or practices.

While Sidney in his time was looking at the 'vates' idea purely from a classical standpoint in the sense of the poet being a foreseer, we in our time, can see more into this. The Victorian critic Carlyle, influenced by German Transcendentalism in The Hero as Poet, looks upon the poet not just as a prophet but also as one who has the eye to explore the inner mystery of the self. The Romantic poet-theorist Shelley, in *A Defence of Poetry*, conclusively looks upon poets as 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world'! Thus we have ample evidence against which to test the veracity of the claims made by Philip Sidney.

Read the following poem by Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy which seems to echo verbatim the idea that has been expressed in the lines above.

We Are the Music-Makers
We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams.
World-losers and world-forsakers,
Upon whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers,
Of the world forever, it seems.
With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.
We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;

For each age is a dream that is dying,

Or one that is coming to birth.

Try to write a substance of the poem and then see if your idea becomes almost an expression in the context of a particular poem, of what Sidney says as general phenomena.

Now let us return to the main text of Sidney:

And may not I presume a little farther to show the reasonableness of this word vates, and say, that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern. But even the name of Psalms will speak for me, which, being interpreted, is nothing but Songs; then, that is fully written in metre, as all learned Hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found. Lastly, and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely poetical. For what else is the awaking his musical instruments; the often and free changing of persons; his notable prosopopoeias, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty; his telling of the beasts' joyfulness, and hills leaping; but a heavenly poesy, wherein, almost, he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? But truly, now, having named him, I fear I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is, among us, thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation. But they that, with quiet judgments, will look a little deeper into it, shall find the end and working of it such, as, being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the church of God.

David's Psalms - The Book of Psalms (Hebrew Tehillim meaning "Praises"), commonly referred to simply as Psalms or "the Psalms", is the first book of the third section of the Hebrew Bible. The English title is from the Greek translation, psalmoi, meaning "instrumental music" and, by extension, "the words accompanying the music. There are 150 psalms in the Jewish and Western Christian tradition (more in the Eastern Christian churches), many of them linked to the name of King David, though modern Bible scholars have questioned the issue of his authorship. By referring to the Psalms (pronounced saams) Sidney is only ensuring for poetry the pristine and elevated status that he has referred to in the earlier section.

Hebrician – **Hebrew scholars**

Prosopopoeia – Personification. You will have come across this as a figure of speech

that was used in Old English elegiac poems like The Dream of the Rood and The Husband's Message. Scourged – Driven out. The obvious context is Plato's oft quoted words about banishing poets from the commonwealth. The idea is that if poetry be equivalent to prayer songs, then it is definitely not as profane to be thrown out of the precincts of human society. Sidney continues with the idea of vates to remind readers that the holy Psalms are also a divine poem. The emphasis here is on the use of poetry as a vehicle to express divinity. While the earlier section talked of the content of poetry as having a visionary quality, here he shows that it has provenly been a vehicle of expressing sacred thoughts. Thus he talks both of the rules of metrical composition and of the prophetic quality of the Psalms – all of it poetic in intent. It is not that all personifications resorted to in the Psalms are actually possible – the appearance of God, the expression of joyfulness of the beasts, the visible responses of nature et all. Yet it is in the right spirit that all of it is to be taken. Hence he is virtually talking of the imaginative reception of poetry that is an important part of an involved poetic process on the part of the reader and the poet. Your counsellor will help you relate this to the Romantic concept of poets and poetry that was to arrive on the English literary scene nearly three centuries later. In expressing his surprise at how poetry has been debased by myopic understanding, Sidney even gets a bit sarcastic when he says he fears he has profaned the holy Psalms by equating them with poetry in an era when poetry has been 'thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation'. Almost with a double emphasis, he concludes the section by placing his hopes for a proper resurrection of the worth of poetry by those who are imbued with sane judgement.

But now let us see how the Greeks have named it, and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him a 'poet', which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word, poiein , which is 'to make'; wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker: which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences, than by my partial allegation.

There is no art delivered unto mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein. So doth the geometrician and arithmetician, in their divers sorts of quantities. So doth the musician, in times, tell you which by nature agree, which not. The natural philosopher thereon hath

his name; and the moral philosopher standeth upon the natural virtues, vices, or passions of man; and 'follow Nature (saith he) 'therein, and thou shalt not err'. The lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech; and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question, according to the proposed matter. The physician weigheth the nature of man's body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he, indeed, build upon the depth of nature.

compassed…matter – limited to questions presented by the subject matter of the rhetorician and the logician. In fact this is applicable to all the branches of knowledge that Sidney refers to in this section. It will be seen that all these disciplines of study are specific and strictly confined to their respective areas, which in turn are governed by the laws of nature. The point he is trying to make here is that no branch of study is superior to poetry, for they are all subservient to nature; poetry alone transcends nature and constructs a super-nature for itself.

Metaphysic – Metaphysician. A metaphysician is a person who studies metaphysics. Metaphysics is a traditional branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the fundamental nature of being and the world that surrounds it. The metaphysician attempts to clarify the fundamental notions by which people understand the world, e.g., existence, objects and their properties, space and time, cause and effect, and possibility. Prior to the modern history of science, scientific questions were addressed as a part of metaphysics known as natural philosophy. second and abstract notions – Distinctions made in logic between primary conception of things and abstract notions, e.g. – a tree, an oak, an elephant, and genus, species etc.

Supernatural – Metaphysical

If the Romans looked upon a poet as a seer, the Greeks adulated him as a maker, that is, one who created, independently. This gives Sidney the scope to compare the poet with people from other disciplines – the astronomer, the geometrician and the mathematician, the musician and the natural philosopher, the lawyer and the historian, the grammarian, the rhetorician and the logician, the physician and even the metaphysic. All of them abide by the moral philosopher's advice of following nature – that is to say, every form of human art has as its guiding factor the works of nature as example and precept. None of them

are thus 'makers' having an independent volition of which to create; they are at best 'actors and players', simply following the pre-set rules and norms of nature. Even the metaphysician whose task it is to study the fundamental nature of existence is chained to the 'depth(s) of nature'. It is important to understand the difference between a 'maker' and a follower; all the categories enumerated here belong to the former group – their art does not provide them the power to make new formations, which by implication the poet can. In following the predetermined course of nature, they can tread a safe path of never going wrong; but never can celebrate the joy of new creation.

This very idea of 'follow(ing) nature' that Sidney disdains was to become the corner stone of poetic creativity in the 18th century, which has come to be known as the Neo-Classical Age. You will read about it in Paper III. For now, it is interesting to note how subtly Sidney reverses the Platonic assumption of poetry being akin to lies on the ground that it is a copy of a copy. He questions the very idea of Nature being the sole governor that in a way thwarts creativity. Of course, later in the essay, he clarifies his stand by showing how poets can, using nature and the natural as backdrop, revel in unique creations. Once again, poetic imagination becomes the key word here in understanding Sidney. Indeed, Romantic poets have transformed such ordinary aspects of nature as a skylark, a nightingale, the west wind, the season of autumn into wonderful objects of art and thereby immortalised them. This is in fact the very essence of the creative theory of master poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is with this understanding that we need to go into the next section of *Apologie*.

> *Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew; forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demi-gods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweetsmelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too- much-loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.*

Cyclops – In Greek and Roman mythology, we come across a primordial race of giants, each with a single eye in the middle of the forehead. These are called Cyclops. While Hesiod talked of three one-eyed Cyclops, Homer actually described another group

of mortal herdsmen Cyclops. There are also other accounts in the works of Theocritus, Euripides and Virgil. The Natural History Museum in London even has a statue of a Cyclops. Sidney's moot point here is that such creatures are not natural to the order of existence, yet poetic imagination renders them tenable.

Heroes and Demi-gods abound in classical literature. It is almost impossible to think of classical epics without divine machinery, just as heroes with super-human prowess are perfectly suited to grand epics and tragedies.

Chimera – "She was of divine stock, not of men, in the fore part a lion, in the hinder a serpent, and in the midst a goat, breathing forth in terrible wise the might of blazing fire." In Canto 6 ll 179 – 82 of Iliad, this is the brief description of the chimera that Homer gives. According to Greek mythology, the chimera was a monstrous fire breathing dragon composed of parts of 3 animals – lion, snake and goat, found mostly in Asia Minor. The term chimera has come to describe any mythical or fictional animal with parts taken from various animals, or to describe anything composed of very disparate parts, or perceived as wildly imaginative or implausible. In the present context, Sidney's reference to it is thus self-explanatory. What is interesting here is not just the way nature is replaced by a super-nature of the poet's making; but also the juxtaposition (coexistence) of contraries that is made possible. You could refer to William Blake's use of mythology and his poetic imagination in a poem like 'The Tyger' in this context.

Furies - Greek Erinyes, also called Eumenides, in Greco-Roman mythology, goddesses of vengeance. They were probably personified curses, but possibly they were originally conceived of as ghosts of the murdered. According to the Greek poet Hesiod they were the daughters of Gaea (Earth) and sprang from the blood of her mutilated spouse Uranus; in the plays of Aeschylus they were the daughters of Nyx; in those of Sophocles, they were the daughters of Darkness and of Gaea. Euripides was the first to speak of them as three in number. Later writers named them Allecto ("Unceasing in Anger"), Tisiphone ("Avenger of Murder"), and Megaera ("Jealous"). They lived in the underworld and ascended to earth to pursue the wicked. Being deities of the underworld, they were often identified with spirits of the fertility of the earth. Because the Greeks feared to utter the dreaded name Erinyes, the goddesses were often addressed by the euphemistic names Eumenides ("Kind Ones") or Semnai Theai ("Venerable Goddesses").

Zodiac – Literally, an imaginary band in the heavens centred on the ecliptic that encompasses the apparent paths of all the planets and is divided into 12 constellations or signs each taken for astrological purposes to extend 30 degrees of longitude. Here Sidney uses it in the context of the range of the poet's imaginative faculties.

Wit – Range of imagination

Brazen – Of bronze; in reference to the gold, silver, bronze and iron ages of classical poets.

In the light of the analysis of the previous section, this present one can be easily understood. The poet's very existence and volition (will) are independent of any subjection to nature, though he draws his material essentially from the nature that surrounds him. Sidney's words are remarkable here; he writes that with 'the vigour of his own invention (imaginative power harmonised with the creative impulse), [the poet] doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew …. (Italics mine) Thus it is clear that the composition of poetry is viewed as an organic process, hence it is a creation in its own right. Such creation is subject only to its own norms, so the poet is able to raise new forms 'such as never were in Nature', and are the result of his imaginative prowess. The strong presence of the poet/creator/vates/ poiein can thus be felt. Carefully look at the following line from Blake's 'The Tyger':

''Did he who made the Lamb make thee?''

Just as the poet's focus here is primarily on the creator whose awesome creative range is worth marvelling; similarly, the poet himself is 'not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her (Nature's) gifts', he ranges freely around the limitlessness of his creative potential. Sidney takes examples from classical poetry to substantiate his claims. The annotations given above will help you to relate the contexts.

Even though Sidney might sound heretical in the context of neo-classical poetics (which you will study in subsequent Papers), yet it is undeniable that his theorisation is an essential guide to our understanding of classical literature; just as it foresees (like the vates) literature of subsequent generations, the Romantics specifically. This is because Romantic poetic theory too believed in the cult of inspired poetry that could create an independent space for itself.

Activity

Do you in some way feel confused about the Poet-Nature relation that Sidney is talking about? Look at the following poems. Your counsellor can help you in this exercise:

Tintern Abbey by Wordsworth

Christabel – Part I by Coleridge

Ode to a Nightingale by Keats

Ode to the West Wind by Shelley

Just as poets in classical times have been subjected to much censure, similarly the Romantics too have often been branded as 'escapists'. Apart from Christabel mentioned above, all the rest of the poems take as their subjects, very commonplace sights of nature – the Wye river banks in Wordsworth; a common English bird like the nightingale in Keats; and the oceanic winds in Shelley's ode. Read the poems to see for yourself how poetic imagination transmutes, without falsifying, these humdrum natural aspects into 'thing(s) of beauty'. Notice how the riverside brings the poet 'home'; how the nightingale's song teaches abiding truths to the poet, or how the wind becomes the poet's vehicle of thought! Coleridge of course is a different ball game altogether! He builds upon your imagination by transporting you to a kind of nowhere-nowhen place-time setting where you willingly suspend your sense of 'disbelief' and tend to believe what the poet says. However, what the poet says is ultimately deep truth that carries philosophical value – it is just that he both 'delights and instructs' as Sidney says, without making such instruction sound very boring to you! These poems will help you to understand the concrete truth of what Sidney is saying here.

The charge of escapism often raised against Romantic poets can be answered if we understand Sidney's lines here.

It is not that the poet creates rivers, trees or flowers or other aspects of nature that we see around us. He uses his acumen to transform the ordinary and the commonplace into something extraordinary. Thus the 'brazen' world is made into a golden one. These lines may be said to contain the core of this long essay, where Sidney throws into perspective the entire aspect of creativity.

But let those things alone, and go to man - for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning is employed - and know whether she have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus, and so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas? Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction; for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that idea, or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

Theagenes – The hero in Aethiopica, a Greek romance by Heliodorus (3rd century A.D) and his only known work. Theagenes, a noble Thessalian (Thessaly was a region in Greece) falls in love with Chariclea, the daughter of King Hydaspes and Queen Persinna of Ethiopia. By a strange quirk of fate, Chariclea arrives in Delphi via Egypt and is made a priestess of Artemis, an ancient Greek deity. Theagenes has to run away with Chariclea and in course of their flight, the lovers encounter dangers through which he stands his stead, though he has to endure severe injuries. The circumstances of their getting married are as dramatic as the childhood story of Chariclea. For more details, see http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/agreek/heliodor.htm

Pylades – A character from Greek mythology, Pylades is the son of King Strophius of Phocis and Queen Anaxibia, who was sister of Agamemnon. Orestes, son of Agamemnon, was sent to Phocis where he spent a large part of his boyhood with Pylades, whom he considered his brother. The two cousins shared an intense relation, which some classical writers have even considered romantic or homoerotic. Sidney's focus here is obviously on the closeness of ties between the two. We need to remember that the Renaissance too celebrated male friendship, un-debatable proof of which is found in many of Shakespeare's poems and plays.

Orlando – The hero of Ariosto's poem Orlando Furioso. Orlando is one of the most valiant paladins of the Christian Emperor Charlemagne (remember the Middle English Romance cycles!) who is presently at war with the Saracen (pagan) king of Africa, Agramante. The episode of Orlando's falling in love with the pagan princess Angelica, her escape from the palace of the Bavarian duke Namo, and Orlando's frenzied pursuit of her form a large part of the long poem. The two meet with various adventures till Angelica meets a Saracen knight with whom she falls in love and Orlando, mad with despair, goes on a rampage over Europe and Africa. It is therefore the tragic valour of Orlando that Sidney highlights here.

Xenophon's Cyrus – The Athenian gentleman-soldier and student of Socrates, Xenophon (4th century B.C) wrote a political romance Cyropaedia or 'Education of Cyrus', supposedly a biography of Cyrus the Great of Persia. It describes the education and upbringing of an ideal ruler, and is an artist's portrait of the character of Cyrus who is said to be following such an ideal. It was popular among medieval writers of the genre called 'mirrors for princes'.

Aeneas – Both the legendary founder of what would become ancient Rome as also its first hero, Aeneas was the son of Prince Anchises and Goddess Venus. A major

character in Greek mythology, he is present in Homer's Iliad and given extensive treatment in Virgil's Aeneid.

Loaded with allusions that show Sidney's immense knowledge of classical literature, he says something very important in this section, though in his characteristic tongue in cheek manner. While medieval Christianity believed in the supremacy of the human species in the natural order of creation, Sidney takes it in a rather roundabout manner and comments that man is the most intelligent of natural creations. In that vein, he questions if nature has ever been able to produce a human being who could be considered a prototype – and his parameters for this are the likes of a true lover like Theagenes; a constant friend like Pylades, a man of valour like Orlando; a right benevolent ruler like Xenophon's Cyrus, or an excellent all round man like Virgil's Aeneas. The range of his examples being really wide, the answer to the question is definitely in the negative; the fact is so obvious that he does not even wait to utter an answer! He then harks back to the Aristotelian concept of mimesis to restate that the poet's/artist's work is an idealised representation of the essentials (basics) posited by nature in her creation. So the artist, in creating, actually unearths and works upon the basic idea behind natural creation and not on any particularised or arbitrary manifestation. Thus the poet is not merely an imitator but also a perfecter of nature! It thus follows that the poet/artist actually culls the best parts of nature's creative scheme and imbues his creation with such sterling aspects. Hence the idealised representation is by default a perfected creation in its own right. The 'brazen-golden' binary of the earlier section thus gets newer emphasis here – as Sidney asserts that the poet, who is also a diviner/seer/prophet along with being a maker, actually perceives the 'idea' behind natural creation and embellishes/gives complete shape to it. In his words, nature has the 'fore-conceit', meaning primary framework of idealising at the conceptual level but not the finished figure of perfection; it is the poet's task to deliver that and thereby complete the unfinished task of nature.

> You need to remember that the delight of perfection in creation (Nazrul calls it shrishti sukher ullas) is not Sidney's only objective in poetry; in keeping with Horace's teachings, such creation must also teach or instruct. So he clarifies that such 'delivering forth' is not just imaginative (lest we consign it to castles built in the air), it has substantive worth that is of a salutary nature. A poetic creation always has a raison d'etre (a reason behind its existence); it is exemplary in nature for common man to emulate.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature; which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry; when, with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings, with no small arguments to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam; since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted; thus much I hope will be given me, that the Greeks, with some probability of reason, gave him the name above all names of learning.

second nature – Ch. I of Genesis says that Man is the first nature of God's creation; all the rest of the created world that is placed under Man, belongs to the second nature.

erected wit – undebased (pre-lapsarian) understanding

name – of the Poet

Sidney makes it clear that there is no fundamental conflict or contradiction between the faculty of the human mind with all its creative potential, and the effectiveness of nature in providing us with a habitable surrounding. He gives all credit to God who made man in His own likeness as his best creation, and made all else secondary to man. To Sidney, the proof of man being 'the roof and crown creation' of the divine maker is proved by the sheer fact that human beings alone can compose poetry, which is essentially a God gifted felicity. Thus the poet, as a divinely inspired being, can surpass the order of nature with his creative oeuvre. Even as he accords this pristine position to poets and poetry, Sidney is aware that he is talking of a post-lapsarian (after the Fall of Adam and Eve, and by virtue of being their progeny all men are logically fallen) existence. In terms of the human ideal of perfection, this means there is a conflict between our archetypal understanding that is pre-lapsarian, and our post-lapsarian will; yet the poet it is whose creativity remains the highest human faculty. Consequently, poetry it is that can help bridge this gap to the maximum possible limit and provide the keys to a sublime kind of life. In this sense, poetry has a therapeutic (curative) value too.

Now let us go to a more ordinary opening of him, that the truth may be the more palpable; and so, I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation. Poesy therefore,

is an art of imitation; for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth - to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture - with this end, to teach and delight

opening of him – explanation of the nature of the poet

names – The various epithets that have been used to refer to poets; each of these having specific meanings that have been discussed in the sections above.

Mimesis – Idealised representation that is a more complete creation in its own right a speaking picture – Taken directly from Horace's Ars Poetica, l 361 In these lines that are a logical conclusion to all that has preceded, Sidney achieves a perfect blend of Aristotle and Horace, his greatest classical influences, to clinch his arguments. Your counsellor will definitely acquaint you with the texts of Poetics and Ars Poetica according to their discretion, to round off your summative understanding of this extract from Philip Sidney's Apologie for Poetrie.

2.6.7. Summing Up

Sidney's basic statements in the treatise may thus be summed up in the following points:

- The purpose of writing Apology for Poetry was to provide an understanding of the nature and purpose of poetic art at a time when the literary scenario in England was in a state of flux.

  His basic tools in this were classical theories and theorists, among whom he was most importantly trying to place Plato and his views on poetry in a right perspective.
- The principle of simultaneously gratifying and edifying remains central to Sidney's concept of poetics. Thus both ideas of poet as inspired being and poetic art as demanding decency find equal importance.
- Poetry is the source and fount of all knowledge and hence the prime of all creative activity – this is an understanding deeply rooted in Sidney's theory.
- Poetry is an imitation on Aristotelian lines, hence it deals with enhanced limits of the plausible and the probable. The poet can therefore deliver a world better than the real; yet such world is not constructed on fantasy alone.

2.6.8. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions

1. What are the grounds for Sidney's upholding of poetry as the highest of all creative human faculties?
2. 2. How does Sidney's treatise contribute to an understanding of Renaissance literature and culture?
3. 3. What were the classical influences that Sidney resorted to in establishing his theory of poetry? How does he adapt them to build up his thesis?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions

1. Analyse the contemporary factors that prompted the writing of Apologie for Poetry.
2. On the basis of your reading of the text, show how Sidney uses Aristotle as a corner stone for his views on poetry.
3. How can you apply Sidney's views in reading Romantic poetry that came to exist much later than his time.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Analyse Sidney's use of any two classical myths in his theory text.
2. 'Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.' Explain
3. 'Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis'. How would you relate this quote in the context of Apology for Poetry?

2.6.9. Suggested Readings

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- Kastan, David Scott. "Rhetoric and Ideology in 'An Apology for Poetry'." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 84, no. 2, 1987, pp. 183-197.
- Lamb, Mary Ellen. "Sidney's 'Apology for Poetry': An Integrated Structure." *PMLA*, vol. 87, no. 5, 1972, pp. 936-944.

- Lee, Maurice. "Sidney's Apology for Poetry: The Poet and His Audience." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1981, pp. 593-608.
- Lupack, Alan. "Sidney's 'Apology for Poetry': The Voice of the Contradiction." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1981, pp. 94-108.
- Mallette, Richard. "Sidney's 'Apology' and the Renaissance Definition of Poet." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1965, pp. 35-45.
- Patrides, C.A. "The Nature of 'An Apology for Poetry'." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1965, pp. 54-78.
- Webster, Anne Malcolmson. "Sidney's 'Apology for Poetry' as Prologue to 'The Defense of Poesy'." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1957, pp. 12-30.

Unit-7 ❑ John Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy (Extract)

Structure

2.7.1. Objectives

This unit will equip you with the following objectives:

- To trace the historical development of English literary criticism upto the time of John Dryden.
- To provide an outline of John Dryden's critical perspective and temperament.
- To offer some ideas about Dryden's views on Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont & Fletcher.
- To develop a clear understanding about the text you will study in this course

2.7.2. Introduction

As stated earlier, the period to which Dryden belonged is known as the Restoration period, and he remained/ stood out as an outstanding literary figure of the age because of his versatile and multifarious literary activities as a poet, playwright and a critic. It is on the third aspect of his career that we shall be concentrating in this Unit.

The Restoration Age (also called the Age of Dryden, given his over-arching presence in almost all fields of literary productivity) pre-eminently took a Neo-Classical view of literature and concurrently its critical tendencies too veered on those lines. This naturally meant a close observance of the rules of classical decorum in the writing of poetry, without really allowing much scope for humanistic thought as espoused by the post-Renaissance Elizabethan era; nor the imaginary faculty that was to characterise Romantic poetry that followed more than a century later. In such a scenario we shall now try to place the critical acumen of John Dryden. To aid your understanding, we shall first acquaint you with Dryden's critical oeuvre; then guide you on the thematic design of the 'Essay' and finally read the prescribed passages of the text in an easy intelligible manner.

2.7.3. John Dryden: the Literary Critic

There are diverse opinions and views on the merit of Dryden's literary criticism. While Jonathan Swift wryly commented that his critical works were "merely writ at first for filling, to raise the author's price a shilling", Dr Johnson spoke of them as "the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction." (For more on this, you may log on to http://www.jstor.org/stable/456662?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

While the two opinions mentioned above show two ends of the spectrum and give you an idea of the divergent reception accorded to Dryden the critic, Dr Johnson's words bring out the age-old classical ring of the dual functions of art - 'delight' and 'instruct' or gratification and edification. In *The Lives of the Poets*, Dr Johnson calls Dryden 'the father of English criticism.[1] For one thing, you will definitely remember that much before Dryden, Philip Sidney had written a tract theorising on the function of poetry. Even if we leave out minor theorists, one cannot be oblivious of the importance of Sidney as an Elizabethan literary critic. Why then does Dr Johnson call Dryden thus? Your counselor will surely engage you in a thorough discussion on this.

Here again, it will be seen that the Neo-Classical principles of composition reign supreme in the consideration: Dr Johnson writes of Dryden that he was the 'writer who first taught us to determine upon principles' of composition. He brings into reckoning the treatises of Webb and Puttenham; mentions (Ben) Jonson and Cowley, but goes on to assert that 'Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* was the first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing'.

As a literary critic Dryden establishes his scholarship, profound wisdom and erudition most often through his elaborate Prefaces. As a poet-critic, he invites comparison with Philip Sidney at the earlier stage of English criticism and with the succeeding generation of critics, including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Matthew Arnold, to name only the more prominent ones. Dryden's uniqueness lies in the fact that his close familiarity with the classical literatures of ancient Greece and Rome notwithstanding (unlike Sidney), he has never tended to be Aristotelian in his critical arguments. On the contrary he has adopted for himself the critical principles of Neo- Classical France, particularly the French School of Boileau and Rapin. Even here, Dryden is free from any slavish adherence to what is often blindly held as the Neo-Classical principle. There is in him an easy adaptability to pragmatic necessities and the availability of clarity of thought backed by logical interpretation. His criticism is wide ranging, although the most notable pieces are *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) and *Preface to the Fables* (1700).

We shall definitely understand these generalised statements better when we relate them to the particular context of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, an extract from which is our prescribed text for now.

2.7.4. Overview of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*

Written probably during the Plague Year of 1666 and published in 1668, Dryden's essay takes up the subject that Philip Sidney had set forth in his *Defence of Poesie* (1580) and attempts to justify drama as a legitimate form of "poetry" comparable to the epic, as well as defend English drama against that of the ancients and the French. The purpose of the treatise is thus significant, coming as it does at a time that follows on the heels of 136 the re-opening of theatres in London after the ardour of Puritan rule. It needs to be mentioned that Dryden's work, unlike Sidney's, is not in response to any assault per se on poetry or drama. It is, by and large, an exposition of several of the major critical positions of the time, set out in a semi-dramatic form that gives life to what would otherwise appear as abstract theories. The essay not only offers a capsule summary of the status of literary criticism in the late seventeenth century; it also provides a succinct view of the tastes of cultured men and women of the period. Dryden synthesises the best of both English and

Continental (particularly French) criticism; hence, the essay is a single source for understanding neoclassical attitudes toward dramatic art. Moreover, in his discussion of the ancients versus the moderns, in his defence of the use of rhyme, and in his argument concerning Aristotelian prescripts for drama, Dryden depicts and reflects upon the tastes of literate Europeans who shaped the cultural climate in France and England for a century.

At the beginning of the text, Dryden writes about "that memorable day". Historically and chronologically the day refers to 3rd June, 1665, when the famous Spanish Armada was defeated by the English Navy. Therefore, it was a day of national pride and glory. The inflated feeling of being English and the high patriotism that surrounded it are clearly evident in Dryden's famous critical discourse. If you look at the text in the full form, you will realize that right from the beginning, it is written in a dialogue form. This is indeed strategic, not only because the topic of conversation relates to drama; but also because he is dealing with and presenting opposed points of view that will finally need to be synthesised. So it makes perfect sense to keep the different points of view distinctly apart to begin with. Let us see how Dryden does this.

There are four speakers, all of them having classical names- **Eugenius** (the real-life counterpart being Charles Sackville, or Lord Buckhurst, to whom the 'Essay' is dedicated), **Crites** (the real-life counterpart being Sir Robert Howard, one of the writers of the Restoration heroic plays), **Lisideius** (in real life Sir Charles Sadley), and **Neander**, the name has the meaning of 'new man'. It is interesting to note that **Neander** represents the new and upcoming generation of Englishmen, who glorify the legacy and tradition of English drama and dramatic practices. Neander represents Dryden himself! These four cultivated gentlemen have taken a barge down the River Thames to observe the combat and, as guns sound in the background, they comment on the sorry state of modern literature; this naval encounter will inspire hundreds of bad verses commending the victors or consoling the vanquished. The four speakers make comparisons between classical drama with that of contemporary England and France; French Drama with English, and English drama of Elizabethan period with that of Dryden's own day. Dryden's *Essay* is evidently the first systematic discourse on dramatic principles in 137 English, and for this reason it may be comparable with the French playwright Corneille's *Examenes* and *Discours* (1650-56).

Although it is clear in course of the treatise that Dryden uses Neander as a mouthpiece for his own views about drama, he is careful to allow his other characters to present cogent arguments for the literature of the classical period, of France, and of Renaissance England. More significantly, although he was a practitioner of the modern form of writing plays himself, Dryden does not insist that the dramatists of the past are to be faulted simply because they did not adhere to methods of composition that his own age venerated. For example, he does not adopt the views of the more strident critics whose insistence on

slavish adherence to the rules derived from Aristotle had led to a narrow definition for greatness among playwrights. Instead, he pleads for commonsensical application of these prescriptions, appealing to a higher standard of judgment: the discriminating sensibility of the reader or playgoer who can recognize greatness even when the rules are not followed. Herein lies the greatness of Dryden as a Neo-Classic critic who showed the flexibility of privileging the demands of art over the rigour of rules. For this reason, Dryden can champion the works of William Shakespeare over those of many dramatists who were more careful in preserving the unities of time, place, and action. It may be difficult to imagine, after centuries of veneration, that at one time Shakespeare was not held in high esteem; in the late seventeenth century, critics reviled him for his disregard for decorum and his seemingly careless attitudes regarding the mixing of genres. Dryden, however, recognized the greatness of Shakespeare's productions; his support for Shakespeare's "natural genius" had a significant impact on the elevation of the Renaissance playwright to a place of preeminence among dramatists. You can thus see for yourselves how balanced and honest criticism comes to play a major role in reorienting writers and their texts to particular social contexts. Let us now proceed to the syllabised portion of the text for a more detailed understanding of what Dryden has to say.

Activity:

Since your syllabus has only a part of the Essay, you might find the beginning of the text all too abrupt. For this, you are advised to click on the following link and go through the lessons and self- check mode exercises that will wonderfully serve the purpose of introducing you to Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*: http://wikieducator.org/Dryden_Dramatic_Poesy

2.7.5. Text (Extract) from An Essay of Dramatic Poesy

To begin then with Shakespeare; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul.[1] *All the Images of* ***Nature.*** [2] *were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but* ***luckily***[3]*: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of Mankind. He is many times* ***flat****,* ***insipid*** [5]*; his Comick wit degenerating*

*into **clenches**[6]; his serious swelling into **Bombast**[7]. But he is alwayes great, when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the Poets,*

Quantum lent a solent, inter viberna cupressi.[8]

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales[9] *of Eaton say, That there was no subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in Shakespeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the Age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson never equaled them to him in their esteem: And in the last Kings Court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling,*[10] *and with him the greater part of the Courtiers, set our Shakespeare far above him.*

Beaumont and Fletche[11] *of whom I am next to speak, had with the advantage of Shakespeare's wit*[12]*, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study. Beaumont especially being so accurate a judge of Plays, that Ben. Jonson while he lived, submitted all his Writings to his Censure*[13]*, and 'tis thought, used his judgement in correcting, if not contriving all his Plots. What value he had for him, appears by the Verses he writes to him; and therefore I need speak no farther of it. The first Play which brought Fletcher and him in esteem was their Philaster*[14]*: for before that, they had written two or three very unsuccessfully: as the like is reported of Ben Jonson, before he writ Every Man in his Humour*[15]*.*

Their Plots were generally more regular than Shakespeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of Gentlemen much better; whose wilde debaucheries, and quickness of wit in reparties, no Poet can ever paint as they have done. This Humour[16] *of which Ben Jonson derived from particular persons, they made it not their business to describe: they represented all the passions very lively, but above all, Love. I am apt to believe the English Language in them arrived to its highest perfection; what words have since been taken in, are rather superfluous then necessary. Their Playes are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the Stage; two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespeare's or Jonson's: the reason is, because there is a certain gayety in their Comedies, and Pathos in their more serious Plays, which suits generally with all men's' humours. Shakespeare's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs.*

As for Jonson, to whose Character I am now arrived, if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last Plays were but his dotages) I think him the most learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a most severe Judge of himself as well as others. One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour also in some measure we had before him; but something of Art was wanting to the Drama till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who preceded him. You seldome find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such a height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent Mechanick people. He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latine, and he borrowed boldly from them: there is scarce a Poet or Historian among the Roman Authors of those times whom he has not translated in Sejanus[17] and Catiline[18].

