# LITERARY CRITICISM

## M.A. ENGLISH, II YEAR - Paper - I

***Lesson Writers***


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LITERARY CRITICISM

**PAPER - I**

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# FOREWORD

Since its establishment in 1976, Acharya Nagarjuna University has been forging ahead in the path of progress and dynamism, offering a variety of courses and research contributions. I am extremely happy that by gaining a B++ (80-85) grade from the NAAC in the year 2003, the University has achieved recognition as one of the front rank universities in the country. At present Acharya Nagarjuna University is offering educational opportunities at the UG, PG levels apart from research degrees to students from about 300 affiliated colleges spread over the three districts of Guntur, Krishna and Prakasam.

The University has also started the Centre for Distance Education with the aim to bring higher education within reach of all. The Centre will be a great help to those who cannot join in colleges, those who cannot afford the exorbitant fees as regular students, and even housewives desirous of pursuing higher studies. With the goal of bringing education to the doorstep of all such people, Acharya Nagarjuna University has started offering B.A., and B.Com courses at the Degree level and M.A., M.Com., M.Sc., M.B.A. and L.L.M. courses at the PG level from the academic year 2003-2004 onwards.

To facilitate easier understanding by students studying through the distance mode, these self-instruction materials have been prepared by eminent and experienced teachers. The lessons have been drafted with great care and expertise within the stipulated time by these teachers. Constructive ideas and scholarly suggestions are welcome from students and teachers involved respectively. Such ideas will be incorporated for the greater efficacy of this distance mode of education. For clarification of doubts and feedback, weekly classes and contact classes will be arranged at the UG and PG levels respectively.

It is my aim that students getting higher education through the Centre for Distance Education should improve their qualification, have better employment opportunities and in turn facilitate the country's progress. It is my fond desire that in the years to come, the Centre for Distance Education will grow from strength to strength in the form of new courses and by catering to larger number of people. My congratulations to all the Directors, Academic Co-ordinators, Editors and Lesson - writers of the Centre who have helped in these endeavours.

**Prof. K. Vyyanna Rao**
**Vice Chancellor**
Acharya Nagarjuna University

## M.A. English 2nd Year

# PAPER I : LITERARY CRITICISM

## SYLLABUS

**TEXT BOOKS:**

1. Marjorie Boulton : **Anatomy of Prose**
2. Marjorie Boulton : **Anatomy of Poetry**
3. Ramaswamy and Sethuraman, ed : **The English Critical Tradition I & II Vols.**
4. Sethurman, ed : **Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology**

**REFERENCE:**

4. Daiches: **Critical Approaches to Literature**
5. Cleanth Brooks and Warren: **Literary Criticism, A Short History.**

**Unit-1**

Critical comment on a prose passage or poem in response to five short questions (Texts 1 &2).

**Unit-2**

Essay question Aristotle: **Poetics, Johnson: from the Life of Milton,** Coleridge; **Biographia Literaria** Chapters XII and XIV (Text-3)

**Unit-3**

Essay questions on Arnold: **The Study of Poetry,** Eliot:**Tradition and Individual Talent, and The Metaphysical Poets**; Richards: **Four kinds of Meaning** (Text-3)

**Unit-4**

Essay questions on Brooks: *Irony as a Principle of Structure*; Wimsatt and Beardsley: **The Intentional Fallacy** : Empson: **The Seventh Type of Ambiguity** (Text-3)

**Unit-5**

Essay questions on H.G. Widdowson: *Stylistiscs*; Gerald Genett *Structuralism and Literary Criticism*; Stanely Fish: **Is There a Text in the Class?**; Jacques Derrida *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*; Elaine Showalter: **Towards of Feminist Poetics** (Text-4).

# M.A. English (Final) DEGREE EXAMINATION, DECEMBER 2005

## Paper - I : LITERARY CRITICISM

**Time : Three hours** **Maximum : 100 marks**

Answer ONE question from Unit I and TWO questions each from Units II and III.

All questions carry equal marks.

### UNIT - I

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the following poem:

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection,

My feet are locked upon the rough bask
It took the whole of creation
To produce my foot, my each feather
Now I hold creation in my foot.

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly
I kill where I please because it is all mine
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living
No arguments asset my right:

The sun is behind me
Nothing has changed since I began
My eye has permitted no change
I am going to keep things like this.

(Ted Hughes: "Hawk Roosting")

2. How does Aristotle define Tragedy? Explain the constituents of Tragedy.
3. Discuss the achievement of Dr. Johnson as a Neoclassical critic with reference to his "Life of Milton".
4. How does Coleridge distinguish between poetry and poem? To what extent is the distinction valid today?
5. Discuss Arnold as a classicist with reference to his "The study of poetry".

## UNIT II

6. Critically examine the value of Eliot's " theory of impersonality.
7. Do you consider Eliot's "The Metaphysical Poetry" a revaluation of Dr. Johnson's definition which held sway for a long time? Discuss.
8. Critically elucidate the four kinds of meaning enunciated by I.A. Richards and their impor- tance in making out the meaning in different contexts.
9. Critically assess the significance of Brooks as a New Critic, in the light of his "Irony as a princple of structure".
10. Examine the value of Wimmsatt and Beardsteg's "Intentional Fallacy" as a testament of new criticism.
11. Discuss the importance of Empson's seventh type of ambiguity.
12. Critically examine the value of new criticism as a method of explication and close scrutiny of the texts.

## UNIT III

13. Discuss the practical value of stylistic analysis to the teaching of language and literature in the light of Widdowson's "Stylistics".
14. What is structuralism? Is it useful as a method of literary criticism? Discuss.
15. Write a note on Reader-Response criticism in the light of Stanley Fish's "Is There a Text in This Class".
16. Critically elucidate the post-structuralist approach in the light of Derrida's "Structure, sign and play in the discourses of Human Sciences".
17. "One thing is certain. Feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay, and we must make it a permanent home". Discuss in the light of Elaine Showatter's "Towards Feminist Poetics".
18. Write short notes on FOUR of the following:
    (a) Hamartia
    (b) Neo-classical school
    (c) Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction
    (d) Poetry as a criticism of life
    (e) Dissociation of sensibility
    (f) Phallocentrism
    (g) Surface Vs. Deep structures
    (h) Derrida's "difference" and "Trace".

M.A. (Final) Degree Examination, May 2006

English

# PAPER I : LITERARY CRITICISM

Time : Three hours Maximum : 100 marks

Answer ONE question from Unit I and Two questions each from Unit II and Unit III.

All questions carry equal marks.

## UNIT - I

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the following passage :

Coldly, sadly descends
The autumn evening. The field
Strewn with its dank yeallow drifts
Of withered leaves, and the elms,
Fade into dimness apace,
Silent, - hardly a shout
From a few boys late at their play!
The lights come out in the street,
In the school-room windows, - but cold,
Solemn, unlighted, austere,
Through the gathering darkness, arise
The chapel-walls, in whose bound
Thou, my father! art laid.

There thou dost lie, in the gloom
Of the autumn evening, But ah,
That word, *gloom*, to my
Brings thee back, in the light
Of thy radiant vigour, again;
In the gloom of November we passed
Days not dark at thy side;
Seasons impaired not the ray
Of thy buoyant cheerfulness clear.
Such thou wast! and I stand
In the autumn evening, and think
Of bygone autumns with thee.

2. Write an essay on Aristotle's views on tragedy.
3. What is Dr. Johnson's estimation of Milton's personality as a factor in the making of the poet?
4. Examine the modernity of Coleridge's poetic theory.
5. Write a note on the three estimates of poetry according to Arnold.

## UNIT II

6. What, according to T.S. Eliot, is the role of tradition in the poet's creative process?
7. Discuss T.S. Eliot's evoluation of the metaphysical poets.
8. Write an essay on Richard's views on language.
9. Comment on Brook's method of critical analysis of poetry.
10. Write an exmplanatory note on "the intentional fallacy".
11. How does Empson approach the ambiguity of "the seventh type"?
12. Discuss the chief tenets of structuralism.

## UNIT - III

13. Comment on the validity and value of stylistics as an approach to the study of literature.
14. Write an essay on the structuralist approach to literary expression as enunciated by Gerard Genette.
15. Attempt an analysis of Stanely Fish's "Is there Text in the Class?"
16. Bring out the post structural elements in Derrida's "structure, sign and play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences".
17. Comment on Elaine Showalter's views on feminist poetics.
18. Write short notes on FOUR of the following :
    a) Mimesis
    b) Peripeteia and anagnorisis
    c) The unities
    d) Secondary imagination
    e) The grand style
    f) Dissociation of sensibility
    g) Differance
    h) Feminism.

# CONTENTS

Lesson - 1

# CLASSICAL SCHOOL

## Contents:



## 1.1.1.Objective

- is to provide a critical, historical background to the growth and explanation of some of the seminar ideas in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus.

## 1.1.2. Structure :

- the definition of literary criticism
- its historical background
- a description of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus.

## 1.1.3. A Critical description of the works of Plato :

Literary Criticism is as old as literature itself. Ever since man came to realize that there are more things in the realm of arts than the world dreams of, he felt compelled to find out ways and means by which he could talk freely to his companions about the beauty of art works. But if one is guided by literary historians the matter of trying to fix the earlier dates of the onset of criticism, one learns that the serious pursuit of criticism as a discipline began only in the Age of Renaissance. Even during the Renaissance, several meanings were attached to the term. Those who were interested in the study of the past, treated criticism as though it were history. People treated criticism as moral philosophy since they looked for ethics and moral philosophy in works. There were also scholars who make it their profession to make a serious study of literature. They were interested – as pedagogues normally are – in finding out the authenticity of literary works and their authors. Apart from these, quite a few others fixed their attention wholly on the language of works. They were rhetoricians and philologists. Literary criticism, as such, should have gradually grown out of such studies and such expectations. It now means understanding literature, subjecting it to some reasonable and reasoned modes of enquiry; in other words critiquing or appreciating as a piece of art, as a well-organised artifact. Many of these subjects we referred to may have had some systematic ways of enquiry but criticism lacked proper and principled methods of study. Even as most words pertaining to philosophy and science are derived etymologically from Greek, the word *criticism* is of Greek origin. In its Greek root, it means 'judgment.' The Greek term, it is said, was put to use as

early as the fourth century BC. This term came into the English and European vocabulary only during the late or early seventeenth century. It has now attained such a wide currency that it is the major subject of study in our time. With the growth of psychoanalysis and other tools of epistemology under our control, criticism has become a big business and major industry now. It helps us in rereading and reinterpreting works of literature. It goes a long way in altering literary traditions. If one looks at its humble origins, one is bewildered at this phenomenal growth in the last two thousand five hundred years.

The general term criticism can be further classified into three categories, all of which overlap in some sense or the other. These are, literary criticism in a restricted sense that retains the original Greek meaning, literary history and literary theory. Literary theory is often treated as an independent form of scholarship. It treats the whole body of literature as a growing process and it establishes historical continuity to literary works. Literary historiography has now become a separate subject, which examines the different ways by which the literature of a period or time can be treated as a whole governed by the spirit of time. Literary theory is concerned with deducing principles and methods of enquiry and organized methods of study of literature. But in recent times, theory has become a more generalized term which goes into such details as ideology and power structures which shape literature, its concern with the lives of people and so on.

The Indian critical tradition has a very hoary past. Aestheticians trace its ancestry to the *Rig Vedas*. From then on there has been a continuous tradition of principles which are concerned with the beauty and enjoyment of beauty in art objects. The basis of enjoyment according to the Indian system is the experience of the *rasas, which* a work of art is capable of arousing in us. The Western tradition – otherwise known as the Graeco Roman tradition- dates back to the fifth century BC, before the time of Plato. Poets, dramatists discussed the literary merits of poetry in a simple, rather crude language devoid of any systematic method. The ancients used the term *vates* to describe the function of a poet. He was a poet-philosopher, endowed with supernatural powers to arouse and contain the emotions of people. They had oracular wisdom and they conveyed these words of wisdom in what was supposed to be divine poetry. Poets also were those who were sanctioned by Gods to mediate and settle social problems. Aristophanes's *Frogs* and Ploto's *Ion* tell us how works were weighed, discussed and their literary merits scrutinized by the cultivated and sensitive Greek audience.

## Plato (429-347 BC)

It was given to the Greek philosopher Plato to put together the existing stray remarks on literary works and organize them into a coherent whole. In that sense he is the author and begetter of Classical criticism. The earliest philosopher as well as the earliest literary critic of the Western world is Plato. There can be no discussion of literary criticism of any sort, which does not invoke the name of the redoubtable Plato. Among the English critics, almost everyone from Philip Sidney onwards expresses his indebtedness to Plato. Shelley, as we all know, was a great admirer and follower of Plato. Plato's *Ion* and *Republic* are most admired for the questions they raise and the light they throw on the art of poetry. *Ion* is in the nature of a discussion between Ion and Socrates: Ion and other contenders in the competition dress themselves like the poets whom they recite and

interpret. Ion's favourite is Homer, the greatest of the Greek poets. According to Socrates, the poet is a holy creature who composes while he is possessed with a divine frenzy. During the time of composition, he is out of his mind. Modern psychoanalysts would attribute this to the unconscious mind. Poetic composition is not art but the result of 'divine dispensation.' Wordsworth's definition that all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility and Shelley's view that the poet's mind in creation is like a fading coal which the invisible influence awakens to brightness coal are Platonic. Poetry is not, indeed not at all, the result of study and labour. *Republic* is a treatise that treats many subjects among which the role of poets and the function of poetry deserve our attention. In Book X of *Republic*, Plato banishes all poets from his ideal commonwealth. This has fuelled a lot of controversy among scholars and students alike. How could a philosopher who concludes that the poet is an inspired angel, excommunicate him from the ideal state he describes? Does he not contradict himself?

Poetical imitation in fact produces the same effect in regard to sex and anger and all the desires and pleasures and pains of the mind - and these, in our view, accompany every action. It waters them and nourishes them, when they ought to be dried up. It makes them our rulers, when they ought to be under control so that we can better and happier people rather than worse and more miserable (49).

Plato's view is that like painting and drawing, all imitation is engaged upon productions, which are removed from truth. They are removed from reason too. As such these imitations do not have a healthy aim of contributing to human welfare. All art, according to Plato's concept of imitation, is only a shadow of the ideal world. Therefore art or poetry is an imitation of an imitation. Hence it is thrice removed from reality. Critics associate this view with 'the doctrine of ideas.' Plato also expects all arts to be based on uncompromising principles of morality. Man should be guided and governed by reason and not by an unbridled passion. Plato's views should be understood in the right spirit. He was no puritan who shunned arts and the pleasure that accompanies it. Plato seems to be more in favour of the narrative mode rather than the dramatic since the latter form imitates vice directly. His view is that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished; art should be a source of spiritual contribution. This didactic principle of arts goes contrary to the view of many modern thinkers.

Some of his followers have tried to modify Plato's view to mean that the poet is a mere copier. All said and done, Plato was indeed the first thinker who gave a new direction to criticism and placed it firmly on some foundation. His influence remains since he was the one who brought art into close relationship with the spiritual aspirations of man.

### 1.1.4. Aristotle (384-322 BC)

Aristotle was called the wandering philosopher because he went from place to place taking along with him his group of devoted students. He established a school called *the Lyceum*, which attracted the best minds. It was a school, which trained students in methods of acquiring knowledge in various subjects as philosophy, science, maths, etc. He was himself a student under Plato for more than two decades before he set up his school. He was the tutor to Alexander, the great. Aristotle wrote a number of treatises; *Nichomechean Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics, Rhetoric, Poetics* are the best known among them. These treatises are so closely packed in their argument and

analysis that it is not easy to understand them by themselves. Knowledge of one throws light on another. These treatises are in the form of lecture notes. The basic concepts that Aristotle developed are being subjected to constant re-examination by succeeding generations of scholars. The original text of Poetics is not available for us but there are manuscripts belonging to different centuries of this famous tract, which is of central interest to us, students of literature. An eleventh century translation is perhaps the earliest available one. This is treated as the authentic text, the basic source for all other translations.

The Aristotelian text has some basic problems associated with it. The text is terse and presents us with crux in interpretation. This may be because Aristotle made only lecture notes for explaining the content to the students of his academy. It is said that only the holy Bible has exceeded *Poetics* in the number of editions, which have come out all these years. *Poetics* is an exceptionally short treatise. It has just twenty-six short chapters; its length is less than twenty thousand words. It is an incomplete text; the second part in which Aristotle treats the comedy is not complete in itself but just sketchy. The works contain remarks on the nature and function of poetry, a theory of the epic, some remarks on the spirit and sense of the comedy, views on what constitutes poetic diction and a somewhat wholesome treatment of the nature of the tragedy (which alone is more than half the text). The break-up is as follows: Five chapters by way of introducing epic, the last chapter being some observations on the problems in criticism. Lyric poetry (which forms the bulk of what we generally term poetry) is not given any treatment. The reason for this omission is pretty obvious. This literary form did not exist during Aristotle's time: it is of a later invention. There are far too many digressions, omissions, inconsistencies and evidences to prove that the work was composed in some haste. All these are understandable since the text should have been edited posthumously by his students several centuries ago.

What is singularly great about Poetics is that it is a scientific, inductive enquiry into the nature of the art of poetry. Aristotle treats poetry as a productive science. Hence he raises the essential issues on the nature of composition. He defines and develops some basic concepts (which have become the *raison de tre* of later criticism) such as *mimesis, katharsis and hamartia*. The term *mimesis* is rendered in English as imitation. Aristotle's theory of imitation differs from Plato's. For Aristotle imitation does not mean mere copying but shaping or giving a form to an object, which by itself cannot arrive at that form. A piece of rock exists as a misshapen thing but it is the sculptor as artist who gives it a shape. This involves imitation. The artist imitates things, as they ought to be. Imitation has a close relationship to learning or acquiring knowledge. Imitation leads us from the particular to the universal. Imitation implies making or constructing a work of art according to the laws of probability and necessity. Imitation therefore involves, inner human action. The term *Katharsisis* is central to Aristotelian logic. The term is found in chapter 6. Tragedy is defined as "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 narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation (*Kantharsis*) of these emotions." The effect of *Kantharsis* on the audience is restoration of emotional balance and health. It is a moralizing agent; it cures us removing from us baser emotions. The term *hamartia* is rendered in English as tragic flaw. The tragic hero has a weakness in his character, which is why he commits a moral error and in consequence meets with a fall or punishment.

At the time when *Poetics* was composed, only drama was in existence. The other literary forms had not evolved. Hence, the insistence on drama and examples from the Greek dramatists. Aristotle was rediscovered by the Latin commentators about a thousand years after it was composed. In the classical period itself it did not have much of an influence.

## 1.1.5. Horace (65-8 BC) :

The full name of Horace is Quintus Horantius Flaccus. Ancient Greece had its heydays during the time of Plato and Aristotle and even as human things are subject to decay, the great Alexandrian empire faded and fell into disrepute. The centre of culture and learning in the Western world moved over to Rome in the first century BC. The time was ripe and it was given to Horace to establish himself as one of the greatest Roman poet-critics of his time. Many things were favourable to him. The king of Rome, Augustus Caesar was his good friend and comrade. The greatest Roman poet Virgil was his the great Augustan Age. Three centuries after Aristotle wrote *Poetics*, Horace's works came out. The major work of literary criticism for which he is so widely known was written in his declining years. Originally titled *Epistle to the Pisos*, it was later nomenclatured *Ars Poetica*. Ben Jonson, the great Elizabethan dramatist translated it to English in 1640. In those days it was customary to write verse epistles addressed to some patron of arts and learning. *Ars Poetica* belongs to this literary tradition. As the title suggests it is all about the art of poetic composition. It deals with the do's and don'ts of constructing poetry. When Aristotle wrote tragedy, comedy and epic were the known literary forms. By the time Horace came on the scene, other forms such as the ode, pastoral and the satire had developed and works were available in these genre. No wonder, Horace was pretty well versed in these forms. The structure of *Ars Poetica is* three tiered. It deals with what constitutes the subject matter of poetry, the appropriate style of composition and a discussion of some poets known for their meritorious compositions. Here is Horace:

You writers must choose material equal to your powers. Consider long what your shoulders will bear what they will refuse. The man who chooses his subject with full control will not be abandoned by eloquence or lucidity of arrangement. As to arrangement: its excellence and charm, unless I am very wrong, consist in saying at this moment what needs to be said at this moment, and postponing and temporarily omitting a great many things. An author who has undertaken a poem must be choosy – cling to one point and spurn another. As to words: if you are delicate and cautious in arranging them you will give distinction to your style if an ingenious combination makes a familiar word new.

There has been a glorious record of poet-critics such as Wordsworth, Arnold and Eliot; but Horace should be rightly looked upon as the trendsetter for this tradition. His objective was to supply right models for would be poets. For this purpose, he chooses examples from the Greek tragedians whom he held in the highest of respect and devotion. They, according to him, were the true models to be followed. He placed a premium on taste, sensibility and discipline in composition. Decorum in poetry is the goal to be achieved by any poet. All good poetry should conform strictly to the needs of decorum and poetic license should not go beyond the normal limits of control. Too much of brevity, obscurity and high flaunting, bombastic expressions should be avoided. These often lead to a degeneracy of good poetry. Every poem has its parts and these parts should be organically related to the whole of the poem. A good poem is much more than the sum of its parts. In the choice of the

ht diction, a poet should exercise strict and control and judgement. Words have a life of their own. race is all in favour of verisimilitude in poetic composition. A good poem should possess internal as well as external coherence. From all this we can see that Horace is less philosophical but more practical than Aristotle.

In poetic narration, Horace favours *medias res*. This was the form of narration in regular practice among the Greek poets. Homer's *The Odyssey* begins in *medians res*. When it comes to poetic form, a full-blown play requires five acts for a complete treatment of the plot. Violent incidents should be reported and not presented on the stage. "Actions may be either performed on the stage or reported when performed. What comes in through the ear is less effective in stirring the mind than what is put before our faithful eyes and told by the spectator to himself. However, you are not to bring on to the stage events which ought to be carried out within; you are to remove many things from sight, and let them be related in due course by the eloquence of an eye-witness." The chorus should be the main performer because it is the chorus, which is the major spokesman judging the moral and ethical action and issues in the play. "The chorus should play an actor's part, and do a man's duty. It should not sing between the acts anything, which has no relevance to or cohesion with the plot. It should side with the good and give them friendly counsel, restrain the angry, and approve those who scruple to go astray. It should praise a frugal table's fare, sound justice, law, and times of peace when the town's gates stand open. It should keep secrets entrusted to it, and beg and pray the gods that Fortune may return tc the wretched and abandon the proud." Poets are not only born but also made, according to him. "Do good poems come by nature or by art? This is a common question. For my part, I don't see what study can do without a rich vein of talent, nor what good can come of untrained genius. They need each other's help and work together in friendship. "He encourages practicing poets to emulate the great poets of the past and practice what they had successfully accomplished. He says, "Study Greek models night and day." He adds, "My advice to the skilled imitator will be to keep his eye on the model of life and manners, and draw his speech living from there."

The function of poetry is two-fold: *dulce et trile* which is rendered as to teach and to delight. These two terms acquire special meanings. Delight in poetry ought not to be associated with simple entertainment. Poetic delight leads to a higher consciousness of the mind; the Indian aestheticians would use the term *brahmananda*. Again by teaching we should not confuse it with the present-day concept of the didactic form of knowledge. Poetry presents and posed ultimate truths in life, an experience of which transforms us and leads us to a higher state of being. All Western criticism has accepted this Horatian dictum as an axiom, as it were. Sir Philip Sidney, in his *An Apology for Poetry says*, "Poetry, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the 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."

Horace did not influence the Romantic critics. They believed in what is called the expressive theory of poetry. Poetry for them is emotion recollected in tranquility. It is not the result of a conscious effort of ordering and organizing an experience. However, the later critics such Arnold and Eliot did make a good use of Horace's views. There are historical records that say that even Queen Elizabeth attempted a free translation of *Ars Poetica*. The simplicity of his style and the utter clarity with which

he expresses his views has impressed a great deal of students and scholars. His maxims on the rules of composition will ever remain a major source of inspiration for all time to come.

The immediate impact of these maxims could be easily seen in the days that followed the publication of Ars. Works in literature came to be analyzed for their style and features of rhetoric. People were taught how to organize words and expressions and how to communicate effectively, be in prose or in verse, Philology gained importance as a discipline worth serious study. Rhetoric came to be treated not as just a technical subject but one that has deep roots in ethics. Aristotle had placed rhetoric lower than poetics. For him rhetoric was meant for persuasion and poetics was for pleasure. It was given to Horace to give rhetoric its pride of place. Horace can be seen as the progenitor of the great rhetorical tradition in the study of literature the impact of which can be seen in the New critics.

Horace lays emphasis on the essentials in poetic art. These are true for all time to come. He lays down a set of principles in the form of axioms and these too are eternally true. It was only during the Middle Ages his influence began to be felt. During the Renaissance, his work exerted such an influence that it came to be treated almost as a text to be studied and followed assiduously. Since Horace's words were close to the humanistic methods propagated by the ancients, his work did much to shape new doctrines and methods of creation and criticism. There has also been the criticism that he is very rigid and wooden in his advice. They are not unlike the words of wisdom offered by Polonius to his son in *Hamlet* – full of platitudes. John Dryden, Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope of the neo-classical school invoke his aid in their essays in criticism. Here is Pope in his famous " An Essay on Criticism":

> First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same:
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
> One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
> Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
> At once the source, and end, and test of art. ll 68-73.

To sum up, Horace gave a new direction to critical thought. He revealed many secrets of poetic art. He established the great standards of Greek literature. His passages have become quite memorable and so they are often quoted in critical discussions.

### 1.1.6. Longinus (I or 3 Century AD) :

Aristotle, Horace and Longinus constitute the classical Triumvirate of criticism. The treatise which is often called in English *On the Sublime* was purported to have been written by a Greek man of letters who lived in the first or third century AD. Many things are a conjecture as regards this treatise. It has also been called by various names such as "Elevated Writing", and "On the Sovereign Perfection of Writing." At the time the treatise got written Greece did not possess its ancient pristine glory. The great Greek drama was a thing of the past. Longinus looks at the great Greek literature even as we might do when we look at the writings of Shakespeare or Milton.

What is sublimity? For Longinus it is that transcendent quality that transmutes a work into something more than a work. Longinus defines sublimity in the following words:

Sublimity is a kind of eminence of excellence of discourse. It is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame. For grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control; whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer. Experience in invention and ability to order and arrange material cannot be detected in single passages; we begin to appreciate them only when we see the whole context. Sublimity, on the other hand, produced at the right moment tears everything up like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's whole power at a single blow.

Longinus has in his mind the kind of literature that bestows a special power on the audience. He does not concern himself with literature that supplies us with knowledge. This distinction will have to be borne in mind when we discuss the essay "On the Sublime." The effect of literature is not achieved by argument but by a sudden illumination, or revelation or better still by 'epiphany.' Literature is conceived as vision and not a piece of entertainment or information. When we listen to a piece of soul-stirring music – all great art aspires to the condition of music – or undergo a profound religious experience, we are transported to a different ecstatic world of wonder. This is exactly what happens when we are confronted by a great work of literature. We see beyond ourselves. The truly sublime lifts up our spirits, casts a spell over us, and fills us with ecstasy and raises the energy of our soul. We wish to undergo this experience repeatedly. "Real sublimity contains much food for reflection, is difficult or rather impossible to resist, and makes a strong and ineffaceable impression on the memory. In a word, reckon those things which please everybody all the time as genuinely and finely sublime."

Longinus classifies the characteristics of sublimity. The sources of sublimity are (a) a capacity for entertaining great thought together with a firm grasp of ideas, (b) inspired emotion and strong passion, (c) proper use and handling of figurative language, (d) noble and dignified diction, and (e) fusion and integration of elements to give them a tone of sublimity. While these are contributory factors to the arousal of sublime feelings and thoughts in us, there are also some obstacles and impediments to sublimity. These are (a) affectation, (b) pedantry and (c) sentimentality. "All such lapses from dignity arise in literature through a single cause: that desire for novelty of thought which is all the rage today. Evils often come from the same source as blessings; and so, since beauty of style, sublimity, and charm all conduce to successful writing, they are also causes and principles not only of success but of failure. Variation, hyperbole, and the use of plural for singular are like this too...."

For long "On the Sublime" and *Ars Poetica* are held to be complementary treatises. The former talks of sublimity and the latter of decorum. These two concepts balance each other very well. Addison finds sublimity in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and hence calls it a great poem. The Romantic critics all the time talk of inspiration and this is just an echo of Longinian sublimity. Sidney says, "Poetry was the first light-giver to ignorance and first nurse." Wordsworth says, "The poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned

expression which is in the countenance of all Science." Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" seems a clear précis of Longinus. "But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought." "A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; its auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why." Matthew Arnold's 'touchstone' recommends recognizing great poetry by its quality and our insight rather than by reason and intellectual analysis. The two elements that are most important for Longinus are thought and diction and strangely enough these were not discussed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. New criticism is built upon these two elements. The two questions which are asked are (I) What is the experience? and (II) How well is it communicated?

Some critics maintain that sublimity is a natural phenomenon and hence it cannot be subjected to any critical enquiry. But Longinus always believed that restraint is part and parcel of freedom and liberty. In any theory of literature, he is a veritable force to reckon with. He was perhaps the first critic to talk about the impact of literature on the reader. We have now fully developed theoretical systems called, 'reception aesthetics' and 'reader-response criticism.' His style is most appealing to the reader. His greatness was discovered during the Renaissance and from then on he has become almost a household name in critical discussions. Pope pays the following rich tribute to Longinus:

> Thee bold Longinus! All the nine inspire,
> And bless their critic with a poet's fire,
> An ardent judge, who zealous in his trust,
> With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;
> Whose own example strengthens all his laws;
> And is himself that great sublime he draws. II 675-80

## 1.1.7. To Sum Up :

The Classical Age gave us three great critics, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus and three seminal critical texts written by them, Poetics, *Ars Poetica* and *On the Sublime* respectively. These texts form the very foundation on which Western critical tradition rests. The critical vocabulary we so often use, the critical thought we so often discuss with reference to individual works of literature, we learnt from those three wise men of antiquity and renown. The whole tradition of interpretation, analysis and evaluation traces its rich ancestry to that period which we term the Classical Age.

## 1.1.8. Sample Questions :

2. Discuss Plato's main ideas as a thinker?
3. What is "Sublimits" according to Longinus?
4. Discuss the significance and contents of Poetics and Aristotle's theories of literature.

## 1.1.9. Suggested Reading :

Atkins, J.W.H. *Literary Criticism in Antiquity*
Brooks, Cleanth and William Wimsatt. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*
Dorsch, T.E. *Classical Literary Criticism.* Penguin Classic, 1965.
Saintsbury, George. A *History of English Criticism.*

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**Lesson - 2**

# ARISTOTLE

**Contents:**



## 1.2.1. Objective:

- to study the genius of Aristotle as a thinker and the most original literary critic.
- to critically understand some aspects of his Poetics.

## 1.2.2. Introduction:

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher was born in 384 BC and died in 322 BC. He established an academy called the *Lyceum* and was its controller and director for well over thirteen years. He was an all round philosopher by which we mean that he was a man of letters, a naturalist, a profound and original thinkers besides being a scholar and an academic in the truest sense of the term. His teacher was the redoubtable Plato, a philosopher beyond compare and a man of formidable learning and knowledge. It is no wonder that Aristotle owes all his wisdom and career to his master Plato. Aristotle, for the most part, concerns himself with similar and sometimes the same problems that Plato addressed. Several times he differs from the views of his master but never mentions his master's name whenever he differs from him.

The whole of the literary criticism of Aristotle comes from two of his well-known tracts – *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. Many of his concepts are still being debated and discussed in literary forums ever since they were discovered during the Renaissance. In our own time, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht invented a new dramatic form (epic theatre) as opposed to the Aristotelian drama of alienation. Hence Aristotle is more modern than most modern thinkers on the form of the drama, the dramatic medium and dramaturgy in general. *Poetics* is a veritable delight in philosophic enquiry as regards this genre, drama. There are controversies regarding the original text of the treatise. Translations of the original Greek text are available and these belong to different centuries. There is a tenth century Arabic translation and many more of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries available of this Greek manuscript. The style of the text being terse, there may be difficulties in interpreting and understanding of the text. The text was in the form of hints and notes that Aristotle must have used when he spoke to his students. These were later developed, with interpolations, into the text that we now have before us. When he wrote his work in the fourth century BC, he had his Greek theatre in his mind.

## 1.2.3. Poetics :

*Poetics* is an incomplete treatise in twenty-six units that we now term chapters. Chapters I through V are introductory in nature which give us a preliminary sketch before Aristotle gets to the business of the dramatic form 'tragedy.' He classifies arts into three categories: 1 the *object* that is imitated, 2. the *medium* employed in imitation and, 3. the *manner* of imitation. The object of imitation is always a particular action. The writer of tragedy imitated a "serious and complete action." By medium is meant the language employed in imitation. It is like the colours of the painter or the sound of the musician. By manner, he means what we now term convention. Such a classification is very broad but it admits of categorization of the various form of poetry that we know of.

In chapter IV Aristotle starts off with the origin and development of poetry, which includes all forms of literature known during his period. Art forms originate from 1. Imitation, and 2. harmony or rhythm. Imitation is concerned with the moral and intellectual content of art and hence it is related to philosophy. Harmony is concerned with aesthetic pleasure we derive from arts. Aristotle considers both the content and form of art. Then he sketches the development of the dithyramb, epic, comedy and tragedy. These were the literary forms available in his lifetime. In chapter V, he discusses comedy, which is fragmentary in nature. In chapter 15, he discusses character, in 19, thought and in chapters 23 and 26, he discusses epic. He commences his discussion of tragedy in chapter 6 and the rest of the chapters form his discussion of tragedy in chapter 6 and the rest of the chapters form his discussion of tragedy. His justly famous definition of tragedy runs thus:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of a 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.

The components of tragedy are (a) Plot, (b) Character, (c) Thought, (d) Diction, (e) Music, and (f) Spectacle. Aristotle takes up for discussion the first four of these six components. Music and spectacle are confined to stagecraft. For illustrations and examples, he takes up Sophocles's masterpiece *Oedipus* Rex, a play with which most of his contemporaries were familiar. In chapter 12, he discusses the different sections or parts of a tragic play; Prologue, Episode, Exode, and Choric song. These are the 'quantitative parts' as opposed to the 'organic parts', which represent the tragic action. Reversal (a change by which the action veers round to its opposite) and recognition (a change from ignorance to knowledge) constitute this. Aristotle discusses simple and complex plots. Simple plots do not include reversal and recognition whereas the complex one includes these. The action in any plot must seem 'probable.' For Aristotle, the basic question one should raise about any work of art is its unity. So a play can be unified only if it represents one action. Character, Thought, Diction – all these are subsidiary to action. Metaphor and analogy are the prime requisites of language in drama. Plot-making, character-delineation and thought-language are the three items which come in for treatment with illustrations. From the point of view of a practicing dramatist, these three are the essential elements. Then he discusses the aim or the end of tragedy which, according to him, is to purge us of the emotions of pity and terror and thus give us artistic pleasure.

*Poetics*, with all its seeming simplicity, is not an easy treatise to read and digest. It raises innumerable questions which are basic to our appreciation of drama and poetry. These are still

relevant to us in our time. Hence it has aroused a lot of discussion among critics past and present. Let us now choose a few of the key concepts in *Poetics* and try to analyse and understand them.

## Mimesis:

This is a Greek word the English equivalent of which is imitation. Plato, too, uses this word but Aristotle's meaning of the term differs from Plato's and is even opposed to it. Plato is concerned with the doctrine of ideas. For him, imitation implies copying or reproducing. Hence, art is twice or even thrice removed from reality. For Aristotle, on the other hand, imitation is making, creating and hence dynamic. The artist is the maker (Poesy is the art of making) and his creation is the imitation of human action, human character, human thoughts, feelings and emotion. It is not copying; it is not representing human beings as they are. It is creating: it is representing human beings as they ought to be. The artist imitates actions as they ought to be. Art is a voluntary activity. It is free from utilitarian motives. In this sense, arts are different from crafts. Also, imitation involves the intellect in that it leads to learning and acquisition of knowledge. Do we not seek pleasure from witnessing the artistic representations of the most hideous and disgusting forms? How else can we account for the most morbid and grotesque forms in sculpture and architecture? We see into the life of things, as it were! Aristotelian imitation leads from the particular to the universal. This is the experience in all learning. Learning is a clarification of a particular experience from which we understand universal nature. In this sense, art gives us an insight into nature and life. Imitation also implies the mode of constructing or making an art object in accordance with the laws of necessity (internal coherence) and probability by which a universal form is imparted to works. Imitation is the art of giving shape to things which by themselves might not attain to such a shape. A carver in stone gives to a piece of rock a shape it cannot get by itself. Thus we see that Aristotle's imitation is rich in meaning and connotation.

## Katharsis:

The most important of all the concepts in *Poetics* is katharsis. This term occurs only twice in the whole treatise. It occurs in chapter 6 in the famous definition of tragedy which we have quoted above. The English equivalent of katharsis in the definition is purgation. This word has several associative meanings and has given room to a lot of argument. Of these we may take up the following four meanings: (1) therapeutic, (2) moral, (3) structural, and (4) intellectual. The first is therapeutic which has to do with cure of the mind and mental faculty. This can be understood with reference to the homoeopathic system of medicine which holds the view that the proper cure for an illness is administering an agent similar to the disease. In this sense, katharsis is translated as purgation. This means that by presenting the emotions of pity and fear to the audience, it is cured of the excesses of these emotions. The assumption is that all of us suffer from an overdose of pity and fear and tragedy by arousing in us the kindred emotions of pity and fear cures us of the malady. Tragedy is a cure-all for us in this sense. This interpretation does not pass muster with many for this would mean that Aristotle should have conceived of an art form in such a simplistic fashion as a system of cure. The moral interpretation is an extension of this meaning and is closely analogous to it. Purgation becomes purification in this sense. Tragedy aims at disciplining our emotions by purifying them by removing the excesses of false and base emotions. The twin emotions of pity and

fear work as disciplining agents. Once again many scholars do not accept this view, as they believe that Aristotle could not have conceived art merely as a moralizing agent. Curing or moralizing may be incidental to tragedy but not its mainstay. Structural interpreters are concerned with the structure of the play as a unified whole. They hold the view that katharsis is a process by which the protagonist can absolve himself of the supposed evils he has perpetrated. Only then can the audience respond with emotions of pity and fear appropriate to the occasion and be willing to free the protagonist from any pollution for the crime he has indulged in. The fourth interpretation is concerned with the intellectual response. Tragedy is intellectual clarification. Learning is a great source of pleasure and nothing can give greater learning than great art. Which is why Sidney calls poetry more philosophic than history. Tragedy leads us on to a balanced view of the world. We accept things with a sense of resignation. Whatever may be the meaning one may support, one thing is certain. Aristotle did not see art as a harmful object as Plato did. Art (tragedy) is beneficial for us: as therapy, as a moralizing agent, as a release from guilt, as a supreme form of learning.

## Hamartia:

The English equivalent of this Greek word is 'tragic flaw.' Some critics also equate it with 'sin.' The protagonist commits a moral error and for this he receives his punishment. It is something like poetic justice. But the question about the emotions of pity and terror do not fit into such a meaning. If the protagonist receives the punishment he deserves, wherein comes pity and terror? Aristotle's view of tragedy is far more sophisticated than a mere melodramatic notion. As an art form tragedy does not accept divine justice or poetic justice. It is a refined art form and it presents and poses deeper philosophic questions about life in general. Critics like George Steiner hold the view that the form of tragedy does not and cannot exist any more.

## Spoudaios:

The nearest English equivalent is 'noble character.' Aristotle's view is that character determines moral choice. Hamlet is caught up in a moral dilemma: "To be or not to be." All tragic heroes in Shakespeare, for instance, are men of noble character. Their fall is the result of their tragic flaw (hamartia). Hamlet's fall is the result of his indecision or procrastination; Macbeth's flaw is his overweening ambition; Othello meets with his fall as a result of his sexual jealousy; Lear makes the fatal mistake of applying laws of feudality in his family relationship. Despite the nobility of character, there is an inherent flaw (or weakness) in character and hence the wrong choice. Tragedy imitates noble character and comedy base character. Some critics make the mistake of believing that nobility in character is socially determined. This is far from truth. In our own time, Arthur Miller, the American dramatist accuses Aristotle of social snobbery. He chooses Willy Loman (the low man), the common man as his protagonist in *Death of a Salesman*. It would be most unfair to charge Aristotle, of all people, with class consciousness and arrogance. One has to understand things in the proper perspective. The hierarchical system in the fifth century Greece was inconceivably different from the democratic system prevalent in most countries of the world now. We should understand that the nobility referred to in *Poetics* is morally determined and not socially. The protagonist is so created as to claim the attention of the audience. Hence they are kings, rulers or war generals. The life of the protagonist should be worthy of the enormous sacrifice he makes and we should be equally

enormously concerned with the effect of his loss to the society. The loss of Hamlet is a great loss to Denmark. The loss of Macbeth is a great loss to Scotland. And so it goes. In our days of democracy we are confronted with the lives of kings and nobles. They do not exist any more. What makes life relevant to us is its value and its loss and repercussions of the loss to society. We will do well to understand Aristotle in the right spirit, in keeping with the comprehensive nature of his philosophical enquiry. Character (*ethos)* for Aristotle is morally determined action.

Besides these concepts, there are also a few other concepts which are equally important and significant. These are less controversial than the ones referred to above. Some of these are *anagnorisis* (recognition), *peripeteia* (reversal), the different parts of tragedy, etc. A few other ideas arising out of an understanding of these concepts deserve our attention. According to Aristotle, a work of art resembles a living organism. Many modern critics, especially the New critics have derived their theory of unity and uniqueness, inclusiveness, complexity, coherence from Aristotle's view. Coleridge's organic formalism is built upon this Aristotelian faith. Aristotle says that the audience perceives the wholeness or coherence of a work if it is constructed with some laws of organization with a beginning, a middle and an end possessing a proper magnitude. Then the audience is capable of achieving the pleasure natural to and inherent in an integrated and unified whole. Aristotle's accommodative view of Plot can be understood in relation to this organic view of a work. He says in chapter 6, "Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy." Plot occupies the most prominent position in the hierarchy he develops: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Spectacle, Song. It is plot that controls and shapes all other elements in a play. The others are determined by and subservient to plot. What vision is to the eye, plot is to the play. It is the shaping principle which gives unity to a work. One and the same story can be shaped into a tragedy or a comedy or a farce. *Romeo and Juliet* and the play within the play in *Midsummer Night's Dream* put up by the 'rude mechanicals' Bottom and Company about Pyramus and have the same story of star-crossed lovers. The former is a refined tragedy whereas the latter is a slapstick comedy. The reason is that the plots of the two are different. They are shaped differently. Latter-day critics such as the Russian Formalists have used this concept in their theory which erects a distinction between the fable and sjuzhet. Aristotle's definition of the plot frees him from the narrow notions about the distinction between poetry and non-poetry. Poetry is the art of fiction, making, so to say and not mere versifying.

If we turn our attention to the history of *Poetics* since its publication, it is quite interesting in itself. This learned treatise exerted little or no influence for more than 1800 years after it was transcribed for the first time. We gather from history that even during the classical period it did not have much of a noticeable impact. From the third century BC onwards, Greek culture became dispersed and scattered and literary criticism came be dominated by moralists and scholars who made a profession out of it. The Epicureans found poetry harmful and the Stoics always judged it strictly according to moralist and ethical norms. Many of the Hellenistic scholars were stylisticians, grammarians and connoisseurs of arts and even editors of books. It was little wonder that they used textual analysis of works to arrive at judgments of these with very strong prescriptive and unprogressive and inflexible predilections. They drew up elaborate schemata with which to classify works and found models for each from their own works of antiquity and renown. *Poetics* was hardly ever

known to Longinus, Horace, Augustine or Aquinas or most others who had also raised pertinent questions about the value and function of poetic art. It was left to the Renaissance scholars in Europe to recover it from the past and realize its worth and value. Later it became an invaluable document for the neoclassical critics who complemented it with Horace's *Ars Poetica*. But then they misinterpreted some of its doctrines (such as the three unities) and placed him in the Roman rhetorical tradition. There were several misreadings of some of the key concepts. This was a great disservice to the man who was thought to be the master of those who know. The Romantic period had no use for his theory. For the Romantics poetry is the outcome of imagination. Their poetic theory is not based on the materials with which it is made. They were reaction to the neoclassical version of Aristotle. Their expressive theory that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility stands in opposition to the theory of imitation. We ought approach Aristotle with an open mind. He writes with the Greek drama written before his time in mind. His knowledge is restricted to one language, Greek. He could not have had the historical understanding that we moderns possess. There is no point in blaming him for things which none of his age could ever have done. Happily there is a rebirth of *Poetics* in the twentieth century which has reclaimed him. A great deal of modern criticism derives from him. Though differing in principles and beliefs, Aristotle has inspired modern theoreticians and critics with his profundity of thought and discriminating powers of argument. Aristotle's empirical and deductive reasoning coupled with his tone of moderation keeps him flexible and undogmatic. He never viewed literature as being cut off from life. That is why he is all the time fresh and vital. The insights into poetry that he offers and the wealth of principles one finds in him will sustain him. George Saintsbury in his *History of English Criticism* remarks that we have not gone much beyond him. His concluding remark on Aristotle puts him in the right perspective. "He is the very Alexander of Criticism, and his conquests in the field, unlike those of his pupil in another, remain practically undestroyed, though not unextended, to the present day."

## 1.2.4. Analysis of *Poetics* :

I 'Imitation' the common principle of the arts of Poetry, Music, Dancing, Painting and Sculpture. These distinguished according to the Medium or material Vehicle, the Objects, and the Manner of Imitation. The Medium of Imitation is Rhythm, Language, and 'harmony' (or Melody), taken singly or combined.

### II The Objects of Imitation :

Higher or lower types are represented in all the Imitative Arts. In poetry this is the basis of the distinction between Tragedy and Comedy.

### III The Manner of Imitation :

Poetry may be in form either dramatic narrative, pure narrative (including lyric poetry), or pure drama. A digression follows on the name and original home of the Drama.

### IV The Origin and Development of Poetry :

Psychologically, Poetry may be traced to two causes, the instinct of Imitation, and the instinct of 'Harmony' and Rhythm. Historically viewed, Poetry diverged early in two directions: traces of this

twofold tendency are found in the Homeric poems; Tragedy and Comedy exhibit the distinction in a developed form. The successive steps in the history of Tragedy are enumerated.

V Definition of the ludicrous and a brief sketch of the rise of Comedy. Points of comparison between Epic Poetry and Tragedy (The chapter is fragmentary).

VI Definition of Tragedy. Six elements in Tragedy; three external – namely, Spectacular Presentment, Lyrical Song, Diction; three internal-namely, Plot, Character, and Thought. Plot or the representation of the action, is of primary importance; Character and Thought come next in order. VII The Plot must be a Unity. Unity of Plot consists not in Unity of Hero, but in Unity of Action.

IX (Plot continued) Dramatic Unity can be attained only by the observance of Poetic as distinct from Historic Truth; for Poetry is an expression of the Universal, History of the Particular. The rule of probable or necessary sequence as applied to the incidents, Certain Plots condemned for want of Unity. The best Tragic effects depend on the combination of the Inevitable and Unexpected.

X (Plot continued) Definitions of Simple and Complex Plots.

XI (Plot continued) Reversal of the Situation, Recognition, and Tragic or disastrous Incident defined and explained.

XII The 'quantitative parts' of Tragedy defined: Prologue, Episode, etc. (Probably an interpolation)

XIII (Plot continued) What consists Tragic Action. The change of fortune and the character of the hero as requisite to an ideal Tragedy. The unhappy ending more truly tragic than the 'poetic justice' which is in favour with a popular audience, and belongs rather to Comedy.

XIV (Plot continued) The Tragic emotions of pity and fear should spring out of the Plot itself. To produce them by scenery or Spectacular effect is entirely against the spirit of Tragedy, Examples of Tragic incidents designed to heighten the emotional effect.

XV The element of character (as the manifestation of moral purpose) in Tragedy. Requisites of ethical portraiture. The Rule of necessity or probability applicable to character as to Plot. How character is idealized.

XVI (Plot continued) Recognition: Its various kinds, with examples.

XVII Practical rules for the Tragic Poet :

1. To place the scene before his eyes, and to act the parts himself in order to enter into vivid sympathy with the *dramatis personae*.
2. To sketch the bare outline of the action before proceeding to fill in the episodes. The Episodes of Tragedy are here incidentally contrasted with those of Epic Poetry.

## XVIII Further rules to the Tragic Plot :

1. To be careful about the Complication and Denouement of the Plot, especially Denouement.
2. To unite, if possible, varied forms of poetic excellence.
3. Not to overcharge a Tragedy with details appropriate to Epic Poetry.
4. To make the Choral Odes – like the Dialogue – an organic part of the whole.

XIX Thought, or the Intellectual element, and Diction in Tragedy. Thought is revealed in the dramatic speeches composed according to the rules of Rhetoric. Diction falls largely within the domain of the Art of Delivery, rather than of Poetry.

XX Diction, or Language in general. An analysis of the parts of speech, and other grammatical details (Probably interpolated).

XXI Poetic Diction. The words and modes of speech admissible in Poetry; including Metaphor, in particular. A passage-probably interpolated-on the Gender of Nouns.

XXII (Poetic Diction continued) How Poetry combines elevation of language with perspicuity.

XXIII Epic Poetry. It agrees with Tragedy in Unity of Action: herein contrasted with History.

XXIV (Epic Poetry continued) Further points of agreement with Tragedy. The points of difference are enumerated and illustrated – namely, (1) the length of the poem; (2) the meter; (3) the art of imparting a plausible air to incredible fiction.

XXV Critical objections brought against Poetry, and the principle on which they are to be answered. In particular, an elucidation of the meaning of Poetic Truth, and its difference from common reality.

XXVI A general estimate of the comparative worth of Epic Poetry and Tragedy. The alleged defects of Tragedy are not essential to it. Its positive merits entitle it to the higher rank of the two.

(From *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art by* S.H. Butcher)

## 1.2.5. Sample Questions:

* Define and explain the concept 'katharsis.'
* What does 'hamartia' mean? How does it stand in relation to tragedy?
* In what sense is Aristotle's view of Plot most comprehensive? Why does he call it the soul of tragedy?
* 'Character is destiny.' Discuss this statement in the light of Aristotelian logic.
* Much of modern criticism derives from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Would you agree and why?
* Differentiate Aristotle's concept of 'imitation from Plato's.

## 1.2.6. Suggested Reading:

S.H. Butcher. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art.* London: 1932.
Imgram Bywater. *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry.* Oxford: 1909.
Gerald F. Else. *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument. Cambridge,* Mass.: 1957.
Ronald S. Crane *et.al. Critics and Criticism : Ancient and Modern,* Chicago: 1952.
J.E. A. *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance.* New York: 1938.
Francis Fergusson. *The Birth of Tragedy.* New York: 1956.

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Lesson - 3

# THE NEO-CLASSICAL SCHOOL

Contents :



## 1.3.1. Objective :

After going through this unit, you should be able to

* recognise the main characteristics of the Neo-classical School of Criticism
* discuss the major Neo-classical critics such as John Dryden, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope and Dr. Samuel Johnson, and their views on different aspects of literature
* assess the contribution and value of their criticism

## 1.3.2. Introduction :

This is one of the units in the paper on Literary Criticism of M.A. Course. It will help you understand the Neo-Classical school of criticism with reference to the major critics such as John Dryden, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope and Dr. Samuel Johnson, and their views on different aspects of literature. It also evaluates their contribution to literary criticism.

The Neo-classical age begins in English literature with the replacement of sensuous and romantic Italian influence in place of the French influence. The period spans almost 140 years starting from 1660 i.e. the Restoration. The writers of this period exhibited a staunch traditionalism, and immense respect for classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome who were supposed to have gained excellence and set up enduring models in all literary genres. Hence, the term 'Neo-classic.' The term 'classic' has been applied to a literary work which is considered to have achieved excellence and established in its kind. It honours the rules and principles of Aristotle and the Greek and Roman critics as interpreted and modified first by the Italian critics and later by the French critics in the reign of Louis XIV.

The Neo-classical Age is called by various terms— Augustan Age, the Age of Reason and Good Sense, and Pseudo-classical. The French critic Boileau's ideal, "Good Sense" has provided the base to name this age after it. It is 'Augustan' because in the splendour of its literature, it resembles the age of Emperor Augustus which has produced the great masters such as Horace, Virgil, Longinus and Quintilian. This is called Pseudo-classical due to its frequent misinterpretation of Aristotle's three unities. Unities of 'time' and 'place' which Aristotle had hardly referred to, were derived from him and made into essential rules for drama. The significant departure of the Neo-classics from Aristotle is witnessed in their preference of epic to tragedy. Sir Philip Sidney who had great veneration for Aristotle and other French critics had never practised what he suggested. "It was even believed," says B. Prasad, "that they represented the highest standards of literary beauty which English writers had only to follow to attain perfection in their art." Neo-classicism has come to exercise its complete hold over English literature only during the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

George Sherburne in his *Literary History of England* defines Neo-classicism as "a veneration for the Roman classics, thought, and way of life," while Atkins describes it as the classic system of France which emerged during the reign of Louis XIV, an alteration rather than exact copy of the original Greek classics. Legouis and Cazamian feel that the term 'classical' "scarcely seems to suit it; neither in inspiration, nor yet in form, does it come very near either to the literatures of antiquity, or to the French model which in fact it very often sets before; both its ideal and the methods followed to attain it, diverge from 'classicism' in the purely artistic meaning of the word."

Neo-classical movement can be viewed in two phases. In its first phase i.e. during Restoration period (1660-1700) which is led by John Dryden, it is liberal and moderate. In its second phase- sixth and seventh decades of the 18th century, it turned to be more and more parochial, imitative and rigid. Alexander Pope, Addison and Dr. Johnson are the leading critics of this phase.

## 1.3.3. The Rise of Classicism: Its Causes :

There are various causes for the emergence of Neo-classicism. The first is the excess of the Metaphysical poets, which made reading poetry painful, as their use of complex poetic metres and the conceits made it difficult to assimilate and enjoy the work. Their far-fetched ideas, violent similes and metaphors, extravagant hyperboles paved the way for the rise of Neo-classicism which insists on 'correctness', 'decorum' and 'sanity'. Secondly, the unprecedented predominance of the French literary modes led to it. Charles I, had married a French princess and brought with him a colony of courtiers, wits and French language to his homeland. During the 'civil war' between Charles I and the Parliament,

Charles II and many other writers of Royalist sympathies like Waller, Denham, Devedant, Cowley and Evelyn sought refuge in France. They got back to England later inspired by French culture, respect for French rules and the French theory and practice of literature. Birjadesh Prasad asserts, "very soon the new, or rather ancient, spirit made itself felt in all branches of literary activity. Seneca provided the model for tragedy, Plautus and Terence for comedy, Virgil for epic and pastoral, Juvenal for satire, and Horace with his *Ars Poetica*, for literary taste and criticism. The change involved the substitution of training for instinct, of conscious craftsmanship for erratic self-expression." The French Academy laid down certain stringent regulations for creative writer. They now travelled into the British. La Bossu and Boilieau were the then leading French critics. R. A. Scott-James remarks: "The invention, passion, curiosity, adventurousness, and experimental effort in which the released forces of the Middle Ages had broken out with explosive violence, were now looked askance at— they appeared as the wildness of a disordered mind— Nature without Method— the inferior, brutish thing, which it was the business of criticism, built up on the good manners of the classics, to expose and suppress." The powerful king Louis XIV, who came to power, brought about discipline in all spheres of life, and also took a similar penchant in letters that Augustus had taken in Ancient Rome. It gradually got a shape of the classical system of its own, which is now called 'Neo-classical' in order to distinguish it from the original creed. It is explained in *Art Poetica* by Boileu, published in 1674. The scientific spirit and new philosophy also helped the rise of the movement. The Royal Society for Science emphasized the reason, clarity, rationalism, self-control and simplicity in thought and expression. Hobbes, a philosopher, suggested that "fancy" should be guided and restrained by 'Judgment.'

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1. The New school respected the rules of the literary genres. Legouis and Cazamian explain thus: "The literary transition from the Renaissance to the Restoration is nothing more or less than the progressive moment of a spirit of liberty, at once fanciful, brilliant, and adventurous, towards a rule and a discipline both in inspiration and in form." For Neo-classicals' form was the primary and the substance secondary.

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2. The literature of the Neo-classical period exhibits the intellectual quality, by avoiding extravagance and emotionalism. It was characterized by reason or commonsense in matter, expressed in a restrained style which has order, proportion and finish. They were more obsessed with the head rather than heart and addressed to the intellect, not to the feelings. Moderation was the best rule in life and in literature. Pope's advice closely resembles that of Boileau:

    Avoid extremes; and shun the faults of such
    Who still are pleased too little or too much

3. Style and diction of poetry was given much importance. They embellished their subject with a style of elegant and polished language, which has been hallowed by poetic custom. It must not be a colloquial or technical language. Dr. Johnson remarks regarding diction that it should be "a system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts," so that the language of the great creative artists tended to be stilted and standardized.

4. The heroic couplet was accepted as a suitable literary form for poetry rather than blank verse for it was practised and supported by the Ancients, and by the practice of the French. It was suitable for drama, epic, and satire; the three most widely practised literary forms of the age.

5. The town life of the contemporary period has become the subject for their creative writing. Satire has been practised by many prominent writers as London life and current fashions and controversies provided abundant scope for it. They attacked the human 'pride' and enforced the lesson of golden mean (avoidance of extremes).

6. They considered the function of poetry didactic rather than aesthetic. With this end in view, the poetic justice was thought essential. They felt the poet must suitably reward virtue and punish vice. However, Dryden recognized that the function of poetry is also to move the heart of the reader.

7. The writers have to deal with universal truths and general ideas and write what is rational, selecting their subjects from every day life i.e. axioms, truths, mottos— uttered by the wise of the past and avoid flights of fancy and imagination, passion and enthusiasm. They emphasised the commonsense of the humanity— widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings and tastes. "True wit" says Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* is "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." It means the goal of the poetry is to give new and consummate expression to the great commonplaces of human wisdom.

8. 'Follow nature' is also one of the chief characteristics of the Neo-classical age. 'Nature' is however used in various meanings. It suggests following the rules of the ancient masters, as they are formed on the basis of Nature. It also means 'external reality' which the poet must imitate and 'follow nature' that becomes thus 'realism.' 'Nature' also means general human nature common to all men and the poet has to deal with the 'universals' and not with the singular. It also gives the meaning of the principal power that rules the world. Its chief characteristics are order, regularity and harmony of which the literature should possess.

9. The Neo-classical School regarded human beings as an integral part of a social organization and hence, the primary subject matter of literature. Poetry is deemed to be an imitation of human life— 'a mirror held up to nature.' It is produced to give instruction and aesthetic pleasure to the reader. They followed central idea of humanism that art is not for art's sake, but for humanity's sake.

### 1.3.5. Neo-Classicism: Its Value :

The Romantics considered the Neo-classicals' strict adherence to rules artificial, unnecessary and suppressive of the genius. It is restriction on the freedom of the poet. However, the Neo-classical age has its own elegance in art. These writers observed harmonious set of rules– polished, rational and perfect, which impart beauty to work. They lived up to their model of classicism in will and expression and this name can justly remain with them. Arnold is right when he calls this age "admirable and indispensable." R.A. Scott explains, "the Neo-classical critics added much that is essential to 'culture' and fixed all the important truisms without which we can hardly begin today to discuss the art of literature."

## 1.3.6. Neo-Classical Critics :

The Neo-classical School starts with John Dryden and ends with Dr. Samuel Johnson. The Neo-classical criticism can be divided into two phases based on its characteristics. During the Restoration (1660-1700) it was liberal and moderate under John Dryden. In its second phase from first six or seven decades of the 18th century it was more parochial, slavish and rigid. Pope, Addison and Dr. Johnson were the leading critics of this phase.

## 1.3.7. John Dryden (1631-1700) :

John Dryden was a great poet, dramatist and prose writer. The rare combination of gifts made him a unique figure in English literature. He completely dominated the age. He was considered the founder of modern prose style. Dr. Johnson called him, "the father of English criticism." Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* is a significant work in the history of literary criticism of English. Apart from this, Dryden's criticism is in the *prefaces, epilogues* and *letters of dedication* of his poetic and dramatic works. They are very important documents as they embodied the expositions of his theory and practice of poetry. He learned his theory of criticism from the French— mainly from Montaigne and Corneille. It had provided Dryden ample liberty to discuss more than one subject at a time and eft him scope to get back to the same subject on various situations and give opportunity for personal explanations, necessitated by the assaults on his works. But this unsystematic criticism sometimes epetitive, varying, and sometimes interesting.

The best of his prefaces are: (a) *Essay on Satire* (b) *Essay on Heroic Tragedy* (c) *Essay on ables.*

**Dryden's Works**

**a) *Essay On Satire :***

It is the preface to his translation of Juvenal's *Satires*. He defines the aim of satire as the orrection of manners and holds a satirical poem as a species of heroic poem. In his own practice e raised satire to the level of the epic.

**) *Essay on Heroic Tragedy :***

It is a preface to his heroic play *The Conquestof Granada*. It projects Dryden as a theorist of ne Heroic play (typical Restoration product). Dryden explains the heroic play as "an imitation; in ttle, of a heroic poem." It is a species of drama designed "by the rules of an heroic poem." It can be ssessed or interpreted with reference to those rules and not the Aristotelian rules of tragedy or the hakespearean. The writers should impart to a poem the dignity, majesty and grand use of heroic oem, by writing it in heroic verse. Its basic themes are love and valour and its function is to arouse dmiration' and not 'pity' and 'fear' of Aristotle's tragedy. The writer or dramatist is at his liberty to troduce in it the improbable and the marvellous, in the guise of the intervention of the supernatural gents, such as gods, angels etc. on the models of Homer and others.

**) *Essay on Fables :***

his is one of the prefaces of his last phase, prefixed to his translations from Ovid, Homer, Chaucer d Boccaccio. It widens the critical horizon of Dryden as it brings into assessment the literature of cient Greese, Rome and England. Atkins regards this preface as Dryden's "masterpiece in judgment,

method and style" in which "native achievement is viewed in the light of ancient standards." Saintsbury calls it "the best criticism of the world." Dryden contrasts Homer and Virgil and then Chaucer and Ovid in the essay. He says, "With Ovid ended the golden age of the Roman tongue, from Chaucer the purity of the English tongue began. The most striking part of the essay is Dryden's enthusiastic appreciation of Chaucer, and interpretation of his poetry and art of characterization. David Daiches puts it: "Dryden succeeds admirably in projecting into the readers mind his own feeling for Chaucer, as well as providing an objective account of his qualities. This is practical criticism really working."

d) ***Essay on Dramatic Poesy*** **:**

Dryden's versatile genius was presented in his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. In his address, "To the Reader" prefixed to the essay, Dryden expressed that his aim in writing the essay was "to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." The essay also throws some light on his efforts to adopt some principles to interpret and judge a play, and to design the rules to help a dramatist to create a good play. The essay was a result of contemporary events. A Frenchman, named Sobiere, paid a visit to England on some diplomatic mission in 1663. After his return to France he published an account of his visit which undermines the English science and drama. Thomas Sprat, the historian of the English Royal Society, gave a reply both on English stage and science. Dryden as a courtly poet and dramatist wrote the present *Essay* in dialogue form which has later become a popular literary genre. Though, Dryden labelled it essay, it takes the form of a dialogue. Here several speakers participate in a discourse representing Howard, Lord Buckhurst, Sedley and Dryden himself.. In the text Crites, a character, finds a marvelous advancement of poetry in the ancient period, from the time of Thepis to Aristophanes. He eulogises the Ancients for their imitation of nature and for their observation of three unities of time, place and action. Eugineus the next speaker considers the Moderns superior to the Ancients as they have the advantage of the experience and the rules of the ancients and the life and nature before them which they imitated. The Ancients did not have the knowledge of division of play into acts, rather they wrote their plays entrances than by acts. Regarding the unities, they never observed the unity of place and unity of time properly. Another shortcoming of the Ancients is lack of poetic justice.

Lisideius champions the cause of the French for their observation of three unities. He did not find fault with the English for their combining of comedy and tragedy. Another greatness of the French drama is that there is no multiplicity of action and incident in their plays. The French deliberately avoid the horrible scenes on the stage. The cruel, obnoxious, absurd, tumultuous and unnatural scene are conveyed to the spectators through narration rather than by direct representation on the stage.

Neander holds that the English are greater than the French. He finds no harm in mixing comedy with the tragedy. He remarks that the long speeches of the French do not suit the English who are sullen and come to the stage for refreshment. He accuses the French dramatists of representing too little humour and too little passion. He praises the English for intrusioning many under-plots in their plays, as they have the capacity to show them well. He defends the British, "yet our (the British) errors so few, and little, and those things wherein we excel them (the French) so considerable, that we ought of right to be preferred above them." Neander then continues to give a

short evaluation of the greatness of English dramatists like Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson. Next he examines Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman* for its excellences. Dryden's national prejudice is seen when he says our present poets, "have far surpassed all the ancients and the modern writers of other countries." While Crites attacks the use of rhyme in play as it is unnatural, Neander asserts that for serious and tragic plays rhymed verse alone is more natural and effective than blank verse. He suggests that the blank verse is suitable for comic plays. The discussion remains unconcluded and the readers are left free to draw their own conclusions. But Dryden seems constant in insisting on one central concept that the excellence of drama is to be evaluated by the liveliness of the representation and the delight experienced by the spectators.

## Dryden's views:

### (a) On the Function of Poetry

In the earlier ages poetry was intended to be read. Plato thought of it to instruct, Aristotle felt it to delight, Horace wanted it to do both and Longinus to transport. Dryden was aware of them all and asserts that the final end of poetry is to give delight and transport, and instruction is secondary. It did not barely imitate life but offered its model of it— 'a beautiful resemblance of the whole. To quote him "delight is the chief, if not the only end of poetry; instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesy only instruct as it delights.' 'Tis true, that to imitate well is a poet's work; but to effect the soul, and excite the passions, and above all to move admiration (awe or fear), which is the delight of serious plays, a bare imitation will not serve... there maybe too great a likeness; as the most skillful painters affirm, that there may be too near a resemblance in a picture; to take every lineament and feature, is not to make an excellent piece; but to take so much only as will make a beautiful resemblance of the whole; and, with an ingenious flattery of Nature, to heighten the beauties of some parts, and hide the deformities of the rest. Therefore, the poet is neither a teacher nor a mere copier, but a creator. He produces a new thing using life or Nature as his raw material that resembles the original in its basis but differs from it in its appearance. In such contexts Dryden admits the necessity of fancy or Coleridge's 'the shaping spirit of imagination.' He says 'it is fancy that gives the life-touches,' in other words, breathes life into the shapeless material from life or Nature.

Various critics interpret this 'delight', 'transport' and 'instruct' in their own way. Scott-James explains that it is aesthetic delight at which the poet aims which is proper to poetry than from contemplation of the beauty. This aesthetic delight has the power to move the power of transport. Dryden says, "to affect the soul, and excite the passions, and above all to move admiration." Regarding 'instruction' David Daiches asserts, "the instruction which poetry gives is psychological, it is better understanding of human nature, a keener insight into the working of the human mind and heart we get from poetry."

### (b) On Dramatic Poetry

Dryden paid much attention to the poetry of Drama. In his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* one of the interlocutors defines drama 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." It implies an 'image' of 'human nature' that is 'just', as well as, 'lively'. Dryden's use of the

word 'just' denotes that literature imitates human actions. The 'image' should not only be 'just' but it must also be 'lively.' David Daiches interprets 'lively' as 'interpreting'— the antithesis to dull, while R.A. Scott-James holds it as 'beautiful' and so 'delightful.' The poet is considered a creator who aims at creating something beautiful. He says, "the poet does not leave things as he finds them, but handles them, treats them, heightens their quality and so creates something that is beautiful, and his own. Dryden compares the poet with a gunsmith or watchmaker. He says the iron or his silver is not his own, but they are the least part of that which gives the value; the price is wholly in the workmanship.' Similarly a poet 'who works duly on a story, without moving laughter in a comedy, or raising concern in a serious play is no more to be accounted a good poet." In Dryden's period in France the unities were carefully observed. The 'time' and 'place' were considered on a par with the 'action.' They avoided the mixture of the comic and the tragic. The scenes of disgusting and violent were reported rather than acted as they have the belief that such scenes strain the feelings of the viewers. It made the English stage inferior when compared to that of the France. Dryden in his essay elucidates that contribution of ancient Greece, Rome and modern France is accepted and he adds that the writer's object is "to vindicate the honour of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them."

**(c) On Tragedy :**

Dryden elucidates his views on tragedy in his prefaces to *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* and *Troilus and Cressida*. His definition of tragedy is very close to Aristotle's: "an imitation of one, entire, great, and probable action; not told but represented; which by moving in us fear and pity is conducive to the purging of those two emotions in our minds." Dryden follows the French critic Rapin, instead of Aristotle, in his interpretation of arousing pity and fear. According to Aristotle these emotions are aroused through 'catharsis' whereas for Rapin's 'that pride and want of commiseration are the most predominant vices of mankind; therefore to cure us of these two, the inventors of tragedy have chosen to work upon two other passions, which are fear and pity.' Fear comes out to heal pride, and pity arises out of want of 'hardness of heart.' But Dryden makes it clear in his observation on Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd*: 'perhaps it may admit of dispute, whether pity and terror are wither of the prime, or at least the only ends of tragedy. 'Tis not enough that Aristotle has said so; for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides; and if he had seen our, might have changed his mind. And chiefly we have to say that the punishment of vice and reward of virtue are the most adequate ends of tragedy because most conducive to good example of life... If this be true, then not only pity and terror are to be moved, as the only means to bring us to virtue, but generally love to virtue and hatred to vice; by shewing the rewards of one, and punishments of the other; at least by rendering virtue always amiable, tho' it be shewn unfortunate; and vice detestable, though it be shewn triumphant.' Dryden follows Aristotle and Horace regarding the tragic hero and the other characters in tragedy.

**(d) On Epic :**

Dryden considers epic superior to tragedy. Dryden does not agree with the idea that the tragedy conveys its message in shorter boundary, and we can enjoy it in both forms of vision and reading, and says that the epic leaves on the reader, as it is restricted to a stipulated length. He adds that the epic 'is not so much in haste and works leisurly... The effects of tragedy are too violent to be lasting.'

Regarding visual appeal Dryden argues that it is combination of the actor's and poet's work, a poet can not claim credit for it. Stage cannot perform all the things refused in the play like big armies etc. which the epic renders them in words beautifully. In epic we find much leisure to comprehend whatever we read in it, while on stage we miss many beauties of play. Performance is not the measure for the merit of a work, because a worthless play can be well performed and succeeded. Dryden concludes that 'an Heroic poem is certainly the greater work of human nature.'

**Value of Dryden's Criticism**

Dr.Johnson describes Dryden as the father of English criticism, who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition. Before him, there had been great writers, but not great critics. Sidney and Ben Jonson made some frequent pronouncements on the critical art, which was a little 'critic learning.' Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* was written to defend poetry, as it was necessitated by the puritans attack against it. It is since Dryden that criticism has become a regular vocation like other arts. For the first time it has become aware of itself, interprets its objects with sympathy and knowledge. Besides his formal work of criticism, namely *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, he left us abundant criticism predominating prefaces to his works and his contemporaries. His criticism covers every aspect and problem of literature— the nature and function of poetry, tragedy, comedy, epic, satire, and other kinds such as tragic-comedy, the unities, rhyme and blank verse. Dryden read widely and learned much from his earlier writers. From Aristotle he learned to respect the rules, and the French Neo-classics made him prefer the epic to tragedy, and he was indebted to Longinus and Saint Evermond for his own judgement which often makes him impatient of rules. He is therefore considered a liberal classicist who would adopt the ancient rules to the genius of the age to which a writer writes.

Dryden had also shown a refined sense in the sphere of 'historical criticism'. He understands the fact that the genius and temperament differ from time to time and so literatures of various periods of history also differ. Dryden finds the decline of literature in the Pre-Restoration period because of historical reasons, and its rebirth, "to the restoration of our happiness". Thus he describes that Elizabethan Drama and the Restoration Drama are ruled by various literary conventions, "and that Aristotle himself might have revised his rules and written differently had he lived in the modern era." He recognizes the fact that tendency of the French and the English differ and so the creative art of the two countries is bound to vary. In the Essay he weighs and balances the characteristics of the English and the French drama. Therefore he can also be called the father of "comparative criticism". Saintsbury points out "He is the first in England to analyse English and foreign plays and examine their comparative merits and demerits." His comparative evaluation often leads him to cultural nationalism marked by his biased and prejudiced criticism. He is often prejudiced on the side of his own country, his age and his criticism reflects the nature of special pleading frequently. His criticism often is vague and digressive. Inspite of all these faults he established the style of English criticism.

### 1.3.8. Joseph Addision

The best works of Addison's criticism appeared mostly in the *Spectator*. The purpose of his contribution to this periodical was to bring 'philosophy of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses.' It means it is not intended for the learned,

but 'for those who had yet their rudiments to learn and found it not easy to understand their master.' This has imparted a new perspective to the English criticism. The concern of the critics before Addison was the 'writer', whereas Addison's concern was the 'reader'— who has to look for 'what books he should like, and how he should like them.' His criticism is confined to his thoughts on true and false wit, fine taste, the imaginative appeal of literature, tragedy and Milton. Addison's criticism is classified into three parts based on their publication. The early papers are: *On True and False Wit* (Nos 58-62) and those about tragedy (Nos. 39-40, 42, 44, 45) are important. The later ones are the series on *Paradise Lost* (Nos.267-369) and the last ones are *On the Pleasure of the Imagination* (Nos.411-21).

## Addison's Views

### (a) On True and False Wit

The papers of his early period consist Addison's views on *True and False Wit*. They reflect the impact of the philosopher, Lock, according to whom, wit is 'the assemblage of ideas wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy.' However, Addison adds that 'resemblance of ideas' alone is not wit, unless it produces 'delight' and 'surprise' in the reader. False wit comes from the resemblance of letters, words, puns etc. This word jugglery is also wit, but false wit. Between these two wits, Addison finds a middle variety, the mixed wit, which consists partly in the resemblance of ideas and partly in the resemblance of words.

### (b) On Taste

The main aim of Addison's criticism is 'formation of taste' in the reader when he says, "I shall endeavor, as much as possible to establish among us a taste of polite writing." He defines fine taste of literature as 'that faculty of the soul which discusses the beauties of an author with pleasure and the imperfection with dislike.' In order to acquire this faculty he asks the readers to read the writings of the great masters, discuss with men of polite learning, and acquaint with the works of the best critics.

### (c) On Tragedy

Addison's views on tragedy appear to have gathered from Aristotle, Horace and the French neo-classicists. Addison points out that modern tragedies surpass the tragedies of Greek and Rome in intricacies and the disposition of the fable, but lacking in the moral. He considers blank verse a more suitable form for tragedy than rhyme as it is nearer the speech of daily life. Addison denounces the mixture of the tragedy with comedy: 'the tragi-comedy which is the product of the English theatre, is one of the most monstrous invention that ever entered into a poet's thoughts. Addison also holds that tragedies should not have double plot. But he has no objection to an under plot if it consists near relation to the principal plot as to contribute to the completion of it. He is also against arousing pity and fear through violent death on the stage and for they can be better reported than acted.

### (d) On *Paradise Lost*

Addison's criticism of later phase contains the criticism of *Paradise Lost*. He examines this work to bring out the greatness of Milton in the light of the ancient theory and practice. He discusses it in four papers under the heads fable, character, thought and expression, in two papers its faults and in

twelve papers he analyses the poem book by book. Addison refers to the classical theories of Aristotle, Horace and Longinus and the models before him are Virgil and Homer.

Fable or Plot: Addison finds the poem 'single, complete, and great' as enunciated by Aristotle. It is single as it relates the fall of man; it is complete for its regular beginning, middle and end; and great because of its involvement of the fate of all mankind. The characters are not lacking in any point compared to Homer's in thought and sentiments– Satan in its mischief, Adam and Eve for their innocence. Expression achieved sublimity through its long similes. The 'censure' follows almost the neo-classical aspect. According to Aristotle a poem should end happily but it ends unhappily. By and large the poem closely follows the classical models of Homer and Virgil.

**(e) On Imagination**

The last phase of papers includes Addison's criticism of 'imagination'. This criticism is not merely on imagination, but the pleasure of imagination. He attempts to answer the questions such as 'How can we derive pleasure from imagination?' He finds two kinds of imagination, the first being the primary, of those 'which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes,' and secondary or those 'which flow from the ideas of visible objects when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.' We can find the secondary pleasure of imagination only in works of art and literature– painting and sculpture, which reproduce the objects themselves to suggest their ideas to the mind but literature uses words to do this job. It means the pleasure arises from a comparison of the copy with the original, the copy often making a stronger appeal to the imagination than the original.

**Addison's Value of Criticism**

In his assessment of Addison's criticism Birjadesh Prasad points out that it shows 'dual tendency' partly Neo-classical as in his examination of tragedy and *Paradise Lost* and partly aesthetic as in the theory of imagination and his utterances on the critical art. However, he shows neo-classical tendency by good sense, tolerance and positive good taste. His appreciation of Milton is tempered by sound commonsense, and reflection of genuine liking for poetic goodness. His end of criticism was to disseminate the taste of his period at large and he succeeds in his effort to a considerable extent.

### 1.3.9. Alexander Pope

Though Pope was a great poet, he also contributed substantially to criticism. His critical works are a) *Essay on Criticism* b) *Preface to the works of Shakespeare* c) *Art of Sinking* d) *Preface to the Translation of Iliad* and e) *Imitation of the Epistle of Horace to Augustus*. His *Essay on Criticism* is regarded as the major critical work worthy of recognition.

*The Essay* contains the most of his canons of literary taste. It is a collection of ideas culled from various sources and presented neatly. It is a treatise in verse, on the art of poetry modelled on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Vida's *De Arte Poetica* and Boileau's *L'Art Poetique*. Pope shows all respect for neo-classical rules and the Ancients. All of Pope's observations are drawn from Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, Longinus, Bossu, Rapin among the ancients and among moderns, Boileau and other critics of his school.

In his *Essay*, Pope reveals his general observations on the art of criticism and brings out the causes for the wrong criticism and lays down some rules for the critic. He defines criticism as 'true taste,' the gift of nature; the poet has to be guided by the 'rules of old' which are of the 'learned Greeces'. The chief canons of Pope's criticism are to follow classical rules of the ancients which follow nature. He suggests, "let Homer's works be your delight/ Read them by day, and read them by Night," and, "The ancient rules discovered not devised/ Are nature still, but methodized." Pope recommends some precepts for ease in writing and composition; "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance/ As those move easiest who have learned to dance." He insists on the correctness of expression. Expression is the dress of thought, as it "appears more decent as more subtle" in a sublime language. Pope suggests that a critic should critcise a work 'with the same spirit that the author writ." He admits that the application of rules is not compulsory, if a critic interprets a poem in the light of the spirit which inspired its creation. It implies that the rules are artificial.

**Pope's Achievement as a Critic**

Pope's criticism is considered a collection of the ideas of the others. To quote lady M. Wortley Mantagu, one of Pope's friends, 'it was all stolen.' We find his greatness of his criticism in his gathering of the most important precepts from the ancients to make it a Neo-classical theory. He collects certain rules from ancient critics according to his likes and dislikes. But Pope's views are unclear on poetry as expressed by the classics, that to him poetry is an art of imitation, and its function is to delight and instruct. B. Prasad says that "what is unmistakable throughout is his wholehearted acceptance of the classical creed, in spite of the allowance he makes for unavoidable deviations therefrom."

**1.3.10. Dr. Johnson**

Dr, Johnson has exercised a great influence on his age than any other critic had done in the past. According to Arthur Compton-Ricket "For nearly fifty years after the death of Pope, Johnson was the dominant figure in the literary life of the day. In his person he seemed at once an expression and a criticism of current social and ethical ideas." There is scarcely any phase of the life of his times, which he does not touch with his forceful personality." The important theory of his criticism comprises in a dozen papers in the form of "Essays and Articles" in the *Rambler*, a periodical founded and edited by the Doctor himself, "Preface to the Dictionary of the English Language" the observations on poetry in *Rasselas*, the *Preface to the Plays of Shakespeare*, and *The Lives of the Poets*. Criticism of his time was wavering between mere application of rules and judgment by 'taste.' He attempts to correct this folly, by determining the principles for meritorious composition. He regards the 'taste' without any guiding source of it as a 'caprice' and 'beauty' which pleases us we know not why is a term 'vague and undefined, different in different minds and diversified by time and place.' He opines that criticism 'should rest on surer foundations.' Johnson's criticism reflects dual trends– one is his persistence to the neo-classical rules and the other is the Romanticism when he says "The Neo-classical School is still dominant, but it is being undermined by the rising Romanticism of the Age." A. Boskar in his book *Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson* remarks "The Literature of the age reflects the conflict between the two main factors in artistic creation, unimpassioned reason on the one side, emotion and imagination on the other." This period made him search for balance, a

struggle against himself. Legouis and Cazamian points out that "without being in the least romantic, his is a troubled if not divided soul; a narrow but deep sensibility lies hidden beneath its rough exterior."

Among his critical works the *Preface to Shakespeare* and *The Lives of the Poets* contain the best part of his criticism. His *Lives of the Poets* is a biographical-cum-critical depiction of fifty two poets, covering from Cowley to Gray that covers the period of hundreds years. *Preface to Shakespeare* is no doubt a masterpiece of literary criticism. He started taking interest in the works of Shakespeare since when he first published *Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* in 1745. It holds up mirror to Johnson's gifts of art, the individuality of his style, the lucidity, his persistence to life and reason, not leaning or ingenuity, as the rule by which books are to be interpreted. It also shows his power of first placing himself on the level of the plain man and then lifting the plain man to his determined commonsense and discernment and his extensive knowledge of English language and literature.

## Johnson's Historical Approach

Dr. Johnson is the spokesman of the classical theory and drives home its doctrines effectively. Hence, his criticism is labelled "Doctrinal Classicism" by Legoius and Cazamian. He did his best to protect tradition, order, discipline, and authority and by extending the reign of classicism for some more years, which kept down, the new age, thought it continued to be under the surface.

Johnson believes that literature is not written subject to a restricted model. It is conditioned by the writer's age and milieu. He explains "To judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them. That which is easy at one time was difficult at another." Following nature and reason is a primary test of literary excellence, a consideration of the writer's convenience and confinements is no less essential for correct appreciation of its performance. It means the historical estimate is a crucial factor in genuine appreciation of an author. Johnson's appreciation of the writers is dependent on a cautious observation of the period, in which they lived and wrote. The representation of violent scenes in Shakespeare's plays implies the primitive tastes of the uncivilised spectators of the period. He applies the same criterion to Milton, Dryden, Addison etc. According to George Watson, Johnson therefore 'is an unambiguously historical critic, and the true father of historical criticism in English."

### Johnson's Views:

### (a) On Theory of Poetry

Dr. Johnson defines poetry in his *Life of Milton* as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason." In *Life of Waller* he tells us, "the essence of poetry is invention; such invention as by producing something unexpected, surpasses and delights." It implies that the nature of poetic art is to imitate truth or life, and its function is to give pleasure. He explains the distinction between 'invention' and 'imagination' in the *Life of Pope*. "Invention", he says, "by which new trains of events are found and new trains of imagery displayed... and by which extrinsic and adventious embellishments and illustrations are connected with a known subject," and that 'imagination' is that faculty "which strongly impresses on the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of his life, and energies of passion." Thus, poet

is a creator on account of his creative and imaginative powers and his creative ability can be found in his imagery.

**(b) On the Function of Poetry**

According to Johnson the function of poetry is predominantly endowed with the 'moral purpose.' In the *Preface to Shakespeare*, he asserts the 'end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. This idea confirms the concept of poetry of Horace and the French neo-classicists. Poetry, primarily, is an imitating of life, not of the particular, but of the universal. Johnson discovers it in Shakespeare's plays. "Shakespeare" holds Johnson "is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world... they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such the world will always supply, and, observation will always find." It implies that the poetic imitation is not that what a few people think, speak or do, but of most people in most ages think, speak or do. In other words it is 'a general nature'— the universal truth. Poetry should also give pleasure, but it must also give truth. It 'pleases many and pleases long' intimating their own thoughts, words and deeds "those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated," language that appears 'to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation,' and scenes where men 'act and speak as he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasions."

Johnson also paid great respect for Milton's *Paradise Lost* for its representation of morality. He points out, "the moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrusive." He says a poet should store his mind with inexhaustible kinds and use his scholarship, "for the enforcement or decoration of moral and religious truths, and he who knows most, will have most power of diversifying his senses, and of gratifying his readers with remote allusions and unexpected instructions." Thus Dr. Johnson places poet and poetry and function of poetry in exalted place.

**(c) On Kinds of Poetry, Versification and Poetic Diction**

Dr. Johnson, following the French Neo-classicists, regards the epic superior to all other forms of verse. He attributes high qualifications to the epic writers. In his *Life of Milton* he asserts "By the general consent of critics, the first praise of assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for their compositions... epic poetry undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts, and therefore relates some great event in the most affecting manner. History must supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which he must improve and exalt by retrospection and anticipation; morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue; from policy and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. To put these materials to poetical use is required an imagination capable of painting nature and realising fiction. Nor is he yet a poet till he attained the whole extension of his language, distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the verities of metrical moderation." He wants to make poetry sincere, actual and moving and avoid far-fetched ideas, empty conventional ornament, and excess

of metaphor and outward poetic tradition. It reflects his hostility to classical mythology, which he holds it to be an unnecessary ornament that disturbs the poetic message, which poetry has to impart. As far as verse forms are concerned, Dr. Johnson is not happy with Pastoral and the Pindaric ode. He holds that the pastoral, in the modern age, is no more than a mere convention, though, it had pleased in ancient times. As a supporter of truth to nature in poetry, clothed in 'naked elegance,' Johnson rejects Milton's *Lycidas* by pointing out "there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply, are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind." Mostly for the same reasons he regards the Pindaric ode as it does not suit to the modern conditions.

In his theory of versification Dr. Johnson wanted regular metre 'the stated recurrence of settled numbers' which the Pindarics are wanting in and in the next he considers rhyme as necessary to English verse since metre or rhyme alone is not enough to make it musical. In rhyme also he prefers the heroic couplet to all other stanza forms, as he believes that it gives more harmony than any other stanza forms. He holds that each line of verse should standalone logically, and rhyme with the next. In *Life of Milton*, he explains that "The music of the English heroic line, strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line cooperate together: this cooperation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another, as a distinct system of sounds; and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme." Thus, he insists on the regularity of harmony in verse. He does not like to have it spoiled by enjambement or Alexandrine or triplet. He regards, blank verse is 'only to the eye.' It 'has neither the easiness of prose, nor the melody of numbers.'

Dr. Johnson also expressed his views on the poetic diction. He explains that all words do not suit poetry. In his "Life of Dryden" he says, "Words too familiar or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet." The words that we hear daily do not make much impression on the reader, and the strange words are also not understood or understood with difficulty. Therefore, Johnson excludes these two categories, and advocates the rest for poetry. He says that diction of poetry should be a 'system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts.' He cites Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* as an example in which Dryden uses words that sailors only can understand.

**d) On Drama**

Johnson comments on the aspects of the dramatic art of his day, especially of its nature, the unities, dramatic pleasure and the tragic-comedy. As it is a part of poetry, it must hold up 'a faithful mirror of manners and of life.' It has to exhibit 'human sentiments in human language.' He explains that a great play is not a mere story of a few people, of a particular age, but they represent the men of all ages of their customs, thoughts, and passions. It narrates 'in widest commonalty spread.' In this respect, he says, Shakespeare is great, for 'he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in traits, to which it cannot be exposed.'

**(e) On The Unities :**

Among the three unities Dr. Johnson has found the unity of action only justified for its union of the events of the plot into an inseparable whole. And the other two unities– the time and the place he

says come from false assumptions and circumscribe the drama and reduce its variety. However, the three unities are considered essential in respect of the credibility of drama. It is held that fiction should be near to the reality to the extent possible. But it is wrong to claim that any dramatic performance is credited with reality. If a viewer can expect the stage to be Alexandria and the action to be Antony and Cleopetra, his imagination can as well extend to any other idea. Drama is an illusion, and illusion has no limits. The spectators know the stage is a stage, and the actors are actors. In the words of Johnson 'The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last, the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation.'

The unity of time has no much importance. A drama is an imitation of continuous deeds, and just as they may be performed at successive places, they also may be represented at different periods, separated by many years. But the events thus represented should be connected with each other with nothing but time intervening between them. In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Johnson says that 'A lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation.' However, the unities are not inevitable to drama. Violation of the unities results often in variety and instruction. The rules may be against Johnson but he defends Shakespeare for his close depiction of drama to life and nature.

**(f) On the Tragi-comedy**

Johnson's views on tragi-comedy reflect his realistic attitude towards drama. According to the classical rules, combining of tragedy with comedy should be condemned. But Johnson says 'there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature' and remarks that 'pleasure consists in variety,' and touch of comedy makes tragedy grim. Shakespeare imitates life and nature when he mixes comedy with tragedy. It has become a distinct species of the dramatic art in the hands of Shakespearre, 'exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hastening to his wine, and the mourner burying his dead; and in which the malignity of one is something defected by the frolic of another.'

**Johnson's Doctrinal Criticism**

Johnson's critical theory represents the classical dogma. He undertakes a task of asserting older traditional school of criticism as the rising romantic school has questioned its validity. He drives home his doctrines effectively. Therefore, Legouis and Cazamian named it 'Doctrinal classicism.' Johnson deeply read the ancient writers since earliest times. He has a great respect for tradition and he has 'a fear of contempt for all innovations, and his criticism everywhere reflects his search for stability and disciplined order.'

**General Estimate of Johnson as a Literary Critic**

Dr. Johnson is one of the greatest and the last critics of the Neo-classical school. His literary criticism belongs to the school of 'Classic' or 'Judicial' criticism. It is an outcome of his study of the classics early in life and the impact of the environment in which he lived and wrote. Therefore, we

understand him judging by certain rules, 'rules of old discovered and not devised,' in the manner of Dryden and Pope. He does not like poets to please by chance. The words of Horace form the ground for Johnson's critical pronouncements when he says that they must know 'what becomes them well and what becomes them ill, what is the path of excellence and what the path of error'.

Johnson's theory criticism is shadowed by classical prejudices. He could not appreciate blank verse. Gray, Collins, and Milton do not deserve the appreciation he showered on them. In his appreciation he applied the 'rationality' and 'good sense' to a work. The excess of the Metaphysics and the Romantics was repulsive to him. He did not even spare Shakespeare for his excesses towards whom he has great respect.

Johnson is also lacking in aesthetic sensibility. He finds the music of *Lycidas* as coarse and "one blade of grass" for him "was like another." He likes and appreciates the heroic couplet and dislikes the blank verse. He repudiates the highest flights of poetry. He admires Milton for uniqueness of mind, and depiction of his characters and not his poetic skills. John Bailey says, 'He never betrayed the slightest suspicion that in speaking of Milton he is speaking of one of the very greatest artists the world has ever known.' In poetry 'eloquence of expression and energy of thought' moved him. He considers poetry as artful intellectual embroidery, not as the only fit utterance of art's exalted mood.

The rules that Johnson had followed, and the authority for those rules were imparted not from an individual but from the deepest knowledge of the human heart. He was interested more in human 'life and manners' than what happens in the minds and heart of man. He condemns *Paradise Lost* for its deficiency in human interest. He remarks that its concept conforms to neither human actions nor human manners. The plot governed by the supernatural, and the purely human, is kept in the background. Shakespeare imitates life and nature by mixing tragedy with comedy. Regarding unities he justifies only the unity of action and the remaining unities of time and place he says are the results of theatrical misconceptions. Leguois and Cazamian explains about his treatment of the three unities that 'In this high priest of the classical faith and of a rational art, sure signs evidence a yearning for mother art, for another psychological tone; in his sub-conscious mind, he shares in the mental change taking place among his contemporaries.'

Johnson's criticism of poetry can be read with interest, profit and admiration. He makes us realize that poetry is an art as well as inspiration; it has a form and a substance and form is as essential as the matter. For this he is ranked 'among the masters of criticism.' He brings about a great value to classical techniques and rules of composition and appreciates the charm, beauty and stimulating power of poetry. Legouis and Cazamian comments: "he has given more solid reality to the classical scale of merits, because he has founded it in the full perception of spiritual energies." Johnson's observations are brought out in a style of condensed force and rich in standards. He has surely become the modern man of letters. As an independent authority on literature and manners, and a critic of reputation, he contributes to regularity and steadiness at a time that is hardly in the pangs of massive alteration which has already begun.

## 1.3.11. Let Us Sum Up

In this Unit we have understood the nature and value of the Neo-Classical school of Criticism with reference to major critics like John Dryden, Addison, Pope and Dr. Johnson.

## 1.3.12. Sample Questions

1. Bring out the causes for the rise of the Neo-classical School and elucidate the chief characteristics of the school.
2. What according to Dryden is the function of poetry?
3. Comment on Dryden's views on Dramatic poetry.
4. Discuss Dryden's contribution to literary criticism.
5. Discuss the value of Addison's criticism.
6. What is the contribution of Alexander Pope to the Neo-Classical School of criticism?
7. Discuss the achievement of Dr. Johnson as a critic.

## 1.3.13. Suggested Reading

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# Lesson 4
# From "Life of Milton" form Lives of the English Poets
**Dr. Samuel Jhonson**

## Contents:



## 1.4.1. Objectives:

- to study Jhonson's important qualities of as a literary critic
- to briely introduce his important works
- to study Life of Milton in Jhonson's Lives of Poets.

## 1.4.2 Life and Works of Dr. Samuel Jhonson:

The son of a booksellerin Lichefield, Samuel Jhonson, (the literary dictator, as he is known in literary circles) was born, on eighteenth of September, 1792. Even at his school, though a physical wreck, he displayed a vigorous and precocious mind. With a strong memory and the power of rapid assimilation, he was in the constant company of books. Even as a schoolboy be revealed great stores of mind. He overcame the disadvantages of his frail body with the awareness of intellectual superiority. He entered Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1628, but poverty made him to leave about a year later.

## Life of Milton:

Dr. Samuel Jhonson's " Life of Milton" carries with it firm conviction and intimacy of judgement, though occasionally he appears drawn at least in some fashion and manner, by his personal prejudices. At least even in a limited, way his other stout critical judgement appears fallible. This is not Milton's biography bit an essay in literary criticism.

As he portrays Milton's life with a close biographical accuracy, from his birth on December (1608 as the spread Eagle in Bread street, between six and seven in the morning till his passing away (" by a quiet and silent expiration") about the tenth of November, 1674 at his house in Bun shill – fields and his burial next father" in the chances of St. Giles at Cripplegate and that his funeral was splendidly and numerously attended", Jhonson brings home Milton's life and the conditions of his life and the circumstances and the fun description of the ambience of Milton's imagination with unfailing correctness. More than anything else, there is an artist's closeness and handling of details, with, of course, a Jhonson's own attitude to certain events in Milton's

life, unlike in the wry portrayal of a professional biographer. We come to know of Milton the man the poet, though, coloured by Jhonson's strong prejudices and attitudes.

As Johnson's description falls into two parts first, let us study Jhonson's portrayal of Milton the man, while in the second part we study Jhonson's attitude to Milton the poet. In Jhonson's portrayal of Milton the man, there is a general correctness to well known facts of Milton's life: his birth, education his championing of the republican cause, his marriage a sorrow, his blindness and finally the successful achievement a fulfillment of his goal and his passing away and burial.

John Milton was instructed at first private tuition under the core of Thomas Young. Then Milton went to St. Paul's school to study under the core of Mr. Gill and to Christ, College in his sixteenth year on February 12, 1624. Though Milton, in a way commended his own early proficiency in Latin, cowley and his other contemporaries surpasses him. At the age of fifteen, he versified two Psalms, 114 and 136. He wrote many of his elegies in his eighteenth year. According to Mr. Hampton, he was the first Englishman to write Latin verses with classical elegance. He was regarded with no great fondness and was without fellowship. He was unfortunately rusticate from the college and according to Dr. Jhonson, Milton was one of the last student" in either university that suffered the public indignity of corporal correction." With this Rustication, he lost a term and retired to this life his life in Harton (though he took the Bachelor degree in 1628 and the master degree in 1632). He left the university with no kindness for its institution and this has some effect on his writings and education. He believed in his vision of education a significant role for literature and grammar. He went to the university with a design of entering into the church but he altered his mind to spend his time in writing poetry. He has no interest to be a clergy man.

At Hortan, after his Rustification from the College, he prepared himself intellectually and in his creative imagination to attempt something unattempted either in prose or in rhyme. At Hortan, he read all the Greek and Latin writers. He first wrote comes and presented it at the residence of the Lord Presidency of Wales in 1634. The story is taken from Homer's circle. Next he wrote Lycides, an elegy, in 1637, and the death of Mr. King. His acquaintance with the Italian writers may be discovered by a mixture of longer and shorter verses. In 1638, he left England and first went to Paris and had the opportunity of visiting Grotius. Form Paris, he went to Italy and stayed for two months at Florence and spent his time in producing compositions of enough profundity and permanence. In their writings, according to Dr. Jhonson, Milton showed " a lofty and steady confidence in himself." He also showed some contempt of others and he praised so few. From Florence he went to Sienna and from Sienna to Rome where he was received with kindness by the learned and the great. He also visited Rome and Naples and though his purpose was to visit Sicily and Greece, he left for England with a patriotic fervour in response to the political turmoil. He also visited Gatrled during his stay in Italy. On his return to England, he heard of the death of his friend Diodati. Back in England, he under took the education of John and Edward Philips, his sister's sons. Here we find that Milton performs wonders. His aim was to instruct his pupils in religion. Every Sunday was spent in Theology. He set his pupils an example of hard study and spare diet for Jhonson, religion a moral knowledge is essential. Prudence and Justice are virtues and excellences of all times and of all traces. We are moralists first and geometricians by chance.

Milton's interest in the country's affairs started now. In 1641 he published a treatise of Reformation in two books, against the established church. His next work was the Reason of Church Government. In this work, he found "with calm confidence his high opinion of his own

powers" and desired to write something that may bring " honour to his country". This quiet a undimmed confidence sets the mood for his poem Paradise Lost.

At his thirty-fifth year, he married Mary, which however subsequently became a failure. He published about the same time his "Aeropagitica", a speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing. But whatever were his engagements; poetry was his main desire and preoccupation. For the subject of his epic poem, after much deliberation, "long chusing and beginning late" he fixed upon Paradise Lost. Once he had designed to celebrate King Arthur. He also planned to write one of those wild dramas called Mysteries. Then Mysteries consist of allegorical persons, such as Justice, Mercy and Faith. Milton had two plans of the tragedy or mystery of Paradise Lost, in the first plan, he had persons like Michael, Chorus of Angels and Heavenly Love and Lucifer. In the second plan, he had Moses and Adam. There is also a debate of justice, Mercy wisdom and the chorus of Angels. In the second Act, there is Heavenly Love, Evening Star and the chorus singing the marriage – song, describing Paradise, Lucifer plans Adam's ruin. Chorus fears for Adam and relates Lucifer's rebellion and fall. In the IV Act, Adam and Eve have fallen and conscience cites them to God's examination. In Act V, Adam and Eve are driven out of Paradise. Faith, Hope and charity comfort and instruct him and the chorus briefly concludes. In another sketch, Milton wrote the story "Adam unparadised." According to Dr. Jhonson, Milton, by virtue of his invention and his "Fancy and the melody of his numbers and his comprehension of much knowledge and memory stored with intellectual treasures" completed the greater English poem, namely Paradise Lost. In 1667, he published "Paradise Regained" and Somson Agonistes". "Samson Agonistes" was a written in imitation of the Ancients.

In the second part of this work, Dr. Johnson describes Milton's qualities and excellencies of Milton. Milton read all the great languages as Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, French and Spanish. In Latin his skill was so great that he could be placed in the first rank of writers and critics. He cultivated Latin with uncommon diligence. He also delightfully read Ovid's Metamorphoses", and "Euripides". He gave much value and importance to the poetry of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley. His favourite poet was Spenser. He also showed profound interest in the capability of Shakespeare as a dramatist. He also approved of the poetic qualities of Cowley. For him, Dryden was a good rhymist, but no poet. At first, he showed Calvinist interest in religion, though after wards, he tended towards Arminianism. He did not associate himself with any denomination of Protestants. He was not nag of the church of Rome: he was not of the church of England. In spite of his fundamental faith and commitment to the truth of Christianity and Holy Scriptures and followed them with "Profoundest veneration" he did not show much interest in any "visible worship". In his daily activities, there was no hour of Prayer. His political thoughts were those of the republican. He believed that " a popular government was the most frugal; for the trappings of a monarchy would set up an ordinary commonwealth." However, here, Dr. Jhonson appears to final fault with Milton's true faith in liberty. For him, Milton did not have" so much love for liberty as repugnance to authority".

Milton had fondness for his poems. His early poems have enough genius. They have originality. Milton wrote these poems with much care. However, Jhonson's criticism of Lycidas shows his disapproval of many qualities of Milton's poetic craftsmanship in this poem. Though this poem may have the strength of sentiments, it is without "the effusion of real passion. In a revealing metaphor Jhonson writes thus: "Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy: nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough satyr and fawns with cloven heel." "Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief". According to him, "In this poem, there is no nature.

for there is no truth, there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar and therefore disgusting'. The poem's images are tiring and exhausted. Its "Inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind." The poem is also defective in its portrayal of my religious Gods, but heathen deities. There is no convincing men in the portrayal of the shepherd's lamentation. His sorrow does not excite sympathy. It is also nag convincing to see how one God does not ask another god what is become of Lycidas. Here the most awful and sacred truths are mingled. The shepherd sometimes appears a feeder of sheep, where as sometimes he appears to be an ecclesiastical Paster, a superintendent of a Christian Flock. Such "equivocations", according to Dr. Jhonson, are "Indecent, and at least approach to impiety". Hence Jhonson believes that "no man could have fancied that he read Lycidas with pleasure had he not known its author.

However, his opinion of Milton's two other early poems, "L'Allegro" and Il Penseroso" is considerate and positive. He believes that " every man that reads them, reads with pleasure". Milton's interest here to show "how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified". The pensive men hears the lark in the morning: the cheerful man hears the nightingale in the evening. The cheerful man sees the cock strut and hears the horn and hound echo in the wood; then walks not unseen to observe the glory of the rising sun or listen to the singing milkmaid and view the labours of the plowman and the mower : then casts his eye about him over scenes of smiling plenty and looks up to the distant tower. Thus he pursues rural happiness through a day of labour or of play and delights himself at higher with the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance. The pensive man, at one time, walks unseen to amuse at midnight; and at another hears.the sellers curfew. When the morning comes, a morning gloomy with rain and wind, he walks into the dark tracklean woods. Falls asleep by some murmuring water and with melanchoiy enthusiasm expects some dreams of prognostication.

Both Mirth and Melancholy are solitary, silent inhabirants. Both his characters delights in music. Milton seems to think that the cheerful notes came from Plato. Here accessing to Jhonson, in these poems, to images are properly selected and "nicely distinguished", though "the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated". Thus Mirth and Melancholy are "two noble efforts of imagination".

Then Jhonson goes to discuss the Masque of Comus, "the greatest of Milton's Juvenile performances". This offers "a specimen of his language" as also exhibits his "power of description and vigour of sentiment". These are employed in "the Praise and defence of virtue." This is " a work more truly poetic is rarely found". It has allusions, images, and descriptive epithets. "As a series of lines, it may be considered as worthy of all the admiration" from us.

However, as a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable. The supernatural element, wherever employed in this poem, may be called "freaks of Imagination" The human action is not reasonable. What is reprehensible is the prologue being spoken in the wild wood by the attendant spirit to the audience. This mode of communication's contrary to the nature of dramatic representation. The discourse of the spirit is too long. The discourse may not have the spiritedness of a dialogue. It appears to be rather declamations deliberately composed and formally repeated on a moral question. Some of the soliloquies of Comus and the lady are elegant, but tedious. In all these parts, the language is poetical and the sentiments are generous, though there is something wanting to attract our attention. The songs are vigorous and fun of imagery but they are harsh in their diction, and not very musical in their numbers. According to

Dr. Jhonson, "or is a drama in the epic style, in elegantly splendid and tediously instructive. Milton's sonnets, written on different occasions, "are not bad and only the eighty and the twenty-first are truly entitled to slender commendation".

Paradise Lost with respect to design "may claim the first place and with respect to performance, the second among the productions of the human mind. For Jhonson, quite rightly Poetry is "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling upon imagination to the help of reason". Epic poetry "relates some great enemy in the most affecting manner" Milton's purpose was to "vindicate the ways of God to men: to show the reasonableness of religion and the necessity of Obedience to the Divine Law. He was involved in his description of the fall of Man the event which preceded and those that were to follow it. He has interwoven the whole system of theology. His subject is the fate of the works the revolutions of heaven and of earth; rebellion against the Supreme Kind: the overthrow of their host and the punishment of their crime; the creation of a new race of reasonable creatures: their original happiness and innocence; their loss of immortality and their restoration to hope and peace. In his epic of cosmic significance, according to Dr. Johnson, "the weakest of his agents are the highest and noblest of human beings," the original parents of mankind" on whose "rectitude or deviation of will" depended all the future inhabitants of the globe. The characters of this epic are those are those of angels and of man; of angels good and evil; of man in his innocent and sinful state. Among the angels, the virtue of Raphael is mild and flaccid; that of Michael is regal and lofty and attentive to the dignity of his own nature. Of the evil angels, the characters are more diversified. According to Addision, sometimes, such sentiments are given to Satan, as suit "the most exalted and most depraved being". Milton is also censured for "the impiety, which sometimes breaks from Satan's mouth". Such thoughts that pass through Satan's mind, "no good man would willingly permit them to pass through his mind however transiently. According to Dr. Jhonson, "the malignity of Satan foams in naughtiness and obstinacy; but his expressions are commonly general, and not otherwise offensive than as they are wicked".

Adam and Eve express their sentiments of obedience to God. Innocence left them nothing to fear. According to Addison, this epic is universally and perpectually interesting. All mankind will, through all ages, bear the same relation to Adam and Eve and must share that good and evil which extend to themselves. The epic has a distinctly and clearly a b`ginning a middle and an end. There is perhaps, no poems of the same length, from which so little can be taken without apparent mutilation.

Milton considered creation in its whole extent and his descriptions are learned. The characteristic quality of this poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant but his element is the great. His natural port is "gigantic loftiness". By his lofty imagination, be "delighted to form new modes of existence and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings. When he cannot "raise wonder by the sublimity of his mind. He gives delight by its fertility." He saw Nature and expresses it "through the spectacles of books". The garden of Eden brings to his mind the vale of Enna, this similarities are numerous and various. His great excellence is amplitude and he expanse "the adventitious detail beyond the dimensions which the occasion required." He shows a high level of moral excellence. He got this moral superiority by his acquaintance with the sacred writing. In him, every line breathes "sanctity of thought and purity of manners.

As human panions did not enter the world before the fall, there is no place for pathetic feeling in this poem. Due to the importance given to Reason, "sublimity is the general and prevailing quality of this poem. Sublimity is variously manifested, sometimes descriptive,

sometimes argumentative". According to Dr. Johnson, Paradise Lost has "neither human actions nor human manners". In this poem as the good and evil of Eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit, the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness. However, Johnson gives full praise to Milton's poetic genius. Milton's displays "the united force of study and genius: of a great accumulation of materials, with to digest and fancy to combine them. He was able "to select from native or from story whatever could illustrate or adorn his thoughts. He shows a rich source of knowledge "fermented by study and exalted by imagination". In reading Paradise Lost we read "a book of Universal Knowledge".

However, for Jhonson, with all these excellencies, Paradise Lost is a poem without human interest as its "perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure". We may read for instruction but not for recreation. Also, his allegory of sin and death is Faulty.

After thus in some fashion, not praising the Milton's poetic genius, finds his next work, Paradise Regained "in many parts elegant and every where in structure". The basis of this poem is narrow, as its dialogue without action can never please anybody. Though Samson Agonists has "many particular beauties many just sentiments and striking lines", it wants "that power of attracting the attention" with a well – connected plan. According to Dr. Jhonson, this poem lacks the authentic dramatic power, as Milton did not know the shades of human nature. Regarding Milton's language, according to Addision, "our language sunk under him". Both Milton's prose diction and poetic diction was formed "by a perverse and pedantic principle". He continuously used the same style, without altering it according to the subject. Inspite of its supposed barbaric quality, "his prose has "copious and variety". He was master of his language in its full extent. He selected the melodious words with such diligence "that from his book alone the Art of English poetry might be learned".

Thus, finally, "the highest praise of genius is original invention", he has "the vigour and amplitude of mind. He is naturally thinker himself confident of his own abilities.

## Critical Evaluation:

Dr. Jhonson is an original critic. There is an authentic stamp of his personality, combined with his own original, creative use of Augustan qualities of reason and judgment; he does not do away with the significance of imagination, altogether. For him, literature is essentially a product of human life. Without life, there is no literature. For he believes that " life must be seen before it can be known". F.R. Miles believes that, with the exception of Dryden Johson is the first English critic whose writings are " a constant pleasure to read" He is honest, eruded, level – headed and sensitive. He bases his judgment as a close knowledge and examination of the work under discussion. He emphasizes the fact that literature is a source of pleasure as well as improvement. It is "a commentary on life itself, as the mature fruit of a writer's experience". He wrote that "books without knowledge of life are unless". For books teach us "the art of living". His insistence on literature as a living experience originates from his own suffering and pleasure in life. According to him a Poet must have "sweeping knowledge, a concentration on several truths; universality. These are also the qualities of the "Augustan Criticism.

In A R Humphrey's ("Eassay on Jhonson" the Pelican guide to English literature, Vol 4) opinion, Jhonson is " a great critic because he works in a tradition his judgments are not those of tradition more by : they are judgments of tradition from which most of what is super final has been

pruned off by his unsurpassed power of looking at a subject for himself. " Jhonson's critical attitude is defined by the acceptance of duty to god and truth, " a discipline of imagination and reason by which eccentricity and whish submit to the large authority of 'things as they are," In a letter to Boswell, he wrote thus: " We may take Fancy for a companion, but must follow reason as our guide". Literature must be based on "a tradition with striking personal wit and independence " _ these are obviously the Augustan qualities. As an Augustan critic, he sought truth and beloved that literature expresses it with wit. Literature is concerned with "the central moral needs of human life and the generic workings of human nature." He believes that literature expresses the truth of a tradition of which Anglicanism is the presiding faith. Like most Augustan humanists, he elevates moral philosophy far above "the new fashion" of physical sciences. He believed that men more frequently require to be reminded (than informed) of "accepted phiiosophy, recalling the things needful to the proper conduct of life". Even with his commitment to the general assent, he does not lower the standards of literary judgment to that of the average may. He only expects the average man to rise the standards of a large sanity and reason. As an intellectual, seeking truth, he believes that "truth can be rationally sought and must be co pounded plainly and that (in literary judgment men can agree on an all important matters.

In any estimate of Jhonson's achievement a contribution as a critic, discussion of his own personality and his relationship with the Augustan tradition is necessary. Much attention has been paid, Jhonson's personal traits, as a social figure a conversationalist. Thanks to Boswell's close study of Jhonson in his celebrated biography, much attention has been paid to his "innate visibility and puzzle ling anamolies". Consequently, much attention has been paid to the study of Jhonson the man rather than Jhonson, the author, which led, in any case, F.R. Leavis to comment that "Jhonson, after all, was a great English writer". Though maintaining " a splendid objectivity in his best writings, his criticism and poetry are nevertheless intensely personal in nature". The fruits of his own struggles and sufferings in life provide the basic materials of his work. He is " a talker of supreme ability and ruthless brutalities". F.R. Miles describes Jhonson thus: One masterful figure, pontificating with a breath taking stock of scholarly knowledge, laying down the low on my subject from women preachers to classical prosody, act in repartee, snubbing the interrupter, agile in shifting his ground, and always triumphing". In a way he exemplifies every thing that is present in the sensibility of the Augustan Age, as he is the voice of reason, Augustan decorum, supreme intellectual control at the expense of personal emotion. At the same time, in many ways, we is " a very unrepresentative eighteenth – century figure. This temperament, far from exhibiting those traits of cool, dispassionate logicality, was one of violent extremes, controlled with conscious effort. In many ways, both in his talking and writing, he was unusually Romantic. His personal and imaginative nature of his matural, the force and emotion of his vocabulary are not the typical qualities of the Augustan Age.

Jhonson's achievement as a critic is remarkable and even heroic, given the obstacles in his life. In reply to Bosworth, he said that his material success was remarkable, by taking into consideration the fact that he had little influence. As a result of the many difficulties, he himself had faced in life, he showed generosity and magnanimity to the poor. This sympathy for the poet originated both from a natural sensitivity and from his own sufferings. He did not indulge in self pity.

**Dr.Jhonson: His Life and his Works**: The Rambler essays from March 1750, under the title The Rambler established his reputation. It covers a wide range of interests. There are discussions of psychological and moral problems of humanity. He admonishes the general lack of contentment in the world. He examines envy as the major social cause of human discontext and misery. He

started Dictionary in 1746. To his contemporaries he was Dictionary Jhonson as his achievement was hailed with wonder and admiration. It held its place as authoritative dictionary, virtually until the appearance of the Oxford Dictionary. He was as a philogist, the first person to establish the principle of deciding the correct usage by quotation.

Next year he accepted the job of an usher in a school at Market Booworth. He left the job to return to Lichfield in 1734. He started his Literary activity by contributing essays to the Birmingham Journal in 1735, he published his first book length work, a free translating from the French of a Protugese book, A Voyage to Abyssinia. He really found himself as a writer when his association with The Gentleman's Magazine started. The Life of Savage published in 1744 become his first well-known major work. In August 1947, he published plan of a Dictionary of the English Language. It was an ambition work and a formidable task to undertake single-handed and without patronage. In any case, his was not the Dictionary. It took eight years for him to complete the work. He wanted to pressure the purity of the English language and protect it from the corrupting influence of the French. He was descriptive, not assertive in the treatment of words. He attaches greater importance to traditional linguistic practices than to innovation, in matters of idiomatic usage.

In 1749, he published anonymously his beautiful poem, "The vanity of Human wishes". In "London", his other poem, he turned to Juvenal. The theme of this poem is the corruption of a city. "The vanity of Human wishes" deals with the theme of vanities of human nature. It tells that in life there is, more to be endured than enjoyed and human happiness comes out of ones's effort. This poem brought endless reputation, on a poet. In June 1756, he sent his proposals for an edition of Shakespeare. His endeavour was 'to disentangle Shakespeare', intricacies and recover the meaning of words new lost in the darkness of antiquity". He worked hard and published the work with a noble preface in eight volumes in October 1765. Here we see him functioning as 'a textual editor, an annotator, a critical interpreter'. In 1758, he began a series of essays under the title The Idler. These essays were less ambitious than those of The Rambler. The death of his mother led to the writing Rasselas the Prince of Abyssinia in 1759. This is a tale on the choice of life with little strong element; this has philosophical observations on the nature of life and its limitations. The tale tells of the wanderings of Rasselas and his final return and emphasizes a few truths, the vanity of human wishes, the meaningless life in a world of cross purposes and the need for accepting life as it comes. His Literary Club formed in 1754, became a centre of literary and intellectual activity, involving writers and thinking like Adam Smith Gibbon and Sheridon and Goldsmith. With the rise in his popularity and with the conferring of LL.D., by Trinity College in 1765, he became "the great chain of literature."

In 1777, he started his greatest work, The Lives of the poets what began as a biographical note turned in his hands into a full-length essay. Here he distinguished himself as a literary biographer and critic, par excellence. His general abilities and his deep knowledge of human nature best qualified him to be the literary biographer of England. He told Boswell that he loved the biographical part of literature the most. He elevated the literary biographies to bloom into "annotations on life".

His contemporaries respected him more as a scholar, philosopher and a moral teacher, than as a literary critic. They respected his sound knowledge of Greek and Latin, his mastery of the classics his scholarship in French literature and his acquaintance with Italian and Spanish. They admired his interest in history and biography and his knowledge in low and medical sciences of the day.

For John Wain, Jhonson's criticism is a strategic moment in literary history as a connection between the Augustan and modern criticism. Jhonson believed in the neo-classical principles such as discipline regularity and rationality as he considers emotions with suspicion. With his classical temper he studied truth, verifiable by his common sense. As a classicist he opted for the concrete and the rational, but not for the subtle and the mysterious. He preferred the direct to the indirect, the general to the particular, the traditional to the spontaneous. He believed that the purpose of writing was to instruct and improve the work and hence all writing should be 'moral'. He longed for harmony and order. As Jhonson writes in his "Life of Milton", Poetry Is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason" and "epic poetry teaches the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts."

However, Jhonson was no narrow classicist, as for him life is the source of literary experience and commonsense is his approach to it. He believes that "Literature is better judged by perception than by principles." To this extent he shows some qualities of the Romantic imagination, though his admiration for the 'classical' virtues of the Augustan poetry of Pope and Dryden is intact. His admiration for Shakespeare in his "Preface". in boundless, even as he denounces Shakespeare's, lack of moral purpose. In the same way, his condemnation of Milton in his "Life of Milton" is equally forceful, as he disapproves of Milton's "ground works and his too much liberty with the English versification. As a champion of rhyme and heroic coupler, he could not appreciate Milton's blank verse.

However, his criticism of Shakespeare is fairly free from personal prejudices. He hails Shakespeare as a poet of nature (human nature) presenting human sentiments in human language. He praises Shakespeare's play because they faithfully 'mirror' life. He defends Shakespeare's neglect of the classical unities. He praises Shakespeare for making nature predominant over accident. His view of Shakespeare as a man endowed with a greater degree of awareness and comprehension than others takes him closer to the neo-classical norms. In many ways, The Lives of the Poets and the proposals and Preface to Shakespeare display " a critical acuteness and intelligent sensibility that are found not often in any other English critic". As Literary Criticism, Preface to Shakespeare is peculiarly Jhonsonian piece of writing. He approaches the plays with unfailing objectivity.

## 1.4.5 Life of Milton:

His "life of Milton" is a superb example how such a precious critical genius is occasionally tainted by occasional critical perversity." If for Cowper, Lycidas is endowed with "the liveliness of the descriptions, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity." For Jhonson, it lacks convincingness and artistic excellence. In a way, as Jhonson was a committed royalist, his disapproval of Milton's interest in the republican politics is natural, through justifiable on grounds of personal prejudice. For Jhonsons, Milton's interest was more in showing repugnance to authority than to champion the cause of liberty. His observations in the Lives of Poets form 'a single vast commentary on the Augustan epoch, as "the great literary dictator", that Jhonson was known, passes his 'Judgement' on poets without fear or favour. Milton and Butler are declared 'dangerous' examples for any one to follow; Druden is praised for beginning the trend of healthy diction in poetry and rendering English criticism rational. Pope is praised in this work, Lives of the Poets for his qualities of "invention, imagination and Judgement that constitute genius." Gray and Collin receive censure as well as praise. As the whole work is in the manner of passing critical judgement (in a "judicious" manner) even if, occasionally there are misjudgements, because of

his prejudices, Jhonson explains the nature of Judgement. He also supports his statement by some justifiable reason, thus making criticism an ideal and rational critic. Even in moments of bitterness and severe indictment, he never fails to show his qualities of generosity and tolerance. Thus, most of the poets in Jhonson's judgment emerge stamped "with his liberal glow of praise". Even when he is provokingly unjust, according to Macaulay, his independence and transparent honesty as an individual make him a critic of great value. As there is clarity of mind, with outspokenness and dictatorial finality, even when he deals with great writers like Shakespeare and Milton, he is remembered ever for his authority, firmness, clarity and magisterial decisiveness. His "critical calculus is perfectly sound on its postulated and axioms." According to Ivor Winters, only Jhonson deserves that epithet of "a great critic" in his time, while James Clifford praises Jhonson's "common sense – critical genius". F.R. Leavis calls his writing living literature, with "the characteristic wisdom, force and human certainty of the great moralist". While H.W. Donner believes that he had more carried more weight, after Aristotle, in the Augustan period.

Also, his prose style is remarkable as he shows a mastery of words, phrases and general management. His knowledge of foreign languages, his training as a lexicographer and rich fund of scholarship give him a rare sense of the potency of words. As his vocabulary won large, colourful and impressive, he utilized it skillfully to give his sentences vitality and force. His "Johnsonese" quality, as Macaulay labels it comes out of his verbal mannerisms, like employing high-sounding words. However, some critics do find fault with his style for his use of bombastic words. Jhonson employs parallelism, where his love of antithesis and balance plays a major part. He is an expert in balancing words against words, clause against clause and sometimes sentence against sentence. Parallelism has become a chief quality of his style. He skillfully presents his definition of poetry. As his prose style evolved in course of his art, the prose of the Lovers of the Poets shows greater improvement in being less ornamental and in using more directness. Here, there is greater flexibility and colloquial ease this language greater verbal elasticity.

In The Lives of the Poets Jhonson shows "robust and unequivocal judgements as the core of a closely argued inductive approach based on a detailed examination of the text. He possessed the knowledge and ability and the remarkable memory to undertake this task of writing this biographical and critical work. He wrote with the authority and maturity and vigour and energy. In all the critical and biographical portrayal of all these poets, there is a stamp of his personality and critical judgement. For example, his life of savage has all the warmth and depth of true affection, while his lives of Milton and Gray Struggle noticeably against a repugnance that he felt towards the two poets. He disapproved of Milton's republicanism and Gray's inexperience of life. He refuses to accept the generally favourable critical opinion about Samson Agonistes as also Milton's Prose style. He is far from a typical eighteenth century critic in his attitude to Milton.

In his assessment of the Metaphysical poets, he is more typical of the Augustan critical opinion. In his view, they failed to rise to general and transcendental truths.

However, though Johnson was rooted in the traditions and spirit of his own century, he never allowed his attitude to lapse into a passive acceptance of generally held opinions. He shows in his critical mind "a searching intellect and an alert sensibility". According to Arthur Murphy, " Addison lends grace and ornament to truth; Johnson gives it force and accuracy." Jhonson, in any case, is superior to Addison at his best. His "excellence is personal the excellence of superlative moral power and of wit and intellect massive, surprising, sensitive and subtle", according A.R. Humphrey. He was supported by the strong general ethos of his time,

and one of the most significant things about him is his continuous reference to public assent. Like the Auguston humanists, he elevates moral philosophy. Like all the Augustins he gave most importance to the public opinion in serious matters, without lowering the standards of literary judgment. He understand the "Code of public taste to express" as this code become, in the long run, the Christian – humanist tradition. He regarded the formation of public taste as his duty as a critic and for him taste means a proper understanding of the laws of the neo-classicism. He believed that, though poetry may be written by exceptional people, it is essentially for the common man and it must be judged accordingly. His conviction was that what had been accepted and found universally good by all must be true. As he was too much of a classicist, too magisterial in nature, his place in English criticism is with those who have practiced the art of rigorous critical assessment of works of art, like F.R. Leavis and Yuor Winters. An acceptance of duty to God, and truth, a discipline of imagination, and a reason by which eccentricity and whim, subject to the large authority of as 'things they are' and a wish to assert human community in serious and intelligent interests – constitute Johnson's imagination and personality as a critic and man.

## 1.4.6 Let Us Sum Up

So far we have studied, in some fashion, Jhonson's critical qualities and the combination of objectivity with occasional blend of prejudices and whimsicalities. On the whole, his assessment of Milton, the man and the poet is flawless, as he unquestioningly accepts Milton's sublimity. This biographies and critical sketch of Milton is memorable by the full fun measure of Jhonson's personality, his intellectual force and incisive critical perception. As common sense is his method and "appeal to nature" is his practice, he brings literary appreciation, closest to life For him, life and literature are synonymous.

## 1.4.7 Sample Questions

1. Jhonson as a neo-classical critic
2. Jhonson's portrayal and assessment of Milton, the man and the poet.
3. The significance of personal element in Jhonson's qualities as a critic.

## 1.4.8. Suggested Reading

1. F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit.*
2. Joseph Wain, *Samuel Jhonson.*
3. J.W. Hagstrum *Samuel Jhonson's Criticism.*
4. F.R. Milas, *A. Jhonson Selection.*
5. Joseph Woodkrutch *Samuel Jhonson.*
6. W.J. Bates *The Achievement of Samuel Jhonson.*

**Prof. M. Madhusudhan Rao**

Lesson - 5

# ROMANTIC CRITICISM

## Contents:



## 1.5.1. Objective :

After going through this unit, you should be able to

* recognise the main characteristics of the Romantic School of Criticism
* discuss the major Romantic critics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley and their views on different aspects of literature
* assess the contribution and value of their criticism

## 1.5.2. Introduction :

This is one of the units in the paper on Literary Criticism of M.A. Course. It will help you understand the Romantic school of criticism with reference to the major critics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley and their views on different aspects of literature. It also evaluates their contribution to literary criticism.

## 1.5.3. The Rise of Romantic Criticism :

Romantic Movement started in England with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and spanned through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. It is an offshoot of the German

Romanticism as well as the French Revolution.. R.D. Trivedi says: "The Romantic Movement at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century was a deliberate and sweeping revolt against the literary principles of the Age of Reason. Just as Dryden and Pope had rejected the romantic tradition of the Elizabethans as crude and irregular and had adopted classical or more correctly neo-classical principles of French literature in their writings, so now Wordsworth and Coleridge in their turn, rejected the neo-classical principles in favour of the romantic. In doing so they were simply reverting to the Elizabethan or the first romantic age in English Literature." The term 'Romanticism' is applied to the new tendency in English literature. Walter Pater defines it as "the addition of strangeness to beauty" and being a fixed element in every artistic organization, it is "the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty that constitutes the romantic temper." He further identifies the essential elements of the romantic spirit as curiosity and love of beauty sought in the Middle Ages. Of these two one is intellectual and the other emotional. But it extends beyond them to assume a more complex and broad based movement. According to Arthur Compton-Rickett Romanticism "is the expression in terms of art of sharpened sensibilities, heightened imaginative feeling." Romanticism as an imaginative point of view has influenced many art forms besides literature, and has left its mark also on philosophy and history. It is an enthusiastic movement for new impressions and new pleasures. Moreover, it is a revolt against authority, tradition, and convention whether it is political or social, religious or literary. In literature it sought for new delight in simple things. "It expressed," says Birjadesh Prasad, "a new delight in simplicity of theme, feeling, and expression, in the worship of nature, and in familiarity with the lives and thoughts of humble men and women."