But he has done his Robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authors like a Monarch, and what would be theft[19] in other Poets, is only victory in him. With the spoils of these Writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its Rites, Ceremonies and Customs, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had seen less of it then in him. If there was any fault in his Language, 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously in his serious Playes; perhaps too, he did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed the Idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit.[20] Shakespeare was the Homer[21], or Father of our Dramatick Poets; Jonson was the Virgil[22], the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.[23] To conclude of him, as he has given us the most correct Playes, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his Discoveries[24], we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us.

2.7.6. Glossary and Notes

1. … the largest and most comprehensive soul- By the particular phrase it is suggested that Shakespeare's creative and imaginative faculty was all- embracing.
2. … the images of nature: the characters, objects and situations of real life.
3. Luckily: Perhaps in the sense of spontaneity.
4. Flat- lacking depth or intensity.
5. Insipid- dull
6. Clenches- clichés.
7. Bombast- Pretentious inflated speech or writing.
8. "Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupresse."- A quotation from Virgil's Eclagues. The English translation of the Latin sentence is "As cypresses oft do among the bending osiers."
9. Mr. Hales of Eton- John Hales (1584- 1656), scholar and divine. Born in Bath and educated at Oxford, where was a distinguished student of Greek and philosophy.
10. Sir John Suckling - English poet (1609 - 41) of the Cavalier tradition, best known for his poem 'Ballad Upon a Wedding'.
11. Beaumont and Fletcher- Francis Beaumont (1584- 1616), John Fletcher (1554-1625). Around 1608 Beaumont began the famous collaboration with Fletcher which lasted for about five years. Among the plays, produced by the BeaumontFletcher collaboration the most famous are ***Philaster*** (1610), ***The Maid's Tragedy*** (1611) and ***A King and No King*** (1611).
12. Wit- An intellectual person (in the archaic form).
13. Censure: Act of blaming.
14. ***Philaster***- A tragic- comedy by Beaumont and Fletcher, written in blank verse, and produced in 1611.
15. ***Everyman in his Humour***- The first important play by Ben Jonson, published in 1598. By 'humour' is to be understood a passion, generated by irrational egotism, and amounting sometimes to a mania.
16. **Humour**- the archaic meaning of ' whim' or 'mental inclination'is suggested here.
17. ***Sejanus***- A satirical tragedy by Ben Jonson, published in 1603. The central character is a historical figure, a favourite of the Roman emperor Tiberius.
18. ***Catiline***- A tragedy by Ben Jonson, published in 1611. The play may be considered as an example of Jonson's great classical scholarship.

19. **Theft**- In the sense of blind imitation.
20. "If I would …greater wit."- By this famous statement Dryden suggests that Shakespeare's dramatic genius is spontaneous and hence demands appreciation over and above rules; while the art of Jonson is strictly in keeping with classical (read neo-classically) rules of composition. There is very little that is conscious or constrained in Shakespeare's dramatic art. This is a line of thought that is later taken up by Dr Samuel Johnson as well. This explains Dryden's comparison, in the next line, with Homer, the great pioneer of classical drama, who has his relevance even in our own time. So with Shakespeare's plays, that never fade across ages and generations.
21. **Homer** (10thc. B.C)- famous classical Greek poet, celebrated for his ethics.
22. **Virgil** (70 -19 B.C)- The well-known classical Roman/ Latin poet. His poetic fame rests on the epic Aeneid and Eclogues.
23. "Shakespeare was …love Shakespeare"- Dryden's attempt to equate Jonson with Virgil suggests that Jonson's dramatic art is more conscious and so less spontaneous than Shakespeare's. For the 'correctness'of his dramatic craftsmanship he is admired by Dryden. But looked at from the point of view of content (as over form), even a neo-classical like Dryden is bowled over by Shakespeare!
24. ***Discoveries***- Published posthumously in 1640, written by Ben Jonson. It actually is a set of notes which he prepared for his lectures at Gresham College, London.

2.7.7. Analysis and Discussion of the Text

Neander's comparative study of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher is earlier preceded by his emphatic assertion that the English dramatic practices are much superior to the French because English drama in every respect is original and is characterized by creative ingenuity. Thus Neander declares: "We have borrowed nothing from them (i.e. the French) ; our plots are weaved in English loans. We endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakespeare and Fletcher; the copiousness and well- knitting of the intrigues we have from Jonson...". Neander's statements seem to suggest a fusion of his natural pride and patriotic fervor with his close acquaintance with the immediately preceding playwrights of England. The same mood, feeling and attitude of Neander are expressed when, being requested by Eugenius, he continues to deliberate on Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher.

Neander begins his deliberation with Shakespeare. His is the representative voice of his own time and, therefore, it reflects the spirit of the Restoration in relation to Shakespeare

and other English dramatists. Neander initiates his discussion with words of appreciation for Shakespeare. The appreciative deliberation on Shakespeare contains Neander's unqualified admiration for the great English dramatist. For instance, Shakespeare, according to Neander, had "the largest and comprehensive soul. "Shakespeare depicted the "images of nature" with essential care and spontaneity. There is nothing like constrained deliberateness or artificiality in his presentation of human nature, and human life in general. There were persons who accused Shakespeare of being ignorant of classical literature and language. But his lack of learning was simply a surface appearance. He was "naturally learned". His responses to life and nature were never bookish and they were rooted in his inwardness.

With critical neutrality and objectivity, Neander also points out some limitations in the dramatic art of Shakespeare. He comments, "He (i.e. Shakespeare) is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, serious swelling into bombast." Despite these limitations, Shakespeare is always great because in the treatment of different subjects in his plays he stands far above the other English playwrights. In this connection, Neander refers to one of the comments, made by Mr. Hales of Eton, "that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better than in Shakespeare. "According to Neander however, Shakespeare's reputation as a dramatic artist far exceeds either Ben Jonson's, or Beaumont and Fletcher's.

Beaumont and Fletcher are the next two playwrights who come within the orbit of Neander's assessment of English dramatists. Beaumont and Fletcher, according to him, have the intellectual capacity of Shakespeare, which is "improved by study". Beaumont particularly had the critical acumen of his own, so much so that "Ben Jonson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure."The particular play that made Beaumont and Fletcher famous, was ***Philaster***. As playwrights, according to Neander, they have maintained greater regularity in the plot- management than Shakespeare. The dialogues, exchanged among characters are essentially witty; the treatment of love in their plays, is essentially lively. Their comedies are enriched with a great amount of gaiety, while their tragedies are remarkable for their pathos. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher agree with the taste of men of all types.

Neander now takes up Ben Jonson for his critical observations. He appreciates the quality of compactness and precision in Jonson's dramatic art. Wit, language, and humour are proportionally interlinked in his plays. Neander rightly points out that "Humour was his (i.e. Ben Jonson's) proper sphere; and in that he delighted most to represent mechanical people."

Neander now focuses his attention on Jonson's close familiarity with the ancient writers, that is, the writers belonging to the classical past of Greece and Rome. Jonson as a playwright remains indebted to Greek and Latin writers, as it is evident in his plays,

Sejanus and **Catiline**. Jonson has exploited the richness of classical legacy with bold confidence; "He (i.e. Jonson) invades authors like a monarch. "In a play like ***Volpone***, he has faithfully represented old Rome, its rites, ceremonies and customs with flawless and meticulous details. Even the language in his plays is highly Latinised ("Romanize our tongue" is the expression used by Neander).

Now we come down to the most meaningful and significant section of this particular unit in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* – the brief comparison between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Neander admits that Ben Jonson is a "correct poet" from the neo- classical critical perspective, but Shakespeare has a greater dramatic genius and philosophical wisdom. Shakespeare, Neander claims "was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets". On the contrary Jonson, being more conscious and therefore, less spontaneous, "was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing". The statements are supplemented by the sentence, which is quite unlikely in a person with neo- classical critical attitude, since it breathes the spirit of subjectivism and impressionism: "I admire him (i.e. Jonson) but I love Shakespeare." Considering the excerpt chosen for your syllabus, these lines stand out as the most succinct proof of the fact that Neo-Classicism as a creed never chained down one like Dryden slavishly to rules. He always had the catholicity to look beyond the immediate and appreciate the greater context of art and its requirements.

Jonson, Neander declares, should also be remembered for his 'Discoveries' where he laid down some rules for the perfection of the English stage.

It has already been pointed out that Neander is the alter ego to Dryden, and for this reason we may consider Neander's arguments as Dryden's also. One of the interesting aspects of the passages from *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, prescribed in your syllabus, is that here Dryden introduces himself as a critic of Shakespeare together with Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. Dryden's observations on these English dramatists reveal both his virtues and limitations as a critic. It is said of Dryden that his virtues are his own, his faults those of his age. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his attitude to Shakespeare. When he judges according to those critical canons which the Restoration derived from Italian and French Aristotelian formalists of the 16th and 17th centuries, he deplores Shakespeare's irregularities, his lapses of good taste and the improper use of language. But when he speaks from the fullness of his intuitions, he reveres Shakespeare as "the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. "On the whole Dryden, however, remains an exceptional critic of the age of Restoration on account of his flexibility of critical temper.

2.7.8. Summing Up

Dryden's An Essay is the first systematic attempt to theorise the nature of contemporary English drama visà-vis Elizabethan drama. The Classical impact is factored in and the continuities with and innovations upon classical drama have been traced. Continental influences are also analysed threadbare. The use of the dialogue form among four speakers, each representing a particular point of view, gives the whole essay a dramatic form.

It becomes evident why Dryden is justly called the 'Father of English Literary Criticism.' His rational thought process and unprejudiced freedom to steer clear of any Neo-Classical pedantry are notable features. He, however, remained.

2.7.9. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. Analyse Dryden's *Essay* and show how it can be looked upon as a text that is written within the Neo-Classical milieu and is yet not bound by its general rigour.
2. How does Neander sum up the achievements of Shakespeare as a dramatist? Do you agree with his view? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Summarise and present in your own words, the central arguments of each of the four speakers in Dryden's Essay.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions

1. Why does Neander reach the conclusion that Beaumont and Fletcher are "more correct" than Jonson and Shakespeare?
2. What, according to Neander, are the special qualities of Jonson as a dramatist?
3. Comment on the following: "Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing."

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Give the English meaning of the Latin quote: " Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi." From which classical text is it taken?
2. Write short notes on (i) ***Philaster***, (ii) ***Everyman in His humour***.
3. Write short notes on (i) ***Sejanus***, (ii) ***Catiline***.
4. Who are Homer and Virgil? Why are Shakespeare and Jonson respectively compared with them?
5. Why does Neander declare that he 'admires' Jonson but ' loves' Shakespeare?

2.7.10. Suggested Readings

- Dryden, John. "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy." *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 2, edited by George Saintsbury, Macmillan, 1882, pp. 71-165.
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Unit-8 ❑ Dr Samuel Johnson: Preface to Shakespeare (Extracts)

Structure

2.8.1. Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are as follows:

- To explore the rich tradition of Shakespearean criticism in the eighteenth century, reflecting the critical temperament and cultural interest of the age in England's greatest dramatist.

- To analyze Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*, which addresses major critical concerns regarding Shakespeare's works, providing insight into the modes, practices, and principles of eighteenth-century neoclassical criticism.

- To examine selected extracts from Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* to understand the reception of Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England, offering a glimpse into the cultural attitudes towards the renowned playwright.

➢ To learn about Samuel Johnson, also known as Dr. Johnson, as a significant voice of the eighteenth century, encompassing his role as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor, and lexicographer.

➢ To gain familiarity with the literary contributions of Samuel Johnson and understand his influence on eighteenth-century literary discourse, particularly in the realm of Shakespearean criticism.

To develop critical thinking skills to evaluate Shakespearean criticism within its historical context, discerning the continuity and evolution of interpretations over centuries.

2.8.2. Introduction

The immensely rich tradition of Shakespearean criticism in the eighteenth century testifies not only to the critical temperament of the age but also to the great interest that the culture took in the works of the greatest dramatist that England had produced. Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* succinctly addresses all the major critical concerns regarding the dramatist's works that were deemed important in the eighteenth century. This invaluable piece of literary criticism also acquaints the contemporary readers with the modes, practices and principles of eighteenth-century neoclassical criticism. In this Unit, a couple of small extracts have been chosen to give you a feel of the reception of Shakespeare in 18th century England. In the process, you will also know about Samuel Johnson, more popularly known as Dr Johnson, an important 18th century voice who is remembered as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer. After reading the Unit, you should, with help from your counsellor, be able to identify the line of evolution in Shakespeare studies from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and perhaps extend it to the present times.

2.7.3. John Dryden: the Literary Critic

There are diverse opinions and views on the merit of Dryden's literary criticism. While Jonathan Swift wryly commented that his critical works were "merely writ at first for filling, to raise the author's price a shilling", Dr Johnson spoke of them as "the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction." (For more on this, you may log on to http://www.jstor.org/stable/456662?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

While the two opinions mentioned above show two ends of the spectrum and give you

an idea of the divergent reception accorded to Dryden the critic, Dr Johnson's words bring out the age-old classical ring of the dual functions of art - 'delight' and 'instruct' or gratification and edification. In *The Lives of the Poets*, Dr Johnson calls Dryden 'the father of English criticism.[1] For one thing, you will definitely remember that much before Dryden, Philip Sidney had written a tract theorising on the function of poetry. Even if we leave out minor theorists, one cannot be oblivious of the importance of Sidney as an Elizabethan literary critic. Why then does Dr Johnson call Dryden thus? Your counselor will surely engage you in a thorough discussion on this.

Here again, it will be seen that the Neo-Classical principles of composition reign supreme in the consideration: Dr Johnson writes of Dryden that he was the 'writer who first taught us to determine upon principles' of composition. He brings into reckoning the treatises of Webb and Puttenham; mentions (Ben) Jonson and Cowley, but goes on to assert that 'Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* was the first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing'.

As a literary critic Dryden establishes his scholarship, profound wisdom and erudition most often through his elaborate Prefaces. As a poet-critic, he invites comparison with Philip Sidney at the earlier stage of English criticism and with the succeeding generation of critics, including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Matthew Arnold, to name only the more prominent ones. Dryden's uniqueness lies in the fact that his close familiarity with the classical literatures of ancient Greece and Rome notwithstanding (unlike Sidney), he has never tended to be Aristotelian in his critical arguments. On the contrary he has adopted for himself the critical principles of Neo- Classical France, particularly the French School of Boileau and Rapin. Even here, Dryden is free from any slavish adherence to what is often blindly held as the Neo-Classical principle. There is in him an easy adaptability to pragmatic necessities and the availability of clarity of thought backed by logical interpretation. His criticism is wide ranging, although the most notable pieces are *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) and *Preface to the Fables* (1700).

We shall definitely understand these generalised statements better when we relate them to the particular context of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, an extract from which is our prescribed text for now.

2.7.4. Overview of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*

Written probably during the Plague Year of 1666 and published in 1668, Dryden's essay takes up the subject that Philip Sidney had set forth in his *Defence of Poesie* (1580) and attempts to justify drama as a legitimate form of "poetry" comparable to the epic, as well as defend English drama against that of the ancients and the French. The purpose of

the treatise is thus significant, coming as it does at a time that follows on the heels of 136 the re-opening of theatres in London after the ardour of Puritan rule. It needs to be mentioned that Dryden's work, unlike Sidney's, is not in response to any assault per se on poetry or drama. It is, by and large, an exposition of several of the major critical positions of the time, set out in a semi-dramatic form that gives life to what would otherwise appear as abstract theories. The essay not only offers a capsule summary of the status of literary criticism in the late seventeenth century; it also provides a succinct view of the tastes of cultured men and women of the period. Dryden synthesises the best of both English and Continental (particularly French) criticism; hence, the essay is a single source for understanding neoclassical attitudes toward dramatic art. Moreover, in his discussion of the ancients versus the moderns, in his defence of the use of rhyme, and in his argument concerning Aristotelian prescripts for drama, Dryden depicts and reflects upon the tastes of literate Europeans who shaped the cultural climate in France and England for a century.

At the beginning of the text, Dryden writes about "that memorable day". Historically and chronologically the day refers to 3rd June, 1665, when the famous Spanish Armada was defeated by the English Navy. Therefore, it was a day of national pride and glory. The inflated feeling of being English and the high patriotism that surrounded it are clearly evident in Dryden's famous critical discourse. If you look at the text in the full form, you will realize that right from the beginning, it is written in a dialogue form. This is indeed strategic, not only because the topic of conversation relates to drama; but also because he is dealing with and presenting opposed points of view that will finally need to be synthesised. So it makes perfect sense to keep the different points of view distinctly apart to begin with. Let us see how Dryden does this.

There are four speakers, all of them having classical names- **Eugenius** (the real-life counterpart being Charles Sackville, or Lord Buckhurst, to whom the 'Essay' is dedicated), **Crites** (the real-life counterpart being Sir Robert Howard, one of the writers of the Restoration heroic plays), **Lisideius** (in real life Sir Charles Sadley), and **Neander**, the name has the meaning of 'new man'. It is interesting to note that **Neander** represents the new and upcoming generation of Englishmen, who glorify the legacy and tradition of English drama and dramatic practices. Neander represents Dryden himself! These four cultivated gentlemen have taken a barge down the River Thames to observe the combat and, as guns sound in the background, they comment on the sorry state of modern literature; this naval encounter will inspire hundreds of bad verses commending the victors or consoling the vanquished. The four speakers make comparisons between classical drama with that of contemporary England and France; French Drama with English, and English drama of Elizabethan period with that of Dryden's own day. Dryden's *Essay* is evidently the first systematic discourse on dramatic principles in 137 English, and for this reason it may be

comparable with the French playwright Corneille's *Examenes* and *Discours* (1650-56).

Although it is clear in course of the treatise that Dryden uses Neander as a mouthpiece for his own views about drama, he is careful to allow his other characters to present cogent arguments for the literature of the classical period, of France, and of Renaissance England. More significantly, although he was a practitioner of the modern form of writing plays himself, Dryden does not insist that the dramatists of the past are to be faulted simply because they did not adhere to methods of composition that his own age venerated. For example, he does not adopt the views of the more strident critics whose insistence on slavish adherence to the rules derived from Aristotle had led to a narrow definition for greatness among playwrights. Instead, he pleads for commonsensical application of these prescriptions, appealing to a higher standard of judgment: the discriminating sensibility of the reader or playgoer who can recognize greatness even when the rules are not followed. Herein lies the greatness of Dryden as a Neo-Classic critic who showed the flexibility of privileging the demands of art over the rigour of rules. For this reason, Dryden can champion the works of William Shakespeare over those of many dramatists who were more careful in preserving the unities of time, place, and action. It may be difficult to imagine, after centuries of veneration, that at one time Shakespeare was not held in high esteem; in the late seventeenth century, critics reviled him for his disregard for decorum and his seemingly careless attitudes regarding the mixing of genres. Dryden, however, recognized the greatness of Shakespeare's productions; his support for Shakespeare's "natural genius" had a significant impact on the elevation of the Renaissance playwright to a place of preeminence among dramatists. You can thus see for yourselves how balanced and honest criticism comes to play a major role in reorienting writers and their texts to particular social contexts. Let us now proceed to the syllabised portion of the text for a more detailed understanding of what Dryden has to say.

Activity:

Since your syllabus has only a part of the Essay, you might find the beginning of the text all too abrupt. For this, you are advised to click on the following link and go through the lessons and self- check mode exercises that will wonderfully serve the purpose of introducing you to Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*: http://wikieducator.org/Dryden_Dramatic_Poesy

2.7.5. Text (Extract) from An Essay of Dramatic Poesy

To begin then with Shakespeare; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul.[1] *All the*

Images of ***Nature.*** [2] *were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but* ***luckily***[3]*: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of Mankind. He is many times* ***flat***, ***insipid*** [5]*; his Comick wit degenerating into* ***clenches***[6]*; his serious swelling into* ***Bombast***[7]*. But he is alwayes great, when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the Poets,*

Quantum lent a solent, inter viberna cupressi.[8]

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales[9] *of Eaton say, That there was no subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in Shakespeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the Age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson never equaled them to him in their esteem: And in the last Kings Court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling,*[10] *and with him the greater part of the Courtiers, set our Shakespeare far above him.*

Beaumont and Fletche[11] *of whom I am next to speak, had with the advantage of Shakespeare's wit*[12]*, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study. Beaumont especially being so accurate a judge of Plays, that Ben. Jonson while he lived, submitted all his Writings to his Censure*[13]*, and 'tis thought, used his judgement in correcting, if not contriving all his Plots. What value he had for him, appears by the Verses he writes to him; and therefore I need speak no farther of it. The first Play which brought Fletcher and him in esteem was their Philaster*[14]*: for before that, they had written two or three very unsuccessfully: as the like is reported of Ben Jonson, before he writ Every Man in his Humour*[15]*.*

Their Plots were generally more regular than Shakespeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of Gentlemen much better; whose wilde debaucheries, and quickness of wit in reparties, no Poet can ever paint as they have done. This Humour[16] *of which Ben Jonson derived from particular persons, they made it not their business to describe: they represented all the passions very lively, but above all, Love. I am*

apt to believe the English Language in them arrived to its highest perfection; what words have since been taken in, are rather superfluous then necessary. Their Playes are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the Stage; two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespeare's or Jonson's: the reason is, because there is a certain gayety in their Comedies, and Pathos in their more serious Plays, which suits generally with all men's' humours. Shakespeare's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs.

As for Jonson, to whose Character I am now arrived, if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last Plays were but his dotages) I think him the most learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a most severe Judge of himself as well as others. One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour also in some measure we had before him; but something of Art was wanting to the Drama till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who preceded him. You seldome find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such a height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent Mechanick people. He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latine, and he borrowed boldly from them: there is scarce a Poet or Historian among the Roman Authors of those times whom he has not translated in Sejanus[17] and Catiline[18].

But he has done his Robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authors like a Monarch, and what would be theft[19] in other Poets, is only victory in him. With the spoils of these Writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its Rites, Ceremonies and Customs, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had seen less of it then in him. If there was any fault in his Language, 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously in his serious Playes; perhaps too, he did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed the Idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare,

I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit.[20] *Shakespeare was the Homer*[21]*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; Jonson was the Virgil*[22]*, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.*[23] *To conclude of him, as he has given us the most correct Playes, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his Discoveries*[24]*, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us.*

2.7.6. Glossary and Notes

1. … the largest and most comprehensive soul- By the particular phrase it is suggested that Shakespeare's creative and imaginative faculty was all- embracing.
2. … the images of nature: the characters, objects and situations of real life.
3. Luckily: Perhaps in the sense of spontaneity.
4. Flat- lacking depth or intensity.
5. Insipid- dull
6. Clenches- clichés.
7. Bombast- Pretentious inflated speech or writing.
8. "Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupresse."- A quotation from Virgil's Eclagues. The English translation of the Latin sentence is "As cypresses oft do among the bending osiers."
9. Mr. Hales of Eton- John Hales (1584- 1656), scholar and divine. Born in Bath and educated at Oxford, where was a distinguished student of Greek and philosophy.
10. Sir John Suckling - English poet (1609 - 41) of the Cavalier tradition, best known for his poem 'Ballad Upon a Wedding'.
11. Beaumont and Fletcher- Francis Beaumont (1584- 1616), John Fletcher (1554-1625). Around 1608 Beaumont began the famous collaboration with Fletcher which lasted for about five years. Among the plays, produced by the BeaumontFletcher collaboration the most famous are ***Philaster*** (1610), ***The Maid's Tragedy*** (1611) and ***A King and No King*** (1611).
12. Wit- An intellectual person (in the archaic form).
13. Censure: Act of blaming.
14. ***Philaster***- A tragic- comedy by Beaumont and Fletcher, written in blank verse, and produced in 1611.

15. ***Everyman in his Humour***- The first important play by Ben Jonson, published in 1598. By 'humour' is to be understood a passion, generated by irrational egotism, and amounting sometimes to a mania.
16. **Humour**- the archaic meaning of ' whim' or 'mental inclination'is suggested here.
17. ***Sejanus***- A satirical tragedy by Ben Jonson, published in 1603. The central character is a historical figure, a favourite of the Roman emperor Tiberius.
18. ***Catiline***- A tragedy by Ben Jonson, published in 1611. The play may be considered as an example of Jonson's great classical scholarship.
19. **Theft**- In the sense of blind imitation.
20. "If I would …greater wit."- By this famous statement Dryden suggests that Shakespeare's dramatic genius is spontaneous and hence demands appreciation over and above rules; while the art of Jonson is strictly in keeping with classical (read neo-classically) rules of composition. There is very little that is conscious or constrained in Shakespeare's dramatic art. This is a line of thought that is later taken up by Dr Samuel Johnson as well. This explains Dryden's comparison, in the next line, with Homer, the great pioneer of classical drama, who has his relevance even in our own time. So with Shakespeare's plays, that never fade across ages and generations.
21. **Homer** (10thc. B.C)- famous classical Greek poet, celebrated for his ethics.
22. **Virgil** (70 -19 B.C)- The well-known classical Roman/ Latin poet. His poetic fame rests on the epic Aeneid and Eclogues.
23. "Shakespeare was …love Shakespeare"- Dryden's attempt to equate Jonson with Virgil suggests that Jonson's dramatic art is more conscious and so less spontaneous than Shakespeare's. For the 'correctness'of his dramatic craftsmanship he is admired by Dryden. But looked at from the point of view of content (as over form), even a neo-classical like Dryden is bowled over by Shakespeare!
24. ***Discoveries***- Published posthumously in 1640, written by Ben Jonson. It actually is a set of notes which he prepared for his lectures at Gresham College, London.

2.7.7. Analysis and Discussion of the Text

Neander's comparative study of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher is earlier preceded by his emphatic assertion that the English dramatic practices are much superior to the French because English drama in every respect is original and is characterized by creative ingenuity. Thus Neander declares: "We have borrowed nothing

from them (i.e. the French) ; our plots are weaved in English loans. We endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakespeare and Fletcher; the copiousness and well- knitting of the intrigues we have from Jonson...". Neander's statements seem to suggest a fusion of his natural pride and patriotic fervor with his close acquaintance with the immediately preceding playwrights of England. The same mood, feeling and attitude of Neander are expressed when, being requested by Eugenius, he continues to deliberate on Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher.

Neander begins his deliberation with Shakespeare. His is the representative voice of his own time and, therefore, it reflects the spirit of the Restoration in relation to Shakespeare and other English dramatists. Neander initiates his discussion with words of appreciation for Shakespeare. The appreciative deliberation on Shakespeare contains Neander's unqualified admiration for the great English dramatist. For instance, Shakespeare, according to Neander, had "the largest and comprehensive soul. "Shakespeare depicted the "images of nature" with essential care and spontaneity. There is nothing like constrained deliberateness or artificiality in his presentation of human nature, and human life in general. There were persons who accused Shakespeare of being ignorant of classical literature and language. But his lack of learning was simply a surface appearance. He was "naturally learned". His responses to life and nature were never bookish and they were rooted in his inwardness.

With critical neutrality and objectivity, Neander also points out some limitations in the dramatic art of Shakespeare. He comments, "He (i.e. Shakespeare) is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, serious swelling into bombast." Despite these limitations, Shakespeare is always great because in the treatment of different subjects in his plays he stands far above the other English playwrights. In this connection, Neander refers to one of the comments, made by Mr. Hales of Eton, "that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better than in Shakespeare. "According to Neander however, Shakespeare's reputation as a dramatic artist far exceeds either Ben Jonson's, or Beaumont and Fletcher's.

Beaumont and Fletcher are the next two playwrights who come within the orbit of Neander's assessment of English dramatists. Beaumont and Fletcher, according to him, have the intellectual capacity of Shakespeare, which is "improved by study". Beaumont particularly had the critical acumen of his own, so much so that "Ben Jonson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure."The particular play that made Beaumont and Fletcher famous, was ***Philaster***. As playwrights, according to Neander, they have maintained greater regularity in the plot- management than Shakespeare. The dialogues, exchanged among characters are essentially witty; the treatment of love in their plays, is essentially lively. Their comedies are enriched with a great amount of gaiety, while their tragedies are remarkable for their pathos. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher agree with

the taste of men of all types.

Neander now takes up Ben Jonson for his critical observations. He appreciates the quality of compactness and precision in Jonson's dramatic art. Wit, language, and humour are proportionally interlinked in his plays. Neander rightly points out that "Humour was his (i.e. Ben Jonson's) proper sphere; and in that he delighted most to represent mechanical people."

Neander now focuses his attention on Jonson's close familiarity with the ancient writers, that is, the writers belonging to the classical past of Greece and Rome. Jonson as a playwright remains indebted to Greek and Latin writers, as it is evident in his plays, **Sejanus** and **Catiline**. Jonson has exploited the richness of classical legacy with bold confidence; "He (i.e. Jonson) invades authors like a monarch. "In a play like ***Volpone***, he has faithfully represented old Rome, its rites, ceremonies and customs with flawless and meticulous details. Even the language in his plays is highly Latinised ("Romanize our tongue" is the expression used by Neander).

Now we come down to the most meaningful and significant section of this particular unit in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* – the brief comparison between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Neander admits that Ben Jonson is a "correct poet" from the neo- classical critical perspective, but Shakespeare has a greater dramatic genius and philosophical wisdom. Shakespeare, Neander claims "was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets". On the contrary Jonson, being more conscious and therefore, less spontaneous, "was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing". The statements are supplemented by the sentence, which is quite unlikely in a person with neo- classical critical attitude, since it breathes the spirit of subjectivism and impressionism: "I admire him (i.e. Jonson) but I love Shakespeare." Considering the excerpt chosen for your syllabus, these lines stand out as the most succinct proof of the fact that Neo-Classicism as a creed never chained down one like Dryden slavishly to rules. He always had the catholicity to look beyond the immediate and appreciate the greater context of art and its requirements.

Jonson, Neander declares, should also be remembered for his 'Discoveries' where he laid down some rules for the perfection of the English stage.

It has already been pointed out that Neander is the alter ego to Dryden, and for this reason we may consider Neander's arguments as Dryden's also. One of the interesting aspects of the passages from *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, prescribed in your syllabus, is that here Dryden introduces himself as a critic of Shakespeare together with Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. Dryden's observations on these English dramatists reveal both his virtues and limitations as a critic. It is said of Dryden that his virtues are his own, his faults

those of his age. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his attitude to Shakespeare. When he judges according to those critical canons which the Restoration derived from Italian and French Aristotelian formalists of the 16th and 17th centuries, he deplores Shakespeare's irregularities, his lapses of good taste and the improper use of language. But when he speaks from the fullness of his intuitions, he reveres Shakespeare as "the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. "On the whole Dryden, however, remains an exceptional critic of the age of Restoration on account of his flexibility of critical temper.

2.7.8. Summing Up

Dryden's An Essay is the first systematic attempt to theorise the nature of contemporary English drama visà-vis Elizabethan drama. The Classical impact is factored in and the continuities with and innovations upon classical drama have been traced. Continental influences are also analysed threadbare. The use of the dialogue form among four speakers, each representing a particular point of view, gives the whole essay a dramatic form.

It becomes evident why Dryden is justly called the 'Father of English Literary Criticism.' His rational thought process and unprejudiced freedom to steer clear of any Neo-Classical pedantry are notable features. He, however, remained.

2.7.9. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. Analyse Dryden's *Essay* and show how it can be looked upon as a text that is written within the Neo-Classical milieu and is yet not bound by its general rigour.
2. How does Neander sum up the achievements of Shakespeare as a dramatist? Do you agree with his view? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Summarise and present in your own words, the central arguments of each of the four speakers in Dryden's Essay.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions

1. Why does Neander reach the conclusion that Beaumont and Fletcher are "more correct" than Jonson and Shakespeare?
2. What, according to Neander, are the special qualities of Jonson as a dramatist?
3. Comment on the following: "Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing."

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Give the English meaning of the Latin quote: " Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi." From which classical text is it taken?
2. Write short notes on (i) ***Philaster***, (ii) ***Everyman in His humour***.
3. Write short notes on (i) ***Sejanus***, (ii) ***Catiline***.
4. Who are Homer and Virgil? Why are Shakespeare and Jonson respectively compared with them?
5. Why does Neander declare that he 'admires' Jonson but ' loves' Shakespeare?

2.7.10. Suggested Readings

- Dryden, John. "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy." *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 2, edited by George Saintsbury, Macmillan, 1882, pp. 71-165.
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Module 2

Literary Criticism of the Romantic & Victorian Periods

Unit-9 ❑ William Wordsworth: Preface to Lyrical Ballads

Structure

3.9.1. Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- Identify the key features of Romantic literary criticism;
- Recognize William Wordsworth's significant contribution to Romantic literary criticism;
- Appreciate Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.
- Comprehend various aspects of Wordsworth's poetic theory.

3.9.2. Introduction

Wordsworth is considered to be one of the most significant British poet-critics. His most important contribution is contained in his *Introduction to Lyrical Ballads* extracts from which you are to study in this course. One of Wordsworth's celebrated declaration is that poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.'. It is the projection of the thoughts and feelings of the poet. In other words, poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesises the images, thoughts, and feelings of the poet. This pattern of thinking in which the artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged, is called the expressive theory of art.

Before we proceed to analyse the Preface, let us have an overview of the Romantic Theory as envisaged by British romantic poet-critics.

3.9.3. Understanding Romantic Literary Criticism

Romantic literary theory was initiated as a revolt against the neo-classical concept of art which assumed a predominantly mechanical dimension in the eighteenth century. Poetry was regarded as craftsmanship. In such a perspective, obviously there was no place for the creative imagination. 'Imagination' was employed in the eighteenth century in a mechanical sense. But from the Romantic point of view, imagination is a mysterious creative faculty which transcends reason. It encompasses all arts including literature which are, in a way, an expression and which, in the end, determines man's relationship with external reality. Its procedure is not analytical but synthetic. It grasps truth all at once through an act of intuition and does not follow the circumlocutory and often unsure routes of reason. Romantic poet- critics such as Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge rejected the mechanical view of imagination propounded by the Neo-classicists. Blake said that imagination was the 'eternal world', 'not a state but the human existence itself', and Coleridge presents it as a human analogy of the divine act of creation. Romantic poetics privileged and favoured the function and role of imagination in unequivocal terms. Commenting on this facet of Romanticism, C. M. Bowra says: "If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and in the special view which they held of it." The Romantic writers regarded imagination to be an integral part of the creative process. The attention on the imagination also implied that the self was prioritised above the social concern that governed much of the eighteenth century literary

and critical discourse. The centrality of the self, then, constitutes another characteristic of Romantic literary and critical theory.

A significant tenet of Romantic criticism which is rather contradictorily linked to the concept of Imagination is that the poet seeks to evade his own personality and self- hood. This doctrine of Romantic self-effacement has its loftiest expression in Keats's account of the 'Chamelion Poet': "it is not itself — it has no self — it is everything and nothing — It has no character — A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity." Critics have sometimes described this poetical character as 'Negative Capability,' coining a phrase from another letter of Keats. Creativity of the kind Keats aimed for, demanded eradication of the self and, according to Coleridge, this has been best exemplified by Shakespeare, 'the one Proteus of the fire and the flood.' Protean and shape-shifting, Shakespeare himself is invisible in his works, 'an omnipresent creativeness', whose poetry is 'characterless.'

His personal self-presence dissipates itself among the multiple voices he inhabits from moment to moment. One of the quintessential characteristics of Romantic poetic theory is that the poets are not at all obsessed with identity-fixity.

On one side of the Romantic idea of art there is the magnanimous invisibility of poetical or artistic self and on the reverse side of it, lies a colossal imaginative egotism. If the first criterion is self-oblivion, then the second is all-absorbing self-awareness. Coleridge scrutinized both with equal and opposite admiration, and considered the best exponent of the second category to be John Milton, who, working in quite the contrary direction to Shakespeare, 'attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL.' In his *Table Talk*, he eulogized the 'intense egotism' of Milton's verse — "It is Milton himself whom you see; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael — they are all John Milton". Keats was also regardful of that Miltonic sort of imagination which he traced in Wordsworth and regarded it as the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone. Hazlitt has put a similar concept most vehemently, and not quite unadmiringly, in his review of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*: "An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything … he lives in the busy solitude of his own heart".

Romantic theory of art is a compound of a particular view of imagination, a particular attitude to nature and a particular style of writing. It begins with the affirmation of the worth of the common man and leads to the affirmation of universal brotherhood. Romantic art emphasizes the subjective dimension of human experience. This stress on individuality implies the autonomy of every individual and the consequent variety and difference. The cardinal Romantic belief is that every individual is different from every other individual. It views man as an independent and individual entity and entails a specific view of human life and man's relationship with external reality.

In their endeavour to seek the wholeness of 'Being', the Romantics repudiated reason and the mechanistic philosophy of John Locke and opted for Immanuel Kant. For them, the Kantian triad of cognitive, moral and aesthetic principles became important. Thus, a shift from the work to the human creator was initiated, and imagination instead of reason became the instrument of creativity. In Romantic concept of art, a work is judged by its sincerity, genuineness of its poetic vision as well as by the experiences the author consciously or unconsciously revealed in it. The Romantics vehemently repudiated the neo-classical triad of reason, nature and truth. Privileging feeling over reason and emotion over thought, they attempted to counter the neo-classical concepts of poetry. The fundamental change brought about by Wordsworth to the Lockean mind-memory construct is the emphasis on the creative process of the mind in dealing with the past. This point has been succinctly expressed by R. Langbaum by stating, 'It is only through memory', says Locke, that the mind has any effectiveness and he equates the self with the sum of conscious memory, whatever has the consciousness of present and past action, is the same person to whom they both belong'. But Locke does not speak of memory as modifying the actions remembered …'

One of the credentials of Romantic literary criticism is the use of ordinary language in poetry. There should not be any gaudiness or empty phraseology in poetry. The language of poetry should not be artificially contrived; it should be true to nature, true to the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions. The Romantics wish to keep the readers of their poetry in the company of flesh and blood. So, they discard the conventional form of poetic diction. Wordsworth says that he wants to bring the language of poetry near to the language that men use. As their object is not to make use of any falsehood of description, there should not be any falsehood in the language of poetry. So they wanted to avoid conventional phrases and figures of speech.

Inspiration is one of the central concepts in Romantic Poetic Aesthetics. Literally, to be inspired is to be breathed on by Apollo or in the Christian context by the Holy Spirit. The Romantics assert their faith in the idea of Inspiration in unmistakable terms. Closely linked to it is the idea of Spontaneity. Romantic critics, theorists and poets repudiate artifice in favour of spontaneity in literature.

One of the prominent propositions of Romantic Aesthetics is 'the return to nature' or 'the revolt against Alexander Pope' comprising a revolt against artificiality that Romantic Polemic typically characterized as Augustan — 'the dark age of English Poetry', as Robert Southey once called it. William Hazlitt once summarized a whole climate of acrimony against the Age of Pope by telling 'He was, in a word, the Poet, not of nature, but of art'. For the Romantics, nature is the criterion. John Keats told his friend Taylor "If Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all". Wordsworth

was a dominating figure in this regard; a poet to whom, as M. H. Abrams puts it in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), 'the cardinal standard of poetic value is "nature". Organicism is another hallmark of Romantic theory of art. Plato firmly believed in innate ideas, which unconsciously enter a work of art and impart a form to it. The Romantics explain it by speaking of the work of art as an organism. Blake turned down Burke's theory of art based on the dichotomy between conception and execution. Other Romantics borrowed metaphors from the animal and the plant world to illustrate the unity of a work of art.

The process of poetic creation or composition constitutes a pivotal part in Romantic Art. Mill had strongly asserted that in so far as a literary product simply imitates objects, it is not poetry at all. He does not approve of the reference of poetry to the external universe. But he has conceded the fact that sensible objects may serve as a stimulus or 'occasion for the generation of poetry', and hence, 'the poetry is not in the object itself', but 'in the state of mind' in which it is contemplated. Poetry must be true not to the object, but to 'the human emotion'. Thus, severed from the external universe, the objects signified by a poem tend to be regarded as no more than a projected equivalent — an extended and articulated symbol for the poet's inner state of mind. Poetry, said J.S. Mill, embodies 'itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind'.

Romantic concept of art endorses a specific genre of poetry. In this regard, Mill reinterprets and inverts the neo-classic ranking of the poetic branches. As the purest and effortless expression of feeling, lyric poetry is 'more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other…' Other forms of poetry are all alloyed by non-poetic elements, whether narrative, descriptive or didactic which serve merely as convenient occasions for the poetic utterances of feelings either by the poet or any one of his invented characters. To Aristotle, tragedy had been the highest and most sublime form of poetry, and the plot, representing the action being imitated, had been its 'soul'; while most neo-classic critics had agreed that, whether judged by greatness of subject-matter or of effect, epic and tragedy are the king and the queen of poetic forms. It serves as an index to the revolution in critical norms to notice that to Mill, plot becomes a kind of necessary evil. An epic poem 'in so far as it so epic… is not poetry at all', but only a suitable frame for the greatest diversity of genuinely poetic passages; while the interest in plot and story 'merely as a story' characterizes rude stages of society, children, and the 'shallowest and emptiest' of civilized adults Similarly with the other arts such as in music, painting, sculpture, and architecture Mill distinguishes between that which is 'simple imitation or description' and that which 'expresses human feeling' and is, therefore, poetry. Mill is recognized as one of the great exponents of expressive theory of art. He has accepted the venerable assumption that

man's susceptibility is innate, but his knowledge, skill and art are required. On the basis of this assumption he has differentiated poets into two categories: poets who are born and poets who are made, or those who are poets 'by nature', and those who are poets 'by culture'. Natural poetry is identifiable because it 'is Feeling itself, employing Thought only as the medium of its utterance'. On the other hand, the poetry of 'a cultivated but not naturally poetic mind,' is written with 'a distinct aim', and in it the thought remains the conspicuous object, however surrounded by 'a halo of feeling'. Natural poetry is 'poetry in a higher sense, than any other; since… that which constitutes poetry, human feeling, enters for more largely into this than into the poetry of culture'.

The relationship between the poet and the audience is of great significance in Romantic literary theory. According to Mill, 'Poetry is feeling, confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude'. The poet's audience is reduced to a single member consisting of the poet himself. 'All poetry', as Mill puts it, 'is of the nature of soliloquy'. The purpose of producing effects upon other men, which for centuries had been the defining character of the art of poetry, now serves precisely the opposite function. Wordsworth insisted that 'Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men 'and that each of his poems 'has a worthy purpose'; even though it turns out that the pleasure and profit of the audience is an automatic consequence of the poet's spontaneous overflow of feeling, provided that the appropriate associations between thoughts and feelings have been established by the poet in advance. Keats, however, affirmed that 'I never wrote one single line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought.' 'A poet is a nightingale', according to

P. B. Shelley, 'who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician…' For Carlyle, the poet utterly replaces the audience as the generator of aesthetic norms.

A prominent characteristic of Romantic poetic theory is that the poets and artists craved for the uncommon, uncanny, bizarre and strange and discovered it in the medieval legends, picturesque, fairy and adventurous tales, myths and romances. This penchant for medievalism triggered the imagination of several romantic writers. In 1765, Thomas Percy published his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in three volumes. Percy's *Reliques* created a new trend in romantic poetry and immensely influenced Scott, Coleridge and Keats. The romantics also dismantled the age-old controversy regarding pleasure or instruction as the objective or aim of literature. Critics since the time of Horace had been regarding instruction as the primary end of poetry. Wordsworth, for the first time deviated from this classical view and wrote in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*: "The poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man". Afterwards,

his contemporary Coleridge established his views more firmly when he told, "A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to the works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth."

3.9.4. Preface to Lyrical Ballads: Annotations

The *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* was published first along with a new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* brought out in 1800. In 1802, Wordsworth amplified it somewhat with a passage on 'What is a Poet?' and added an Appendix on Poetic Diction. Regarded as the most authentic expression of the ideals of the pioneers of the Romantic movement in English Poetry, the *Preface,* in which Wordsworth's collaborator in *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge, had no part at all, provoked strong protests. The *Preface* comes in for devastating criticism at the hands of Coleridge himself but more important still, Wordsworth seemed, in his poetical practice, even in *Lyrical Ballads*, to ignore his own theory that there was any 'essential' difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. His claim that the best part of language is derived from communion between rustic people and the world of Nature is, polemical exaggeration. The definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' clashes with the statement that poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility'. But the militancy of the man in the prose defense of his poems does not detract from the poetic worth of the poems.

Given below are annotations of some key words, phrases and concepts Wordsworth used in the Preface:

a selection of the real language of men: This passage has been commented upon by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* Chapters XVII and XVIII. With the qualifications suggested by Wordsworth the language ceases to be the 'real' language of men.

This exponent or symbol...: Wordsworth refers to the way metre enhances the beauty of a passage and therefore the effect the words produce on the reader.

the gaudiness and inane phraseology...: Wordsworth has in mind the artificial diction employed by some poets of the late eighteenth century who, to keep the language of poetry free of the commonplace, used circumlocutions like 'finny tribe' instead of the word 'fish'.

The principal object: occurring in para 4, this is a revolutionary declaration, asserting his goal in the choice of subject and language.

a certain colouring of imagination: Wordsworth in this passage refers to the significant features of his poetry: (i) the habit of looking at objects of nature not in the

customary way; (ii) the habit of drawing our attention to the essential humanity behind the appearance.

we associate ideas in a state of excitement...: Wordsworth and Coleridge were largely influenced by the philosopher David Hartley. It was his theory of associations that provided them with certain ideas. Hartley said, we associate certain sights and sounds with painful or pleasurable feelings. As we grow older our whole personality develops into a complex of these associations. Hartley also felt that nature was so organized that if we allowed ourselves to be conditioned by nature we shall all grow into morally perfect human beings. A knowledge of this doctrine is essential for an understanding of Wordsworth's poetry and the role of Wordsworth as a teacher.

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen...: This was based on the belief that the simple rustics living close to nature are the best specimens of humanity.

The language too of these men...: See Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XVII. The point stated here need not however be considered absurd. All that Wordsworth means here is that the language should be in touch with life.

The present outcry against the triviality and meanness: Wordsworth perhaps refers to the contemporary reviewers of Southey's poetry and perhaps even of his own poetry.

For all good poetry etc.: Wordsworth describes what is now called the creative process or the act of poetic creation. Wordsworth does not mean that poetry is all feelings and emotions. The context makes it clear that the poet has a life experience which is largely emotional, nay, even sensational. It is lodged in the consciousness. It gets converted into art experience when in a state of calm (the event will, to borrow Wordsworth's own words, 'flash upon the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude'. It is contemplated, and re-collected. This contemplation results in the production of an emotion which is kindred to but not the same as the original emotion. The modern critic calls this process 'distancing'; the ancient Indian aestheticians would have called the resulting emotion *rasa*. This new emotion is modified not only by thought but by other feelings and experiences lodged in the consciousness. Besides it is well organized. However, the way it gets organized and is given a shape is something mysterious in the sense that the poet is not wholly conscious of it. Perhaps Wordsworth uses 'spontaneous' in the sense that the process is at least partly unconscious. It is the faculty of creative imagination that selects, organizes and provides a perspective, endowing it (the process) with a purpose; the poet himself seems to know what he is creating (or has created) only when the poem has been brought forth.

Has a purpose: That this is not anything conscious may be seen from the above. The poems in the Lyrical Ballads, which he makes a general reference to, are truly Wordsworthian

in that their themes are i) solitude (ii) inability to admit the notion of death (iii) the influence of nature in bringing out and developing moral sense and(iv) the stress on what human beings think and feel as human beings.

belonging rather to nature than to manners: 'manners' is here used in the sense of the sophistication brought in by city life and the way it acts as a kind of encrustation.

the feelings therein developed: Wordsworth, influenced by Hartley's philosophy, believed that our mental and emotional life is influenced by feelings. Hence in understanding the themes of Wordsworth's poems we have to get at the feeling part of the poem and not the so-called action part.

a craving for extraordinary incidents . . .: Wordsworth says, the craving for sensations and sensational news or incidents makes us neglect the simple joys and pleasures afforded by nature. He is probably referring to the popular gothic novels and extravagant and melodramatic German novels and tragedies which, in translated version, were very popular.

The personifications of the abstract: you should keep in mind that Wordsworth's assessment of the characteristics of eighteenth century poetry is rather one –sided, because he is trying to establish the superiority of his kind of poetry. For him, eighteenth century poetry is marred by—

(i) Personification as an artificial device to exalt when it is not warranted by the emotional context.

(ii) Employment of poetic diction— that is, the use of uncommon words and phrases in the belief that the real language is vulgar.

endeavored to look steadily at my subject: Wordsworth cared more for truth than for literary conventions.

It may be safely: One may note here that Gray himself believed that the language of the age can never be the language of poetry. Wordsworth thinks that there can only be two kinds of composition, scientific and imaginative. Poetry, coming under the imaginative, includes all literature.

'such as Angels weep.': *Paradise Lost*, Book I, 1. 690

celestial ichor: supposed to be a fluid like blood which ran in the veins of the gods. The implication in both the metaphors is that the raw materials which are processed into poetry belong very much to life.

What is a poet? when Wordsworth says that the poet is a man speaking to men he makes it a point to endow him with certain special qualifications such as 'a more lively

sensibility…' etc. which distinguish him from other men. Also in the matter of communication he is different from the ordinary man even as the language he employs is different from the language of ordinary men. He may be using the language of real men but the words take on an additional meaning because of the form and structure of the poem into which they are fitted. The paragraph is interesting for showing us the difference in intensity between the language of the man who suffers and that of the poet who creates.

Frontiniac: a wine from the grapes of Frontignan in France.

Aristotle: See *Poetics*. Chapter IX.

carried alive into the heart by passion: 'felt in the blood'; coming to us as more than simple statements.

tribunal to which it appeals: It may be the heart that 'watches and receives'.

What then does the poet? the question is the same as what is his subject matter and Wordsworth says that the poet shall write on man, on life and human nature.

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit...: Wordsworth places the truth that poetry communicates higher than the truth that science gives us because the truth of poetry is felt and experienced by the whole being.

the poet will lend his spirit to aid transfiguration: C. Day Lewis in *The poetic Image* discusses the way the transfiguration is achieved by the poet.

Poets do not write for poets alone, but for men: though Wordsworth seeks to educate his readers he also remembers his responsibility as a poet: that he should constantly have in mind the common reader.

the distinction of metre...: Coleridge, critiquing this, in Chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria* said that metre was only a stimulant, not enough by itself. In this paragraph Wordsworth is still governed by Hartley's theory of association but the stress in these lines seems to be on the pleasure-principle:

Wordsworth refers to the experience of the reader when he responds.

I put my hand: Coleridge in his comment on the passage from the ballad 'Children in the Wood' points out that several other popular folk tales have survived in prose. The metre of the quoted ballad is not the sole reason for its popularity.

There is in these feelings: Wordsworth always felt 'that every great and original writer in proportion as he is great and original must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen'.

3.9.5. Wordsworth's Definition of Poetry

Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads is generally considered to be the manifesto of the Romantic revolt against the rules of decorum in poetry, emphasized in neoclassical poetics. But it is strikingly interesting that a thorough critical examination discloses his modified adaptations of many a neoclassical conception commonly perceived to be abandoned. He believes that poetry must be artless, that the impressiveness of the subject as it is in nature should be enough to make a poem. And at the same time, he steadily sees poetry as a made thing, the result of craft, workmanship and "long and deep thinking". Wordsworth may be said to veer between the demands of decorum and the demands of sincerity (spontaneity). Though it is natural to think that as a romantic poet he ignores decorum and triumphs over art, actually his achievement lies in his capacity to satisfy the opposing demands of Art (or Decorum) and sincerity.

"Poetry", asserts Wordsworth in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". The definition involves a metaphor for 'overflow' implying the idea of a container which is overfilled and so overflows. The container is the poet's mind and the things contained are his feelings. He is forced into utterance because he cannot contain his feelings within himself and so overflows on the page. This shifts the emphasis from the material which is organized into the poem to the poet himself. This way of thinking in which the poet himself becomes the major element generating both the poetic product and the criterion by which the value of the product is to be judged has been marked as the "expressive theory" by M. H. Abrams. The major criteria of value are the spontaneity and powerful involuntary expression, as opposed to the neoclassical maintenance of rules, art of expression, decorum and propriety. Thus the statement marks the divergence between the neoclassical and Romantic modes of poetry. But there is a problem. In his later theoretical writings Wordsworth advocates what may be called modified neoclassicism. Secondly, his remark is interpreted, many a time, overlooking what follows immediately: "it takes its origin from the emotion recollected in tranquility". When the act of recollection is overlooked, what remains is a literal theory of spontaneity.

Because in the Preface Wordsworth repeatedly talks of spontaneity, it is easily remembered. It gives expression to the dignity and prestige of the spontaneity which is the one characteristic of the age of sensibility. But the Preface I also emphasizes on the idea of the poet as 'maker' and on the poem as a thing 'made'. His poetic medium is the "selection of the real language of men" and this selection may include additions and

deductions. When he says in the Preface that his "ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance", he is certainly thinking of "decorum".

Wordsworth in his early years had the belief that Art is the opposite of Nature and a failure in spontaneity is a failure in sincerity. But as he matures, he comes to realise that Art is not opposed to Nature: the demands of Art and Nature can be reconciled. In the 1815 Preface he lists a number of powers requisite for the production of poetry and the last, judgment, will show "how and where and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be executed". But his notion of 'judgment' turns out to be decorum, for it must determine "what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition". In 1828, he talks about the "rules of art and workmanship which must be applied to an imaginative literature". For him poetry becomes "infinitely more of an art than the world is disposed to believe". This increasing emphasis on the rules of art and craft marks his falling away from the reconciliation of sincerity and art which he had partly achieved in his youth.

In the *Preface* where he talks about the process of composition, the process has four stages: recollection, contemplation, recrudescence and composition. If a poet has to go through these four stages, his verse can in no way be "unpremeditated" and "spontaneous". By 'spontaneity' he seems to imply that a poet in his art of composition must not exercise any superficial or superfluous reworking which would become a bar to relish the presentation of humanity's primal aspects. His objection to the 'inane phraseology' can be an example of what he intends to advocate through 'spontaneity'.

3.9.6. On the Language of Poetry or Poetic Diction

In the *Preface* Wordsworth writes against “the gaudiness and inane phraseology” of the poets who were his immediate predecessors. He is critical of the poetic practices of the age of Dryden and Pope. He refuses to continue the neo-classical tradition in the poems he wrote. In the *Preface* he states his purpose as a poet. First he is willing to choose incidents and situation from common life. Secondly, he wishes to delineate the subject-matter with the help of the language really used by men; and lastly he wishes to throw a certain colouring of imagination on the subject he chooses.

The selection of the ordinary language as the language of poetry is inspired by the Romantic doctrine of “Return to Nature.” To a Romantic like Wordsworth, the emphasis on Nature is really important. He wishes to invest the language of poetry with a pleasant

familiarity. That is why, the so-called poetic diction with its cultivated artificiality may not be found in the poems included in *Lyrical Ballads*. He declares that he intends, "to bring my (his) language near to the language of man". He tries to avoid artificial devices in his poetic style. For instance, he carefully avoids personifications, forced metaphoric expressions, superimposed similes & similar other rhetorical devices. What is needed is the avoidance of "falsehood of description" and to inculcate good sense in poetry. The purpose is to establish a communion with the readers and to invest poetry with intelligibility. Thus, for the purpose of easy understanding "the language of prose may be well adapted to poetry." In order to substantiate his argument, he further writes that there is no essential difference "between the language of prose and metrical composition." The first reason behind the sameness of language he speaks of is that both poetry and prose address themselves to the same body of readers. Moreover, both prose and poetry borrow their basic impulses from the fundamental human feelings and emotions.

Wordsworth's arguments on the uniformity of language in prose and poetry may be justified specially with reference to Lamb's personal essays, and some of Wordsworth's own poems. But, as Coleridge pointed out, in order to be the proper language of poetry the ordinary language of common men needed change and selection. The 'colouring of imagination' Wordsworth will give to the language would no longer make it the 'real language 'of men.

In the *Preface*, while discussing the nature of poetry and its function Wordsworth has referred to Aristotle's observation on poetry, to be found in chapter 9 of *Poetics*. Wordsworth echoes Aristotle and subscribes to his view in order to glorify the nature of poetry and to elevate the function of a poet and poetry to a philosophic height. In this context we should be cautious regarding the different definitions of poetry prevalent in the time of Aristotle and the time of Wordsworth.

According to William Wordsworth, language of poetry should be the real language of men. There should not be any gaudiness or empty phraseology in poetry. The language of poetry should not be artificially contrived; it should be true to nature. He discards the conventional form of poetic diction. He further says that he wants "to bring his language near to the language of men".

This implies that the language of poetry will not be absolutely different from the language of prose. He wants to establish that language of a good poem, except for its metre

is not different from the language of a well-written prose piece. In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* he has quoted lots of passages from the best poets including Milton to justify the truth of this assertion. He has also quoted Gray's "In vain to me the smiling mornings shine", to show that even though Gray believed that poetry should use an elaborately different language, there is actually no difference between the language of prose and language of this poem. The only difference is that there is rhyme in this poem and the word "fruitless" has been used instead of its adverbial form "fruitlessly".

Therefore, Wordsworth tells us that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential (or fundamental) difference between the language of prose and metrical composition . "Both prose and poetry emerge out of the same source of the human mind. So, he says, "poetry sheds no tears such as 'Angels weep', but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both". As only rhyme and metrical arrangements constitute a distinction between the language of prose and poetry, there is no difficulty in adopting in poetry the language really spoken by men.

Coleridge, however, does not accept the contention that language of poetry can be the real language of men. He opines that two buildings built side by side may be constructed with blocks cut into the same forms but they may be different from each other so far as the style of architecture is concerned. Similarly, words of prose and poetry may more or less be common but they are different where style of expression is concerned. For this style or mode of expression, use of words also differs in prose and poetry. It very often appears that words which are considered very appropriate in prose become very inappropriate in metrical composition and vice-versa. Arrangement of words is considered very important in metrical composition whereas these considerations are far less important even in good prose.

Every passion has its own characteristic mode of expression. If poetry is the product of passion i.e. the excited state of the feelings and faculties, it will have its own way of expression. In fact, language has no separate entity in poetry. Language, metre, feelings are fused together and produced as an organized whole which assimilates in it all its component parts and as such nothing, e.g. language, or metre or feeling can be separated, one from the other. Coleridge emphatically asserts that "there may be, is and ought to be, an essential

difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition".

Wordsworth's overzealous assertion about the language of men in poetry came from a necessity to defend the new kind of poems he was offering and which met with a lot of critical censure. His own poems, such as 'Immortality Ode', 'Tintern Abbey', 'Ode to Duty', 'Laodamia', do not adhere to his prescription about language. They are not written in a selection of language really used by men.

3.9.7. Imagination and its Role in Poetic Creation

During the seventeenth century the terms imagination and fancy had often been used in a vaguely synonymous way to refer to the realm of fairy tale or make-belief. Yet in certain places imagination and fancy came to be distinguished from each other and this is largely evident in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. This had been in harmony with the medieval and Renaissance tradition where "imagination" and fantasia had been fairly close together and in certain places fantasia was considered to be the lighter and less responsible kind of imagination. In the Age of Reason fancy suffered a decline in reputation. But it was during the eighteenth century that imagination gradually came to be considered as superior to fancy. Imagination began to assume a higher role of reference because it was associated with creative power.

An early and somewhat haphazard attempt on the part of Wordsworth to differntiate between imagination and fancy appears in a note to *The Thorn* where he says that imagination is "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements "and defines fancy as "the power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situations and by accumulated imagery.".

Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is not only a manifesto of romanticism, it also substantiates a notion of romantic imagination. Wordsworth considers it to be a co-relating factor which is highly important in aesthetic matters. Thus Wordsworth points out that he intends to "choose incidents and situations from common life" and his subject should be expressed through "a selection of language really used by man". But this co-relation between subjects and language is not exactly easy. He refers to the "colouring of imagination" which will present everything in its unusual aspect. It is through the proper exercise of this colouring of imagination that poetic sublimation is properly reached.

He also suggests that imagination may be considered to be an organic sensibility which allows the poets to think "long and deeply". Feelings are modified and directed by creative thoughts. There is a distinct touch of Hartley's associationism. In the analysis of Hartley, the idea of experience and consequent thoughts on the basis of memory come to work as

distinctly creative functions. This theory of associationism is largely influenced by Lockean Empiricism. Thus imagination is associated with emotions which are "recollected in tranquility" and the process of recollection is a critical process that substantiates the imaginative faculty of the artist. Wordsworth formulates this process of reaction which is significantly co-related with the powers of imagination. Thus emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and actually exists in the mind. Wordsworth considers imagination a creative faculty that modifies the poetic principle and operates through a passionate ecstasy.

3.9.8. The Vocation of the Poet

Coleridge expressed his uneasiness with some features of Wordsworth's ideas about poetry. In response Wordsworth added to the preface of the 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* a long passage on "what is meant by the word poet? To whom does he address himself?" Wordsworth recommends not only a new style but also a new definition of 'poet' and 'poetry'. To the neoclassical critic the poet is a craftsman, though a gifted one. He observes and reproduces general nature with the help of ancient precedent and the "rules". To Wordsworth, the poet is 'a man speaking to men.' Gifted with 'a more lively sensibility', 'enthusiasm and tenderness' and 'greater knowledge of human nature', he has to his advantage a 'more comprehensive soul.' Vitality and joy in the universe move him to enthusiasm. It overflows in the form of a creative urge to be imparted to others. Not only by immediate impressions, he is almost to an equal degree affected by the memory of similar experiences stored up in his mind. Constant 'practice' along these lines confers upon him 'a great readiness and power' to express himself whenever the urge is on him, even without the immediate stimulus of external excitement.

But the poet can express only a part of 'which is uttered by men in real life.' The transcription of passions is to a certain extent mechanical. Therefore, it must fall short of the 'liveliness and truth' of "the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering." To overcome this difficulty, the poet has to identify himself with the feelings he wishes to express. In the process he modifies the language of real men so that it can give pleasure. The modification is made on the principle of 'selection.' Driven by creative urge it will ensue spontaneously from contact with reality and truth.

Wordsworth says that the poet directs his attention to man and the objects that surround him, acting and reacting upon each other. The mind of man is "naturally the mirror of the fairest and the most interesting properties of nature." The poet's focus of interest are both external nature and human nature. Wordsworth considers the poet in terms not local

but universal: "The poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time." The pleasure the poet gives is generated by expressing in concrete and sensuous terms those fundamental principles and passions, ideas and sensations that are illustrated both in the workings of nature and the mind of man.

Wordsworth affirms that the poet differs not 'in kind' but 'only in degree' from common humanity. He is more intuitive and better able to express than a non-poet. But what he expresses is the general passion and thoughts of common people connected with animal sensations, moral sentiments and the visible universe. Wordsworth believes that the poets write for the non-poets. Therefore, the metre he uses must be regular and uniform. It must not impress upon the language the arbitrariness of personal caprice as in 'poetic diction'. Metre should conform to established laws to which both the poet and the reader willingly submit. It may here be pointed out that Wordsworth himself does not attempt any major formal experiment in the *Lyrical Ballads.* His main object is to avoid consciously artificial language. The poet relates isolated and individual experience to the sum-total of life. He, therefore, selects for his themes, life at its simplest. For general truths of man's experiences can be found in the unalloyed passions of a humble, half- witted man, a shepherd, a leech-gatherer and an idiot boy. The idea of passion is essential in Wordsworth's theory. It depends not on stylistic devices but on the poet's perception.

In *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth raises certain critical issues like the use of poetic diction, definition of poetry, composition of poetry etc. The poet and his role in society are also important issues in the *Preface*. In Wordsworth's works, the poet is a man speaking to men. He is a man endowed with a more lively sensibility, one who has a great knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul. The poet writes in order to give pleasure to human beings. The man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude. The poet sings a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our 'visible friend and hourly companion'. The only restriction under which the poet writes is the ' necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man".

In this sense, poetry is the breath and fine spirit of all knowledge. The poet can "bind together by passion & knowledge the vast empire of human society as it is spread over

the whole earth and over all time" No difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs will obstruct his universality.

In the *Preface* Wordsworth's focus is on the pleasure poetry gives. Later, he would shift his stand to the moral and didactic aspects of poetry. In 1807, in a letter to lady Beaumont, he says that his purpose in writing poetry is to "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." But he affirms very strongly in the Preface that the poet, in making pleasure his goal, is not degrading poetry, but rather 'acknowledging the beauty of the universe'.

3.9.9. The Subject-Matter of Poetry

In the *Preface*, Wordsworth expresses his desire to break away from the restrictions constraining 18th century poetry. He severely criticizes the artificial language some poets of the preceding generation employed. Wordsworth states that "personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes (Lyrical Ballads); and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose". Instead, Wordsworth wants to emphasize and adopt the language of men, which rejects personification as a "mechanical device of style or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription". In essence the *Preface* is Wordsworth's poetic manifesto. The most obvious point that Wordsworth makes in it relates directly to the style and technique used in writing the poems themselves, as well as to the subject matter or focus of the poems, which relate to the common, everyday activities of rural life and folk. Wordsworth categorically states: "The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way."

It must be kept in mind that though a reader of today may find nothing unusual in the style employed throughout the *Lyrical Ballads*, the simplicity of language and the depiction of 'common' people, places and events used by Wordsworth, was in openopposition to the poetic convention of his day. The fact that Wordsworth chooses for his character's men, women and children from a rural setting, as opposed to the more cosmopolitan characters of his contemporaries, leads to another important facet of his poetry which he expounds in his *Preface*. Wordsworth held a remarkably close affinity to nature. He argued that one who lives close to nature (as he himself did for most of his life residing in the English Lake District), lives closer to the well-spring of *human*- nature. Many of Wordsworth's poems are autobiographical in as far as they display a love and deep appreciation of the natural environment as experienced by the poet himself. However even more than a simple aesthetic appreciation of nature, Wordsworth believed that there was an element of the Divine to be found in nature,

which held a tremendous potential to mould and even to instruct the minds of men who live in its midst and to conjure up a depth of emotional response unattainable outside of nature. In the *Preface* Wordsworth defines poetry as: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." The element of spontaneity however, "modified and directed by our thoughts." Any subject can be treated poetically. Wordsworth noted in 1798: "It is the honourable characteristic of poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind." He states that subjects are not poetic and unpoetic in themselves. A slight incident of village life may be material for poetry, if the poet can make it meaningful. Thus Wordsworth expands the scope of poetry, by bringing within its folds themes chosen from humble and common life. We can trace in this democratisation of poetry the influence of the French revolution.