In his *Preface* to second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), which was considered a poetic "manifesto", or statement of revolutionary aims, Wordsworth castigates the 'poetic diction' of the writers of his preceding century and suggests dealing with subjects from "common life" in "a selection of language really used by men." But it is also fascinated by the morbid and supernatural, remote things such as the pagan world and the Middle Ages and splendour of the East. In other words romantics developed a desire for imaginative freedom, passion for Nature and yearning for the past. These three impulses had been percolating through the 18th century paving the way for the revolt almost from the period of Pope.

## 1.5.4. Causes of the Romantic Revolt :

**(a) German romanticism:**

In Germany the writers like Friedrich, Schelling and August Wilhelm rejected the exhausted and unimaginative ideals that had reigned over the contemporary prose and poetry. The new works of this new school which were brought into English, inspired and instilled a new spirit in the English Romantics and became an important source for revolt against the superficial poetry and unimaginative approach of the classical school of poets in England.

**(b) Influence of France :**

The teachings of Rousseau and the principles of the French Revolution equally influenced the Romantics to form and direct their ideas. Jean Jacques Rousseau, a great thinker of France, preached return to Nature. In his *Emile* Rousseau advocated that education develops in man a close contact with Nature. He insists on the dignity of individuals and necessity for a great reform in the established

order of milieu in order to protect the rights of the individuals however low they might be. In his *Social Contract* he refers to the importance of Nature and its influence on mankind. He asserts "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains." This humanistic approach of Rousseau impressed very much the poetry of Blake, Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge.

The ideals of the French Revolution— Liberty, Equality and Fraternity also influenced the English Romanticism. The remarkable victory of the French Revolutionaries against the tyranny and bondage sparked the imagination of the English Romantics and prepared the base for their freethinking. Perhaps the American war of Independence, which preceded the French Revolution, resulted in the same end. When Wordsworth was under the influence of the French revolution and fiery temper, whatever he wrote has proved to be his best with a refreshing vitality and poetic insight. Wordsworth and Coleridge raised their voice against Neo-classicism and laid foundations for the Romantic criticism through their critical pronouncements.

## 1.5.5. Chief Characteristics of the Romantic Criticism

1. Romanticism opposed the classical doctrines. The Classical writing is characterized by reason or commonsense in subject and expressed in a particular style which follows order, proportion and finish. Contrary to it the Romantic writing is characterized by imagination in subject, expressed in a style that has no restriction depending on the temperament of the writer. In other words classicism is governed by regimentation, regularity and authority while Romanticism is characterized by individuality, informality and freedom.

2. Romantic criticism ignores the rules whether of Aristotle or Horace or of the French, and suggests that literature should be assessed based on the impression they produce and not with reference to any rules. It is impressionistic and individualistic and its key-note is freedom of inquiry.

3. It is mainly concerned with the fundamentals, such as the nature of poetry, and its functions, and not with the issues of diction, style or metre. It deals with the theory of poetry and the process of creation. It upholds the power of the creative imagination and turns over the rigid classical rules. Nature was the main source of its inspiration. Wordsworth is primarily a poet of Nature. Wonderful scenes such as flora and fauna, twilight, bluesky, serene lakes, oceans, steep hills and green valleys have exerted an indelible impression upon Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. This movement believes in pantheism, the importance of the individual, the deification of Nature and the idea that imagination is a supreme creative power.

4. Romantic criticism insists on imagination and emotion and not on 'reason' and 'good sense' of the Neo-classicists'. They give a new definition to poetry. They consider poetry to be no longer mere imitation or invention but the expression of emotion and imagination. Inspiration and intuition, rather than adherence to the rules, are considered the true basis for creation.

5. Pleasure rather than instruction becomes the function of poetry. Coleridge says, "if poetry instructs, it does so only through pleasure." Poetry has to transport and mould people nobler and better and its appeal should be to heart and not to the head.

6. Romantics regarded imagination as the basis for both the creation and criticism of great work of art. Shakespeare is great because his works are the result of this imagination. A critic must also possess this quality primarily in order to appreciate the beauty of a work of art. He has to look imaginatively into the spirit of a literary work of art.
7. Opinions on poetic diction and versification have changed radically. They insist on simplicity in theme and treatment. Instead of the traditional style of lofty poetic diction, the romantics use ordinary language of the rustic men and women. Romantics preferred blank verse, ballad and ode to heroic couplet and the Alexandrine of the Neo-classics. Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley wrote much of their poetry in these genres. 'Lyric poetry flourished under Neo-classicism because of a strong tendency towards the submergence of the individual,' while in the romantic age, 'it burst into a chorus probably never equaled in the world before.' Byron, Keats and Shelley are popular in this genre.
8. Romantic criticism is creative because the critics interpret a work of art of a writer after entering imaginatively into the thoughts and feelings of the writers whose works they like to examine.
9. The influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge on Romanticism is also worth mentioning. Their work *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798) marks the beginning of the Romantic Movement. Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) is regarded as the unofficial manifesto of the Romantic Movement. It kicks off the rise of the Romantic criticism in the early decades of the next century. Wordsworth was the first man to stimulate interest and controversy in many fields to bring about fundamental changes in Romantic theory and practice. He was the first theorist to insist on simplicity both in theme and treatment and thereby to open new territories for poetry and extend the domains of theory and practice of literature. By emphasizing emotion and imagination, Wordsworth has imparted to English poetry the essence which properly belongs to it and revolutionized literary concepts. Besides Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly and others contributed to the Romantic criticism.

## 1.5.6. William Wordsworth: His Life

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumbria, on 7th April 1770, and was educated at Hawkshead near Esthwaite Water. During his school days he enjoyed many imaginative experiences among the hills and lakes of the region which revealed to him of the firm bond that exists between Man and Nature. In later life Wordsworth recalled this period as the 'seed-time' of his soul when he grew up "fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

In 1790 Wordsworth went on a "pedestrian tour" through France and Switzerland, accompanied by his college friend, the Welshman Robert Jones. These two friends returned to England in October, 1790. Wordsworth took his B.A. degree in 1791 and in November he went back to France. He visited the Legislative Assembly in Paris and the ruins of the Bastille. He passed through the revolutionary times of Paris with satisfaction and sympathy. He later travelled to Orleans. There he fell in love with Annette Vallon, daughter of a surgeon from Blois. She gave birth to a daughter Caroline in December 1792. Wordsworth was compelled to return to England owing to pecuniary problems. And also perhaps

the outbreak of war might have prevented him from returning to Blois and meeting Annette and his daughter. This desertion filled him with remorse and tormented him for long afterwards.

In the summer of 1792 Wordsworth met Michael Beaupery, an officer in the French regiment at Blois. Beaupery's conversation fired him with the ideas of freedom that had been latent in him since childhood. He entertained cheerful hopes for the regeneration of society. His euphoria was short-lived, because England declared war on France. Consequently Wordsworth was held up and he felt unable to change his loyalties to England because of his patriotism. He suffered mental anguish. In the summer of 1794 he made his first visit to 'Tintern Abbey' along with his school friend William Calvert. After visiting Wales, he returned to the Lake District. His sister Dorothy joined him there after a period of separation enforced by their uncles.

In 1795 during his stay in London Wordsworth met William Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*. He felt deeply affected by the teaching of Godwin and found the philosophy to be irreconcilable with life as he experienced it. In August 1795, Wordsworth settled down at Racedown in Dorset. He met Coleridge in August 1795 at Bristol. In December 1796 Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey in Somerset and the Wordsworthians settled at Alfoxden, a little distance away. The two poets' friendship grew to be strong, stimulating and creatively productive. The *Lyrical Ballads* was the result of constant exchange of their ideas about creative writing.

## Wordsworth's Critical Works

Wordsworth is primarily a poet rather than a critic. His entry into criticism is accidental. He assumes this new role when his share of the *Lyrical Ballads* published by him and his friend Coleridge in 1798 was violently castigated by the Neo-classical critics of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Reviews*. He was dragged and compelled to enter the field for mere self-defence. However he did not produce a comprehensive and systematic treatise on literary criticism. We can find his criticism in *Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads* (1798), *Preface* to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* edition of (1800), *Preface* to the revised edition of *Lyrical Ballads* of 1802 along with an *Appendix on Poetic Diction*. Wordsworth thus constantly modified his own theory. He wrote a new Preface and the older one was included as an *Appendix* to the 1815 edition. It also contained an *Essay Supplementary to the Preface*. In all of them Wordsworth expressed his views on poetic diction and poetry. But his *preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* published in1800, is generally regarded as the most important document as it reflects the Romantic revolt. His criticism is also seen in his Notes to "The Thorn" and other poems and his critical remarks of significance are sprinkled all over his correspondence.

### Wordsworth's Views

### (a) Poetic Diction

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is partially a reaction against the criticism of "the Neo-classical" theory of poetic diction. It was also a result of his toiling for finding a suitable language for the new sector of human life which he was achieving for poetic treatment. Wordsworth holds that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions. It is born of 'emotion recollected in tranquility' and it is the free expression of poet's thoughts and feelings. The poet has to try to bring out truth from an imaginative knowledge of persons and things. He should communicate or transmit his ideas and emotions through a powerful re-creation of the original experience. In order to achieve this, Wordsworth

replaced the outworn expressions of the older poetic language and replaced the vocabulary of the common man. He believes that the poet is necessarily a man speaking to men and so he should adopt such language as is spoken by men. In his *Preface* to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) he underlines his object thus: "The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of a language actually 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 aspect." In other words, the language of poetry should be the language spoken by the shepherds and peasants. In *Lyrical Ballads* he uses a language, simple, clear and free from regional variation and vulgarity. He chooses incidents and situations from 'humble and rustic life.' He explains that men 'convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.' Hence such a language 'is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets.'

Unlike the Neo-classics, he holds that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry. In his own words "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." He refutes the embellished language like that of the school of Pope, as a "masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas."

The value of Wordsworth's concept of poetic diction is immeasurable when it is considered as a rectifier of the artificial, inane and unnatural phraseology which was in vogue at that time. But it is interesting to note that Wordsworth himself did not practise what he preached in his poetic composoition. He violated his own theory in his best poetry found in the *Immortality Ode*, *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode to Duty*. Coleridge exposes his weaknesses. Coleridge agrees to the idea of Wordsworth's plain poetic diction. But he subsequently finds faults with Wordsworth for his not conforming to his own theory. Coleridge points out that Wordsworth's grandest poetry was produced in the diction which could never be within the common speech of rustics. Coleridge examined *the Lyrical Ballads* and specially its *Preface* in chapters 14,17,18,19,20 and 22 of his *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth says there is no essential difference between the diction of prose and that of poetry. Whereas Coleridge explains that Wordsworth admits the use of metre for poetry, which requires certain order, and arrangement of words. Naturally such poetry is bound to vary from that of prose as metre regulates the whole situation. Therefore, there ought to be an essential difference between these two languages. Coleridge asserts that as man advanced in thought, he has acquired new ideas and concepts which cannot be explained through the use of rustic language which is primitive and undeveloped.

Eliot's also brought out the contradictions intrinsic in Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction. In his *Advertisement* to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth says that he had used the "Language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of life." T.S. Eliot questions, "Did Wordsworth examine the language of conversation in the higher classes?" Generally the use of upper class language to a character belonging to its class is as appropriate as the use of rustic language to a character from rustic life. In his Preface to the edition of 1800, Wordsworth preached "a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" and continues, "I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men." But in 1802 and 1805 editions he said that he would, "bring his language near to the language of men." Thus he goes on contradicting with his earlier

statements which baffles the readers what exactly he means by the real language of men, and who has to choose that suits the real language of men for poetic composition.

But Wordsworth honestly believes that a poet has to convey his message to as wide an audience as possible. He views poet as a "man speaking to men in the language of men." Therefore he rejects use of artificial poetic diction, personification and hackneyed poetic phrases. In the opinion of Herbert Read poems like *Lucy Gray*, *Michael* and *The Solitary Reaper* conform to the theory of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction. Still there are many poems in which Wordsworth contradicts his own theory. However it is safe to conclude that his intention in suggesting selection of common speech from rustic life, is to bring a new image to poetry through simplicity in style and naturalness in speech by avoiding the artificial, empty and rhetorical diction of the 18th century poets. He achieved this goal by making English poetry natural and simple.

## (b) Nature and Function of Poetry :

Wordsworth underlines his views on poetry, its nature, functions and the qualifications of true poet, in the *Preface* to the 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* which later developed in the *Preface* to the 1815 edition and a Supplementary Essay. He says that poetry "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." It implies that poetry originates from the internal feelings of the poet. It is a matter of feeling, mood or temperament. It flows naturally and without any effort when he is in that feeling without which it cannot possible. Later he modifies this statement in the *Preface* thus: "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on." Here it is interesting to note the contradiction in Wordsworth's statements. The two statements—" spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "emotion recollected in tranquility" are opposed to each other. The former comes spontaneously and the latter is deliberate and calculated. He does not distinguish between the two and attempts to explain the one by the other. The process is however evident in the composition of his own great poems like "The Solitary Reaper" or "The Daffodils". The emotions actually aroused by the sight were recollected in contemplation till it overpowered the mind completely, directing the contemplation from that place. Thus poetry finds its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility. Finally it is the result of the original free flow of that emotion. Here poetry is created in three phases. The first being 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,' the second is their recollection in tranquility, and finally their expression in poetry. All of his best poems like *Tintern Abbey*, *The Daffodils*, *Solitary Reaper*, *Peele Castle* etc. are the product of his emotions recollected in tranquility.

Wordsworth regards pleasure with morality as the function of poetry. The former comes primarily from the poet's manner of moulding things, use of metre or rhyme which make pathetic conditions and sentiments painless. The latter contains in the perfection of 'Man, Nature, and Human Life' which it communicates and in its insistence on whatever modifies life richer and fuller—'Truth, Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope/ And Melancholy, Fear subdued Faith.' (The Recluse) Wordsworth considers poet to be 'a man speaking to men.' Through his greater power to feel and express his feelings, he has

a ready channel to the reader's heart directly, and as his feelings are saner, purer, and permanent, the reader is inspired to feel the poet's way in the same situation and in others too. The reader then emerges saner and purer than before. Wordsworth says that the aim of the poetry is to "Arouse the sensual from their sleep of Death/ And win the vacant and the vain to noble Rapture." Thus the poetry has to serve the purpose of life and morality. Poetry devoid of morality is valueless.

Wordsworth also views poetry as the pursuit of "truth" of man's knowledge of himself and the world. Science is also aims at finding the "truth" but its discovery of truths benefits us only materially, whereas the truths of poetry 'Cleave to us as a necessary part of our existence.' Their chief concern is man's relation to man and his relation to the external world of Nature. The pursuit of the science pleases the scientist more than the common man. It is confined to the pleasure of a few who know science. It is not the product of the 'meddling intellect' 'felt in the blood, and felt along the heart' as the truths of poetry. Therefore poetry "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science."

Wordsworth believes that poetry is a great force for good. The duty of his poetry is "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." He also eulogises poetry in the preface as "the most philosophical of all writings," "the image of man and nature" etc. He brings out the significance and the role of poetry in shaping images, "to improve the scheme of man's existence and re-cast the world." From this he comes to the conclusion that 'every great poet is a teacher; I wish either to be considered as teacher or as nothing." This concept of function of poetry was also expressed by Plato, but, Wordsworth, in addition to this, insists on pleasure as being a necessary condition of poetic teaching. He is said to have followed Horace more than Plato. Regarding teaching alone, Wordsworth appears to echo the very idea of Plato: "they will cooperate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier." He defines these benign tendencies in the *Preface* as 'relationship and love' which poetry should promote. But they are to be stimulated through purification of feelings rather than through a mere appeal to the intellect or good sense.

**(C) Imagination :**

Wordsworth first refers to the term 'imagination' in the *Preface*. He explains his purpose has been to choose incidents and situations from common life and present them in an unusual aspect by throwing over them a colouring of imagination. It implies that imagination has the power of transforming and transfiguring to present the ordinary things in extraordinary. The poet here not only presents an "image of men and nature" but also modifies, shapes and transfigures that image by the power of his imagination. Thus the imagination is a creative and shaping power which makes the poet half the creator, a specially gifted individual, who adds something to nature and reality. It is the imagination of the poet which imparts to nature, the 'glory and freshness of a dream.'

Wordsworth also considers imagination as a visualising power. He tells that the poet contemplates in tranquility the emotions, which he had experienced in the past and can visualize the object, which arouse emotions. In this way imagination becomes visualising power which enables the poet to re-create the past. It is the eye of the poet's mind that empowers the poet to look into the 'heart of things' into the past, the remote and the unknown.

## 1.5.7. General Estimate of Wordsworth as a Critic

Wordsworth was basically a poet and not a critic. Though his critical treatise is small, the core of his criticism is ao inspired as his poetry. When he took to writing Neo-classical criticism was governing the field. It was merely concerned with the rules of the ancients, but not with the substance—the soul of poetry. Wordsworth was the first critic to digress from this mode to substance. He formulated a new theory and the nature of the creative process. He emphasized on novelty, liberty, spontaneity, inspiration, experiment and imagination contrary to the classical emphasis on authority, tradition and restraint. His *Preface* is considered an unofficial manifesto of the English Romantic Movement. It is a great landmark in literary criticism which gave new direction, consciousness and programs to English Romanticism. He condemns the Neo-classical poets who "separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation." Rejecting formal finish and perfection, he insists on sensation and spontaneous feeling. Scott-James explains, "He (Wordsworth) discards Aristotelian doctrine. For him, the plot, or situation is not the first thing. It is the feeling that matters."

Wordsworth advocates simplicity both in theme and treatment and selection of subject from "humble and rustic life." Unlike his predecessors dealing with nymphs and goddesses, he portrays the rustic girls and peasants. He reflects realism in his suggestion to use the language of common men to poetry. The ultimate test of literary excellence lay in the healthy pleasure it affords to the reader– a pleasure of a noble and exalted kind, pleasure which emerges from matured understanding and sympathy. If at all it teaches, it does so only indirectly by purifying the emotions, stimulating the soul, and bringing it close to nature. Wordsworth democratizes the concept of the poet. According to him the poet is 'a man speaking to men.' He possesses more lively sensibility, more comprehensive soul, more powers for deep sense of observation, imagination and transformation. His theory of poetry places imagination at the centre of power of unification and ultimate insight into the unity of the world. Though Wordsworth left only a small quantity of criticism, it marks the end of the old school and the beginning of a new school or the revival of the Romantic school of the Elizabethans.

## 1.5.8. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Life and Work

Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772 at the village of Othery, in Dovenshire town of England. As a boy he was imaginative, precocious and solitary. During his childhood he displayed great poetical and philosophical abilities. From Christ's Hospital he proceeded in his nineteenth year to Jesus College, Cambridge. He left the University in 1794 without taking a degree. He met Robert Southey and a few friends and planned the Utopian scheme of Pantisocracy. Money was needed to execute the plan of Pantisocracy. They went to Bristol to earn money through lectures for executing this plan. Here Coleridge fell in love with Sarah Fricker, the sister-in-law of Southey. He married her and settled at Nether Stowey. To a great extent, the financial problem was solved. It was at this place that Coleridge came into contact with Wordsworth.

During his stay at Nether Stowey (1797-98) at Germany (1798-99) and in the Lake District (1800-1803) Coleridge produced very enduring poems. His visit to Germany proved fatal to his poetic inspiration. Hence, he turned to prose in which he wrote on metaphysics, criticism, religion and politics.

Coleridge is the first English critic to base his literary criticism on philosophical principles. While his predecessors concentrated on the excellences and weaknesses of poetry, he wanted to find out the answer to the basic question as to how it came to be there at all. He was more interested in creative process than what it was there in the finished product. He asserts he endeavoured 'to establish the principles of writing rather than to furnish rules how to pass judgement on what has been written by others.' He discovered them in "the nature of man." But his critical works suffer from a lack of systematic organization. His great critical work *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is ill-planned and unfinished and his next important work *Lectures on Shakespeare* delivered from 1808 to 1819 full of digressions and repetitions. Nevertheless, *Lectures on Shakespeare* shows Coleridge as a giant in the ranks of English critics. His acute and logical analysis of Shakespeare's plays and others' poems stimulated keener perceptions in the readers. The lectures are regarded as "an impressionistic, romantic criticism of the highest order," and Coleridge is regarded as the ancestor of such great modern Shakespearean critics as A.C. Bradley and Wilson Knight.

His *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is a work of great value on literary theory. George Saintsbury comments, "The whole book is among the few which constitute the very Bible of criticism." The greatness of book lies in the fact that a synthesis of philosophy and literature has been achieved. Coleridge could be designated as a precursor to psychology as he based literary criticism on psychology and used psychology to explain the process of artistic creation. And some scattered remarks on literature and literary theory could be found in his prose works such as *The Friend*, *Table Talks*, *Letters*, *Aids to Reflections*, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, *Anima Poetae*, and *Sybylline Leaves*.

## Formative Influences on Coleridge

Coleridge was a man of wide and comprehensive reading. His theory moulded the views and attitudes of writers. But his criticism is considered a plagiarism. Rene Wellek says that "many or most of Coleridge's key terms and distinctions are derived from Germany." Though he borrowed from others he made it entirely of his own. His principal critical theory reflects his own style of criticism. It seems his theory was influenced and shaped by the following: i) Wordsworth: Acknowledging Wordsworth's influence, Coleridge says,:"I was in my twenty-fourth year which I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally, and while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced in my mind by his recitation of a manuscript poem, which still remains unpublished. It was the union of the deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed." ii) Hartley and his Associationist psychology: According to the Associationist theory, the human mind decreased merely to a passive recipient of impressions and sensations from the outside world, and iii) German transcendental and idealistic philosophy of Lessing, Kant, Hegel, Shelling, Schiller etc.: During his German tour with Wordsworth in 1879-1880, Coleridge was influenced by the German philosophers who had a more active view of imagination. They viewed the human mind or imagination not as a mere passive agent, but as an active and creative power. Rejecting the Associationist's view of imagination, Coleridge turned to the Kantian view of imagination as an "esemplastic power" (an active power which shapes, moulds and recreates). Art is not a mere imitation of nature, it is re-creation. Beauty is imparted to the external world by the observer. In catching the beauty, the soul designs itself into the outward forms of nature. Thus the

internal is made external and the external, the internal. The soul of the artist unites with external reality and transforms and recreates it.

**Coleridge's Views:**

**(a) Theory of Imagination: Primary and Secondary**

Coleridge views that all creative activity is an act of the imagination. During the 18th century it was often confused with fancy. It was held that where the imitation truly imaged the original, it was considered a work of imagination; and where it was replaced by something of the poet's own creation which bore but a distant likeness to the original, it was regarded a work of fancy. It was Wordsworth who distinguished between the two in his 'preface' of 1815 assigning a higher function to both. He considered both as creative rather than simply reproductive faculties. The imagination fuses all things into one, making them 'take one colour and serve to one effect,' while fancy reshapes them more or less voluntarily. The inventions of the former are sublime, and the latter are only the beatification.

In chapter xiii of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge examines the nature and genesis of imagination. He writes, "The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am." It is the power of perceiving the objects of sense, places, persons, things in their parts and wholeness. It empowers the mind to form a clear picture of the object perceived by the senses. It is an involuntary act of the mind. The human mind receives impressions and sensations from the outside world, consciously and wilfully; it enforces certain system on those impressions, reduces them to a shape and size, so that the mind forms a clear picture of the external world. A clear and coherent perception is possible in this process.

The secondary imagination he considers "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 composite of the soul, including all the other faculties, perceptions, intellect, will and emotions. All possess the primary imagination. The secondary imagination is also possessed by all, but it is the unique and distinctive nature of the artist. It is more active, and conscious in its task which makes artistic creation possible. It acts upon the perceptions of the primary imagination. Its source of creation is the sensations and impressions supplied to it by the primary imagination. With an effort and intellect, the secondary imagination selects and orders the material from its source, reduces them, reshapes and remodels them into things of beauty. It reduces all to a 'solution sweet' to forms of its own. It is 'esemplastic' i.e. a shaping and modifying power, which from its 'plastic stress' reshapes objects of the external world and steeps them with a glory and dream that was never existing before. Therefore, it is a more active agent than the primary, which "dissolves, dissipates in order to create."

The secondary imagination is the base for all the poetic activity. It harmonizes and reconciles the contradictions. Therefore Coleridge calls it a "magical, synthetic power." The synthesizing power fuses the various faculties of the mind– perception, intellect, will, emotion and maker of the internal (subject) external (object), and the external (object) internal (subject). It is through the act of this unifying power that nature is coloured by the soul or mind of the poet, and soul of the poet is steeped

in nature. The truth the poet discovers lies neither in himself nor in the things he sees, but in 'the identity of both.' It is the result of what mind perceives from nature and what mind imparts to nature. It implies that the primary and secondary imaginations do not differ from each other in kind. Both act on the objects of the sense. It is just a difference of degree, emerging from the lack of capacity in the one and its presence in the other. The secondary imagination is more active, and more voluntary than the primary imagination.

## (b) Imagination and Fancy

Coleridge does not consider fancy as a creative power. He defines "Fancy... has no counters to play with but fixties and definities. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified that empirical phenomenon of the will which he expresses by the world choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association." It merely combines its perceptions into pleasing shapes instead of fusing, unifying and giving them shapes of its own like imagination. So fancy according to Coleridge is "the arbitrary bringing together of the things that lie remote and forming them into unity." It is "the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness." For Wordsworth, also "fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch." They remain unchanged in their new combination too. For both the difference between fancy and imagination is the same. One is a combinatory and the other a unifying force. The difference between the two is the same as the difference between the production of a mixture and a compound. In a mixture, as in the creation of fancy, the ingredients are brought together, but they do not lose their original properties, whereas in a compound, as in the products of imagination, they do not remain as they are 'dissolved, diffused, dissipated into a new substance altogether. Thus imagination creates new things by fusing and unifying different impressions from the external world. Fancy on the other hand is not creative. It is a kind of memory. It only brings together images of different properties which continue to retain their separate identity. Here also Wordsworth and Coleridge do not differ. The poetry of Shakespeare and Milton was the product of their imagination while the poetry of Donne and Cowley was of their fancy.

Wordsworth has the opinion that the fancy and imagination are almost close to each other. But Coleridge is the first critic to distinguish between them and explain their individual rules. Wordsworth does not distinguish between primary imagination and the secondary imagination. Coleridge's treatment of the subject, however, is characterized by greater depth, penetration and philosophical subtlety.

## (C) On Poem and Poetry

Coleridge explains his views on poetry in chapter xiv of "*The Biographia Literaria.*" Poetry broadly is an activity of imagination, idealizing the real and realizing the ideal. It has its own form that distinguishes from other kinds of composition. Coleridge explains what this form is, how it comes to be their, what relation it bears to its content, how poetry differs from other kinds of artistic activity, and the role and significance of metre as an essential and significant part of a poem. He emphasizes the essential difference between prose and poetry. He clarifies that a poem uses the same medium as a prose composition– words. But the difference between poem and prose composition cannot lie in their use of the same medium, but it "consists in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different

object being proposed." A poem composes words differently in order to project something different. If the aim of a poem is merely to facilitate memory, all it has to do is to arrange the words in the metrical form with or without rhyme. Such arrangement of words give a particular pleasure with their recurrence of "sounds and quantities," not of a very high order. It may be called a poem, "but we should note that, though such rhyming tags have the charm of metre and rhyme, 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 memorized." Their use is not necessitated by anything in the content or matter of the poem. There is no natural relation between the two.

## (D) Function of Poetry

The content of a poem is determined by the object of writing which leads ultimately to the difference between the objects of two different modes of writing. One is the scientific and the other, the poetical. Both have immediate and ultimate objects. The immediate object of a work of science is to communicate truth and that of a poem or poetry is to communicate pleasure. The work of science yields deep pleasure to its reader and the poem may be consisting a deep truth which is their ultimate object or purpose. But, Coleridge insists on distinction between the ultimate and immediate ends. As it is, if the immediate object be the communication of pleasure, truth may however be the ultimate end, and which in an ideal society nothing that was not truth could yield pleasure; in society as it has always existed, a literary work might impart pleasure without having any relation with "truth, either moral or intellectual." "The proper kinds of distinction between different kinds of writing can thus be most logically discussed in terms of the difference in the immediate aim, or function of each." The immediate object of poetry is to yield pleasure.

## (E) Metre and Organic Theory of Poem

The works of prose or novel also have pleasure as their immediate object, but they do not become poems if put in metrical form. The metrical form will not suit its language and content and due to its length all its parts, not requiring an equal attention, will not equally contribute to the total pleasure. Therefore Coleridge elucidates that one "cannot derive true and permanent pleasure out of any feature of a work which does not arise naturally from the total nature of that work." "Super added" metre merely provides an artificial decorative charm. A work cannot please permanently unless it "contains in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise." "If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it." "A poem, therefore, must be an organic unity in the sense that, while we note and appreciate each part to which the regular recurrence of accent and sound draw attention," our pleasure grows collectively out of such appreciation. Then the poem varies from a work of scientific prose as its immediate purpose is pleasure and not truth.

## (F) Distinction Between Poem and Poetry

Coleridge distinguishes between poem and poetry. According to him poetry is an activity of the mind, and a poem is only one of the forms of expression, a verbal expression of that activity. Poetic activity is primarily an activity of imagination. David Daiches comments that "poetry for Coleridge is a wider category than that of poem; that is, poetry is a kind of activity which can be engaged in by painters or philosophers or scientists and is not confined to those who employ metrical language, or

even to those who employ language of any kind." Poetry, in this larger sense, brings, "the whole soul of man", into activity, with each faculty playing its proper part according to its 'relative worth and dignity'." It is possible when the unifying and integrating powers of secondary imagination are in operation, bringing all features of a subject into a complex whole.

## (G) Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworths Theory of Poetic Diction:

Coleridge disputes with Wordsworth's view of poetic diction. Wordsworth asserts that the language of poetry should be "a selection of the real language of men, or the very language of men; and that there was no difference between the language of prose and that of poetry." Coleridge points out "every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings." Every man's language has, first its 'individualities'; secondly the common characteristics of the class to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of 'universal' use. "No two men of the same class or of different classes speak alike, although both use words and phrases common to them all, because in the one case their nature are different, and in the other their classes are different." It applies equally to the language of common men as well as townsmen. In both these classes the language differs from person to person, and class to class.

Coleridge questions, as to which of these varieties of language is 'the real language of men,' and he answers that each language should be purified by removing its uncommon or accidental features before it becomes common. "Omit the peculiarities of each, and the result of course must be common to all. And assuredly the omissions and changes to be made in the language of rustics, before it could be transferred to any species of poem, except the drama or other professed imitation, are at least as numerous and weighty as would be required in adapting to the same purpose the ordinary language of tradesmen and manufacturers." "Such language alone has a universal appeal and is, therefore, the language of poetry." A language thus selected will not differ from the language of any other man of commonsense. Coleridge has reservations against Wordsworth's use of the words 'very' or 'real', and suggests that the 'ordinary' or 'generally' ought to have been used. He says Wordsworth's addition of the words "in state of excitement" is absurd. The emotional excitement may result in a more concentrated expression, but it cannot create a nobler and richer language.

To Wordsworth's statement that "there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and that of prose", Coleridge retorts that there is, and there ought to be, an essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry." The language of poetry differs from that of prose in the same way as the language of prose differs from the language of conversation, and reading differs from speaking. He clarifies that language is a matter of words. The words used in prose and poetry are the same, but their arrangement differs. This variation arises from the fact that poetry employs metre, which necessitates a different arrangement of words. According to Coleridge, metre is not a mere artificial ornamentation, but an essential organic part of a poem. Therefore there is bound to be an essential difference between the languages, i.e. the arrangement of words of poetry and prose. Coleridge's final reply to the above was: "I write in metre, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." Thus Coleridge condemns Wordsworth's views on themes and diction of poetry.

### (H) Coleridge's Concept of Dramatic Illusion

Coleridge's phrase 'willing suspension of disbelief' had shown a profound impact on subsequent literary theory, which he used to indicate the nature of poetic/dramatic illusion. Coleridge refers to the phrase in connection with his account in chapter xiv of the *Biographia Literaria* of the origin and genesis of the *Lyrical Ballads*. He writes, "In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as 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." It gives us Coleridge's view of how fiction, poetic or dramatic delights even what it is known to be fiction. The reader or spectator knows that it is a story or drama. In order to believe what the poet says, what one has to do is to have faith in his imaginative world; he voluntarily suspends his disbelief as long as he is reading a book or witnessing a play. This applies event to the supernatural characters of the book, and we would believe for the moment in what is incredible and improbable. The readers should send their judgement to sleep, so that they can read the poem with delight. In chapter xxiii of the *Lyrical Ballads* he explains further: The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this, too, with our eyes open, and with our judgment *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only, not to disbelieve. A momentary suspension of disbelief is needed to enjoy the imaginative literature. We enjoy our dream when our judgement is asleep. In the same manner, a skilful poet keeps our judgement under suspension so that we neither believe nor disbelieve in it to be a reality, but only enjoy what is presented to the mind's eye.

## 1.5.9. General Assessment of Coleridge as a Critic

Coleridge is one of the greatest poetic critics that England had ever produced. He is widely acclaimed as a literart critic. I.A. Richards points out that he was the for-runner "of the modern science of semantics." Arthur Symons considers Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* as the greatest book of criticism in English." Coleridge's criticism is replete with suggestions of far reaching value and significance. Unlike Neo-classic critics who judged a work of art on the basis of definite rules, Coleridge did not pass any judgement, but gave his response and reaction to a work of art. He differs from all the previous English critics because of his psychological approach to literary problems. His stupendous learning in philosophy and metaphysics enabled him more than any of his predecessors "to bring attention to the profundity of the philosophic problems into which the study of poetry may take us." He was interested in probing the process of poetic creation, the principles of creative activity. He formulated all of his principles based on philosophy and psychology. He was the first critic to make philosophy the basis for literary studies and to bring together the subjects philosophy, psychology and literary criticism. The greatest contribution of Coleridge to literary criticism is his theory of 'imagination' which has revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation. He was the first critic to distinguish between 'fancy' and 'imagination' and the first critic to differentiate between primary and secondary imagination. I.A. Richards regarded him as a critic of psychological theory for enunciation of his ideas on differentiation between 'imagination' and 'fancy.' He observes that Coleridge's merit as a critic lies in the strenuous persistence with which he brought philosophy upon criticism. It is this interpretation of philosophical method of criticism that puts Coleridge above every other English critic.

Coleridge's demonstration of the organic wholeness of a poem is also one of his contributions to literary theory. Through his philosophical probe into the nature and value of poetry, he comes to the conclusion that a poem is an organic whole and that its form is decided by its content and is essential to that content. He proves that metre and rhyme are not just "pleasure super-added" but equally essential for the true poetic pleasure. Similarly his theory of "willing suspension of disbelief" is remarkable advancement over earlier theories on the subject. He expressed his views on poetic diction with reference to the rudiments of human speech. Saintsbury places Coleridge beside Aristotle and Longinus– the two critics in Europe delved so deep before him. Indeed his range is necessarily wider.

There are certain serious and obvious faults in Coleridge. Digressions have crept in the book *Biographia Literaria*. There is a strange blending of philosophy, literary theory and biography. Despite the lapses in the book, the greatness and originality of the book consists in the fact that a synthesis of philosophy and literature has been achieved. Coleridge used psychology as the basis for explanation of the process of artistic creation. Thus the work is a unique landmark in the history of literary criticism.

## 1.5.10. P.B. Shelley

P.B. Shelley is one of the greatest poets of the Romantic Age. His contribution to the Romantic criticism mainly lies in his small treatise besides his critical remarks scattered in his letters, prefaces and a few prose essays. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* was written in 1821 and published posthumously in 1840. It has become a landmark in the history of English literary criticism. Many great critics praised it. W.B. Yeats finds it to be "the profoundest essay on the foundations of poetry in English." The treatise illustrates Shelley's craft and the 'incandescent quality' of his prose. Shelley deals with the philosophy of poetry in the treatise and his illustration of it is quite interesting.

### Shelley's *Defence of Poetry:* The Background

Thomas Love Peacock's castigation of poetry in his *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) has necessitated Shelley to bring out this critical pamphlet. Peacock categorises all poetic creations into four ages– the iron age, the golden age, the silver age and brass age. He argues that poetry originated in the iron age, the golden was of the noblest period from great poetic creation, then leading to the superficial silver age which was followed by the age of brass, an age of decay and decline. He asserts that their own age was the brass age of poetry. In his own words, "A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community." According to Peacock the poet is useless, and therefore the honour of society will be given more to those who promote utility. And poetry for him "is essentially the most worthless of all intellectual exercises. It can never make a philosopher nor a statesman, nor in any class of life a useful or a rational man." Thus he condemns poetry as absurd and a mere waste of time and energy. He holds the supremacy of reason over imagination.

Shelley in his treatise contradicts Peacock and attempts to explain the nobility and dignity of poetry as well as its social utility. The pamphlet reminds us of Sidney's *Apology of Poetry* which was a reply to Stephen Gosson's onslaught on poetry. The aim of both the writers is the same as to establish the nobility, dignity and utility of poetry. The plan of the two treatises is similar. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* can be divided into four parts. In the first part he defines poetry, its nature and elaborates in a comprehensive manner. In the second part he discusses the noble nature of poetry, and its moral and

ethical relevance to society, where Shelley briefly examines poetry from Homer down to his own time. Covering such a large field is very enlightening and suggestive. The third part deals with Shelley's defence of poetry against the charges levied on it by its derogators. In the beginning of the treatise Shelley declares that poetry is the highest of all human powers as it is more directly creative than any other art. He views that all other arts and sciences depend on nature, whereas poet is not limited to study or imitation, but can enhance upon nature and produce better than nature. He defines poetry as the expression of imagination and considers that "all are poets who express imagination in life; sculptors, artists, musicians, even law-givers and the founders of religions. All arts are poetry because they render imagination; but rhythmical language provides the highest kind of poetry, since language is itself created by the imagination and is a medium in its substance intellectual, which is not true of any other."

## Plato's Objection to Poetry and Shelley's Reply

Plato has the opinion that poet is thrice removed from reality. He says the actual world is made up of things which are only copies of divine ideas. The painter and the poet copy these copies and are thus removed three times from reality. In the same way they merely copy the images of virtue and the like but do not assimilate their true nature. For this, he says poets are the promoters of falseness and instigate men in deceits.

Shelley admits Plato's theory that all things in the world are mere copies of divine ideas, but holds that poetry gets behind the copy, and images directly the divine idea, which in the revelation of the idea itself. In the words of Shelley, "A poem is the very image of the life expressed in its eternal truth... It is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as exciting in the mind of the creator which is itself the image of all other minds." This is the secret of the sense exaltation created by poetry as it asserts a profound reality than that of the world. It transports the man to the domain of the absolute and enables him to look into the very characteristics of love, wisdom and virtue in their divine reality. It is better than nature because it corrects the misrepresentation of the divine idea which is necessitated when the idea is embodied in earthly things. Poetry also universal in its appeal since by rendering the idea, it consists within itself, "the germs of a relation to whatever motives or actions have taken place in the possible varieties of human nature."

## Moral Function of Poetry

Shelley believes in the moral function of poetry. He says that poetry does not instruct by direct precepts, and it is seen in its appeal to the imaginative nature and emotional faculties. Imagination always plays a crucial role in the development of moral spirit. Shelley explains "A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively... Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature." He points out that men have never lacked excellent moral precepts, they know them at least in theory, but they have lacked the understanding to apply that theory in day-to-day life. He continues that poetry widens the imaginative power and exerts an ennobling effect on the quality of the imagination itself. This idea takes us back to Aristotle's famous theory of 'catharsis'– the purifying power of tragedy. Aristotle explains that tragedy through pity and fear causes the proper purification of these emotions. Similarly Shelley's concept of imagination is enlarged by "a sympathy with pains and pleasures so mighty that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which

they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror, and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into tumults of familiar life." And he adds "Poetry purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration."

Shelley also is influenced by Wordsworth. Wordsworth defines poetry in his preface as, "The breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," and explains that "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." Similarly for Shelley "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds... Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world... A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight."

## On Rhyme and Metre

Shelley does not consider rhyme and metre as essential things. The essential things are the dignity and nobility of thought and language suitably harmonious and rhythmical. But rhythm is not strictly confined to poetry only. A good prose work possesses a beautiful rhythm of its own. To quote Shelley, "The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error... Plato was essentially a poet... The truth and splendour of his imagery and the melody of his language are the most intense that it is possible to conceive." Hence, he calls Lord Bacon also a poet.

## Shelley's Historical Survey of Poetry

Shelley reviews comprehensively the world's poetry and its common functions in history. He fully appreciates the Greek and Italian literatures and applauds the Athenian drama above all other kinds of poetry assuming that it consists of, as a class, the noblest poetry the world has witnessed. Shelley appreciates the interpenetration of comedy in *King Lear*, which he defines as, "universal, ideal, and sublime," and rates it above *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or The *Agamemnon*. Shelley asserts that the highest dramatic art is not possible without a social environment of high degree of nobility, and he points out that the utter degradation in the English drama took place during the reign of Charles II.

Regarding the Latin poetry, Shelley says that the institutions of Rome are the highest expression of her imagination. He had a great veneration for Italian poetry as it suits to his genius in its spiritual quality. He writes that Petrarch's poems "are as spells which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of love." Dante "understood the secret things of love even more than Petrarch." Shelley discusses English literature very little. He chooses Milton to compare with Dante. He rejects Milton's theology, but considers that Satan is the real hero of *Paradise Lost*, and so concludes, "Milton's Poem contains within itself a complete refutation of the system of which it has been a chief popular support." In the last paragraph of the treatise Shelley depicts the great picture of the poet, "as an inspired rhapsodist capturing in language the moments of his contact with the ideal world."

## 1.5.11. Shelley's Greatness as a Critic

Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* is not only a defence of poetry but also defence of all imaginative activity, of all fine arts as expression of the imagination. Shelley emphasizes the superiority of poet over all other artists because language is produced by imagination for its own use, whereas the medium of all

other arts exists separately in the external world. Thus poetry in its form and content is highly imaginative which clarifies its impact on the human mind. It is through his imagination that the poet gets through the world of reality and reaches the ideal world and thereby he creates an ideal world more true than the world of nature. Therefore he holds that the poetry is not "the mother of lies," but an embodiment of ideal truths, which can never be seized by reason, but are recognized by the imagination of the poet. So he claims that the poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world. David Daiches explains that Shelley was the first critic to use Plato's own argument to destroy his allegations against poetry. Shelley's criticism, however, is not free from shortcomings. He wrote his treatise with fuller enthusiasm. We get excited and exalted commendation instead of getting reason and argument from the text. He hurries with rapid expression from one point to another without having formulated the first. Much of his practical criticism is corrupted by his political and religious prejudices as his remarks on Milton and Wordsworth. However his greatness cannot be denied because of his enlightening and inspiring suggestions. Shelley possessed a very high order of critical ability on the philosophical as well as on the perceptive side.

### 1.5.12. Let us Sum up

In this unit, we have discussed the characteristic features of the Romantic Age, the evolution of the Romantic Criticism, and the major Romantic critics like Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley, their views on literature and criticism and the value of their criticism.

### 1.5.13. Sample Questions

1. What are the causes of the Romantic Revolt?
2. What art the chief characterstics of the Romantic Criticism.
3. Comment on Wordsworth's views on poetic diction.
4. Sketch the views of Wordsworth on nature and function of poetry and imagination.
5. Assess the importance of Wordsworth as a Romantic critic.
6. Critically comment on Coleridge's concept of imagination.
7. How does Coleridge distinguish between imagination and fancy?
8. How does Coleridge distinguish between poetry and poem.
9. Comment on Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's poetic diction.
10. What is the contribution of Coleridge to criticism as a Romantic critic?
11. How does Shelley defend poetry from the charges against it by the contemporaries?
12. Comment on Shelley's views on the moral function of poetry.
13. Assess the contribution of Shelley to literary criticism.

### 1.15.14. Suggested Reading

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# 6. BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA
# CHAPTER XII AND XIV

**S.T. Coleridge**

## Contents:



## 1:6:1 Objective

- to discuss the important ideas of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria
- to study Coleridge's idea of imagination in Chapter XII and XIV

## 1:6:2 Coleridge Biographia Literaria

There are many issues of agreement as well as disagreement between Wordsworth and Coleriage (1772-1834) in their Collaborative Friendship and work. Though this appears to be a formless work, it is a fascinating book. Like Jhonson, as Coleridge was a great talker, what flows from his pen in this book is a mixture of autobiography literary theory and metaphysical speculation. The literary criticism, constitutes a healthy combination of logic and sensibility in speaking of his early years, he describes how the sonnets of Willam Lisle Bowles captivated his adolescent mind. He reacted against the poetry of Pope, as he observed that Pope's poetry was interested in 'Just and acute observations on men and manners in an artificial state of society' and in the logic of wit and epigram. Pope's poetry was without poetic thoughts'; it only consisted of poetic thoughts translated into the language of poetry. He also did many like Wordsworth's attitude of 'dead' personification as in array. According to him, we find the most fantastic thoughts in the poetry from Donne to Cowley. He praises Cowper and Bowles for effecting a reconciliation between heart and head, and combining natural thought and natural diction. After reaching the end of first Chapter (in his Biographia Literaria) he inserts a chapter on a scarcely relevant subject.

Coleridge then pays an ironic tribute to contemporary critics, who have so persistently attacked him. Looking at his personal relationships and achievements, he is unable to explain the hostility. There can be only one explanation, that is, he was "in habits of intimacy with Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Southey". He thus defends, in this context, Southey's achievements, talents and personality. Coleridge argues that neither Southey's output nor his own creativity justify 'the fiction of a new school of poetry'. It was Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads that sparked off the unprecedented opposition. Critics seized on the 'humbler passages' in his poems to ridicule the theory. According to Coleridge, while analyzing Wordsworth, poetic theory, "the

language is not only peculiar and strong, but at times, knotty and contorted'. However, he recognized in Wordsworth, "the union of deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed". There was also "the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations". According to Coleridge, Fancy and imagination are "two distinct and wildly different faculties". If Milton had "a highly imaginative mind", Cowley had a " a very fanciful mind". Here, Coleridge in six chapters, makes a Philosophical enquiry into these aspects. Coleridge explores the works of the Philosophers to shed light on the vital arriving force in the mind, which creates a work of art.

In chapter XIII he defines imagination as the "Esemplastic" power. It means 'unifying' or 'building into one'. The imagination is primary or secondary. The primary imagination is the 'living power and prime agent of all human perception. It is 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination is its echo, alike in kind with the primary, but different in degree and in mode of operation. It dissolved and diffuses to recreate. It struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital, on the contrary, Fancy has "no other counters to play with, but fixities and definitions'. It is just ' a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space'. Like the memory, it receives all its materials ready made from the law of association'.

By using this definition of imagination and Fancy, Wordsworth describes he and Wordsworth conceived The Lyrics Ballads. They discussed 'the two cardinal points of poetry'. They were 'the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature' and 'the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination'. They decided on a series of poems of two sorts, one involving the supernatural, the other on subjects drawn from ordinary life. Coleridge was to handle the supernatural with sufficient resemblance of truth to produce that 'wiling suspension of disbelief' which constitutes poetic faith'; while Wordsworth was 'to give the charm of novelty to things of every day'. Such was the genesis of Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth however added his lengthy preface to the second edition in which the defence of experimentation with poems in the language of the ordinary life was blown up into a doctrine for poetry in general. Coleridge could not agree with this idea. He thus defines the meaning and constitution of a poem from a Philosophical point of view.

He discusses the two questions; what is poem? What is Poetry? Since a poem contains the same elements as a prose composition, the distinction must be in their combination and in the objective. The communication of pleasure is one object of poetry, but it might also be the object of a piece of prose. For him, "a poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its " immediate" object pleasure, not truth". In a poem, the parts must mutually support and explain each other and the reader must be carried forward by the 'pleasurable activity of the mind'. For him, the poet "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity".

In his Biographic Literaria Coleridge now turns his attention to practical criticism, making a critical analysis of Shakespeare, "Venus and Adonais" and the "Rape of Lucrece" to describe "promises and specific symptoms of poetic power". First there is the 'sweetness of versification'. There must be music in the soul of the poet. The second quality is the ability to deal with a subject remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. The third quality is the use of images organize the poet's passion. The fourth quality is the depth and

energy of thought, in Shakespeare's poem, his creative power and intellectual energy unify themselves with each other.

In another chapter of "Biographic Literaria", Coleridge discusses with Wordsworth the issue of differences between the recent poets and the poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In particular, Coleridge points out how in the poets of the past, the novelty of subject was avoided. In the post, "super excellence in the manner of treating the same subjects was the trial and test of the artists merit'. The essence of the art is in the art, in polished phrases, in melodious cadences and in gentlemanly vocabulary. Coleridge did not Wordsworth's idea of the use of the common man's language. He believed that Wordsworth's ideas, if any have limited use on the contrary, he believed that poetic diction is of a rare species of communisation. It originates in the moments of contemplation in the poet's consciousness. In this context, Coleridge undertakes a study of Wordsworth's "dramatic poems", such as "The Brothers", "Michael", "Ruth" and "The Mad Mother" to study Wordsworth's practice and use of common man's language in these poems. Coleridge between that poetry, essentially, is ideal and characters must be representative of a class. He disagreed with Wordsworth to believe that when the rustic language is purified, it loses its intented purpose of Wordsworth. It becomes similar to Wordsworth's own language. In any case, what Wordsworth has in mind is not the real language of the rustics.

In chapter XVIII. Coleridge discusses Wordsworth's idea that there can be no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. The question here is not whether poetry might not contain prosaic passages, but whether there may not be modes of expression acceptable in prose, which would be inappropriate in poetry. Metre, the language of excitement, frequency and intensity of imagery uracity, vividness of description and wholeness of organization are characteristics of poetry. It is when poetry becomes mere verbal expressions of prose. Coleridge here writes that what Wordsworth was really after was that quality in which conversational naturalness is sustained in rhymed verse that is dignified, attractive and metrically correct. Such charm is found in spenser, chaucer and George Herbert. Coleridge ends his work on Wordsworth with a substantial chaper (XXII) examining the beauties and defects of his poetry. And the first defect in Wordsworth's poetry is the "inconsistency" of style. The second defect is the prosaic quality of some of his poems. In these poems, there is too much minuteness and closeness of description of objects and also the insertion of excessive detail in the characterization. In this respect, Wordsworth does not leave enough to the imagination. In spit of these defects, there are many excellencies, Coleridge notices many excellencies in his poetry. The first good quality of his poetry is his purity and austerity of his diction. There is a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning. There is the correspondent weight and sanity of the thought and sentiments which spring from the poet's own meditative observation. They are fresh, natural and spontaneous. The third beauty of his poetry lies in the sinewy strength and originals of singe lines and paragraphs. The fourth is the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions. The fifth is a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility. There is also a description of sympathy of man with man. Wordsworth can detect the image and superscription of the creator under the dark lines with which guilt or calamity has cancelled it. Wordsworth also has the gift of imagination in the strictest and highest sense of the word. Coleridge, thus, in his Biogrophia literaria, by his perceptive observation and definitive insights into Wordsworth's poetry has excelled in his critical acumen along with Dryden and Jhonson.

## 1:6:3 His idea of imagination

Though Coleridge do not have any substantial and connected body of prose to his credit, like Hazlitt, Lamb and De Quincey, his prose is a collection of brilliantly discursive Fragments. His critical faculty was second to nope and in purely literary subjects he is easily first in an age of great critics. His aesthetic judgment were regulated and clarified by his philosophical speculations. He was the first to show that criticism in the highest sense is a creative aspect of a poet's imagination. He was influenced by the German Critic lessing in his intellectual life and rediscovery of Shakespeare. In Coleridge's works, the imaginative greatness was fully realized. He brought out Shakespeare's transcendent power of characterization, the conditions of his age as well as his universality. In Coleridge's imagination, critical activity began a systematic and pleasurable activity of the mind and spirit. A part from his contributions to religions, political or literary thought, Coleridge is full of good ideas. He read and followed widely the works of schlegel, and Philosophers such as shelling and Kant. Like Dante and Rossetti, he seems to have been more remarkable as a personality. His personal manetism appears extraordinary. This power of personality is united with a rare genius. His genius has a unique quality of imagination. He has the fertilizing power to synthesize diverse ideas into an organic whole. His brilliance and the immense discursive nature of his imagination influenced many other critics. He was successful in providing a Philosophical background to creative art and an aesthetic value to intellectual processes.

In chapter V – IX of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge traces the growth of his mind from Hartleyan associationism to neo-platonic and to German transcendental, idealism. Chapter XII lays down in ten theses the Fichtean and Schelligion phase of ideal realism. All this is undertaken in preparation for the grand purpose of expounding the nature and genesis of the imagination. For him, imagination, either primary or secondary, holds the living power and prime Agent of all human perception as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination, co-existing with the conscious will, similar with the primary imagination, is yet different from the primary imagination, only in degree. As it is essentially vital, as all objects are essentially fixed and dead, it idealizes and unifies diversified objects.

On the contrary Fancy has only fixities and definites. It is no more 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. It receives all its association from the law of association. We may see the relation of Coleridge's "imagination" and "fancy" to German ideas. Kant defines understanding the faculty of thinking and forming judgments on the notices furnished by the sense pure reason, for Kant, is "the power by we become possessed of principles – the eternal verities of Plato and Descartes and of ideas, not images". The terms, primary imagination, understanding secondary imagination, and Reason stand as a kind of ascending series. The platonic sensory knowledge (eikasia), more or less the equivalent of the Kantian immediate sensory intuition (Anschaung) does not appear in the Coleridgean system. This "imagination" is a primary creative act, a willed activity of spirit it is a self-realizing intuition. It joins the otherwise separated parts of our self, the outer unconscious and the inner conscious, the object and the subject. According to him, in chapters XI and VII, there are two powers at work, which relatively to each other, are active and passive and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. The two powers between which the imagination mediates are the "subject" and "object" of chapter XII. Primary imagination is a human creative act which we may take as a type of and participation in the living Act.

We conceive the "Secondary Imagination" a higher plastic power. This reworks the perceptual products of primary imagination into concrete expressions – that is symbols of those "ideas" – such as the self, the absolute, the world and God Nature, for a poet, symbolizes the spiritual life of man and hence to that higher life in which the spiritual life of man participates, "the one life within us and abroad". For Kant, the ideas of a such a life are framed by reason. But for Coleridge, there ideas are realities and the reason is the faculty of philosophical insight into them, as secondary imagination gave symbolic embodiment. Kant distinguished this imagination under the name of the "aesthetic" from the "productive" (Similar to Coleridge's primary imagination) and from the "reproductive" (Coleridge's fancy"). According to Coleridge, the Fine Arts belong to the outward work, for they all operate by the images of sight and sound and other sensible impressions. A poet must master the essence, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man. In the objects of nature, all the possible elements, steps and process of intellect antecedent to consciousness. Man's mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect, which are scattered throughout the images of nature. To have genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, but reflected from the flowers, and the beasts. A man of genius finds a reflex of himself were it only in the mystery of being.

In Coleridge's conception, there is a union between the meaning of art and the meaning of nature. This is based on the schellingian emphasis on coalescence, and on reconciliation. Coleridge believes in the reconciliation between the conscious and the unconscious, subject and object. For Coleridge in his "Poesy or Art", art is a middle quality between a thought and a thing. It is "the figured language of thought, and is distinguished from nature by the unity of all parts in one thought or idea. In his rhapsodic analysis of a couplet from "Venus and Adonais", Coleridge discovers that, in this sonnet of Shakespeare, many images and feelings are brought together without effort and without discord, in the beauty of Adonais for him, imitation is the "mesothesis of Likeness and difference. The difference is as essential to it as the likeness", for without the difference, it would be copy or fac-simile. As in the case of thinking of a distinction between a basic universal power of knowing and a special power of artistic knowing as in the theory of art from plotinus to Croce and Susan Langer, in Coleridge and Wordsworth also, there is this difference between our knowledge of a self realizing intuition and forms of nature. This is a very special way of showing of how "nature" is "thought" and "thought" is "nature".

In the romantic poetry, we have a theory of "animating" imagery of romantic anthropomorphism. The theory of imagination of Coleridge and Wordsworth is an excellent description of their own best poetry in its formal, structural and metaphoric aspect. They agreed in their ideas about their association of the imagination with the vast and infinite, "the shadowy ideal character". Imagination incites and supports the eternal. The spiritual, the divine meaning is nearly identical with the generality, the abstraction.

## 1:6:4 Biographia Literaria : Chapter XIV : Study of the text

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, indisputably the greatest and the original critic in English literary theory, is gifted with a seminal mind. It is true that most of his admirers discover themselves as Coleridge discovered himself in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Gifted with a comprehensive mind, he can synthesise all the apparently elements and forms of knowledge into his organic theory of poetry. As he distinguishes between fancy and imagination, in his original response to Wordsworth's poetic theory, for him imagination is "the union of deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty and in modifying the

objects observed and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere." Coleridge thus examined 'what our faculties are and what they are capable of becoming. In his idea of imagination, as there is unity in all the elements of this universe, in idea of Fancy, there is no such fusion of disparate images. However, his most original theoretical preposition are not organized with any system, (all his ideas are disparately spread in his Biographia Literaria, Lectures on Shakespeare, and Table Talk), some of his seminar ideas (comprehending psychological and metaphysics) appear even fundamental to the modern criticism. He is a master of applied criticism. On many occasions, the German Transcendentalist influence is prominent in his theoretical and creative imagination. His ideas about poetic consciousness and the origin of poetic diction are of great interest to the modern criticism. He is the originator of the theory of organic form as it is relates to his distinction between fancy and imagination.

In this chapter XIV Coleridge defines his idea of a poem, poetry and imagination. The origing the Biographia Literaria, is in conversations between himself and Wordsworth, concerning "the cardinal points of poetry the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature". As they decided to write the two forms of human existence, the ordinary and natural (by Wordsworth) and the supernatural (by Coleridge). In the poetry of the "natural" objects of nature, Wordsworth chose the incidents and the objects to describe "the dramatic truth" of such emotions. In the poetry of supernatural objects, Coleridge chose incidents, which operator under the supernatural agency. As the plan of Lurical Balleds originted, Coleridge's endeavour was to describe persons and characters. Under the supernatural influence, as for Coleridge, poetry is "the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith", Wordsworth gave "charm of novelty to things of every day and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural" to direct the mind to "the loveliness and wonders of the world, so that we can see and enjoy the inexhaustible treasure of nature.

With this view, Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner", "The Dark Ladio" and "The Christabel". As he differed with Wordsworth idea of poetic diction (of the rustic language) for him poetic diction is originates with a metaphysical purpose in the poet's consciousness. He thus discuss his ideas of (1) Poem (2) Poetry and (3) Imagination.

First his definition of a poem. A poem's immediate concern is pleasure, not truth. It evokes pleasure by its organic whole where each part is organically related with other parts to constitute a "living" species. A poem moves by its spirit than by its meaning. Its "immediate" object is not truth, as in science. It consists of the same elements as a prose composition. It differs with a poem in its combination. Its combination of the elements differs from its object. Thus, a poem's higher purpose is pleasure of the highest and permanent kind. It may result from the realization of its goal. However, great poems more than merely "communicate". They create status of mind of the highest truth. The kind of truth depends upon the character of the writer. A poem has an organic form. Its meaning" and "value" lie within itself. Its spirit moves us, more than its meaning. A reader's consciousness unwinds itself. His mind is inspired by the spirit of the poem. It moves forward and backward by "a relentless desire of the reader to arrive at the final solution" by a pleasurable and creative activity of the mind. The awakening of the mind of the reader is like the motion of a serpent or like the path of sound through the air. It progresses creatively transcendent tally. It pauses and half recedes on it progresses. A poem exists by its spirit may by its intellectual meaning.

What is Imagination? It is a synthetic and magical power, as it reveals itself in "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities". It has the sameness and generality

of the universality. It fuses the idea with the image, the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects. It given a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order. It combines judgment with enthusiasm and profound feeling. It blends and harmonizes the natural and artificial. It subordinates art to nature, the manner to the matter. It is the soul of a poem. According to Sir John Davies, imagination turns "bodies to spirit by sublimation strange. It converts "to fire the things it burns". It abstracts their forms from their gross matter. It draws a kind of quintessence from things. It brings them light from its celestial wings. She abstracts the universal kinds".

In addition to imagination, good sense is the body of poetic genius. It consists of fancy. Motion is its life. Imagination is its soul, as it makes a poem a graceful and intelligent whole.

## 1:6:5 To Sum Up:

In this lesson, we have studied Coleride's Idea of imagination, as for imagination is a poet's capability to unite human soul with the spirit of nature, Imagination is the most original and divine poetic activity. We discover enough originality of purpose in his theory of imagination.

## 1:6:6 Sample Questions

1. Coleridge's idea of imagination.
2. Coleridge and his Biographia Literaria

## :6:7 Suggested Reading

1. W.K. Wimsatt Jr a Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism A short History
2. William O' Conner An Age of Criticism – 1900 – 1950
3. Rene Wellek A History of Modern Criticism : 1750 – 1950 II The Romantic Age
4. M.H. Abrams The Mirror and the Lamp

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Lesson - 7

# THE VICTORIAN SCHOOL OF CRITICISM

## Contents:



## 1.7.1. Objective :

After going through this unit, you should be able to

- recognise the main characteristics of the Victorian School of Criticism
- discuss the major Victorian critics such as Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, and their views on different aspects of literature
- assess the contribution and value of their criticism

## 1.7.2. Introduction

This is one of the units in the paper on Literary Criticism of M.A. Course. It will help you understand the Victorian school of criticism with reference to the major critics such as Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, and their views on different aspects of literature. It also evaluates their contribution to literary criticism.

## 1.7.3. The Victorian Age:

Its Characteristic features. The period during which Queen Victoria ruled England is called the Victorian Age. Queen Victoria ruled England between 1837 and 1901. This period witnessed far-reaching economic, social, scientific and literary changes. It brought about transformation both in the social life of England and its literature and literary criticism.

## (a) The Spirit of Compromise

There was a fierce controversy between the Neo-Classical Age and the Romantic Age. The rules laboriously framed by the former were demolished by the latter. At this stage emerged a new set of critics who were anxious to define "the function of criticism at the present time." The Victorian age called for a sort of "golden mean" and "compromise" between the Neo-classical Age and the Romantic Age. Several factors influenced the Age. The rise of democracy, progress of science, transfer of power from the upper to the middle class by the Reforms Act of 1832, Reforms Bill of 1867, 1884 had democratized the Parliament to a great extent. The introduction of free education and the establishment of new universities helped this. The Industrial Revolution and its technological advancement not only brought about unprecedented material prosperity, but also the evils of unfettered capitalism, materialism and mammon-worship. The result was, as Birjadesh Prasad remarks, the emergence of "an age of contrasts in which authority coexisted with freedom, wealth with want, faith with doubt, culture with philistinism." These evils appear to be a component of the capitalist society, which might have inspired Karl Marx to produce *Das Capital* in 1867. Marx advocated socialism as the only remedy for these social evils. It emerged as a living force in the 1880's and 90's. 'This condition of England question' dominantly preoccupied the Age. The geological discoveries of Sir Charles Lyell and Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* posed a serious challenge to the orthodox Christianity and shook people's faith in religion. The Age was described as an "age of doubts, distractions and despair." There was a feeling social insecurity and discontent throughout. What made for the reconciliation of these opposites was the spirit of compromise. The need for order overwhelmed all other considerations. So the age of Queen Victoria with all 'its divided aims' was yet of one mind ultimately—"the mind that saw England's good in the golden mean in politics, religion, morals, industry, science and literature."

## (b) The Crisis of Culture and the Writer's mission

There was a "crisis of culture" and the writers had one mission—that of making the good prevail. "Tennyson sought it in orderly existence, Browning in spiritual development, Arnold in 'Sweetness and Light', Carlyle in devotion to duty, Ruskin in righteous living, Pater in the cult of the beautiful." Responding to the multiple problems of the day, the writers assumed the role of preachers. The duty of criticism was seen to bring the best that is thought and said in the world, as Arnold exhorted. Unlike the Romantic, the Victorian critics wanted that criticism in the new age must draw closer to life and make life nobler and better. Literary criticism to be worthwhile must serve the ends of life, and promote a better understanding of cultural values and thus bring about social regeneration. Poetry was regarded as "criticism of life". Critics like Ruskin and Carlyle also gave a religious and moral bias to criticism to overcome the degeneration of values. While the Victorian literature reflected the Victorian life, the Victorian criticism aimed at making that life better and nobler by creating a current of best thoughts and ideas.

## (C) Search for Order and Balance

Disillusioned with the French Revolution and its aftermath, the Victorians yearned for law and order, steady, ordered progress and healthy evolution in place of bloody revolution. As a disciplined nation, it pleaded for obedience to authority, rules and regulations. The literary criticism of the age also reflected the same spirit. With the decline of the Romanticism was gone its lawlessness. When

Queen Victoria came to the throne, the great romantics were either dead, or had ceased to be creative. While the great Romantic critics followed their own inner light and produced great criticism, the lesser critics degenerated criticism into waywardness, whimsicality and licence. There was naturally a revolt against such criticism in favour of an orderly, balanced, standard criticism. The Victorian compromise helped creation of an order which is not so rigid as that of the Neo-Classicists, nor so flexible as that of the Romantics. It was neither tyrannical, nor capricious. The golden mean was struck. Arnold suggested establishment of an English Academy on the model of the French to regulate literary taste. Though England did not favour this, they were impressed by the critical theories of the two gifted French critics, Taine and Sainte Beauve.

## (d) Influence of the French Critical Theories

The Victorian criticism was greatly influenced by the Continental criticism, especially that of the French. The materialistic and positivistic philosophy of Saint Simon and August Comte with its accent on the reality of the physical world went against the romantic and idealistic forces. The influence of the French critics Hippolyte Taine and Sainte-Beuve who emphasised the historical and biographical context of a work of art further strengthened the realism and matter-of-factness of the Victorian criticism. Taine regarded literature as the product of social forces which he classified into the race, the milieu and the moment. Similarly Sainte Beauve emphasised the writer's race and country, the upbringing and education, then his period of youth and youthful associations, and so on to his maturity. The critic, according to him, must live solely in his author; he should abjure all passion and prejudice and be guided by the desire to see the author as he really is. This biographical critical method influenced Arnold and many others in the Victorian Age, because it was a sort of compromise between romantic licence and neo-classical rigidity.

## (e) The Dual Trend

Though the scientific temper and the materialistic philosophy undermined romanticism, the romantic trends were not completely eradicated. These two contradictory trends prevailed simultaneously side by side in both Victorian literature and criticism. While the writers like Macaulay, John Stuart Mill, Huxley, John Morley, Herbert Spencer advocated the rationalistic and the materialistic trends of the age, others like Ruskin, Carlyle, Pater, Addington, Symonds, Arthur Symons and the Pre-Raphaelites took the opposite romantic-idealistic stance. On the question of the function of poetry, the Victorians were divided into two groups.. While Carlyle and Ruskin reverted to the neo-classical doctrine of 'Art for Life's sake', Walter Pater and Ocar Wilde continued the romantic tradition of the "Art for Art's sake" movement. Arnold stood midway between the two.

## (f) The Role of Reviewers

Several Review periodicals such as *The Edinburgh Review, The Quarterly Review, The Monthly Review* emerged in the Victorian Age to fulfil the needs of a new class of casual readers who had no time to read a full scale book. They have added a new complexity to the literary scene with their multiplicity and popularity. Though some of the reviews were excellent and of a very high order, the periodical criticism, in general, was quite inferior due to its extreme bigotry and muddle-headedness. It was full of their personal, literary, political and religious prejudices, and lacking in any sense of

responsibility. The abundance of its output was accompanied by paucity of standards. The inter st in history, religion and social reform mixed up with literary criticism to its disadvantage.

## 1.7.4. The Evolution of Victorian Criticism

The Victorian criticism falls into three divisions—the early Victorian, the mid-Victorian, and the later Victorian.

**(a) The Early Victorian era (1835-1860):** This is a period of decay and decline of literary criticism as there was neither any talented critic nor any outstanding work of literary criticism during this age. Only Keble and Brimley are critics worth-mentioning. Though Macaulay, Carlyle, and John Stuart Mill belong to this age, they are not literary critics. Their interests are historical, social or philosophical.

**(b) The Middle Phase—'Art for Life's sake' (1860-1880):** The two outstanding thinkers—Arnold and Ruskin belong to this period. Of these two, Ruskin is more an art critic than a literary critic. Considering art to be the greatest which conveyed to the reader the greatest number of the greatest ideas, Ruskin could achieve a synthesis between art and morality. Arnold also achieved this with his advocacy that poetry is a criticism of life, and that criticism should propagate the best that ever was thought or written.

**(c) The Later Phase—'Art for Art's sake'(1880-1900):** During this period, the cult of 'Art for Life's sake' was replaced by that of 'Art for Art's sake'. Pater and Oscar Wilde, the two great aesthetes, represent this movement. They found the concern of art in beauty to the total exclusion of life and reality. Their criticism was individualistic and impressionistic. The 'art for art's sake' movement drew its inspiration from the powerful aesthetic principles of the German philosopher Kant, the French critic Gautier, the American poet-critic Edgar Allan Poe, and his French disciple Baudelaire. The movement inspired in England D.G. Rosetti, Swinburne, Pater, and Oscar Wilde who sought refuge in art out of disgust for the ugliness of Victorian life.

We can also find **Academic criticism** in this later phase represented by scholar-critics like Leslie Stephen, Edward Dowden, George Saintsbury, David Masson who pursued a scientific and systematic research taking great pains, though their work lacked originality.

## 1.7.5. Matthew Arnold

Among the Victorian critics, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater are the major critics worth the discussion. Matthew Arnold was acknowledged as the founder of a distinctly modern movement in English literary criticism. He was not only a critic but also a poet, prophet and an apostle of culture. His criticism thus springs from his own personal experience. Arnold expresses his indebtedness to the critics, Sainte-Beuve, Goethe, Renan, Wordsworth, Newman and classicists Homer, Epictetus, Sophocles.

### Arnold's Works

A multi-faceted personality, Arnold wrote poetry, literary criticism, and works of prose bearing on social, political, cultural, religious and theological subjects.

**(a) Poetry:**

Arnold reveals his moral consciousness and a melancholic note in his poetry which includes *The Stray Reveller and Other Poems* (1849), *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* (1852), *Juvenilia, Alaric at Rome* (1840) a Rugby prize poem, *Cromwell* (1843) an oxford prize poem, and *Last Poems* in 1867. Arnold today is remembered more as a critic rather than a poet.

**(b) Social and Political Criticism:**

We can find the best of Arnold's social and cultural criticism in his *Culture and Anarchy (1869)* and *Friendship's Garland (1879)*. Arnold's social criticism was the natural outcome of his literary criticism and educational criticism. *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is the principal work under this category. J.W. Beach regards it as the cornerstone of Arnold's social criticism. His definition of culture, division of English society into three classes—Barbarians, Philistines and Populace, his Hebraism and Hellenism have assumed great importance.

**(c) Religious and Theological Writings**

Arnold's ideas on religion are expounded in *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). *Mixed Essays (1879)* is a collection of political and literary studies. No pious soul could show deeper religious feeling than his *Note Books* (1892) could. He was one of those who believed that in the sphere of religion as everywhere, reason must be supreme. Though there is some amount of flippancy and levity in his treatment of sacred subjects, one cannot question the sincerity and the seriousness of his motives.

**(d) Literary Criticism**

Arnold's literary criticism can be seen in his *Preface to "Poems", 1853, On Translating Homer (1861), Last Words on Translating Homer, Essays in Criticism-First Series (1865), On the Study of Celtic Literature (1867)*. His second series of *Essays in Criticism* was published posthumously in 1888.

*Preface to the Poems, 1853* is regarded as Arnold's critical manifesto. We find in it for the first time many of the views and principles which were elaborated in the later works. It reminds us of Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. Arnold here tries to justify the exclusion of *Empedocles* from his collection of poems. It also "looks forward to Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in as much as the earlier work is the *classical* reaction to the weakening (or decadent) romanticism—and insists on the need for choosing appropriate subjects for poetry."

In *On Translating Homer,* Arnold studies the existing translations of Homer's *Iliad,* with a view to giving practical advice to future translators. He also speaks of the "grand style" and explains it with reference to Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton.

In *Last Words on Translating Homer*, Arnold develops his earlier criticism of the English intellect. "The critic of poetry," says Arnold, "should have the finest tact, the nicest moderation, the most free, flexible, and elastic spirit imaginable." He should be eagerly receptive, Grand style arises in poetry, says he, "when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject."

In *On the Study of Celtic Literature,* Arnold argues that the modern Englishman unites in himself Norman, Germanic and Celtic strains. The Englishman has inherited strenuousness and talent for practical affairs from his Norman ancestors, steadiness and honesty from his Germanic ancestors, ardour and sensibility from his Celtic ancestors. He has to fully realize and harmonise in himself these three sets of virtues.

Arnold's critical method is found in his *Essays in Criticism* (First and Second Series). The appearance of the First Series in 1865 was something of a literary sensation due its style, novelty, and confidence of opinions and the wide range and diversity of its subjects. No volume of critical essays had before appeared in England at least on a collection of subjects and authors so diverse as The Literary Influence of Academies, Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment, the De Guerins, Joubert, Heine, Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius.

While the First Series of *Essays in Criticism* deals with the Continental figures, the Second Series deals largely with the English writers such as Milton, Gray, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley. Arnold's recognition of Tolstoy's genius, and his social ideals at a time when it was hardly known on this side of the Channel was "as true as it was prompt." His essay on Amiel, a Swiss Professor, poet and journalist, has turned Amiel an increasingly popular "bedside book" even today. Saintsbury criticizes that in *Essays in Criticism,* theory divorced from history makes its appearance too often and that his estimate of the condition of the French and the German literatures will not stand to scrutiny. His critical practice, however, exemplifies delightful variety and charm in spite of their repetitions. Except the *Preface* to Ward's *Poets,* the *Essays in Criticism* is much the best known of Arnold's critical works.

**Arnold's Views on Poetry**

Arnold expresses his views on poetry as well as criticism. He appears to be a thorough classicist in his views. An attempt is made here to examine them separately.

**(a) Choice of Subjects in Poetry**

Arnold's views on the choice of subjects in poetry could be found in his *Preface* to *"Poems", 1853.* Arnold wrote the *Preface* to combat the Spasmodic tendency, to which he himself had fallen a victim. The group of poets represented by P.J. Bailey, Sidney Dobell, and Alexander Smith of the Age was called Spasmodics. They considered poetry to be the expression of 'the state of one's own mind' in striking language. This resulted in the extravagance of thought and emotion on the one hand, and to 'a provoking excess of metaphor' on the other. It was to combat this Spasmodic tendency that Arnold wrote the *Preface* to the *Poems of 1853. Empedocles on Aetna,* the poem that had led him astray, was omitted from the volume. The hero does nothing here but to suffer; and Arnold feels that suffering that finds no vent in action is not a fit subject for poetry. For "all art," says Arnold quoting Schiller, "is dedicated to joy." Even tragedy is no exception to this. Like Aristotle, he believes that the joy that poetry imparts is dependent on its subject. While the Spasmodics thought that the modern subjects are fit for poetry, Arnold thought otherwise. The business of the poets, according to Arnold, "is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure which they are capable of feeling." Actions that "most powerfully appeal to those elementary feelings which are independent of time" are the fittest subjects for poetry. The subjects which satisfy this test of abiding appeal can be either

ancient or modern. But "an age wanting in moral grandeur can with difficulty supply such," says Arnold. Poetry aims higher: it is *cathartic*. The Spasmodics' attempt to cover up the inferiority of the subject with their superior treatment also will not help. Expression cannot take the place of action, which is the first condition of poetry. For it is itself dependent for its effectiveness on the excellence of the action. A purple patch here and a purple patch there, as was the fashion with the Spasmodics, is not poetry. It is, as the Greeks conceived it, one whole in which part is coordinated with part to form a single action. Though Shakespeare chose excellent subjects of the past times, Arnold does not regard him as a safe model because of his unbridled expression and inability "to say a thing plainly, even when the press of the action demands the very directest language." So is Keats. Arnold turns to the ancients for models. It can therefore be concluded that Arnold's criterion of great poetry is that it should give joy even when the situation is painful, that it should treat of action rather than thought, that it should please as a whole and not merely in parts, and that its highest models are the ancient classics. Arnold appears to be on safer ground when he confines himself to those principles which he shares with Aristotle, Coleridge and Goethe. They and he agree that the plot, or action, or motive is the first thing. They agree also that its unity, the total impression, is what gives a poem its essential character. He, however, seems to restrict the writer's scope when he says that the life of our own times should not be explored as a subject for poetry. If his narrow view of art were to be taken strictly, the work of such great writers as Ibsen, Walt Whitman, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy and many others would have to be excluded from the category of great literature.

## (b) The Grand Style

Arnold refers to the superiority of the grand style of the Greeks over the colourful style of the English in his *Preface* of *Poems of 1853*. In his essay *On Translating Homer,* he develops his views and suggests it as a cure for a further evil creeping into English life and property—Americanism. He considers the ancients as the "unapproached masters" of the grand style. He regards Homer as the grand master of the grand style. Arnold hit upon the phrase in a passage in Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*. The latter's reference to the enlargement of stature while reading Homer is taken for grand style. The grand style ennobles poetry and it ennobles life. To Arnold it appears to be the result of his *rapidity* of movement, *plainness* and *directness* of language, *nobility* of nature, and 'simple *lucidity* of mind." The grand style, therefore, "arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject." It is, of course, no definition at all, nor was meant to be one. It indicates the prominent features of the sublime in poetry suggested by Longinus. For the grand style, there must be (i) nobility of soul, for great words issue only from great minds, (ii) the subject or action chosen must be serious enough. It must have, "truth of substance and high seriousness," (iii) the treatment must be severe like that of Milton or simple like that of Homer, (iv) "The stylist must be poetically gifted." Homer, Dante and Milton were masters of the grand style, but other English poets are lacking in this quality. Modern poets like Keats do not have the shaping power of great literature. They have short passges and single line of admitted excellence, but not the beauty of the whole. But it is the total impression which produces the grand style. Hence, the ancient masters serve as masters for our matter and manner. Arnold's theory of poetry is to be understood as a revolt against Romantic individualism, subjectivity, and contempt for authority. Wimsatt and Brooks visualise Arnold as "the most imposing figure in English mid-Victorian criticism, not as part of the lyric-spasmodic

movement, but in a brusque classical resistance to it." He provides " a countercheck quarrelsome to the prevailing lyrical trend, a reaffirmation of the classical norm of the fable."

### (c) Poetry as criticism of life

In his essay "The Study of Poetry," which first appeared as an Introduction to A.C. Ward's *Selections from English Poets,* Arnold reveals a high conception of poetry. He compares poetry with religion and philosophy, and asserts that "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 even surer and surer stay." He believes that poetry has "immense future." It is capable of higher uses, interpreting life for us, consoling us, and sustaining us. Arnold defines poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." The power of consolation and stay it gives is proportionate to the power of poetry as criticism of life. The power of poetry springs from its excellence. The phrase "criticism of life" has variously been interpreted. Elsewhere, Arnold himself explains the phrase "criticism of life" as "the noble and profound application of ideas to life," and "laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty" as "truth and seriousness of substance and matter," and "felicity and perfection of diction and manner." Arnold believes with Aristotle that it is not the function of poetry to present life as it is. The poet has to add to it something of his own, too, to indicate *what he thinks of it.* This makes it different from life. It is the poet's criticism of life, his contribution to its enrichment. While science and morality appeal either to reason or to good sense, poetry appeals to all the faculties of the soul and so to the whole man. Poetry therefore exists to make life richer and fuller by applying itself to the question: "How to live", which for him is a moral question. Arnold further says that "The best poetry will be found to have the power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can." Thus Arnold expresses a sublime and exalted view of the nature and effect of poetry. It is therefore essentially moral, not in the narrow didactic sense, but in the larger sense of conforming to the highest ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty.

## Arnold's Views on Criticism

It is in his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," prefixed to the first series of his *Essays in Criticism,* that Arnold defines criticism, explains its function and also talks about the essentials of a competent critic. His view of criticism is quite high as that of poetry. He refers to the characteristics of a classic and suggests the Touchstone method as the right method of judgment of poetry in another essay "The Study of Poetry".

### (a) Creative and Critical Faculties

Arnold admits that the critical faculty is lower than the creative. The exercise of creative power is proved to be "highest function of man; it is proved to be so by man's finding in it his true happiness." But so far as the writing of literature is concerned, creative power by itself is of little value. The times and the milieu are also important for the creation of literature. An auspicious time, according to Arnold, is one in which the materials with which a writer works. The "best ideas on every matter which literature touches" are not only readily available but current in the very air he breathes. It is these that he shapes into "beautiful works".. With Taine Arnold believes that "for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not

enough without the moment." The power of the moment i.e. stir and growth of noble ideas is made possible by criticism. The function of criticism is not merely "judgment in literature" but much more noble. In this context, Arnold pleads that it is the critic who "discovers" the ideas, propagates them and nothing is left to the creative work which is one of "synthesis and exposition", rather than analysis and discovery. Arnold feels that criticism can actively prepare the basic ground for the creative power to exercise upon. Thus criticism assumes equal importance with creativity.

R.A. Scott James remarks: "The function of Arnold's critic in the broadest sense of the term is to promote culture; his function as literary critic is to promote that part of culture which depends upon knowledge of letters." He aims at gaining acceptance for his ideas and "carrying others alongwith him in his march towards perfection." There is, thus, an element of the propagandist in Arnold's conception of the role of the critic and criticism. That is why he has been criticised as a salesman. The importance of Arnold's views on criticism as a preparation ground for creativity, however, needs no overemphasis.

## (b) The "Disinterestedness" of Criticism

Arnold defines criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." Thus the task of the critic is a threefold activity. First, it is the *personal culture,* "to learn the best that is known and thought in the world," and to "see the object as in itself it really is." Secondly, it is a *service to society,* to "make the best ideas prevail" with a missionary zeal. Thirdly, it is a *service to literature*—"to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." To discharge the first two functions "knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself

The word "disinterestedness" in Arnold's definition of criticism has been the subject of controversy. Criticism for Arnold is the handmaid of culture—personal, social, and literary. It has "interests" beyond itself and in this sense it is not disinterested. But there were other interests that attached to it in Arnold's day, from which he wanted it to be free. These were generally political and religious, or otherwise practical. "Our organs of criticism," says Arnold, "are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve, and with them those practical ends are the first thing and the play of mind the second; so much play of mind as is compatible with the prosecution of those practical ends is all that is wanted." Criticism is "a free disinterested play of mind" and its duty is "to see the object as in itself it really is." If criticism were to be an organ of political parties, it ceases to be disinterested. Our judgment, says he, should not be swayed by the prejudices of the barbarians, the blind impulses of the populace and the falsification of ideas which marks the philistines. The end of criticism is "perfection, spiritual growth, governed by 'sweetness and light'." As R.A. Scott James points out, "The interests from which he would have us be free are those which militate against intellectual and moral perfection." Criticism in England was being stifled by such practical considerations. Arnold identifies disinterestedness with the "Indian virtue of detachment" which reminds us of the *Bhagavdgitha* and its definition of the ideal man– the *Sthitapragna* and *Nishkama Karma*– action, without having any interest in its result. Though Arnold pleads for disinterestedness, he himself was not free from it in his evaluation of contemporary poets. He himself ties the critic to preconceived notions of moral perfection which are likely to colour his judgment and make him overpraise some and denigrate others. As Scott James points out: "He frees the critic from certain interests, ulterior political, practical considerations, but he ties him up to other interests."

## (c) The Fallacious Estimates

Arnold's concern for best poetry has led to the problem of how to judge the best poetry. A critic has to make a real estimate of the best poetry. But this real estimate, if one is not vigilant, warns Arnold, will be superseded by two kinds of fallacious estimates, viz the historic estimate and the personal estimate. A poem may look important in historical terms or personal terms though, in reality, it is not. For example, if the work of a poet marks a stage in the course of the literary development of a nation, we may easily make the mistake of attaching greater importance to it than its inherent quality warrants. This fallacy is caused by the historic estimate. Similarly a critic's judgment of a poet may tend to be biased due to his personal affinities, likings, and circumstances. As a result, he may overrate the importance of the poet or his poetry. This fallacy is caused by the personal estimate.

## (d) The Touchstone Method

Arnold considers the question of the judgment of literature. In spite of his classical leanings, he lays down no hard and fast rule. He is content with a test of his own, ultimately borrowed from Longinus and first suggested in England by Addison. In order to distinguish a classic and to make a real estimate of poetry, Arnold suggests a method known as the Touchstone method. To determine the truly excellent, a critic has to have always in mind lines and expressions of the great masters and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Answering the likely question as to how we can compare lines from the works which are dissimilar, Arnold observes: "Of course, we are not to require this poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them." The lines from the great masters should serve as "infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them." Short passages, even single lines, will serve the purpose sufficiently, he says. He then gives us illustrations, quoting two lines from Homer (Homer's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers), another three lines from Homer (the address of Zeus to the Horses of Peleus), another line from Homer (the words of Achilles to Priam), a few lines from Dante, a few lines from Shakespeare and another few from Milton. Arnold says that the specimens of poetry quoted by him are enough to enable us to form clear and sound judgments of any other poetry and to conduct us to a real estimate. While admitting that the specimens he has quoted are widely different, he asserts that they commonly possess the "very highest poetical quality." He contends that a critic in stead of dabbling in abstractions about the character of high quality poetry, may do well by depending on concrete examples such as the best lines from various accomplished poets. These lines possess "substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other." They have "a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth and power." The substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, "truth and seriousness." Arnold borrows the words—"truth and seriousness" from Aristotle who said that poetry is superior to history because it possesses a higher truth and higher seriousness. The style and manner of best poetry derive their special character from superiority of diction and of movement. At the same time, says Arnold, 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 in its manner and style.

Arnold's advocacy of judgment by short passages or lines certainly goes counter to his earlier thesis that it is the "total impression" which counts. Wimsatt and Brooks observe that "this sample

appeal to the chunklet, this sample piece of precious stuff, is a rather startling shift towards the norm of style run away from the initial classic thesis of 1853, that the 'action is all'." Further a passage taken out of its context often creates a false impression, and may not be a sure sign of excellence. R.A. Scott-James however finds in it the importance of comparative approach in literature which could be extended from isolated passages to the whole works. The method will be better employed by the critic who has exceptional "tact" as suggested by Arnold.

## (d) Practical Criticism

Arnold's illuminating and suggestive remarks on poets and poetry are scattered all over his literary criticism. His *The Essays in Criticism, First and Second Series,* contain the best of his practical criticism. He makes a rapid survey of English poetry from Chaucer to the end of 18th century upholding only that poetry which has high seriousness. In "The Function of Criticism at the present time" he applies the touchstone method to a number of poets, both ancient and modern. Besides there are a number of essays on both English and foreign poets. Of these the essays on Gray, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth are regarded as the best.

Arnold's views on writers are quite interesting. He regards Gray's *Elegy* as beautiful poem, but not his best work. The unfavourable milieu accounts for the scantiness of Gray's production and his sterility. It is not free from the faults of the age. Still he is almost alone in poetic merit in his age. He may not rank with the great masters of the golden age of poetry, but he is certainly greater than his contemporaries.

Arnold regards Keats as one of the greatest of English poets by his promise, if not fully by his performance. He is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous but wanting in character and self-control which are necessary for a great poet. Keats wanted to devote his faculties to the "ardours, rather than the pleasures, of song." Keats's yearning passion for the Beautiful was not a passion of the sensuous or the sentimental man, but of an intellectual and spiritual passion. Keats's achievement lies in his perception of the necessary relation of beauty with truth, and of both with joy. Misfortune, disease and early death were responsible for Keats's partial and incomplete achievement. Yet Arnold places him with Shakespeare by virtue of his faculty of natural magic and Shakespearean felicity of expression. Keats, however, was not ripe for that faculty of moral interpretation which Shakespeare has. Keats is perfect in his shorter pieces, because in them the faculty of moral interrelation and high architectonics which go with complete poetic development, are not required.

Arnold regrets the lack of recognition for Wordsworth though his poetical performance is next only to Shakespeare and Milton in English literature and Goethe and Moliere in European poetry. He tries to disengage Wordsworth's best work(found in his shorter pieces) from the large quantity of inferior work produced by him. Wordsworth's superiority arises from the powerful application of ideas to life. He applies to his subject his ideas "on man, on Nature, and on human life." He best poems are criticism of life. His work has moral profundity, for he answers the question,"how to live?" and this is a moral question. His treatment of life has "high seriousness". His formal philosophy as revealed in the *Excursion* and *Immortality Ode* is not an element in his poetic greatness. He communicates to us the joy "in widest commonalty spread." It is for this reason that his poetry soothes, and strengthens. Wordsworth's poetry, at its best, is as inevitable as Nature herself. Often Nature seems to take the

pen out of his hand and write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power. His plain style is unique and unmatchable.

Arnold condemns Prof Dowden's pleading for Shelley on the basis of his personal life, because there is in it much that is ridiculous and odious. In spite of his faults, Shelley had qualities of characters which make him angelic. Shelley's poetry too has great charm and yet, in poetry no less than in life, "Shelley is a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings, in vain." In life as well as in poetry, Shelley is a vision of beauty "availing nothing, effecting nothing."

Arnold's practical criticism reveals his critical acumen and insight. It also brings out his genius for trenchant phrasing and Continental orientation. He follows the methods Sainte-Beuve and Taine and gives importance to both man and milieu. He has however not left behind an analytical study of even a single poem. His criticism is seeped in his classical, moral bias and preconceived theories. His contempt for the romantic poets is, as pointed out by Wimsatt and Brooks, "partly biographical, and to that extent it was purely moral." His dislike of Shelley is a case in point. His criticism is out of sympathy with the Augustan Age and so fails to appreciate the greatness of Dryden and Pope whom he regards as "classics of our prose", not of poetry. His lack of sympathy for the comic mars his appreciation of comedies.

## 1.7.6. The Value of Arnold's Criticism

Arnold was the first critic to emphasize the importance of comparative study of various literatures and to make a serious study on the subject. He based his work and his life upon the intellectual principles of criticism. His criticism is steeped in classicism though he admires the Romantic poets like Wordsworth. He is known for his touchstone method of evaluation of works of art and definitions of poetry and criticism, and the concepts of grand style and high seriousness. He is described as the "personification of choice academic tradition."

Arnold has equally been praised and condemned by the critics. R.A. Scot-James compares him with Aristotle in respect of the wide influence he exercised, "the mark he impressed upon criticism, and the blind faith with which he was trusted by his votaries." Trilling comments that "Arnold had a manner and a style rather new to England and perfectly adapted to the art of criticism– elegant yet sinewy; colloquial yet reserved, cool yet able to glow into warmth, careful never to flare into heart." It is, however, ironic to note that Arnold himself did not practice disinterestedness in his evaluation of writers like Keats and Shelley. Eliot considers Arnold a propagandist, salesman, and clever advertiser rather than a critic. He finds him lacking in power of connected reasoning at any length and remarks that "his flights are short flying or circular flights." F.R. Leavis alleges his works as "high pamphleteering." He is faulted on the following grounds: (i) He is not capable of connected reasoning at any length, and often contradicts himself. (ii) He is not a scientific critic. (iii) He mixes literary criticism with socio-ethical considerations and regards it as an instrument of culture. (iv) He is a propagandist. (v) His criticism is lacking in originality as he borrows all his critical concepts from classics. George Watson says: "he plagiarises too heavily." (vi) He does not collect his facts painstakingly and many of his touchstones are misquotations. (vii) He is in favour of biographical interpretation. Though he is aware of the importance of the "moment", he is against the historical method of criticism. (viii) He is not really "disinterested" though he advocates disinterestedness in criticism. (ix) His standards of judgment are

non-literary in that he speaks of ethical standards and not aesthetic pleasure. (x) His literary criticism is steeped in his moral, classical and continental prejudices.

It is, however, unjust to dismiss Arnold as a propagandist in spite of his repetitious statements and Victorian style. Arnold rendered a great service to criticism. He brought about system in critical appreciation which was in the form of disorganised state in his time. Thus his criticism acquires greater historical significance. As George Watson points out: "He is the great gainsayer of criticism, the most insistent and professional of non-conformists." He elevated criticism to higher position by making it the caretaker of literature in the periods not feasible for its growth. Baldick observes that criticism for Arnold involved a long period of activity for the reform of Britain's whole intellectual life, an attempt to soften the stridency of contemporary political and religious partisanship, "a strategy for containing radical new movements within traditional frame works in the interest of social and cultural harmony." He widened the horizons of criticism and emphasised its independent role in judging a work. He placed it on a par with creative activity. To conclude with the assessment of Saintsbury: "His services...to English criticism, whether as a 'preceptist' or as an actual craftsman, cannot possibly be overestimated. In the first respect he was, if not the absolute reformer, the leader in reform, of the slovenly and disorganised condition into which Romantic criticism had fallen. In the second, the things which he had not, as well as those which he had, combined give him a place among the very first."

## 1.7.7. Walter Pater

Walter Pater (1839-1894) is regarded as the greatest critic of the later part of Victorian age, as M tthew Arnold is of its middle phase. He is the pioneer of the Art for Art's sake movement and represents the antithesis to Arnold. While Arnold is an objective-classical critic, Pater is a romantic-impressionist. He was closely associated with the Aesthetic Movement in England which gained ground during the nineties of the last century and early years of the 20th. Its followers believed in the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake". They regarded the worship of Beauty as the highest goal of life. Art, according to this movement, has nothing to do with morality or any other utilitarian considerations. Its primary purpose is to impart aesthetic pleasure by the cultivation of Beauty. Form in art is given more value than content. There was an unconventional note of sensuality as in the poems of Swinburne. The movement failed because of the practical genius of the English people, the immorality of its practitioners like Oscar Wilde, and the outbreak of the World War I. Pater is, however, regarded as the most learned and sober follower of the cult of the beauty. Though some regard him as the pioneer of the aesthetic movement, Eliot differs from this view and says that he is a moralist like Ruskin and Carlyle.

**Pater's Works**

Pater's literary criticism is extremely small in quantity. The following are his chief works:

***(a) Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873):*** It is a collection of a series of essays published from time to time in *The Fortnightly* on a number of renaissance writers. The Preface and the Conclusion of this book is regarded as the unofficial manifesto of the aesthetic movement. Speaking of what to look for in life or a work of art, he says: "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end." Experience, to him, consists in what is most moving: "some form perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or sea choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or intellectual excitement irresistibly real and attractive." It can occur only to the open mind that is free of all preconceived notions. "To maintain this ecstasy is success in life." This is the true function of art: "to give nothing but the highest

quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." Pater's concern is not e practical purpose but the aesthetic fulfilment. It is the business of art to catch them in all their ıtensity, and of criticism to disengage them from their elements in the artist's work to indicate what their source is, and under what conditions they are experienced. Art, thus, is its own reward; it beholds the great spectacle of life "for the mere joy of beholding" and for no other purpose. Pater sets no special store by morality but treats it as one of the many beauties available to man and as such, to be treated on a par with the rest. He is different from other decadents in his emphasis on human life. As Eliot says, he is not an aesthete, that he represents one of the many variations of the fluctuating relations between religion and culture. Distinguishing between good art and great art, he says: "Great art ceases to be an end in itself in as much as it is 'devoted, further, to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other." His view that "Great art has something of the soul of humanity" makes him an advocate of "art for life's sake" like Arnold.

***(b) Marius, the Epicurean (1885):*** It is the study of the spiritual life of born artist, a symbol of the universal in man. It appears to be a veiled autobiography, complete expression of Pater's intellectual Epicureanism. Pater is here concerned with the humanity at its highest point of sensibility inclined to creativity.

***(c) Appreciations (1889):*** It is the impressionistic criticism at its best. It is a collection of impressionistic essays on a number of writers including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb etc. It has such well-known essays as "On Style", "Classicism and Romanticism".

***(d) Plato and Platonism (1893):*** It is a study of Plato's philosophy and his influence through the ages.

## Pater's Views

A romantic-impressionistic critic, Pater does not judge literature according to any rules or principles. He relies on his own impressions. As R.A. Scott-James points out: "His way is experimental, tentative, bringing the trained sensibility of a keenly alert mind into contact with an author's work." His method is intuitive and impressionistic, and hence we cannot find any canons of criticism in him. However we can derive some of his views from his well-known essays and stray remarks scattered all over his works.

## (a) On Literature

Viewing literature as a delightful experience in itself, Pater draws a distinction between two forms of literature—the imaginative and the unimaginative, parallel to De Quincey' distinction between "the literature of power and the literature of knowledge." Science, history and other branches of knowledge which are based on facts and repress the play of imagination constitute unimaginative literature. Imaginative literature, though also works on fact does not reproduce it as it is. Being the product of the writer's imagination, it gives his impression of it—his 'sense of fact' or what strikes him as most expressive of it. In it bare fact emerges transformed as 'soul-fact'—the fact as the soul conceives it. Wherever, therefore, "the writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work

*fine* art." Its object is not utility, but pleasure. 'Literature of fact' does nothing more than reproduce life or nature, but 'literature of the imaginative sense of fact' refashions them into pleasing shapes after its own sense of them. This sense can be exercised as much by imaginative prose as by poetry. Prose is no less a fine art than poetry.

But something is more necessary to turn a fine art into *good* art and *great* art. Truth to bare fact makes good literature of fact, while truth to the sense of fact makes good art. It is good art to the extent to which "its representation of that sense is true." A good artist says to the reader: "I want you to see precisely what I see." Good art consists in the "absolute accordance of expression to idea—" the accurate translation of the sense of fact into language. It cannot, however, become great art unless it attracts "the soul of humanity" by aligning itself to the great ends 'devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately to the glory of God." This makes Pater, the advocate of art for art's sake sound strangely like Arnold, the advocate of art for life's sake.

Commenting on the function of literature, he says that it is "not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects."

## (b) On Style

Pater's essay "On Style" is important in that "in discussing diction, form and style, he is discussing the central problems of literary art." Pater regards both prose and poetry as the two branches of imaginative literature and does not find any essential difference between the two. Holding the sense of fact to be the subject of fine art, he suggests three means of presenting it, viz—diction, design, and personality. (i) Words should be selected carefully keeping in view their distinction. He should select "a vocabulary faithful to the colouring of his own spirit"—in order to convey his sense of fact in the precise way it has occurred to him. He should exclude the obsolete or worn-out words and use current words in the only sense they bear, restoring their "finer edge", blunted by constant misuse. The critic should be learned in the various arts, sciences and philosophies so that he may enrich the language. "The literary artist is of necessity a scholar... writing for scholarly." He has to exercise skilful economy in the use of words. He says: "All art doth but consist in the removal of surplusage." He has to shun the uncommon in word and phrase, and even ornament, unless it is absolutely necessary. For they linger longer in memory and substitute the thought they are intended to convey. Self-restraint provides a skilful economy of means. (ii) The next requirement of style is design—the combination of words into a unified whole. It is not just a series of sentences, held together by their common purpose, but an architectural design "which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigour, unfold and justify the first." It is a condition of the literary art which Pater calls "the necessity of *mind* in style." It is the work of the mind to combine word with word, phrase with phrase, sentence with sentence, part with part till they become one whole and one with the subject. It achieves a kind of Aristotelian

organic unity. As Scott-James explains: "The mind reveals itself in design, in structure, in careful adjustment of words to sense, and of part to the whole." (iii) In addition to the diction and design, there requires another important factor for style i.e. personality or "soul in style". It represents a unity of tone, colour, atmosphere, and certain subtle graces. It is the very breath of the writer in his work. It rekindles words to a degree no literary artifice can. They rise from a soul that is inspired. Words are the body, structure is the mind and certain subtler graces are the soul of style. By mind the literary artist reaches us step by step, with that part of his design, but with soul he overcomes us, as Longinus said, too , "with an irresistible might." It is his very self in his work--the man in style. And yet paradoxically, the more personal a style is, the more impersonal it is "in a real sense". It acquires something universal or "the soul of humanity" in it.

## (b) On the Functions of a Critic

The function of the critic for Pater is quite systematic. It is "to feel the virtue of the poet or the painter, to disengage it, to set it forth,—these are the three stages of the critic's duty." In other words, the critic, first of all, has to detect the characteristic virtue of the writer with his tact. He should feel it and enjoy it. Secondly, he has to disengage the poet's virtue or his sense of things from such "commoner elements". Thirdly, he must also set forth the characteristic virtue of a writer for the benefit of the reader "to indicate what the source of that impression (i.e. of the poet's virtue formed by the critic) is, and under what conditions it is experienced." The true critic is one "who experienced these impressions strongly and drives directly at the discrimination, and analysis of them." The critic, however, will have to depend on his own sensibility, on his own intuitions. In "wise passivity" he should allow impressions to flow in, and then record those emotions for the benefit of others. In the words of Saintsbury, Pater's advice to a critic is: "Expose mind and sense to them, like the plate of a camera: assist the reception of the impression by cunning lenses of comparison, and history, and hypothesis; shelter it with a cabinet of remembered reading and corroborative imagination; develop it by meditation, and print it off with the light of style:—there you have, in but a coarse and half-mechanical analogy, the process itself." Though this method is criticised as effeminate and capricious, it shows good results in the practice of Pater.

Pater prescribes a number of qualities for the critic of literature. (i) He should have tact and sensibility. (ii) He should be learned not only in literature, but also in science and philosophy as well. (iii) His vision should be noble. Only then he can detect the dignity of matter and the grandeur of the writer, and judge whether it is great art or merely good art.

## 1.7.8. The Value of Pater's Criticism

Pater is the greatest critic of the romantic-impressionistic school who imparted a new dimension and a new dignity to impressionistic criticism. He has been both praised and criticised as a critic. While critics like Paul Elmer More are critical of Pater's methods and regard him as no critic at all, for he had, "no fixed point of view of his own," nor could he enter sympathetically into the point of view of others, Legouis and Cazamian take a more balanced view of his greatness as a critic, when they say tht Pater may lack completeness or conviction, but he gives us a kind of insight into the work he studies, which few critics can do. A. C. Benson also praises his extraordinary sensibility, and says that in his appreciations he moves like a bee from flower to flower gathering particles of sweet honey.

He has however his own faults. He lacks originality. His notion of the writer's sense of the fact is ultimately Coleridgean, and his view of style can be traced to Longinus. His critical method is basically the romantic impressionistic—judging by impression rather than by the rule. In the distinction between the characteristic and the uncharacteristic in an author, too, as in Wordsworth, he was anticipated by Arnold, who made selection from Wordsworth and Byron with the same end in view. Secondly, he did not formulate any rules and principles. Thirdly, his criticism lacks a sense of purpose and direction. In spite of all his faults, Pater remains a great critic. As Birjadesh Prasad remarks: "he is, doubtless, more lucid than Coleridge, more precise than Arnold, and quite a scientist in his definition of style." His stress on the pleasure-giving quality of literature needs appreciation as a condition for great art. Graham Hough regards Pater's triumph as one of a treatment rather than of a purpose. "His work, for all its lack of definition, leaves its own specific flavour in the mouth; and it is perhaps this which is his special contribution to English literature." There is no gap between his precept and practice. He helped to bridge the gulf between creation and criticism. For Compton Rickett, to read Pater's criticism is "both a joy and a discipline." Long is justified in ranking him as "one of our best critics."

## 1.7.9. Let us Sum up

In this unit, we have discussed the characteristic features of the Victorian Age, the evolution of Victorian Criticism, and the major Victorian critics like Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, their views on literature and criticism and the value of their criticism.

## 1.7.10. Sample Examination Questions

1. What are the important characteristic features of the Victorian Age?
2. Comment on the evolution of the Victorian criticism.
3. What are the important works of Arnold in the fields of politics, culture and religion? Give a brief account of them.
4. Briefly account for the importance of Arnold's works of criticism.
5. Comment on Arnold's views on the choice of subjects in poetry.
6. Sketch the views of Arnold on Grand Style.
7. Critically discuss Arnold's definition of Poetry as "criticism of life".
8. How does Arnold distinguish between creative and critical faculties?
9. Critically comment on Arnold's concept of "disinterestedness" in criticism.
10. What, according to Arnold, are the fallacious estimates?
11. Discuss the importance of the Touchstone method of evaluation in criticism.
12. Comment on the practical criticism of Arnold.
13. What is the contribution of Arnold to criticism as a Victorian critic?
14. Comment on the contribution of Walter Pater to the Art for Art's sake Movement in England.
15. How does Pater distinguish between imaginative and unimaginative literature, and good art and great art?
16. Critically discuss Pater's views on style in literature.
17. What, according to Pater, are the functions of a critic?

### 1.7.11. Suggested Reading

Legouis and Cazamian, *History of English Literature*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1971.
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Lesson - 8

# MATTHEW ARNOLD: "THE STUDY OF POETRY"

## Contents :



## 1.8.1. Objective

After going through this unit, you should be able to

- recognise main features of the Victorian Age
- understand the life and work of Arnold
- critically analyse the text "The Study of Poetry"
- assess the contribution of Matthew Arnold as a critic

## 1.8.2. Introduction

This unit of the Literary Criticism Course will help you understand Matthew Arnold's life and work, the Victorian Age to which he belonged and critically analyse his essay "The Study of Poetry" and assess Matthew Arnold as a critic.

## 1.8.3. The Victorian Age: The Background

Before analysing and assessing Arnold's criticism, it is necessary to understand the background of the Victorian Age which shaped Arnold's personality. Between 1701 and 1830, there was a fierce battle between the Neo-Classicals and the Romantics. The rules laboriously framed by the Neo-Classicals were demolished by the Romantics. At this critical juncture rose a new set of critics eager to define "the function of the criticism at the present time."

This age was influenced by many factors, which brought about drastic changes in the society. The rise of democracy, progress of science, transfer of power from the upper to the middle class by the Reforms Act of 1832, Reforms Bill of 1867, 1884 had democratized the Parliament to a great extent. The introduction of free education and the establishment of new universities helped this. Though these reforms helped to improve the lot of the common man, conditions were far from satisfactory. New changes in the industrial system created hardships for the working classes. Steam, smoke, sin, drudgery, and at the top of them all,, poverty was their daily experience. Birjadesh Prasad remarks: "It was an age of contrasts in which authority coexisted with freedom, wealth with want, faith with doubt, culture with philistinism." These evils appear to be a component of a capitalist society, which might have inspired Karl Marx to produce *Das Capital* in 1867. Marx advocated socialism as the only remedy for these social evils. It emerged as a living force in the 1880's and 90's. 'This condition of England question' dominantly preoccupied the Age. The spirit of democracy manifests itself in various forms in its literature. The varied works reflect the humanitarian and reforming interest, socialistic ideology, reforming zeal and social abuse, and conflicting ideas about 'progress'. There was, of course, the conflict between science and religion. The geological discoveries of Sir Charles Lyell and Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* posed a serious challenge to the orthodox Christianity and shook people's faith in religion. The Age was described as an "age of doubts, distractions and despair." There was, however, a Victorian spirit of "compromise" which worked towards the reconciliation of these opposites. There was an effort to see England's good in the golden mean in politics, religion, morals, industry, science and literature.

The writers had one mission—that of making the good prevail. "Tennyson sought it in orderly existence, Browning in spiritual development, Arnold in 'Sweetness and Light', Carlyle in devotion to duty, Ruskin in righteous living, Pater in the cult of the beautiful." Responding to the multiple problems of the day, the writers assumed the role of preachers. It had its impact on criticism, too. The duty of criticism was seen to bring the best that is thought and said in the world. Though he Romantics flouted all rules, the Victorian mind was in favour of creation of some order, restraint, and discipline. The Victorian compromise helped the creation of an order which is not so rigid as that of the Neo-Classicists, nor so flexible as that of the Romantics. It was neither tyrannical, nor capricious. The golden mean was struck. Arnold suggested the establishment of an English Academy on the model of the French to regulate literary taste. Though England did not favour this, they were impressed by the critical theories of the two gifted French critics, Taine and Sainte Beauve.

Taine regarded literature as the product of social forces which he classified into the race, the milieu and the moment. The writer's mental and emotional make-up, he said, is determined by the race into which he is born and by the social environment (milieu) of the age in which he lives. Thus moulded by his formative years, he finally arrives at a stage of development (moment) when his gathered experience presses for expression in art. Critical evaluation should therefore depend on these three factors. Similarly Sainte Beauve emphasises the writer's race and country, the upbringing and education, then his period of youth and youthful associations, and so to his maturity. The critic, according to him, must live solely in his author; he should abjure all passion and prejudice and be guided by the desire to see the author as he really is. Thus biographical critical method influenced Arnold and many others in the Victorian Age.

The Victorians were divided into two groups on the question of poetry. One is represented by Carlyle and Ruskin, and the other by Pater and Oscar Wilde. Arnold stands midway between the two. Carlyle and Ruskin came to the defence of religion and morality as against science and industrialism which invaded the former. Thus they saw didacticism or moral purpose in art. Carlyle also expected the "lofty rhyme" to communicate a lofty vision to the reader. But Pater and Wilde advocated the "Art for Art's sake" movement by emphasising the pleasurable principle of art under the influence of the aesthetic principles of German philosopher Kant.

In an age torn by strifes and controversies, Arnold steers the middle course between classicism and romanticism, between "art for art's sake" and "art for life's sake". He combines both formalism and didacticism in his critical approach. While it was not the business of the poet, according to him, to compose moral and didactic poems, he could not overlook the fact that poetry was "thought and art in one," "a powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life," addressing the question "How to live?" Arnold was in search of "the best that was known and thought in the world," and this he found both in neo-classicism and romanticism.

## 1.8.4. Matthew Arnold: A Biographical Sketch

Matthew Arnold is one of the most significant critics of the Victorian Age. He was acknowledged as the founder of a distinctly modern movement in English literary criticism for his "emphatic readjustment of literary critical discussion towards question of literature's social function and consequently the social function of criticism itself." Arnold was the first critic to emphasize the importance of comparative study of various literatures and to make a serious study on the subject. He based his work and his life upon the intellectual principles of criticism. He was not only a critic but also a poet, prophet and an apostle of culture. His criticism thus springs from his own personal experience. He studied the attitude of the rational mind from the psychological point of view. He offered not only some good prose and literary criticism, but extended his intellectual insights into social, political, cultural, religious and theological criticism. Thus it can be said that he is a multi-faceted personality. Legouis and Cazamian remark: "He reveals more complex and more attractive sensibility than that of the critic; he is, in many ways, nearer to our own age. He will probably better stand the test of time." His criticism is steeped in classicism though he admires the Romantic poets like Wordsworth. He is known for his touchstone method of evaluation of works of art and definition of poetry as "a criticism of life," criticism "as a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" and the concepts of grand style and high seriousness. He is described as the "personification of choice academic tradition."

Matthew Arnold was born at Laleham on December 24, 1822 as the second of the ten children of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby. He inherited his liberalism and broad European outlook from his father and his poetic sensibility from his mother who had "Celtic" blood in her. Even in his early childhood, there was behind his flippancy a sadness and lucidity which came to characterise his poetry. His father also gave him too his sense of religion and his wisdom born of a knowledge of history, though Arnold resisted his moral pressure. He had his formal education under his uncle and father. Subsequently, he studied at Winchester and Rugby. In the autumn of 1841, he joined Balliol College, Oxford as a classical scholar. He won prizes for poetry and distinction in classics. He had his vacations spent in Lake District, and thus saw a good deal of Wordsworth there. Arnold was quite

boisterous in his manners. His friends were worried that "our friend Matt utters as many absurdities as ever, with as grave a face, and I am afraid wastes his time considerably." The indolent Matthew could not obtain his degree examination with a first class as feared by his friends. But it was compensated by the Newdigate prize he won in 1845. He went to France and interviewed the famous novelist George Sand discussing Senancour, their favourite author of *Obermann*. He admired the profound inwardness, deep sincerity, delicate feeling of the work. Back in London, he met the great French tragic actress Elisa Rachel and became at once her admirer. He followed her to Paris in 1846 and attended all her theatrical performances. In 1847 he was appointed Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, the influential Whig statesman. He did not however shed his foppishness.

Arnold was fascinated by many French writers. He admired Beranger for his eplicureanism, George Sand for her cry of her agony and revolt, Senancour for his romantic melancholy. He was also a great admirer of some of the British writers like Wordsworth for his love of Nature , Byron for his titanic defiance of eternal law and Goethe for his profound criticism of life. . Arnold revealed his moral consciousness from the very first of his poetry volumes, *The Strary Reveller and Other Poems* published in 1849. His second volume *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* appeared in 1852. His other poems include *Juvenilia, Alaric at Rome* (1840) a Rugby prize poem, *Cromwell* (1843) Oxford prize poem. The volume of 1853 contains many of the poems that have already been published with such notable additions as *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Scholar Gipsy*. Arnold's poetical career came practically to an end with the publication of *Last Poems* in 1867. During his continental holiday in 1845-47, Arnold had a love affair with an unidentified French girl with blue eyes. She was named Marguerite in his poetry. His poems suggest that some insurmountable obstacle came in the way of their friendship. Subsequently Arnold fell in love with Miss Wightman, daughter of the Judge Sir William Wightman. He could marry her only after he got appointment as Inspector of Schools in 1851 with a respectable salary. He had a happy married life. Arnold had spent thirty-five long years as an Inspector of Schools visiting schools, examining teachers, correcting papers and writing reports. His best literary work, it appears, was done late at night after a day of tedious toil. Though he disliked the tedious job, he took it seriously and did a great service to the cause of education. As an Inspector of schools, he established the Normal School in England, organized Extension lectures and turned London University into a teaching institution. He was described as the "father" of University Extension Movement. S.R.Littlewood says, "He encouraged the teaching of the natural science, as at Rugby. He brought into a larger educational field his father's aim in trying to ensure younger generation composed of something more than wage earning machines." From 1857 to 1867, he served as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. This helped him a great deal in crystallising his ideas on literature. Arnold expresses his indebtedness to the great French critic Sainte-Beuve who, according to him, was the "the first of the living critics." He acknowledges that he learned "habits, methods, ruling ideas" from four great men, namely—Sainte Beuve, Goethe, Wordsworth and Newman and also from the Great classicists– Homer, Epictetus, Sophocles, 'who saw life steadily and saw it whole' (*To a Friend*). He was also a great admirer of Goethe and Wordsworth because of their 'high seriousness'– their sanity, their wisdom.

## 1.8.5. Arnold'sWorks of Prose and Criticism

Arnold published three volumes of literary criticism: *On Translating Homer (1861), Essays in Criticism-*

*First Series (1865), On the Study of Celtic Literature (1867).* His second series of *Essays in Criticism* was published posthumously in 1888.

We can find the best of his social and cultural criticism in his *Culture and Anarchy (1869)* and *Friendship's Garland (1879).* His theological and religious works are—*St. Paul and Protestantism (1870), Literature and Dogma (1873), God and the Bible (1875),* and *Last Essays on Church and Religion (1877). Mixed Essays (1879)* was a collection of political and literary studies. Arnold died in April 1888 at Liverpool. "There goes our last Greek", someone remarked on hearing the news of his death.

## Social and Political Criticism

Arnold's social criticism was the natural outcome of his literary criticism and educational criticism. *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is the principal work under this category. J.W. Beach regards it as the cornerstone of Arnold's social criticism. It was published at a time of considerable social and political unrest. Though Arnold was sympathetic to the democratic movement, he believed that there could be anarchy without some order in the society. Culture, according to Arnold, directs us to the good life characterized by a harmonious expansion of all our human faculties. Harmonious self-development is the true object of human effort and all other things acquire value in so far as they attain this objective. The fault of the Philistines is their absolute faith in such machinery as freedom, coal, railways, a growing population, physical health, vigour and even particular forms of religious organizations. Arnold hopes that the emerging working class should have regard for beauty and intelligence, for "sweetness" and "light" which culture gives. Our individualism, says Arnold, should not be allowed to sweep us into anarchy. The state should control the individual into anarchy. The state should control the individual wills for the general interest of society.

Arnold uses three nicknames for the three main social classes in England: "Barbarians" for the aristocracy who are essentially crude, in soul, notwithstanding their good clothes and superficial graces, "Philistines" for the middle class—narrow-minded and self-complacent people, and "Popu-lace" for the lower class—still raw and blind. Arnold saw in the Philistines the key to the weakness or strength of the society as they constitute the most influential section of the society, Their excessive Hebraism should be remedied by a dose of Hellenism. The state, according to Arnold, should work not for any class but for the "best self" or essential "humanity" of all citizens. He regrets that the contemporary environment is unhelpful to this end.

Arnold refers to two forces which regulate human life, namely Hebraism and Hellenism. Hebraism mobilizes our moral impulses while Hellenism the intellectual ones. Arnold says that the Victorian Philistine's narrow-minded concentration upon "machinery", making money, and saving his soul, needs to be corrected by an infusion of Hellenism. "The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they are: the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience." He concludes "the development of our Hellenising instincts, seeking ardently the intelligible law of things, and mak-ing a stream of fresh thought play freely about our stock notions and habits, is what is most wanted by us at present." Arnold pleads for both these elements which together aim at "culture", that is at moral and intellectual perfection. Though Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* has repetitious statements and is not very closely argued, it is indisputably a masterpiece of social criticism. Arnold emerges as

"the most liberal and modern of the Victorian giants." Though he is conservative in taste, his intellect is subtly radical as stated by Beach.

## Religious and Theological Writings

Arnold's ideas on religion are expounded in *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). Though the modern spirit has turned the belief in supernatural impossible, Arnold is anxious that the people should discard religion itself because religion is not exclusively based on a belief in the supernatural. To Arnold, religion is essentially morality and will stand to the modern test of experience. He however extends its meaning further saying that religion is in fact "morality touched with emotion." He rejects miracles of the Old Testament including the incarnation and other unverifiable propositions. He regards the Bible as "literature" or poetry, and not as "dogma" or science. He defines God as "the enduring power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness." He finds the essence of the Old Testament religion in the "eternal law of Righteousness" and that of the New Testament in the rebirth of each individual into spirituality, symbolized by the theological doctrine of the Resurrection. Arnold's ideas on religion however evoked hostile criticism from the orthodox. We are mistaken if we regard Arnold as an irreligious man. No pious soul could show deeper religious feeling than his *Note Books* (1892) could. *Literature and Dogma,* the greatest of Arnold's books on religion, created a great deal of commotion. But Arnold feels that the work is entirely religious. He was one of those who believed that in the sphere of religion as everywhere, reason must be supreme. Though there is some amount of flippancy and levity in his treatment of sacred subjects, one cannot question the sincerity and the seriousness of his motives. Some of his definitions such as those of God as "a stream of tendency, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness," and religion as "morality touched by emotion" and the phrase "the sweet reasonableness" of Jesus obtained wide currency because of their epigrammatic quality. J.W Beach comments that "His philosophy was eclectic, his method Socratic and leisurely; he made his way into the minds of those who could read him by a diabolic combination of smiling urbanity with gentle self-assurance and pertinacity."

## Literary Criticism

Arnold's literary criticism is found in *On Translating Homer, Last Words on Translating Homer, On the Study of Celtic Literature* and *Essays in Criticism* (First and Second Series). In *On Translating Homer,* Arnold studies the existing translations of Homer's *Iliad,* with a view to giving practical advice to future translators. He finds in Homer's poetry rapidity of movement, simplicity of style, plainness of thought, and all nobility. Cowper's translation loses Homer's rapidity of movement; Pope's translation is artificial and goes against the simplicity of Homer; Chapman's translation replaces Homer's plainness of thought with an Elizabethan fancifulness; and Francis W. Newman's translation betrays eccentricity and arbitrariness which the "the great defects of English intellect, the great blemish of English literature." None of them is satisfactory. Arnold also speaks of the "grand style" and explains it with reference to Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton.

In *Last Words on Translating Homer,* Arnold develops his earlier criticism of the English intellect. Criticising Newman, he condemns the "obduracy and over-vehemence in liking and disliking to which English criticism is so prone." "The critic of poetry," says Arnold, "should have the finest tact,

the nicest moderation, the most free, flexible, and elastic spirit imaginable." He should be eagerly receptive. Grand style arises in poetry, says he, "when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject."

In *On the Study of Celtic Literature,* Arnold argues that the modern Englishman unites in himself Norman, Germanic and Celtic strains. The Englishman has inherited strenuousness and talent for practical affairs from his Norman ancestors, steadiness and honesty from his Germanic ancestors, ardour and sensibility from his Celtic ancestors. He has to fully realize and harmonise in himself these three sets of virtues. He attacks "Philistinism" of the Englishmen which is due to their exclusive reliance on the Germanic element in the national make-up. The emphasis on the Celtic strain would rid them of this defect. English poetry owes its aptitude for style to a Celtic source. He defines style as "a peculiar recasting and heightening, under a certain condition of spiritual excitement, of what a man has to say in such a manner as to add dignity and distinction to it." In this context, he denies style to Goethe, but recognizes it in Milton. He finds English poetry indebted to a Celtic source for its natural magic. He traces "Greek radiance" and "Celtic magic" in the poetic representations of nature by Keats and Shakespeare. Fearing one-sidedness, Arnold however turns from the Celts to the Germans and acknowledges that the Germans have produced a modern poetry which has moral profundity inspite of their humdrum and prosaic elements. It has made a moral interpretation of man and the world from an independent point of view.

Arnold's critical method is found in his *Essays in Criticism* (First and Second Series). The appearance of the First Series in 1865 was something of a literary sensation due its style, novelty, and confidence of opinions and the wide range and diversity of its subjects. No volume of critical essays had before appeared in England at least on a collection of subjects and authors so diverse as *The Literary Influence of Academies, Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment,* the De Guerins, Joubert, Heine, Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius. The attack on Philistinism started in the first two essays. The two contemporary critics he admired most were Sainte-Beuve and Renan. While Sainte Beuve is the chief model for him in his purely literary criticism, his methods in other fields were largely the results of his reading of Renan. His partiality towards French prose led him to some strange vagaries of judgment in his estimates of individual writers. His definition of criticism in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" as a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is thought and said in the world has been quite famous. In "The Literary Influence of Academies", Arnold praises the French Academy as "a high court of letters," "a recognized authority imposing a high standard in matters of intellect and taste." He deplores the absence of such an academy for the English who suffer from a lack of critical spirit. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and "The Influence of Academies" take up the main line and strategy of the 1853 *Preface.* In "Eugene De Guerin", Arnold compares English Protestantism with the French Catholicism and holds that English Protestantism is deficient in grace and charm. He describes Heine (in "Heinerich Heine") as an apostle of the modern spirit.

While the First Series of *Essays in Criticism* deals with the Continental figures, the Second Series deals largely with the English writers such as Milton, Gray, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley. In "The Function of Criticism", he finds the ignorance of the English romantics to be essentially ignorance of the Continental ideas and poetry. "This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so

incoherent, Wordsworth so wanting in completeness and variety." His praise for some of the Romantics is also not without any qualification. For example, he says Keats was "a great spirit", true, but "not ripe" for the creation of enduring works such as the *Agamemnon,* or *King Lear;* Wordsworth lacks style; Byron emerges as a kind of an infant prodigy and Shelley as a crazed angelic clown. Arnold's recognition of Tolstoy's genius, and his social ideals at a time when it was hardly known on this side of the Channel was "as true as it was prompt." His essay on Amiel, a Swiss Professor, poet and journalist, has turned Amiel an increasingly popular "bedside book" even today. Saintsbury criticizes that in *Essays in Criticism*, theory divorced from history makes its appearance too often and that his estimate of the condition of the French and the German literatures will not stand to scrutiny. In Saintsbury's opinion, Arnold was quite wrong as to the general inferiority of English criticism, though he was not quite wrong about the general criticism of the time of his own youth and early manhood, of the criticism which he himself came to reform. Very few critics can make for themselves instances of comparative, appreciative, loosely but subtly judicial criticism so attractive, so stimulating, so graceful, so varied and critically so excellent, being at the same time real examples of creative literature. Arnold's general critical views matured without altering; and their application to fresh subjects brought out even more their value and charm. His critical practice exemplifies delightful variety and charm in spite of their repetitions. Except the *Preface* to Ward's *Poets,* the *Essays in Criticism* is much the best known of Arnold's critical works.

## 1.8.6. "The Study of Poetry": A critical Analysis

The essay "The Study of Poetry" was first published in 1880 as a general introduction to T.H. Ward's *The English Poets,* a selection in four volumes. The volumes covered poets from Chaucer to Rosetti. T.H. Ward was the husband of Arnold's niece who was the author of *Robert Elsmer.* The essay is one of the most important works of Arnold in the critical sphere as it exemplifies some of his most important ideas on poetry and criticism. It is known for its definition of poetry as "a criticism of life", condemnation of the historical and the personal estimates in favour of the real estimate, introduction of comparative approach in criticism through the famous "Touchstone method," definition of the "classic" and the insightful estimate of various poets from Chaucer to Burns.