3.9.10. Summing Up

Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is rightly called the manifesto of Romantic poetic aesthetics and criticism as it underscores and underlines the cardinal and fundamental propositions and principles of Romantic literary theory in a nutshell. Wordsworth has presented his views on the function and role of the poet, the use of language in poetry, the role of Imagination in poetic creativity, the subject matter of poetry, the role of the readers and has provided a definition of poetry in a cogent and coherent manner.

3.9.11. Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Examine Wordsworth's views on the function and role of the poet as envisaged in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads.*
2. Assess Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* as a Romantic manifesto.
3. Write an essay on Wordsworth's views on the use of language in poetry or poetic diction.
4. Comment on Wordsworth's views on Imagination.
5. What, according to Wordsworth, should be the subject-matter of poetry*?*
6. How do the Romantic principles of literary criticism differ from the Augustan or Neoclassical principles?

Mid-length Questions-12 marks

1. What is Wordsworth's opinion on the role of the reader?
2. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Analyse and discuss.
3. Comment on Wordsworth's distinction between Imagination and Fancy.

Short Questions-6 marks

1. What are Wordsworth's views on the use of diction in neo-classical poetry?
2. Comment on Wordsworth's opinions on Aristotle's idea of poetry.
3. What does Wordsworth say about poets and the non-poets?
4. Sum up and comment on Wordsworth's views on the use of metre in poetry.

3.9.12. Suggested Readings

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Unit-10 ❑ Samuel Taylor Coleridge : Biographia Literaria (Chapers XIII. XIV, XVIII)

Structure

3.10.1 Objectives

In this unit we shall take up Coleridge's major critical work Biographia Literar with special attention to his theory of Imagination and his view of poetry. In doir so we shall also touch upon the influence of German thinkers on his thought.

3.10.2 Introducion to Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), English poet and critic, was gifted with a scholarly and enquiring mind, but lacked the tough moral fibre of Wordsworth. Son of a Devon clergyman, he was educated in London and Cambridge, although he never completed lus degree In 1794, along with Robert Southey (who was later to be his brother-in-law), Coleridge evolved a communistic scheme called 'Pantisocracy under the influence of the French Revolution. He met Wordsworth

around 1796 and the two poets lived close to each other for a time in Somerset. The joint publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads which heralded the beginning of the Romantic Movement in English literature took place in 1798. It was around this time that Coleridge lost his faith in the French Revolution, as expressed in his poem, France, An Ode. In 1798-99, he travelled to Germany and came under the influence of the German philosophers like Schlegel and Kant. Early in his life, Coleridge had been reliant on opium, and never fully recovered from the addiction. In his later life, he quarrelled with Wordsworth, and became increasingly conservative in politics and Anglican in religion. Coleridge's poetic achievement has been given more widely varying assessments than that of any other English literary artist, though there is a broad agreement that his enormous potential was never fully realised in his works Coleridge's poetic output is small and diverse, but immensely important. His symbolic works, such us The Rime of the Ancient Manner, Kubla Khan and Christabel explore new psychological and emotional depths. He also has a reputation as one of the most important of ail English literary entics, largely on the basis of his Biographia Literaria (1817).

3.10.3 Introduction to Biographia Literaria

Biographia Literaria is an autobiography in discourse by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which he published in 1817. The work is long and seemingly loosely structured, and although there are autobiographical elements, it is not a straight forward or linear autobiography. Instead, it is meditative, with numerous essays on philosophy. In particular, it discusses and engages the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Being fluent in German, Coleridge was one of the first major English literary figures to translate and discuss Schelling. in particular. Cntics have reacted strongly to the Biographia. Early reactions were that it was a demonstration of Coleridge's opiate-driven decline into ill health. Recent re-evaluations have given it more credit. While contemporary critics recognise the degree to winch Coleridge borrowed from his sources (with straight lifts from Schelling), they also see in the work far more structure and planning than is apparent on first glance. In *Biographia,* Coleridge presents his philosophy of poetry and a critique of Romantic ideals in life and art. It is also taken as his longer-term reaction and comment on William Wordsworth, earlier (at the time of *Lyrical Ballads*) his close collaborator. Much of the literary criticism in this book is devoted to detailed analysis and appreciation

of Wordsworth's artifice The critical analysis of poems by Shakespeare and Wordsworth which occupies much of the second volume of this book displays a very modem sophistication in its treatment of metre and diction.

3.10.4 A Brief Survey of the Important Topics of the *Biographia Literaria* (Select Portions)

Primary Imagination, Secondary (imagination & Fancy: In Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge makes his famous observations on primary imagination, secondary imagination and fancy He says. "The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition of the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" According to David Daiches, Coleridge views primary imagination as the great ordering principle an agency which enables us both to discriminate and to order, to separate and to synthesise which makes perception possible. We understand, therefore, that according to Coleridge primary imagination is something without which we have only a meaningless collection of sense data. The function of primary imagination is thus conceived as an act of creation that is essential and perpetual, bringing order out of chaos by making its parts intelligible by the assertion of the identity of the designer So, accordmg to Coleridge primary imagination is essentially creative - "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am", as Coleridge says.

Primary imagination, dien, is a power. Coleridge views secondary imagination as the conscious human use of this power. He says:

> The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation It dissolves. diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create, or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify, It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Coleridge argues here that when we employ our primary imagination in the very act of perception we are not doing so with our conscious will but are exercising the basic faculty of our awareness of ourselves and the external world, hi this sense, the secondary imagination is less elemental and more conscious than

the primary imagination, but it does not differ in kind from the primary imagination. While the primary imagination generates meanings from the sense data, the secondary imagination projects and creates new harmonies of meanings. Thus, the employment of the faculty of secondary imagination is in a larger sense - a poetic activity. According to Coleridge, a poem is always the work of a poet of a man employing the secondary imagination and so achieving the harmony of meanings and the reconciliation of opposites. The value of secondary imagination thus lies in the fact that by the exercise of this faculty a poet is able to achieve a special kind of creative awareness which results in harmony and reconciliation.

About fancy, Coleridge says the following:

> Fancy has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE But equally with the ordinary memory the fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

One would suspect that Coleridge here attaches less importance to the faculty of fancy. And certainly, he views fancy as an activity which has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The notion that Coleridge attaches less importance to fancy (certainly less than primary imagination and secondary imagination) is largely true, because according to him fancy simply juxtaposes memories and impressions. Fancy constructs surface decorations out of new combinations of memories and perceptions, while imagination "generates and produces a form of its own." However, it is also true that although fancy is dependent on and inferior to imagination and is merely associative, it is nevertheless creative, too. It is the faculty of the power of conceiving and giving artistic form to that which is not existent, known, or experienced.

3.10.5 Distinction between Prose and Poem

Wordsworth, in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads, was clear enough in expressing his view of what the poet did and why what he did was valuable. But he did not touch upon the question of how the poet's aim affected his way of writing and how a poem - as a work of literary art differs from other forms of expression. The problem of the relationsliip between the form and the content was thus kept

untouched. In attempung to remedy this defect of Wordsworth, Coleridge, in Chapter XIV of the Biographic, makes a philosopliical enquiry into the nature and value of poetry and poems on an entirely new footing. The argument of Coleridge is highly philosophical What Coleridge is enquiring into are the differentiating qualities of poetry and the raison d'etre of these qualities. The approach that he adopts may be called the ontological approach. According to him, "A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition." In both, words are used. The difference between poem and prose cannot therefore lie in the medium us both employ the same medium. A poem combines words differently, because it is seeking to do something different. At one level, Coleridge says, all that a poem seeks to do is to facilitate memory, as in the following lines:

Thirty days hath September.

April. June, and November

Coleridge says that rhyming tags of this kind yield a particular pleasure. However. he argues that here metre and rhyme have been superadded they do not arise from the nature of the content but have been imposed on it in order to make it more easily memorised. Essentially, then, it is a piece of prose cast into rhymed and metrical form so that we can remember it better. The "superficial form". Coleridge thus contends, provides no profound logical reason for distinguishing between poem and prose.

According to Coleridge. "A difference of objects and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction" He seeks to characterise the way of handling language in a poem by pointing out what it seeks to achieve and how that aim determines its nature Here he insists that one must be able to distinguish between the ultimate end and the immediate end. The immediate aim of a poem, according to Coleridge, is to provide pleasure. Truth may nevertheless be the ultimate end; but Coleridge says that - while in an ideal society nothing that was not truth could give pleasure - in our real society a poem might communicate pleasure without having any concern for "truth, either moral or intellectual.

But here, again, we face another problem The communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a literary work not metrically composed, for example, the novels. Do we make these into poems simply by superadding metre with or without thyme? Coleridge solves this problem by saying that one cannot derive true and permanent pleasure out of any feature of a work that does not arise naturally from the total nature of that work. If metre is added, all other parts

must be made consonant with it. A poem must be an organic unity, while in a poem we should be led to note and appreciate each part of a poem to which the metre and rhyme draw attention, our pleasure in the whole as well should be developed cumulatively out of such appreciation. Our appreciation of a poem is therefore pleasurable in itself and at the same time conducive to an awareness of the total pattern of the complete poem.

Thus, according to Coleridge, a poem differs from a work of prose in having as its immediate object pleasure and not truth, and it differs from other kinds of writing which have pleasure as their immediate object by the fact that in a poem the pleasure we derive from the whole work is compatible with and led up to by the pleasure we take in each component part. A legitimate poem is a composition in which rhyme tuul mtHre bear an organic relationship with the total work. To quote Coleridge, in a poem "the puris mutually support and explain each other supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."

3.10.6 Poem and Poetry & What is a Poet

While discussing the differences between poem and prose, Coleridge says that the differentiating quality of a poem is its special kind of form. From this, many critics have concluded that Coleridge's contribution to critical theory consists simply of the notion that in a 'legitimate' poem the relation between the parts and the whole is so intimate, so 'organic', that a total harmony of expression results, and form and content become different aspects of the same thing. In other words, they believe that Coleridge's view of what constitutes a poem is unrelated to any larger view of the nature of imaginative literature in general. However, Coleridge's view in fact is much more comprehensive than this. The clue to his general theory is to be found in a distinction he proceeds to make, in Chapter XIV of the Biographia, immediately after his definition of a 'legitimate' poem. Poetry, for Coleridge, is wider than poem. Poetry is a kind of activity which can be engaged in by painters and philosophers and is not only confined to those who employ language. Poetry, in this larger sense, brings "the whole soul of man" into activity, with each faculty playing its role according to its "relative worth and dignity." This takes place whenever the "secondary imagination" comes into operation. Thus Coleridge defines poetry through an account of how the poet works the poet works through the exercise of his imagination. In his own words.

> What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind.

Whenever, the synthesising and integrating powers of the secondary imagination are at work, bringing all aspects of a subject into complex unity, poetry of the highest order results. Thus, according to Coleridge, a poem is poetry in the narrower sense, it uses the same elements that we find in a work of poetry, but it differs from the work of poetry in the larger sense by combining its elements in a different way, "in consequence of a different object being proposed." This different object' is the immediate communication of pleasure. But since a poem is also poetry, the communication of pleasure may be its immediate object, but is not its whole function. It is here that a poem differs from poetry, where we find that the whole function is achieved. A poem, according to Coleridge, also differs from other forms of poetry by the fact that its medium is language. To discuss what poetry is, Coleridge affirms. equals to discuss what a poet is. A poet is a person endowed with a peculiar ability to conciliate discordant qualities, a person endowed with a special ability to feel emotions combined with an unusual mental order. So, according to Coleridge, a poet is not necessarily someone who simply writes a poem, he also seeks to include in that category all those who employ secondary imagination for the purpose of bringing all aspects of a subject into a complex unity, until synthesis and integration result.

3.10.7 Language of Poetry and its Difference from Prose

Wordsworth, in his Preface, says, "There neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." However, Coleridge disagrees and in Chapter XVIII of Biographia he seeks to demolish Wordsworth's argument. First, he says that the language of prose, especially "in all argumentative and consecutive works", differs from the language of conversation. Then, he proceeds to argue that there exists a still greater difference between the ordonuance of poetic composition and that of prose, than is expected to distinguish prose from ordinary conversation. So, here Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth's view that, in poetry, the language that one should use is the language of the ordinary men (in fact, in Chapter XVII of the Biographia Coleridge asserts mat

the best parts of poetic language are the product of philosophers, not of the low and rustic life).

Coleridge argues that as the architectural style of the Westminster Abbey differs from that of St. Paul's although both have been built with blocks from the same quarry so the language of poetry is different from that of prose He contends that the modes of expression, the construction, and the order of sentences that we find in a serious prose composition would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry" Similarly, he argues, in the language of a serious poem we find the use and selection of figures of speech, which - if used in such frequency "would he vicious and alien in correct and manly prose. Tin's, he says, is the 'essential difference hetween the language of prose and that of poetry, something which Wordsworth has denied.

3.10.8 Coleridge's View on Metre

In defence of metre in poetry Coleridge says in Chapter XVIII of the Biographia, "This i would trace to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous efforn which strives to hold in check the workings of passion." Metre, according to him, is the necessary chock to the undue effervescence of emotional language It is "a supervening act of the will and judgement, consciously and for the foreseen purpose of pleasure. Naturally, therefore, Coleridge argues, there must be two necessary characteristics of metre first, it should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement (since the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement), and second, traces of a voluntary act "with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion" must be discernible in it. So, the stir of feeling and metrical form are like impulse and law to the poet both are necessary. When there is no stir of feeling in the poet, there can be no poetry, but when there is no metre, poetic expression cannot acquire the finish and regulated articulate energy which the metre can alone provide Coleridge thus says that the employment of metre increases "the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention." Where metre is not provided, Coleridge argues, "there must needs be a disappointment felt." He thus deduces that metre is the "proper form of poetry". and poetry is imperfect and defective without metre This, he says, is "an essential chtference between the language of prose and mat of a poem.

3.10.9 *Biographia Literaria* : Critical Issues

In the I Coleridge presents his argument in an elaborate and ambitiously conceived chain of reasoning which embraces all his general philosophical views and proceeds through a series of apparently casual but deeply meaningful-digressions. He never sums up his views on the nature and value of poetry in a brief and cogent manner. On the contrary, he puts his arguments in a manner which, though brilliant and exciting to those who read him carefully and closely, appears disconcerting to anybody who wants to get at his argument quickly.

Colendge's theory of the "Imagination" is worthy of being examined and analysed He divides "Imagination" into two parts, which are "the Primary Imagination" and "the Secondary Imagination" His interpretation of the subject sounds scientific, and close to the field of philosophy. "The Primary Imagination" is, as Coleridge defines it, creating the world by our perceptions at the conscious mind. The Secondary Imagination", in his definition, is creating an ideal world of reality by recreating the perceptual world we know. In "the Primary Imagination" we have no choice but to see the world as it is, but in the Secondary Imagination" we have the will to create another world. Coleridge explains that "Secondary Imagination" differs from one person to another. This has been interpreted by many signifying that if a person has a vast "Secondary Imagination", then he is capable of writing poetry. Coleridge's definition of "Imagination" reminds one of Plato, who states that all poets are liars, and that feelings should be controlled by the mind But while Plato looks at the subject as a defect of poetry, Coleridge sees it as a privilege.

Coleridge's attitude to poetic language is not the same as Wordsworth's. He criticises Wordsworth's primitivistic assumptions as well us the implications winch are derived from them with respect to poctic language. Coleridge does not share Wordsworth's faith in the intrinsic virtues of the cottagers and country life. He believes in the value of culture and education, rathe than in "untutored minds" in contact with nature. He points out that Wordsworth's definition of "the language of real life" is equivocal-on the one hand, he identifies it with the language of the lower classes, on the other, he insists that this language is to be a "selection". Language, for Coleridge, does not spring immediately from nature in the way Wordsworth would have it: it is the product of a whole society, and it has a long history, in which the role of the learned is fundamental.

According to Coleridge, a poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part. We may note that Coleridge has defined the whole of the poem as a system, a structure. This is only possible not merely through Wordsworth's orderly mind feeling spontaneously, but thirough reflection. consciousness and hard work About the poet, he says that the mind of the poet may seem disorderly at first sight, but in fact this appearance conceals a much more basic order: the poet is in tune with the universe. The universe is orderly, and the mind of the poet is orderly as well. His whole imaginative activity is one of ordering, of distinguishing the similar from the same, hi this sense, poetry is a kind of repetition of God's creative act winch is also an act of adoration of God Like Wordsworth, Coleridge insists on the necessity of objectivisation in the poet. In shaping a poem, it is essential to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. He also says that the communication of pleasure is the only legitimate way for a poet to moralise his readers.

For Coleridge, metre is the proper form for poetry It favours, when it is successful, the most perfect blend of content and form, it must be adequate to the content of the poem and become one with its meaning. The role of metre is to intensify the attention of the reader to every element in the poem, as well as to the whole. Metre tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continual excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocation of curiosity still gratified and still re excited. However, it is not a necessary element for poetry: only the most suitable form. And this is so because the language of poetry is not the same as the language of prose, even if its vocabulary is the same. It is peculiar to the Romantic era that poetry is defined not only with respect to science, but also with respect to other kinds of literature.

3.10.10 Summing Up

Biographia Literaria is one of the greatest books of criticism in English, and one of the most annoying, too, in any language. It is a major document in

Western literary inquiry, but its intricacies have baffled and infuriated generations of readers. Many have argued that Coleridge's brilliance comes shrouded in an obscure, infuriating intricacy. However, for a text so often described as unreadable, it has been read more often and valued more highly than quite makes sense. Coleridge's autobiographical format presents a richly metaphorical self whose literary life has led to the now famous doctrine of secondary imagination. In its proper context within the whole Biographia, this doctrine anchors Coleridge's attempt to reconcile traditional ideas about literature's cultural and moral value with post-Kantean beliefs in the mind's dynamic powers. The hovering central idea of the work is imagitation and emotion are the principal characteristics of a poem, and are indeed the principal characteristics of a poet as well. If this governing central unity of the work is properly taken note of, then much of the alleged obscurity and intricacy of the Biographia would disappear.

3.10.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions:

1. How does Coleridge define Primary Imagination, Secondary Imagination and Fancy? (Hint: see section 3.10.1)
2. Critically comment on Coleridge's view on Imagination (Hint: see sections 3.10.1 & 3.2)
3. How does Coleridge distinguish poem from prose" (Hint: see sections 2.2 & 3.4)
4. What is Coleridge's view on the importance of metre in a poem? (Hint: see sections 2.5 & 3.5)
5. Critically comment on Coleridge's ideas on poetic language, and show how he differs from Wordsworth in this respect. (Hint: see sections 2.4 & 3.3)
6. What, according to Coleridge, are the qualities of a poet? (Hint, see sections 2.3 &34)
7. Sketch the importance of Biographia Literaria in the history of English literary criticism (Hint: see sections 12, 31 & 4)

Short Questions

1. According to Coleridge, what is the common element in hoth prose and poem? (Hint see section 2.2)

2. What, according to Coleridge, is the immediate object of a poem? (Hint: see section 2.2)
3. What, according to Colendge, is the relationship between poetry and secondary imagination? (Hint: see section 2.3)
4. What are the two characteristics of metre according to Coleridge? (Hint: see section 2.5)
5. Why is Biographia Literaria difficult to read? (Hint- see section 3 1)

3.10.12 Suggested Reading

- Abrams, M. H: *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition,* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1971
- Abrams, M. H. (ed): *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period,* Volume 2A, Seventh Edition, New York: W. W Norton and Company. Inc., 2003.
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Unit-11 ❑ William Wordsworth: Preface to Lyrical Ballads

Structure

3.11.1. Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to give learners an idea of P.B. Shelley's critical work A Defence of Poetry. The main wants to examine Shelley's view of poetry with special attention to how poetry is seen as an integral part of the fabric of society. Shelley's ideas of imagination, the utility of poetry, the function of poetry and his sense of practical criticism would be discussed briefly.

3.11.2. Introduction

In this unit we shall try to give you a broad introduction to the concept embedded in *A Defence of Poetry*. The treatise can be considered to be a reply against Shelly's friend, the neo-pagan satirical novelist Thomas Love Peacock. To understand Shelley's conception of poetry we also need to know how Plato objects to the poet on the ground that he is thrice removed from poetry and also how Sidney establishes his theory of poetry in *Apologie*.

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Plato, a monumental figure in the history of Western philosophy marks the beginning of the traditional literary theory. He had attacked the conception of poetry by stating that all kinds of art including poetry are an imitation of objects which are imperfect copies of 'Forms.' Hence poetry is twice removed from reality. It is thus a copy of a copy, a "shadow of a shadow." Based as it is on emotions and concerned with producing a narrative, poetry is distant from reality and is prone to making false statements.

Sir Philip Sidney defends poetry against the attack by Stephen Goson. Sidney argues that the poet is a 'maker.' According to Sidney, a poet does not imitate but he creates and invents a world better than the realistic world. He uses his imagination to reform and re-establish a world, far better than the real world. He demonstrates the superiority of poetry over, history and philosophy as it does not deal with mere abstract propositions, as philosophy does, but with the concrete example, and as its examples are not tied to fact, it can make them more convincing than anything found in history. Both Shelley and Sidney aim to assert the nobility, dignity and usefulness of poetry.

In 1820 Shelley's close friend and noted novelist, Thomas Love Peacock (1785 – 1866) wrote an essay entitled "The Four Ages of Poetry" which appeared in a single issue of Literary Miscellany. According to Peacock, poetry needs to transcend four ages; the iron age, the golden age, the silver age and the bronze age. In the iron age everything is very elemental or primitive and untutored; the golden age, an age from Homer to Sophocles, is very productive and full of creative personalities; in the silver age the growth of imagination is shaped and given a definite form as here we observe heroic imitation in the epic of Virgil or social criticism in the comedy of Aristophanes or satire of Horace. In the bronze age, poetry returns to an artificial simplicity, it represents a degenerate attempt to regain the primitive. So, in the bronze age there is a deterioration of the classical values. The age witnessed the burgeoning of Wordsworth, Scott, Byron and others. In the words of Wimstatt,

> Peacock's waggishly provocative and bumptious rhetoric gives a vivid enough image of a closing phase in the long process by which the four ages, golden, silver, iron, brazen, of classical myth, were settling into the three (theological, metaphysical, scientific) of 19th-century Cometean positivism. (Wimstatt 417)

The essay promped Shelley to write the brilliant treatise, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) as a rebuttal of, rather than a reply to, Thomas Love Peacock's essay. In Peacock's essay

poetry is condemned as a mere frivolous amusement, not a rational use of time and energy and he asserts the importance of reason over scientific invention. Shelley asserts in his treatise that human civilization is not the product of reason, it is rather the creation of imagination. Shelley's thesis emphasises an intense relationship between nature and evolution of mankind as a society is formed and nurtured by imagination. To establish his theory, he defines poetry, narrates the creative process involved in it and evaluates it in terms of its influence on the life of an individual and society. The tenets of *The Defence of Poetry* focus on the Romantic movement in general. It provides basic information about different philosophical assumptions of different poets and their poetry. In the words of Mathew Arnold, "poetry for Shelley takes the place of religion".

Activity:

Make a comparative study of Sidney's *Apologie* and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. This will be helpful in understanding the critical theory.

3.11.3. Defining Poetry: Imagination and Its Role

Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is not remarkable for metaphysical precision. The essay begins with the distinction between "Reason" and 'imagination,' between the ability to judge anything rationally and the inherent ability to think. Reason enumerates known quantities while imagination perceives and determines their value. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason always justifies the difference and imagination the indistinguishability of things. There is an integral relation between reason and imagination as the relation exists between an instrument and agent; as the body is connected to the spirit and as the shadow is related to the substance.

According to Shelley, poetry can be defined as "the expression of imagination." He considers that all those who give expression to imagination – sculptors, artists, musicians, even law givers and the founders of religion – are poets. A poet participates in the external, the infinite and the One, and a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. Shelley argues that man in society becomes an object of his own powerful feelings and expressions. When human mind and heart is filled with strong feelings then it is represented in the form of language, gesticulation and different forms of art. Shelley has referred to some very beautiful relations to explain how society results. According to him, society develops when two human beings exist together. He believes that the present can foresee future as the growth and development of a plant can be foreseen from the quality of a seed. The motives of an individual are guided by the values of equality, unity, diversity, contrast,

mutual dependence and this acts as a driving force in an individual's life. Even at a very early age, in every individual, there is an order in their choice of words or in the execution of an action and this distinguishes and justifies the objects and impressions used by them. Poetry is thus the manifestation of the creative, the poetical faculty in different spheres of life. Poetry is always associated with pleasure. Poetry pours in abundant knowledge and provides immense satisfaction. What is unique about the essay is the overall rhythm of its enthusiasm and the glowing cascade of images which celebrate the magnificent theme. See, for example, the language in the following quotation: "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing world over an Aeolian lyre; which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody" (Defence 2).

Shelley observes that poetry is the expression of imagination in language and it is the most ideal and effective expression. Poetry is always related to metre and poetic expressions are created by poetic faculty of an individual.

The language emanates from nature itself and nature is a representation of the spontaneous expression of our internal feelings. It is a very delicate and sensible combination of variegated colour, form, or motion and it is always under control. Shelley anticipates the difference between philosophers and poets. He defends that Plato also had poetical qualities. It is his perception that the veracity of his statements and the images created by him truly depict his poetic genius.

Shelley also asserts that Bacon also delineated his poetic quality in his creations. Bacon's language appeals to our sense and is highly rhythmical. Besides the language, Bacon's philosophy is equally interesting and sagacious, which satiates the cognitive understanding. It has the capacity to penetrate the reader's mind and gradually instil in it the knowledge that is required to understand his philosophy. Poets do not use language literally but metaphorically. These languages lose its freshness with the passage of time and it needs regular renewal. If new poets do not emerge then the language will supersede and it will perish from the purposes of human intercourse.

Poetry brings light and fire from the eternal regions where meticulous calculations do not get an appropriate space. It is beyond the boundary of a definite space, unparalleled and exquisite. It is not defined by reason and cannot be within the periphery of rational understanding. On the contrary, a poet depends on involuntary inspiration. Poetry differs from logic in this respect that it is not subject to the consciousness and will. It has been observed that the finest poetic creations result from the happiest moments of inspiration.

Activity:

Write a comparative analysis of the theories proposed by Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley. Highlight the essential features of their works.

3.11.4. Poetry and Moral Transformation

Shelley believes in the moral efficacy of poetry. Imagination has a significant role to play in poetry. Poetry broadens the region of imagination and always illumines it with new ideas that provides pleasure. It has the capacity to strengthen the organ of the moral nature of man. Poetry has an ennobling effect on the quality of imagination. It can morally enliven the spirit and can spread positivity everywhere.

Shelley reinforces the concept of moral transformation as he believed that poetry with its imagination and formation of new ideas effects transformation by means of imparting pleasure, not animal pleasure but pleasure of higher and nobler kind, where knowledge and pleasure mingle. He argues that there is something prophetic about poetry; the poet has the "vision and the faculty divine" and this arises out of the poet's contact with the eternal and his ability to make his readers participate in the experience. In this way, poetry awakens and strengthens the imagination and inculcates the great moral force of love:

> The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action and person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. (Shelley 34)

There is a specific role of poetry in human civilisation as poetry strengthens the human faculty which constitute the moral identity of a man, in the same way as regular exercise nourishes the power of limbs. Shelley is influenced by Aristotle's definition of tragedy, possibly also by reminiscences, conscious or unconscious, of Wordsworth's prefaces. Shelley states that poetry does not instruct by direct precept, it does it partially. In the words of Shelley: "The highest moral effect of poetry lies in its appeal to the imaginative and emotional faculties; in the development it gives to these it enlarges the power of the

mind itself." Shelley firmly believes that a man in order to show his greatness need to imagine wisely and intensely.

Poetry, according to Shelley, is behind all that is valuable in human history. Poetry alone has the power to save the modern world from destruction and decay.

> The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceeds the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. (Shelley 76)

Shelley believes that every author is born with a poetic faculty. A poet has to perceive everything that is beautiful and pristine, everything that is good in its relation between existence and perception and also between deep understanding and expression. There was poetry in every language, the nuances of grammar and its various derivations came later.

Shelley does not agree with Peacock that poetry in his age is experiencing a decay, rather he sees a new upsurge of creativity around him. He says that poetry is the supreme expression and it mostly recreates happiness with the choice of words. There will always be creation in poetry with new imagination and *A Defence of Poetry* concludes on a very positive note: "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration: the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley 46).

Shelley believed that poetry could reform the world. So, in his poetry we can see an illustration of what he envisaged for poetry in *A Defence of Poetry*. Central to this belief is that the creative power of the imagination and the poet's quest for beauty and the eternal truths of beauty will show the way to a better society. For him poetry becomes an expression of and a shaping force for, civilisation. Shelley links up decadence with deterioration of social values, as for instance in his censure of the Restoration Comedy of manners. Shelley does not indulge in 'rhapsodic didacticism' but attributes ontological and epistemological values to poetry. He states that the language of the poets predominantly invoke metaphor. All the expressions used by the poets through several ages become signs for a specific type of thoughts instead of being pictorial representation of congregation of

thoughts. The word pictures created by the poets evoke different types of associations and this brings out the essence of language. Language through the usage of the poets become more powerful and lot of significant messages are being conveyed through this language.

Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is not just a defence of poetry, its scope is much larger. It is a defence of all imaginative activity, of all the fine arts as expression of the imagination.

3.11.5. Rhyme and Metre

Shelley also denies the necessity of rhyme and metre in *A Defence of Poetry*. He believes that the essential components of poetry are dignity and nobility of thought and language, they should be suitably harmonious and rhythmical; but rhythm is not limited to verse, and good prose possesses excellent rhythm of its own. While he defends poetry, he is less into the meticulous details of poetry as an art and its varied features; he rather focuses on people's ability to sympathise, to imagine themselves in other people's positions, and to imagine themselves as better than they are. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting to their own nature all other thoughts. This dynamic process forms new interstices, any void in the intervening periods craves fresh food (Shelley 14). Shelley emphasises the point that poetry has its origin in inspiration. He differs from Coleridge, who maintains that the language of poetry is, and ought to be, different from the language of prose, since the mere addition of metre pre-supposes a state of high excitement, and therefore, should produce a change of language. Like the other Romantic critics, he makes no distinction between the poet and poetry. Poetry becomes a quality that permeates the entire universe and is not confined to the rhythmic pattern in verse or to a verbal structure.

3.11.6 Summing up

- Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is a defence of the imagination against rationality. *A Defence of Poetry* is a rebuttal rather than a reply to Thomas Love Peacock's essay entitled "The Four Ages of Poetry". Peacock's essay asserts the importance of reason over scientific invention. Shelley defends this assertion in his treatise to establish the fact that human civilization is not the product of reason rather of imagination.

- Poetry is the expression of imagination in language.
- The finest passages of poetry are the record of the best and happiest moments of inspiration.
- Poetry imparts pleasure of a higher and nobler kind.
- Shelley stresses the fact that a poet is superior to all other artists because language is a creation of the imagination, created by imagination for its own use, while the media of all other arts exist independently in the external world.
- Poetry can bring moral transformation and can even purge the civilization from vices and erosion. Poetry is thus the manifestation of the creative, the poetical faculty in different spheres of life.

3.11.7 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions

1. What, according to Shelley, is the contribution of poetry to the fabric of society?
2. How does Shelley put forward imagination as a positive factor against the onslaught of rationality?

Medium Length Questions

1. Distinguish between reason and imagination.
2. Why does Shelley say that "in the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry"?

Short Answer Type Questions

1. What are the main points of Shelley's essay *A Defence of Poetry*?
2. State the grounds on which Percy Bysshe Shelley defends poetry.

3.11.8 Suggested Readings

- David, Daiches. *A Critical History of English Literature Volume II*. Supernova Publishers & Distributors, 2017.

- W.K. Wimstatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History Vol3*. Rutledge Kegan Paul, 1997.
- Cook Abert S. editor. *A Defence of Poetry*. Ginn & Company,1891.

Unit 12 Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry'

Structure

3.12.1 Objective

Text

3.12.2 Introduction

Arnold wrote during the Victorian period (1837-1901), and is sometimes called the third great Victorian poet, behind Alfred Tennyson, and Robert Browning. Arnold himself was keenly aware of his place in poetry, and in an 1869 letter to Jus mother, discussed the merits of his work and his two more famous peers: "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that me venient of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it. It might be fairly urged that I have less poetic sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigour and abundance, than Browning. Yet because I have more perhaps of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modem development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they have had theirs."

His 1867 poem 'Dover Beach', which depicted a nightmarish world from which the old religious verities have retroceded, is sometimes held up as an early, if not the first, example of the modem sensibility. In a famous preface to a selection of the poems of William Wordsworth, Arnold identified himself, a little ironically, as a "Wordsworthian." The influence of Wordsworth, both in ideas and in diction, is unmistakable in Arnold's best poetry.

Some consider Arnold to be the bridge between Romanticism and Modernism. His use of symbolic landscapes was typical of the Romantic era, while his skeptical and pessimistic perspective was typical of the Modem era. The rationalistic tendency of certain of his writings gave offence to many readers, and the sufficiency of his equipment in scholarship for dealing with some of the subjects which he handled was called in question; but he undoubtedly exercised a stimulating influence on his time;his writings are characterised by the finest culture, high purpose, sincerity, and a style of great distinction, and much of his poetry has an exquisite and subtle beauty, though here also it has been doubted whether high culture and wide knowledge of poetry did not sometimes take me place of true poetic fire. Henry James wrote that

Matthew Arnold's poetry will appeal to those who "like their pleasures rare" and who like to hear the poet "taking breath."

Although Arnold's poetry received only mixed reviews and attention during his lifetime, his forays into literary criticism were more successful. Arnold is famous for introducing a methodology of literary criticism through his Essays in Criticism (1865, 1888), which influence critics to this day. Arnold believed that rules for an objective approach in literary criticism existed, and argued that these rules should be followed by all critics. In 1861 his lectures On Translating Homer were published, to be followed in 1862 by Last Words on Translating Homer, both volumes admirable in style and full of striking judgments and suggestive remarks, but built on rather arbitrary assumptions and reaching no well-established conclusions. Especially characteristic, both of his defects and his qualities, are on the one hand, Arnold's unconvincing advocacy of English hexameters and his creation of a kind of literary absolute in the "grand style," and, on the other, his keen feeling of the need for a disinterested and intelligent criticism in England.

This feeling, a direct result of his admiration for France, finds fuller expression in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and "The Literary Influence of Academies," which were published as the first two of the Essays in Criticism (1865) in which collection the influence of French ideas, especially of the critic Sainte-Beuve, is conspicuous, both in matter and in form that of the causerie. The Essays are bound together by a scheme of social rather than of purely literary criticism, as is apparent from the Preface, written in a vein of delicious irony and culminating unexpectedly in the well-known poetically phrased tribute to Oxford.

Essays in Criticism: Second Series which he had already collected, appeared shortly after his death. This volume, introduced by the essay on "The Study of Poetry," with the celebrated discussion of poetry as "a criticism of life," contains, together with Essays in Criticism: First Series the prose work by winch Arnold is best known.

He was led on from literary criticism to a more general critique of the spirit of his age. Between 1867 and 1869 he wrote Culture and Anarchy, famous for the termhe popularised for a section of the Victorian era population: "Philistines", a word which derives its modem cultural meaning (in English - German-language usage was well established) from him.

Matthew Arnold "was indeed the most delightful of companions," writes G. W. E. Russell in Portraits of the Seventies: "a man of the world entirely free from worldli-

ness and a man of letters without the faintest trace of pedantry." A familiar figure at the Athenaeum Club, a frequent diner-out and guest at great country houses, fond offish-ing and shooting, a lively conversationalist, affecting a combination of fop-pishness and Olympian grandeur, he read constantly, widely, and deeply, and in the intervals of supporting himself and his family by the quiet drudgery of school inspecting, filled notebook after notebook with meditations of an almost monastic tone. In his writings, he often baffled and sometimes annoyed his contemporaries by the apparent contradiction between his urbane, even frivolous manner in controversy, and the "high seriousness" of his critical views and the melancholy, almost plaintive note of much of his poetry. "A voice poking fun in the wilderness" was T. ?. Warren's description of him.

3.12.3. Arnold and Literary Criticism

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the Victorian poet and critic, was 'the first modem critic', and could be called 'the critic's critic', being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself. The purpose of literary criticism, in his view, was 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas', and he has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot, F R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism, and tlirough his touchstone method introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as the two primary toots of criticism.

Arnold's evaluations of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and. Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism, and as a poet-critic he occupies an eminent position in the rich galaxy of poet-critics of English literature.

T. S. Eliot praised Arnold's objective approach to critical evaluation, particularly his tools of comparison and analysis, and Allen Tate in his essay Tension in Poetry imitates Arnold's touchstone method to discover 'tension', or the proper balance between connotation and denotation, in poetry. These new critics have come a long way from the Romantic approach to poetry, and this change in attitude could be attributed to Arnold, who comes midway between the two schools.

3.12.3.1. The Social Role of Poetry and Criticism

To Arnold a critic is a social benefactor. In his view the creative artist, no matter how much of a genius, would cut a sorry figure without the critic to come to his aid.

Before Arnold a literary critic cared only for the beauties and defects of works of art, but Arnold the critic chose to be the educator and guardian of public opinion and propagator of the best ideas.

Cultural and critical values seem to be synonymous for Arnold. Scott James, comparing him to Aristotle, says that where Aristotle analyses the work of ait, Arnold analyses the role of the critic. The one gives us the principles which govern the making of a poem, the other the principles by which the best poems should be selected and made known. Aristotle's critic owes allegiance to the artist, but Arnold's critic has a duty to society.

To Arnold poetry itself was the criticism of life: The criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty', and in his seminal essay The Study of Poetry' (1888) he says that poetry alone can be our sustenance and stay in an era where religious beliefs are fast losing their hold. He claims that poetry is superior to philosophy, science, and religion. Religion attaches its emotion to supposed facts, and the supposed facts are failing it, but poetry attaches its emotion to ideas and ideas are infallible. And science, in his view is incomplete without poetry. He endorses Wordsworth's view that 'poetry is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science', adding 'What is a countenance without its expression? and calls poetry 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge'. Matthew Arnold echoes the thoughts of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's views of poetry when he declares that the ultimate function of humankind lies in exercising its creative power. Arnold therefore is able to link criticism with creative power in his essay, ultimately asserting that writing criticism actually produces in its practitioner a sense of ecstatic creative joy very similar to that enjoyed by the person who engages in creative writing.

Matthew Arnold goes on to equate the emotional experience of writing criticism with the emotional experience of creative writing in order to undermine the typical rap against criticism that it serves no purpose, or is just the sour grapes expression of one who criticizes something that he can't do as well himself.

Throughout the essay, Matthew Arnold very carefully delineates the personal function of criticism, but he also leaps from the personal to the universal in his argument that one of the functions of criticism is to propagate the best ideas so that they trickle down to the masses. According to Arnold, truly great liteature and thinking springs forth from an epoch of great ideas, and these epochs are manifested when the great ideas reach the masses.

For Arnold, the "eternal objects of poetry" are actions: "human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves." Those actions are "most excellent... which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections." Arnold believes that there is an elementary and shared part of human nature-"our passions." "That which is great and passionate is eternally interesting... A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting than a smaller human action of today." In keeping with this necessity to appeal to human passion, the poet must not deal with the outer circumstances of a man's life, but with the "inward man; with [hisl feelings and behavior in certain tragic situations." Arnold regarded the classical poets as superior to the moderns in this respect: the classical poets emphasized "the poetical character of the action in itself," while the moderns emphasize "the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action." The classical authors "regarded the whole." The modems "regard the parts." Arnold also prefers the simplicity of classical poetic language to the "overcuriousness of expression" found in Shakespeare, who "appears in liis language to have tried all styles except that of simplicity."

3.12.3.2. A Moralist

As a critic Arnold is essentially a moralist, and has very definite ideas about what poetry should and should not be. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas, he says, is a poetry of revolt against life, and a poetry of indifference to moral ideas is a poetry of indifference to life.

Arnold even censored his own collection on moral grounds. He omitted the poem Empedocles on Etna from his volume of 1853, whereas he had included it in his collection of 1852. The reason he advances, in the Preface to his Poems of 1853 is not that the poem is too subjective, with its Hamlet-like introspection, or that it was a deviation from his classical ideals, but that the poem is too depressing in its subject matter, and would leave the reader hopeless and crushed. There is nothing in it in the way of hope or optimism, and such a poem could prove to be neither instructive nor of any delight to the reader.

Aristotle says that poetry is superior to History since it bears the stamp of high seriousness and truth. If truth and seriousness are wanting in the subject matter of a poem, so will the true poetic stamp of diction and movement be found wanting in its style and manner. Hence the two, the nobility of subject matter, and the superiority of style and manner, are proportional and cannot occur independently.

Arnold took up Aristotle's view, asserting that true greatness in poetry is given by the truth and seriousness of its subject matter, and by the high diction and movement

in its style and manner, and although indebted to Joshua Reynolds for the expression 'grand style', Arnold gave it a new meaning when he used it in his lecture On Translating Homer (1861):

I think it will be found that that the grand style arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with a severity a serious subject.

According to Arnold, Homer is the best model of a simple grand style, while Milton is the best mode! of severe grand style. Dante, however, is an example of both.

Even Chaucer, in Arnold's view, in spite of his virtues such as benignity, largeness, and spontaneity, lacks seriousness. Bums too lacks sufficient seriousness, because he was hypocritical in that while he adopted a moral stance in some of his poems, in his private life he flouted morality.

This is where Arnold apotheosizes poetry:

"More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, so sutain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."

Arnold outlines three ways in which poems may have importance: 1) they "may count to us historically"; 2) "they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves"; 3) "they may count to us really." A poem may he regarded as important due to its position in the development of a language--but this does not say anything about its intrinsic merit. A poem may appeal to readers for personal reasons which have nothing to-do with intrinsic merit. For a poem to be of real quality, it must possess both a "higher truth" and a "higher seriousness."

Matthew Arnold's 1864 essay on "The Literary Influence of Academies" examines how the absence of a centralized academic system shapes English tliought. Arnold takes the French Academy as an example of "a recognized authority in matters of the highest literary opinion, a recognized authority in matters of intellectual tone and taste". In contrast to the way the French academy creates a centralized institution of learning, English provinciality represents the fragmentation of cultural thought. Arnold outlines the problem with provinciality in these terms:

The less literature has felt the influence of a supposed centre of correct information, correct judgment, correct taste, die more shall we find in it this note of provinciality For here great even the greatest powers of mind most fail a man. Great

powers of mind will make him inform himself thoroughly, great powers of mind will make him think profoundly, even with ignorance and platitude all round him; but not even great powers of mind will keep his taste and style perfectly sound and sure, if he is left too much to himself, with no 'sovereign organ of opinion,' in these matters, near him.

3.12.3.3. Return to Classical Values

Arnold believed that a modem writer should be aware that contemporary literature is built on the foundations of the past, and should contribute to the future by continuing a firm tradition. Quoting Goethe and Niebuhr in support of his view, he asserts that his age suffers from spiritual weakness because it thrives on self-interest and scientific materialism, and therefore cannot provide noble characters such as those found in Classical literature.

He urged modern poets to look to the ancients and their great characters and themes for guidance and inspiration. Classical literature, in his view, possess pathos, moral profundity and noble simplicity, while modern themes, arising from an age of spiritual weakness, are suitable for only comic and lighter kinds of poetry, and don't possess the loftiness to support epic or heroic poetry.

Arnold turns his back on the prevailing Romantic view of poetry and seeks to revive the Classical values of objectivity, urbanity, and architectonics. He denounces the Romantics for ignoring the Classical writers for the sake of novelty, and for their allusive (Arnold uses the word 'suggestive') writing which defies easy comprehension.

The modern spirit is synonymous with the positive and critical spirit, the refusal to take things on authority. The Greeks of the great period are, according to Arnold, modern in this sense and therefore much nearer to us man the men of the Middle Ages. He was later to praise the Greeks, not only for being positive and critical, but also for achieving what we too must achieve if we are to carry through our modem experiment successfully the union of imagination and reason.

3.12.3.4. Preface to Poems of 1853

In the preface to his Poems (1853) Arnold asserts the importance of architectonics; ('that power of execution, which creates, forms, and constitutes') in poetry the necessity of achieving unity by subordinating the parts to the whole, and the expression of ideas to the depiction of human action, and condemns poems winch exist for the sake of single lines or passages, stray metaphors, images, and fancy

expressions. Scattered images and happy turns of phrase, in his view, can only provide partial effects, and not contribute to unity. He also, continuing his anti-Romantic theme, urges modem poets to shun allusiveness and not fall into the temptation of subjectivity.

He says that even the imitation of Shakespeare is risky for a young writer, who should imitate only his excellences, and avoid his attractive accessories, tricks of style, such as quibble, conceit, circumlocution and allusiveness, which will lead him astray.

Arnold commends Shakespeare's use of great plots from the past. He had what Goethe called the architectonic quality, that is, his expression was matched to the action (or the subject). But at the same time Arnold quotes Hallam to show that Shakespeare's style was complex even where the press of action demanded simplicity and directness, and hence his style could not be taken as a model by young writers. Elsewhere he says that Shakespeare's 'expression tends to become a little sensuous and simple, too much intellectualised'.

Shakespeare's excellences are 1)The architectonic quality of his style; the harmony between action and expression. 2) His reliance on the ancients for his themes. 3) Accurate construction of action. 4) His strong conception of action and accurate portrayal of, his subject matter. 5) His intense feeling for the subjects he dramatises.

His attractive accessories (or tricks of style) which a young writer should handle carefully are 1) His fondness for quibble, fancy, conceit. 2) His excessive use of imagery. 3) Circumlocution, even where the press of action demands directness. 4) His lack of simplicity (according to Hallam and Guizot). 5) His allusiveness.

As an example of the danger of imitating Shakespeare he gives Keats's imitation of Shakespeare in his Isabella or the Pot of Basil. Keats uses felicitous phrases and single happy turns of phrase, yet the action is handled vaguely and so the poem does not have unity. By way of contrast, he says the Italian writer Boccaccio handled the same theme successfully in his Decameron, because he rightly subordinated expression to action. Hence Boccaccio's poem is a poetic success where Keats's is a failure.

Arnold also wants the modern writer to take models from the past because they depict human actions which touch on 'the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time'. Characters such as Agamemnon, Dido, Aeneas, Orestes, Merope, Alcmeon, and Clytemnestra, leave a permanent impression on our minds. Compare

The Iliad or The Aeneid' with The Childe Harold' or The Excursion' and you see the difference.

A modern writer might complain that ancient subjects pose problems with regard to ancient culture, customs, manners, dress and so on which are not familiar to contemporary readers. But Arnold is of the view that a writer should not concern himself with the externals, but with the inward man'. The inward man is the same irrespective of clime or time.

3.12.3.5 The Function of Criticism

It is in his *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1864) that Arnold says that criticism should be a 'dissemination of ideas, a disinterested endeavour to learn. and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world'. He says that when evaluating a work the aim is 'to see the object as in itself it really is'. Psychological, historical and sociological background are irrelevant, and to dwell on such aspects is mere dilettantism. This stance was very influential with later critics.

Arnold also believed that in his quest for the best a critic should not confine himself to the literature of his own country, but should draw substantially on foreign literature and ideas, because the propagation of ideas should be an objective endeavour. Acknowledging criticism's inferiority to creative artistic activity, Arnold nonetheless claims that England is in dire need of skilled critics, if for no other reason than to prepare the soil for future artists. According to Arnold, the creative power "works with elements, with materials," "with data"; these materials are the "best ideas, on every matter which literature touches, current at the time". And it is the job of critics to "establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely truc, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces"

For Arnold, the crucial quality for criticism, and the chief lack in English criticism, is "disinterestedness," an "aloofness from practice".Political and practical allegiances distort intellectuals' abilities to look clearly at ideas, to evaluate them fairly, and simply to approach new ideas with "curiosity," and a "free play of the mind" .2 Intellectual honesty 'and integrity always suffer when the, intellectual is tied to a cause or a party, arid thus, the ideas produced by the intellectual are second-rate.

3.12.4. The Study of Poetry

In The Study of Poetry, (1888) which opens his Essays in Criticism: Second

series, in support of his plea for nobility in poetry, Arnold recalls Sainte-Beuve's reply to Napoleon, when the latter said that charlatanism is found in everything. Sainte-Beuve replied that charlatanism might be found everywhere else, but not in the field of poetry, because in poetry the distinction between sound and unsound, or only half-sound, truth and untruth, or only half-truth, between the excellent and the inferior, is of paramount importance.

For Arnold there is no place for charlatanism in poetry. To him poetry is the criticism of life, governed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. It is in the criticism of life that the spirit of our race will find its stay and consolation. The extent to which the spirit of mankind finds its stay and consolation is proportional to the power of a poem's criticism of life, and the power of the criticism of life is in direct proportion to the extent to which the poem is genuine and free from charlatanism.

As he writes-

THE FUTURE of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.

Arnold's remedy for anarchy the failure to rise sufficiently above the level of one's ordinary self-is, it is hardly necessary to say, culture. The warfare that Arnold waged on the Philistine in the name of culture is not to be confused with the romantic revolt from convention. To the respectability of the Philistine, Heine opposed, Arnold complains, positive disrespectability. So far from favoring Bohemianism, Arnold was not willing to pardon any outer irregularity even in a Dante. What the romanticist attacked first of all in the Philistine was his lack of aesthetic refinement; what Arnold attacked first of all was his lack of wholeness. The opposite of the man who is aiming at totality is the man who suffers from a stunted growth, who has partial and provincial views. 'I hate all over-preponderance of single elements.' This sentence more perhaps man any other that could be cited gives the key to Arnold's prose writings. In working out Ins model of a rounded human nature that he sets up for imitation he turns to the past; for if the positivist is not willing that the past should

be imposed on him as a dogma he admits its validity as experience. The human law is not susceptible of final abstract fonnulation. It is many-sided and elusive. For this or that aspect of it we need to go to this or that country or individual or period. Greece can supply certain elements, Judea certain other elements, to the man who seeks to live proportionately. Arnold always assumes a core of normal experience, a permanent self in man, and rates a writer according to the degree of his insight into this something that abides? tlirough all the flux of circumstance, or, as he himself would say, according to the depth and soundness of this writer's criticism of life. It was inevitable, as Professor Sherman points out, that Arnold should be comparatively indifferent to that great fetish of modem scholarship, the historical method, which tends to deny the enduring scale of values, and to see everything relatively, to account for everything in terms of time and place.

The few writers, chiefly poets, who seem to Arnold to tend to imaginative wholeness, to combine ethical insight in an eminent degree with excellence of form, or, as he would say, high seriousness of substance with the grand style, he puts in a class apart; they differ from other writers not merely in degree but in kind. Tin's general distinction, which goes back to Aristotle, is surely sound, and those who have sought to discard high seriousness in favor of intensity or some other criterion are simply compromising poetry and literature; they are playing into the hands of the utilitarian, who would relegate literature to the recreative side of life, who has no place in his scheme of things for the literature of wisdom, literature that ministers to leisure in the Aristotelian sense. It must be granted, however, that Arnold is not always as clear or consistent as he might be in the working out of his main distinction. When we ask him for a definition of the grand style in poetry and of the special quality of imagination, the ethical imagination, as one may say, that underlies it, he supplies us instead with brief passages from the great poets that we are to use as touchstones, a method not always easy to reconcile with his previous assertion that the worth of a poem is determined, not by separate passages, but by its architectonics, its total structure. He fights shy of theory because 'the critical perception of poetic truth is,' he feels, 'of all things the most volatile, elusive, and evanescent.' So far as he means by theory the merely metaphysical, every type of positivist will sympathize with him. But there seems to be something more than this in his avoidance of theory-some survival, namely, of the romantic fear of precise analysis. I have already mentioned Aristotle, and as a matter of fact Aristotle is almost necessarily the master of those who, like Arnold, seek to put humanistic and religious truth on a critical basis. Now two things are needed to make the complete Aristotelian: in the first

place, hard consecutive thinking in working out principles, and in the second place, the utmost flexibility in the application of them. For, though fixed principles exist, one must grant Bergson that life in the concrete is a peipetual gushing forth of novelties.' If one is to bridge correctly the gap between the general law and the particular instance, one cannot be too finely perceptive, too 'undulating and diverse.' Unfortunately, Arnold seems at times to carry over into the realm of principle, where hard consecutive thinking is the prime requisite, the fluidity that is only permissible in the realm of practice.

Inasmuch as high seriousness of substance and the grand style coexist only in the best poets, Arnold is Jed to set up the best poetry as a substitute for philosophy and religion; to proclaim that what is best in philosophy and religion themselves is their unconscious poetry. Various correctives to statements of this kind may be supplied from Arnold himself, yet, even so, this remains his dubious side. One may affirm that the man of today will be more aided in his struggle toward standards by the study of Aristotle (perhaps the most modem of the ancients), especially of the Ethics and Politics, than by reading Homer, the chief of poets; and one may at the same time refuse to go to the opposite extreme with Plato and indict Homer for his lack of religious seriousness, Yet Aristotle's excellence of substance, so far from being associated with the grand style, is associated with something that at times comes perilously near jargon.

Thus Arnold seeks to discuss the stream of poetry since it is the bridge to knowledge. What is interesting is how Arnold fuses Victorian ideas of science, imagination and knowledge with true poetry:

More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. 'for finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry 'the impassioned expression winch is in the countenance of all science'; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry 'tlie breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'; our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but die shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness,

the more ?we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry.

It is therefore that the identification of true poetry becomes so important:

The best poetry is what we want; me best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

In The Study of Poetry he also cautions the critic that in forming a genuine and disinterested estimate of the poet under consideration he should not be influenced by historical or personal judgements, historical judgements being fallacious because we regard ancient poets with excessive veneration, and personal judgements being fallacious when we are biased towards a contemporary poet. If a poet is a 'dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best... enjoy his work'.

Arnold is thus refreaming the Aristotlean notion of the superiority of poetry over history and philosophy:

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness ([Greek]). Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substances and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents, of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other.

As examples of erroneous judgements he says that the 17th century court tragedies of the French were spoken of with exaggerated praise, until Pellisson reproached them for want of the true poetic stamp, and another critic, Charles d' Hericault, said that 17th century French poetry had received undue and undeserving veneration. Arnold says the critics seem to substitute 'a halo for physiognomy and a statue in the place where there was once a man. They give us a human personage no larger than God seated amidst his perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus.'

He also condemns the French critic Vitet, who had eloquent words of praise for the epic poem Chanson de Roland by Turoldus, (which was sung by a jester, Taillefer, in William the Conqueror's army), saying that it was superior to Homer's Iliad. Arnold's view is that this poem can never be compared to Homer's work, and that we only have to compare the description of dying Roland to Helen's words about her wounded brothers Pollux and Castor and its inferiority will be clearly revealed.

3.12.5 The Study of Poetry: Touchstone Method

Arnold's criticism of Vitet above illustrates his 'touchstone method'; his theory states that in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose.

From this we see that he has shifted his position from that expressed in the preface to his Poems of 1853. In The 'Study of Poetry' he no longer uses the acid test of action and architectonics. He became an advocate of 'touchstones'. 'Short passages even single lines,' he said, 'will serve our turn quite sufficiently'. Arnold writes:

Indeed Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of his quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently.

He follows up by arguing:

These few lines, if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate. The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this: the possession of the very highest poetical quality. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there. Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples; to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed there. They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic. Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner, and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality

Some of Arnold's touchstone passages are: Helen's words about her wounded brother Zeus addressing the horses of Peleus, suppliant Achilles' words to Priam, and for Dante; Ugolino's brave words, and Beatrice's loving words to Virgil.

From non-Classical writers he selects from Henry IV Part II (III, i), Henry's expostulation with sleep 'Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast...'. From Hamlet (V, ii) 'Absent thee from felicity awhile...'. From Milton's Paradise Lost Book 1, 'Care sat on his faded cheek', and 'What is else not to be overcome ..."

3.12.6. The Study of Poetry: on Chaucer

The French Romance poetry of the 13th century langue d'oc and langue d'oil was extremely popular in Europe and Italy, but soon lost its popularity and now it is

important only in terms of historical study. But Chaucer, who was nourished by the romance poetry of the French, and influenced by the Italian Royal rhyme stanza, still holds enduring fascination. There is an excellence of style and subject in his poetry, which is the quality the French poetry lacks. Dryden says of Chaucer's Prologue 'Here is God's plenty!' and that 'he is a perpetual fountain of good sense'. There is largeness, benignity, freedom and spontaneity in Chaucer's writings. 'He is the well of English unde filed'. He has divine fluidity of movement, divine liquidness of diction. He has created n epoch and founded a tradition.

Arnold writes:

If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance-poetry-why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly feel ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that his superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life, so unlike the total want, in the romance-poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales. The right comment upon it is Dryden's: 'It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. And again: 'He is a perpetual fountain of good sense. It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance

Some say that the fluidity of Chaucer's verse is due to license in the use of the language, a liberty which Bums enjoyed much later. But Arnold says that the excellence of Chaucer's poetry is due to his sheer poetic talent. This liberty in the use of language was enjoyed by many poets, but we do not find the same kind of fluidity in others. Only in Shakespeare and Keats do we find the same kind of fluidity, though they wrote without the same liberty in the use of language.

Arnold praises Chaucer's excellent style and manner, but says that Chaucer cannot be called a classic since, unlike Homer, Virgil and Shakespeare, hiss poetry does not have the high poetic seriousness which Aristotle regards as a mark of its superiority over the other atts. Arnold's argument is as follows:

The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, slirewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare has it. It is this chiefly

which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon; and with the increasing demands of our modem ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed... To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue. Still, the main fact for us to bear in mind about Chaucer is his sterling value according to that real estimate which we firmly adopt for all poets. He has poetic truth of substance, though he has not high poetic seriousness, and corresponding to his truth of substance he has an exquisite virtue of style and manner. With him is bom our real poetry.

3.12.7. 'The Study of Poetry': on the Age of Dryden and Pope

The age of Dryden is regarded as superior to that of the others for 'sweetness of poetry'. Arnold asks whether Dryden and Pope, poets of great merit, are truly the poetical classics of the 18th century. He says Dryden's post-script to the readers in his translation of The Aeneid reveals the fact that in prose writing he is even better than Milton and Chapman.

Just as the laxity in religious matters during the Restoration period was a dire outcome of the strict discipline of the Puritans, in the same way in order to control tr dangerous sway of imagination found in the poetry of the Metaphysicals, to counterai 'the dangerous prevalence of imagination', the poets of the 18th century introduce certain regulations. The restrictions that were imposed on the poets were uniformity regularity, precision, and balance. These restrictions curbed the growth of poetry, am encouraged the growth of prose.

Hence we can regard Dryden as the glorious founder, and Pope as the splendid liigl priest, of the age of prose and reason, our indispensable 18th century. Their poetry was that of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Arnold says that Pope and Dryden are not poet classics, but the 'prose classics' of the 18th century.

As for poetry, he considers Gray to be the only classic of the 18th century. Gray constantly studied and enjoyed Greek poetry and thus inherited their poetic point of view and their application of poetry to life. But he is the 'scantiest, frailest classic' since his output was small. Arnold writes:

Gray is our poetical classic of that literature and age; the position of Gray is singular, and demands a word of notice here. He has not the volume or the power of poets who, coming in times more favourable, have attained to an independent criticism of life. But he lived with the great poets, he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner. The point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him, he caught them of others; and he had not the free and abundant use of them. But, whereas Addison and Pope never had the use of them, Gray had the use of them at times. He is the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic.

3.12.8 'The Study of Poetry': on Burns

Although Burns lived close to the 19th century his poetry breathes the spirit of 18th Century life. Burns is most at home in his native language. His poems deal with Scottish dress, Scottish manner, and Scottish religion. This Scottish world is not a beautiful one, and it is an advantage if a poet deals with a beautiful world. But Bums shines whenever he triumphs over his sordid, repulsive and dull world with his poetry.

Perhaps we find the true Burns only in his bacchanalian poetry, though occasionally his bacchanalian attitude was affected. For example in his Holy Fair, the lines 'Leeze me on drink! it gives us mair/ Than either school or college', may represent the bacchanalian attitude, but they are not truly bacchanalian in spirit. There is something insincere about it, smacking of bravado.

When Burns moralises in some of his poems it also sounds insincere, coming from a man who disregarded morality in actual life. And sometimes his pathos is intolerable, as in Auld Lang Syne.

We see the real Bums (wherein he is unsurpassable) in lines such as, To make a happy fire-side clime'/ to weans and wife/ That's the true pathos and sublime/ Of human life' (Ae Fond Kiss). Here we see the genius of Burns.

But, like Chaucer, Burns lacks high poetic seriousness, though his poems have poetic truth in diction and movement. Sometimes his poems are profound and heart-rending, such as in the lines, 'Had we never loved sae kindly/ had we never loved sae blindly/ never met or never parted/ we had ne'er been brokenhearted'.

Also like Chaucer, Burns possesses largeness, benignity, freedom and spontaneity. But instead of Chaucer's fluidity, we find in Burns a springing bounding energy. Chaucer's benignity deepens in Bums into a sense of sympathy for both human as well as non-human things, but Chaucer's world is richer and fairer than that of Bums.

Sometimes Burns's poetic genius is unmatched by anyone. He is even better than Goethe at times and he is unrivalled by anyone except Shakespeare. He has written excellent poems such as Tarn O'Shanter, Whistle and I'll come to you my Lad, and Auld Lang Syne.

When we compare Shelley's 'Pinnacled dim in the of intense inane' (Prometheus Unbound III, iv) with Bums's, They flatter, she says, to deceive me' (Tarn Glen), the latter is salutary.

3.12.9 Arnold on Shakespeare

Praising Shakespeare, Arnold says 'In England there needs a miracle of genius like Shakespeare's to produce a balance of mind'. This is not bardolatory, but praise tempered by a critical sense. In a letter he writes. 'I keep saying Shakespeare, you are as obscure as life is 1.

In his sonnet 'On Shakespeare' he says; 'Others abide our question. Thou are free./ We ask and ask Thou smilest and art still,/ Out-topping knowledge'.

3.12.10. Arnold's Limitations

For all his championing of disinterestedness, Arnold was unable to practise disinterestedness in all his essays, in his essay on Shelley particularly he displayed a lamentable lack of disinterestedness. Shelley's moral views were too much for the Victorian Arnold. In his essay on Keats too Arnold failed to be disinterested. The sentimental letters of Keats to Fanny Brawne were too much for him.

Arnold sometimes became a satirist, and as a satirical critic saw things too quickly, too summarily. In spite of their charm, the essays are characterised by egotism and, as Tilotson says, 'the attention is directed, not on his object but on himself and his objects together'.

Arnold makes clear his disapproval of the vagaries of some of the Romantic poets. Perhaps he would have agreed with Goethe, who saw Romanticism as disease

and Classicism as, health. But Arnold occasionally looked at things with jaundiced eyes, and he overlooked the positive features of Romanticism which posterity will not willingly let die, such as its humanitarian!srn, love of nature, love of childhood, a sense of mysticism, faith in man with all his imperfections, and faith in man's unconquerable mind.

Arnold's inordinate love of classicism made him blind to the beauty of lyricism He ignored the importance of lyrical poems, which are subjective and which express the sentiments and the personality of the poet. Judged by Arnold's standards, a large number of poets both ancient and modern are dismissed because they sang with 'Profuse strains of unpremeditated art'.

It was also unfair of Arnold to compare the classical works in wliich figure the classical quartet, namely Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra and Dido with Heamann and Dorothea, Childe Harold, Jocelyn, and The Excursion'. Even the strongest advocates of Arnold would agree that it is not always profitable for poets to draw upon the past. Literature expresses the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the contemporary age. Writers must choose subjects from the world of their own experience. What is ancient Greece to many of us? Historians and archaeologists are familiar with it, but the common readers delight justifiably in modem themes. To be in the company of Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra and Dido is not always a pleasant experience. What a reader wants is variety, wliich classical mythology with all its tradition and richness cannot provide. An excessive fondness for Greek and Latin classics produces a literary diet without variety, while modem poetry and drama have branched out in innumerable directions.

As we have seen, as a classicist Arnold upheld the supreme importance of the architectonic faculty, then later shifted his ground. In the lectures On Translating Homer, On the Study of Celtic Literature, and The Study of Poetry, he himself tested the greatness of poetry by single lines. Arnold the classicist presumably realised towards the end of his life that classicism was not the last word in literature.

Arnold's lack of historic sense was another major failing. While he spoke authoritatively on his own century, he was sometimes groping in the dark in his assessment of earlier centuries. He used to speak at times as if ex cathedra, and this pontifical solemnity vitiated his criticism.

As we have seen, later critics praise. Arnold, but it is only a qualified praise. Oliver Elton calls him a 'bad great critic'. T. S. Eliot said that Arnold is a

'Propagandist and not a creator of ideas'. According to Walter Raleigh, Arnold's method is like that of a man who took a brick to the market to give the buyers an impression of the building.