### Importance of Poetry

Arnold begins his essay with a quotation from his introduction to the poetry volume in a collection called *The Hundred Greatest Men (1879).* In this paragraph, he pays glowing tributes to poetry. He compares poetry with religion and philosophy, and asserts that "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 even surer and surer stay." Arnold here gathers the high claims made for poetry by his Romantic predecessors and reformulates them to prophesy that poetry will occupy the topmost place in the areas of human thought and activity. As Chris Baldick rightly points out what we see here at its "most challenging and controversial" is Arnold's declaration of faith in the future of poetry. He finds it marks "a transformation in English criticism, from the defence of poetry to a bold offensive against poetry's potential competitors—religion, philosophy and science." He avers that poetry not only interprets life, but also consoles and sustains us. For him, science is "incomplete" and religion is insubstantial without poetry. He prophesies that in course of time what is passing now for religion

and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Religion and philosophy are but "the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge" when compared to poetry which is, in the words of Wordsworth, "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge." He quotes Wordsworth who defines poetry as "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. If poetry has to fulfil such high destinies as set out by Arnold, it has to be of a "high order of excellence." The judgment should be strict. He quotes Sainte-Beuve to claim that charlatanism (pretence or falsehood) has no place in the realm of art, especially poetry. In poetry there should not be any confusion between "excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or half-sound, true or only half-true." Such distinctions are of great concern in poetry keeping in view its high destinies.

## Poetry as a Criticism of Life

Arnold defines poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." He says that in such poetry, "the spirit of our race will find... as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. The power of consolation and stay is proportionate to the power of poetry as the criticism of life. The power of poetry springs from its excellence. The phrase "criticism of life" has variously been interpreted. There is some ambiguity about this phrase. Broadly speaking, it means that poetry is the writer's interpretation of life and the expression of his mental attitudes or outlook upon life. But if it were so, it is not peculiar to poetry. It can apply to the other genres as well and to literature in general. Elsewhere, Arnold interprets poetry as an application of ideas to life. The more powerful this application of ideas to life, the greater will be the resulting poetry. Arnold quotes Voltaire who found the great merit of the English poets in their profound and energetic treatment of moral ideas in their poetry. He also distinguishes the greatest poets from others on the basis of "their powerful and profound application of ideas to life," and prefers to prefix the term "moral" to the word "ideas". So Arnold seems to interpret the word "criticism" in terms of moral interpretation/application of ideas to life. But he regards the question "how to live?" itself as a moral idea and seems to take out the special import of it. What he means by this is that poetry should not degenerate into cheap didacticism. That is the reason why he talks about the conditions of poetic truth and poetic beauty. The "laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty" means, as Arnold explains subsequently in this essay, high seriousness, truth to nature and excellences of expression and style. In other words, it is substance and manner of poetry. A powerful criticism of life, which means a powerful moral application of ideas to life, is possible only in genuine poetry. Arnold further says that "The best poetry will be found to have the power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can." Thus Arnold expresses a sublime and exalted view of the nature and effect of poetry.

## The Historic and the Personal Estimates vis-à-vis the Real Estimate

Arnold's concern for best poetry has led to the problem of how to judge the best poetry. A critic has to make a real estimate of the best poetry. But this real estimate, if one is not vigilant, warns Arnold, will be superseded by two kinds of fallacious estimates, viz the historic estimate and the personal estimate. A poem may look important in historical terms or personal terms though, in reality, it is not. For example, a poem or a poet may be important to us from the historical point of view. If the work of a poet marks a stage in the course of the literary development of a nation, we may easily make

the mistake of attaching greater importance to it than its inherent quality warrants. This fallacy is caused by the historic estimate. Similarly a critic's judgment of a poet may tend to be biased due to his personal affinities, likings, and circumstances. As a result, he may overrate the importance of the poet or his poetry. This fallacy is caused by the personal estimate.

Arnold illustrates the fallacy of the historic estimate with reference to the attitude of the French towards their own early poetry and towards their so-called classical poetry, i.e. the Court tragedy of the seventeenth century. The French became devoted students of their own early poetry which they long neglected. The study of their early poetry makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, which is wanting in true poetic stamp but which nevertheless reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry. Arnold says that the dissatisfaction is natural. He quotes a lively and accomplished critic M Charles d'Hericault who argues that glorification of a work and deification of its author is dangerous as it hinders correct evaluation. But Arnold disputes this argument and observes: "To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint oneself with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end."

Arnold further argues that the historic estimate generally affects us when we are dealing with ancient poets and personal estimate when we are dealing with the contemporary poets. The exaggeration resulting from the historic estimate leads to "dangerous abuse of language even though they fail to make an impact on the public." Arnold here illustrates the example of a French critic M.Vitet's historic estimate of the famous document of the early French poetry, *Chanson de Roland.* Vitet finds in it the grandiose conception and the constant union of simplicity with greatness which are the marks of the genuine epic. Though *Chanson de Roland* has some poetic value, and a very high historic and linguistic value, to heap on it the praise worthy of Homer shows incapacity to make a distinction between a classic and an ordinary work of considerable merit. Real estimate alone can observe this distinction.

## What is a Classic?

Arnold pleads that a critic must be able to distinguish a genuine classic from the counterfeit. There is a need to understand the classic character of a writer. The writer is a classic if he belongs to the class of the very best. He remarks: "If he (the writer) 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 (for this is the true and right meaning of the word *classic, classical*), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character." The distinction plays a salutary, and formative effect and is one of the great benefits to be got from the study of poetry. But we must read our classic with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded by superstition. We must at the same time guard ourselves against overrating his work; we must perceive the shortfalls and demerits which prevent it from belonging to the class of the very best. This negative attitude is important in so far as it will enable us to have a clearer sense and deep enjoyment of what is truly excellent. The more we know about a classic, the better we shall enjoy him.

## The Touchstone Method

In order to distinguish a classic and to make a real estimate of poetry, Arnold suggests a method known as the Touchstone method. To determine the truly excellent, a critic has to have always in mind lines and expressions of the great masters and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Answering the likely question as to how we can compare lines from the works which are dissimilar, Arnold observes: "Of course, we are not to require this poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them." The lines from the great masters should serve as "infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them." Short passages, even single lines, will serve the purpose sufficiently, he says. He then gives us illustrations, quoting two lines from Homer (Homer's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers), another three lines from Homer (the address of Zeus to the Horses of Peleus), another line from Homer (the words of Achilles to Priam), a few lines from Dante, a few lines from Shakespeare and another few from Milton. Arnold says that the specimens of poetry quoted by him are enough to enable us to form clear and sound judgments of any other poetry and to conduct us to a real estimate. While admitting that the specimens he has quoted are widely different, he asserts that they commonly possess the "very highest poetical quality." He contends that a critic instead of dabbling in abstractions about the character of high quality poetry may do well by depending on concrete examples such as the best lines from various accomplished poets. These lines possess "substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other." They have "a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth and power." The substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, "truth and seriousness." Arnold borrows the words truth and seriousness from Aristotle who said that poetry is superior to history because it possesses a higher truth and higher seriousness. The style and manner of best poetry derive their special character from superiority of diction and of movement. At the same time, says Arnold, 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 in its manner and style. Arnold, however, realises the limitations of such theoretical discussion of the issues and turns to their application to English poetry.

## Evaluation of English Poetry

Arnold begins his evaluation of the English poetry with Chaucer. He says that Chaucer's poetry is far superior to the French romance poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries both in its substance and style though he was nourished on that poetry. Chaucer's poetical importance does not need the assistance of the historic estimate. Chaucer's superiority lies in his "large, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life." This quality is missing in the French romance poetry. Chaucer's poetry surveys the world from a central, a truly human point of view. Arnold endorses Dryden's comment on Chaucer's *Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*: "It is sufficient to say that here is God's plenty." He regards him as "a perpetual fountain of good sense." Chaucer's poetry has a truth of substance and is a high criticism of life. It has a "divine liquidness of diction," and "divine fluidity of movement." Arnold says that Johnson misses the point when he finds fault with Dryden for ascribing to Chaucer the first refinement of English verse. Johnson says that Gower has also "smooth numbers and easy rhymes." But Arnold rates Chaucer higher than Gower because the former has made an epoch and founded a

tion by "the lovely charm of his diction (and) the lovely charm of his movement." Chaucer is the ıer of English poetry and is "a well of English undefiled." In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction and the fluid movement of Chaucer. As an instance of Chaucer's charming diction, Arnold quotes his line: "O martyr sounded in virginity!" This line, says Arnold, has a virtue of manner and movement such as not to be found in all the verse of romance poetry; in fact it is not to be found in all English poetry, outside the poets who are the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition. Arnold does not agree with the view that Chaucer achieves this by taking liberties with words. Though Chaucer's poetry is far superior to the French romance poetry of twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to all the poetry of his contemporaries, and to that subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth, Arnold does not consider him a great classic. He does not have the accent of the great classics. It is the lack of "the high and excellent seriousness" which does not make him a classic. According to Aristotle, it is one of the grand virtues of poetry. He observes "the substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness." He finds this seriousness in the works of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. However he concedes that Chaucer has "poetic truth of substance" and "exquisite virtue of style and manner." "With his is born our real poetry," concludes Arnold.

Arnold considers both Milton and Shakespeare real poetical classics. The real estimate of these poets is universally accepted. While agreeing that 18th century is an important period in the history of English poetry, he disputes the unrealistic claims of Dryden that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers." Are Dryden and Pope poetical classics? he queries. They might appear as classics according to the historic estimate, but not the real estimate. Wordsworth and Coleridge denied to Dryden and Pope the status of poetical classics. Arnold's real estimate considers Dryden "the puissant and glorious founder" and Pope "the splendid high priest" of the age of prose and reason. He applies to them the yardstick of high seriousness or poetic criticism of life and contends that "they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification" but they are "not classics of our poetry"; they are "classics of our prose."

Arnold regards Gray's the poetic classic of the eighteenth century. While pointing out the influence of Greeks on Gray, Arnold observes that he "caught their poetic point of view for regarding life (and) caught their poetic manner," which he occasionally made use of . He calls him "the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry."

After Gray Arnold turns to Robert Burns and observes that from now on the personal estimate becomes rife. In spite of such pressures he attempts a real estimate of Burns. He argues that real Burns is found in Scotch poems, but not in English poems. Burns himself says: "In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch." The world of Burns is a world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners and so it evokes a Scotch critic's favourable response and the adverse reaction from the English. His world is often "a harsh, a sordid (and) a repulsive world." Burns being a competent poet triumphs over it. The bias of the personal estimate has warped the judgment of Burns' admirers and Arnold tries to give a real estimate. While agreeing with admirers of Burns that there is "powerful application of ideas to life" in the poetry of Burns, he remarks that it is not all. He insists "it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." These laws fix high seriousness as an essential condition for their treatment and high seri-

ousness comes from absolute sincerity that produces an accent which is absent in Burns. The voice of Burns does not come from the inmost depths; he is more or less preaching. So Arnold concludes that "Burns like Chaucer comes short of the high seriousness of the great classics, and the virtue of matter and manner which goes with that high seriousness is wanting in his work." Occasionally, Burns touches "the virtue of matter and manner" with "a profound and passionate melancholy." But such moments are rare. According to Arnold's real estimate, the work of Burns has "truth of matter and truth of manner" but not the poetic virtue of the highest masters." When the poet in Burns speaks, his criticism of life is ironic. Like Chaucer's, Burns' vision of life and the world is "large, free, shrewd, benignant—truly poetic." But the great difference is "the freedom of Chaucer is heightened in Burns, by a fiery, reckless energy; the benignity of Chaucer deepens in Burns, into an overwhelming sense of the pathos of things—of the pathos of human nature, the pathos, also, of non-human nature." As against Chaucer's fluidity of manner, Burns has spring and bounding swiftness. Chaucer's world is fairer and richer but Burns' world has breadth, truth and power which can match only with that of Shakespeare and Aristophanes. Finally Arnold concludes his estimate of Burns commenting that though Burns is not a classic, he is a poet with "thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core." He discusses Burns to show how one can raise above the personal estimate to the real estimate through the touchstone method he has advocated. In the end Arnold concludes that "currency and supremacy" of good literature is insured not by the world s deliberate and conscious choice, but by "the instinct of self-preservation in humanity."

## 1.8.7. Arnold as a Critic

Arnold's critical formulations in the essay "The Study of Poetry" have evoked mixed response. There has not been any dispute about Arnold's claims of high importance of poetry and the social and cultural import attached to it. His famous definition of poetry as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for it by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty was attacked by critics like Lytton Strachey. Eliot protested that Arnold's definition of poetry is "frigid to anyone who has felt the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry." Several interpretations have been given of this definition. Professor Garrod interprets it to mean merely that in so far as a work possesses organic unity, it is a criticism of the chaos of life and that literature is a criticism of life exactly in the sense that a good man is a criticism of a bad one. Trilling points out that Arnold is not offering a definition of poetry here, but only the function of poetry. J.D. Jump points out that the word "criticism" here means a disinterested attempt to see things as they are, in the course of which value judgments naturally and almost insensibly form themselves. Criticism means a description of the ideal attitude of a creative artist towards his experience. It is because imaginative literature really is a criticism of life that I.A. Richards speaks of it as constituting with the other arts "our storehouse of recorded values," and Ezra Pound suggests that its function may be to "incite humanity to continue living." As already explained in the essay, Arnold uses the definition to mean a moral application of ideas to life without however degenerating into propaganda.

Arnold repudiates the historic and personal estimates which overrate the importance of a work of art on the basis of the historic context or personal adulation and advocates the real estimate. But in fact, it is impossible to ignore completely the historic or personal estimates. We cannot completely disregard the writers who introduced something new into literature and who, therefore, have a

certain historical importance, even though the new elements introduced by them in the course of time may become customary or stale. Similarly if a piece of literature means much to us personally, it means that we have found the utmost that is really in it. It is one of the aims of the alert reader to acquire a sense of intimate personal relationship with a work of art. It is also generally argued that no judgment about a book has become a real judgment until it has become a personal one. Further a work of art is not a depersonalised mechanical product, but a human document with personality of the writer steeped in it. But Arnold's views here should be taken as caution against the misuse of the historic and personal affiliations in judging a work of art at the cost of its actual merit.

Arnold's touchstone method is appreciated for introducing a comparative, critical approach to literature. The authority of Longinus is on the side of Arnold. Longinus had said that there were passages in which we might recognise the beauty and truth of the sublime because they always pleased and pleased all readers and because they may create such a strong impression on the mind that they could not be forgotten. But Arnold's touchstone method appears absurd because it always pleads for keeping certain great lines or short passages of great masters in mind while analysing a new work of art. An individual must study a poem in such a mood as to allow himself completely to fall under its spell. A few lines or passages from great masters cannot offer any judicious comparison with the new work. It is criticised as a school-boyish exercise. A part cannot help judge a whole. Further Arnold's selection of touchstones are not always the best representations of the poets. The touchstone from Milton ("And courage never to submit or yield") is criticised on the ground that the diction and movement are faulty, though the sentiment or the moral is noble. Further most of the touchstones of Arnold express melancholy and deprivation. Arnold's selection here appears to be vitiated by his personal estimate. The comparative method, says Scott-James, is an invaluable aid to appreciation in approaching any kind of art; but it must be pointed out that it is not by itself adequate.

Arnold's critical review of poetry from Chaucer to Burns is excellent in parts but it is far from being wholly satisfactory. He admits only Shakespeare and Milton to the rank of unquestionable classics. He examines Chaucer, Dryden, Pope and Burns only to exclude them. He does not mention Donne at all. His praise of Chaucer and Burns is too restricted. His description of Dryden and Pope as classics of prose and reason rather than of poetry has become controversial like that of a similar statement from Eliot about "dissociation of sensibility." It is held that his bondage to "high seriousness" and to elevated poetry impairs his appreciation of Chaucer and Burns and incapacitates him as a critic of Dryden and Pope. In spite of the lapses of Arnold, the essay "The Study of Poetry" is viewed as representing a new epoch in English literary criticism for his high claims of the superiority of poetry, introduction of comparative criticism, the touchstone method and the rough critical survey of poetry from Chaucer to Burns.

Arnold has equally been praised and condemned by the critics. R.A. Scot-James compares him with Aristotle in respect of the wide influence he exercised, "the mark he impressed upon criticism, and the blind faith with which he was trusted by his votaries." Trilling comments that "Arnold had a manner and a style rather new to England and perfectly adapted to the art of criticism– elegant yet sinewy; colloquial yet reserved, cool yet able to glow into warmth, careful never to flare into heart." It is, however, ironic to note that Arnold himself did not practice disinterestedness in his evaluation of writers like Keats and Shelley. Eliot considers Arnold a propagandist, salesman, and clever adver-

tiser rather than a critic. He finds him lacking in power of connected reasoning at any length and remarks that "his flights are short flying or circular flights." F.R. Leavis alleges his works as "high pamphleteering." It is, however, unjust to dismiss Arnold as a propagandist in spite of his repetitious statements and Victorian style. Arnold rendered a great service to criticism. He brought about system in critical appreciation which was in the form of disorganised state in his time. He elevated criticism to a higher position by making it the caretaker of literature in the periods not feasible for its growth. Baldick observes that criticism for Arnold involved a long period of activity for the reform of Britain's whole intellectual life, an attempt to soften the stridency of contemporary political and religious partisanship, "a strategy for containing radical new movements within traditional frame works in the interest of social and cultural harmony." He widened the horizons of criticism and emphasised its independent role in judging a work. He placed it on a par with creative activity. He has been considered by many as the founder of modern movement on English Literary criticism because of his revaluation of literature's social function, and consequently the social function of criticism itself.

## 1.8.8. Let us Sum Up

In this unit, we have discussed Matthew Arnold's famous essay "The Study of Poetry" with reference to his views on the importance of poetry, historic and personal estimates vis-à-vis the real estimate, the nature of a classic, the touchstone method, and English poetry from Chaucer to Burns and assessed the contribution of Matthew Arnold as a critic

## 1.8.9. Sample Questions

1. Critically discuss Arnold's definition of poetry as criticism of life
2. Critically anlyse Arnold's views on the historic, personal, and real estimates.
3. Assess the contribution of Arnold's Touchstone Method to the evaluation of literary works.
4. What, according to Arnold, is a classic? Is he right in rejecting Chaucer as a classic?
5. "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose," Discuss.
6. Critically examine Arnold's assessment of Burns.
7. Assess the value of Arnold's estimation of poets from Chaucer to Robert Burns.
8. Critically assess the contribution of Arnold as a critic with reference to his essay, "The Study of Poetry."
9. Discuss the limitations of Arnold as a Victorian critic.
10. Discuss Arnold's classicism with reference to the essay, "The Study of Poetry."

## 1.8.10. Suggested Reading

Arnold, Matthew. *Essays in Criticism, Second Series.* London: Macmillan, 1969.

Prasad, Birjadish. *An Introduction to English Criticism.* New Delhi: Macmillan, 1965.

Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1938.

Trivedi, R.D. *A Compendious History of English Literature.* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976.

Ramaswamy, S., V.S Sethuraman,eds. *The English Critical Tradition,* Vol. II (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1978)

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Lesson - 9

# NEW CRITICISM

## Contents



## 1.9.1. OBJECTIVE:

To familiarise the student with the principles and practices of the school of New Criticism.

## 1.9.2. NEW CRITICISM

### a. Background:

The term *New Criticism* was used by John Crowe Ransom in the title of his book The *New Criticism* published in 1941. However, the foundations of New Criticism were laid in books written in the 1930's. Among the chief of them were I. A. Richards *Practical Criticism*, 1929, William Empson, *The Function of Criticism*, 1933 and the essays of F. R. Levis in his journal *Scrutiny*, 1932-53. The movement was taken up and developed by a group of American poets and critics, including R. P. Blackmun, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Pen Warren and William K. Wimsatt.

*New Criticism* is often valued for the critical terminology such as *affective fallacy* (the notion that the reader's response is relevant to the meaning of the work), and *intentional fallacy* (the notion that the author's intention determines the work's meaning). Yet the New Critics were also trying to make a cultural statement. They to a great extent devalued the historical or biographical elements in a work. However, at the same time they were trying to evolve a theory and a method by which the value of literature could be established. In a post-World War of isolation, the excellence as capable of being appreciated in isolation (a text being appreciated *as it is* and not *because it is*) was a significant cultural dogma for the lost generation and the mass in the wasteland. Hence *New Criticism* could also be valued as a reflection of this isolation. Whatever the sources of *New Criticism* its practitioners and the textbooks that they wrote were very influential in the academia, especially American, and the approach became a standard in college and school examinations for a fairly long period.

## b. Methodology

*New Criticism* had dominated the Anglo-American literary criticism for more than fifty years beginning from the 1930's. The movement was a reaction to what Arnold called the *historical fallacy* and the *personal fallacy*. It enunciated and formulated a new approach to the business of criticism.

*New Criticism* believes that every text is *autonomous*. It goes on to assert that history, biography, sociology, psychology as well as the author's intention and the reader's private or personal reaction need not be taken into account in interpreting a text. Any attempt to look at the author's relationship to a work is called "*the intentional fallacy*" and any attempt to look at the reader's individual response is called "*the affective fallacy*".

New Critics believe that each text has a *central unity*. The function of criticism on the part of the reader is to discover this *unity*. The reader should go about it by *interpreting* the text, and finding out in what way each of these parts contributes to the *central unity*. The primary interest of the *New Critic* is in the *themes*. A text is spoken by a *persona* (narrator or speaker). The *persona* expresses an *attitude* which must be defined and he adapts a *tone* which further defines the attitude as *ironic*, *straight forward* or *ambiguous*. The value of a text is judged on the basis of the *richness of the attitude* and the *complexity* and the *balance* of the text. Some of the key phrases that the New Critics used to describe the elements in a text are: *ambivalence*, *ambiguity*, *tension*, *irony* and *paradox*.

The reader's identification, analysis and examination of these elements leads him to the themes. A work is evaluated depending on whether the *themes* are *complex* and whether or not they contribute to the *central, unifying theme*. The more *complex* the themes are and the more closely they contribute to the central theme (*unity*) the better the work.

Usually, the New Critics define their themes as *oppositions*: life and death, good and evil, love and hate, harmony and strife, order and disorder, eternity and time, reality and appearance, truth and falsehood, emotion and reason, simplicity and complexity, nature and art. The analysis of the text is an exercise in showing how all of its parts contribute to a complex but simple or unified statement about the central theme.

The method that the New Critics follow is what they term as *close analysis*. The reader is required to look at and examine the words, the syntax, the images and the structure (usually, *the*

*argument*). The words must be examined for their *ambiguity* and the more possible meanings a word has, the richer the *ambiguity*. The reader should also search out *irony* (*ambiguous meaning*) and *paradox* (contradictory meaning, hence also *ambiguity*). This dual or more meanings the word carries leads to two different meanings that are stretched, it creates what is called *tension*. The reader should be able to discover these *tensions* and relate them to *thematic oppositions*, though they may also occur as oppositions in imagination such as light Vs dark, beautiful Vs ugly, graceful Vs. clumsy. The oppositions may also be in the words chosen such as concrete Vs abstract, energetic Vs placid, and so on.

The reader should however guard himself against two pitfalls. (i) *stock responses* like the word *autumn* should not make the reader think of sadness unless the poem directs the render to it (ii) *idiosyncratic* or affective responses such as the term *lush grass* should not make the reader think of cows, how often he has seen them surrounded by grass, unless the poem directs one to the them.

## c. Common features

The new critics differed form one another in many ways in the details of their theories and applications. But there were certain common aspects to all of them. They were:

1. A poem, it is held, should be treated as a poem, as an object in itself—or in Eliot's words 'primarily as poetry and not as any other thing'. The first law of criticism, John Crowe Ransom said, 'is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object' and shall recognize 'the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake.' New critics warn the reader against such temptations to lose sight of the object itself as the *intentional fallacy* or the *affective fallacy;* and in analysing and evaluating a particular work, they usually eschew recourse to the biography of the author, to the social conditions at the time of its production, or to its psychological and moral effects on the reader; they also tend to minimise recourse to the history of literary genres and subject matter.
2. The distinctive procedure of the new critic is **explication**, or **close reading**: the detailed and subtle analysis of the complex interrelations and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the component elements within a work. 'Explication de text' has long been a formal procedure for teaching literature in French schools, but the distinctive explicative procedure of the New Criticism derives from such books as I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929) and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).
3. The principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language whose attributes are defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of logical discourse, and the key concepts of this criticism deal with the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols. There is a great emphasis on the 'organic unity' of structure and meaning and warning against separating the two by what Cleanth Brooks has called the 'heresy of the paraphrase'.
4. The distinction between literary *genres*, although casually recognized, is not essential in the New Criticism. The basic components of any work of literature, whether lyric, narrative or dramatic, are conceived to be words, images, and symbols rather than character, thought and plot These lin-

guistic elements are often said to be organised around a central theme, and to manifest '*tension*', '*irony*', and '*paradox*' within a structure which is a 'reconciliation of diverse impulses' or an equilibrium of opposed forces.' The form of a work, whether or not it has characters or plot, is said to be primarily a 'structure of meanings,' and to develop mainly through play and counterplay of evoking 'thematic imagery' and 'symbolic action'. [M. H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 1978 edition].

### 1.9.3. A NOTE ON SOME OF THE NEW CRITICS:

#### a. I. A. RICHARDS

I. A. Richards felt that the great traditions of culture were weakening and the study of poetry could halt this. Richards was well versed in psychology and traces of this are found in his theories. Richards argued that poetry is the only form in which these things can be recorded, (a record) of the experiences which have seemed worth having to the most sensitive and discriminating persons. Poetry, therefore, for Richards was a medium leading to the experiences and feelings of the elite. The ability to generate a poem depended to an extent on the sensitivity and moral discrimination of the poet. The ability of the reader to react to a poem also reflected the moral health and sensibility of the reader. These sensitive readers then could refine and defend Western civilization. Richards' approach to literature was largely empirical and not theoretical. The poem was to be considered as it appeared on the printed page and the reader was invited to a 'close reading' of the text and arrive at an uninhibited and true response to the poem. The procedure was to fine-tune the reader in his response, and laid emphasis on the verbal structure and imagery.

#### b. T. S. ELIOT

For Eliot a great poem is transparent. That is there is no need of any external aid or direction to appreciate good poetry or conversely a good poem is one that carries the meaning in itself and does not need external aids for understanding. He said 'the end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all accidents of personal emotions are removed'. Thus we aim to see the object as it really is. Eliot also believed that society was degenerating from an original organic state. (His *Wasteland* amply illustrated this). He called this splitting between intellect and feeling the 'dissociation of sensibility'. Though Eliot approved of the methodology of the New Critics, he sounded a note of caution. He felt that these tools in the hands of inexperienced critics or inexperienced readers may produce meanings some of which could even be ludicrous. He humorously called these exercises 'lemon – squeezing criticism' (*Functions of Criticism* – 1954). Helen Gardener in her book *Business of Criticism* (1959) agrees with this point and points out that experienced critics, surreptitiously, brought in their knowledge of biography and literary history without being obvious.

#### c. F. R. LEAVIS

F. R. Leavis started and ran the journal *Scrutiny* (1932-53) which was devoted to criticism. Through the articles that appeared in this journal, New Criticism attained a great degree of refinement through Leavis, analysis of passages. He demonstrated that a concentration on verbal texture and imagery would lead to insights in prose and fiction as well. He effectively demonstrated Eliot's claim that a poem communicates through its imagery and texture. F. R. Leavis not only added weight to the

'close analysis' of literary texts, but also demonstrated the efficacy of practical criticism as a tool of judgement. His contribution is significant for the moral turn it gave to New Criticism.

## d. CLEANTH BROOKS

Cleanth Brooks' contribution to New Criticism is the number of analytical tools, he contributed to the critical jargon of the school. Some of them are: *Ambiguity*: More than one meaning a word or phrase carries, leading to a duality or more of meanings that could all be possibly relevant. Thus several layers of meanings are projected.

*Irony*: the normal meaning is that the opposite is meant. The New Critics used it in the sense that both the opposite meanings are relevant contextually and hence create a sort of tension by being held together.

*Tension, Paradox and Complexity* used to indicate a 'double' or 'dialectical' position where two elements that are normally juxtaposed are fused or brought together. A technique at which the Meta-physical poets were masters.

is derived by reference and the other is 'intention' which is the meaning as implied. William K. Wilmsatt and Beardsley in their essays. 'The Intentional fallacy' and 'The Affective fallacy' developed this theory further.

## 1.9.4. EXTRACT FROM SOME NEW CRITICS

The following are some extracts from the writings of New Critics. Two of them, one by I. A. Richards and the other by Robert Pen Warren deal with theory. the other two by Cleanth Brooks and William Empson illustrate practical application.

**a. I. A. Richards**

In its use of words poetry is just the reverse of science. Very definite thoughts do occur, but not because the words are chosen as logically to bar out all possibilities but one. No. But because the manner, the tone of voice, the cadence and the rhythm play upon our interests and make them pick out from among an indefinite number of possibilities the precise particular thought which they need. That is why poetical descriptions often seem so much more accurate than prose descriptions. Language logically and scientifically used cannot describe a landscape or a face. To do so would need a prodigious apparatus of names for shades and nuances, for precise particular qualities. These names do not exist, so other means have to be used. The poet, even when, like Ruskin or De Quincy, he writes in prose, makes the reader pick out the precise particular sense required from an indefinite number of possible senses which a word, phrase or sentence may carry. The means by which he does this are many and varied... . Misunderstanding and under-estimation of poetry is mainly due to over-estimation of the thought in it. We can see still more clearly that thought is not the prime factor if we consider for a moment not the experience of the reader but that of the poet. Why does the poet use these words and not others? Not because they stand for a series of thoughts which in themselves are what he is concerned to communicate. It is never what a poem *says* which matters, but what it *is*. The poet is not writing as a scientist. He uses these words because the interests

which the situation calls into play combine to bring them, just in this form, into his consciousness as a means of ordering, controlling, and consolidating the whole experience. The experience itself, the tide of impulses sweeping through the mind, is the source and the sanction of the words. They represent this experience itself, not any set of perceptions or reflections, though often to a reader who approaches the poem wrongly they will seem to be only a series of remarks about other things. But to a suitable reader the words – if they actually spring from experience and arc not due to verbal habits, to the desire to be effective, to factitious excogitation, to imitation, to irrelevant contrivances, or to any other of the failings which prevent most people from writing poetry – the words will reproduce in his mind a similar play of interests putting him for the while into a similar situation and leading to the same response. (*Science and Poetry* 1926).

b. **Robert Pen Warren**

Poetry does not inhere in any particular element but depends upon the set of relationships, the structure which we call the poem... Then the question arises: what elements cannot be used in such a structure? I should answer that nothing that is available in human experience is to be legislated out of poetry. This does not mean that anything can be used in any poem, or that some materials or elements may not prove more recalcitrant than others, or that it might not be easy to have too much of some things. But it does mean that, granted certain contexts, any sort of material, a chemical formula for instance, might appear functionally in a poem. It also may mean that, other things being equal, the greatness of a poet depends upon the extent of the area of experience which he can master poetically.

Can we make generalizations about the nature of the poetic structure? First, it involves resistances, at various levels. There is the tension between the rhythm of the poem and the rhythm of speech (a tension which is very low at the extreme of free verse and at the extreme of verse such as that of *Ulalume*, which verges toward a walloping doggerel); between the formality of the rhythm and the informality of the language; between the particular and the general, the concrete and the abstract; between the elements of even the simplest metaphor, between the beautiful and the ugly; between ideas . . . ; between the elements involved in irony . . . ; between prosaisms and poeticisms . . . This list is not intended to be exhaustive; it is intended to be merely suggestive. But it may be taken to imply that the poet is like the jiujitsu expert; he wins by utilizing the resistance of his opponent – the materials of the poem.

. . . [Poets] have not only tried to say what they mean, they have tried to prove what they mean. The saint proves his vision by stepping cheerfully into the fires. The poet, somewhat less spectacularly, proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony – to the drama of his structure – in the hope that the fires will refine it. In other words, the poet wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned, that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience. And irony is one such device of reference. ("Pure and Impure Poetry", *The Kenyon* Review)

c. **Cleanth Brooks**

The case of William Wordsworth, for instance, is instructive on this point. His poetry would r appear to promise many examples of the language of paradox. He usually prefers the dir

attack. He insists on simplicity; he distrusts whatever seems sophisticated. 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 worshipping. The implication is that she should respond to the holy time, and become like the evening itself, unlike; but she seems less worshipful than inanimate nature itself. 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-conscious poet who walks beside her? 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 prayest 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 poem, even a hint of Phasaical holiness, with which the girl's careless innocence, itself a symbol of her continual secret worship, stands in contrast... T. S. Eliot has commented upon "that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations," which occur 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, free, 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. (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1947).

**d. William Empson**

In *The Sacrifice*, (by George Herbert) with a magnificence he never excelled, the various sets of conflicts in the Christian doctrine of the Sacrifice are stated with an assured and easy simplicity, a reliable and unassuming grandeur, extraordinary in any material, but unique as achieved by successive fireworks of contradiction, and a mind jumping like a flea. Herbert's poems are usually more 'personal' and Renaissance than this one, in which the theological system is accepted so completely that the poet is only its-mouthpiece. Perhaps this, as a releasing and reassuring condition, is necessary if so high a degree of ambiguity is to seem normal. -For, to this extent, the poem is outside the conflict theory of poetry; it assumes, as does its theology, the existence of conflicts, but its business is to state a generalised solution of them. Here, then, the speaker is Jesus, the subject doctrinal, and the method that strange monotony of accent, simplicity of purpose, and rarefied intensity of feeling, which belong to a scholastic abstraction, come to life on -the stage of a miracle play.

They did accuse me of great villainy
That I did thrust into the Deitie;
Who never thought that any robberie;
*Was ever grief like mine?*

*Some said that I the temple to the floore*
*In three days razed, and raised as before.*
*Why, he that built the world can do much more.*
Was ever grief like mine?

He is speaking with pathetic simplicity, an innocent surprise that people should treat him so, and a complete failure to understand the case against him; thus *who* in the third line quoted and *he* in the seventh make their point by applying equally to *I* and the *Deitie*. But before thinking the situation. as simple as the speaker one must consider the use of the word *rased* to apply to the two opposite operations concerned; and that the quotation from Jeremiah which makes the refrain refers in the original not to the Saviour but to the wicked city of Jerusalem, abandoned by God, and in the hands of her enemies for her sins. (*The Seventh Type of Ambiguity*, 1930).

## 1.9.5. NEW CRITICISM IN A NUTSHELL

**1. Definition**:

New criticism involves a close reading of the text. New critics feel that all the details necessary to understand, interpret and evaluate a text must be found within the work itself. There is no need to know about the author's life or the background of his times. New critics do not view a wok in terms of myth or social context; they try to analyze a text in terms of irony, paradox, imagery and metaphor. Besides the texture of language, they are also interested in the work's setting, characters, symbols and point of view.

**Terms used in New Criticism**:

*Tension*: the integral unity of the poem which results from the resolution of opposites, often in irony or paradox.

*Intentional fallacy*: the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention.

*Affective fallacy*: the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by its affect on the reader.

*External form*: rhyme scheme, meter, stanza form, etc

*Objective correlative* – originated by T. S. Eliot, this term refers to a collection of objects, situations, or events that instantly evoke a particular emotion

### c. Practitioners :

I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Pen Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot, William Empson and others.

### d. Advantages :

This approach can be practiced without much research or external reading. it emphasizes the value of literature apart from its context virtually all critical approaches begin here.

### e. Disadvantages :

The text is seen in isolation. New Criticism ignores the context of the work. It does not explain biographical, historical allusions. It tends to reduce literature to a collection of rhetorical devices (Source: Warren Hedges, Southern Oregon University, 1997).

## 1.9.6. Sample Questions :

1. Trace the literary conditions for the development of New Criticism?
2. Discuss the salient features of New Criticism?
3. Briefly study the important ideas of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards?

## 1.9.7. Suggested Reading:

1. Seldan, Raman, (ed) The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present.
2. Webster, Roger studying Literary Theory: An Introduction

Author : Prof. M.S. Rama Murthy

Lesson - 10

# T. S. ELIOT AS A CRITIC: "TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT" AND "THE METAPHYSICAL POETS"

**Contents :**



**Objective:**

- to Study two critical texts prescribed.
- to study Eliot's achievement and contribution as a critic.

## 1.10.1 T. S. ELIOT: LIFE SKETCH

T. S. Eliot was born on September 26, 1888. His family traced its ancestory to Massachusetts. Among his ancestors were prominent clergymen and educators such as Charles William Eliot, who was President of Harvard University and three U S presidents, John Adams, John Quincy and Rutherford B Hayer. Eliot grew up in St. Louis, Missouri and later shifted to Boston. His grandfather was a prominent educator and founded Smith Academy and Washington University. Eliot was educated at Smith Academy and went to Massachusetts for further studies. He did his Ph. D. courses at Harvard and later studied for a year at Oxford University from 1914 to 1915. He also spent a year at the University of Paris. Later on he spent a year at Oxford University working on a doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of F. H. Bradley. Though the first World War prevented his return to Oxford, the Philosophy department accepted it. Eliot's undergraduate studies laid stress on language, including Latin, Greek, German and French. His graduate work was centered on Philosophy. Eliot was regarded as an outstanding student. After his studies Eliot decided to remain in England and follow a literary career. In 1927, he became a British citizen and joined the Church of England. Eliot progressed to become one of the outstanding modern literary figures and received countless awards including the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

Eliot's achievements include great works in poetry, criticism, drama and editing. Eliot's early poetical works *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917), and *Poems* (1920) and *The Waste Land* (1922) expressed modern themes of anguish and barrenness, isolation of the individual as reflected in the failure of love. There was also a striking departure from the 19th century Victorian poets in the form that he employed. His career as a poet concluded with *The Four Quartets* (1936-1942).

T. S. Eliot's literary criticism won him great respect. He began writing criticism in the mid 1920's, to supplement his salary first as a teacher, then as a bank clerk. By the late 1920's his criticism covered religion and social issues also. From the 1920's Eliot began to write Drama. One of his most famous and still very popular plays is *The Cocktail Party* written in 1949.

While Eliot's life seemed a success from the beginning, his personal life was in troubled waters. In June 1915, he married Vivian Haigh-Wood. This marriage was on the rocks right form the beginning as she was mentally ill and ended in madness. This strain of taking care of her lead to his own collapse in 1921. Financially he struggled very hard to earn enough of money to care for his wife's illness and to support himself. After Vivian's death he married his secretary Esme Valerie Fletcher who was forty years younger and Eliot himself was 69. However the marriage proved to be a happy union and Eliot found contentment in his later years. On his death two of the leading magazines *The London Times* and *Life Magazine* in their obituaries summed up the influence of T. S. Eliot as follows:

*The Most influential English Poet of His time* – The London Times.

*Our age beyond any doubt has been, and will continue to be, the Age of Eliot* – Life Magazine.

## 1.10.2. T. S. ELIOT: POET AND CRITIC

Eliot achieved recognition with the publication of his very first poem 'The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock". The poem is considered to be a masterpiece of '*modernism*'. As some critics have pointed out the poem is not an experiment but an achievement of perfection. The poem signified a break from the immediate past, which may be considered as radical as that of Coleridge and Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem was a result of Eliot and his contemporary Ezra Pound seeking to reform poetic diction by creating new verse rhythms based on contemporary speech. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Eliot won international reputation. The poem expressed, with great power, the disenchantment, disillusionment and disgust during the period after World War I. *The Waste Land* consists of five sections that reflect the shattered experience of the great modern cities of the West, for, in this poem Eliot expresses the hopelessness and aimlessness of life in the city. However, *The Waste Land* is not just a simple contrast of the heroic past with the degraded present. The poem also presents an awareness of moral evil. Eliot, however, believed that "*Any religion, while it lasts, and on its own level, gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the framework for a culture, and protects most of humanity from boredom and despair*".

E. M. Foster noted that "*Eliot was not a mystic. His work contains several well-turned compliments to religion and Divine Grace, but no trace of religious emotion, he has not got it; what he seeks is not revelation, but stability*". Eliot's masterpiece is *The Four Quartets* which was published as a book in 1943. The first of the quartets is *Burnt Norton* published in 1936. The poem is a meditation on the nature of time and its relation to eternity. On the model of *Burnt Norton*, Eliot wrote the other three quartets *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942). Eliot brought together the four poems *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), *Little Gidding* (1942), together in the volume *The Four Quartets* in 1943. In these four poems T. S. Eliot explored, through images of great beauty and handling power his own individual past, the past of the human race and the meaning of history. Each of the poems was independent but when taken together,

they formed a single work. *The Four Quartets* was widely appreciated by the reading public and the originality of the form and technical mastery of his verse lead to the award of the Nobel prize for literature in 1948.

Eliot's career as a dramatist began with *Sweeney Agonistes* (published in 1926, first performed in 1934) and ended with *The Elder Statesmen* (first performed 1958, published 1959). His drama however, is inferior to his lyric and meditative poetry. Eliot's belief that secular drama would attract people made him seek religion and he himself considered drama as being above all other forms of poetry. Eliot employed his own version of blank verse in his plays, and revised poetic drama making it popular on the stage. *The Family Reunion* (1939) and *The Murder in The Cathedral* are both tragedies that deal with religion (Christianity). *The Family Reunion* is a tragedy of revenge while *The Murder in the Cathedral* deals with the Sin of Pride. This play is a modern miracle play based on the martyrdom of Thomas Becket who was the Archbishop of Canterbury. The use of Chorus in the traditional Greek manner is a striking feature of this play. *The Family Reunion* is based on the story of Orestes transformed into a modern situation with a mixture of psychological realism. The play however was a failure since the public found it rather confusing. After World War II, Eliot wrote three plays, *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesmen* (1958). All the three plays are comedies and the plots are derived from Greek drama. In these plays Eliot followed the current theoretical conventions, but sacrificed the lyrical style of his earlier plays. Of the three plays *The Cocktail Party*, based on the play Alcestis by Euripides was the only one that achieved popular success. Though in total the plays of Eliot failed to impress the audience, they are important in handling moral and religious issues and also the use of sharp social satire.

Eliot's career as an editor was second to his main interests. In spite of this *The Criterion* published between (1922 – 1939) was one of the most distinguished international journals of the period. As editor of the publishing company *Faber & Faber*, Eliot encouraged many young poets.

Eliot's first volume of critical essays is *The Sacred Wood* (1920), in which appeared his famous essay, '*Tradition and the Individual Talent*'. In this essay Eliot, asserted that tradition as used by the poet, is not a mere repetition of the work of the immediate past ("*Novelty is better than repetition*" he said). He pointed out that it comprises the whole of European literature from Homer to the present. The poet therefore may create his own tradition by using material from any language and any period. In 'Hamlet and His Problems' (*The Sacred Wood*) Eliot set forth his famous theory of the 'objective correlative' as follows:

*The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion, such that, when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.*

Eliot's *Selected Essays*, 1917 – 32 (1932) dealt with a new historical perspective of English poetry. In the relative importance of English poetry, Eliot put Donne and other metaphysical poets of the 17th century on top and the poets of 18th and 19th centuries were secondary. In this essay Eliot used the famous phase, "dissociation of sensibility" to explain the change that took place in English poetry after Donne and Andrew Marvell. The change Eliot felt came because of a lack of unity of

thought and feeling. This essay revived interest in the 17th century poets and had a strong influence n modern poetry. The first phase of Eliot's criticism ended with the publication of *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), which was based on his lectures at Harvard. There were three books which dealt with theology and sociology that Eliot published namely *Thoughts After Lambeth* (1931), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948).

These essays, along with *Dante* (1929), may be considered as Eliot's masterpieces. They dealt with the relation of literature to theology and philosophy. Eliot suggested that standards higher than merely literary must be employed to judge the greatness of any poetry.

In conclusion, we may place Eliot as a successor to the poet critics, John Dryden – Samuel Johnson – Mathew Arnold. Eliot has proved himself to be a very successful critic. His poems *The Waste Land*, and *The Four Quartets* have not only gained the admiration of readers but also have been trend setters in modern poetry. His criticism, though sometimes extremely outspoken and embarrassing, has achieved a combination of literary and theological judgement, especially when he talks of the importance of culture in the evaluation of poetry. As a dramatist, even though Eliot is not an outstanding success, he had set new trends and encouraged the revival of poetic drama. Overall his achievement is remarkable and highly influential in modern literature.

## 1.10.3. COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT:

### a. Tradition and The Individual Talent

T. S. Eliot begins his essay by defining what is 'tradition'. He says it is usually used in a negative sense, to mean that a person is very old fashioned. He then goes on to define what tradition means in literary criticism. He goes on to point out that every nation has its own body of literature. And all these literatures put together would constitute what we may call World Literature. The flow of literature has something common among all its writers. A writer is not an isolated person but carries within a sense of the past or a historical sense. For the writer the past is not a series of events but exists simultaneously and hence is in a sense timeless. This awareness of the timelessness of the past and its relation to the present may be called tradition in a writer. Every poet or artist is one who finds his existence in relation to the dead poets and artists. This does not mean that he is one who copies his predecessors but one who is able to fit into the total order of tradition. In a sense he adds to the existing order by contributing his own novelty and thus readjusts the past. The poet however has the capacity to absorb the essential meaning of any given work, and thus does not become pedantic or a bookworm.

Eliot now illustrates the process of creativity. He points out that the poet, by his learning and experience is aware of a number of emotions, feelings, phrases and images. These various elements are acted upon in the mind of the poet (without any personal prejudices) and the work of art results. Eliot brings out an analogy from science. He points out how when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide, the resultant product is sulphurous acid. In this experiment the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum and the platinum itself is unaffected. Eliot goes on to point out that a similar process is at work in the creative activity. Namely, there are as pointed out earlier a number of elements present separately in the poet's memory. The poet's mind (platinum) fuses these various elements, some of them drawn from tradition and others

springing from the poets mind, and the result is the work of art. As soon as the process is over, the poet's mind is back to its original stage. Eliot points out that when the poet creates a work of art, there is a process of depersonalization. That is, a poet is related to his work by being able to depersonalize himself. In other words, the poet should be totally objective, and the lesser a poet's personality interferes in the work the better the work. In other words, Eliot feels that the poet has not a "personality" to express but a particular medium in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. For Eliot, therefore, poetry is not a turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.

Eliot finally remarks on the poet, his emotions and the poem as follows: *It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express, and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones, and in working them up into poetry, to express feelings, which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him.*

Eliot feels that the interest of the reader should be not in the poet but in the poem that is created. Many readers look for the emotion or feeling in a poem and often fail to appreciate the 'technical excellence' of the poem. Yet readers often miss the point that feeling or emotion in a poem is adequately conveyed through the elements or 'objective correlatives' and not through the personality of the poet. Hence, there is this depersonalization of the poet and the association of sense and feeling that produces great poetry. To achieve this the poet has to undergo depersonalization, perhaps smoothen the odd and rough angles of his personality and be able to assimilate and absorb the historical past and the present, which constitutes tradition. Thus Eliot establishes a close relationship between *Tradition and the Individual Talent.*

## b. The Metaphysical Poets

T. S. Eliot wrote this essay with reference to the publication of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* edited by Grierson. Eliot starts with the question as to how far the metaphysical school or movement is different from the main current of English Literature. Another problem is to define metaphysical poetry and to decide what poets belong to it. He points out how the poetry of Donne, Marvell and Bishop King are considered to be close to the movement. Again there are poets like Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw who belong to this group. Metaphor, simile or conceit is one element that is common to these poets, as far as their style is concerned. Yet they differ in the use of these devices. This becomes evident when we compare Donne, Cowley, Crashaw, Herbert to name a few, with each other.

One of the distinctions that the famous critic Dr. Johnson, who was the first to employ the term 'metaphysical poets', pointed out, was that these poets namely Donne, Cleveland and Cowley employed what he termed as the 'metaphysical conceit'. Dr. Johnson remarks that in the conceit 'the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together'. Eliot however points out that there is a

degree of heterogeneity of materials, but this is "compelled into unity" by the poet's mind. Eliot agrees with Dr. Johnson that the metaphysical poets were widely read and they brought all their learning into play. However, they were not pedantic, but were able to associate their learning with their sensitivity. Eliot here makes an important observation, namely that in the metaphysical poets, there was a unity of thought and feeling. He termed it as the *association of sensibility*. Eliot in this essay he defies what Dr. Johnson had said that: "*the metaphysical poets where men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour*". Dr. Johnson further observes the metaphysical conceit as: "*a kind of discordia concors – a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblance in things apparently unlike...the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together*".

Eliot agrees with Dr. Johnson that the metaphysical poets were men of learning. But he disagrees that their poetry was only parading their learning. He goes on to observe that the metaphysical poets were able to fuse their learning with their feeling or sensibility. Thus, Eliot's essay on the metaphysical poets may be considered as a revaluation of Dr. Johnson definition which held sway for a long time.

Another important distinction that Eliot makes is between two different schools of poetry. He observes:

*The difference is not a simple difference of degree between poets. It is something which had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; It is the difference between intellectual poets and the reflecting poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.*

Here Eliot makes a distinction between the two schools of poets namely the intellectual and the reflective poet. Eliot suggests that the poets of the Elizabeth age upto Donne had the capability of turning experience into sensibility, or feeling. This leads to Eliot's observations on the association or dissociation of sensibility. Eliot observes:

*We may express the difference by the following theory; the poets of the 17th century, the successors of the dramatists of the Sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as these predecessors were; ..... In the Seventeenth century, a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well, that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The languages went on and in some respects improved; the best verse of Collins, Gray, Johnson and even Goldsmith satisfies some of our fastidious demands better than that of Donne or Marvell or King. But while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude.*

Thus Eliot makes a distinction between what we may call two schools of poetry and feels that the one to which the metaphysical poets belong produces poetry that is perhaps superior because of the association of sensibility.

## 1.10.4 SELECT CRITICISM ON T. S. ELIOT

Eliot rejected both academicism and pomposity, and the quiet, sardonic, penetratingly, realistic attitude he took and expressed, at first affronting the literate public, soon captured the imagination of his younger readers and, more than any other single influence, helped to bring poetry back to a serious confrontation of the actual world of daily experience.

D. S. Savage, *A Decline in Quality*

Eliot's non-dramatic poetry and his early criticism have had the effect in this century of reordering and renewing literary taste both in this country and in America. He was not alone, but he was outstanding, in reviving admiration for the metaphysical poets, and reducing the relative status of the Spenserian and Miltonic strains in the English tradition. His poetry enlarged the range and form of poetic expression as a medium of the modern consciousness.

- *Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature*

**ed. Marion Wynne – Davies**

When Eliot began to write, it was inevitable that his poetry should be 'undecipherable' to the reading pubic. The speech of the tribe had become impoverished, atrophied, inarticulate. Hence the return to some of the sources of its lost life, to the language of symbol, the logic of the imagination, made it appear a stranger, whose unfamiliarity must be repudiated. A generation of readers and critics and teachers, and of other poets writing in the same language, has done much to reawaken consciousness, and to widen the area over which the music can be heard. As to the fight for his values, all the poet can do in his art is to present them as poetry. 'The rest is not our business'.

- Elizabeth Drew

In confronting the world and its past, present and future in art and philosophy, Eliot developed an approach to history as complex and mature as any professional historian's like Vico and Toynbee, Eliot viewed history in terms of the development of cultures. Grounding himself in the absolute authority of Anglo – Catholic Christianity, Eliot pointed religion as the source of all cultures, describing how these cultures develop through the dynamic interaction of unity and diversity, tradition and novelty, and individual perspective and cultural context. Unlike the Enlightenment historians and their heirs, he did not see progress as an escalating improvement in culture, but as the regeneration of cultural tradition. Like many thinkers of his time, Eliot believed Western culture was a fragmentary mess. He cited the decay of religion – the source of culture – and tradition – the permanence of culture – as the cause of cultural collapse. Though he believed this decay had proceeded too far to be easily reversed, he enjoined thinkers to adopt his theories and draw hope from the understanding they provided. And though Eliot was staunchly conservative in outlook and disposition, his focus on individual perspective made him one of the fathers of post-modern thought.

Born to a well-established Anglo-American family in 1888, Eliot confronted both the early twentieth century's frightening alienation and the collapse of the Western bourgeois synthesis. Western thought had replaced the Christian religion with a combination of capital, progress and the reification of natural science and positive philosophy. The disaster of World War had proved to Eliot and thinkers like him that the progress of technology and material wealth without a broader meaning

or system of values was bankrupt and hopeless. Since the renaissance, philosophers had the authority of traditional religion. Their faith gone and its substitute revealed as an ineffectual character, the Europeans and Americans stumbled about in a shell shocked daze, desperately scrabbling for a foothold of hope and authority and able to find none. Eliot, who detailed this alienation in poems like *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*, himself participated in this search, exploring the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Eros, Aestheticism, Humanism, Idealism and even Buddhism for doctrines to explain and repair the fragmentation of culture.

- Scott Weidner, 'T. S. Eliot poet and Critic as Historical Theorist'

In 1925, Eliot left Lloyds and became a director of Faber and Faber, where he built up a list of poets (Austin, G. Barker, Pound, Spender etc) which represented the main stream of the modern movement in poetry in England. From this time he was regarded as a figure of great cultural authority, whose influence was more or less inescapable.

- *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* ed Margaret Drabble

Needless to say, Christianity, abandoned in the West with an increasing sense of lethargy, has played little role in cultural preservation in the past half century. Doubtless Eliot would pronounce his life's work and efforts a failure and say a prayer for the soul of Western culture. Still, despite the intellectual and moral difficulties contemporary life presents, a richer community now contributes to our culture, more races, religions, and genders speak the peace of their fresh Eliotic perspectives to change culture as we know it and as Eliot knew it. These groups have found their voices both through religious cult (the non-violent Christian efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr. come to mind), as Eliot might have predicated, and through allegiance to idea which haven't proved nearly so insubstantial as Eliot thought. To Eliot, due to Western hegemony, Western civilization meant, by extension, world civilization. Now many other cultures play a much larger role in defining world civilization. If the post-modern world seems morally bankrupt, human beings are becoming increasingly, accountable to one another. If society has not embraced Christianity as a panacea for aimlessness, each individual is learning to follow his or her own path rather than marching on a unified path in a group, distinct perspective no longer indicates aimlessness. Even if the currently subordinate state of tradition might disappoint Eliot, a much more open, incentive and diverse human family, a unity in diversity he might have appreciated, will contribute to the tradition of tomorrow.

- Scott Weidner

New Criticism can be considered a movement, beginning after World War I with the critical work of modern poets and critics, especially T. S. Eliot, Richards, and somewhat later John Crowe Ransom, culminating some 30 years later in the work of explicitly academic critics, such as Wellek, Wimsatt, and Brooks, since, these decades coincide with the institutional rise of English department and the development of academic literary criticism in the United States. New criticism has exerted a complex and lasting influence on the shaping of educational programs in literature and more generally, on the literary culture of the English - speaking world. The debt of the New Critics to Eliot was pervasive, but two germinal ideas from his essays shaped both New Critical theory and practice. In *Tradition and The Individual Talent* (1917). Eliot argued that the literature of Western Europe could be viewed as a 'simultaneous order' of works, where the value of any new work depended on its

relation to the order of the tradition. Thus, the work of the *individual talent* does not so much express a personality as it affects and is affected by the literature of the past. Eliot was responding in part to complaints that modern poetry was too hard to understand, too austere, metaphysical or unfamiliar. Eliot's essay asserts that difficult language reflect an equally difficult modern historical process and a response to human predicaments is difficult, especially as literature of any age is also a response to previous literature as a whole.

In *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919) Eliot further proposed that the effect of poetry stems from a relation between the words of the text and events, states of mind, or experiences that offer an *objective correlative*. Eliot suggests that there is a unique experience to which the language of the poem corresponds, the poem means just what it says, but it is the *objective correlative* in experience that makes the intellectual and emotional value of the poem intelligible. Ironically, Eliot propounds this idea while arguing that Hamlet is a less than satisfactory play because no sufficient correlative (or too many correlatives) can be found. A more encompassing irony is that both the origin and the collapse of New Criticism are contained in this point, where the precision of language demanded of a poem cannot be shown to determine a correlative meaning, *objective* or otherwise.

In suggesting that literature could be treated as a simultaneous order as a system Eliot opened the way to more explicitly speculative and theoretical studies of literature, while in focusing attention on the fundamental operations by which literary works create intelligible structure, he provided an analytical example for critics that went well beyond traditional protocols for assigning critical praise or blame. While Eliot himself evinces no strong inclination to pursue either explicit theory or critical technique. Richards pursued both, partly in an attempt to appraise the value of modern poets such as Eliot in explicitly theoretical terms. Other critics, notably Leavis, pursued the questions as opportunities to reevaluate literary history, explicitly as a great tradition, continuing into the modern age.

- Leroy F. Searle, *New Criticism*

## 1.10.5. GLOSSARY

**Depersonalization**:

Eliot feels that in the process of creation the poet undergoes a continual surrender of himself. He surrenders to something which is more valued. In other words the ego of the poet undergoes a continual self-sacrifice, a continuous extinction of personality until the aim is achieved.

**Objective Correlative**:

The term was first coined by Washington Auston and introduced by T. S. Eliot in his essay "Hamlet and His problems" (1919). Eliot defined the concept as: 'the only way of expressing emotion is by finding an *objective correlative*'. In other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formulae of that particular emotion".

**Dissociation of Sensibility:**

It was a phrase introduced by T. S. Eliot in his essay 'The Metaphysical Poets" (1921). Eliot's claim was that John Donne and the other metaphysical poets earlier to the seventeenth century, like

the Elizabethan and Jacobian dramatists, 'possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience'. They manifested 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought', and felt, their thought as immediately as "the odour of a rose". But "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered". This dissociation of intellect from emotion and sensuous perception, according to Eliot, was greatly aggravated by the influence of John Milton and John Dryden; and most later poets in English either thought or felt, but did not think and feel as an act of unified sensibility.

## Association of Sensibility :

T. S. Eliot believed that there are two aspects to poetry namely thought and feeling. He points out that the earlier poets like Chapman and Donne were able to recreate thought into feeling. They were able to incorporate their learning into their sensibility. Their feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought. The mind of the poet is constantly fusing together disparate experiences as opposed to an ordinary man for whom experience is chaotic, irregular and fragmentary. As Eliot points out *'A thought to Donne was an experience, it modified its sensibility'*.

## Metaphysical conceit :

The term was coined by Samuel Johnson in his essay 'Life of Cowley". With the great revival of interest in the metaphysical poets during the early decades of twentieth century, a number of modern poets made use of this device. Dr. Johnson defined the metaphysical conceit as follows: *a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike... the most heterogeneous idea are yoked by violence together.*

However, T. S. Eliot, in his essay on the metaphysical poets, modified Dr. Johnson's definition. He argued that the metaphysical poets did not yoke ideas by violence, but on the other hand, they were able to fuse the idea and sensibility. He pointed out that they achieved a certain association of sensibility between thought and feeling which is lacking in many of the later poets.

## 1.10.6 Sample Questions:

1. Give an account of Eliot's definition of Tradition and the Individual Talent.

   (OR)

   Discuss the role of Tradition and Individual Talent in the creation of a work of art.
2. How does Eliot depend the metaphysical poets from the criticism of Dr. Johnson.
3. Write a note on the dissociation of sensibility.

   (OR)

   Trace the dissociation of sensibility in English literature with suitable examples.

## 1.10.8. Suggested Reading:


1. *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* by Matthiessen, F. O.
2. *Critical Approaches to Literature* by David Daiches.
3. 'T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry' by Gardner, H. L
4. 'A Decline in Quality' by Savage, D. S.,
5. 'T. S. Eliot: Poet and Critic as Historical Theorist' by Scott Weidner.
6. 'New Criticism' by Leroy F. Searle


Author : **Dr. M.S. Rama Murthy**

Lesson - 11

# I. A. RICHARDS: "THE FOUR KINDS OF MEANING"

## Contents:



## 1.11.1 Objective:

— to describe the main qualities of I.A. Richards as a critic
— to discuss the essay prescribed essay
— to evaluate I.A. Richards as a critic

## 1.11.2. Life Sketch:

I. A. Richards was born on February 26, 1893 in Cheshire, England. While he was a teenager he suffered with tuberculosis and while he was recovering and taking rest, he developed an interest in language. At Cambridge Richards initially studied history, but soon turned to moral sciences, and philosophy under the influences of C. K. Ogden. During his graduate course he attended lectures on the philosophy of mind by G. E. Moore. Richards noticed that his fellow students somehow did not fully understand the lectures. This made him think about the understanding of language. The philosopher Moore held a theory that few people could clearly convey the meaning of what they wanted to say. However Richards believed that it was possible to communicate in total what one intended or meant.

After graduating with a bachelor degree in 1915, Richards was once again ill with tuberculosis for a short time. After recovering from it, he continued his further education with the intention of becoming psychoanalyst. He met C. K. Ogden again in 1918, and together they began outlining *The Meaning of Meaning* which was published in instalments in a quarterly journal.

His career as a teacher began in 1919. In this year, Professor Mansfield Forbes of Clare College invited I. A. Richards to deliver lectures on the contemporary novel and the theory of criticism. In 1922, he was appointed as a lecturer in English and Moral Sciences at Magdalene College, four years later, he was promoted.

In 1922, Richards and Ogden published the book *The Foundation of Aesthetics*. When Richards and Ogden were writing the book *The Meaning of Meaning*, they felt if descriptive phrases were substituted by specific words. A vocabulary of one thousand words would be sufficient for effective communication. This led to the publication of *Basic English*, which was also used by Richards for teaching English in China.

The publication of *Basic English*, led to the Harvard University inviting Richards to direct The Commission of English Language studies in 1939. He was entrusted with the task of producing text books in Basic English and also to train teachers in the method of basic English. Richards began writing poetry in 1953 at the age of 60. He wrote several volumes before his death on September 7, 1979.

## 1.11.3. I. A. RICHARDS AS CRITIC

I. A. Richards may be considered as one of the founders of modern literary criticism. He exerted an immense influence on the study of literature. He made a significant contribution to the school of criticism known as *New Criticism*.

I. A. Richards' career as a critic began with *The Meaning of Meaning* (co authored with C. K. Ogden in 1923) and *Principles of Literary Criticism* in 1924. These were followed by *Science and Poetry* (1926) and *Practical Criticism* (1929). I. A. Richards may be considered at the pioneer of the age of analysis in literary theory and practice. He was against following critical principles blindly. He was also against using biography in literary evaluation, and also against giving undue value to a poet for historical reasons (what Matthew Arnold terms as historical fallacy) I. A. Richards invented a method for analysing language, particularly, literary language. The method he employed was to break down linguistic structure into smaller units, which could then be examined with regard to one another and to the context of the total work. Through his influence on William Empson and the American New Critics, his method became the standard for literary analysis in English-speaking class rooms.

The main theme of *The Meaning of Meaning* is the importance of context. Richards felt, (influenced by behaviourist psychologists Watson an Pavlov) that words stimulate the reader. He felt that there are to types of stimulus. One is the external which acts at the moment of stimulation or reading, the other is a mental one which is the result of past memory. Again according to Richards words carry out jobs, duties, functions according to their *context*. One of the functions is referential namely pointing to objective reality; the second is emotive, that is conveying a feeling, the third is expression of a sense of relation to an audience (the reader); the fourth is the attitude of the speaker towards the object under discussion, and finally the fifth is the overall intention of the utterance. Later on in a more elaborate theory, Richards had enumerated eight linguistic functions that were more or less simultaneously present within this stream or any given speech. However broadly speaking, Richards refers to two broad uses of language. The first is *referential*, examples of which are scientific or expository prose where the language is functional whose purpose is specialization and mainly used by the technological society. The second is *emotive* language which conveys or stimulates feeling and attitude.

*Science and Poetry* was a collection of his ideas. Even after the catastrophic World War, Richards was an optimist by nature and put great faith in science and a science of criticism. His intention was to extend the range of criticism by bringing in the principles or disciplines of contemporary science, especially psychology. Richards set great value on what he called '*Poetry of Inclusion*'. By this he was referring to the kind of poetry where unity is achieved by employing broadest opposition within its formal boundaries. The other kind of poetry which Richards valued less was the 'poetry of exclusion'. Here the poet eliminated or avoided heterogeneous elements in order to, easily achieve wholeness.

Richards considers irony as an important element in poetry because it can widen the scope of a poem; it consists in the bringing in the of the opposite, the complementary impulses'. Eliot's *Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* were praised by Richards for their use of the principle of irony, and this led to the championing of modernism and its acceptance in academic circles.

His book on practical criticism is often referred to as one of the first to employ *Reader – Response Theory and Criticism*. In this book Richards pointed out that art allows for variant readings. At the same time the work guards itself from misleading by contextual checks. A poem for Richards was a combination of many meanings and linguistic functions. He categorized them under the headings of *sense, feeling, tone* and *intention*. Richards felt that great writers should be able to modify the structure of the mind. In Richard's theory the object of belief that the writer projects is not of the greatest importance as it may be disproved or superseded. The value of the work is based upon the feeling and attitudes associated with the belief. In other words, Richards lays great value on the sincerity which contributes to the coherence and stability of a work. Here, Richards is echoing Matthew Arnold who also believed in the supremacy of a classic.

The *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) is one of the Richards' most significant work. In this book, he set forth his highly original theory of metaphor. Traditionally the metaphor was considered as having two parts of unequal value. One was the image which was ornamental while the other was the idea which contained the meaning. Richards in contrast gave equal importance to the two halves. For him, the metaphor is a double unit. The meaning is generated by the interaction of two elements which he termed as *Tenor* and *Vehicle*. The tenor is the underlying idea of the principal subject, vehicles is the figure. The two elements tenor and vehicle share something in common which Richards termed as the *ground*. Richards pointed out that tenor and vehicle have their own context, though not all parts are active in the exchange that created an effective metaphor (more often, it is what is *not* shared in common that determines the effectiveness of the metaphor). A commonly sighted definition of metaphor by Richards is 'a transaction between contexts'.

Having spent many years on the higher level of education, Richards' now turned his attention to developing approaches to reading at the lower or beginning levels. He brought out the book *Basic English and its Uses* (1943), which gave a list of 850 key words and rules of grammar. He also pioneered with Christina N Gibson the use of media for both learning how to read and second language instruction.

I. A. Richards is one of the outstanding figures in the area of literary criticism. He is considered as one of the pioneers of new criticism, having contributed significantly in his own way. He combined the modern scientific advancement, especially in psychology with theories of literary criticism. Richards was considered as one of the foremost teachers of literature. Though Richards was deeply concerned with the linguistic and contextual aspects of language and literature, he never lost sight of the basic function of literature mainly that of humanizing. The following is an extract from Helen Vender's article. 'I. A. Richards at Harvard' and the extract speaks for itself.

Most teachers of literature lack Richard's tenacious memory, and could not hope to range as he did, without books, without notes, from the Greeks to the moderns. But there is a great deal to be said for straying in any class, beyond the confines of the author of the day, to make students feel how

wholly a mind that admires Keats will also admire the Symposium, or the psalms, or Spenser. It was a world, not a text to which Richards introduced his students.

If placing a single word or image in juxtaposition with its appearance elsewhere was Richards' first way of conveying its 'meaning', he did not evade pursuing 'meaning' to more ample reaches. He never failed in delicacy in this most difficult of tasks. I think it was for this delicacy that I revered him. We have all, in teaching, heard our own failures in tone exaggerations innocently enough meant, perhaps, in an effort to persuade young readers or enliven a dull day – indicating a lapse in tryst that the poem can do its own work. Richards was never less than exquisite, at the same time never less than firm. He never vulgarized, he never condescended, he was never reductive, he never patronized his author, he never underestimated his students. How he gained this heroic equipoise I cannot imagine. Why he thought well enough of us – if he thought of us at all, his mind so wholly on the poets – to address us as if we understood the mysteries of life and death, is to me a mystery. Perhaps he learned his manner from Socrates. Or Confucius. I will give only one example of a serious remark (again, from the class on the Um, which I recall as the single best class he gave, and from which I draw still when I approach Keats).

Richards is speaking of the way Keats passes, in illustrating his um, from scenes of love and music to the scene of sacrifice.

*It is by this sacrifice that the other side of the Um as we tum to it becomes so poignantly fulfilling. We need though to remind ourselves of how central to men's hopes and fears his ritual sacrifice of his best has been.*

I may be risky to speak to twenty year olds in such Orphic terms. But for me, Richards' classes were classes in perception as well as art. There was a great deal I did not, in my youth, ignorance and innocence understand, but I understood that Richards knew, and the poets knew, things about sacrifice, renunciation, hopes, and fears that I did not yet know, but could hope to know. "In brief" as Richards put it, "the way of Love and the way of Knowledge meet".

## 1.11.4. THE FOUR KINDS OF MEANING: COMMENTARY

*The Four Kinds of Meaning* is taken from I. A. Richards' book *Practical Criticism*. In *Practical Criticism* Richards distinguishes between two uses of language. Namely the referential and emotive. Richards obviously means that language may serve two functions. First the referential which means that it is direct and refers to something. The second aspect is that it could be emotive, this is suggest different kinds of meaning or arouse different emotions in the reader. Richards further goes on to analyse different elements that go into the structure of any communication.

Richards begins with the question as to what is the meaning of any work that we are reading or listening to. He distinguishes between active communicators as in speech or writing or passive communicators as in readers or listeners. Whichever category we belong to when study literature, we are looking for the meaning of the work. Yet the work may contain several kinds of meaning as he says: "*The all – important fact for the study of lite – rature– or any other mode of communication is that there are several kinds of meaning*".

Language therefore has many functions to perform and it is important for the reader to be able to identify these functions and also to apportion the role they play. Richards distinguishes four types of function, or four kinds of meaning that languages has. The four elements are ***sense***, ***feeling***, ***tone*** and ***intention***. Richards defines them, as follows:

i) ***Sense***: We speak to say something, and when we listen we expect something to be said. We use words to direct our hearers attention upon some state of affairs, to present to them some items for consideration and to excite in them some thoughts about these items.

ii) ***Feeling***: But we also, as a rule, have some feelings about these items, about the state of affairs, we are referring to. We have an attitude towards it, some special direction, bias or accentuation of interest towards it, some personal flavour or colouring of feeling, and we use language to express these feelings, this nuance of interest. Equally, when we listen we pick it up, rightly or wrongly; it seems inextricably part of what we receive; and this whether the speaker be conscious himself of his feelings towards what he is talking about or not. I am, of course here describing the normal situation, my reader will be able without difficulty to think of exceptional case. (mathematics for example) where no feeling enters.

iii) ***Tone***: Furthermore, the speaker has ordinarily an attitude to his listener. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic, or deliberate recognition of his relation to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. Again the exceptional case of dissimilation or instances in which the speaker unwillingly reveals an attitude he is not consciously desirous of expressing, will come to mind.

iv) ***Intention***: finally, apart from what he says (sense,) his attitude to what he is talking about (feeling) and his attitude to this listener (tone) there is the speaker's intention, his aim, conscious or unconscious, the effect he is endeavouring to promote.

For Richards the first element *sense* is the statement of fact that we make. We draw our hearers attention to something that we want to present it of course follows that the hearer will react to the fact and some thoughts would arise in his mind.

For example when we say, "This is a cat" the hearer would realize the fact that we are stating, namely, *cat*. At the same time different thoughts would arise in the minds of different readers. One would imagine just a plain and simple quadruped, another may think of a fluffy *Cheshire cat*. The second aspect is *feeling*, the speaker has some personal feeling or a feeling that he intends when he communicates to the reader or listener. This feeling would modify the fact or sense according to the speaker's or writer's intention. This feeling is picked up by the listener and the accuracy depends on the speaker or writers intention. For example, when a statement like "This is a good cat" is made, the listener or speaker would modify his image of the cat has one that is domesticated or trained or one that moves quietly around the house without causing any disturbances. Richards points our that there can be certain situations were there is no feeling involved at all.

For example a mathematical equation where there is only sense.

Richards points out that the speaker usually has a relationship with his listener. In terms of communication, the language that the writer or speaker uses reflects this attitude or tone towards those he is addressing. The tone would vary according to the relationship, for example friendly, respectful, etc. Again in a sentence like "*Talking of cats, I would like to say...*" the tone adopted is obviously one of discussion where the speaker or writer is trying to inform the reader or listener about certain facts regarding cats. The tone is obviously one of condescension. Again different tones may be seen in conversation or communication between a teacher and a student, friends, etc. Finally the speaker or writer has a particular aim in his writing or speech. He uses sense feeling, tone in different combinations, to promote his aim. He may even sometimes totally sacrifice one of the elements to achieve his intention.

For example, a politician may completely falsify facts (sense) to achieve his purpose, in a political speech. The intention of the speaker or writer is important because it controls the total structure of at given speech, or writing. The use of a proper combinations of these four elements leads to effective communication on the part of the speaker or writer and the reader or listener would be able to grasp the right meaning, thus avoiding misunderstanding or misconception.

Richards goes on to give some examples of the ways in which the four elements he has mentioned namely, *sense, feeling, tone* and *intention* combine. The first example, he gives is a purely scientific treatise. Here he points out that the *sense* of what the writer has to say is more important. The writer will take care to see that his *feelings* do not interfere with the argument that he is presenting. His *tone* will be one that indicates respect for his readers. This is because he is seeking the reader's approval. The *intention* is to convey in the clearest terms possible, the *sense* of what he is saying. The second example that Richards takes up is the popular science article. In this case the article or essay is written for the layman or the common reader. In an article like this the element of *sense* may be to some extent modified in order that the common man will be able to follow. There is a simplification of the *sense*. The writer will also employ a more lively and interesting style to maintain the readers interest. Therefore the writer of a popular scientific article, by necessity of has to employ some *feeling*. The *tone* of the popular scientific essay would be less serious than that of a purely scientific article. The *intention* of the writer is to create interest in science in the minds of the reader. The third example that Richards gives is political speeches. In political speeches the most important is 'establishment of favourable relations with the audience'. In order to achieve this favourable relationship the speaker would adopt a suitable *tone*. The role of *sense* however is the least important in a political speech. The fact (sense) may often be totally sacrificed or distorted to suit the speakers *intention*. The *intention* namely that of making a favourable impression and swaying the audience in favour of his political manifesto is of prime importance. *Feeling* and *tone* are adjusted to achieve the intention, whereas *sense or the statement of fact* is of least importance.

Richards points out that in poetry mainly *feelings* and sometimes *tone* combine to produce the meaning. The *sense* in the poem is very often modified by the *feeling* and *tone*. This is especially so when we consider statements in poetry as representing literal truth. Especially in the use of metaphor the statements when taken literally seem to be silly or ridiculous. As for example, in a statement like 'My soul is a ship in full sail'. Again when the poet makes certain observations or generalization which are a result of his intention, to examine them for sense, would lead to all sorts of complications.

Richards gives the example of the famous statement of Keats, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty...' which if examined for its *sense* would lead to endless debate. The only way of appreciating such a statement is through intuition.

## Richards finally observes:

A poet may distort his statements, he may make statements which have logically nothing to do with the subject under treatment, he may by metaphor and otherwise, present objects of thought which are logically quite irrelevant; he may perpetrate logical nonsense, be as trivial or as silly, logically, as it is possible to be; all in the interests of the other functions of his language – to express feeling or adjust tone or further his other intentions. If his success in these other aims justify him, no reader (of the kind at least to take his meaning as it should be taken) can validly say anything against him.

'*The Four Kinds of Meaning*' taken from Richards' book *Practical Criticism* analyses the four elements that go into written and oral communication. He further shows how these elements combine in different forms in different kinds of oral and written communications, namely a scientific treatise, a popular scientific article, a political speech and a peace of creative literature (poetry).

## 1.11.5. I. A. RICHARDS: SELECT CRITICISM

Richards' attacks on vagueness, sentimentality and laziness in poets and readers, his praise of irony ('a characteristic of poetry of the highest order'), ambiguity, complexity and allusiveness, did much to create the climate which accepted Modernism and greatly influenced Empson (his student from 1928 to 1929) and Leavis; but perhaps his greatest contribution lay in his emphasis on the importance of close to actual study and the danger of random generalisation. His methods have now become standard classroom procedure in many schools and universities, Richards's views on scientific and emotive languages, on the nature of the status statements (or pseudo statements) in poetry have been less widely accepted.

– *The Oxford companion to English Literature*
ed. Margaret Drabble

His (I. A. Richards) approach to poetry was philosophic, linguistic and psychological. One of his important insights was that we are inevitably influenced by some kind of poetry, even if it is only that of bad films and magazine covers, or advertisements. In *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Science and Poetry* (1926) he discusses what kind of truth is the subject matter of poetry, the place of poetry in the context of the rest of life, and what is the nature of critical judgements of poetry.

- *Prentice hall Guide to English Literature*
ed. Marion Wynne – Davies

Most teachers of literature lack Richard's tenacious memory, and could not hope to range as he did, without books, without notes, from the Greeks to the moderns. But there is a great deal to be said for straying in any class, beyond the confines of the author of the day, to make students feel how wholly a mind that admires Keats will also admire the Symposium, or the psalms, or Spenser. It was a world, not a text to which Richards introduced his students.

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It is important to distinguish Richards' manner of enunciating moral remarks, such as the one on sacrifice, from comparable remarks made in a religious vein. Richard's vein was unalterably polemic, not hortatory. He was in every case defending his poet against misinterpretation. "The prose of discussion", Richards remarked in an early essay – in a remark which perfectly expresses his own lively critical practice – 'is grounded, if not in an instinct, at least upon a tradition of combativeness".

*'I. A. Richards at Harvard'* by Helen Vendler

## Richards on Rhetoric

Richards rejected the views of Aristotle and other traditional rhetorical theorists. He thought that they were just a collection of rules for writing and speaking that were largely irrelevant for the twentieth century. He wrote in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* that the study of rhetoric should be 'a philosophic inquiry into how words work in discourse'. He also believed that the traditional view had narrowed rhetoric down to a basic theme of persuasion and that by doing so had taken the emphasis off the er problem of how language works.

Richards believed that rhetoric should be viewed as 'a philosophic discipline aiming at mastery of the fundamental laws of the use of language'. He defined it as "the art by which discourse is adapted to its end". He believed that the primary purpose of the study of rhetoric was to find ways not

to be misunderstood. Richards had three requirements that had to be met if his idea of rhetoric was to provide an explanation for how discourse works; Scholars must question and evaluate the assumptions of rhetoric and not simply assume that they are true. The study of rhetoric should begin with words themselves. And rhetoric must be seen as being central to knowledge itself.

## Richards on Meaning

Richards was concerned with how words come to mean what they do. He believed that meaning begins with perception. To connect meaning and perception, Richards uses the idea of context, "a cluster of events that occur together". "In every perception, context is formed composed of the sensations being experienced". When a part of the context is re-experienced, it is possible that the entire context will be remembered. When we hear a word, we 'see' what it is in our mind. Likewise, when we see something, we 'hear' that word in our mind.

## Richards on Metaphors

Richards had many ideas for preventing misunderstanding. Most notable is the use of metaphors. In *The Meaning of Meaning* Richards and Ogden viewed metaphors as the use of one reference to a group of things that are related in a particular way in order to discover a similar relation in another group. In Richards' view then, we think metaphorically. Accordingly metaphors may be used to provide listeners with the insight necessary to elicit the proper reference to a particular idea.

- The Life and Times of I. A. Richards

The main theme of *The Meaning of Meaning*, called the best-known book ever written on semantics, is the significance of context. Richards and Ogden crossed pragmatism and linguistic theory to analyze the role of language in determining thought and to define words and things. As for the determination of thought, Richards's reliance on Watson and Pavlov, both behaviorists, led to a form of nominalism. He treats a stimulus as a sign that links two contexts- an external one, in which the stimulus-sign is found at the moment of stimulation, and a mental one, with which it has been associated in the past. In either case, interpretation of a sign ends in a spatiotemporal particular, an empiricist assumption that Richards does not seriously question. He takes issue with *Ferdinand de Saussure* and *Ludwig Wittgenstein* on the relations between thought, sign, and thing. These disputes prefigure the split between critics who argue the endlessly proliferating textual significations and those who would still link the text to empirical reality.

With regard to defining words and things, *The Meaning of Meaning* considers abstractions, universals, concepts, as so much symbolic machinery. Some could be useful for analysis; the rest are verbiage, or "word magic." In Richards's view, most philosophy, theology, and criticism fell in the latter category. His corrective starts with a "Triangle of Interpretation," which soon became a common item in linguistics textbooks: symbol (e.g., a noun), reference (or thought), and referent. According to his instrumentalist theory, words carry out jobs, duties, functions in *context*. One function is referential, the pointing to objective reality; a second is emotive, the conveyance of feeling; a third, the expression of a sense of relation to an audience; a fourth, the attitude of the speaker toward the object under discussion; a fifth, the overall intention of the utterance. By 1955, in a mature formulation, Richards had enumerated eight linguistic functions that were more or less simultaneously present within the

stream of any given speech act. In addition to the functions, however, Richards sometimes speaks more simply of two broad uses of language: *referential* language, exemplified by the strictest scientific or expository prose (purely rational, functional language, the mark of specialization and technological society), and *emotive* language, which conveys or stimulates feeling and attitude.

Despite his attempts at clarification, critics attacked Richards's division of emotive and referential language on grounds that it divorces reference (knowledge, truth) from poetry. Actually, Richards's emphasis on the emotive function and poetic form in his first books stemmed from his effort to rid criticism of the then excessively message-oriented approach to literature. As the battle was won, more of his attention went to referential factors, though he had never dismissed them and called truth the "decisive notion" in his earliest publication (1919). In any case, a selective reading of Richards on this issue, as on others, is dangerous, since he is given to strong, epigrammatic assertion; local qualification, though normally present, may be extremely subtle and nuanced. Essentially he believes that if the multiple functions of language could be separated by analysis, one could diagnose errors in reading and plot strategies to avoid them. One could check emotive interference in what purported to be objective prose. One might at least get agreement on what was in dispute. Some problems might be found to be merely a matter of words and not things.

In 1926 Richards published *Science and Poetry*, a popular compendium of his ideas. An optimist by nature, he put great faith in science (and a science of criticism) and a guarded belief in progress at a time when the sciences were in deep theoretical crisis and humanity had emerged from a catastrophic war. His hope was to extend the range of criticism by bringing it into contact with disciplines that were impacting on the modern world. But while this and other early books give the impression that scientific concepts can deliver more than they possibly can and that solutions to ancient problems are just around the corner, Richards was neither captured nor controlled by his models. If some, mistakenly, labeled him a behaviorist, he had merely employed behaviorist themes and played off one psychological concept against another: behaviorism was not taken so seriously as to eliminate consciousness and introspection.

- *I. A. Richards* by John Paul Russo

Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) is arguably the first book in English that attempted to develop a comprehensive theory of criticism, a view Richards himself took in describing all previous speculation about literature as a "chaos" consisting of "random apercues" and "brilliant guesses". According to Richards, a theory in criticism must offer both a theory of value and a theory of communication, on the assumption that poems communicate value, grounded on the reconciliation of conflicting "impulses" in the experience of the poet.

In *Science and Poetry* (1926) Richards elaborated his theory as it applied to the modern crisis of values. Following Matthew Arnold, Richards presumed that poetry could be an intellectually respectable substitute for religion in an emerging age of science. As an advocate for such a substitution, Richards urged that poetry should be regarded as presenting, not statements, but rather "pseudo-statements" valued for an "emotive" meaning (58-59) that could change our attitudes without requiring us to believe in what he called the "Magical View" (50 ff.) as found in myth or traditional religion.

For the New Critics, however, Richards's most influential book was *Practical Criticism* (1929). The book reports in detail an experiment in critical reading in which students were presented with the texts of poems without their titles or the names of their authors. Put simply, this experiment represents a severe complication for Richards's theory of poetic communication, which he had assumed in his previous work to be relatively unproblematic and based almost entirely on "emotive" effects. In the experiment, students were given the texts of the poems and asked to write brief commentaries on them. For the most part, the experiment showed that poetry (as typically read or misread) did not reconcile conflicts but induced them, that instead of communicating valuable experience it provoked confusion and incomprehension. The student responses, or "protocols," show a wide, sometimes bewildering range of irrelevant associations, "doctrinal adhesions," and confusions or uncertainties about sense, feeling, tone, and intent. Practical Criticism turned attention to the importance of teaching as it disclosed a problem that had largely escaped critical investigation: how do readers actually read? What do they actually understand, or fail to understand, and why?

- *New Criticism* by Leroy F. Searle

By a theory of value based on psychological humanism which is in turn based on certain psychological theories about how the nervous system functions, Richards finds a means of not only "defending" poetry, but of proving it to be the salvation of civilization. By a theory of perception, of stimuli and responses, of how signs and symbols work, he made semantics a tool of literary analysis and endeavoured to show how poetry operates and how in fact it is able to capture and transmit those states which he considers valuable. A scientific method is used in order to distinguish poetry from science. Poetry was saved for the modern world, ... Though claiming as a high a destiny for poetry as Shelley or Arnold, Richards' tone was always that of the calm scientific investigations. If we wish to discover the true nature and value of poetry, let us discover what really goes on when a poem is produced and a poem is read. The tone of resolute inquiry, the emphasis on a careful analysis and meticulously defined terminology, and the suggestion that the value of a work of art can be discovered by investigation of how it *operates*, have had considerable influence on modern criticism.

*Critical Approaches to Literature* by David Daiches

## 1.11.6. Sample Questions :

1. What are the elements that go into the structure of a language
2. Any communication is a combination of different elements used by the writer or speaker. Illustrate with reference to I. A. Richards's 'Four Kinds of Meaning'.

## 1.11.7. Suggested Reading :


1. *Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature* – Ed. Marion Wynne – Davies
2. *Oxford Companion to English Literature* – Ed. Margaret Drabble
3. *Critical Approaches to Literature* by David Daiches
4. 'I. A. Richards at Harvard' by Helen Vendler
5. 'I. A. Richards' by John Paul Russo
6. 'New Criticism' by Leroy F. Searle


Author: **Dr. M.S. Rama Murthy**

# 12. Irony as a Principle Structure

***Cleanth Brooks***

## Contents:



## 1:12:2 New Criticism

New criticism appeared in 1930s. Its approach is formalistic. Formalism gives importance to the 'form' or 'structure' of a poem or a work of art. The New Critics emerged from Vanderbilt University in South of America. Most of them were teacher-scholar-poets.

The most important New Critics are John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, Donald Davidson and Ivor Winters. Ransom labeled their intrinsic formalistic approach to poetry as New Criticism.

The New Critics were mainly influenced by T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards. They strongly adhered to the idea that a literary work is an organic form. It is independent and autonomous. The external circumstances in creating a work of art are unimportant. The New Critics discredited the historical or moral dimension of a work of art. The author, the period and the school are extraneous to New Criticism.

The New Critics insisted on close, analytical reading of the literary text in isolation. They are interested in a poem's semantic aspect and verbal complexity. They take a keen note of the principles of metaphor, paradox, irony, tension and other internal relations. They emphasized the poem's uniqueness and timelessness.

The principal organ of New Critics was The Southern Review edited from 1935-42 by Brooks and Warren. New Criticism with close analytical methods generated new perceptions in approaching literature and worked hard to bring out the "full performance of the text". New

Criticism became the most important method of teaching literature in American colleges nearly for three decades. Thus we understand that New Criticism played a major role in literary criticism during the twentieth century in the United States. It cannot be denied that it brought forth so great a change that literary criticism has come to occupy almost an equal place with creative literature.

## 1:12:3 Cleanth Brooks

Cleanth Brooks was one of the leading figures of New Criticism in America in the thirties and forties. He focused on the importance of close reading of poetry.

Brooks, born in 1906, was educated at Vanderbilt College and Tulane University in the United States. He was Rhodes scholar at Oxford between 1929-32. He worked as Professor of English at Louisiana State University. Later he worked as Professor of Rhetoric in Yale University. Between 1931-45 he was the editor of The Southern Review. He was a member of American Academy of Arts and Sciences. From 1964-66 he was cultural attaché at the American Embassy in London. His services at various institutions of learning are uncountable. He is a scholar par excellence.

Brooks's theory of poetry is largely based on the vital critical concepts of T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, William Empson and S.T. Coleridge.

Brooks's important critical works are Understanding Poetry (1938), Understanding Fiction (1943), Understanding Drama (1945), The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (1947); Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939) and Literary Criticism : A Short History (1957).

Brooks in collaboration with Warren published Understanding Poetry. It is considered as a standard text on modern poetics and pedagogy. Modern literary criticism cannot be complete without it. Countless number of students and scholars understood the importance of close analysis of individual poems. This offers an interesting approach to reading literature. Many contemporary critics emulated the model of interpretation put forward by Brooks and Warren.

Understanding Poetry revolutionized the classroom learning of poetry in American Universities. It stimulated fresh responses to well-known texts. This was the signal for change in literary criticism that stabilized New Criticism.

Along with Understanding Poetry, Understanding Fiction (1943) by Brooks and Warren and Understanding Drama (1945) by Brooks proved that the method of close reading works also in the larger discourses. These works have continuing influence on literary criticism even to day. They have an impact on the art of teaching literature.

Further Brooks's Well-Wrought Urn (1947) is a classic example of Practical Criticism wherein he made detailed studies of well-known poems. The work exerted good deal of influence during the 1940s and 50. The work's merit is Brooks's convincing presentation of his seminal views on poetry.

Literary Criticism : A Short History is collaborative work with Wimsatt. Brooks's contribution is a major achievement, though he wrote only five of the thirty two chapters. The work traces the development of varied critical theories from the ancients to moderns.

Brooks is the quintessential New Critic. He fervently defended New Criticism in his essay "In search of New Criticism," His works will have a permanent place in the rich library of New Criticism.

## 1:12:4 Brooks's Theory of Poetry

Brooks's Theory of poetry evolved out of his analytical and thorough understanding of poetry. In this process he was influenced by eminent critics like Eliot, Richards, Ransom and Warren. He developed a number of critical devices to arrive at practical interpretation of poetry.

Brooks emphasizes on close reading of the text, paying attention to each component part. Further, she advocates the reader to establish the complex inter-relationships of these component parts, in order to understand the poem only as a poem.

From this kind of study, we receive the poem as "Organic Unity'. Each element coheres with others and brings out the essential in the poem. While speaking of Organic Unity he is most nearly Coleridgean. Brooks believes that use of metaphor, irony, paradox and tension are important in the evolution of organic unity. Organic unity interweaves overall structure and verbal meanings of a poem. Thus a successful poem is the sole linguistic vehicle which makes harmonious use of the resources of poetic language.

Brooks's approach to poetry gives utmost importance to irony. For him, irony is the resolution of opposites which determines poetic structure. The presence of irony in a poem indicates the maturity and competence of poetic creation. Use of irony brings forth unified poetic vision. Poetic vision is all powerful in harmonizing the reader's knowledge of poetry, self and the world.

Brooks's poetic theory revolves round the context of the poem. Context determines the structure and meaning of a poem. Skilful disposition of the context by means of metaphor, irony, paradox and tension makes the poem vibrantly meaningful. Brooks calls it "the pressure of the context". In poetry any statement grows from the pressure of the context. Of all the poetic principles irony acknowledges the total pressure of the context. Brooks's contextualist poetics considers the poem a unique entity which cannot be judged by values lying outside it.

Nothing extraneous to poetry is relevant to the study of poetry. Hence in Brooks's theory historical, biographical or generic details are unimportant. Instead of relying on such information, the reader should think for himself in order to respond relevantly to the poem. "The poem has to be read as a poem – that is, what it "says".

In order to read the poem as poem, the reader cannot reduce the logical structure of the poem to mere summary. Brooks calls it "heresy of paraphrase" and thus affirms the indissolubility of form and context in a poem. Paraphrase can never substitute the poem itself.

Brooks draws his best examples for analysis from the Elizbethans and the Metaphysicals.

Brooks says poetry is poetry. It cannot cure any ills. It has no therapeutic value. But it helps us to "order our attitudes to one another and to the world".

Brooks in his essay "The Formalistic Critic" (1951) defines the true scope of poetry. He reiterates that Literary Criticism is a description and evaluation of its object. It concerns itself with the work itself.

Understanding what a poem means is the result of several factors working together – the poetic form, the literary tradition of which it is a willing part, the methods characteristic of poetry, and the willingness of the reader to accept the responsibility for reading the poem "as poetry".

Brooks emphasizes the need for careful, close examination of the poem and states that both the writing of the poem and the understanding of it come under a process of exploration.

## 1:12:5 Introduction to "Irony as a Principle of Structure"

T.S. Eliot called irony as "internal equilibrium". Influenced by Eliot the New Critics began to use the term Irony itself as a structural principle. Brooks was not only influenced by Eliot's "internal equilibrium" but also I.A. Richards's "stability of the context." Brooks's concept of irony as a principle of structure evolved both from Eliot and Richards.

"Irony as a Principle of Structure" was first published in Literary Opinion in America (1951) edited by M.D.Zabel. It was meant to be a fitting reply to R.S. Crane's attack on Brooks in his famous essay "The Critical Monism of Cleanth Brooks" published in Critics and Criticism (1951).

The analogy between a poem and an object is as old as Horace's literary criticism. Eliot, Richards, Wellek and Warren drew on similar analogies. Brooks's The Well-Wrought Urn, Wimsatts The Verbal Icon are examples of this analogy from active critical thinking and writing in Twentieth century English speaking world.

## Summary of "Irony as a Principle of Structure"

Brooks begins the essay by mentioning a special quality of modern poetic technique. Modern poetry rediscovered the importance of metaphor. It is totally preoccupied in using metaphor to yield the most relevant meaning from a poem. Metaphor associates things or actions without asserting a comparison.

Speaking of the particular and the Universal, Brooks says that the poet should firstly establish the details of the particular in order to move on to the general or universal meaning. That is, the meaning of the poem should grow from the particulars. It is the particular that determines the universal. Brooks gives the example of a kite. The tail is the particular. The frame of paper is the universal. It is the tail that makes the kite fly. It is the particular that makes the universal meaningful in a poem. That is, the poet cannot attain universality without passing through the particular.

But here is a problem. The poet arranges his poem in concrete particulars while aspiring to be universal. More often than not the particular denies the universal. The poet may find himself left with the load of particulars. Like the tail of the kite, the particulars, functioning in opposite direction facilitate the rise of the universal.

The poet never says anything directly in a poem. He says it through his metaphors. He takes the risk of revealing the meaning indirectly. Sometimes in this process of indirection, the meaning may not reach the reader or the reader may misinterpret. Yet the poet prefers communication through metaphors. This is because he feels direct statement may destroy the essential value of poetry.

From this we understand metaphor is a principle of indirection. It weaves together images and statements. Togetherness makes the various components of the poem establish an organic relationship with one another. Mere putting together of poetic images will not make a poem. The elements of the poem in relating to each other give rise to organic unity. Organic unity is the ultimate goal of any poem. Brooks to highlight the importance of organic unity compare the mere arrangement of flowers in a bouquet with a flowering plant.

The poem is like a little drama. All the necessary elements of drama together bring the effect. In a poem nothing that is unnecessary is included. The vital components of the poem unify to bring the effect.

We understand that in a good poem, the parts are related to each other organically, and are also related to the theme. This well-knitted relationship leads to the importance of context. The particular context of the poem gives poetic quality to the parts of the poem. We often quote phrases or sentences out of context. Such statements may have abstract value. But in all good poetry the context modifies or gives meaning. Hence context of the poem is very important.

The context provides significance to a particular word or image or statement. In the given context images become symbols, and statements become dramatic utterances. Further each part of the poem gets modified or altered by the pressure of the context.

The context influences the statement. Brooks calls this obvious influence of the context on the poem as "ironical". The same statement may mean just the opposite in a different context. The context completely reverses the meaning. A skilful disposition of context results in the tone of irony. Brooks gives the example of Gray's Elegy. There are several questions in Gray's Elegy. But the manner in which the questions are fixed in the context, tells that these are obviously rhetorical questions.

More poetry is 'ironical' than the reader is likely to think. This is because irony is obvious in its conventional forms like tragic irony, self-irony, playful, amusing, mocking or gentle irony. But sometimes irony can be in unrecognized forms too. Irony stretches from drama to lyric.

Those statements which are devoid of ironical potential are statements which have no qualifying context. Brooks gives the example of statements in mathematics. These are pure denotations free from any context.

Connotations are important in poetry. That is, any statement made in the poem bears the pressure of the context. The context modifies the meaning of the poem. Even philosophical statements made in a poem are bound to be under the pressure of the context. Their relevance, acceptability, rhetorical force and meaning cannot be separated from the context in which they are fixed.

The term 'irony' is very important in modern criticism. In Brooks's poetics irony is central. Brooks does not try to justify the tem irony, but examines why modern criticism is very much concerned with the term irony. He concludes that 'irony' is the only term available to critics to point out an important aspect of poetry.

In this context Brooks examines Mathew Arnold's Dover Beach. Any statement of the speaker in the poem appears true for some readers and false or questionable for some others. If we try to prove the statement either as true or false, we find ourselves confused. And in the ensuing confusion we move away from the real problems of the poem. Ultimately we fail to justify the meaning of the poem. In order to avoid any confusion in interpreting the statement, we should examine the poem in terms of the context. We should study whether the statement grows properly out of a context; whether the statement acknowledges the pressure of a context. If our study proves this essential relationship between the statement and the context, certainly the statement is "ironical". Here Brooks applies T.S. Eliot's test.

From this argument Brooks moves to I.A. Richards's 'poetry of synthesis'. In 'poetry of synthesis' there is extraordinary heterogeneity of elements. It is poetry of inclusion. It does not omit if something is hostile to it. It fuses the irrelevant and disagreeing elements into a harmonious balance. It not only acknowledges the pressure of the context, but also the stability of the context. Stability of the context means the opposing, internal pressures balance themselves and mutually support each other. Brooks compares the stability of the context with that of the stability of an arch constructed with stones. Push and counter-push of the structure become the means of stability. Likewise the opposing elements in a poem work to stabilize the context. To support his hypothesis Brooks says that he finds obvious irony in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Gray's Elegy.

Further Brooks takes a simple lyric to examine whether it is also 'ironical,' because his argument is that all poetry is ironical. He considers one of Shakespeare's songs for ironical potential.

In Shakespeare's song cited by Brooks Silvia is an angel living on the dull earth. She is virtuous, wise and holy. Men in love bring her garlands. However the theological implications bring the song close to irony. The song is not totally theological. There are untheological elements disturbing Christian interpretation. Reference to Cupid and Silvia's love makes it non-Christian for Cupid is little pagan God.

The song contains a mixture of pagan myth and Christian theology. Certainly it is not due to Shakespeare's confusion. The song brings out the divinity of Silvia which men wish in their lady loves. The song moves in lyrical grace. Yet the complexity of tone is all that matters. It makes the song ironical. Brooks comments that 'irony' in Shakespeare is vital and not at all uncommon. Shakespeare is like the Metaphysicals in employing ironic complexity.

Brooks, to prove his point that irony prevails in all good poetry, takes up the study of one of Wordsworth's Lucy poems. In the poem Wordsworth metaphorically suggests that Lucy is like a violet and also is like a star. The violet is unnoticed, because Lucy lived and died without being noticed by the world. The star in its solitary magnificance is shining in the sky. It is very much noticeable. Brooks says that Wordsworth referring to Lucy as the violet and the star in the same stanza has a poetic purpose. The violet and the star balance each other. By bringing out such balance they define the situation. Lucy has been unnoticed by the world but fondly loved and remembered by the poet. The contrast is sufficient to develop into irony. But Wordsworth stops here. He is contented with his simple method of juxtaposition, and leaves it there. That should not deter us from recognizing the ironic potential of the poem.

Brooks gives yet another example to show that all of Wordsworth's successful lyrics possess ironical potential which has not been developed. "A Slumber did My Spirit Seal' is a poem where the lover speaks after the death of his lady love. Here is the context wherein the lover declares that she has no human fears. When the reader examines the statement he finds irony embedded in the context. He has no human fears for he is also immortal like her. Slumber sealed his spirit and also hers. The lover is alive and the lady is dead. Yet both the spirits are sealed by sleep.

The dead body of the lady is without motion. But for the lover it is in violent motion along with the rotation of the earth. It is an inert thing in violent motion. Here is a powerful image. She is one with rocks and stones, and eternal time. She could not feel the touch of earthly years because she is mortal and divine at the same time. Every component in the poem falls into a pattern contributing to the total unity of the poem. Here is potential irony, which of course has not been developed by Wordsworth.

Brooks says that his intention is not to cal Wordsworth lyrics 'ironical'. But to point out that like in Donne's poems, in Wordsworth's poems too there is relation between part and part. They possess organic unity, which means each part modifies and is modified by the whole.

Wordsworth's poems are simple and spontaneous. There are critical catchwords of nineteenth century. 'Simple' and 'Spontaenous' mean the poem came to the poet easily. Even 'ironical' and 'complex' poems might come to the poet easily. While focusing on words 'simple' 'spontaenous' 'complex' 'ironical' Brooks speaks of intrusion of the theory of composition in understanding a poem. Theory of composition deals with how a poem is written. The same theory is allowed to dictate to us how the poem is to be read. Brooks is sarcastic about the theory of composition intruding to decide how to read and understand a poem. Brooks emphasizes the irrelevance.

So far Brooks argued that irony is the acknowledgement of the pressure of the context. Irony is present in poetry of every period. It is present even in simple lyrical poetry.

Now, Brooks turns his attention to irony in modern poetry. In modern poetry irony is strikingly revealed. Modern poetry uses irony as a special device or characteristic strategy.

The prime importance of irony in modern poetry is due to various reasons:

1. In modern poetry occurred a breakdown of common symbolism
2. There is general skepticism regarding the universals
3. Language itself became corrupt by advertisements, mass-produced arts, films and badly written fiction

The task of the modern poet is to restore acceptability to language. He should make it a vehicle to communicate meaning with precision and force. Of course the task of modify in and preserving language is a continuous and unending process. At this juncture of creativity in the medium of language, it has become a special burden of the modern poet. In this age of commercial art, use of irony as a technique is very much challenging.

However, Brooks affirms that the modern poet has succeeded in using his ironic techniques purposefully. He could bring to poetry clarity and enthusiasm. In this context he gives the example of Randall Jarrell's (1914-65) "Eighth Air Force". The first trait of this poem is, it does not allow any part that is not needed. Secondly it gives respect to human values, even though the context of the poem is war. The poet offers clever arguments and insincere apolologies. He gives the image of Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate was the magistrate of Judaea who presided at the trial of Jesus Christ. He was the one who had given up Jesus to satisfy the avengeful mob. A little earlier he was a joker who posed the unanswerable question 'what is truth?' Through the poem Jarrell questions the integrity of Man himself. Is man a wolf or Saviour of humanity? The question lingers on in our minds after reading the poem. What are the hopes of a modern poet for man and his destiny. The modern poet is under more pressure than was Pontius Pilate. This is because he cannot convince himself of any man's innocence, himself being guilty. The hands of all men are bloody. Men are basically murderers.

There are several layers of meaning in the poem "Eighth Air Force". Each layer of meaning contributes to the total meaning of the poem. Here the poem is truly "ironical". Irony emerges from the total dramatic situation.

For Brooks, the function of irony in a poem is all important. Jarrell's ironical approach makes his poem acceptable. It does not encourage our personal beliefs. The poem dramatizes the total situation accurately and honestly. It encourages our participation in the poetic experience. It gives us some important insight into life. Benefiting from such insight and experience, we become better citizens of the world.

Brooks draws from Jarrell's poem something which leads us beyond our beliefs. It takes us to the centrality of life. Brooks says that all good poetry does just this-that is to lead us into life in its essential purity. In Jarrell's poem we moved from a particular dramatic situation to a universal understanding. The particular theme opposes the universal. The tension created by opposing themes plays its role. Thus the ultimate irony is magnificantly achieved. The load of the kite is opposed by the tail of the kite. Together the tension created makes it possible for the kite to fly in the sky. The same is true of a poem. Irony in a poem acknowledges the tension set up in the context between disparate elements and compels them into unity. Hence Brooks says irony is a principle of structure.

## 1:12:6 To Sum Up

To Sum Up, the cardinal critical views of "Irony as a Principe of Structure" are :

1. the functional value of metaphor in poetry.
2. the validity of poetic truth
3. the importance of context in poetry
4. Irony as structural principle that organizes the poem
5. the method of indirection
6. and finally the conception of the poem as an organism

## 1:12:7 Sample Questions

1. Examine modern poetic technique as the rediscovery of metaphor.
2. What is organic unity in poetry?
3. What do you understand by "the pressure of the context" with regards to Brooks's theory of Poetry.
4. Bring out the importance of the term "irony" in modern criticism.
5. How do you account for Brooks's view "Irony as a principle of structure?"
6. What is the task of the modern poet in contemporary poetry"

## 1:12:8 Suggested Reading

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**Dr. Y. Somalatha**

# 13. The Intentional Fallacy

**Wimsatt and Beardsley**

## Contents:



### 1.13.1 Introduction

One of the most controversial issues of literary criticism from the earliest times has been the question of author's intention and its relevance to the process of critical interpretation and evaluation of works of art. Different periods have entertained different critical conceptions and conventions regarding author's intention. New Criticism of the twentieth century being formalistic in approach regards literature as a verbal artifact. It is the poem, not the poet, which is their main concern. Wimsatt and Beardsley's The Verbal Icon provided theoretical framework for New Criticism.

W.K. Wimsatt (Jr.) was born in Washington D.C. on 27 November, 1907. He was Professor of English at Yale University for several years. He is considered the most intelligent, and subtlest of the American New Critics of poetry. Wimsatt's important books include The Prose Style of Dr. Johnson; Philosphic Words; Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism (1965). He collaborated with Monroe C. Beardsely in writing. The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (1954). Further, he collaborated with Cleanth Brooks in writing Literary Criticism: A Short History (1965).

Monroe C. Beardsley was educated at Yale University and later became Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics. His important works are Aesthetics: Problems in Philosophy of Criticism (1958); Practical Logic; An introduction of Philosophical Thinking; Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present (1966). He collaborated with Wimsatt in writing The Verbal Icon. Wimsatt and Beardsley's book The Verbal Icon sums up the spirit and critical atmosphere of the later half of the twentieth century.

Wimsatt and Beardsley are best known for their 1946 essays. "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy." These two are very influential essays. "The Intentional Fallacy" first appeared in The Sewanee Review, LIV, Summer 1946, and was included in a revised form in The Verbal Icon.

"The Intentional Fallacy" became a Holy Writ for the New Critics. Cleanth Brooks supports the stand of Wimsatt and Beardsley in the essay. To quote him: "I am, by the way, in entire sympathy with the essay "The Intentional Fallacy." We had best not try to telescope the separate problems of the psychology of composition and that of objective evaluation. However one should know "The Intentional Fallacy" never commanded universal support either among critics or literary theorists.

According to Wimsatt and Beardsley interpreting a poem with reference to author's intention is a wrong approach. Critical Judgement based on examination of the author's intention cannot be objective. It involves a fallacy in judgement. They named this kind of fallacy as 'the intentional fallacy.'

Wimsatt and Beardsley define "intention" as design or plan or purpose in the auhtor's mind. They argue that although the designing intellect might be the cause of a poem it should not be taken as the *standard* by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poem's performance.

They emphasize that the meaning, structure and value of a text are inherent within the work of literature itself. All references to the artist's life, his intention – realized or unrealized, historical context of the creation of the work of art are dismissed as extra-textual and hence irrelevant to the appreciation and evaluation of a work of art.

Wimsatt and Beardsley conclude that the object of literary analysis is the printed poem and not the author's intention. A literary work of art has an independent existence. It is a self-containing entity like an object. The work itself provides all resources needed for such an interpretation. A critic should not commit the error of going outside the poem in order to evaluate it. Any kind of fallacy threatens to violate the independence and the integrity of the sovereign poem.

In "The Intentional Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley stipulate the right manner of reading a poem. A poem is a fullness of actually presented meanings. The understanding of these meanings requires a capacity to read the text closely, intelligently and sensitively. A poem read properly is totally coherent and enables the reader to enjoy the poem for the right reasons.

"The Intentional Fallacy" and its companion essay "The Affective Fallacy" are central documents in the development of modern critical theory. "The Intentional Fallacy" is a seminal contribution to both Poetics and Aesthetics. It has drawn wide critical attention and generated never-ending debate regarding the error of searching for the intention of the author in the text. It alerted critics and aestheticians to some of the basic problems of Aesthetics.

## 1.13.2 "The Intentional Fallacy": A Study

I

The error of judging a work of art speculating on the intention of the author is called intentional fallacy. In a number of recent literary discussions, the issue of the intention of the author as a guideline for the critic has been questioned. Professor Lewis and Tillyard engaged themselves in a debate regarding the issue. The debate was published in 1939 under the title The Personal Heresy. The argument has not led to serious and involved questioning. Wimsatt and Beardsley discussed intentional fallacy in a Dictionary of Literary Criticism. They argued that design or intention of the author cannot be a parameter for judging the success of a work of literary art. The discussion strikes an emphatic disagreement with earlier critical theories which took intention of the author as an important aspect in understanding a poem or a work of literary art. It is a principle opposing both Classicism and Romanticism. Till Wimsatt and Beardsley proposed intentional fallacy, the whole literary criticism accepted approach to the poem through the intention of the poet.

The earlier concept is that intention is design or plan in the author's mind. It reveals author's attitude towards his work, his personal feelings and puts forth the motivation that urged him to undertake the work. Hence in order to judge the poet's performance we ought to know what he intended.

Wimsatt and Beardsley are clear in their critical attitude towards author's intention. They believe that they are obviously correct. They put forth five points for consideration by the reader:

1. The critic canhot judge the worth of the poet's performance, taking intention as a standard.
2. They condemn intentionalism because, on various grounds it rejects itself. Hence a poem should be judged by the art of the poem itself.
3. A poem works through the medium of words. It handles several complex meanings at once. It is unlike practical messages in which intention alone is important.
4. Any poem is dramatic wherein the speaker and the situation are of utmost importance. The reader should apply thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic speaker, but not to the author.
5. Revising the poem is solely the author's job. We are concerned only with the final, printed version.

Professor Stoll says "the poem is not the critic's own." Wimsatt and Beardsley, while agreeing with the statement, add more to it. They emphasize that the poem is not the cirtic's own and not the author's own. O e the poem is published it is beyond the control of the author. Hence, the poem, embodied in language, belongs to the public. It is open to scrutiny.

After reading Wimsatt and Beardsley's article on "Intention" in the Dictionary of Literary Criticism, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, an Indo-Ceylonese art-critic, came out with two kinds of inquiry about a work of art. The first is to find out whether the artist achieved his intentions. The second is whether the work of art ought ever to have been undertaken at all and so whether it is worth preserving. He calls the first kind of inquiry as artistic criticism and second is moral criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley overlook moral aspect in deciding whether a work of art should be preserved. They recommend 'objective criticism.' They turn round and call the second inquiry as 'artistic criticism.' The first inquiry comes under intentional fallacy.

ii

According to Wimsatt and Beardsley that intentional fallacy is a romantic fallacy. They give the example of Longinus of the 1st Century A.D. When Longinus speaks of sublimity or of Homer involving in the epic wars in his famous epics, the critic in Longinus proves to be a romantic.

Goethe of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to a large extent a romantic intentionalist For Benedetto Croce, an Italian aesthetician of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the beautiful is the successful intution-expression. The intention is the aesthetic part, and the poem is not a subject of aesthetics at all. Croce's is an extreme view of intentionalism. According to Croce, historical interpretation enables us to see a work of art *as its author saw it* in the moment of production. Wimsatt and Beardsley condemn Croce for his lack of understanding of what is aesthetic and what is non-aesthetic.

III

Socrates says that poets create poetry not by wisdom but by inspiration. This strengthens our mistrust in what poets say about their own poetry. However, seemingly important criticism has been produced by poets themselves. Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth made their own explicit statements regarding the process of poetic creativity. Some other writers like Young, Carlyle and Pater gave earnest advice to authors. Housman, poet of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, confessed how he came to write poetry in his The Name and Nature of Poetry. Housman's description of his poetic activity almost amounts to ridicule. His advice, 'discover and express the real truth' is no advice at all.

From Keats to Housman, cited by Wimsatt and Beardsley, many poets tried inspiring imagination of poets in making. The art of inspiring poets has been given more attention in the latter half of the twentieth century. Now books of creative writing are available in plenty. But these attempts have nothing to do with literary criticism. Literary criticism is a separate subject. It does not aim to inspire young minds. It is a psychological discipline, a system of self-development, a yoga. Young poets should take literary criticism seriously. Young poets should look to Aristotle and I.A.Richards for guidance.

Wimsatt and Beardsley put forth the argument that judgement of poems is different from the art of producing them. That is, criticism is different from poetic creativity. They give the example of Coleridge and Arnold. It is said that their critical aptitude lessened their poetic ability. According to Coleridge, Criticism is psychological curiosity where as poetry needs imagination and much more. Wimsatt and Beardsley endorse this view.

Intentional fallacy uses words like sincerity, spontaneity, authenticity, originality etc. But true criticism needs precise terms of evaluation such as integrity, relevance, unity, function, maturity, subtlety, adequacy. One should take a careful note that all expression is not aesthetic.

Professor Curt Ducasse in his The Philosophy of Art (1929) says that aesthetic art is conscious objectification of feelings. As and when the poet finds the objectification inadequate, he replaces it with another. Professor Ducasse's argument is not acceptable to Wimsatt and Beardsley. They argue that art cannot be reduced to terms of objectification. A published work of art is open to public scrutiny. The author is outside the work and so cannot be referred or consulted.

IV

Criticism of poetry is different from observation of author psychology. When one brings in a discussion of author psychology, he is stepping into historical premises too. This could be called literary biography, an attractive study in itself. Wimsatt and Beardsley do not look down on literary biography. Yet they point out the danger of confusing personal and poetic studies. Further there is danger of writing the personal aspect as if it were poetic aspect.

Wimsatt and Beardsley move to yet another point in their argument regarding intentional fallacy. In understanding the meaning of a poem we come across two kinds of evidence – internal and external. When they say what is internal is also public we should not be confused. The contradiction is merely verbal.

Internal evidence is provided through language and culture. The meaning of words and sentences, grammatical structures, sources from dictionaries make for internal evidence. External evidence is private, pertaining to the author's personality, biography etc. External evidence does not really consider the work of art as linguistic fact. Letters, conversations, interviews of the author published in journals come under external or private evidence. External evidence also includes what the poet said about the composition of the poem, the motivation, the context and other similar things. There is yet another evidence which is called intermediate evidence. It includes the character of the author, the kind of company he had and private meanings attached to words in the poem. Here the fallacy lies in not considering word's history and meaning.

There is difficulty in using these three types of evidence in literary criticism. This is because external or private evidence usually overlaps with intermediate evidence. The critic who is concerned with internal or public evidence and intermediate evidence might come out with a perspective which might fundamentally differ from the perspective of another critic who is concerned with external or private and intermediate evidence.

In this context of three types of evidence, Wimsatt and Beardsley refer to Prof.J.L.Lowes's Road to Xanadu. The book is very famous. It analyses Coleridge's creative imagination. Wimsatt and Beardsley are of the opinion that the book is on the border of external or private evidence and intermediate evidence. Lowes is romantic in explaining Coleridge's imagination. He speaks of clusters of associations drawn into several other complex clusters that make Coleridge's memory. The amalgamation of these clusters takes shape as poems.

The pattern of imagination was not planned by Coleridge. That leads Wimsatt and Beardsley to point out a few possibilities. One is Coleridge, perhaps, limited by experience of life and reading, could not produce poetry of high order. Another is Coleridge having had clusters in his memory, had to import them into his poetry. The value of his poetry depended on these limitations. At this point we should recall that Coleridge himself rejected associationism in his Biographia Literaria. Ultimately Wimsatt and Beardsley find fault with Lowes's analysis of Coleridge's imagination.

Lowes's analysis of Coleridge's poems leads no where. In fact he totally deviates from the poems. Coleridge used frequently phrases from writers like Bartram, Purchas, Bruce and Milton. We come across them in Kubla Khan. But for a critic of Coleridge's poems, it matters little what authors Coleridge had read. The critic's concern mainly is the intellectual composition which is the poem. This is because a poem is independent of the context in which it was created. In spite Lowes's theory of associationism in Coleridge which might diminish the value of his poetry, readers and critics continue to appreciate "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan."

Wimsatt and Beardsley focus their attention on intermediate evidence. This evidence certainly distorts a critic's view of a poem. They quote a quatrain from John Donne's famous poem "A Velediction Forbidding Mourning." While offering an interpretation of this poem, a critic of recent times focused on intermediate evidence. Apparently the critic's argument is reasonable. But he examines the entire poem in the light of Donne's deep interest in astronomy. Donne's familiarity with the works of astronomers like Kepler, Galileo and Gilbert revealed in his church sermons functions as intermediate evidence to the critic. However this interpretation relying on private evidence comes under intentional fallacy.

A diligent critic would not examine the poem keeping Donne's interest in astronomy as the only backdrop. He would consider the poem as a poem. Ho would interpret and explicate the poem as vehicle of a complicated metaphor. He tries to explore the meaning of the metaphor. This study is internal or public and hence welcome.

V

The contemporary critic also has to deal with problems arising out of the three types of evidence mentioned. A judgement of a critic will turn out to be a rule for a poet. Critics deal with poems or works of art already published. That way they are bound to the past. The poet works in the present aiming at future audience. That way the poet is connected to present and future. In this context we should understand that the problems discussed in the essay "The Intentional Fallacy" would certainly influence poets of the present and future.

Wimsatt and Beardsley discuss allusiveness or indirect reference in literature. They take poetry of Eliot as their example for allusiveness. In order to understand Eliot's allusions and their full meaning, critics turn to Frazer's The Golden Bough. It means that we do not know what a poet means unless we read what he had read. This approach is extra-textual and comes under intentional fallacy.

In the context of Eliot's poetry of allusions, F.O.Matthiessen comes to the reader's help. A scholar and teacher Matthiessen suggests close reading of the text. With or without realizing allusions in Eliot's poetry, one can understand and enjoy his poetry. The suggestive power of the poem with its movement and music is enough to grasp the essence of the poem.

Sometimes allusions in the poem are explained in the notes. For example Eliot's 'Notes' to The Waste Land. A keen reading of his 'Notes' will make the reader understand that whatever is given in the 'Notes' is incorporated into the structure of the poem. In such case 'Notes' is not that important. The poem is autonomous.

In The Waste Land Eliot alluded to great writers like Dante, Marvell and Baudelaire. And occasionally referred to ballads without knowing their origin. Regarding anonymous poets and unknown ballads the 'Notes' is futile. In more cases than not, notes tries to supplement or explain the unknown structures of meaning in the poem. As notes stands outside the integrated poem, whatever its function it remains incomplete.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's view of notes explaining the meaning of a poem is nothing but author's anxiety to communicate his intention. Critics should not be guided by notes which is extra-textual and comes under intentionalism. Eliot himself considered 'Notes' in terms of intention. While rejecting notes as part of intentionalism, Wimsatt and Beardsley welcome the device of epigraphs. An epigraph is sufficiently structural. It is condensed expression focusing on the quintessential meaning of the poem. Wimsatt and Beardsley point out the fault of Eliot and his contemporaries as that of planning too much.

Allusiveness in poetry is the direct result of intentionalism. It diverts the reader's attention from the poem to the intention behind the given allusion. Wimsatt and Beardsley put forth Eliot's poem "Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock" which might have alluded to one of Donne's poems.

From the so called allusion several inconsistent, critical questions might arise. Detailed explanation of the allusion might prove the allusion totally insignificant. If the reader were to be very enthusiastic about the allusion, and approach Eliot (imagine he is still alive) his answer would have nothing to do with the poem "Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock." From this lead argument, we understand allusions are not meant to be explained.

On the whole Wimsatt and Beardsley plead for liberty of interpreting a text. Interpretation, evaluation and judgement should proceed on the basis of the text itself. Extra-textual material has no place in a genuine critical inquiry.

## 1.13.3. Suggested Questions

1. Explain the term "intentional fallacy."
2. There is conflict between artistic criticism and moral criticism. Do you agree? Substantiate.
3. Literary criticism is a psychological discipline. Explain.
4. What do the authors of the essay mean when they point out that art cannot be reduced to terms of objectification?
5. Elaborate the terms 'internal' 'external' and 'intermediate' evidence in the context of the essay "The Intentional Fallacy."
6. What do you understand by 'allusiveness?'

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Lesson - 14

# EMPSON'S SEVENTH TYPE OF AMBIGUITY

## Contents:



## 1.14.1. Objective

After going through this lesson you will be able to understand

* And appreciate Empson the man and the period in which he lived.
* Empson's contribution to criticism of poetry
* the first six types of ambiguity.
* the ambiguity of the Seventh type
* relation between Empson's method and other approaches to literature.

## 1.14.2. Introduction :

William Empson was a poet and a brilliant critic of the twentieth century. He studied English literature under I.A.Richards and systematically applied Richards' principles to poetry as his disciple, both the teacher and disciple having emerged from science backgrounds. His contribution to the modern criticism of 1930's, which was moving towards the close reading of texts, was significant. Most of the earlier criticism was author-centered and used to interpret a literary work in terms of writer's experience and intention. In the words of Ramaswami and Sethuraman, "Empson is perhaps the first analytic critic to apply the principles of I.A.Richards on the nature and function of language consistently and with gusto to particular passages of poetry". The present essay "The Seventh Type of Ambiguity" we are going to discuss in detail is taken from Section VII of his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. The book, published in 1930, presents different kinds of ambiguity in poetry which are "types of logical disorder in the order of increasing distance from simple statement and logical exposition". The present extract from the book focuses on "the most ambiguous that can be conceived. It occurs when two meanings of a word are at odds with each other and two values of ambiguity have opposite meanings defined by the context. The total effect of such a poem demonstrates a division or a conflict in the writers mind.

## 1.14.3. Background: Empson and his Period

Before we have a detailed discussion of the seventh type of ambiguity, let us have a look at the critical climate in which Empson worked and also the fundamental influences on him. In the words of Chris Baldick

The major developments in literary theory and critical practice between the wars can be summarized as the effects of a revolutionary purification of criticism, one which repudiated the irrelevances of history and biography all the better to concentrate on the arts of interpretation and analysis or 'close reading'. The amateur impressionism prevalent before the war came to be challenged and sometimes dislodged by a semi-professional approach to the rigorours of reading. The New Criticism, in the widest sense that includes Eliot, Richards, Empson and the Leavis group was 'new' chiefly in its sense of responsibility to the objective status of the text, to the overriding authority of the 'words on the page'. In some respects this new obligation seemed to arise from the professional requirements of academic study, as in the case of Richards' model of practical criticism ( p.110).

The movement away from philological and historical scholarship taken forward by different critics during this period could be regarded a renaissance in English criticism. It is in this period the best work of Eliot, Richards, Lawrence, Woolf, Murry, Empson, Wilson Knight and Lubbock came out. Major journals such as the *Criterion, the Adelphi, the Calendar of Modern Letters* and *Scrutiny* were launched and there were also sudden advances in the theory of the novel and innovative Shakespeare criticism. There was in general a rebellious spirit with which critics brought down the reputations of established writers like Kipling, Galsworthy, Shaw and Georgian poets. The most important development of this period is the triumph of New Criticism and the emergence of the *Scrutiny* group. The criticism took exciting new directions in the invention of American literature, the theorizing of the novel, the revisioning of Shakespeare and the discovery of Marxism and psychoanalysis. There have also been heated wrangles about the merits of classical and romantic principles. Some figures from the inter-war years have drawn new sympathy in the recent past. Examples include Virginia Woolf's work as founding documents of modern literary feminism, Kenneth Burke as "the missing link between radical and formalist traditions and William Empson is being re-read something like the first post-structuralist critic" (Baldick, p.113).

Different major critics during this time paid a great deal of attention to words on the page, especially in poetry. Richards spoke of critical reading as a kind of liberating exercise, almost salvation and treated it as a redemptive sacrament since new critics compared the paradoxes of the poem's organic form to those of Christian faith. F.R. Leavis believed a critic has to convey his experience of the text to readers in a language that is concrete and particular. Empson who wrote in such an atmosphere demonstrated how seven types of ambiguity can be discovered in poetry. For him ambiguity in poetry, rather than being a flaw is a source of strength and richness. Before we have a detailed discussion of the text in question, let us have a brief look at Empson's life and works.

## 1.14.4. Empson, His Life and His Work

Empson was born in 1906 into landed gentry at Yorkfleet in Yorkshire. At Cambridge he studied Mathematics initially and then English under I.A.Richards. He was also trained in Psychology.

Though he studied Freud, he owed much more to I.A.Richard's work in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. It is a detailed study of multiple shades of meaning in poetry and it encouraged the trend towards close verbal analysis in modern criticism. In 1930's he taught English at Tokyo and Peking and after working for the BBC Far Eastern Section during the war he returned to Peking. In 1953 he returned to England as Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffild, where he remained until his retirement in 1971. He received knighthood in 1979 and subsequently died in 1984. He had a few volumes of poetry to this credit. In *Poems* (1935) his poetry is complex with a skilful weaving of scientific conceits and cerebral puzzles in the manner of metaphysical poets. His second volume of poems entitled *The Gathering Storm* (1940) deals with his experiences in the east. The *Collected Poems* (1955) is a selection of earlier poems which were revised for the book. In his critical work Empson was regarded as something of a maverick i.e., an unorthodox dissenter. *Some versions of the Pastoral* extends the definition of its subject to embrace the proletarian fiction as well as *Alice in Wonderland*. *The Structure of Complex Words* which came out in 1951 was a further study in verbal analysis but this time it veers away from literary criticism to the theory of lexicography. Unlike New Critics the author's intention and mood always mattered to him. In this book he attempts a more precise method of classification for the multiple senses of a word while distinguishing various kinds of implication, connotation and contextuality that influence meaning.

On another front, too, Empson exhibited a rebellious attitude by writing *Milton's God* in 1961 as a kind of affront to Christian critics such as T.S.Eliot, Wimsatt, F.R.Leavis and others. The book is both an interpretation of *Paradise Lost* and an extended diatribe against Christianity which he finds "the most insinuating of all organized evils." He found an element of regimentation and cruelty in dogmatic Christianity and an element of new impudence among some Christian critics who were then openly boasting of their creed's saddism. Empson takes the side of Shelley in pointing out that "the reason why the poem *Paradise Lost* is so good is that it makes God so bad". Chris Baldick aptly remarks about this dissenting streak in Empson which is evident in *Milton's God*.

This is a poorly organized and rambling, but nevertheless a shocking work, whose bluntness exposes the prior consensus by which Leavis, for example, refers to Christianity in Milton's work as if – Empson notices – it were merely a neutral topic. Empson violated an important taboo here, indicating again that in the debates of the 1960s, the flood gates of some kind of anarchy were creaking open (p.159).