3.12.11 Arnold's Legacy

In spite of his faults, Arnold's position as an eminent critic is secure. Douglas Bush says that the breadth and depth of Arnold's influence cannot be measured or even guessed at because, from his own time onward, so much of his thought and outlook became part of the general educated consciousness. He was one of those critics who, as Eliot said, arrive from time to time to set the literary house in order. Eliot named Dryden, Johnson and Arnold as some of the greatest critics of the English language.

Arnold united active independent insight with the authority of the humanistic tradition. He carried on, in his more sophisticated way, the Renaissance humanistic faith in good letters as the teachers of wisdom, and in the virtue of great literature, and above all, great poetry. He saw poetry as a supremely illuminating, animating, and fortifying aid in the difficult endeavour to become or remain fully human.

Arnold's method of criticism is comparative. Steeped in classical poetry, and thoroughly acquainted with continental literature, he compares English literature to French and German literature, adopting the disinterested approach he had learned from Sainte-Beuve.

Arnold's objective approach to criticism and his view that historical and biographical study are unnecessary was very influential on the new criticism. His emphasis on the importance of tradition also influenced F. R. Leavis, and T. S. Eliot.

Eliot is also indebted to Arnold for his classicism, and for his objective approach which paved the way for Eliot to say that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality, because it is not an expression of emotions but an escape from emotions.

Although Arnold disapproved of the Romantics' approach to poetry, their propensity for allusiveness and symbolism, he also shows his appreciation of the Romantics in his Essays in Criticism. He praises Wordsworth thus: 'Nature herself took the pen out of his hand and wrote with a bare, sheer penetrating power'. Arnold also valued poetry for its strong ideas, which he found to be the chief merit of Wordsworth's

poetry. About Shelley he says that Shelley is 'A beautiful but ineffectual angel beating in a void his luminous wings in vain'.

In an age when cheap literature caters to the taste of the common man, one might fear that the classics will fade into insignificance. But Arnold is sure that the currency and the supremacy of the classics will be preserved in the modem age, not because of conscious effort on the part of the readers, but because of the human instinct of self-preservation.

In the present day with the literary tradition over-burdened with imagery, myth, symbol and abstract jargon, it is refreshing to come back to Arnold and his like to encounter central questions about literature and life as they are perceived by a mature and civilised mind.

3.12.12. Comprehension Exercises

1. Explain how poetry stands in relation to religion, philosophy, and science for Arnold.
2. What does Arnold mean when he says "poetry is a criticism of life"? Is this a mimetic or a pragmatic statement, or both?
3. What are the historical" estimate and the "personal" estimate? What's wrong with them?
4. Does Arnold agree or disagree with Hericault's ideas that we should not declare certain art works classics?
5. What do you think of Arnold's "touchstone" method? Who does it remind you of? What does this method say about organic unity? How does it avoid the fallacies of historical and personal estimation?
6. What are Arnold's criteria for determining poetic worth?
7. What does Arnold's praise of Chaucer show us about his criteria for good poetry?

   What does Chaucer imitate?
8. Why is Chaucer not as great a poet as Dante, according to Arnold? Do you agree'?

3.12.13 Suggested Readingds

Annan, Noel, in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Essays*. OUP, 1964.

Arnold, Matthew, *Essays in Criticism*. Ed S. R. Littlewood. Macmillan.

Arnold, Matthew, *Selected Poems and Prose*. Ed, Denys Thompson. Heinemann, 1971.

Module 4

Modern Literary Criticism

Unit-13 ❑ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction"

Structure

4.13.1. Objectives

The present Unit seeks to introduce the learners to the essay "Modern Fiction" by Virginia Woolf. The Unit will not only address the inner world of the designated text but will try to understand the essayist, because textual knowledge is never complete without the knowledge of its author. Simultaneously, we shall endeavour to evaluate Virginia Woolf's contribution to English literature through her essays with particular focus on the present essay. The different points of view, the language used in "Modern Fiction", the messages she caters all along-these are also prime features of our discussion, for without them the learners won't be able to get to the proper understanding of the text written by one of the pioneers of modern English literature.

4.13.2. Introduction

The first thing that attracts our attention before reading the text is the combination of two words forming the title—'modern' and 'fiction.' The essay deals with the nature and scope of fictions or novels in the modern age. The complete reading of the text gives us the view that the essayist finds fault with a number of contemporary novelists or fiction-writers whose preoccupation with the conventional plots, themes and narrative techniques has marred the arena of fiction and barred English fiction from further progress. Virginia Woolf is very clear about the faults of the contemporary English novelists and provides her own views to remedy this. Basically, this literary renovation or reformation through innovation is Woolf's primary concern in the essay. Interestingly, here we see her critique of the prevalent mode of fiction-penning, and this particular mental engagement is something that we see in her other essays also. Woolf proves herself a significant English critic in that she chalks out a modern route for English novels that have to come out of obsoleteness if they are to make progress through necessary change. If we read *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) by E M Forster, we discover similar discussion there which we shall come to in the subsequent pages.

4.11.3. Defining Poetry: Imagination and Its Role

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was born at South Kensington in London to Leslie Stephen (1832-1904) and Julia Stephen (1846-1895) from their second wedlock. Leslie Stephen was a prominent literary figure who had been the son-in-law of the famous Victorian novelist William Makepeace Thackeray by way of his first marriage to the youngest daughter of the veteran novelist. Julia Stephen had children from her previous marriage, the Duckworths—all being brought up together. Therefore, there was the tense competitive atmosphere among the siblings and half-siblings. Virginia had envious competition with her sister Vanessa, and couldn't tolerate the love Thoby, her brother received from her parents. But there was always happiness with her mother yielding a great emotional impact on her psyche.

The Stephens had two residences—the rented summer residence at St. Ives in Cornwall (in addition to the winter residence in London) was a delight to the whole family who enjoyed the sight of the Godrevy Lighthouse in the distance; the house was a beauty in respect of its magnificent floral and vegetative surroundings. Although the Victorian ethos was in the way of girls' education outdoors, Woolf's father took care to educate his girls children also. His library was open to all, and it was here that Virginia's literary taste started

to blossom. Leslie Stephen's connection to Thackeray brought literary giants like Alfred Tennyson to their household, and the children gobbled up the varied stories and influencing talks to grow up with a sustained love for literature.

The sexual maltreatment at Gerald Duckworth's hands was the first shocking and unnerving mental experience of Woolf's life, about which she later talks in her diaries. Her dislike for heterosexuality probably took its roots from here. With her mother's death in 1895, Virginia lost track of her canopied, secure existence and her train of nervous breakdowns commenced. Life wasn't the same anymore to her. Her father was not so friendly a guide as her mother. Consequently, she began to despair of the dearest touches that only a woman can supplement. This accounts for her homosexual relationship with Vita Sackville-West and her delayed response and consent to her marriage with Leonard Woolf n 1912. Stella Duckworth's death within a space of two years, and finally her father's death in 1904 made her lonely and desolate. Her life became a bundle of past memories, sweet and sad that haunted her.

To escape the feeling of despondency, the Stephen siblings decided to move to Bloomsbury. It was here that the Bloomsbury Group would be formed with the active assistance of her brother Thoby Stephen and sister Vanessa Bell, now wife to art critic Clive Bell. The group included luminaries like Lytton Strachey, E M Forster, economist John Maynard Keynes et al. In 1917 she founded the Hogarth Press with husband Leonard Woolf, where many of her writings were published.

Woolf is considered one of the English modernist writers in that the post-First World War mental ennui and other psychological realities were manifestly portrayed in her writings, especially novels. She is generally classed with James Joyce and Henry James, both of whom were pioneering fiction-writers of her age. Virginia's first novel was *The Voyage Out* (1915) which depicts the heroine Rachel Vinrace's frustrating voyage which symbolically tells of Woolf's own psychological dilemmas and sufferings. Her other novels include various autobiographical hints and details, especially in the trilogy—*Jacob's Room* (1922), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931)—depicting the life in the Talland house, St. Ives, Cornwall. Her first essays published in 1925 are known as the *The Common Reader* (first series). The second series of *The Common Reader* came out in 1932. But her book-length essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is possibly her most-remembered one, in which Woolf not only sought loneliness and privacy for women writers from a feminist point of view, but also left her indelible mark as a high-thinking art critic.

However, she had many happy memories with her husband Leonard who, as she admitted later in her suicide note in 1941, gave her the most soothing moments of her life. Mental frustration, taking the form of a chronic disease, made her drown herself into a river

in that very year. The earlier suicide attempts finally found their success in this last one. Ironically, the writer who had endeavoured to uncover the dark recesses of human psyche in her novels ultimately became its unwelcome prey. The frustration and insecurity starting with the death of Julia Stephen did never really stop chasing her. Julia Briggs in her *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005) writes, "Woolf's life, like that of Sylvia Plath, is too often read in terms of her death, as if that was the most interesting or significant thing that happened to her. But like Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, her death was the outcome of a series of particular circumstances. Events seemed to conspire against her…" (395).

4.13.4. Essays in General and "Modern Fiction"

Virginia Woolf has always concerned herself with proper literary stuff—be it in fiction or in poetry. Learners are only invited to read *A Room of One's Own* to better acquaint themselves with the critically literary thought-world of Woolf. Along with the essay-books mentioned above, *Collected Essays*, Vol I (1924), *Three Guineas* (1938) and *A Sketch of the Past* (1939) help to establish her as a pioneering essayist.

Her essays range from the commentary on the art of Shakespeare to the uniqueness of George Eliot's mind with Emily Bronte and Charlotte Bronte finding mention in her art criticism frequently. She has expressed her views on the art of reading, of fiction, of modern essay and has gone on to strongly champion the Russian novels and short stories, putting her ordered reasoning one by one. Her range in the essays is vast and provokes thought and amazement. In her paper "The Common Reader and Critical Method in Virginia Woolf's Essays" published in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* in October, 1981, Elizabeth C Madison attests to this: "These essays reveal an unusual analytical intellect and critical lucidity responding to a large and diverse body of literature" (61). The two phrases ''unusual analytical intellect" and ''critical lucidity" clearly hint at Woolf's possession of a unique power for dealing with complex subject-matters very lucidly. One particular thing always supplemented her analytical power: her indefatigable capacity for reading. Reading Tolstoy's monumental work *War and Peace* twice is something gargantuan, and she advises an English reader to go through the novel twice patiently to get to the Russian thought processes, which she vehemently admires in her essay "The Russian Point of View". Madison in her article touches on some of the key essays in the volume *The Common Reader* (Vol I, 1925), from where the present text "Modern Fiction" is excerpted. In the essay the essayist ventures forth to chart out the way modern fiction-writers should write modern fictions.

4.13.5. Text

4.13.5.1. The Essay: Its Publication

The essay "Modern Fiction" was first published in 1919 with the title "Modern Novels" in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Later the essay was renamed with the present name and included in the 1925 collection of first series of essays, *The Common Reader* published by the Hogarth Press. The essay also features in the multi-volume *Collected Essays* of Woolf.

4.13.5.2. The Text: Explanation

The text being referred to here is contained in the Seventh Impression of *The Common Reader* published by the Hogarth Press in 1948, extending from page no. 184 to page no. 195 (documented in the 'Suggested Reading' section below). Learners may take any edition of the text or any collection of essays where the text is incorporated, and tally the page numbers of the excerpts cited below.

The text of any literary piece, learners must attend, is the most important locus where they need to exercise their fullest strength. The text of "Modern Fiction" covers almost eleven pages. Here the essayist Virginia Woolf is making a 'survey' of the prevalent or contemporary fictions running from the late Victorian age to the Edwardian period. She has steadied her critical focus on three English fiction writers from the previous generation, namely H G Wells (1866-1946), John Galsworthy (1867-1933) and Arnold Bennett (1867-1931). She unambiguously hurls her detestation at them for their artificial production of literature, esp. novels. Woolf provides an analogy in the initial phase of the essay to denounce her targets: "It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about literature" (184). The English expertise in making machines is actually the symbolic inability of making proper fictional stuff; in other words, literature is being mechanically manufactured without any literary substance in them, as Woolf suggests. And Woolf further adds: "We only know that certain gratitudes and hostilities inspire us; that certain paths seem to lead to fertile land, others to the dust and the desert…" (185). She again uses symbolic language: the 'fertile land' (ibid) symbolises the excellent literary finesse of the classics that, according to Woolf, are to be had of Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Jane Austen and the lesser known William Henry Hudson, the novelists from the previous generation; whereas 'the dust and the desert' (ibid) symbolise the intolerable poverty of presentation of human life as found in the novels of the trio—Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy.

The essayist moves on with her argument and clarifies that she is averse to the trio particularly for one reason: their preoccupation with the outer or shallow aspects of materiality. Samuel Hynes in his article "The Whole Contention between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf" mentions Woolf's reservation against Bennett's "vulgar taste in furniture" (43), which implies that Bennett unnecessarily describes unimportant things and events in his novels. She praises the trio's myriad achievements and says that they created possibilities for their works to become great but couldn't repair the crevices peeping up here and there. She beautifully describes, "Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy have excited so many hopes and disappointed them so persistently that our gratitude largely takes the form of thanking them for having shown us what they might have done but have not done…" ("Modern Fiction" 185). Woolf clearly is not blindly angry or biased about her certification, but finely balances her point of view through reasoning that counts; and this reasoning is particularly sound if we strive to understand the author as one surrounded by modernist discourses of her era with all its connection with World War I, Dadaism, Surrealism, scientific advancement and the psychological inroads that all these diverse factors had produced. Woolf is all about the "mind", and the writers who did not speak of the human psyche were mere dross to her. In all her works—be it *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) or *Orlando* (1928), or her essays—she has honestly and sincerely followed the ''stream of consciousness'' technique (a technique that delineates the flow or 'stream' of a conscious mind that responds inwardly to various thoughts or events of the past and present at the same time) that was also present in James Joyce, as was evident from his most famous works *Ulysses* (1922) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). She, out of her thoughtful exasperation, calls the trio ''materialists'' and jumps up to the explanation of why they are materialists: "It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul" (185-6). The meaning of the lines, if properly understood, can indicate the extent to which Woolf was frustrated with the soulless depiction of characters and events by the trio. Among the three, Arnold Bennett is referred to as the "worst culprit" but not without the attendant praise: "He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in" (186). By this the essayist means to say that the three novelists build the sequence of events (plot) in their novels in so compact a way that there is no palpable flaw to be discovered by even a most fault-finding critic. But what is missing is the description of the diverse feelings or impressions that a particular character in such a novel goes through. To present an imagined situation as an example, if a narrator speaks of the event of a grown-up person sitting grey-shirted in the dark corner of a room at seven in the evening and desiring that no one should disturb his privacy, it describes nothing of

what is going through in his mind. The words 'grown-up', 'grey-shirted', 'dark corner' and 'seven in the evening' are perfect details that have nothing to do with his mind. Rather, the description, that critics like Woolf desire in a modern fiction, would be to show, for instance, that the man is crammed up with particular events or memories that have mentally hurt him, and that his mind is troubled by this or that thought or tension making him unable to mix his isolated self with the surroundings. The great philosopher Baruch Spinoza was of the opinion that it is our mind that directs the whole of our being including our body. The writer who is not concerned about this truth is not important to critics like Woolf, who search for the soul or spirit or mind in everything and every person. Woolf wants a novelist or an artist to produce the inner conversations one is having with one's mind—be he the character in the novel or the novelist himself.

Whether it be the insignificant material descriptions of cosy shelter taken ''in the very best hotel of Brighton'' (186) in Bennett or the unfailing ''crudity and coarseness of his human beings" (187) in H G Wells' depiction of ''his Joans and his Peters'' (ibid) in novels like *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education* (1918), there is no escaping the fact that ''they [the three novelists] write of unimportant things; that they spend immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (187). A reading of "The Square", the first chapter in Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), or any chapter in the book for that matter, would bring before us such lines as—''Sophia wandered about, a prey ripe for the Evil one. "Oh," she exclaimed joyously—even ecstatically—looking behind the cheval glass, "here's mother's new skirt! Miss Dunn's been putting the gimp on it! Oh, mother, what a proud thing you will be!" (12). The monotonous and "unimportant" descriptions of, for example, furniture, orchard, dress and valuables crowd his pages from the first to the last. The excerpt given above may contain words like 'joyously' and 'ecstatically' which are more or less related to the mind, but there's the end of it. The hopes awakened in us are mercilessly shattered multiple occasions as one continues to read the novel. And so, Woolf's ironical thanking to the trio "for having shown us what they might have done but have not done" ("Modern Fiction'' 185). Talking of the sterility of plot construction in the trio's novels, she says,

> "Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds. So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception." (188)

Woolf means to say here that 'the light of the conception' or 'the vision in our minds' before venturing into some novel writing gets brutally slashed after even the completion of thirty two chapters because, as Woolf opines, the novelist becomes

> "constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour." (ibid)

In order to meet public or market demands of providing an interesting plot with tragic and comic events combined with love episodes, the novelist sacrifices his inspiring conception or vision that he had before writing, and thus finally throws away or blots out the essential stuff of his fiction: the depiction of mental reality or mind's multi-coloured vibrating world full of life. Hynes' article mentions this money-mongering professional aspect of Arnold Bennett who "had been writing novels at the rate of one a year for twenty years" (34) "on any subject for two shillings a word" (ibid). when we put this aspect of Bennett's crave for popularity and professionalism beside Joyce who composed *Finnegans Wake* (1939) seventeen after his *Ulysses* (1922), we realise our essayist's justness of her protest. To Joyce, art is a worship, an inspiration, and inspiration doesn't maintain any regularity as we find in Bennett's case. Litterateurs must maintain a minimum regard for psychological ideals. Therefore, disturbed Woolf questions, "Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" (189).

Then, how should novels be, if not 'like this?' Woolf answers, "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impression—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday…" (ibid). This is one of the most famous lines associated with Woolf's conception of art, by which she means to prescribe that a novelist should record the "myriad impressions" of various sort that come to and go off the mind every single moment. "The proper stuff of fiction" (ibid) lies here, and the novelist must "base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention…" (ibid). The novelist, she again warns, should never conform to the 'accepted style' of convention. Life is not so arranged as the trio, following convention, present it to be. "Life", Woolf famously continues, "is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (ibid). The way the trio present life in their novels seems to imply that 'life' is a well-lit path properly visible and easy to tread on, that life is a sequence of material events properly arranged. But it is not so, as the essayist understands life. To her, 'life' is 'semi-transparent', i.e. half visible and mysterious; and life's workings come to impress us through the flickering of thoughts in the mind. What she implies is that life should not be presented so symmetrically, should not be taken so easily. All our days we try to understand life through the exercise of

thoughts—and thoughts can only occur in the mind that sends its message to the brain. An active consciousness, half aware of the mysteries of this world, reigns like a 'luminous halo' in the mind and guides us. Woolf endeavours to query: should we forget all about this guiding force and write of 'life' in a novel? Her question is not only valid but very forceful. It shows how great a critic Woolf was.

In search of 'life' in a novel she reaches firstly to her Irish contemporary James Joyce, and certifies that works like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* (which was being serially produced in the magazine *Little Review* at that time) establish their author to be a first-rate writer. Anyone who is familiar with these two texts, along with Woolf's various novels like *Mrs. Dalloway*, knows that these novels through techniques like flashbacks, memories and swift shifting of time and place present 'this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit' (=mind) which expresses 'life' in all its hues. So, unlike the three ''materialists" who write about unimportant, shallow and superficial things, James Joyce "is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain…" (190). She gives the example of the sixth chapter called "Hades" from *Ulysses*, where one finds various unpredictable 'flickering' of the mind ('flame') in the cemetery scene, coming from Stephen, Bloom and Mr Power. Woolf says, "If we want life itself, here surely we have it" (191). In the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Woolf, the eponymous heroine's mind is explored thus: "Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on an iceblock" (11). Memory, desire, past and present—all come into play here to give a picture of the character's heart. This is what constitutes the soul of a novel; this is literature, for it describes the important aspects of the mind or heart. Woolf believes it is the mind that gives human life its meaning and charm and reality. She is very much like Forster who in his *Aspects of the Novel* not only says, "…the novel is sogged with humanity" (19), but also likes the Russian presentation of life as Woolf has certified. Forster also stresses the fact that novels don't need to necessarily follow any "[p]rinciples and systems" (ibid) and that it is the human heart that will ultimately examine the success of a novelist. All this is what Woolf talks about in her present text.

Having thus established her point of preference for psychological novels, Woolf then goes on to ascertain, "Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers…" (192). The important thing is "to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses" (ibid). This freedom of a writer from conventional and financial constraints, obtrusively absent in Bennett, is what Woolf desires most from the modern novelists who need depict "the dark places of psychology" (ibid). While discussing the modernity of contemporary texts, Woolf takes into consideration the short stories of the

Russian author Anton Tchekov whose short story "Gusev" (the plot of which is nicely paraphrased by the essayist, 193) is highly eulogised by Woolf for its psychological completeness of truth. About Tchekov she feels elated to affirm, "If we want understanding of the soul and heart where else shall we find it of comparable profundity?" (ibid). Later on, she declares some great Russian writers as saints for their outpouring of sympathy and love towards the suffering humanity through their works (ibid). We may refer to "The Russian Point of View", another essay of Woolf's where she greatly admires three Russian psychological authors—Tolstoi, Dostoevsky and Tchekov—for their presentation of the "the panorama of the human mind" (*The Common Reader* 227). Then, Woolf speaks of the "infinite possibilities of the art and remind[s] us that there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing—no "method", no experiment, even of the wildest—is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence" (194). Novelists should stop pretending and spreading falsity about literature, for Woolf denounces the prevalent idea of "proper stuff of fiction". Woolf vigorously affirms that "everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought…" (194-5). Here she, for the umpteenth time, attacks the trio who followed strict patterns and rules and penned "proper" fiction as they thought it so. To assure the "sovereignty" (195) of English literature, the prevalent pretence and falsity must submit to the truth which lies in the fact that English novelists and readers learn to respect the reality of the human spirit (=mind or heart) that laughs, cries, suffers and understands like the way Dostoevsky shows it in his novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) through the character of Raskolnikov.

4.13.5.3. Themes

If we can dismantle the main elements of the discussion we have had above, the themes get loosened in discrete forms. The primary theme of the essay is the essayist's earnest effort to rid contemporary English novel of its crudities and shortcomings. We have seen how Virginia Woolf, the essayist has attacked Mr Wells, Mr Bennett and Mr Galsworthy for their novels which don't have the element of human psychology. Their lengthy discussions of unimportant things and events, and their ignorance of human mind and its myriad impressions make her detest them. She calls them "materialists." Up against this mode of writing and this group of writers, Woolf brings the "spiritualists" like Joyce, Conrad and Hardy who speak of the flickering or psychic realities of the mind—mind that only matters for humans.

Another theme of the text is the essayist's effort to discover a "method" of writing. And she boldly declares that there is no method or even proper stuff of fiction. Any method that depicts the heart's realities is proper; every method is proper that catches the feelings and slippery thoughts of the psyche with all its imperfections and potentials.

Finally, we have the essayist's unconditional commendation for Russian fiction and short stories. Tchekov's short story is taken for the ideal example of a modern literary text, showcasing suffering humanity, love, sympathy and saintliness. Moreover, the way Tchekov formulates his stories with simple plots and meagre characters is something of a recipe or method for the English contemporaries of Woolf, who might follow it and construct plots where human mind is worshipped.

4.13.6. Woolf's Contribution as an Essayist

Over the centuries in the history of English literature we have great essayists and art critics: George Puttenham (1529-1590), Dr. Johnson (1709-1784), Charles Lamb (1775-1834), William Hazlitt (1778-1830), T S Eliot (1888-1965) et al, to mention a few. Most of their essays or treatises have changed the course or critical thought process of English literature. Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), Johnson's criticism of Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Hazlitt's critical commentary on Shakespeare or Lamb's *Essays of Elia* or Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920)—all have contributed a lot in strengthening English literature and criticism. Virginia Woolf is different from all of them in that she had to struggle her way out of the Victorian reservations against women's education. The literary atmosphere she received at her disposal at home did certainly help, but it was her studious perseverance that carved a road for her to success. Her point of view, no matter what Hynes says in his article and how he wants to present Bennett as a 'conscious artist', appropriately counterattacks Bennett's arguments in his 1923 article "Is the Novel Decaying?" (Hynes 36), where he attacked Woolf's *Jacob's Room* for its lack of 'real' characters, by retorting in her 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" with the conviction that modern writing must portray the shifting and unstable nature of 'reality' by focusing on the inward conversations of the mind with the self. After almost hundred years of this convincing expression of her viewpoint, we see today how dead right she was in her literary sensitivity! Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, to give another example of her critical acumen, is a seminal text where she not only wrote about women's plight but also warned the women writers against writing their rage in their texts, for rage dissipates one's inspiration; in a word, she advised to compose art out of 'objectivity' just as supreme artists like Shakespeare did. Her criticism, expressed in various other contexts, has won the test of time; she survives. But the group of Bennett, as we may see today, is not read now as is read the kind of literature propounded by Woolf in her present essay and in essays like "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", "The Russian Point of View", "George Eliot" and "*Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*" etc. She will always be remembered as a great essayist quite varied and effective in her assertions.

4.13.7 Summing up

To conclude, Virginia Woolf in her essay "Modern Fiction" has presented herself as a far-sighted art critic. In stressing her timeless literary convictions, she has exalted herself to the height of stalwarts like T S Eliot. The text bears proof to her meticulous attention to details and alertness to the extent of her call for a ban on all the three novelists. She protests in anger as well as praises for the gifts the trio possessed. In praising the modern Russian mind, she proves her neutrality and liberality by overcoming narrow nationalism that often soils the best of the enlightened minds. Her mapping out a new route for English fiction through affirmations like "everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought" ("Modern Fiction" 194-5) emphasises the sovereignty of 'mind' over matter in literary representations. This is something really significant if we consider the way psychological novels would pour forth onto the scene in the following decades with writers like Joyce and Faulkner, including Woolf, penning about the sub-conscious domain of the mind in their psychological novels and stories, that would change modern English literature for ever. Julia Briggs in her preface of *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005) indirectly eulogises her: "In his magisterial survey of representation in European fiction, Mimesis, the German critic Erich Auerbach argued that Woolf's method of depicting the interior life of a range of characters gestured towards 'a common life of mankind on earth', and he considered this a new and significant development in narrative method" (x).

4.13.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions

1. Would you consider Woolf an art critic in view of her discussion in "Modern Fiction"? Give examples in support of your answer.
2. Would you agree to the contention that Woolf has used various poetic or symbolic utterances in "Modern Fiction" to reach her conclusions? If yes, why?
3. What are the key points of discussion in the text by Virginia Woolf? / Thematic discussions.

Medium Length Questions

1. Who are referred to as the "materialists" and why?
2. Who are "spiritualists" as Woolf suggests?

3. What definition of 'life' is provided by Woolf in the text? Quote the lines and explain.
4. What should be the "method" of novel-writing, according to Woolf?

Short Answer Type Questions

1. What was the first title of the essay "Modern Fiction"? When was it published?
2. What does Woolf mean by 'modern fiction?'
3. "…their existence in the flesh"-Who are being referred to here?
4. Who is Mr Hudson? Name two of his famous works.
5. What is "Five Towns?"
6. In what sense is Mr Wells a "materialist" to the essayist Virginia Woolf?
7. Name four characters created by Arnold Bennett in his novel The Old Wives' Tale.
8. What is referred to as the "powerful and unscrupulous tyrant?"
9. What is the "accepted style" of fiction that Woolf attacks in "Modern Fiction?"
10. "…life is a luminous halo"-What does the expression suggest?
11. Name two works of fiction by James Joyce as incorporated in the text.
12. Who are the writers of Tristram Shandy and Pendennis?
13. Which Russian short story writer is praised by Woolf? What is the name of his text that she mentions?
14. Who were Sterne and Meredith?
15. What is the "proper stuff of fiction" as Woolf hints in "Modern Fiction?"

4.13.9 Suggested Readings

- Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Essays, Vol I*. Hogarth Press, 1924.
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Unit-14 ❑ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent"

Structure

4.14.1. Objectives

In this Unit we will discuss,

1. Historical and Biographical details of T.S. Eliot
2. Eliot's views on how poems should be written and how they should be read and appreciated.
3. Historical Sense, the concept of Tradition, the Theory of Impersonal Poetry and Depersonalisation.

4.14.2. Introduction

We often use the term 'tradition' or 'traditional' in our daily life in the context of the richness of the past of the country. But being a student of literature, we also know the way literary terms are used in the context of literature or literary criticism are significant as it

helps us to understand what the term actually means or what it signifies. The essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was published in 1919 the period following the First World War, an era of profound disillusionment and cultural upheaval, with traditional literary conventions and values being fervently challenged. Eliot wrote this essay as a response to this crisis. It provides a new perspective on how literature should be written and read in the context of modernity. It has had a significant influence on literary analysis and comprehension of the interplay between tradition and originality in literature. Eliot's this piece of work helps us to examine its pertinence within the framework of literary theory and application.

4.11.3. Background of the Essay

The essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" was published in *After Strange God*, Eliot maintains: Tradition is not solely the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs. On the contrary, these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of a tradition. Eliot suggests that a sense of tradition is necessary because this sense of tradition enables us to realise our kinship with the same people living in the same place. Nevertheless, at the same time, we are instructed to bear in mind that the prevailing condition of life that produced a particular tradition is not something immovable but rather something that constantly grows and becomes different from what it was previously.

The essay was first published in 1919 and later on it was included in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920). He tried to redefine "tradition" by emphasising the importance of history to write and understand poetry. After that, Eliot goes on to argue that poetry should be fundamentally "impersonal," that is independent and distinct from the personality of its writer, by highlighting the significance of history in producing and comprehending poetry.

4.14.4. Introduction to T.S Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot known as T.S. Eliot is a 20th-century renowned American-British poet, essayist, playwright, and literary critic. He was born on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, and died on January 4, 1965, in London, England. His contributions are celebrated for their profound influence on modernist poetry and their deep exploration of the complexities of the human condition.

He lived during two world wars when significant social and cultural transformations happened not just in England but all across the world. He emerged as a central figure in the modernist literary movement, which sought to break away from conventional forms and explore new ways of expressing the modern experience. Eliot's poetry and prose reflect the disillusionment and fragmentation of the post-World War I era, capturing the sense of alienation and existential uncertainty that characterized his time.

Important works of Eliot includes "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "The Waste Land," "The Hollow Men," and "Ash-Wednesday." His writing was characterized by its intricate use of symbolism, allusion, and innovative poetic techniques, which challenged readers to engage deeply with his texts.

Apart from literature (poetry) Eliot is a renowned critic. His critical works include "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "The Sacred Wood," which played a pivotal role in shaping literary criticism and theory. He established an idea that literature should be viewed in the context of a larger cultural and historical tradition.

Eliot's literary career can be roughly divided into three periods. The first period which he wrote, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in 1911, which was published in Poetry magazine, and other poems that are important in the history of modern literature between the years 1910 and 1911. The second spanned the time he spent studying in Boston and Paris. The second, which culminated in *The Waste Land* in 1922, was contemporaneous with World War 1 and the financial and marital strain of his early years in London.

The third was written at the same time as Eliot's anxiety over the Great Depression and the advent of Nazism, and it culminated in 1943 with the release of the *Four Quartets.* Only a few exercises published in school publications came before the poems of the first period. However, in 1910 and 1911, he composed four poems that presented themes that, with modification and development, he returned to time and time again: *Portrait of a Lady, Preludes, Rhapsody on a Windy Night* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, are some examples of music. Through the first decade of the 1920s, he took centre stage in Eliot's life and creative output.

The quatrains in Poetry, Eliot's subsequent collection of poems, were influenced by Ezra Pound in both form and substance. Eliot passed away in 1965.

4.14.5. Reading of the Essay: Tradition and Individual Talent

(We have discussed the essay critically and in details in this sub-unit. Please use this

link to read the original essay: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent)

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" is an essay by T.S. Eliot that talks about how poets should approach their work. In the first part, Eliot discusses the idea that when a poet writes, they are not just expressing their own feelings or thoughts; they are also connecting to a long tradition of poetry that came before them.

Eliot argues that this connection to tradition is crucial because it allows the poet to be part of something larger than themselves. He compares this to a chemical reaction, where the new poem combines with the elements of past poetry to create something new and valuable. In other words, poets should be aware of the poetry that came before them and use it to inspire and inform their own work.

He also emphasizes that the poet's personality and emotions should not overpower the poem. Instead, the poet should try to detach themselves from their personal emotions and let the poem stand on its own merit. This idea might seem a bit complex, but it's basically saying that the poem should be more important than the poet's ego.

T.S. Eliot claims that the word "tradition" sounds unpleasant to English ears. The most "unique" and "original" features of a poet's work are those that the English laud. They believe that these are his main strengths. This excessive emphasis on uniqueness reveals the uncritical mindset of the English. They give the poet the wrong kind of adulation. They will realise that the best and most distinctive portion of a poet's work is that which exhibits the most impact on the writers of the past if they attentively and impartially investigate the subject.