In his career of more than five decades Empson achieved quite a few distinctions. His poetry drew considerable attention from scholars. Together with his teacher I.A.Richards, he laid the first foundations for analytic criticism in English criticism and brought some amount of scientific rigour to it. As a maverick he shook the foundations of Christian outlook in criticism and showed that these Christian texts can be and have to be analysed and interrogated like any other literary work. The essays in his posthumous work *Using Biography* (1984) defend the use of biographical information in literary criticism against the dogmas of New Criticism. Some of Empson's work on Shakespeare and Renaissance literature was also published after his death in the books edited by others. After having considered Empson's contribution to literature and criticism we shall discuss in detail the *Seventh Type of Ambiguity*.

## 1.14.5. Seventh Type of Ambiguity

Before we look at the *Seventh Type of Ambiguity* let us first look at how ambiguity is perceived commonly and then see what the first six types of ambiguity Empson perceives are. Common people understand ambiguity as an element in a discourse that is capable of being understood in different ways. In plain prose it is considered a fault where precision rather than vagueness is required. In creative writing it is seen as a useful device. Before Empson proposed his theory of seven types of ambiguity it is generally understood as of three types. 1) Lexical ambiguity, 2) Syntactical ambiguity, 3) Ambiguity of cross-reference. Lexical ambiguity occurs where a single word in a sentence can be understood in more than one way (eg. A tailor boasted that his suits would always one a fit. 'Fit' could mean fit one's body properly or spasm or shock). Structural ambiguity is said to occur when words can be differently grouped in dividing a sentence (eg. 'Flying planes can be dangerous' could mean planes which fly can be dangerous to people on the earth, or the act of flying can be risky to pilots). The ambiguity of cross-reference occurs when a word or phrase in a sentence refers back to something mentioned earlier in the sentence and it is unclear what it refers back to (eg. When a baby does not thrive on raw milk boil it. Humour of the sentence is based on the ambiguity of reference of 'it'; whether it refers to the 'baby' or raw milk). There can be combinations of the above types of ambiguity.

Contrary to the above sense of ambiguity, Empson makes 'ambiguity' a poetic device capable of enriching poetry. In *Seventh Type of Ambiguity* he attempts close readings of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Windhover", George Herbert's "The Sacrifice" and other short works and passages. He made it one of the seminal texts of twentieth-century criticism. By his brilliant analysis Empson makes ambiguity valid as a positive quality of literary texts without giving up authorial intention.

Taking a cue from the games of interpretation played by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in *A Survey of Modern Poetry* (1927), Empson attempted reading of texts eliciting different kinds of meaning. Some critics objected to his analysis later saying that it was not actually ambiguity but multiplicity of meaning and the resultant preferential order of several meanings of the same text. Empson shows by his practical method various processes of communication in creative use of language, and how they lead to multiple meanings of a poem. This multiplicity leads to the ambiguity of the meaning. In other words multiple meaning or plurisignation are alternate terms for ambiguity of meaning.

Empson identified seven kinds of ambiguity and defined them. His classification must not be pressed too hard, as he himself points out, since the types overlap and definitions are highly arbitrary at some points. Let us now briefly discuss the first six types of ambiguity. For Empson an ambiguity is "any verbal nuance, however slight which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language." His seven types may be understood as stages of achieving logical or grammatical disorder that may be found in a text.

1) The first one is when a passage may be understood in more than one way. Empson is concerned not just about what words mean but with differences in what their author meant. Empson includes in this type a greater diversity of sources of ambiguity, including matters which transcend simple logical analysis such as metaphor or rhythm.

2) In this type the different meanings work together and the reader may resolve them into a single sense.

3) In the third type ambiguities simultaneously convey two or more apparently unconnected meanings, as in puns or to a longer extent in allegory.
4) In this type ambiguities work at a superficial level: the distinct meanings exhibit a complexity in the author's state of mind.
5) The fifth type of ambiguity arises because the author has changed his mind or developed his ideas in the course of composing the passage.
6) Ambiguities of this type appear to be meaningless because they are contradictory, tautological or irrelevant and the reader is left to deduce what must have been intended. Such an ambiguity is between different possible meanings which the reader may attribute to the passage.

Now let us consider the seventh type of ambiguity as defined by Empson. Sethuraman remarks that Empson in his *Seventh Type of Ambiguity* exploited the distinction pointed by I.A.Richards between the emotive and intellectual meanings of an utterance and defined ambiguity as 'any real verbal nuance however slight which gave room for alternative reactions for the same piece of language (Vol. I. Introduction, xliii).

The seventh type of ambiguity is also contradictory in which opposite ideas and impulses which are invisible are held in balance by the author. Those ideas are no longer thought of as contradictory by the author or even if he thinks so it is only from the stylistic angle. He thinks he can reconcile them and he is clear that he is stating their reconciliation. Here one can compare this type of ambiguity with paradox and poetic tension valued highly in poetry by New Critics. Empson illustrates by analysing Gerard Manley Hopkin's sonnet how ambiguity can be the result of an indecision and its reverberation in the mind of the poet.

## The Windhover, to Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king- 1
Dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding 2
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding 3
High there, how he rung upon the rein a whimpling wing 4
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing 5
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bowbend: the hurl and gliding 6
Rebuffed the big wheel. My heart in hiding 7
Stirred for a bird - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing! 8
Brute beauty and valour and act, Oh, air, pride, plume here 9
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion 10
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier! 11
No wondor of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion 12
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, all my dear 13
Fall gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion 14

While acknowledging I.A.Richards for the excellent analysis of this poem, Empson says he has taken up the poem again because it is a good example of the seventh type of ambiguity. Hopkins became a Jesuit and burnt all his early poems immediately after that. Perhaps the fire in the poem is a reference to that sacrifice. Empson says the poem is the result of a kind of inner tension within the mind of the poet between the impulses of renunciation and the passions of attachment to beauty. He remarks:

Confronted suddenly with the active physical beauty of the bird, he conceives it as the opposite of his patient spiritual renunciation; the statements of the poem appear to insist that his own life is superior, that he cannot decisively judge between them, and holds both with agony in mind (p.276).

For Empson the poem is an expression of the glory achieved by sacrifice, suffering and self-immolation than the glory achieved by fulfilling of natural impulses which the bird symbolises. The poet describes the flying of the Windhover which rides high skies, gliding here and gaining height there, effecting large sweeps of air through spinning and circling. The rapid and mighty movement of the bird seems to subdue even the wind. The poet's heart, which might be timid or even secretive as my heart in hiding indicates, is fascinated by the brute beauty, strength and daring of the bird. It is drawn to the kind of life the bird represents. When he is caught thus he asks his heart to buckle or muster restraint. While the short quick phrases in the 9th line of the poem show the poet's breathless admiration for the bird scaling skies, here buckle which follows these phrases might indicate a warning to hold himself aloof. But the downward movement which is in opposition to the bird's upward movement indicated by plough down and plod represents the slow and arduous movement of the spiritual renunciation. But for the poet the fire that emerges from the chevalier is even more beautiful. Even the blue embers when the fire (passion) rages itself out, while falling flame out again into gold-vermilion, the hues of spiritual glory. Thus the poem represents a kind of tension between two opposing impulses of the human heart, one a desire for the life of physical activity and the other an aspiration for spiritual renunciation.

After looking at a brief summary of the poem let us now look at Empson's analysis of ambiguity. Due to the inherent ambiguity in the poem, i.e., the internal tension in the poet's mind between contradictory impulses, many words and images in the poem seem to indicate alternate meanings to Empson.

My heart in hiding would seem to imply that the more dangerous life is that of Windhover, but the last three lines insist it is no wonder that the life of renunciation should be more lovely. Buckle admits of two tenses and two meanings:' they do buckle here, 'or' come, and buckle yourself here', buckle like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action; and buckle like a bicycle wheel, make useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion'. Here many mean 'in the case of the bird' or in the case of the Jesuit'; then 'when you have become like a bird' or 'when you have become like a Jesuit'. Chevalier personifies either physical or spiritual activity; Christ riding to Jerusalem, or the Cavalryman ready for the charge; Pegasus or the Windhover

Thus in the first three lines of the sestet we seem to have a clear case of the Freudian use of opposites, where two things thought of as incompatible, but desired intensely by different systems of judgements, are spoken of simultaneously by words applying to both; both desires are thus given a transient and exhausting satisfaction, and the two systems of judgement are forced into open conflict before the reader (p.276).

Empson finds in the last three lines, which perhaps are too loud in their protest, the conflict between contradictory impulses being expressed beautifully and powerfully. Next he chooses George Herbert's doctrinal poem The Sacrifice for the analysis of ambiguity since it works as an effective contrast to Hopkins' poem as it uses the same methods. He deals with the various sets of conflicts in the Christian doctrine of the sacrifice presented by Herbert. The successive fireworks of contradiction make the particular poem unique. Other poems of Hebert are more personal in which the theological system is accepted so completely and the poet becomes merely its mouthpiece. In "Sacrifice" a high degree of ambiguity is to appear normal. The poem is outside the conflict theory of poetry since it assumes, as does its theology, the existence of conflicts. But it also assumes its business is to state a generalised solution to them. The speaker in the poem is Jesus. The method used is the monotony of accent, simplicity of purpose and an intensity of feeling which brings to mind a miracle play in its vividness. Using the line "Was ever grief like mine?" at the end of each stanza like a refrain Herbert pours out Jesus's pain that people for whom he is ready to sacrifice himself fail to understand him. He speaks with pathetic simplicity and innocent surprise that people should treat him so cruelly. He completely fails to understand the case against him. The refraining line in the original Jeremiah does not refer to Saviour but to the wicked city of Jerusalem which is in the hand of its enemies. It is abandoned by God for its sins.

In each case of ambiguity, the stress of the main meaning is on the loving-kindness of Jesus. It is only because this presentment of sacrificial idea is so powerfully and beautifully imagined that all its impulses are involved. We will just consider a few stanzas in "The Sacrifice" to see how ambiguity is illustrated in them by Empson.

Then they condemn me all, with that same breath
Which I do give them daily, unto death;
Thus Adam my first breathing rendereth;
Was ever grief like mine?

Hark how they cry aloud still crucify,
He is not fit to live a day, they cry;
Who cannot live less than eternally.
Was ever grief like mine?

'Me all' implies 'they all condemn me' and 'they condemn whole of me' (I am Jerusalem and include them). It means they condemn him upto the total death of which he is not capable of. By condemning him, who gives them breath daily till their death, they call upon their own destruction. The word rendereth includes 'repay me for my goodness' and 'give up the ghost.' Again 'give up the ghost' means both 'until their eventual death' and in 'their killing of Jesus at the moment'.

Weep not dear friends, since I for both have wept
When all my tears were blood, the while you slept,
Yours tears for your own fortunes should be kept.
Was ever grief like mine?

In the above stanza, too, the same fusion of love of Christ for humanity and the revengeful terrors of the sacrificial idea emerge in his advice to his friends not to weep for him. He has wept for them both when in his agony, they abandoned him. They will need their tears for themselves.

The last stanza of all contains as strong and simple a double meaning

But now I die; Now all is finished.
My woe, man's weal; and now I bow my head:
Only let others say when I am dead,
Never was grief like mine.

There is a change in the refrain in the last line of the stanza from the rhetorical question, Was ever grief like mine? to Never was grief like mine which draws attention to itself. Jesus submits himself to suffering and death for the sake of mankind. He may wish that his suffering would never exceed in man he pities. He may also incidentally wish that they might say there was never agony like Christ's. He may also wish his sacrifice would be recognised by the Church. Or he may also mean mine as a quotation from others. "Only let there be retribution, only let my torturers say never was grief like theirs, in the day when my agony shall be exceeded" (p.279)

Empson expresses his doubt about readers' willingness to accept this double meaning. But once the idea strikes, one will never be able to read the poem without remembering it as a possibility. The resultant meaning, since the idea is used as a religious doctrine, appears like a contradiction. Empson remarks that it arises out of the notion

> Christ has made all safe, a weight is off our shoulders, and it is for that very reason far more urgent that we should be careful. Salvation is by Faith, and this gives an intolerable importance to works. O death, where is thy sting; because the second death is infinitely terrible (p.279).

One may say pious Herbert may not have intended the above. It would have been blasphemous since he had a very positive view of his religion.

Similarly in each stanza Empson teases out the opposite meanings cleverly.

The depiction of Herod sitting on judgement on Jesus who stands before him intensifies irony. The opposition of *'sit'* and *'stand'* implies a hierarchy of values, is reversed in worldly sphere. It resonates with another contradiction that is between the revengeful power of Jehova, and the merciful love of Jesus.

Herod in judgement sits, while I do stand;
Examines me with a censorious hand.
I him obey, who all things else command.
Was ever grief like mine?

Me in the second line rings out with a triumphant and scornful arrogance. It also implies that his attitude of deference before Herod is one that will give full play to his right hand and stretched out arm, that he will be far more furious in his judgement than his judges. He would stand to exert as well

as to suffer. Concentration of ironies makes the lines very powerful. Both the earthly power of the conqueror and the legal rationalism of the Pharsisees are opposed both to the profounder mercy of the Christ and to the profounder searchings of heart that he generates. The poem brings out Christs' agony in Passion where he suffers for the sake of mankind and is conscious of retribution that the people in their foolish blindness bring upon himself. Christ is the scapegoat as well as tragic hero loved as well as hated. He frees men from torture "because tortured; torturing his torturers because all-merciful; source of all strength to men because by accepting he exaggerates their weakness; and because outcast, creating the possibility of society" (p.284).

Herbert deals in this poem with most complicated and deeply-rooted motions of human mind with appropriate methods. Empson sees in the achievement of the poem not merely several references being brought together but their being kept in the frame. The frame is that of monotonous and rather naïve pathos, of fixity of doctrinal outlook, of heart rending and straightforward grandeur.

## 1.14.6. Empson's Method and Other Approaches

Empson has been undoubtedly one of the most brilliant and sensitive of modern critics. However there is a criticism against him that his analyses are interesting only as Empson's workings of ingenious mind not as revelations of the poet's mind. In giving unabashed free play to a poem's meanings, Empson, in a way, anticipates the later post-structuralist and deconstructive readings of poems. (You will see the discussion of post-structuralism and deconstruction in one of the forth coming lessons). However for Empson, unlike for post-structuralists, the author's intention, the social context of the poem and the readers' response are all significant. Comparing Empson's with New critics' method Terry Eagleton complements Empson thus:

Far from existing as an opaquely enclosed object, the literary work for Empson is open ended; understanding it involves grasping the general contexts in which words are socially used, rather than simply tracing patterns of internal verbal coherence, and such contexts are always likely to be indeterminate. It is interesting to contrast Empson's famous ambiguities with New Criticism's paradox', 'irony' and 'ambivalence'. The latter terms suggest the economic fusion of two opposite but complementary meanings: the New critical poem is a taut structure of such antitheses, but they never really threaten our need for coherence because they are always resoluble into a closed unity. Empsonian ambiguities, on the other hand, can never be pinned down: they indicate points where the poem's language falters, trails off or gestures beyond itself, frequently suggestive of some potentially inexhaustible context of meaning. Whereas the reader is shut out by a locked structure of ambivalences, reduced to admiring passivity, 'ambiguity' solicits his or her active participation; an ambiguity as Empson defined it as 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the sa.. piece of language. 'It is the reader's response which makes for ambiguity, and this response depends on more than one poem alone. For I.A.Richards and the New critics, the meaning of a poetic word is radically 'contextual', a function of the poem's internal verbal organization. For Empson, the reader inevitably brings to the work whole social contexts of discourse, tacit-assumptions of sense-making which the text may challenge but with which it is also in continuity (p.52).

What the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton finds praiseworthy in our critic is Empson's poetics are liberal, social and democratic, appealing, for all their dazzling idiosyncracy, to the likely sympathies and expectations of a common reader rather than to the technocratic techniques of the professional (p.52).

Empson is also called the earliest post-structuralist because like them he believes in multiple signification and uses all his ingenuity to tease meaning out of a text.

We have had a brief look at the relation between Empson's and other approaches to literature.

## 1.14.7. A Brief Critical Summary

In this lesson we considered Empson's critical contribution to the English critical scene of the 1930's. His use of seven types of ambiguity to analyse a text is quite innovative. He believes ambiguity as a poetic device enriches poetry. He classifies seven types of ambiguity according to the value he accords them. He see the seventh type of ambiguity occurs within author's mind where he holds the opposite ideas and impulses in balance. To illustrate this point, Empson analyses two poems: "The Windhover, to Christ Our Lord" by Hopkins and "The Sacrifice" by George Herbert, both religious poems. It is indeed surprising to see such an anti-Christian critic as Empson (his Milton's God is a case in point) giving such a sensitive analysis of the religious idea of sacrifice. With great subtlety and insight he shows all the possible inner workings of the poet's mind.

## 1.14.8. Glossary

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ambiguity | : | Capable of being understood in more than one way |
| Buckle | : | A clasp for two ends |
| Cavalry | : | Troops mounted on horseback or moving in motor cycles |
| Chevalier | : | A member of one of various orders of knighthood or of merit. |
| Connotation | : | A meaning in addition to or apart from the thing explicitly named or described by a word, implicit additional meaning. |
| Dapple | : | To mark with different – colored spots |
| Dauphin | : | The eldest son of a King of France |
| Denote | : | To mark out plainly; indicate, to make known, mean, name |
| Diatribe | : | Biting or abusive speech or writing. |
| Falcon | : | A long-tailed hawk, inhabiting open areas. |
| Minion official | : | A servile dependent, follower or underlining: one highly favoured: a subordinate |
| Pegasus | : | A winged horse in classical mythology: figuratively, poetic inspiration. |
| Seminal | : | Contributing the seeds of later development, creative, original. |
| Whimple | : | A cloth covering worn over the head and around the neck and chin by women especially nuns: to cover with or as if with a whimple: to ripple or cause to ripple |
| Windhover: | : | Kestrel: A common small European falcon inhabiting moors, coasts and farmland and noted for hovering in the air with its head to the wind. |

## 1.14.9. Sample Questions

1. What is the 'Seventh Type of Ambiguity' according to Empson? Discuss
2. William Empson "is a wayward genius as apt to embarrass his admirers as to scandalize his critics". Discuss with reference to the essay prescribed.
3. How far is Empson's concept of 'ambiguity' a useful tool of criticism?
4. Why does Empson call the seventh type of ambiguity "the most ambiguous that can be conceived?"

## 1.14.10. Suggested Reading

1. Chris Baldick. *Criticism and Literary Theory: 1890 to the Present*. London: Longman, 1996.
2. George Sampson. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, 1970.
3. S.Ramaswami and V.S.Sethuraman, Ed., *The English Tradition: An Anthology of English Literary Criticism, Vol.I and II*. Madras: Macmillan, 1977 (Textual quotations are from this book).
4. Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982.
5. William K.Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1957, rpt.1970.

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Lesson - 15

# WIDDOWSON'S STYLISTICS

Contents :



## 1.15.1. Objective

After going through this lesson you will be able to understand,

* the relation between linguistics and stylistics
* the scope of stylistics
* the relevance of stylistics to the study of literature
* stylistics vs. other approaches to literature.

## 1.15.2. Linguistics and Stylistics

Stylistics is an applied branch of Linguistics as English Language Teaching, Socio-linguistics and Pscholinguistics are. It uses the tools of linguistics to analyse mostly literary texts though in the recent past it has also been used to analyse the language of advertisements, journalism and such other kinds of writing. Linguistics claims to be an objective and scientific study of language and it has tools and methods to examine language at several levels: the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic. As you are already aware, phonology deals with the study of sounds of particular languages, morphology deals with the formation of words, syntax studies the way in which words are put together to form phrases, clauses or sentences and semantics studies meanings in a language. A linguist is generally satisfied with the accurate and detailed description of language elements of a given text, whether it is a poem or prose piece. The stylistician goes further and tells us how the meaning and particular effects in a poem are achieved through the analysis of its style at different levels. A literary critic usually describes, interprets and evaluates a poem. Since stylistics attempts all these too, it can lay claim to a place within literary criticism. Since it is possible to use stylistics for both the above purposes it is often described as a bridge between Linguistics and Literary Criticism. A student of stylistics focuses his attention on units of language such as sounds, words, phrases and sentences and arrives at the analysis and description of a text. Stylistics thus approaches literary texts through their linguistic form.

Detailed study of style had very much been part of literary approach since the classical times. was done under the name of rhetoric. It is an approach that looks at style as an embellishment. The oldest view of style was that writing was made beautiful by poetic figures, metaphors, antithesis, hyperbole and the decorum was required to choose the style appropriate for the subject. For example one of the defining features of the epic was the grand style.

Another approach to style is to view it as self-reference. Jakobson and Riffaterre work with this assumption. They observe and analyse a text for linguistic deviations from the ordinary normative use of language. Jakobson paid attention to the structures of equivalence with focus on the linguistic message as a whole. Riffaterre also makes use of deviation theory. In his analysis of 'The Yew-trees' by Wordsworth (see V.S.Seturaman –*Contemporary Theory,* pp.127-153) he shows how in descriptive poetry "the representation of reality is a verbal construct in which meaning is achieved by reference from words to words, not to things". He maintains that in a poem by a complex organization of various linguistic elements the poet demonstrates the structure's power to create and transform any reality and to reshape it for his own purpose. In his view style can be defined as possessing a constant and specific property and literature can be analysed objectively and exactly. He calls this stylistic function and it is set towards the message which is not necessarily violation of the ordinary language. Stylistic features which are found striking by an ordinary reader are explained by a stylistician for their literary effect.

Another approach views style as representation. This approach is also likely to make claims to scientific status. It defines style in purely literary terms and relates it to interpretations of literary content and these must inevitably be approximate. Best known example is that of Spitzer who developed a method of stylistic analysis with firm focus on the individual text. He defined it as 'philological circle' and it begins with any detail that strikes as deviant in relation to established modes of writing as well as potentially significant in relation to work as a whole. The first step or 'click' is mainly intuitive and analyst connects this feature to his impression or feeling for the whole work by a circular movement or a 'to and fro' voyage to other details of text's language to relate together both details and general impression in an organic whole. Spitzer's analysis of 'Leda and the Swan' belongs to the stylistics of representation. Starting with the most individual feature of the poem, Spitzer focuses on the rendering of the time – place sequence in the poem. This conveys one of the mysterious paradoxes of copulation and procreation and the overwhelming strength of a moment in 'Leda and the Swan' whose meaning will become clear only in their result in time. Syntactically brusque beginning of the poem shows the violent, irrational character of Jupiter's rape of Leda in the guise of a swan and the rapid progress of the narrative reinforces the speed of the act. Paradoxically, this sudden, violent and mindless process is the cause of enormous tragic magnitude for the human race. Spitzer reads the poem as a protest against gods who let sex be the effect of power uncoupled with knowledge and at the same time a drastic force in human affairs. Spitzer's professed method of a constant back and forth movement between the specific description of linguistic structures and the interpretation of the meaning of the poem as a whole is similar to the structuralism of Prague school. The school has interest in elements of deviation and similar view of literary text as a closely knit set of interrelated features. But emphasis on interpretation sets Spitzer apart from the above formalists.

In contrast to Spitzer's analysis of 'Leda and the Swan' M.A.K.Halliday's analysis of the 'Leda and the Swan' is in the tradition of modern linguistics. Halliday is happy with the accurate and detailed description of the definite article and verbal elements in the poem. Unlike Spitzer, he does not attempt interpretation and describes only linguistic features which distinguish it from other texts. He leaves it to the literary specialist to determine the nature of literary significance of these linguistic features. (You might refer to p.176 of Seturaman's *Contemporary Criticism* for Halliday's analysis of 'Leda and the Swan').

So far, we have seen different approaches such as style as embellishment, style as self-reference and style as representation, the latter two of which definitely come under the scope of stylistics. Stylistics, as you have noted, is an essentially comparative study of the patterns of preference shown by the writer in his selection from the linguistic sources available to him, a question of relative frequencies of choice which distinguish the language of his text from others. Stylistics is therefore an application rather than an extension of linguistics.

Recent stylistic criticism including that of Roger Fowler and H.G.Widdowson advocates some kind of functional analysis that asks what the language of a text does and how it contributes to the meaning and effect of the whole. They also believe that the stylistician must pay attention to the social function of language.

Fowler argues that the analyst should attend particularly to the social function of linguistic structures in literature; texts should not be viewed as self-contained systems but as process, 'the communicative interaction of implied speakers and thus of consciousness and of communities. (Jefferson and Robey, p.71)

Widdowson too believes that language has a social function and analyses linguistic features of poems to see how they contribute to the meaning and effect of texts. After having a brief glance at his work, we will consider what he says in his essay on stylistics.

## 1.15.3. H.G.Wddowson and His Work

During 1980s Widdowson was a professor of Education at the University of London and he had lectured in many parts of the world on stylistics, applied linguistics and discourse analysis. His books include *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* and *Applied Linguistics* (as the editor). His other publications from the Oxford University Press are *Teaching Language as Communication* (1978) and *Explorations in Applied Linguistics* (1979). He also served as the editor and contributor for *English in Focus*, a series of specialist English text books published by the Oxford University Press.

Widdowson in the present essay discusses an approach to stylistic analysis.

## 1.15.4. Stylistics

Stylistics is concerned with patterns of use in texts since the purpose of the analysis is to investigate how the resources of language code are handled in the production of actual messages. These concepts roughly correspond to Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue* and *parole* or the language system and the individual act of utterance or communication about which you will study in one of the later lessons.

The user of a language ensures that his utterance or message is grammatical as well as appropriate. The knowledge of the rules of code enables him to make his message grammatical and the knowledge of (social) conventions which govern the rules of the code in the production of message makes his utterance appropriate. Together these elements provide language with its unique feature that is creativity. The creativity of language enables the user to generate endless variety of utterances which he had never heard before and he also understands perfectly the novel utterances he hears. Widdowson thus gives the reason for this

... though they are novel as manifestations of code, they are familiar as messages. The user of a language is creative because the novel linguistic forms he generates function as familiar units of communication: if they did not, he would only generate gibberish (p.156).

Widdowson emphasizes that the code is not the only important factor in analysing the patterns of language use in a text since any message is produced according to systems of social convention to enable understanding. Units of message are not simply parts of the language system but are types in their own right definable in terms of social communication. Thus

Stylistics is concerned with such message types; its purpose is to discover what linguistic units count as in communication and how the effects of different conventions reveal themselves in the way messages are organized in texts (p.156).

Stylistics is the study of the social function of language since it aims to characterize texts as pieces of communication. But it does not attempt to discover the different social functions of language. Widdowson prefers to call it technological rather than scientific because it works on the data (texts) provided by others.

While being wary of extending stylistics to all varieties of language, Widdowson discusses the scope of stylistics in consideration of literary texts. He gives two significant reasons why stylistics should first concern itself with literary texts. "One is methodological and relates to the nature of literature as such, and the other is pedagogical and relates to the value stylistic analysis has for the teaching of language" (p.157).

Firstly literature has certain features as a mode of communication and it differs from all other social communication. Compare a poem with a news item in the Newspaper about which facts can be verified and challenged. A piece of literature, unlike a non-literary text breaks the normal relations between the sender and receiver, the addresser and the addressee. In grammar you call these first person and the second person and the third person is usually found in the message itself as reference. Both first person and second person are necessary in a communication situation. But in a piece of literature this sender and receiver combination can be broken up. The first and second person along with the third person can creep into the text itself. For example all kind of strange creatures and things can be directly addressed by the poets: the insects by Gray, a brook by Tennyson, a Skylark by Shelley and a Grecian urn by Keats. Innumerable aspects of nature can be written about and addressed to. The addresser and the addressee (first and second person) along with the third person have thus entered into the text and make the text self-contained. Widdowson makes the point thus:

This points to the essential difference between literary and other uses of language: in literature the message is text contained, and presupposes no wider context so that everything necessary for its interpretation is to be found within the message itself. All other uses of language on the other hand find some place in the general social matrix; they develop from antecedent events and presuppose consequent events; they are contextualized in a social continuity (p.158).

Unlike a non-literary text, a literary text is not oriented to the external reality but creates its own kind of reality within the text. Due to this unique feature of literature, stylistics has proved methodologically as well as pedagogically beneficial to the study of literature. Since a literary text, unlike in normal social communication, has close organization of intra-textual elements and scant regard for outside social environment it is easily amenable to stylistic analysis. Consideration of social environment in a non-literary communication complicates matters and makes stylistic analysis difficult. Stylistics is methodologically viable in considering a poem since one can focus on the text itself generally without worrying about distracting social questions.

The pedagogical value of stylistics has been immense and Widdowson claims that "... it justifies the inclusion of stylistics within applied linguistics seen as an area of enquiry which brings the findings of linguistics to bear on the practical problems of language teaching" (p.158).

Traditionally literary criticism was regarded as a branch of aesthetics and concerned itself with the texts as artistic wholes. Critics believed that the value of a work lies in the artistic universals it embodies, which appeal to the intuition of the readers. The conventional critics made use of impressionistic terminology to convey their intuitive awareness to readers and avoided any attempt to relate their observations about the poem's aesthetic power to its actual language. Such criticism failed when the readers did not share the intuitive understanding with the critic. This is generally true about foreign learners whose language awareness limits their response to the subtle nuances of language use. Even native readers whose exposure to literature has been limited do not share the intuitive understanding with critics. Thus stylistics can make valuable contribution to pedagogy by providing students and teachers with a metalanguage to describe the texts and it can convince students that "... the text is a practice of rhetoric rather than the product of some mysterious force of art". (Richard Leith, p.15). Stylistics can sensitize students to the aspects of language otherwise they may take for granted. It helps students to realize how literary meaning and the particular aesthetics of a poem are achieved through the skillful use of language.

While asserting the validity and value of stylistics as an approach to the study of literature Widdowson remarks:

> By investigating the way language is used in a text, it can make apparent those linguistic patterns upon which an intuitive awareness of artistic values ultimately depends. It provides a basis for aesthetic appreciation by bringing to the level of conscious awareness features of the text otherwise accessible only to trained intuition... Stylistics renders an essential service to language learning in that even if the learner does not develop an appreciation of literature as literature, he will have acquired an awareness of the way language functions in at least this form of communication: he will have developed an awareness of literature as language (p.159).

It also indicates how by correlating the study of literary texts with that of texts concerned with other forms of social communication, the teaching of language and the teaching of literature can be co-ordinated in a way which is useful for both.

Poetry or literature, as we observed earlier, is different from non literary texts because of its scant regard for outside reality and because of its close organization of the intra-textual elements. Due to its skillful exploitation of use of resources of language, poetry contains a good deal of language that is grammatically and semantically deviant. Let us consider a few examples to illustrate the point. A standard example 'a grief ago' which is used by Dylan Thomas breaks the rules of English in two ways that is at the level of sentence structure / syntax and at the level of meaning / semantics.

1. Syntactic deviation - We expect the indefine to article 'a' to go with countable nouns like 'dogs' 'cows' and so on but here it is used with an abstract noun 'grief,' thus breaking a norm of the grammar.
2. Semantic deviation – In normal use, the adverb *'ago'* collocates with adverbs of time like days, months, years and so on. 'Grief' is a term of emotion, which can neither be counted nor can be thought of in terms of time. By a strange combination the phrase here breaks a rule of meaning. Thus 'a grief ago' which is used in a syntactically and semantically deviant situation is highly noticeable or is foregrounded. It arrests the attention of the reader and compels him to take into account its strange and unique features while interpreting the poem. We are made to understand by these linguistic deviations that Dylan Thomas is measuring *time* in terms of *emotion*.

Foregrounding, which compels the reader to notice the language elements can be achieved in a poem by breaking the linguistic rules. Foregrounding can also be achieved by repeating certain patterns more often than we normally expect, which is called convergence. Let me illustrate a case of parallelism from Othello here in which several patterns of similarity converge to foreground the sentence.

I kissed thee ere I killed thee (vii 357)

There is a phonetic (sound) parallelism through alliteration in the repeated word initial sound /K/ and similarity between the word final sounds /t/ and /d/ in the two verbal elements /kist/ and /kild/. The syllabic structure of the words in parallel syntactic structure is the same: CVCC and CVCC

In spelling and morphological structure also since both verbs occur in the simple past tense there is much in common.

The words *kissed* and *killed* occur in grammatically parallel clauses. The sentence has a structure: subject-verb-object-conjunction-subject-verb-object. The similar patterning in several layers – phonological, morphological and grammatical makes the sentence an exemplary case of parallelism. Since there is parallelism at three levels it is a case convergence also.

The line is heavily foregrounded and so is significant for interpretation. In the line uttered by Othello immediately after killing Desdimona, "I kissed thee ere I killed thee," we are forced to see the two halves of the sentence opposing each other, in particular the words *kissed* and *killed*. The opposition is valid because *kissed* is related to the love theme of the play and *killed* to the theme of hatred or jealousy. Here we are forced to see these two words as antonyms to each other. But if we think of

*kiss* and *kill* in isolation, it is clear they are not antonyms of each other. Thus the words *kiss* and *kill* have acquired new shades of meaning without losing the meanings they have in the general code. Now we can have a look at another example of parallism which forcefully brings out the irony of the situation. It is the following line from Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.

Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet – douse.

Here also you find a repetition of bilabial plosives /p/ and /b/ in the word initial positions in combination with varied vowels. There is also a repetion of nouns. Except the bibles all the other words belong to the same semantic field in that they could be found on the dressing table of an unmarried lady having several suitors. *Bibles* is the odd man out here and so it reinforces the irony that the sacramental religious text has the same value for the lady as objects of make up. Widdowson in his essay illustrates how the phonological patterning adds significance to the meaning of a line. By using complex linguistic devices a poet is able to express meanings other than those which are communicable by conventional means.

Widdowson gives another example from Pope to illustrate how meanings in the code change in particular contexts.

She went from opera, park, assembly, play,
To morning walks, and prayers three hours a day;
To part her time 'twixt reading and bohea,
To muse and spill her solitary tea;
Or o'er cold coffee trifle with the spoon,
Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon...
(Epistle to Miss Blount, on her leaving the town after coronation)

If you look for the meaning of *coffee* in a dictionary perhaps you will find "a drink made from the roasted and ground seeds of a tropical shrub'. *Cold coffee* in this context has a significance over and above the dictionary or denotative meaning. Trifling with a spoon over cold coffee represents boredom and is shown as a similar activity to counting the slow clock and dining exact at noon. The phonological patterning between *cold, coffee, spoon* and *count, slow, clock* reinforces the idea of boredom. Thus the recognition of the contextual implications involves a revision of its denotative meaning, in this case in the form of extension. What we have discussed so far is the familiar distinction between connotation and denotation.

Instead of characteristically being connotative, literature characteristically effaces the distinction between these two different types of meaning. Connotative meaning is generally regarded as a matter of personal associations which could be idiosyncratic and unsystemizable. But contextual meaning within a literary text emerges out of linguistic items set in a system of intra-textual relations. As a result what may be regarded as connotative with reference to the code, might be regarded as denotative with reference to the secondary language system established by the regularities of the context. Thus the meaning of 'coffee' in Pope's lines is both connotative and denotative in a sense.

The above are simple illustrations of how literary messages convey meaning. Now let us consider an important question before we move on to more complex examples. What kind of meaning does a literary message convey?

Since Widdowson looks upon style as meaning he asserts that language is essentially a social phenomenon. It serves a social purpose by codifying those aspects of reality which a society wishes in some way to control. Language therefore can be regarded as a socially sanctioned representation of the external world. People have a sense of security when they have common attitude towards reality obtained in sharing a common means of communication. It is possible to have communication if there are conventionally accepted ways of looking at the world. It is socially convenient for people to accept a conventional view of reality. But they also have needs as individuals which social conventions by their very nature are incapable of satisfying. Every society has a form of art and a form of religion as necessary outlets for individual expression whose expression would otherwise disrupt the ordered pattern of reality. Art and religion are a recognition that there is a reality apart from that sanctioned socially. This other reality is related to that which is conventionally recognized in the same way as literary language is related to the conventional code. Literature creates patterns out of deviations from normality and these patterns then represent a different reality from that represented by the conventional code. Thus literature gives formal expression to the individual awareness of a world beyond the reach of communal communication.

Having discussed how literary language conveys meanings and what kinds of meaning they are, let us look at some kinds of patterning which occur in literary texts and at meanings they convey. Let us see how Wilfred Owen could convey meaning through particular patterns of language. The poet creates a new kind of reality which deviates from ordinary conventional reality in the poem.

## Futility

Move him into the sun –
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds –
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so-dear achieved, are sides
Full-nerved – still warm–too hard to stir?
Was it for this the day grew tall?
-O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

In 'Futility' what strikes the reader at first glance is, though the poem is titled 'Futility', there is no specific reference to the tittle in the body of the poem. On the contrary, the poem seems to say a

lot about the sun and it also creates a pattern through the repeated use of words like *awoke, woke, rouse* in the first stanza and *wakes, woke, stir* and *break sleep* in the second one. We are made to think of denotations and connotations of 'sleep'. The sun, addressed to in human terms, is asked to touch and wake up someone. It is clear from the context that this someone, assumed to be sleeping, is not in any ordinary sleep but in eternal sleep. The poet asks others to move him into the sun.

Three attributes of the sun are portrayed in the poem.

1. The sun in human capacity (*the kind old sun*) is asked to wake up an already living human being.
2. The sun as an animate catalyst which stimulates all seasonal growth. It wakes the seeds and the fields thus.
3. The sun as the representative of elemental force is supposed to have engendered life from primeval clay and refers to the actual creation (*woke, once the clays of a cold star*). The first quality of the sun is related to the diurnal cycles of day and night and the second to the seasonal cycles. The third is associated with the cycles of creation.

Of the three attributes of the sun the poet depicts in the poem, the sun as an animate catalyst and as an elemental force can occur even in a non-literary text, say a scientific article. But the image of the sun in human capacity can occur only in a poem; the poet takes the poetic licence here and uses his imagination freely. He tries to impose this imaginative logic on objective reality but gradually the poet himself realizes the futility of it. The sun who had engendered life on the planet has already given life to the young man once at his birth. The sun which activities the life process in the seeds has no capacity to activate a dead person. Even if the sun, spoken of as a human being, has the desire to bring this man back to life, it will be powerless to do so. The sun is seen in human form but inanimate pronouns (*its touch,* and *it*) are used to describe it. A kind of hybrid unit is created by the poet thus by the overlap of extra-textual relations which link the word with the code and intra-textual relations which link the word with other items of language in the context. Here you see an overlap of denotative and connotative meaning of the sun that is both animate and inanimate.

Now let us consider the syntax of the poem. The two sentences which begin the two stanzas are syntactically equivalent but have a different elocutionary force. Both *move him into the sun* and *think how it wakes the seed* are imperative sentences. But the first one is an order and the second one is an appeal. The difference marks a transition from the assured command of the first to wistful appeal of the second. The similarity of the syntactic structure draws our attention to the difference.

Similarly the syntactic equivalence of the three interrogative sentences in the second stanza forces us to note the difference in the elocutionary force of these sentences. The question *Are limbs, so dear – achieved, are sides / Full nerved - still warm – too hard to stir?* expects a particular reply and is a leading question. It almost says "Surely these limbs, are not too hard to stir?" The second sentence is more like a challenge or an accusation than a question. With an increasing frustration it seemed to say, "so that's all the fresh grew tall for!" The phrase "the clay grew tall for" seems to remind us of the seeds in first line of the poem and represents a convergence of the seasonal and creative cycles which underlines the futility of the poets argument. The futility is most fully dramatized

in the last question which is almost a cry of despair rather than a normal question. It cannot have a possible answer. The significance of the title of the poem is fully dramatised in the poem through several linguistic devices though it is never specifically referred to. The associated imagery of waking and sleeping reinforces the tension between themes of death and the life in the poem. The line *until this morning and this snow* emphasizes the opposition between the symbolic implications of *morning* representing new life and *snow* symbolizing death. In the normal circumstances one expects *until this morning* to be followed by either 'this evening' or some other adverbial construction of time.

You might have also noticed the complexity of phrases *dear-achieved* and *full-nerved* in contrast to the use of simple words in the rest of the poem. Widdowson makes the final observation that

Their compressed complexity might be said to suggest an emotional intensity and a definite shift from the rationally controlled simplicity of the preceding lines. Secondly, the representation of the sun as both a human and an inanimate entity recurs in the last sentence and links the end of the poem with the beginning (p.169).

The logical inconsistency in treating the sun both as an inanimate and human sun does not lead the poet to give up the concept altogether but makes him note other implications of it. The sun as an elemental force working through its inanimate sunbeams is humanly fatuous or silly and toils to fulfil its primeval task like humans working in "fields unsown".

For a detailed discussion of the poem you may look up Widdowson's essay Stylistics. In the same essay you will find a stylistic analysis of a highly nominal poem "Here" by Philip Larkin and in the Appendex to the essay you can have a glimpse of M.A.K.Halliday's approach to "Leda and the Swan" and Geoffrey Leech's analysis of "This bread I break" by Dylan Thomas. By understanding various types of stylistic analyses of the above poems, you will benefit greatly which will help you while doing the practical criticism of poems.

## 1.15.5. Stylistics and Other Approaches

Stylistics is one of the most tangible approaches to literature and can be of immense help to a student of literature. When the literary critics are using the current knowledge in various fields like sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy in the study of literature, it is only right that we utilize the knowledge of linguistics in the study of literature.

Finally stylistics does not actually depart from earlier schools of criticism so radically as it appears to do. It shares several characteristics like the close study of the text, the disregard for the historical and biographical scholarship with the New Criticism. It also resembles Russian Formalism which emphasizes the value of the study of devices such as phonetic patterns, rhyme, rhythm and metre in literature. Stylistics can also be traced back to the ancient study of rhetoric which emphasizes the individuality and concrete quality of a text.

## 1.15.6. A Brief Critical Summary

In this lesson you have seen how literary style could be viewed as an embellishment, self-reference and representation. Widdowson's approach to style which obviously comes under style as representation attempts a functional analysis of poems. He views literature as communication and

for him in any communication language code as well as the social context in which it operates are important factors. Stylistics is the study of social function of language since it aims to analyse poems essentially as pieces of communication. He argues that because of the special nature of literature, stylistic approach is methodologically and pedagogically a viable and valid tool for a critic. He also shows how it could be used as an immensely practical tool both in teaching of language and literature.

## 1.15.7. Glossary

Cohesion It means the intra-textual relations of a grammatical and lexical kind which knit the parts of a text together into a complete unit of discourse and which, therefore, convey the meaning of the text as a whole. For instance in 'Futility' there is a lexical cohesion in the use of words such as 'awoke', 'woke' and 'rouse' and the repetition of word 'clay' in different senses. There is a cohesion in the use of imperative sentences and interrogative sentences.

Foregrounding A position of prominence is the ordinary meaning of the word. It is used by stylistic critics to characterize the act of giving prominence to literary features or speech. In poetic language it is a literary device which arrests the attention of the reader and makes him notice itself. Lexical Of the vocabulary of a language as opposed to grammatical.

## Russian Formalism

A school of critical thinking which flourished in Moscow in the 1920s and whose concepts were later absorbed by the Prague Linguistic Circle. Russian formalist vehemently opposed the attempt to value literature for its social significance. It viewed literature as a special mode of discourse in which language is employed with acute self consciousness. Literary work is self–contained and form is the organisation of pre-aesthetic materials for them. They denounced the separation of form and content. They concentrated on the literariness of the devices used in poetry. Roman Jakobson who belonged to the school later initiated Prague Linguistic Circle with a more thoroughgoing stylistic analysis in terms of the principles of defamiliarization, deviation and foregrounding etc.

### 1.15.8. Sample Questions

1. Assess the practical value of stylistic analysis to the teaching of language and literature.
2. Consider the validity of the following claim made for stylistic analysis. "By investigating the way language is used in a text, it can make apparent those linguistic patterns upon which an intuitive awareness of artistic values ultimately depends. It provides a basis for aesthetic appreciation by bringing to the level of conscious awareness features of the text otherwise only accessible to trained intuition."
3. Make a comment on the following concepts: foregrounding, syntactic deviation, semantic deviation, parallelism, cohesion and convergence.
4. Does stylistic approach help in critical evaluation of a poem? Discuss.

### 1.15.9. Suggested Reading

1. Ann Jefferson and David Robey. *Modern Literary Theory*. London: B.T.Batsford Ltd., 1986.
2. H.G.Widdowson "Stylistics", *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*, ed. By V.S.Seturaman, Madras: Macmillan, 1989.
3. *Michael H.Short, "Who is Stylistics?" Focus on English*, Vol.1, No.3.
4. Richard Leith, "Seven Deadly Sins in Stylistics: A Pedagogical Proposal," *Focus on English*, Vol.3, No.1

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Lesson - 16

# GERARD GENETTE'S STRUCTURALISM AND LITERARY CRITICISM STANLEY FISH'S IS THERE A TEXT IN THIS CLASS?

CONTENTS:



## 1.16.1. Objective

After going through this lesson you will be able to understand

* basic issues in structuralism
* the relationship between structuralism and Literary Criticism
* reader response theory and its founding principles
* Fish's response to poststructuralism
* his concept of interpretative community

## 1.16.2. Introduction

In this unit you will see a detailed discussion of two essays prescribed for your study in Literary Criticism. These are Gerard Genette's essay "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" and Stanley Fish's essay "Is There a Text in This Class?" The former essay tells you about Structuralism's contribution to literary interpretation by comparing it with traditional literary criticism. The latter essay deals with problems of Derrida's Deconstructive conception of language and proposes a concept of 'interpretative community' which makes communication possible inspite of the provisional nature of language. If you read these two essays in conjunction with Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" you will be able to appreciate radical changes that have taken place in the West in language philosophies and literary studies. Now let us have a look at structuralism before we see what Genette's views are on structuralism and literary criticism.

## 1.16.3. Structuralism and Saussure

The word 'structure' is not new to the students of literature. They often hear about the structure of a poem, play or novel. But the word acquired a set of new and complex meanings in the second

half of twentieth century because of the contribution made by linguistics to philosophy and literary criticism. Some critics, in fact, trace the origin of Structuralism to Aristotle's *Poetics* and his discussion of four types of plots.

The basic principles of Structuralism were drawn from the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Through his pathbreaking work in linguistics *A Course in General Linguistics* which was published posthumously his penetrating research into the working of language came to light. The concepts he put forward are *langage, langue, parole* and the sign and its components *signifier* and *signified.*

For Saussure a language is a network of interrelationships whose basic units are signs. A sign is arbitrary and differential. A linguistic sign is composed of two elements, a sound image or graphic image and a concept, the first of which is called a signifier and the second is termed signified. The idea can be represented thus:

sign = signifier
signified

However, the relation between the signifier or sound image and the signified or the concept is arbitrary and not intrinsic. There is no natural and indissolvable link between them. The four letters TREE and three sounds /tri/ are a signifier which evoke just that object or the signified in an English mind. The relation between them being arbitrary, there is no inherent reason why the marks on the page should sound /tri/. The only reason is cultural and historical convention. The relation between the above sign tree and what it refers to, the structure with a trunk and leaves is a capricious one. The same object is called peid in Hindi and Chettu in Telugu. Saussure maintains that each sign in a system has a meaning only by virtue of its difference from others. Thus a tree has a meaning only because of its difference with other concepts like bush and plant. Similarly the word acquires a positive identity phonetically in contrast to words like free and tray. It does not really matter how the signifier alters, in what accent you pronounce it, as long as its difference with other signifiers is retained, it will be identifiable. A word thus does not have any positive meanings by itself but only acquires meanings because of its difference with others. When words are viewed as signs we see that their meanings depend on conventions, relations and systems that govern them than on any intrinsic features. It thus follows that to study how language functions one cannot take individual signs in isolation as one's object of study but only the relations that obtain between them.

For Saussure language is not a collection of discrete elements but is a closed system, in the sense that the function of each element depends entirely on its position within the whole. Thus Saussure's crucial distinctions in the study of language between langage, langue and parole become significant. Langage is the entire human potential for speech or the universal human phenomenon of language and langue, the language system, a particular one like English or Telugu. Parole is the individual act of utterance or communication, which the system produces and conditions. Hence langue and not parole should be the primary object of linguistics which aims to show how language works. Another important point Saussure makes is that synchonic study rather than diachronic study of language gives insights to a linguist. Earlier language studies were predominantly diachronic in the sense that they focussed on the way languages change through time. Synchronic study considers

how a language functions as a system at a given moment in time, analysing the relations between its constituent parts. In other words, synchronic study examines how a language works but not how it develops. On the whole structuralism gave central importance to the concepts of system and difference and shifted attention away from considerations of origin or cause and the function or effect.

In the words of David Lodge the following are the implications of Saussure's work for literary studies.

a) The idea that literary texts could be seen as manifestations of a literary system (such as narrative) the underlying rules of which might be understood, thus making literary criticism a more scientific discipline.

b) Skepticism about historical explanations of literary phenomena, especially research into the origins of meaning.

c) A corresponding emphasis on the collective or social construction of meaning in the production and reception of literary texts.

d) A critique of naïve theories of literary realism.

Though Saussure himself never used the concepts 'structure' and 'structural', his idea of arbitrary and differential nature of the linguistic sign gave rise to the radical disfunction between language and reality in structuralism. Another important feature of structuralism is not just the importance it attributes to language, but language itself is used as a model for all sorts of non-linguistic institutions. For example Levi-Strauss used the linguistic model for his anthropological analysis of kinship relations and Barthes tried to construct a grammar of fashion. Unlike fashion or kinship systems, literature is not only organized like language it is actually made of language. Saying that unlike music and arts, c.:ticism shares its medium language with the object of its study i.e., literature Genette says his aim is to see how structuralism can complement the interpretative activity of literary criticism. Let us now have a glimpse at Genette's life and work before considering his arguments in detail.

## 1.16.4. Gerard Genette, His Life and Work

Genette was born in 1930 in France and teaches in Paris. He is the author of several distinguished works of literary theory, including three collections of essays Figures I (1966), Figures II (1969) and Figures III (1972). The last book has been translated into English under the title Narrative Discourse (1980). One of the finest working out of Russian formalist distinction between fabula (the story as it would have been enacted in reality) and sjuzet (the presentation of the story in a discourse) that has so far been accomplished. The book has considerable influence on criticism of the novel. Genette appreciates the poetics of Plato and Aristotle and the classical tradition of rhetoric. He saw the possibility of reviving and extending this approach to literature by means of structuralist methodology. "Literary Criticism and Structuralism", first published in 1964, is a remarkably balanced and perceptive consideration of the topic. Genette gives due credit to the pioneering work of the Russian Formalists by saying it is now time to regard literature as a code without message. He shows how Jakobson revised the more extreme doctrines of the Formalists to take into account the semantic dimension of literature but in his observation that structuralism's privileging of structure is an ideological stance, "the prejudice of which is to value structures at the expense of substance, and which may therefore

over-estimate their explanatory value". He thus anticipated many poststructuralist critiques of structuralism. At the time of writing this essay Genette's concern was only to show how best structuralism can complement literary criticism.

## 1.16.5. Structuralism and Literary Criticism

In this essay Genette aims to show the chief ways in which structuralism could reach the object of criticism and offer itself to criticism as a fruitful method. Structuralism can sharpen the tools to study the genres, the canon formation, the evolution of literary forms and so on.

Genette argues of all the forms of criticism, literary criticism is in a unique position because it shares its medium with creative work unlike music or painting. The language of literary criticism can thus be called a 'meta language' or a "discourse upon a discourse". Literature is primarily a product of language and structuralism because of its linguistic bias deals with sounds, forms, words and sentences and studies closely the system of literature's conventions. Genette acknowledges the Russian formalists contribution in emphasizing formal elements of literature which make it literary. Genette aptly remarks.

Literature had long enough been regarded as a message without a code for it to become necessary to regard it for a time as a code without a message

Structuralist method as such is constituted at the very moment when one rediscovers the message in the code, uncovered by an analysis of the immanent structures and not imposed from the outside by ideological prejudices (V.S.Seturaman, p.198).

Thus structuralism disregards all external factors which were earlier seen as determining a work's significance such as race, class, gender, nationality and period. Pure Formalism reduces literary forms to phonetic material that is ultimately formless because it is nonsignifying. On the other hand traditional realism accords to each form an autonomous, substantial 'expressive value'. Structuralism has merits of both the above approaches since it attempts to uncover the connection that exists between a system of forms and a system of meanings. Structuralism cannot reject the analysis of the relations between code and message. It values the structures at the expense of content or substance. The structuralist method is valuable whenever the external frame- works are abandoned and the work is looked upon as a being or an entity by itself. The tendency of structuralism to disregard factors like history, biography of the writer, the race, gender, class and nation connects it to other schools of criticism like stylistics, New Criticism and Russian Formalism since the text is of primary importance for these schools also.

Structuralism is more fruitful than Stylistics because it studies larger unities of discourse beyond the framework of sentence whereas Stylistics studies a work at the level of sentences, words and sounds. Structuralism deals with systems from a much higher level of generality, such as narrative, description and other major forms of literary expression. It studies latent relations within a work and analyses their relation to the meanings. Thus Genette says that once the search for genesis or causes of a work is given up completely

A somewhat spatial determinism of structure would thus take over, but in a quite modern spirit, from the temporal determinism of genesis, each unit being defined in terms of relations, instead of filiation. 'Thematic' analysis, then would tend spontaneously to culminate and to be tested in a structural synthesis in which the different themes are grouped in networks, in order to extract their full meaning from their place and function in the system of the work (V.S.Seturaman, p.200).

Structuralist method studies a work closely and reaches its bone-structure by a sort of penetration and uncovers the latent relations or filiations in a work. It could be more fruitful than Psychoanalysis or Marxist approach which bring in external factors to the analysis of a work.

The method also values the synchronic study over the diachronic and pays particular attention to the way major elements become minor and minor elements become major in literary evolution. For example the birth of cinema altered the status of literature by depriving it of certain of its functions. Literature has to survive by altering, by redefining its role and purpose and by changing some of its functions. Thus knowledge of the synchronic relations is necessary to understand the evolution of functions. As David Lodge aptly pointed out, Genette was successful in emphasizing

... the ways in which structuralism could usefully extend and complement the hermeneutic or interpretative activity of literary criticism: the study of genres and conventions which govern their production and reception; of popular literature and culture; of canon formation and evolution of literary forms. (David Lodge, p.62).

## 1.16.6. Deconstruction

Before we look at Stanley Fish's work and his essay, let us briefly discuss what were the reactions against structuralism and how the poststructuralism made its beginnings. Derrida's paper, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" was originally submitted in 1966 at Johns Hopkins University at a conference entitled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man". It is regarded as a manifesto of post-structuralism and inaugurated what is regarded as Deconstruction. Deconstruction was in some ways a continuation of structuralism and in some ways was a reaction against it. Both schools think that human subject is neither the source, origin or end of all meaning. One major difference between structuralists and Deconstructionists is the former believe though the relationship between the signified and signifier is arbitrary, there is a unity between them in particular unambiguous contexts and so signification can be a stable systematic process. But Deconstruction dwells on the instability inherent in all signification. The composite of signifier and signified instead of leading to a meaning leads to an endless chain of signification. A signified leads to a signifier which in turn leads to another signifier and so on. Since in this way language can never be a stable and systematic affair, it bears within itself the necessity of its own critique (you will see how this works in the lesson on "Structure, Sign). Deconstructive criticism aims to show that any text undermines its own claim to have a determinate meaning and allows the reader to produce his meanings out of it by an activity of semantic play. Stanley Fish believes it is the reader who makes a meaning out

of the text but these meanings instead of being infinite are only a finite set of indeterminate meanings. We will see what his arguments are after having a glimpse at his life and work.

## 1.16.7. Stanley Fish, His Life and Work

Stanley Fish, born in 1938, was originally a Renaissance scholar trained in the explicatory techniques of the New Criticism. He has taught at several American Universities, including the University of California at Berkley and Johns Hopkins. He has become increasingly interested in questions of literary theory. He is a leading exponent of American reader-response criticism. His book on Milton, *Surprised by Sin* (1967) was subtitled, 'The Reader in *Paradise Lost*'. He argues that the reader of the poem is constantly lured into mistakes of interpretation by the ambiguities of Milton's syntax, and thus compelled to recognize his own fallen state. *Self-consuming Arte facts* (1972) adopted a similar approach to other seventeenth century texts and included an appendix entitled 'Affective Stylistics' in which Fish explained the theoretical basis of his critical method. Fish's work starts from and questions New Criticism's effort to locate literary meaning in the formal features of the text, rather than in the author's intention or the reader's response. In *Interpreting the Variorium* he argues that both authorial intention and formal features are produced by the interpretative assumptions and procedures the reader brings to the text and they have no prior or objective existence outside the reading experience. This argument has affinities with the reception theory of Wolfgang Iser and with Derridean theories of discourse. However Fish is less radical than Derrida and rescues criticism from the abyss of relativism and solipsism by his concept of the *interpretative community*. He has defended, and elaborated on his views in a number of essays and lecturers collected in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), dealing wittily and incisively with such topics as stylistics and speech act theory in the process.

## 1.16.8. Is There a Text In the Class?

The above essay belongs to Reader-response or Reception theory. The theory is also known as Hermeneutics. There are wide range of responses within Reader-response theory. For Example, E.D. Hirsch maintains that a text has a stable meaning and a flexible significance. The meaning of a text is what a text had meant to its author and his contemporaries whereas significance is the changing relevance of a text to a different generation. Whereas Hirsch is in orthodox hermeneutical tradition both Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish are postmodern in spirit because they view reading as an inter-subjective activity. It is the reader who makes out the meaning which is potential in the text. The idea of a text itself is fluid since the New Critics. For Iser the text is built by the reader through a process of gestalt by following certain strands from the work. For Fish even this is not definite as the implications of his question "Is There a Text in the class?" show.

In his essay, Fish demonstrates how the text alone does not determine the meaning. He assigns an active role to the reader in the reading process. Moreover the context also contributes greatly to the reader's understanding. He questions the idea that human mind can achieve comprehension or apprehension independent of the context. Raman Selden comments thus about the model of reading process Fish presents:

The reader's journey through a book is a continuous process of adjustments of viewpoint. We ld in our minds certain expectations, based on our memory of characters and events, but the xpectations are continually modified as the text advances. We grasp a series of changing viewpoints, each one establishing a new total perspective. (Raman Seldon, pp.189-190).

To illustrate his thesis that the reading of a text is guided as well as controlled by the reader and the context, Fish recounts a particular experience from the class room.

On the first day of the new semester a student approached a colleague of Fish at Johns Hopkin's University and asked him "Is there a text in this class?" He had replied that it was *Norton Anthology of Literature*. She immediately revised her question and asked whether they believe "in poems and things or is it just us?" referring to the Reader-response theories of Fish. The teacher could make out the meaning of the question at once because he is aware of the literary theories (of indeterminacy or undecidability of the text) taught by Fish.

The above question has two literal meanings. Though the teacher got it wrong the first time, he could immediately correct himself by the student's response. Here the case is not that of inderminacy or undecidability of the utterance but that of determinacy that changes. Neither the first meaning nor the second meaning was imposed on a more normal one by a private interpretation. The norms are not embedded in the language but in the context of the situation. Fish asserts thus

Because both my colleague and his student are situated in that institution, their interpretative activities are not free, but what constraints them are the understood practices and assumptions of the institution and not the rules and fixed meanings of a language system (V.S.Seturaman, p. 278).

Then Fish goes on to speculate on the several other possible meanings of this question. For example the question could also be understood as an enquiry about a lost book in this context. The infinite plurality of meanings is only a theoretical possibility since occurances always occur in specific contexts.

... sentences emerge only in situations, and within those situations, the normative meaning of an utterance will always be obvious or at least accessible, although within another situation that same utterance, no longer the same, will have another normative meaning that will be no less obvious or accessible. This does not mean that there is no way to discriminate between the meanings an utterance will have in different situations, but that the discrimination will also have already been made by virtue of our being in a situation and that in another situation the discrimination will also have already been made, but differently (V.S.Seturaman, p. 279).

Thus sentences always have meanings in specific contexts. They never appear independent of situations. In a particular situation even if an utterance has more than one meaning one can figure it out consciously as the teacher in the class did. Constructing of sense leads to the identification of the context. People can do it because they already have the knowledge of the context and can recall it. The change from one kind of understanding to another occurs by the modification of viewpoint.

The humanist critics like M.H.Abrams believe that the question of interpretation depends upon the existence of a determinate core of meanings. The absence of such a core can result in confusion; the public communication can become an impossible thing and every interpretation can become as valid as the other in literary criticism. No one interpretation can be said to be either worse or better than the other. Stanley Fish counters Abram's fears of solipsism and relativism thus:

It is only if there is a shared basis of agreement at once guiding interpretation and providing a mechanism for deciding between interpretations that a total and debilitating relativism can be avoided (V.S.Seturaman, p. 288).

Out of a set of indeterminate meanings a person arrives at the right meaning because he is in a particular situation which already involves possessing a structure of assumptions. These assumptions are relevant in relation to purposes and goals already in place and it is within these assumptions any utterance is immediately heard and understood. Meanings thus come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in language, but because language is always perceived, from the very first within a structure of norms. The structure is not abstract but social. In fact this structure of norms exists because of what Fish calls an interpretative community of a language. In his view communication occurs thus

We see that (i) communication does occur, despite the absence of an independent and context-free system of meanings, that ii) those who participate in this communication do so confidently rather than provisionally and that iii) while their confidence has its source in a set of beliefs, those beliefs are not individual specific or idiosyncratic but communal and conventional (V.S.Seturaman, p. 291).

Thus Fish comes to the conclusion that the text alone cannot authorize an interpretation. The reader has an active role in the process of interpretation and the social context shapes the interpretation in a significant way. The theory is against other text-oriented schools of criticism like Linguistics, New Criticism, Formalism and Structuralism which tend to disregard both the writer and the reader and give importance only to the text. By saying the text has a finite set of indeterminate meanings which are to a large extent shaped by the reader and the context, Fish also revises his earlier position of the deconstructionism.

## 1.16.9. A Brief Critical Summary

In this lesson you have read a brief account of structuralism and Post- structuralism and a detailed discussion of two essays prescribed for your study. These are Gerard Genette's "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" and Stanley Fish's "Is There a Text in This Class?" Genette shows how structuralist method extends the enterprise of literary criticism by a deep analysis of internal structures within a work. It also treats literary texts as networks of relations, by the analysis of which a critic may arrive at a grammar of a genre or the literature. In contrast Fish, while agreeing with post- structuralists that a sentence or a text has a set of indeterminate meanings, argues that these are only a finite set not an infinite one since the play of meaning is constrained by the context, the reader and the

interpretative community he belongs to. It is because assumptions behind and practices of communication are already built into the situation. All the above mentioned approaches to language and literature are anti-humanist. They do not believe that a literary work is the result of inspired genius of an individual like the Romantics. Nor is the individual the goal of a work. They also reject the expressive and mimetic theories of language. All these approaches together show radical changes that took place in literary studies and the linguistic turn philosophy took in the second half of the twentieth century.

## 1.16.10. Glossary

deconstruction : Refers to the new way texts are being read and interpreted. It consists in exploiting the potential of the text by the reader who may bring in his own interests, be they political, philosophical, literary, ideological. The basis of this ading is language philosophy which stresses the relativity of all meaning.

determinate : Limited, fixed, definite, settled, established, positive, decisive, conclusive

diachronic : dealing with the study of language changes over a period of time; historical

filiations : The act of forming into thread; the reeling of silk from cocoons.