He says: "If we approach a poet without prejudice, we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Eliot turns his attention to the importance and value of tradition. In Eliot's view, tradition does not imply slavish devotion to the practices of the past. This would be simple replication of what has already been accomplished, mere slavish imitation, he believes that "Novelty is better than repetition". The poet should have a historical sense, not simply resembling traditional works, but an awareness and understanding. Shakespeare may have been traditional when he adopted the revenge theme for Hamlet from Thomas Kyd's Spanish tragedy. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was partially imitating. He used his talent and also remained impersonal.

Next Eliot goes on to discuss "dissociation of sensibility" and its impact on poetry. Eliot introduces this term to describe a change in the way people perceive and experience

emotions and intellect. He argues that in the past, emotions and intellect were closely connected in human thought and expression. However, over time, especially in the 17th century, there was a "dissociation," or separation, between these two aspects of human experience. Eliot suggests that this separation had a significant impact on poetry. In the earlier periods of poetry, such as the Elizabethan era (Shakespeare's time), poets were able to seamlessly blend their emotions and intellectual ideas in their work. For example, Shakespeare's sonnets beautifully combine deep emotions with intellectual exploration. Eliot believes that in his contemporary era (early 20th century), this dissociation of sensibility has become even more pronounced. He observes that poets now tend to either focus solely on emotions or on intellectual ideas, but they struggle to combine them effectively. This, he argues, leads to poetry that lacks depth and resonance. Eliot suggests that it's the poet's responsibility to bridge this dissociation by reintegrating emotions and intellect in their poetry. Poets should strive to combine their feelings with a deep understanding of the literary tradition and literary techniques. By doing so, they can create more profound and meaningful poetry. Eliot introduces the concept of the "objective correlative" as a way to express emotions effectively in poetry. This means using external objects, actions, or situations to represent and evoke the poet's emotions. Instead of directly stating feelings, poets can use symbols, imagery, and metaphors to convey their emotional states indirectly, allowing readers to experience those emotions themselves.

Romantic writers felt that their poetry ought to be intimate and emotional. According to Eliot, poetry is about "escaping from emotions" and "escaping from personality" to avoid having the emotions run amok and come to an end, like in Romantic poetry."

When the poet can remove his or her feelings from the writing of his or her poetry, criticism will be directed at the text rather than the author. Critically, Eliot proclaims the idea of art for art's sake, where the text has its own life and should be able to live without the presence of a writer.

4.14.6. Key Concepts of the Text

Individual talent: Eliot argues that the work of the individual artist should not be perceived in isolation from the broader literary tradition. Instead, he asserts that every poet is a product of their predecessors and that the poet must engage with this tradition while still bringing a unique and individual perspective to their work. This idea is fundamental to the essay's scope, as it sets the stage for a re-evaluation of the role of the poet in relation to the collective legacy of literature.

Dissociation of sensibility: Eliot explains the perceived gap between thought and feeling in modern literature. He suggests that modern poets have lost the ability to combine intellectual and emotional elements in their work. This "dissociation" is attributed to the fragmentation of the tradition and the poet's failure to engage with it effectively. Eliot argues that the poet's task is to bridge this gap and restore the unity of sensibility by connecting with the literary tradition.

Historical sense: Another key element in Eliot's essay. He emphasizes the importance of poets having a deep awareness of literary history and an understanding of how their contemporary context shapes their work. This historical consciousness allows the poet to engage with tradition in a meaningful way and to bring it into the present. Eliot contends that poets should not only know their literary forebears but also comprehend the cultural and intellectual currents that have influenced their predecessors and continue to influence them.

Impersonality: He posits that modern poets should strive to distance themselves from their personal emotions and experiences, allowing the universal and timeless elements of the tradition to come to the forefront. This, in turn, contributes to the enduring quality of the work. Eliot does not advocate for complete detachment from emotion but rather a controlled and objective treatment of it. The "impersonal" poet becomes a conduit for universal truths, transcending the transient concerns of the self.

Objective correlative: It is introduced by Eliot to stress the importance of finding external, objective symbols or images that can represent complex emotions and ideas in poetry. This technique allows the poet to convey emotions indirectly and objectively, avoiding excessive sentimentality. The "objective correlative" serves as a bridge between the poet's personal experiences and the universal emotions and ideas they seek to convey.

4.14.7. Summing up

In his Essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent, Thomas Stern Eliot* says that art's emotion is impersonal. The poet can only reach this impersonality by surrendering himself to work. However, of course, he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what not merely the present is, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious about the things, what are dead and what is already living. In this unit, we have discussed Thomas Stern Eliot. We have also discussed three sections of the essay. Eliot's notion of tradition is presented in the first section, while his theory of the impersonality of the poet is covered in the second. The brief third section serves as the discussion conclusion.

4.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions

1. How does Eliot define "tradition" in the essay, and why does he believe it's important for poets to understand and engage with it?
2. What does Eliot mean by the "historical sense," and how does it relate to a poet's individual talent?
3. How does Eliot view the relationship between the poet's personality and their work? What does he mean by the "extinction of personality"?
4. In what ways does Eliot believe a poet should be "impersonal"?
5. How does Eliot's concept of tradition relate to the idea of modernity in poetry? Does Eliot see tradition as something that holds poets back, or as something that enables them to create new and original work?

Medium Length Questions

1. What is the role of tradition in shaping an artist's work according to Eliot?
2. How does Eliot view the relationship between the individual artist and tradition?
3. What does Eliot mean by the "historical sense" in relation to literary creation?
4. According to Eliot, how does tradition affect the process of artistic creation?
5. What is the significance of the "simultaneous existence" of past and present in an artist's mind, as per Eliot?

Short Answer Type Questions

1. According to T.S. Eliot, what is the role of the "individual talent" in poetry?
2. Eliot introduces the concept of the "dissociation of sensibility" to describe what aspect of modern literature?
3. According to Eliot, what should poets aim to restore in modern literature?
4. What does Eliot mean by "historical sense" in the context of literature?
5. In Eliot's essay, what does "impersonality" in poetry refer to?
6. What is the "objective correlative" as introduced by Eliot?

7. How does Eliot view the relationship between tradition and innovation in poetry?
8. According to Eliot, what is the poet's primary focus in the creation of great poetry?
9. How does Eliot suggest poets should bridge the gap between thought and feeling in modern literature?
10. What is one significant implication of Eliot's essay for literary criticism?

4.14.9 Suggested Readings

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- Leitch, Vincent B. The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. W.W. Norton and Company, 2010.
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism, 1920. Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Unit-15 ❑ I.A. Richards - Principles of Literary Criticism, Chapters 1, 2 & 34

Structure

4.15.1. Objectives

I.A. Richards is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of New Criticism, and in this module, you will delve into his critical essay *Principles of Literary Criticism* and evaluate his contributions as a critic. The focus will be on introducing I.A. Richards as a critic and providing an overview of his crucial work with emphasis on three chapters i.e., Chp-1, 2 and 34 only. It also enables to

- Gain a comprehensive understanding of the key arguments presented in his seminal book, *Principles of Literary Criticism*.
- Grasp the overall structure and framework employed in *Principles of Literary Criticism*.

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- Construct an evaluation of the principal arguments put forth in the book.
- Highlight the importance and relevance of *Principles of Literary Criticism* in the realm of literary analysis.

4.15.2. Introduction

Ivor Armstrong Richards, renowned for his scholarly work in semantics, collaborated with philosopher, writer, and editor Charles K. Ogden in formulating Basic English. Their joint work "The Meaning Of Meaning" (1923) stands as a crucial contribution to the field of linguistics. Following this, Richards authored "Principles of Literary Criticism" (1924), "Science and Poetry" (1926), "Practical Criticism" (1929), and "Coleridge on Imagination" (1934). Rejecting positivist criticism, which links human achievements to an individual's psychology, the era they lived in, and their race, Richards advocated for the independent study of literary texts, free from these three factors. His fascination with advancements in psychology led him to assess art based on the mental states it evoked. He championed a psychological theory of value, which, while once influential, has been surpassed by subsequent research in psychology.

4.15.3. The Chapters in Richards Principles of Literary Criticism

Richards states in the Preface to *Principles of Literary Criticism* that criticism is an attempt to "discriminate between experiences and to evaluate them." However, this discernment between experiences and the accompanying evaluative processes necessitates an understanding of the nature of experience itself, the theories of valuation, and effective communication.

Richards goes on to note that modern critics believe in evoking emotions appropriate to the subject matter to captivate their audience. The chapters within this book serve a dual purpose: they offer an engaging commentary on contemporary culture while also serving as a potent tool to cultivate critical insight.

The majority of the chapters featured in the text provide a psychological foundation for understanding specific aspects of aesthetic appreciation and communication.

The thirty-five chapters in the text are:

I. The Chaos of Critical Theories

II. The Phantom Aesthetic State

III. The Language of Criticism

IV. Communication and the Artist

V. The Critics' Concern with Value

VI. Value as An Ultimate Idea

VII. A Psychological Theory of Value

VIII. Art and Morals

IX. Actual and Possible Misapprehensions

X. Poetry for Poetry's Sake

XI. A Sketch for a Psychology

XII. Pleasure

XIII. Emotion and the Coenesthesia

XIV. Memory

XV. Attitudes

XVI. The Analysis of a Poem

XVII. Rhythm and Meter

XVIII. On Looking at a Picture.

XIX. Sculpture and the Construction of Form

XX. The Impasse of Musical Theory

XXI. A Theory of Communication

XXII. The Availability of the Poets Experience

XXIII. Tolstoy's Infection Theory

XXIV. The Normality of the Artist

XXV. Badness in Poetry

XXVI. Judgement and Divergent Readings

XXVII. Levels of Response and the Width of Appeal

XXVIII. The Allusiveness of Modern Poetry

XXIX Permanence as a Criterion

XXX. The Definition of a Poem

XXXI Art, Play, and Civilization

XXXII. The Imagination

XXIII. Truth and Revelation Theories

XXXIV. The Two Uses of Language

XXXV. Poetry and Beliefs

Appendix A On Value

Appendix B On Mr. Eliot's Poetry

4.15.4. Critical Analysis

Richards' primary focus centers on extracting value from the arts, with particular emphasis on poetry as an art form. This concern for deriving value from poetry serves as the cornerstone of his critical and artistic expressions.

At the beginning of his book, Richards highlights various obstacles that hinder valid criticism. He refers to "Experimental aesthetics," where attempts are made to subject human tastes and actions to laboratory scrutiny. This leads to criticism fixating on insignificant aspects of art, neglecting its true value. Another hindrance lies in the use of ambiguous language, which obscures critical concepts. Richards illustrates how critics often discuss art objects as if they possess inherent attributes, rather than acknowledging their power to evoke effects in us. To surmount these challenges, Richards stresses the importance of understanding the nature of experience and subsequently formulating a compelling theory for assessing and communicating in the arts.

Moving on to the first topic of experience, Richards analyses it through a psychological framework. In Chapter eleven, titled "A Sketch for a Psychology," he describes the mind as part of the nervous system, influenced by various stimuli that evoke human responses based on bodily needs. This implies that the basis of aesthetic experience lies in the mental impulses triggered by these stimuli, which may either be novel or connected to prior experiences.

Richards delves into various facets of experience, such as memory, emotion, coenesthesia, and attitude, dedicating separate chapters to each.

In Chapter twelve, "The Poet's Experience," Richards explores another aspect of experience—the contrast between the experiences of a poet and an ordinary individual. He identifies "range, delicacy, and freedom" as the three parameters that determine the nature of relationships formed from experience. The poet's ability to share their experience depends on their capacity to maintain a specific state of mind when necessary, characterized by a heightened sense of "vigilance," which allows for organizing impulses effectively. Consequently, poets are better equipped to make use of their experiences.

Having elucidated the cause, nature, and effect of experience, Richards shifts his focus to the other two aspects: value and communication. He considers the arts as repositories of recorded values. However, he asserts that critics should not be preoccupied with matters of value and morality. In Chapter seven, "A Psychological Theory of Value," Richards defines value as anything that satisfies an individual's desires. Additional value is attained when one desire is sacrificed for another. Value, in relation to desire, encompasses the expression and fulfilment of impulses and their desires.

The artist is particularly concerned with values more than anyone else. Their constant engagement lies in recording and sharing experiences that hold significant value for them. They possess unique and valuable experiences that they are better equipped to organize, encompassing both significant and trivial impulses that form part of their artistic journey. The poet, according to Richards, can lay the foundation of morality as it depends on the value derived from life. This means that Richards rejects the "Art for Art's sake" theory of poetry, which disregards external values in art. Instead, he advocates for harmony between real life and the world of poetry, as any disconnect would result in "imbalance, narrowness, and incompleteness" among advocates of the aesthetic theory.

Values, in Richards' view, play a crucial role in determining the quality of a poem. In Chapter twenty-five, "Badness in Poetry," Richards emphasizes that art becomes ineffective if communication is flawed or if the conveyed experience lacks value. Effective communication is essential for spectators to perceive value in art. In Chapter four, "Communication and the Artist," Richards considers art as the "supreme form" of communication, even though it is not the artist's primary objective. The artist strives to make the work relatable to their readers, acknowledging that individual minds can relate to specific experiences, but true transference or participation in shared experiences remains elusive. Communication is a complex process involving the interaction between minds and the effect of change.

Recognizing art as the ultimate form of communication, the artist faces the challenge of effectively transmitting their experiences to the reader. To achieve this, the artist must maintain a state of normality. Regardless of their past experiences, they need to be normal enough to communicate effectively. Uniform responses triggered by stimuli and handled physically are required for successful communication, and the artist must be able to organize their responses to avoid potential disasters.

After delving into the nature of experience, the essence of value, and the significance of communication in the arts, Richards proceeds to describe the three credentials of a good critic. Firstly, the critic must possess a sound mind to effectively evaluate a work of art. Secondly, the critic must possess the ability to discern subtle differences in experiences through analysis. Finally, the critic must be skilled in judging values. A critic who possesses these qualities but is still unable to make sound judgments on poetry remains uncertain about the essence of poetry.

According to Richards, one of the reasons for the poor quality of criticism is the critic's inability to fully comprehend what they are evaluating. The critic needs a practical definition of poetry. Richards defines poetry as a collection of experiences that differ slightly from standard experiences, making it more than just the artist's experience. He believes that the reader's involvement is necessary for the completion of the poetic experience.

The main areas discussed in "Principles of Literary Criticism" are experience, value, communication, poetry, and the role of the critic. Other topics covered include the analysis of a poem in chapter sixteen, rhyme and meter in chapter seventeen, allusiveness as a characteristic feature of modern poetry in chapter twenty-eight, creative imagination in chapter thirty-two, and the two uses of language in chapter thirty-four. The final chapter, "The Poetry of T. S. Eliot," added as an appendix to the second edition of the book in 1926, shows Richards' allegiance to Coleridge's theory of imagination as a power that synthesizes and balances dissimilar qualities. The influence of arts rests on this fundamental principle.

"Principles of Literary Criticism" introduced a new dimension of criticism previously unexplored in the literary world. Its penetrating study of experience, value, and communication, along with its definition of poetry, has influenced every modern critic, from traditionalists like Lionel Trilling to new critics like Cleanth Brooks.

4.15.5. Summary of Important Discussions in Principles of Literary Criticism

In Principles of Literary Criticism, Richards aims to establish a theoretical framework for criticism, free from subjectivity and emotionalism. He proposes a psychological theory of art, suggesting that art is valuable as it helps order impulses. Richards rejects the idea of a special aesthetic taste, considering aesthetic experience akin to ordinary experience. Art experience is complex and unified, with intrinsic and practical value that can be analysed in everyday life.

The foundation of Richards' theory of criticism lies in value and communication, with arts seen as the absolute form of communicative activity. Art's chief function is to embody the artist's experiences. However, Richards discourages analysing the poet's mental processes through their artistic work. He views art as improving life by communicating valuable experiences. Value, according to Richards, is not a transcendental idea but rooted in satisfying impulses, whether conscious or subconscious.

Over time, Richards' psychological theories have become outdated, and the role of art in organizing impulses has been questioned. Though he acknowledged the importance of the audience's response, he did not delve further into this aspect. Later critics of Reception Theory and Reader Response schools, such as Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich, and Stanley Fish, have explored the reader's response and its significance in criticism.

Views of Coleridge and Richards

Richards, much like Coleridge, is primarily a theoretical critic and has employed literary analysis merely to exemplify a particular approach. However, Coleridge, being a poet himself, devotedly immersed himself in poetry, forsaking other interests due to his ardent passion for the art form. On the other hand, Richards' interest in poetry aims to emphasize that it should not merely serve as a demonstration of aesthetic principles or data to support experimental theories of communication. Both Richards' and Coleridge's criticism share an abstract nature, but while Coleridge's critical expressions brim with enthusiasm and passion, Richards takes an iconoclastic and anti-romantic stance in his critiques.

4.15.6 Chapter Wise Analysis

(Chapter 1)

In the opening chapter of "Principles of Literary Criticism" titled "The Chaos of Critical Theories," Richards highlights the significance of the field of literary criticism, tracing its roots back to the contributions of the great scholar Aristotle, who was among the earliest intellectuals to engage in this practice. As the modern student delves into the realm of criticism, they are likely to be intrigued by its various contributions, strengths, and occasional incorrect assessments. Criticism also delves into the nature of experiences and the process of utilizing these experiences, such as when one observes a picture, plays music, or reads a book.

Within this context, critics grapple with fundamental questions like determining the value derived from reading a poem, understanding the differences in felt experiences that lead one to prefer one picture over another, identifying the most valuable moments in music, and discerning variations in the quality of different works of art. These fundamental questions can be compared to the more basic queries concerning what constitutes a picture, a poem, or a piece of music, the process of comparing experiences, and the value we place on those experiences.

Richards contends that even the most thoughtful critics have not provided entirely satisfactory answers to these questions. Over time, criticism has contributed certain assumptions, isolated observations, far-reaching conclusions, and dogmatic approaches, as evidenced by quotes from prominent figures such as Aristotle, Longinus, Horace, Boileau, Dryden, Addison, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold, which Richards cites to bolster his argument.

Richards mentions numerous quotes to support the idea that critics make observations, yet none of these quotes address the central concern of how to evaluate the value of a work of art. These quotes touch on various aspects of art and its effects, such as the pleasure derived from imitation, the role of poetry in conveying universal truths, the importance of enthusiasm and imagination, the significance of beautiful language in shaping thought, the value of simplicity and unity in artistic works, and the relationship between art and nature, among others. While these quotes reflect the attempts of great thinkers to explain the value of art, they fall short in providing a satisfactory assessment of its true merit.

According to Richards, some of these observations may serve as starting points for contemplation, but when considered individually or collectively, they fail to offer a comprehensive understanding of the genuine value of art. While the quotes do discuss the appreciation, interpretation, and evaluation of specific poems and artworks, they do not effectively address the fundamental question of why art holds such importance in human endeavours, and why scholars and thinkers dedicate significant time to explore and critique it.

In summary, while the quotes mentioned by Richards contribute to the discourse on art appreciation and analysis, they do not adequately address the core inquiry about the intrinsic value of art and the significance of criticism in the broader context of human pursuit. At this point, it can be inferred that no attempt has been made to explain the value or aesthetic state of art. Critics have only relied on reasoning, intuition, and argumentation in their critiques, without considering essential facts or developing a suitable method to assess the value of art. Valuable insights on the processes involved in appreciating artworks have been skilfully summarized, suggesting shortcomings in the experimental work on aesthetics. If the assessment of art's value is not conducted properly, it may diminish the credibility of experiments conducted in a laboratory.

Aestheticians begin their exploration with aesthetic choices and utilize basic elements such as primary colours, peculiar rhymes, rhythm, and meter, which are open for investigation. It remains to be examined whether anyone has ever experienced viewing a picture or reading a poem while inside a psychological laboratory or engaging with a representative psychologist. The influence of simple stimuli can elicit diverse responses from individuals in various states of mind. Consequently, complex objects like pictures would likely evoke a variety of responses from viewers, inviting an inquiry into the process of comparing these experiences.

An important observation emerges at this stage: the simpler the object considered, the more varied the responses tend to be. However, it is challenging to contemplate a relatively simple object in isolation without considering the context in which it is used. For example, Richards illustrates this with the word "night," which can evoke different thoughts and feelings in different people. The word's meaning, when used in isolation, remains open-ended, but its meaning becomes more defined when used in a sentence and further fixed when incorporated into a poem. This demonstrates that the word's occurrence in a specific context and the meaning derived from that context are crucial factors to consider.

(Chapter 2)

In the second chapter titled "The Phantom Aesthetic Taste," Richards points out a crucial flaw in aesthetics: the disregard for considering the value of art. He emphasizes that the experiences evoked by art hold significant value and must be duly acknowledged, regardless of their form. The nature of these art experiences depends on the adopted theory of value. According to modern aesthetics, there exists a distinct mental activity in what is termed as "aesthetic experience." This concept was initially introduced by Kant, who defined the "judgment of taste" as a special kind of pleasure that is disinterested, universal, and unrelated to sensory pleasures or ordinary emotions. Modern aesthetics argues that the encounter with art is a unique class of experience that cannot be compared to everyday life experiences. This assumption renders aesthetic pleasure sui generis, a truly unique and unparalleled encounter, leading to the "phantom problem" of the aesthetic mode or state.

In considering the faculties of the soul, will, feeling, and thought are recognized as the key parameters expressing individual capacities. Kant highlights that the faculty of knowledge, the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and the faculty of desire form the common grounds for evaluating aesthetic pleasure. Understanding the essence of judgment and reason is vital to these three faculties. The feeling of pleasure stands between the faculties of knowledge and desire, similar to how judgment is positioned between understanding and reason. It is in light of this arrangement that Kant continues to discuss the relevance of aesthetics to judgment.

Abstract concepts like the good, the beautiful, and the true represent domains where truth and thought can be interconnected, while the will and the good are closely linked. Attempting to equate beauty solely with feeling could be detrimental yet echoes of such comparisons persist in critical writings. Reviewers often use emotions and reference aesthetic emotions, prompting the need to identify a distinct mode of mental activity to which beauty belongs. This quest gave rise to the concept of the aesthetic mode.

The pursuit of truth falls under the intellectual or theoretical domain of the mind, while goodness is associated with the practical aspect. However, beauty does not fit into either category. Any activity that lacks an inquisitive or practical nature should be avoided. As a result, aesthetic or contemplative activities, defined by negative conditions alone, do not seek to fulfil desires. Experiences arising from contemplating works of art are often explained in practical terms, ensuring the success of the practice.

These experiences possess peculiar traits, such as intellectual interest and the development of desires within them. These traits, including detachment, impersonality, and serenity, are

intriguing and warrant thorough examination. One ongoing question is whether there is an exclusive aesthetic state or unique aesthetic characteristics within experiences. Additionally, there's a debate regarding the existence of art-related experiences that differ from other types of experiences.

While various types of experiences contribute to the value of art, the fundamental question remains: does a distinct type of experience, separate from ordinary ones, truly exist? Richards raises the query of whether the degree of experience obtained from recalling a mathematical calculation differs from that gained from eating cherries. These differences, according to Richards, are immeasurable, varying in degree and challenging to quantify. Nevertheless, many writers, including those predating Kant and his contemporaries, have acknowledged the existence of a peculiar and specific aesthetic experience.

There are two methods of determining the existence of a distinct aesthetic species of experience. One possibility is that aesthetic experiences involve a unique type of mental activity does not present in any other experiences. However, psychology does not support the idea of such a distinct entity. Alternatively, aesthetic experiences may lack a particular constituent found in ordinary experiences, but they manifest in a special form characterized by "disinterestedness, detachment, distance, impersonality, subjective universality," and other traits. According to Richards, this special form could be considered an experience, a condition, or an effect of communication, and it represents an essential aspect of the aesthetic experience, adding value to it.

Richards suggests examining the source of writing's aesthetic character and value. The aesthetic mode offers a different perspective on things, whether the resulting experiences are deemed valuable, indifferent, or not. He argues that no such unique mode exists; experiences of beauty and ugliness have nothing in common and do not share any underlying commonalities with countless other experiences. It would be challenging to demonstrate significant differences in the constituents of various experiences. For instance, looking at a picture, reading a poem, and listening to music can offer similar experiences to dressing up in the morning or visiting an art gallery. The way each individual experiences these activities may differ, but the activities themselves are not fundamentally distinct.

Richards' main point is that there is no peculiar aesthetic attitude. The task of appreciating a work of art and analysing its effect on those who do not accept it uncritically is undesirable. Treating art as a mysterious entity intimately connected to the aesthetic mood could have harmful consequences.

(Chapter 34)

In the chapter "The Two Uses of Language," Richards asserts the existence of "two entirely distinct uses of language." These uses, however, have been overlooked due to the neglect of language theory in academic studies. Understanding these differences is crucial for explaining the theory of poetry and comprehending discussions related to poetry. Moreover, the mental processes associated with language use also need to be examined.

In psychological terms, the words "knowledge," "belief," "assertion," "thought," and "understanding" are used ambiguously, leading to a lack of precise distinctions between them. Richards substitutes terms like causes, characters, and consequences when analyzing mental activity instead of using thought, feeling, and will. He identifies two types of causation for mental activity. The first type involves stimuli that directly affect the mind through the senses and combine with past stimuli. The second type of causation lies within the mind itself, influenced by its needs, receptiveness, and responsiveness to external stimuli. The resulting impulses are shaped by the interaction between these two groups, and it is essential to clearly differentiate between them.

To illustrate the importance of these factors, consider the example of hunger. A hungry person would eat almost anything edible, with little regard for the nature of the food. In contrast, someone who is satiated would be selective and choose foods that promote good health. When an impulse's character is determined by its stimulus, it can be termed "reference," representing thought or cognition. However, a person's mental state can distort this reference to some extent. It is only when impulses remain undistorted that individual needs can be satisfied.

The behaviour of individuals can be distinguished based on the stimuli they receive and how they respond to them. The reactions to stimuli are mostly independent of the reference point. Complex mechanisms continuously change because they are not influenced by external stimuli. The process of selecting stimuli can impact one's frame of reference. Most familiar objects are perceived accurately, and any errors do not deprive individuals of their benefits. However, it is impossible for anyone to perfectly recreate someone else's personal experiences.

Truth holds a higher priority than all other considerations. For instance, emotions like love should be rooted in knowledge; otherwise, they may become meaningless. Loving someone solely for their beauty is superficial, as beauty is an internal quality, whereas goodness is an abstract concept beyond measure. Both beauty and goodness are influenced by our impulses, which ultimately stem from desires. While these concepts

provide immediate emotional satisfaction, they cannot fully satisfy individual impulses, and they do not necessarily refer to something specific.

The term "thinking" encompasses mental operations driven entirely by internal factors and is considered beyond the control of stimuli. The definition of "thinking" may vary depending on the context in which it is used.

The scientific use of language relies on undistorted reference, unaffected by the biases of the recipient's mind. Science has progressed by distancing itself from religious influences. Various principles organize our impulses and understanding them reveals the inevitability of such organization. Some have proposed that science is driven by instincts, emotions, or desires, referring to it as "curiosity" – a distinct passion for knowledge that was previously unrecognized. All passions, instincts, human needs, and desires may influence science. In every human activity, an undistorted reference has been essential at least once. The key point is that science operates autonomously. Impulses developed in scientific exploration are shaped by other impulses to systematize and reach conclusions, facilitating further references.

Distinguishing science as an autonomous field from subordinating all other activities to it is crucial. Countless human endeavours necessitate accurate references to be fulfilled. Fiction, as a form of distorted reference, serves various purposes beyond mere pretense or make-believe. These fictional elements can be found in statements and other artistic expressions, serving diverse functions. For instance, fiction can be used for deception, but this characteristic isn't inherent to all poetry.

In language usage, we can differentiate between two primary purposes: the scientific use, wherein words are employed for reference, and the emotive use, wherein words evoke emotions and attitudes. The distinction is clear: words can be arranged to produce attitudes without a specific reference being made, akin to phrases in musical compositions. References are often secondary to the attitudes they evoke, and the ultimate goal is to elicit emotions that transcend the need for factual truth.

The mental processes involved in scientific and emotive language usage differ significantly. Scientific language seeks clarity and a single fixed meaning, avoiding ambiguity, and maintaining logical consistency. On the other hand, emotive language embraces multiple meanings and various connotations of words, prioritizing emotional connections over logical coherence, even if contradictions in references arise.

Richards proceeds to illustrate his propositions by exploring how truth functions in criticism. He delves into three crucial aspects: the scientific sense of truth and its connection to reference, truth as acceptability, and truth synonymous with sincerity.

In the scientific sense, a reference is deemed true if the entities it refers to are genuinely united in the manner it describes. Otherwise, it is considered false, but such meaning doesn't encompass artistic works. The emotional power attached to words cannot be universally deciphered in a general discussion. In criticism, truth is often understood as acceptability.

For instance, grasping the "truth" of Robinson Crusoe lies in its acceptability concerning the narrative's impact, rather than its adherence to factual details about the main character. The rejection of happy endings for works like Lear or Don Quixote is unacceptable to those who have deeply connected with the pieces. Here, truth is synonymous with necessity and doing justice. Additionally, truth can be associated with sincerity when discussing art. From a critic's perspective, it can be best defined negatively as the absence of any apparent attempt by the artist to manipulate the reader with effects that don't resonate with them. External circumstances become irrelevant when the artist's sincerity is at stake.

4.15.7. Summing up

Richards did not endorse the idea of reading literary works devoid of their historical context. Instead, he emphasized treating the text as a self-contained entity, and his example of practical criticism, rather than pedantically historical analysis, was embraced enthusiastically by the New Critics.

An example of this practical criticism can be seen in Robert Graves and Laura Riding's "A Survey of Modernist Poetry" (published in 1927, London) where they provided a detailed analysis of Shakespeare's 129th sonnet, "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame." They demonstrated how multiple meanings can be intertwined within a single line of verse. This inspired Empson, a student of Richards, to create "Seven Types of Ambiguity" (1930), a study exploring multiple meanings through advancing stages of difficulty.

William Empson (1906-1984) further defined ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions" and classified it into seven types representing different levels of complexity. In his subsequent work "Some Versions of Pastoral" (1935), Empson shifted his focus to the total meaning of entire literary works, revealing the influence of Marx and Freud in his close readings.

Empson's later essays on Shakespeare, Milton, and the novel considered the context

of the respective works. This stance deviated from one of the principles of New Criticism, as he believed a critic should possess insight into the author's mind and disapproved of attacking "The Fallacy of Intentionalism."

Richards's approach to analysing specific texts followed the organistic tradition of poetic theory from Aristotle through the Germans to Coleridge. However, his literary theory was distinctive, marked by a radical rejection of aesthetics, reducing art to a mental state, denying truth-value to poetry, and defending poetry as emotive language that orders the mind, offering equilibrium and mental well-being.

I. A. Richards stood out by combining an interest in reader response with scientific aims, though his view of the reader was relatively simple from a psychological perspective. Subsequent critics have delved into the role of the reader in more sophisticated terms, recognizing how cultural and historical contexts influence responses to texts.

While some aspects of Richards's theory lack clarity and sophistication, several elements have become integral to the Anglo-American critical tradition. These include his empiricism and humanism, and his insistence on organicist analysis, closely attending to every detail of a text and recognizing that literary works, like living organisms, function through the interaction of all their constituent parts.

In "Practical Criticism," he carefully distinguished between the sense, feeling, tone, and intention of a text. Moreover, in "Principles of Literary Criticism," his discussion of rhythm and meter demonstrated that sound and meaning, meter and sense cannot be separated. Richards emphasized that content cannot be discussed in isolation from expression.

Overall, Richards's contributions to English and American criticism, particularly his focus on language, its meaning, and its function in poetry, have firmly secured his position in the history of modern criticism, inspiring subsequent generations of critics such as Empson and Cleanth Brooks.

4.15.8. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What are the Principles of Literary Criticism according to I.A. Richards? Discuss.

2. Attempt a summary of the first and second chapter.
3. Comment on Richard's theory of value.
4. Present as evaluation of I. A. Richards as a critic.

Medium length Answer type Questions:

1. What is Basic English?
2. What does Richard's mention in the opening line of the chapter "The Two Uses of Language"?
3. The views of Coleridge and Richards.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Importance of value and communication, according to Richards.
2. What is the aim of *Principles of Literary Criticism*?
3. What influence of the theory of two uses of language had on other critics?

4.15.9. Suggested Readings

Richards, I.A. *Principles of Literary Criticism.* Allied Publishers, 1967.

Wellek, Réné. *Concepts of Criticism.* Yale University Press, 1973.

Wimsatt, William K. Jr., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. Oxford, 1957.

Unit-16 ❑ "The Language of Paradox" by Cleanth Brooks

Structure

4.16.1. Objectives

The primary aim of this Unit is to introduce learners to Cleanth Brooks and analyse his contribution to New Criticism. Studying his work offers several objectives:

- Understanding the practical application of New Criticism, that is, applying New Critical principles to specific literary works.
- Recognizing Brooks' impact on literary studies, particularly in shaping university literature programs and promoting "close reading".
- Consider the historical context of New Criticism and its relationship to other schools of literary theory.
- Analyse how New Critics like Brooks engage with specific literary works and evaluate the strengths and limitations of their interpretations.

4.16.2. Introduction to Cleanth Brooks

In the 1930s and 1940s, the emergence of a new way of thinking about literature and works of art helped form the school of criticism known as New Criticism. Until this time, the criticism of literary works depended on biographical material related to the author, philosophy or certain ideological tropes of the time. New Criticism opened up a completely distinct approach to literature and the arts and the value that resides within it, irrespective of philosophy or history of the time. The New Critics proposed a closer and more detailed study of the work or the text without involving biographical details. Cleanth Brooks was a prominent figure in this new critical trend that developed in the middle of the twentieth century. He worked extensively on the works of William Faulkner. He was one of the significant American New Critics along with Robert Penn Warren. He was completely focused on the poem or the work and not on the political overbearing of the text or the author.

Cleanth Brooks was a student of Cambridge along with the renowned scholar and critic I. A. Richards. I. A. Richards's work Principles of Literary Criticism laid the very foundations upon which New Criticism was founded. Naturally, Brooks was inspired by the concepts raised and formulated by Richards in his critical works. Brooks can be seen as the pioneer of the New Critical School of criticism as it developed in America and he was associated with the scholars like Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and John Crowe Ransom. His most prominent publication, The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (1947) can be seen as an important document of the methodology used by the New Critics while analysing poetry or texts. He collaborated with Robert Penn Warren for the work Understanding Poetry (1938) which is seen as an influential text for understanding the method of close reading as applied to poetry and its use of language.

4.16.3. New Criticism: An Overview

Since the nineteenth century, the term New Criticism has been used to depict the various movements or trends of thought pertaining to literary criticism. John Crowe Ransom coined the term in his 1941 book with the same title. The book examined and analysed the critical theories of I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, Yvor Winters and William Empson. He also published an influential essay titled "Criticism, Inc. ," in his book The World's Body (1938). Both of his books formulate the principles on which the New Critics based their works. It was an attempt to make the discipline of literary criticism "more scientific, or precise".

In approaching a text, the new Critics emphasized that literary language should be given priority rather than being moralistic or philosophical in terms of analysing works. In the words of Stephen Matterson, "The difference between literary and non-literary uses of language was a crucial starting-point for the development of other New Critical ideas." (Matterson 170). The major New critics focused on some aspect of literary language like Empson who focused on 'ambiguity', Allen Tate who focused on 'tension', Ransom focused on 'concrete universal' and Brooks focused on 'paradox'. New Critics were concerned with the autonomy of a particular literary text and that a literary text should essentially be different from a non-literary text.

The text has to be seen as an object in itself which is distinct from the world around it. The relationship between the words and things within the text is more important than the relationship between the text and the real world. The text, therefore, is the only space where criticism can enter; it is an enclosed space with little interaction with outside. The text can be seen as a system of language and should be treated as one. The fallacy of intention or affective fallacy threatens the boundaries of the text and therefore affects the critical analysis of the same. The emotional, philosophical or moral issues in relation to the world should be avoided at all costs. The closed and detailed textual analysis was a priority for the New Critics.

New Critics also helped in the reformation of the poetic cannon that was available to the people. They put their special focus on the metaphysical poets, especially the poem of John Donne. The complexity and special use of language necessary for writing poetry were highly preferred as objects of new critical analysis. In this context, writers like Robert Frost and Robert Lowell got preference from the New Critics because of their use of symbolism in poetry. New Criticism, therefore, developed a reading strategy which was most useful for certain kinds of poems like lyric poems and metaphysical poetry.

4.16.4. Text of The Language of Paradox

Few of us are prepared to accept the statement that the language of poetry is the language of paradox. Paradox is the language of sophistry, hard, bright, witty; it is hardly the language of the soul. We are willing to allow that paradox is a permissible weapon which a Chesterton may on occasion exploit. We may permit it in epigram, a special subvariety of poetry; and in satire, which though useful, we are hardly willing to allow to be poetry at all. Our prejudices force us to regard paradox as intellectual rather than emotional, clever rather than profound, rational rather than divinely irrational. Yet there is

a sense in which paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry. It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox. I overstate the case, to be sure; it is possible that the title of this chapter is itself to be treated as merely a paradox. But there are reasons for thinking that the overstatement which I propose may light up some elements in the nature of poetry which tend to be overlooked. The case of William Wordsworth, for instance, is instructive on this point. His poetry would not appear to promise many examples of the language of paradox. He usually prefers the direct attack. He insists on simplicity; he distrusts whatever seems sophistical. And yet the typical Wordsworth poem is based upon a paradoxical situation. Consider his celebrated

"It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,

The holy time is quiet as a Nun Breathless with adoration. . . ."

The poet is filled with worship, but the girl who walks beside him is not worshiping. The implication is that she should respond to the holy time, and become like the evening itself, nun-like; but she seems less worshipful than inanimate nature itself. Yet,

"Yet If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,

Thy nature is not therefore less divine:

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;

And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,

God being with thee when we know it not."

The underlying paradox (of which the enthusiastic reader may well be unconscious) is nevertheless thoroughly necessary, even for that reader. Why does the innocent girl worship more deeply than the self Because she is filled with an unconscious sympathy for all of nature, not merely the grandiose and solemn. One remembers the lines from Wordsworth's friend, Coleridge:

"He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things both great and small.

Her unconscious sympathy is the unconscious worship. She is in communion with nature "all the year," and her devotion is continual whereas that of the poet is sporadic and momentary. But we have not done with the paradox yet. It not only underlies the poem, but something of the paradox informs the poem, though, since this is Wordsworth, rather timidly. The comparison of the evening to the nun actually has more than one dimension.

The calm of the evening obviously means "worship" even to the dull-witted and insensitive. It corresponds to the trappings of the nun, visible to everyone. Thus, it suggests not merely holiness, but, in the total poem, even a hint of Pharisaical holiness, with which the girl's careless innocence, itself a symbol of her continual secret worship, stands in contrast. Or consider Wordsworth's sonnet, "Composed upon West· minster Bridge." I believe that most readers will agree that it is one of Wordsworth's most successful poems; yet most students have the greatest difficulty in accounting for its goodness. The attempt to account for it on the grounds of nobility of sentiment soon breaks down. On this level, the poem merely says: that the city in the morning light presents a picture which is majestic and touching to all but the most dull of soul; but the poem says very little more about the sight: the city is beautiful in the morning light and it is awfully still. The attempt to make a case for the poem in terms of the brilliance of its images also quickly breaks down: the student searches for graphic details in vain; there are next to no realistic touches. In fact, the poet simply huddles the details together:

silent, bare,·

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie

Open unto the fields ....

We get a blurred impression-points of roofs and pinnacles along the skyline, all twinkling in the morning light. More than that, the sonnet as a whole contains some very flat writing and some well-worn comparisons. The reader may ask: Where, then, does the poem get its power? It gets it, it seems to me, from the paradoxical situation out of which the poem arises. The speaker is honestly surprised, and he manages to get some sense of awed surprise into the poem. It is odd to the poet that the city should be able to "wear the beauty of the morning" at all. Mount Snowden, Skiddaw, Mont Blanc-these wear it by natural right, but surely no grimy, feverish London. This is the point of the almost shocked exclamation:

"Never did sun more beautifully steep

In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill …"

The "smokeless air" reveals a city which the poet did not know existed: man-made London is a part of nature too, is lighted by the sun of nature, and lighted to as beautiful effect.

"The river glideth at his own sweet will . . ."

A river is the most "natural" thing that one can imagine; it has the elasticity, the curved

line of nature itself. The poet had never been able to regard this one as a real river-now, uncluttered by barges, the river reveals itself as a natural thing, not at all disciplined into a rigid and mechanical pattern: it is like the daffodils, or the mountain brooks, artless, and whimsical, and "natural" as they. The poem closes, you will remember, as follows:

"Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;

And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

The city, in the poet's insight of the morning, has earned its right to be considered organic, not merely mechanical. That is why the stale metaphor of the sleeping houses is strangely renewed. The most exciting thing that the poet can say about the houses is that they are asleep. He has been in the habit of counting them dead-as just mechanical and inanimate; to say they are "asleep" is to say that they are alive, that they participate in the life of nature. In the same way, the tired old metaphor which sees a great city as a pulsating heart of empire becomes revivified. It is only when the poet sees the city under the semblance of death that he can see it as actually alive-quick with the only life which he can accept, the organic life of "nature." It is not my intention to exaggerate Wordsworth's own consciousness of the paradox involved. In this poem, he prefers, at is usual with him, the frontal attack. But the situation is paradoxical here as in so many of his poems. In his preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth stated that his general purpose was "to choose incidents and situations from common life" but so to treat them that "ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect." Coleridge was to state the purpose for him later, in terms which make even more evident Wordsworth's exploitation of the paradoxical: "Mr. Wordsworth was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us ... " Wordsworth, in short, was consciously attempting to show his audience that the common was really uncommon, the prosaic was really poetic.

Coleridge's terms, "the charm of novelty to things of every day," "awakening the mind," suggest the Romantic preoccupation with wonder-the surprise, the revelation which puts the tarnished familiar world in a new light. This may well be the raison d' itre of most Romantic paradoxes; and yet the neo-classic poets use paradox for much the same reason. Consider Pope's lines from "The Essay on Man" :

In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;

Bom but to die, and reas'ning but to err;

A like in ignorance, his Reason such,

Whether he thinks too little, or too much ..

Created half to rise, and half to fall;

Great Lord of all things, yet a Prey to all;

Sole Judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd;

The Glory, Jest, and Riddle of the world!

Here, it is true, the paradoxes insist on the irony, rather than the wonder. But Pope too might have claimed that he was treating the things of everyday, man himself, and awakening his mind so that he would view himself in a new and blinding light. Thus, there is a certain awed wonder in Pope just as there is a certain trace of irony implicit in the Wordsworth sonnets. There is, of course, no reason why they should not occur together, and they do. Wonder and irony merge in many of the lyrics of Blake; they merge in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. The variations in emphasis are numerous. Gray's "Elegy" uses a typical Wordsworth "situation" with the rural scene and with peasants contemplated in the light of their "betters." But in the "Elegy" the balance is heavily tilted in the direction of irony, the revelation an ironic rather than a startling one:

"Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath

Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust

Or Flatt'ry sooth the dull cold ear of Death"

But I am not here interested in enumerating the possible variations; I am interested rather in our seeing that the paradoxes spring from the very nature of the poet's language: it is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations. And I do not mean that the connotations are important as supplying some sort of frill or trimming, something external to the real matter in hand. I mean that the poet does not use a notation at all-as the scientist may properly be said to do so. The poet, within limits, has to make up his language as he goes. T. S. Eliot has commented upon "that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations," which occurs in poetry. It is perpetual; it cannot be kept out of the poem; it can only be directed and controlled. The tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotations; the poet 's tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other, and thus violating their dictionary meanings. To take a very simple example, consider the adjectives in the first lines of Wordsworth's evening sonnet:

"beauteous, calm,

Tee, holy, quiet, breathless."

The juxtapositions are hardly startling; and yet notice this: the evening is like a nun breathless with adoration. The adjective "breathless" suggests tremendous excitement; and yet the evening is not only quiet but calm. There is no final contradiction, to be sure: it is that kind of calm and that kind of excitement, and the two states may well occur together. But the poet has no one term. Even if he had a polysyllabic technical term, the term would not provide the solution for his problem. He must work by contradiction and qualification. We may approach the problem in this way: the poet has to work by analogies. All of the subtler states of emotion, as I. A. Richards has pointed out, necessarily demand metaphor for their expression. The poet must work by analogies, but the metaphors do not lie in the same plane or fit neatly edge to edge. There is a continual tilting of the planes; necessary overlappings, discrepancies, and contradictions. Even the most direct and simple poet is forced into paradoxes far more often than we think if we are sufficiently alive to what he is doing. But in dilating on the difficulties of the poet's task, I do not want to leave the impression that it is a task which necessarily defeats him, or even that with his method he may not win to a fine precision. To use Shakespeare's figure, "he can with assays of bias, /By indirections find directions out". Shakespeare had in mind the game of lawn bowls in which the bowl is distorted, a distortion which allows the skilful player to bowl a curve. To elaborate the figure, science makes use of the perfect sphere and its attack can be direct. The method of art can, I believe, never be direct-is always indirect. But that does not mean that the master of the game cannot place the bowl where he wants it. The serious difficulties will only occur when he confuses his game with that of science and mistakes the nature of his appropriate instrument. Mr. Stuart Chase a few years ago, with a touching naivete, urged us to take the distortion out of the bowl-to treat language like notation. I have said that even the apparently simple and straightforward poet is forced into paradoxes by the nature of his instrument. Seeing this, we should not be surprised to find poets who consciously employ it to gain a compression and precision otherwise unobtainable. Such a method, like any other, carries with it its own perils. But the dangers are not overpowering; the poem is not predetermined to a shallow and glittering sophistry. The method is an extension of the normal language of poetry, not a perversion of it. I should like to refer the reader to a concrete case. Donne's "Canonization" ought to provide a sufficiently extreme instance. The basic metaphor which underlies the poem (and which is reflected in the title) involves a son of paradox. For the poet daringly treats profane love as if it were divine love. The canonization is not that of a pair of holy anchorites who have renounced the world and the flesh. The hermitage of each is the other's body; but they do

renounce the world, and so their title to sainthood is cunningly argued. The poem then is a parody of Christian sainthood; but it is an intensely serious parody of a son that modern man, habituated as he is to an easy yes or no, can hardly understand. He refuses to accept the paradox as a serious rhetorical device; and since he is able to accept it only as a cheap trick, he is forced into this dilemma. Either: Donne does not take love seriously; here he is merely sharpening his wit as a sort of mechanical exercise. Or: Donne does not take sainthood seriously; here he is merely indulging in a cynical and bawdy parody. Neither account is true; a reading of the poem will show that Donne takes both love and religion seriously; it will show, further, that the paradox is here his inevitable instrument. But to see this plainly will require a closer reading than most of us give to poetry. The poem opens dramatically on a note of exasperation. The "you" whom the speaker addresses is not identified. We can imagine that it is a person, perhaps a friend, who is objecting to the speaker's love affair. At any rate, the person represents the practical world which regards love as a silly affectation. To use the metaphor on which the poem is built, the friend represents the secular world which the lovers have renounced. Donne begins to suggest this metaphor in the first stanza by the contemptuous alternatives which he suggests to the friend:

"... chide my palsy, or my gout,

My five gray haires, or ruin'd fortune flout ...."

The implications are: (1) All right, consider my love as an infirmity, as a disease, if you will, but confine yourself to my other infirmities, my palsy, my approaching old age, my ruined fortune. You stand a better chance of curing those; in chiding me for this one, you are simply wasting your time as well as mine. (1) Why don't you pay attention to your own welfare-go on and get wealth and honor for yourself. What should you care if I do give these up in pursuing my love. The two main categories of secular success are neatly, and contemptuously epitomized in the line

Or the Kings reall, or his stamped face

Cultivate the count and gaze at the king's face there,

or, if you prefer, get into business and look at his face stamped on coins.

But let me alone.

This conflict between the "real" world and the lover absorbed in the world of love runs through the poem; it dominates the second stanza in which the torments of love, vivid to the lover, affect the real world not at all –

"What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd"

It is touched on in the fourth stanza in the contrast between the word "Chronicle" which suggests secular history with its pomp and magnificence, the history of kings and princes, and the word "sonnets" with its suggestions of trivial and precious intricacy. The conflict appears again in the last stanza, only to be resolved when the unworldly lovers, love's saints who have given up the world, paradoxically achieve a more intense world. But here the paradox is still contained in, and supported by, the dominant metaphor: so does the holy anchorite win a better world by giving up this one. But before going on to discuss this development of the theme, it is important to see what else the second stanza does. For it is in this second stanza and the third, that the poet shifts the tone of the poem, modulating from the note of irritation with which the poem opens into the quite different tone with which it closes. Donne accomplishes the modulation of tone by what may be called an analysis of love-metaphor. Here, as in many of his poems, he shows that he is thoroughly self-conscious about what he is doing. This second stanza, he fills with the conventionalized figures of the Petrarchan tradition: the wind of lovers' sighs, the floods of lovers' tears, etc.- extravagant figures with which the contemptuous secular friend might be expected to tease the lover. The implication is that the poet himself recognizes the absurdity of the Petrarchan love metaphors. But what of it? The very absurdity of the jargon which lovers are expected to talk makes for his argument: their love, however absurd it may appear to the world, does no harm to the world. The practical friend need have no fears: there will still be wars to fight and lawsuits to argue. The opening of the third stanza suggests that this vein of irony is to be maintained. The poet points out to his friend the infinite fund of such absurdities which can be applied to lovers:

"Call her one, mee another flye,

We'are Tapers too, and at our own cost die …"

For that matter, the lovers can conjure up for themselves plenty of such fantastic comparisons: they know what the world thinks of them. But these figures of the third stanza are no longer the threadbare Petrarchan conventionalities; they have sharpness and bite. The last one, the likening of the lovers to the phoenix, is fully serious, and with it, the tone has shifted from ironic banter into a defiant but controlled tenderness. The effect of the poet's implied awareness of the lovers' apparent madness is to cleanse and revivify metaphor; to indicate the sense in which the poet accepts it, and thus to prepare w for accepting seriously the fine and seriously intended metaphors which dominate the last two stanzas of the poem. The opening line of the fourth stanza,

"We can dye by it, if not live by love,…"

achieves an effect of tenderness and deliberate resolution. The lovers are ready to die to the world; they are committed; they are not callow but confident. (The basic metaphor of the saint, one notices, is being carried on; the lovers in their renunciation of the world, have something of the confident resolution of the saint. By the bye, the word "legend"- ... if unfit for tombes and hearse /Our legend be/… in Donne's time meant "the life of a saint.")

The lovers are willing to forego the ponderous and stately chronicle and to accept the trifling and insubstantial "sonnet" instead; but then if the urn be well wrought, it provides a finer memorial for one's ashes than does the pompous and grotesque monument. With the finely contemptuous, yet quiet phrase, "halfe-acre tombes," the world which the lovers reject expands into something gross and vulgar. But the figure works further; the pretty sonnets will not merely hold their ashes as a decent earthly memorial. Their legend, their story, will gain them canonization; and approved as love's saints, other lovers will invoke them. In this last stanza, the theme receives a final complication. The lovers in rejecting life actually win to the most intense life. This paradox has been hinted at earlier in the phoenix metaphor. Here it receives a powerful dramatization. The Iovers in becoming hermits, find that they have not lost the world, but have gained the world in each other, now a more intense, more meaningful world. Donne is not content to treat the lovers' discovery as something which comes to them passively, but rather as something which they actively achieve.

They are like the saint, God's athlete:

Who did the whole wor'lds soule contract, and drove

Into the glasses of you,.

The image is that of a violent squeezing as of a powerful hand. And what do the lovers "drive" into each other's eyes? The "Countries, Townes," and "Courtes," which they renounced in the lint stanza of the poem. The unworldly love thus become the most "worldly" of all. The tone with which the poem closes is one of triumphant achievement, but the tone is a development contributed to by various earlier elements. One of the more important elements which works toward our acceptance of the final paradox is the figure of the phoenix, which will bear a little further analysis. The comparison of the lovers to the phoenix is very skillfully related to the two earlier comparisons, that in which the lovers are like burning tapers, and that in which they are like the eagle and the dove. The phoenix comparison gathers up both: the phoenix is a bird, and like the tapers, it burns. We have a .elected series of items: the phoenix figure seems to come in a natural stream of association. "Call us what you will," the lover says. and rattles off in his desperation the first comparisons that occur to him. The comparison to the phoenix seems thus merely

another outlandish one, the most outrageous of all. But it is this most fantastic one, stumbled over apparently in his haste, that the poet goes on to develop. It really describes the lovers best and justifies their renunciation. For the phoenix is not two but one, "we two being one, are it"; and it burns, not like the taper at its own cost, but to live again. Its death is life: "Wee dye and rise the same ... ,"

The poet literally justifies the fantastic assertion. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to "die" means to experience the consummation of the act of love. The lovers after the act are the same. Their love is not exhausted in mere lust. This is their title to canonization. Their love is like the phoenix. I hope that I do not seem to juggle the meaning of die. The meaning that I have cited can be abundantly justified in the literature of the period; Shakespeare uses "die" in this sense; so does Dryden. Moreover, I do not think that I give it undue emphasis. The word is in a crucial position. On it is pivoted the transition to the next stanza,

"Wee can dye by it, if not live by love,

And if unfit for tombes ..."

Most important of all, the sexual submeaning of "die" does not contradict the other meanings: the poet is saying: "Our death is really a more intense life"; "We can afford to trade life (the world) for death (love), for that death is the consummation of life"; "After all, one does not expect to live by love, one expects, and wants, to die by it." But in the total passage he is also saying: "Because our love is not mundane, we can give up the world"; "Because our love is not merely lust, we can give up the other lusts, the lust for wealth and power"; "because," and this is said with an inflection of irony as by one who knows the world too well, "because our love can outlast its consummation, we are a minor miracle, we are love's saints." This passage with its ironical tenderness and its realism feeds and supports the brilliant paradox with which the poem closes. There is one more factor in developing and sustaining the final effect. The poem is an instance of the doctrine which it asserts; it is both the assertion and the realization of the assertion. The poet has actually before our eyes built within the song the "pretty room" with which he says the lovers can be content. The poem itself is the well-wrought urn which can hold the lovers' ashes and which will not suffer in comparison with the prince's "halfe-acre tomb." And how necessary are the paradoxes? Donne might have said directly, "Love in a cottage is enough." "The Canonization" contains this admirable thesis, but it contains a great deal more. He might have been as forthright as a later lyricist who wrote,

"We'll build a sweet little nest,

Somewhere out in the West,

And let the rest of the world go by."

He might even have imitated that more metaphysical lyric, which maintains, "You're the cream in my coffee." "The Canonization" touches on all these observations, but it goes beyond them, not merely in dignity, but in precision. I submit that the only way by which the poet could say what "The Canonization" says is by paradox. More direct methods may be tempting, but all of them enfeeble and distort what is to be said. This statement may seem less surprising when we reflect on how many of the important things which the poet has to say have to be said by means of paradox: most of the language of lovers is such-"The Canonization" is a good example; so is most of the language of religion-"He who would save his life, must love it;" "The last shall be first." Indeed, almost any insight important enough to warrant a great poem apparently has to be stated in such terms. Deprived of the character of paradox with its twin concomitants of irony and wonder, the matter of Donne's poem unravels into "facts," biological, sociological, and economic. What happens to Donne's lovers if we consider them "scientifically," without benefit of the supernaturalism which the poet confers upon them? Well, what happens to Shakespeare's lovers, for Shakespeare uses the basic metaphor of "The Canonization" in his Romeo and Juliet? In their first conversation, the lovers play with the analogy between the lover and the pilgrim to the Holy Land. Juliet says:

"For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

Considered scientifically, the lovers become Mr. Aldous Huxley's animals, "quietly sweating, palm to palm." For us today, Donne's imagination seems obsessed with the problem of unity; the sense in which the lovers become one. The sense in which the soul is united with God. Frequently, as we have seen, one type of union becomes a metaphor for the other. It may not be too far-fetched to see both as instances of, and metaphors for, the union which the creative imagination itself effects. For that fusion is not logical; it apparently violates science and common sense; it welds together the discordant and the contradictory. Coleridge has of course given us the classic description of its nature and power. It "reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order ... " It is a great and illuminating statement, but is a series of paradoxes. Apparently Coleridge could describe the effect of the imagination in no other way. Shakespeare, in one of his poems,

has given a description that oddly parallels that of Coleridge.

"Reason in it selfe confounded,

Saw Division grow together,

To themselves yet either neither,

Simple were so well compounded."

I do not know what his "The Phoenix and the Turtle" celebrates. Perhaps it was written to honor the marriage of Sir John Salisbury and Ursula Stanley; or perhaps the Phoenix is Lucy, Countess of Bedford; or perhaps the poem is merely an essay on Platonic love. But the scholars themselves are so uncertain, that I think we will do little violence to established habits of thinking, if we boldly pre-empt the poem for our own purposes. Certainly the poem is an instance of that magic power which Coleridge sought to describe. I propose that we take it for a moment as a poem about that power;

"So they loved as love in twaine,

Had the essence but in one,

Two distincts, Division none,

Number there in love was slaine.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder;

Distance and no space was seene,

Twixt this Turtle and his Queene;

But in them it were a wonder…

Propertie was thus appalled,

That the selfe was not the same;

Single Natures double name,

Neither two nor one was called".

Precisely! The nature is single, one, unified. But the name is double, and today with our multiplication of sciences, it is multiple. If the poet is to be true to his poetry, he must call it neither two nor one: the paradox is his only solution. The difficulty has intensified since Shakespeare's day: the timid poet, when confronted with the problem of "Single Natures double name," has too often funked it. A history of poetry from Dryden's time to our own might bear as its subtitle "The Half-Hearted Phoenix." In Shakespeare's poem, Reason is

"in it selfe confounded" at the union of the Phoenix and the Turtle; but it recovers to admit its own bankruptcy:

"Love hath Reason, Reason none,

If what parts, can so remaine .... "

and it is Reason which goes on to utter the beautiful threnos with which the poem concludes:

"Beautie, Truth, and Raritie,

Grace in all simplicitie,

Here enclosde, in cinders lie.

Death is now the Phoenix nest,

And the Turtles loyall brest,

To eternitie doth rest ...

Truth may seeme, but cannot be,

Beautie bragge,

but tis not she,

Truth and Beautie buried be.

To this urne let those repaire,

That are either true or faire,

For these dead Birds, sigh a prayer.

Having pre-empted the poem for our own purposes, it may not be too outrageous to go on to make one further observation. The urn to which we are summoned, the urn which holds the ashes of the phoenix, is like the well-wrought urn of Donne's "Canonization" which holds the phoenix-lovers' ashes: it is the poem itself. One is reminded of still another urn, Keats's Grecian urn, which contained for Keats, Truth and Beauty, as Shakespeare's urn encloses "Beautie, Truth, and Raritie." But there is a sense in which all such well-wrought urns contain the ashes of a phoenix. The urns are not meant for memorial purposes only, though that often seems to be their chief significance to the professors of literature. The phoenix rises from its ashes; or ought to rise; but it will not arise for all our mere sifting and measuring the ashes, or testing them for their chemical content. We must be prepared to accept the paradox of the imagination itself; else "Beautie, Truth, and Raritie" remain

enclosed in their cinders and we shall end with essential cinders, for all our pains.

4.16.5. Concepts in the Text

In this essay, Brooks focuses on the essential element of poetry which is a paradox. It is always difficult for us to accept the fact that paradox is the important element in poetry because we normally associate paradox with epigrams or satires. We are of the opinion that paradox is an intellectual, clever and rational trope which rarely has any emotions or irrationality. It is for this reason that we associate it with epigrams or satires, mainly. But, according to Brooks, it is the most appropriate element for poetry and its composition. the poet's utterance only finds full importance by means of a paradox.

He refers to the Wordsworth's poem "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free" to depict the use of paradox in the poem. Paradox of the poem is shown in the fact that thought the girl is shown as not worshipping in the beginning, she shows more worship than the poet because of her empathy for all things that emerge from Nature, all the time, unlike the poet. Her secret worship of Nature is shown in the way that the calm evening is compared with the nun who is always secretive and is never outrageously expressing her feelings on the outside. Though Wordsworth uses simple language and prefers non-intellectual poetry, he deftly uses the paradox of the worship of the girl, thus, pointing towards the importance of the paradox in a poem. The next poem that Brooks refers to is the poem "Composed upon Westminster Bridge". There are extremely simple and blurred images in the beginning. However, the poem derives its power from the paradox it emerged from. London, as a city, is shown as a man-made marvel. It should be treated as an artificial creation, however, the poet treats it as something which is made of nature as it is made by man, who is, in turn, made of nature. Houses and buildings are given the natural and human qualities of 'sleeping' and 'resting' in order to show that these are natural. Though Wordsworth chose simple things for his poems, their representations should be in an unusual manner. There should be an objectification of the charm in everyday things and also dealing with the loveliness of the world around us. This balance can only be created and portrayed by paradox alone.

Brooks also talked about the differential aspect of the treatment of paradox by the Romantics and the Neo-Classical poets. Paradoxes insist on irony rather than on wonder for the Neoclassical poets. However, in Pope's Essay on Man, we observe that he is also dealing with everyday things but is treating them in a new way, awakening his mind to view things in an unusual way. Brooks witnesses a sense of 'awed wonder' in Pope's work.

Similarly, wonder and irony merge in Blake as well as in Coleridge. Even Gray's Elegy is pointed out to show that its premise is primarily ironic. It is in these situations that we understand that a poet's language is a mixture of various analogies and paradoxes. The connotations and denotations each play a great part. The poet makes up his language as he writes and therefore, he is continually creating newer paradoxes to deal with the subject. Unlike a scientist who is always trying to freeze meanings and definitions, the poet keeps on creating new meanings for words as he moves further. He takes the example of Wordsworth's evening sonnet in which the words breathless and calm are used in the same sentence. Here, breathless stands for excitement and calm stands for peace. Both of these elements exist together, as in, there is a particular peace in excitement for the thing one loves. This is the paradox that helps the poem to attain a bigger meaning.

Even a simple poet has to naturally deal with paradoxes. Shakespeare in most of his expressions, does not directly point at the paradox but they are there, lurking behind. Brooks is of the opinion that the very purpose of art is to be indirect. Paradox enables the poet to indirectly point towards the true meanings that he wants to convey through his composition. Language can never be taken as notation alone. It has to be taken as something that tries to convey a hidden meaning. The poem is not supposed to be a superficial use of grand expressions. The method of poetry is an extension of the normal language and is not supposed to be a perversion of it, according to Brooks.

After this, Brooks attempts a close reading of the poem The Canonization by John Donne to depict his use of paradox throughout the poem. Donne uses a religious term (canonization) to describe physical love as something which is saintly. By rejecting the world that is physical and material, entering into each other's worlds by the process of union, and treating each other as their own hermitages, the lovers are true contenders for canonization. It combines the impacts of both love and religion within the same word, therefore forwarding the idea of the paradox used in the poem. He also refers to the extensive use of the term 'die' in the poem which is used not only to denote physical death but to connote the idea of consummation of love. There is a reference to the duality and singularity of spiritual love or love which is endless and immortal. The comparison of lovers to tapers which die or consume themselves in their own fire or passion of love is another paradox. These various meanings cannot be conveyed if paradoxes are not used by the poet. Brooks also refers to Shakespeare's use of the idea of canonization in his play Romeo and Juliet.

Brooks concludes by using the idea of imagination as put forward by S.T Coleridge in his critical works. According to Coleridge, it "reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement

of opposite or discordant qualities: of saneness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order .... ". These very ideas are ideas which have embedded within themselves the paradoxes of imagination. Every word is a paradox in Coleridge's definition. Since poetry is primarily made up of imagination and fancy, there can be no better device that can convey its meaning than the paradox. Paradox is the use of simple language in a manner which is indirect in order to convey deeper meanings. This is integral to the composition of good poetry of all kinds.

4.16.6. Summing Up

Cleanth Brooks makes an argument which says that the use of paradox is essential to poetry. Since referential language is always abstract, the poet has to create meanings and language as he writes them, so that meanings are conveyed according to his wish. Words frequently change their meanings as and when placed in reference to other words. It is for this reason that paradox should be taken as the primary agent of poetry. Through paradox, contrasting meanings can be placed together and deeper meaning can be easily connoted without the use of direct expressions. Imagination, irony and wonder accompany the us of paradox in poems at all times. The essay can be seen as one of the most significant contributions to the idea of paradox as a figurative language integral to poetry. It also helps in promoting the ideas put forward by the New Critics. The close reading of words and expressions is all that matters and any external influences should not be given much importance. Brooks does the same with the analysis of the various poems to depict the way in which paradoxes are used in poems.

4.16.7. Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions

1. How is the essay "Language of Paradox" a major expression of the tenets of the New Critical mode of thought?
2. How would you define Paradox with reference to Cleanth Brooks's essay?
3. Discuss the idea that the language of poetry is primarily the language of paradox.
4. What are the variations in poetic language used by poets and how do they differ from scientists?

5. What is the difference between the Neoclassical poet and the Romantic poet in terms of the use of paradoxes?
6. Discuss the various points raised by Brooks in analysing the poem "The Canonization" by John Donne, in terms of the use of paradox.
7. How does Brooks look at Wordsworth's use of paradox in his various poems?
8. Give a brief overview of the ideas put forward by the critic in the essay *The Language of Paradox*.

4.16.8. Suggested Readings

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