Gestalt : In psychology, a form or pattern that works as a unified or functional unit, and has properties that cannot be derived by summation of the separate parts

hermneutics : The art or science of interpretation originally applied to the scriptures.

Nomology : study of relations of similarities in structure, nature, position and value.

ncracy : personal peculiarity of constitution, temperament or manner; a mental or moral characteristic belonging to and distinguishing an individual

intersubjective : Understood by or relating to two or three persons, such as language

normative : Relating to or establishing norms, based on a standard.

relativism : In philosophy the doctrine that knowledge or truth is relative and dependent upon, time, place and individual experience.

Russian Formalism : a school of critical thinking which flourished in the 1920s. It is a vehement reaction to the attempt to value literature for its social significance in Russia. It propounded the view that literature is a special discourse in which language is employed with acute self-consciousness. Formalists denounced the separation of form and content. They concentrated on the literariness of the devices used in poetry.

solipsism : In philosophy the theory that nothing but the self exists and therefore the self is the only object of real knowledge.

synchronic : Coinciding in time, relating to a language feature or system considered at a particular point in time without reference to its historical background; distinguished from diachronic

utterance : Something spoken, uttered or written; in linguistics a meaningful speech sequence grammatically independent of the context in which it appears

## 1.16.11. Sample Questions

1. Explain the theoretical base of structuralism.
2. How does Ferdinad de Saussure contribute to the development of structuralism?
3. Comment on the relation of structuralism to other schools of criticism.
4. How does structuralism extend and complement the interpretative activity of literary criticism?
5. What changes have been brought about by structuralism to literary studies?
6. How does Stanley Fish make the reader-response theory objective and responsible?
7. Discuss the relation of reader-response theory to other schools of criticism.
8. What, according to Fish, are the factors that make an utterance intelligible?
9. Write short notes on the following:
   a) Concept of sign
   b) Langue and parole
   c) Synchronic vs. diachronic study of language.
   d) Fish's definition of the text.

## 1.16.12. Suggested Reading

1. Ann Jefferson and David Robey. *Modern Literary Theory*. London: B.T.Batsford Ltd,, 1986.
2. David Lodge (Ed), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, London: Longman, 1988.
3. M.H.Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. U.S.A. Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993.
4. Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in the Class?" and Gerard Genette, "Sturcturalism and Literary Criticism" from V.S.Seturaman (Ed.). *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*. Madras :Macmillan, 1989

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Lesson - 17

# DERRIDA'S STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY

## Contents



## 1.17.1. Objective

After going through this lesson you will be able to grasp

* the basic assumptions of post-structuralism
* Derrida's impact on human sciences
* his criticism of structuralism
* interrelationship of structure, sign and play

## 1.17.2. Introduction

Derrida, the French philosopher, is often regarded as the inaugurator of what is known as deconstruction. Deconstuction figured prominently in much of the recent literary theory. A school of deconstructive criticism drawing its inspiration from Derrida's work became a major force in the nineteen seventies and eighties in the United States of America. In fact he has wielded more influence in the universities of America, such as Yale than in France. Though he practised his method of deconstructive reading both on texts of literature and philosophy, he had more impact on the discipline of literary studies. He questioned all signifying practices or meaning making processes by differing with positivists as well as structuralists. You have perhaps come across some new words for the first time, some strange concepts which may sound difficult. In the coming sections we shall discuss these terms and consider Derrida's ideas in detail.

Let us now have a glimpse of Derrida's life and work.

## 1.17.3. Derrida, His Life and Work

Jacques Derrida was born in 1930, in the suburbs of Algeria to middle class Jewish parents. At the age of nineteen he went to France, where he studied philosophy as well as taught it later for many years in the universities. His sense of belonging to a marginal and dispossessed culture and the rabbinical tradition were perhaps major formative influences on the development of his intellect,

The general sense of rebellion in the French culture and the relative rigidity in educational institutes also had an effect on the growing intellectual. Through he has been a teacher of philosophy in France for many years, his work had more impact in the English studies than in philosophy and greater impact in the Anglo-American world than in France itself. The present essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" was originally a paper contributed to a conference entitled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" held at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore in 1966. At the conference the American world experienced, for the first time, the challenge of the new ideas and methodologies in the humanities generated by European structuralism. David Lodge remarks that the essay "belongs to a historic moment in the traffic of ideas between Europe and America (p.107). The present essay is taken from Derrida's book *Writing and Difference* (1978). The book contains, among other things, important essays on Hegel, Freud, Foucault and Levi-Strauss. The book reflects most explicitly Derrida's views on structuralism and its contents. It could be read as a sequel to another monumental book *Of Grammatology* (1977) which challenges our concept of that most basic element, language and its relation to speech and writing. While discussing in detail the writings of Rousseau, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss he shows the problematic status of writing in Western tradition. In Derrida's writing the science of signs or semiology is replaced by grammatology, which, he says takes the form of a question rather than a new science. In the same way, structural analysis is replaced by deconstruction which also questions its objects rather than reflecting on them. *Grammatology* is the science of writing in so far as writing is regarded as a generalized phenomenon, as arche-ecriture. Deconstruction is the form it takes when it turns its attention to specific texts. A deconstructive reading tries to bring out the logic of the text's language as opposed to the logic of its author's claims. It will tease out the text's implied presuppositions and point out contradictions in them. Other major works of Derrida available in English translation are *Speech, and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1973), *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry* (1978), *Spurs: Nietzsche's styles* (1979), *Positions* (1981) and *Discriminations* (1982). *Positions* contains Derrida's interviews with others which give us a clue to the implications of some of his ideas. There are many more important essays by Derrida and much work of his in French which is yet to be translated into English. Derrida has indeed shaken the founding assumptions of Western philosophical thought by his radical work. His work on desconstruction paves the way for post-structuralism, which we shall discuss in detail in the next section.

## 1.17.4. Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is in a way both a continuation of structuralism and at the same time a radical critique of structuralism. Structuralism includes many disciplines, started outside educational institutes in France and reached its peak in 1980s in Anglo-American criticism. The primary focus of structuralism is language which is believed to be an organization of several relations. Structuralism has drawn its basic assumptions from the work of Swis linguistic philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure. His book *A Course in General Linguistics* which was first published in French in 1915 was made accessible to the world in translation only in nineteen seventies. The concepts put forward by Saussure in *A Course* had far reaching implications in the world of language, thought and philosophy. Saussure believed that "language is a system of relations and a system is a structure of interrelationship and hence it is interrelationship which makes language work. Without the interrelationship the atomised items do not have any individual significance or meaning" (Wheeler, Introduction viii).

Before we look at the atomised items, the basic elements of language in detail, let us see how structuralism revolutionized the existing thought. Structuralism is a rebellion against traditional humanism and challenges the ideas that a work is the outcome of either the inspiration or imagination of an individual and a good work of literature should tell the truth about human life or external world. Traditional humanism believes that human subject is either the source, origin or end and goal of all meaning in the world. Structuralists take an anti-humanist stance in this regard. They see literature as a system of relations or a structure of interrelationships like language. For them the object of literary study is to see literature as a system with underlying relations and conventions. These relations are important for them as structures are important in a language study. 'Sign' is the basic unit of language. Due to the nature of arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified which compose a sign words can acquire meanings only because of the structures they are embedded in. Hence the structure is the most important aspect of any study of language including literary language. (For a detailed discussion of Saussure's notions, see the previous lesson once again). Since they believed that societies are structured like language, thinkers like Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes applied the tools of structuralism to study social and cultural phenomena. David Lodge remarks "Classical structuralism, based on Saussurian Linguistics, held out the hope of achieving a scientific account of culture by identifying the system that underlies the infinite manifestations of any form of cultural production" (Lodge, p.107).

Though structuralism made important contribution towards the understanding of language and social systems there were problems in the logic of it. It was Derrida who brought it to light through his deconstruction. Saussure's theory of language highlights the major role of meaning and signification in structuring human life generally. Derrida questions all the signifying practices or meaning making processes because he finds structuralists notion of structure and sign problematic. He elaborates these ideas in his pathbreaking essay "Structure, Sign and Play" which is regarded as a manifesto of post-structuralism. It also marks the historical moment at which post-structuralism as a movement begins. Post-structuralism is opposed to classical structuralism as well as traditional humanism in many ways. One major difference between structuralism and post-structuralism is the former believes that though the relationship between the signified and signifier (the word and the concept, the graphic acoustic image and the idea) is arbitrary, there is unity between them in particular unambiguous contexts. And hence the structuralists finally concede signification can be a stable systematic process. But deconstruction, whose architect Derrida is, dwells on the instability inherent in all signification. It is Derrida who had carried the argument to the logical consequences of structuralism though others from different positions like Marxist, psycho-analytical and social discourse theories challenged some of the structuralist assumptions. Among these post-structuralists Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva belong to psycho-analytical school, Pierre Macherey and Frederic Jameson belong to the Marxist one and Michael Foucault and Mikhail Bakhtin are social discourse theorists. If Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes are the French exponents of Deconstruction, Harold Bloom, Hillis Miller, Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hantman are the major figures in American deconstruction.

## 1.17.5. Structure, Sign and Play

Derrida is the single most important theorist who inaugurated the rebellion against structuralism and his theory of desconstruction critiques the basic notions of structuralism. Taking its cue from

Derrida's assertion in "Structure, Sign and Play" that language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique, deconstructive criticism aims to show that any text undermines its own claim to have a definite or determinate meaning. It also demonstrates how a text licenses a reader to produce his own meanings out of it by an activity of semantic play. Derrida comes to this conclusion by questioning the way classical structuralism unwittingly betrayed the very principle on which the Saussurian revolution was founded. In other words Derrida's far-reaching exploration of the implications of Saussure's claim that "in language there are only differences without positive terms," leads him to challenge the founding concepts of structuralism – the sign and structure. His contention is the Western philosophy from Plato to Levi-Strauss (the French anthropologist who applied structuralist methodology to the study of myths) has been phonocentric and logocentric. Derrida uses the term logocentrism to describe all forms of thought which base themselves on some external form of reference such as the notion of truth. From the beginning Western philosophy thought that language is subservient to some idea, intention or referent that lies outside it. Whereas the idea or content had the privileged position, language, which was seen as a medium, vehicle or instrument of something, was regarded as a secondary category.

Derrida remarks Saussure's concept of sign and structure were contaminated by phonocentrism and logocentrism. He views that phonocentrism consists in privileging speech over writing. The preference for speech tends to be based on logocentric assumption that speech directly expresses a meaning or an intention the speaker has in mind. However writing can never be such a transparent medium to the meaning because it is regarded conventionally to copy speech rather than ideas themselves. And so it is removed from meaning. M.H.Abrams remarks in "How to Do Things with Texts" on Derrida's philosophy of language thus:

Derrida proposes that both the Western use of language and philosophies of language are "logocentric", that they are logocentric because essentially "phonocentric" (that is, giving priority and privilege to speech over writings; and that language is thereby permeated, explicitly and implicitly, by what, in a phrase from Heideggar, he calls the "metaphysics of presence". By "presence" – or in alternative terms, a "transcendental signified" or "ultimate referent" – he designated what I call an absolute, that is a foundation outside the play of language itself which is immediately and simply present to us as something ultimate, terminal, self-certifying, and thus adequate to "center" the structure of the linguistic system to guarantee the determinate meaning of an utterance within that system (Seturaman, p.1753).

The Western philosophy has been logocentric, "committed to a belief in some ultimate 'word' 'presence' or 'essence', 'truth' or 'reality' which can act as the foundation of all human thought, language and experience. It has yearned for the *sign*, which will give meaning to all others – "the transcendenta signifier" – and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all other signs can be seen tc point". The central signifier could be *God*, the *Idea*, the *world spirit*, *the self*, *the substance* and so on. In contemporary times, it could be *Freedom*, the *Family, Democracy, Independence, Authority, Orde*r and so on as Terry Eagleton maintains. These are the mega or grand ideas which give value and meaning to all other ideas. Since each of these concepts hopes to found a whole system of thought and language, it must also be beyond that system, untainted by its play of linguistic differences within the structure and outside it. It cannot be implicated in the very language it attempts to order and

anchor; it must be anterior to these discourses, must have existed before it. It must be a meaning but not like any other meaning, just a product of a play of differences. It must figure as the meaning of meanings, the key idea of a whole thought system, the sign around which all other signs revolve and which all others obediently reflect. In other words the centre of the structure.

Here now let us see what problem Derrida has with the notion of the center of a structure. He says that the structurality of structure has always been neutralized by the process of giving it a center or of process of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this centre was not only to balance and organize the structure but also to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the centre of a structure permits the play of elements inside the total form. At the same time the centre also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. The center is also the point at which substitution of contents, elements or terms is no longer possible. Derrida explains the paradox about the concept of center thus.

Thus it has always been thought that the center which is by definition unique, constituted the very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and *outside it*. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere* (Seturaman, p.296).

Derrida argues thus that the concept of the centre is contradictiorily coherent. If the centre is inside the language, being subject to the linguistic play of difference it cannot be stable and so be the center of a structure. If it is outside the language it cannot be the center of the structure and it cannot anchor or order language. Therefore any idea of an immobile, stable center or origin or transcendental meaning is merely a philosophical fiction.

... in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse... when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum* (Seturaman, p.297)

It is only because of a desire for the center which gives stability to the whole process of signification, people have endowed the center with a Being as presence. All the names related to fundamentals or first principles have always designated an invariable presence whether one calls it transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth. Any idea of a center that organizes the structure or a transcendental sign is only a philosophical fiction and this is what deconstructive language theory puts forward. There is no concept which is not shot through with the traces and fragments of other ideas, not embroiled in an open-ended play of signification. Out of the play of signification (that is one signified giving place to another and that in turn giving place to another signifier) certain meanings are elevated by social idealogies to a privileged position or made centers around which other meanings are forced to turn. Terry Eagleton claims such ideas in our times are freedom, the family, democracy and independence. Such ideas are sometimes seen as the origin of other ideas and at other times as the goal. Even about the meanings of these, he says for them to have been possible in the first place other signs must have already existed. It is difficult to think of an origin without wanting to go beyond

Derrida labels as metaphysical any such thought system which depends on an unassailable position or first principles. Derrida regards his own work as contaminated by such metaphysical thought. He also thinks that Freudian criticism of consciousness, of self-identity or self-possession and Heideggar's destruction of the determination of being as presence are trapped in a strange circle.

This circle is unique. It describes the history of metaphysics and the destruction of history of metaphysics. *There is no sense* in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexican – which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest (Seturaman, p.298).

The point Derrida makes is there is no pure language to critique the inherited concepts which is not already sullied by such concepts. To explain the relevance of such new ideas for human sciences such as criticism, linguistics, philosophy and anthropology, Derrida takes up the example of ethnology. Ethnology is a science dealing with the races of human beings, their origin, distribution, characteristics and relations. The discipline of ethnology as a science must have come into existence when European culture stopped considering itself as a culture of reference, having some authority. Paradoxically the assumptions from and the methods through which the other races are studied are again based on ethnocentric metaphysics. So Derrida argues that human discourses and the languages of these discourses are contaminated by the very assumptions they seem to challenge.

Another example he gives is that of nature/culture opposition proposed by Levi-Strauss to study kinship relations. Levi-Strauss is a structuralist anthropologist who believed social formations are structured like languages and hence used the structuralist methodology to study myths. Strauss himself saw the necessity of utilizing the nature/culture opposition to study kinship relations and the impossibility of making it acceptable. He calls the incest-prohibition a scandal in the study since it no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition. He views something that belongs to nature is universal, spontaneous, not depending on any particular culture or on any determinate norm. Something which belongs to culture on the other hand, depends on a system of norms regulating society and is therefore capable of varying from one social structure to another. He calls incest prohibition a scandal because it requires at the same time the attributes of nature and those of culture. The incest-prohibition is universal and can be called natural. But it is also a system of norms and regulations and can be called cultural. Therefore language, instead of expressing truth, bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.

Once the limit of nature/culture opposition is seen, one possibility is conserving in the field of empirical discovery all these old concepts while at the same time exposing here and there their limits, treating them as tools which can still be of use. Their relative efficacy is exploited and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. Thus the language of human sciences criticizes itself. Levi-Strauss thinks he can separate method from truth: nature / culture opposition because of the above contradiction has more methodological value than truth value for him.

Another contribution Levi-Strauss makes to the structuralist thought is the status he accords to his own discourse on myth by calling it "mythologicals". Most remarkable in this critical search for a new status of the discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference or to an origin. The focus and the sources of myths are always shadows which are elusive and non-existent in the first place. So Derrida points out

Everything begins with the structure, the configuration, the relationship. The discourse on this acentric structure, the myth, that is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. In order not to short change the form and the movement of the myth, that violence which consists in centering a language which is describing an acentric structure must be avoided. In this context, therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse, to renounce the episteme which absolutely requires, which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on (Seturaman, p.305).

This acentric structure, with the center, which arrests and founds the freeplay, missing opens a field of unbounded freeplay which permits infinite substitutions, and can give rise to innumerable indeterminate meanings. And so to overcome the limits of a sign, and a structure which desires a center or a central signified Derrida proposes the concept of *differance*.

## 1.17.6. Difference

The word in French means both to differ and to postpone or defer. Each sign in language thus acquires meanings in relation to other elements and also by being distinct from them. The elements are seen as part of a chain of relationships without any definable meanings. The concept of structure is replaced in Derrida's writing by the concept of a chain of signification which avoids the dangers implicit in the notion of a structure. It is open-ended and does not move towards a goal. So it does away with any idea of a commanding entity within the system and by having a temporal and spatial dimension it cannot itself be reduced to the status of an entity or a subject.

According to Derrida neither language nor literature is a stable object because neither the language of the text we read nor the language of the discourse in which we discuss them is exempt from the play of differance. Literature in general does not make any claims to the truth outside. But the discourses of human sciences make this claim and are inescapably logicentric and carry within them the seeds of dismantling their own ruling systems of logic. In the words of Terry Eagleton Derrida's concept of architecture spells out clearly his major differences with structuralism.

All language, for Derrida, displays this surplus over exact meaning, is always threatening to outrun and escape the sense which tries to contain it. 'Literary' discourse is the place where this is most evident, but it is also true of all other writing; deconstruction rejects the literary / non-literary opposition as any absolute distinction. The advent of the concept of writing, then is a challenge to the very idea of structure; for structure always presumes a centre, a fixed principle, a hierarchy of meanings and a solid foundation, and it is just these notions which the endless differing and deferring of writing throws into question.

These are the ideas which fall into post-structuralism that embraces the deconstructive operations of Derrida. Post-structuralism looks upon language as an open ended play in contrast to Saussure's conception of language as a closed system with binary oppositions between speech and

writing, signifiers and signifieds. Derrida shows how the distinction between signifier and signified is not distinct since each signifier gives place to a signified which in turn gives place to another signified resulting in an endless play of meaning. Derrida also counters Saussure's view that writing is secondary to speech which he considers the true object of language study. Saussure privileges speech over writing since sound is perceived to be closer to thought and ideas whereas writing is at one further remove. Derrida shows convincingly how Saussure's binary oppositions are difficult to maintain in the face of his intention to develop a purely formal account of language as "a system of differences without positive terms". Derrida is not happy merely by deconstructing speech/writing hierarchy of Saussure. He also develops a new theory of discourse built around the concept of arche-writing. He argues all the inferior characteristics attributed to writing-materiality, absence, repeatability, and spacing are necessary for any language use. This aspect is obscured by privileging speech over writing. He does not reflect on our everyday communication (speech and writing) but on the underlying presuppositions that enable words to function as language at all. Without these characteristics, no speaking or language would be possible.

Thus Derrida initiates post-structuralism by making two important points 1) The relationship of the signified and signifier which make up a sign is of course arbitrary. The signified and signifier do not give rise just to a finite set of indeterminable meanings but to an infinite number of undecidable meanings. 2) Writing is not secondary to speech and removed from meaning or intention but has all the conditions and correlates that make language possible in the first place at all.

## 1.17.7. A Brief Critical Summary

In this rather difficult lesson you have seen how Derrida tries to demystify the notion that received knowledge is absolute by rigorously dismantling the traditional hierarchies of language to arrive at exactly the opposite position. To demonstrate this he deconstructed Saussure's binary oppositions of speech and writing, signified and signifier, structure and sign. By deconstructing Levi Strauss's analysis of myth is through nature/culture opposition he shows how finally Levi Strauss works against his own logic. By his rigorous and dazzling deconstructive reading of various literary and philosophical texts, Derrida shows how there is a provisionality in all language use and how texts lend themselves to potentially endless readings. This has made literary reading a rich enterprise freed from the tyranny of all received knowledge.

However there is a scepticism among equally great contemporary thinkers such as Foouault, Edward Said and Habermas about Derrida's theory of deconstruction. Foucault argues that deconstructive practice is nothing but a "little pedagogy...which teaches the pupil that there is nothing outside the text". Said says deconstruction is a textualization of discourse which fails to see the "local material density and power of ideas as historical ideas." Derrida is accused of reducing social and political issues to the continuous deconstruction of philosophical texts and arguments by Habermas. Hence the value of his approach to human sciences is distrusted. As an example critics have shown how Derrida's analysis of apartheid is too general and conceptual and fails to point 'to something beyond the text'. However some major social scientists agree that deconstruction provides vital insights into the understanding of social and political relationships.

Thus Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" ushers in post-structuralism by challenging and dismantling the basic concepts of structuralism – the sign and the structure – though he endorses Saussure's principle of differential nature of language. Deconstruction, which asserts that language in general is not governed by anything outside the text has parallels with other schools of criticism like Russian Formalism, the New Criticism and Stylistics as far as its application to literature goes.

## 1.17.8. Glossary

Arche-ecriture : Derrida resists the hierarchical model of language in which speech is privileged over writing. He describes language in general as a kind of writing and terms it arche-ecriture. The reversal of the conventional speech and writing hierarchy which is implied in the term arche-ecriture makes it impossible to see any use of language written or spoken, as being determined by presence, intention or representation.

Difference : The structuralists believe that each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the others. 'Cat' has meaning not in 'itself' but because it is not 'cap', 'cad' or 'bat'. "In the linguistic system" says Saussure, "there are only differences" and meaning is not mysteriously immanent in a sign but is functional, the result of its difference from others.

Difference : A concept Derrida uses to counter logocentrism. The portmanteau coinage, difference is derived from the French word *differer* which means both to defer, postpone, delay and to 'differ', be 'different from'. It explains both the element of fact that any element of language relates to other elements in a text, and the fact that it is distinct from them. The function or meaning of an element is never fully present because it depends on its association with other elements to which it harks back and refers forward. At the same time, its existence as an element depends on its being distinct from other elements.

Discourse : formal and usually extended expression of thought on a subject.

Ecriture : A term which refers to writing which amounts to creation. Though a text is a set of codes, the active participation of the reader in interpreting the codes virtually remakes it or recreates it. Such a conception of writing and reading has been largely governed by the structuralist and post-structuralist criticism. 'Ecriture' in no way aims to reflect the reality outside. Hence it is self-reflective.

Metaphysics : the philosophical study of the ultimate causes and underlying nature of things. Metaphysics of presenceDerrida thought that language is permeated by the metaphysics of presence. It is a phrase from Heideggar meaning a presence, a transendental signified or ultimate referent. Derrida argues it is a historical illusion and is the consequence of the particular theory of language. Derrida labels metaphysical any such thought system - which depends on an unassailable foundation, a first principle, the ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed. Derrida would see his own work as inescapably 'contaminated', by such metaphysical thought though he strives to

escape it. The first principles, on close examination, may always be 'deconstructed' and they can be shown to be products of a particular system of meaning, rather than what prop them up from outside.

Positivism : a distinctive philosophy of knowledge formulated in the work of the French philosopher, Auguste Compte. The object of this philosophy was to extend to the 'arts' subjects the methods and principles of the natural sciences. The positivist philosopher was concerned with perceptible facts rather than ideas, and with how these facts arise, not why; all knowledge not wholly founded on the evidence of the senses was dismissed as idle speculation. In the later nineteenth century this kind of positivism became a major influence on European thought and study of literature.

Signification : Showing by a sign; meaning, the process of signifying.

## 1.17.9. Sample Questions

1. Write a critical note on the arguments put forward by Derrida in "Structure,Sign and Play in the Discourses of Human Sciences".
2. Why is Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" considered the manifesto of post-structuralism?
3. What is the relevance of Derrida's theory of language for the study of human sciences?
4. How does Derrida substantiate his arguments in "Structure, Sign and Play?"
5. What problems did Derrida find in Levi-Struass's work?

## 1.17.10. Suggested Reading

1. David Howarth. *Discourse*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2002.
2. David Lodge (Ed), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, London: Longman, 1988.
3. Kathleen Wheeler and C.T. Indra, *Explaining Deconstruction*, Chennai:Macmillan, 1997.
4. Raman Seldon, (Ed.) *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present: A Reader*. London: Longman, 1988.
5. Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
6. V.S.Seturaman (Ed.). *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*. Madras :Macmillan, 1989

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Lesson - 18

# SHOWALTER : TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS

**Contents :**



## 1.18.1. Objective

After going through this lesson you will be able to understand

* the relevance of feminism for literary studies.
* the growth of feminism as a literary approach
* relation of feminism with other approaches
* the difference between feminist critique and gynocriticism

## 1.18.2. Introduction

Before we look at the notions put forward by Elaine Showalter in "Towards a Feminist Poetics" let us look at feminism in general and feminist literary criticism in particular. The word feminism has been very frequently heard in media and public sphere today. It denotes the theory of the political, economic and social equality of sexes as well as organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. The word 'feminism' has political connotations and it has an emancipatory goal politically and socially. Our main interest is in the cultural ramifications of the feminist enterprise. What are the basic assumptions in feminist literary criticism? Do men and women approach literature differently? Do men and women write literature differently? Before we answer these questions we shall discuss feminist literary criticism and trace its history.

## 1.18.3. Feminism and Its History

The feminist literary criticism has a long history now but has no single definite theoretical framework or affinity. It can be broadly termed as analyses of writing by men and women, focusing on different ways in which they approach and produce literature, exposing the underlying patriarchal structures. It uses all other approaches to literature like Marxist, psychoanalytical, sociological, structuralist, post-structuralist eclectically with the above goal. The absence of a single, definite theoretical framework is seen to be a limitation by some feminist critics and a creative possibility by others. However there are two discernible streams in the feminist theory. One stream of feminist

criticism has a distinct social and political orientation and makes use of Marxist ideology. These critics see an obvious parallel between the notions of class oppression and gender oppression. The consciousness of oppression has been a great source of rebel ideologies and reformist impetus in modern societies. Some feminists argue the oppression of women can be comprehended only within the larger understanding of class oppression. The implication of this notion is once the people are liberated from class oppression and get economic equality, the women in the new societies will also be liberated from gender oppression.

The second type of feminism is revisionist in nature and questions the above assumption, too. These critics argue that patriarchal societies have long been there before class societies and that socialist societies are no less patriarchal than capitalist societies. And so they reject all conceptual structures as male dominated, including the Dialectical materialism within which the Marxist thought originated and developed. Their suspicion of all theory arose from the fact it is made by the men and from the belief it is made for their benefit.

Many of assumptions in feminism are put forward by the French Philosopher, a student of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir's in *The Second Sex* (1949). In this work, she established the principles of modern feminism. She observes centuries of oppression have made men and women reach self-definition differently. Man defines himself as a human being first, for this reason considers himself the norm whereas woman apprehends herself as the woman first and hence deviation from the norm. She is the other and he is the self. Such assumptions lead to a deep-seated alienation in woman and a lopsided relationship with man. Simone de Beauvoir shows with great scholarship how

... man's dominance has been secured through the ages by an ideological power: legislators, priests, scientists and philosophers have all promoted the idea of women's sub-ordination. For feminists to break this patriarchal power it is necessary to challenge men at the level of theory, but without entering the theoretical domain on men's terms (Raman Seldon, p.521).

The assumption of female inferiority can be traced back even to such male major thinkers as Aristotle and St. Thomas. It was perpetuated in later ages by such male thinkers as Freud. St. Thomas called woman an imperfect man and so an incidental being. The concept is symbolised in Genesis where Eve was depicted as made from a 'supernumerary bone' of Adam. Aristotle said 'the female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities'. Freud only echoed Aristotle when he observed 'female sexuality is shaped by penis-envy'. Feminists, however, successfully countered this argument by saying that there are biological differences as well as similarities between men and women but it is illogical to suppose they envy one another on that account. They further argued since all over the world in different cultures, it is the female parent who brings up a child and if at all a child develops a feeling of inferiority by watching a parent's body closely it should be the male child but not the female child. Feminists are sceptical not only about this psychoanalytical concept of Freud but all theory. It is because of the power of the daunting image of male structures projected by natural sciences which push the human race towards destruction relentlessly.

Contemporary feminist criticism took inspiration from the women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and resulted in pioneering works in the field such as Mary Ellman's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millet's polemical book *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*. However it is erroneous to suppose feminism had its beginnings only in the twentieth century. There is two centuries of struggle for women's social and political rights evidenced by the

stence of books such as Mary Wollstronecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and nn Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1845). What gave fresh impetus to the feminist literary criticism in the 60s was political success of women's movements. An important precursor to feminist literary criticism was Virginia Woolf who argued in *A Room of One's Own* in 1929 that cultural, economic and educational limitations within patriarchal societies hindered women writers from realizing fully their creative potential. In "Professions for Women" she discussed the disabling nineteenth-century ideology of womanhood. She called this particular myth the "Angel in the House" and it called for women to be 'sympathetic, unselfish and pure'. To make space for writing, both internal and external, a woman had to be selfish and use 'wiles and flattery'. She opens the question of female language and the nature of genres.

In a similar way Woolf claims the genres were made by men for their own use. Only the novel gives women a workable space, and even the form has to be reworked for its new purpose – expressing the female body.

(Raman Seldon, p.522)

Another major feminist critic, Helen Cixous called women to put their bodies into the writing in her celebrated manifesto of woman's writing 'The Laugh of the Medusa'. Her emphasis is psychological rather than sociological, theoretical rather than pragmatic. She questioned the phallocentrism and phallogocentrism of the conventional criticism that is the male-centred view and male-dominated discourse. She asks women to celebrate the feminine and female instead of trying to be androgynous in contrast to Woolf's advocacy.

She skillfully uses Derrida's concept of 'difference' and the advice to allow free play of the signifier, in her attempt to go beyond death dealing polarities of Father/Mother, Sun/Moon, culture/ nature, head/emotion.

(V.S.Sethuraman, p.45).

Helen Cixous was also obviously influenced by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, not just Derrida. Following Virginia Woolf, Tillie Olsen, Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter have developed definitions of women's writing and established its traditions. They encouraged publishing houses to reprint lost works of women writers. Some new publishing houses entirely devoted to women's works such as Virago (Kali for women in India) also emerged. A host of journals focusing on women's writing also cropped up. So far we looked at new directions feminist literary criticism took and major feminist critics who developed the varied approaches. Now we shall briefly discuss Showalter's life and work before we focus on "Towards a Feminist Poetics".

## 1.18.4. Showalter, Her Life and Her Work

Elaine Showalter was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts of Jewish immigrant parents. Graduating in English in 1962, she did her post-graduation at Brandeis University. Against parental opposition she married English Showalter, a scholar of French literature in 1963. After two children, she moved with him to the University of California, Davis, where she began her doctoral research. She taught English and Women's Studies for many years at Rutgers University and later became a Professor of English at Princeton. Her Ph.D. is on the double standards in Victorian Criticism of

women's fiction. Soon after she edited an anthology of *Women's Liberation and Literature* in 1971. The book she published six years later, *A Literature of Their own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing* belongs to the line of what she describes as gynocriticism. The book includes brief accounts of many forgotten women writers awaiting rediscovery. It quickly established itself as an authoritative study of its subject, and a standard textbook in the rapidly burgeoning field of women's studies. Her book was a major contribution to the revival of the work of women writers, done by exposing the hegemony in the construction of canons. But by the late 1970's it seemed to her that feminist criticism had reached a 'theoretical *impasse'*. In the lecture delivered in 1978, entitled "Towards a Feminist Poetics", she attributed this dead end to the essentially male character of theory itself and to the way it is practised and professionally institutionalized in the academy. This lecture was published in 1979 in *Women's Writing and Writing About Women* and in 1985 reprinted in *The New Feminist Criticism* edited by herself. But in 1981 in "Feminist criticism in the wilderness" she says "it now appears that what looked like a theoretical *impasse* was actually an evolutionary phase". Her contribution to feminist literary criticism is significant and it includes works such as *The Female Malady* (1985), *Sister's Choice* (1989) and *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* (1990). She edited an anthology of late-Victorian feminist stories, *Daughters of Decadence* in 1993.

## 1.18.5. Feminist Poetics

Following the explosion of feminist criticism in the 1970's there have been efforts to analyse and classify the work. Showalter in her essay says feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties based on woman's relation to a book i.e., that is whether she is a reader or writer of the work. The first she terms as *feminist critique* and it attempts the exposure of sexism and stereotypes in literary and critical texts usually texts by men, known as the androtexts. The second she calls gynocriticism which involves the more sympathetic study of writings by women or gynotexts.

The Feminist Critique is concerned with the woman as the reader,

> ... with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of awakening a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes (p.403).

The feminist critique explores the ideological assumptions underlying critical works, critically examines stereotypical images of men and women in literature, the misconceptions about women in criticism and omissions in the conventional male-centered literary history. "It is also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience, especially in popular culture and film; and with the analysis of woman-as-sign in semiotic systems" (p.403).

In her work *A Literature of Their Own* which comes under the category of gynocriticism Showalter divided the evolution of the female literary tradition into three phases. These are the feminine, the feminist and female stages. In the feminine phase from 1840 to 1880, women writers tried to imitate the male writers to equal their intellectual achievements and in the process they internalized the assumptions of typical male views about female nature. The images of women they created (women were frail and beautiful, in need of physical and moral support of strong and brave men) corresponded to the conventional stereotypical images because they needed the approval of the male critical establishment to survive. The typical characteristic of this age is the use of male pseudonym,

George. As a result of these survival devices, the feminist content of woman's writing turned out to be either oblique or ironic.

In the feminist phase from 1880 to 1920, the woman writers were in a position to reject the accommodating postures of femininity because they have won the vote. They were angry and admonitory since they made the wronged womanhood their subject.

In the female phase starting in 1940 and going on in the present, women extend analysis of culture to forms and techniques of literature rejecting both imitation and protest. Both these are seen in fact to be forms of dependency. During this period woman novelists like Richardson and Virginia Woolf started thinking in terms of female sentences and fem genres. In an effort to account for complex combinations of female tradition, the feminist critics ha used many available devices and methodologies borrowing elements from approaches like Marxism and structuralism. Since feminist critique uses borrowed methodologies from male-dominated theories due to historical conditions Showalter remarks it reached a dead-end. She uses a telling metaphor in describing this process.

I believe, however, the this thrifty feminine making–do is ultimately unsatisfactory. Feminist criticism cannot go around forever in man's ill-fitting hand-me-downs (p.405).

The shift from feminist critique to gynocriticism is thus occasioned by the need to free criticism from the borrowed models. Gynocritics aim to find their own direction. Showalter adapts the gynocritics from French where 'gyno' means 'womb'. She describes gynocriticism thus:

The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psycho-dynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and of course, studies of particular writers and works (pp.403-404).

The feminist critique has social and political orientation and affiliation with Marxist aesthetics. The gynocriticism is more self-contained, more imaginative and experimental, with connections to modes of new feminist research. The four models of difference the new feminists think of are based on the biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural factors. The gynocriticism takes women's experience into account and values subjectivity over what it calls the scienticism i.e., the so called scientific attitude of male dominated discourse. The new theories of the text such as structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis competing aggressively with science in technological societies are in danger of creating new hierarchies. The higher system is seen to be concerned with the scientific problems of form and structure and the lower system is seen to be concerned with humanistic problem of content and interpretation in criticism. Showalter points out that these systems might take on subtle gender identities and might manage to push women's writing to the margins again..

Showalter finds the feminist critique inadequate because it has yet to free itself from the yoke of male-orientation. When these woman critics study sexual stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, the limited roles women played in literary history, they are not learning anything specific about women's experience but only about the way men thought of women. The feminist critics worked for long years as apprentices to male theoreticians and this process has increased their resistance to challenging such theories.

At the point of giving this lecture Showalter speaks about the contemporary theoretical impasse in feminist criticism. She attributes it

... our own divided consciousness, the split in each of us. We are both the daughters of the male tradition, of our teachers, our professors, our dissertation advisers and our publishers – a tradition which asks us to be rational, marginal and grateful; and sisters in a new women's movement which engenders another kind of awareness and commitment, which demands that we renounce the pseudo-success of token womanhood and the ironic masks of academic debate (p.407).

The same inheritance of double tradition she views later as a positive factor. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" published in 1981, she remarks though feminist criticism is not unified "it is more adventurous in assimilating and engaging with theory" (David Lodge, p.330). Here she views the plurality of feminist criticism as a gain but not as a lacuna.

In "Feminist Poetics", Showalter advises feminist critics to stop imitating male theorists as well as protesting vociferously against male-dominated discourse since both denote a dependency. She asks the new woman critics to find a new vocabulary, a new way of reading that can combine woman's authentic experience with her intelligence, her reason with her suffering, her scepticism – as the inheritor of a double tradition-with ner vision. She finally assert that "One thing is certain: feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay, and we must make it a permanent home".

## 1.18.6. A Brief Critical Summary

In the first section of this lesson we looked at two streams of feminist criticism. Having affiliation with Marxism, one stream has social and political orientation and equates gender oppression with class oppression. The other stream, revisionist in nature, distrusts all theory as it is man made.

We had a glimpse of the history of feminist criticism and also the deconstruction of traditional patriarchal notions by feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. After looking at the contribution of many women writers and critics to varied elements in feminist criticism, we have considered Showalter's review of current feminist criticism and critical analysis of it. The feminist critique is concerned with woman as reader and approaches writing by men to explore underlying patriarchal assumptions. Showalter finds feminist critique inadequate because it uses borrowed tools from other male-centred approaches and does not reveal anything about women's authentic experience. Gynocriticism which is concerned with woman as writer is more autonomous and innovative. It privileges woman's subjectivity against the so-called objectivity of professed scientific approaches to literature. She asks feminist critics finally to develop independent and appropriate theoretical frameworks to approach literature. Showalter made significant contribution to the rapidly burgeoning field of feminist literary scholarship.

## 1.18.7. Glossary

Androgynous : Having the characteristics of both male and female, suitable for either sex.

Assumption : Something assumed for the sake of argument or for use in a proof; hypothesis.

Canon : Selection of texts, partly for the purpose of study, regarded as exemplary. For feminists the canon represented on assertion of patriarchal values and male superiority.

Dialectical materialism It gave primacy to the economic and social base in any given society and relegated beliefs, customs and ideas of a cultural unity to the realm of superstructure. Literature and culture were supposed to be determined by and reflect the relations at the base of the society.

Hegemony : The means, generally cultural, by which the ruling groups come to dominate without direct oppression.

Patriarchy : the male dominance in social, institutional and personal power relations between sexes. Kate Millet used the term in the sense in *Sexual Politics*, 1979. Patriarchy is seen to be cause of women's oppression. It is the rule of the father which has for centuries distorted the position and the role of woman in society. Millet distinguishes sex from gender; sex is biological whereas gender is a social and cultural construct.

Revision : the act of making a new version of

Semiotics : a theory of signs and symbols that deals with their function in languages

## 1.18.8. Sample Questions

1. Trace the history of feminist criticism.
2. Discuss Showalter's views on feminist poetics.
3. Distinguish between the feminist critique and gynocriticism.
4. What is the justification for a feminist approach to literature?
5. Why does Showalter find the Feminist critique inadequate to approach literature?

## 1.18.9. Suggested Reading

1. Ann Jefferson and David Robey. *Modern Literary Theory*. London: B.T.Batsford Ltd., 1986.
2. David Lodge, ed. *Modern Criticism and Thoery: A Reader*. London: Longman, 1988.
3. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*, ed. V.S.Seturaman., Madras: Macmillan, 1989 (All textual quotations are from this essay).
4. Raman Seldon, Ed. *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present.* A Reader. London: Longman, 1988.

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Lesson - 19

# SAILENT FEATURES OF MARJORIE BOULTON'S ANATOMY OF POETRY

## Contents:



## Objective:

- to focuss on the importance aspects of Marjorie Boulton's book, Anatomy of Poetry
- to study the qualities of traditional verse forms
- to familiarize the students with various formal aspects of poetry.

## 1.19.2. Introduction:

Marjorie Boulton's The Anatomy of Poetry comes under essential readings for students of poetry. The 'Foreword' is given by L.A.G. Strong. Strong acknowledges the book as 'practical' guide for beginners and also Boulton's "original response to poetry" (VII). Boulton is also the author of The Anatomy of Prose, The Anatomy of Drama and The Anatomy of Language. In "Author's Introduction" to The Anatomy of Poetry Boulton puts forth the fact of her long association with poetry. After a considerable search for a proper book which focuses on technique and content of poetry, she herself wrote The Anatomy of Poetry, a comprehensive book focusing on the subject of poetry – its content and technique.

Boulton's The Anatomy of Poetry is not about history of English poetry. It is a technical book. Her belief that knowing the technique enhances one's enjoyment is clearly stated. Boulton, in this small comprehensive book, aims at provoking the reader to think of poetry in clear, technical terms without losing upon the charm and enhancement of poetry.

## 1.19.3. The Importance of Form

It is difficult to define 'form.' For general understanding form is 'shape of some kind.' In the context of poetry shape means ordering which gives rise to beauty. While talking of poetic beauty we are talking of formal beauty. We shall try to understand what is beauty of form through analysis.

In the first place, to appreciate poetry, we should read more poetry, and gradually increase our capacity to comprehend poetry. Reading poetry aloud adds up to our joy in poetry. But it is essential to know how to read a poem. Reading poetry gives us delight. Sometimes delight comes due to the

content, which might be nearer to our heart. For example, theology, religion etc,. But the real delight lies in recognizing the appropriateness of rhythm and diction.

In analyzing a poem, the student should be familiar with technical terms. Familiarity with technical terms – like onomatopoeia and alliteration – saves time and rescues us from misunderstanding. Hence Boulton recommends knowledge of critical terms.

However, it is usually not possible to analyse a poem completely. The demand is to understand each component part and how these parts relate appropriately to each other. Hence the difficulty in working towards complete analysis.

The poetic form is the most beautiful form of literature. It is also historically most primitive. The primitive element in poetry is the physical. By physical we mean marked rhythm. More often we are attracted by the sound of the poem, without fully understanding the words.

Boulton separates the form of poetry into two: the Physical form and the Mental form. The physical form includes its appearance on paper, rhythm, thyme, intonation, echo and repetition. Mental from includes the content, grammatical structure, logical sequence, the pattern of associations and the pattern of images. The physical form and the mental form combine to give a good poem its power over our imagination.

## II The Physical form of Poetry

The physical form of a poem and its mental form are inextricably interrelated. That is why a prose paraphrase of a poem can never substitute the poem itself. A poem is governed by complex interrelated laws. A poem is a fusion of imagination, speculation, learning and verse technique. Together these make one whole which is a work of art.

An important aspect while studying poetry is tonal variation. Tonal variation, in other terms is the difference in meaning shown by intonation. Intonation is part of the physical form. Sometimes intonation may go very deeply into the meaning of a poem.

The physical form of poetry is mainly a pattern of sounds. The pattern of sounds can be divided into two important categories. One is rhythm. The other is phonetic form. Rhythm is very difficult to understand. The phonetic form emerges from sharp difference of vowel and consonant sounds placed in relation to one another. The two important aspects that associate physical form with mental form are intonation and repetition.

## III Rhythm

### (A) Metre

The words rhythm and metre in English poetry refer to pattern of stresses. But one must remember rhythm includes metre but metre is relatively small part of rhythm.

English verse rhythm depends on the arrangement of stresses. The simplest way to denote stresses is to use (/). Use a stroke(/) over each stressed syllable and understand that the other syllables are weak or unstressed.

Eg: The cat sat on the mat and ate a rat.

The stressed syllables are those to which we give more emphasis in natural speech. Common sense enables us to place the natural stress of speech in sentences. While using 'stress' we have to pay attention to the meaning.

English is an irregular language. A word may be stressed differently depending on whether it is a noun or verb, or whether a suffix is added. For foreign students of English, 'stress pattern' poses a definite challenge. The only way is to look up in a dictionary.

In English, we generally have all strong stresses separated by one or more unstressed syllables between them. Stress is produced by putting more force of breath to the syllable. The metre of poetry is the basic pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Now we shall look at some patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables:

### Trochaic

This pattern may be described as alternative stressed and unstressed syllables, beginning with a stressed syllable.

### Dactylic

This pattern may be described as alternating one stressed and two unstressed syllables beginning with a stressed syllable.

### Iambic

A pattern alternating stressed and unstressed syllables beginning with an unstressed syllable.

When an 'iambic' has five stresses in a line it is called iambic pentametre. This is the commonest kind of English metre. Eg: Plays of Shakespeare, all heroic couplets, all sonnets, Paradise Lost, The Faerie Queene, Idylls of King etc,.

The other important patterns are Anapaestic, Spondee, Amphibrach, Cretic and Pyrrhic.

So far, we have seen basic patterns otherwise known as metre. Metre is divided into feet. The 'foot' is the stressed syllable together with the unstressed syllables that naturally attached themselves to it. This analysis is called 'Scansion.'

The number of feet in a line is important. Here are given some technical terms for lines of various length: Seven feet, six feet, five feet, four feet, three feet, two feet and one foot are respectively referred as Septenarius, Hexametre, Pentametre, Tetrametre, Trimetre, Dimetre and Monometre.

To work out the rhythm of a poem we should know these technical terms.

## IV Rhythm
## (B)Variation: Counterpoint

To decipher the pattern of stress, we should understand that important ideas dictate the stresses.

Eg: To be or not to be, that is the question.

What appeals to the reader or listener is natural rhythm. A few variations in the basic metre make the rhythm sound more natural and lively. Hence, occasionally variations are welcome. Variations can be practiced on all the basic patterns but we should remember that unless we know to recognize the basic metre, we cannot appreciate variations and derive pleasure.

We have interesting examples of variation from Shakespeare's plays. This is because Shakespeare has used rhythm for dramatic effect. The rhythm in Shakespeare is flexible.

However variation for the sake of variation is useless.

To understand properly rhythm and variation, it is necessary to read the poem aloud, intelligently, and mark the syllables that are naturally stressed.

Indeed, a certain ambiguity of rhythm is one of the beauties of a poem.

**V Phonetic Form**

**(A) Rhyme**

Rhyme is part of the physical form of poetry. It is a repetition of some arrangement of vowels and consonants at the end of lines, or sometimes in the middle. There are no special terms to describe rhyme.

Many different arrangements of rhymes are possible. In old ballads we find simplest forms of rhyme.

Eg: I'll do as much for my true love
As any young man may;
I'll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelvemonth and a day

Spenser's Prothalamion is an example of elaborate rhyme. Pattern of rhyme is called rhyme-scheme. It is customary and convenient to denote rhyme-scheme by using letters of alphabet. Eg: abab;...

The rhyme-scheme of a poem plays a part in its emotional effect, though not generally so great a part as the rhythm. Elaborate rhyme-scheme suggests something formal. Eg: Spenser's Prothalamion. Simple rhyme-schemes are used in couplets Eg: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales; The rhyming in quatrain is usually abcb or abab. Eg: Coleridge's The Ancient Mariner. Elaborate verse form is used in narrative poems. The most remarkable example is the difficult nine-line Spensarian stanza used by Spenser in The Faerie Queene. Elaborate narrative forms of rhyme move slowly. Satire demands a crisp rhyme-scheme. Heroic couplets – iambic pentametre couplets – are a favourite form of satire.

Thousands of different rhyme-schemes are possible for short lyrics, depending on the mood. Further repetition of the verse form is part of the symmetry of a poem.

In the twentieth century the possibilities of rhyme-schemes in English have increased. Many poets accepted several kinds of rhymes. They accepted even partial rhymes. This is the most important development in the form of poetry for it gave freedom to the poet. Eg: Wilfred Owen's

partial rhymes or pararhymes. In the twentieth century which Auden called the Age of Anxiety, pararhymes were suitable to express hopes, fears and vague ideas. The other kinds of rhymes well-known in the twentieth century are:

### Assonance

It is the rhyming of vowel sounds without regard for consonants. Eg: poems of Louis Macneice.

### Semi-Rhyme

This is a kind of partial rhyme.

### Unaccented Rhyme

In this one of the rhyme-syllables is a stressed syllable but the other is not. Unaccented rhymes are intended to serve as rhymes. Eg: Poems of Robert Penn Warren.

### Suspended Rhyme

In this the rhyme is made by borrowing a sound from the following line. This rhyme came into existence because of Gerard Manley Hopkins's daring technique. Suspended rhyme has had an enormous influence on the twentieth century poets.

A serious student of poetry should possess knowledge of techniques – of old and new.

## VI Phonetic Form

### (A) Onomatopoeia

Rhythm obviously supports the meaning of words of a poem. But sometimes the sound of the words also gives great support to the meaning. This tendency in words to echo the meaning by the actual sound is called Onomatopoeia. Eg: buzz, crash, bang, miaow, quack, giggle, sizzle, hiss, sneeze, thud, snort. It is important to pronounce Onomatopoeic words correctly.

Onomatopoeia is very common in poetry. It gives artistic effect. Pope and Tennyson have used it effectively. Pope in his An Essay on Criticism points out, that Onomatopoeia is a necessary part of poet's technique. Look at this example from Tennyson's "Brook"

I chatter over stony ways
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

Among the twentieth century poets Onomatopoeia effects are skilfully cultivated by poets like Dylan Thomas.

Onomatopoeic poems are suitable for reading aloud. They contain the power of incantation. They give sound-pictures. Spontaneity is more important in using Onomatopoeia than craftsmanship. The context in which it is used and the other sounds in juxtaposition make it viable.

**VII Phonetic Form**
**(B) Internal Pattern**

To understand the togethemess of sound and sense, the study of phonetics will be very helpful. Rhythm-pattern and rhyme-scheme give symmetry of form to a poem. Further a poem can have details within the symmetry or main structure. These details include alliteration, internal rhymes, assonances, echoes, various kinds of repetitions and contrast. When we become sensitive to these internal patterns, we enjoy poetry more.

Alliteration is an instinctive method of emphasis. Many proverbs and idiomatic expressions draw their force from alliteration. Eg: Speech is Silvern, silence is golden; peace and prosperity.

Two types of alliteration can be distinguished: 1) Piled alliteration, in which the initial letter is repeated several times to give a cumulative effect. This is generally used for emphasis. 2) Crossed alliteration in which two or more initial letters are woven into a pattern, perhaps in alternation, to give a kind of balance. This is more subtle kind and probably the most attractive.
Example for Piled alliteration:

Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset...

- - Tennyson: "Ulysses"

Example for Crossed alliteration:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three and twentieth year!

—Milton

Alliteration is not the only kind of repeated sound in a poem. We have already seen repeated sound in rhyme. There are several other internal echoes which a diligent reader might find to his joy. Edgar Allen Poe and Swinburne used a great many internal echoes.

## VIII Form in Intonation

The ups and downs of the reading voice conveys the intonation. The pattern of intonation can be grasped only when the poem is read aloud. We can alter the meaning of a poem entirely by altering the intonation.

Poems in which the intonation-pattern is important to convey the sense, tend to be written in ironical and conversational style. Look at the pattern of intonation in one of Sir John Suckling's poems:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't win her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee, why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing do't?
Prithee, why so mute?

Quit, quit for shame this will not move;
This cannot take her.
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her;
The devil take her!

The reader expects repetition of the pattern of the two stanzas in the third. He gets an agreeable, amusing shock in the third stanza. The third stanza has a very different intonation. The half-sympathetic, reasoning tone of the first two verses gives place to a robust and hearty dismissal of the whole matter.

Shifts of intonation make the poem lively. A good reciter comprehends the meaning and agility of the poem through intonation.

## IX The Use of Repetition

### (A) Intellectual Effect

When we discuss the pattern in poetry, we discuss repetition, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and internal echoes. These are all repetition of sounds. But the repetition of whole words or phrases is as much a part of the mental as of the physical form.

The repetition of words is used for emphasis. There are two kinds of effects when we repeat a word or phrase: to emphasize a fact or idea is called intellectual effect. This is quite different from the function of repetition in a refrain or chorus.

Repetition of a single word is very common. It is used for emphasis.

**Eg:**

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause.

— Shakespeare

A single word may be repeated in order to bring emotional climax.

**Eg:**

Let him have time to tear his curled hair,
Let him have time against himself to rave,
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

— Shakespeare

In the hands of a master-poet, repetition becomes magnificent. In an inferior poet it might sound very dull.

The repetition of a phrase also serves to give emphasis:

All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high.

— Swinburne

Repetition of the structure of a phrase is common device:

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit

There are more subtle devices of repetition. One is to play with a word using it several times with a slightly different meaning each time. John Donne's "Hymn to God the Father" is a good example. A few lines from the poem explain the play with words:

Swear by Thyself that at my death Thy son
Shall shine as he shines now and heretofore;
And having done that Thou has done,
I fear no more.

The 'Son' is a 'sun' that shines as well as the son of God. Repetition of the word 'done' has special effect. The poet is saying 'Thou, God, has Donne – in Thy keeping for ever.' When ideas are paralleled, repetition helps in avoiding monotony:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly.

— Shelley.

Repetition helps when reversal of normal word-order occurs:

Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
There was – and then no more of Thee and me.

In the context of reversal of normal word-order the poet should use the device of repetition with discretion or else it will result in artificiality.

The last type of repetition for its intellectual effect is the repetition of the whole structure of a verse.

**Eg:**

Then she became a duck,
A duck upon the stream;
And he became a water-dog,
And fetched her back again.
Hulloa, etc.

Then she became a hare,
A hare all on the plain;
And he became a greyhound dog
And fetched her back again.
Hulloa, etc.

Then she became a fly,
A fly all in the air;
And he became a spider,
And fetched her to his lair.
Hulloa, etc.

This form is a favourite of folk-songs. Though it is primitive use of repetition, the effect is not unpleasant.

**X The Use of Repetition**
**(B) Pure Magical Effect**

Use of repetition might give the effect of magic to the poem. Boulton traces it back to religious rituals. The magic touches the reader, when some of the poet's emotion is passed on to him by processes that are not conscious.

Repetition heightens the emotional effect of its real, implied meaning. The device of repetition some times referred as refrain is used by poets to bring contrast or create horror. It was used in early English ballads and carols.

The nineteenth century experiments with refrain failed. Tennyson, Rossettis and Morrison can be given as examples. In the twentieth century the refrain is almost entirely abandoned except in humorous verse. Modern poets abandoned regularity of refrain in favour of interest. They believe that repetitive pattern of words, which imply ideas, are more intellectual than patterns of sounds.

**XI Mental Form**
**The Main Types of Poetry**

The study of mental form is more advanced than the study of physical form. Real appreciation depends on the power to grasp the mental form. Mental form can be appreciated by grasping the content of the poem, with consciousness of the poem.

Poems range from very short and simple expression of a single mood to something as large and complex as Paradise Lost. Poetry has been divided into various main types. Here we shall briefly look at types of intellectual structure in poetry:

## Epic

Epic is the longest kind of poem. It tells a story of heroic action. There is generally a good deal of physical or spiritual conflict or both. Some of the characters are portrayed in great detail. The style is very dignified, ornate and formal. The figures of speech are often elaborate.

The epic form is early in any history of literature. Its verse form is simple.

Examples: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey; Virgil's Aeneid; Miltion's Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained; Spenser's The Faerie Queene

## Epic narrative

Epic narrative is associated with epic in formal style. It tells a story of heroic action or suffering. But the action is simple without the length and complexity of epic. Epic narrative can be read at one sitting and an epic is not normally read at all at once.
Examples: Chaucer's "The Clerk's Tale"; Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis; Arnold's Sohrab and Rustum;

## Simple narrative

In this the story is all-important. The style is simple and direct.
Examples: Old Ballads; Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

## Verse Essay

A piece of thoughtful verse on some topic of interest. There are two kinds (a) didactic verse essay giving good advice (b) discussing something in a calm way.

## Satire

Satire is didactic in purpose but it is also intended to arouse laughter by witty criticism of maladies in society.
Example: Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel

## Ode

Ode is a fairly long and dignified poem written on some public occasion or addressed to some person.
Example: Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

## Lyric

Lyric is a fairly short poem expressing emotion. It is simple and musical in diction.

## Sonnet

Sonnet is lyric in subject but not in form.

## Elegy

Elegy is a subdivision of lyric. It is short or long poem of mourning or on some sorrowful theme.

## Epigram

Epigram is a very short poem consisting of 2,4 or 6 lines. It is crisp with a stinging climax. Its function is to display wit.

## Dramatic Poetry

It is a large body of magnificent poetry requiring more than one voice for correct interpretation. The plays of Shakespeare, Webster, Marlowe, Milton, T.S.Eliot and Christopher Fry can be given as examples. Dramatic poetry is intended for the stage and highly suitable to it.

Some dramatic poems are intended to reading in silence. Example: the plays of Byron and Shelley.

A verse play like any other play may be full length or one Act. Its setting could be historical, fantastic or contemporary. The diction could be modern, archaic or stylized. Poetry in a dramatic poem has its dramatic function.

## Semi-dramatic Poetry

In this more than one person speaks. But the stage production is not intended. The purpose of such an untheatrical dialogue is to clarify a contrast of ideas, ideals or characters.

## Dramatic Lyric

The poet speaks with a single voice that is not his own. He is trying to give sympathetic, explanatory expression to an alien personality. Example: Browning's "Andrea Del Sarto"

Knowledge of these main types of poetry enhances our appreciation of poetry.

### XII Mental Form
### Logical Sequence

Disciplined reasoning is called logic. Logic is rather opposed to emotion. We can't expect pure logic in poetry. But all great poetry contains 'intellectual emotion.' Intellectual emotion may be defined as reconciling reason and emotion. Every poem—narrative, didactic, satirical and so on has a plan called 'logical sequence.' Every reader encounters difficulty in grasping the logical sequence of a poem.

To understand a poem the reader should be alert to ideological, historical, mythological and allegorical allusions. The reader should pay attention to the use of associations. For example to understand contemporary poetry we should have knowledge of Freud, Marx and Jung and others.

Poetry which has obvious coherent meaning can be categorized into three main kinds of structure: (1) there is the kind in which the poet simply leads up to a climax (2) the poem in which the poet turns on himself with a contradiction (3) the most important one is what might be called dialectical development in which the contradiction is resolved. We find this kind of highly logical structure in Shakespeare and the Metaphysical poets.

To conclude, the poem of a single main idea reaching a climax, tends to make us share the emotion with the writer. The poem of contrast makes us join the writer in thinking about the subject. The poem of dialectical development poses intellectual toughness.

**'III Mental Form**
**.e Use of Associations**

The use of associations is a very important feature of poetry. In life as well as in poetry associations have great power to arouse emotions. The reader should be sufficiently intelligent and well furnished to grasp the associations which might be called mental connections.

The associations of a word depend very largely on the context. Words which are heavily charged with associations are more likely to be effective in poetry than technical words. On the other hand every now and then the poetic language becomes tedious from stock words and a reaction takes place. Some words become unfashionable and new words are brought in to refresh the language. Poets like Auden, Empson and Eliot have done a tremendous service to English poetry by widening its vocabulary.

Classicist critics pointed out that vocabulary proper to poetry should possess dignity. The idea that some words were more suited to poetry than others was the recognition of the power of a word's associations. Nowadays it is safer to say that all words are suitable for use in poetry, however crude and common, rare or technical, provided their associations are appropriate to the context.

This importance of associations is one of the differences between prose and poetry. Prose relies on analogy and poetry on metaphor. Metaphor enriches poetry and adds something unique to our experience.

Example:

But at my back I always hear
Times winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity

—Marvell

In order to be effective, associations must be generally comprehensive. Apart from the poet's fault in using associations, there could be several reasons in making associations ineffective. With the passage of time associations might become unfamiliar. Sometimes it could be reader's fault for having inadequate general knowledge, experience or imagination. In this context the poet has both responsibility and right: the poet is to choose images that are comprehensible to his audience. And the poet has a perfect right to choose his audience. On the whole, the poet should see that associations must lead to successful communication.

**XIV Mental Form**
**The Two Main Patterns of Imagery**

There are two ways of using images in poetry: (1) a poem may have a series of images that support or contradict one another. Eg: Burns's "A Red, Red Rose" (2) a poem may have a single dominant image on which the sequence and structure of the poem depend. Eg: Herbert's "Love"

Why does a poet choose an image? The poet chooses an image to illustrate his own experience for himself, as well as to pass it on to others. Yet we should understand that the poet does not always consciously choose his image. The image may choose him. Psychologists say that an image might spring from the unconscious mind.

Sometimes the images affect us long before we have grasped the intellectual meaning. However, probably a really great poem is one in which the image, while it has an immediate and powerful emotional effect, will also bear intellectual analysis. For the greatest poetic excitement, we need imagery that shall strike directly at the unconscious mind and also be worth analysis by the conscious reasoning mind.

In early poetry poets gave less conscious thought to their images but nowadays all poets surely give some conscious thought to their images.

## XV Some Traditional Verse Forms

Boulton gives a list of traditional verse forms:

**Blank verse**: A sequence of unrhymed pentametres. This is the principal verse form for dramatic poetry in English. It is very flexible and dignified. It is the nearest to normal human speech. Eg: plays of Shakespeare; Milton's Paradise Lost

**Heroic Couplet:** Iambic pentametre lines rhyming in pairs. This is most commonly used in English for satirical or didactic poetry. Eg: Pope's Essay on Criticism

**Sonnet:** A poem of fourteen iambic pentametre lines. There are two kinds. (1) Petrarchan Sonnet (2) Shakespearean Sonnet.

There are two segments in Petrarchan sonnet. The first eight lines are called Octave. The second segment consisting six lines is called Sestet. The usual rhyme-scheme is abba, abba, cde, cde. In the Shakespearean sonnet there is a break followed by a couplet.

**Terza Rima:** Iambic pentametres rhyming aba, bcb, cdc, ded. It ends with a quatrain or couplet. The form is taken from Dante's Divinia Commedia.

**Ottava Rima:** Eight iambic pentametres rhyming abababcc. This attractive narrative form is found in several well known English poems. Examples: Byron's Don Juan; Keats's Isabella.

**Spensarian Stanza:** Eight iambic pentametres followed by one iambic hexametre rhyming aba, bbc, bcc. It is the most splendid English verse form to be found in narrative poems. Examples: Spenser's The Faerie Queene; Keats's The Eve of St.Agnes.

The other important traditional verse forms are Rhyme Royal, Villanelle, English Hexametre, Octosyllabics, Couplets, Triplets, Quatrains and Sestina.

### XVI Free Verse

Free verse is unrhymed verse without a traditional metrical form. Good Free Verse is not at all easy to write for there is no repetitive beat to impress the reader. Compared to the usual forms such as sonnet, quatrain and couplet Free Verse is the most difficult. This is because the slightest intellectual, psychological or aesthetic failure stands mercilessly exposed.

The term 'Free Verse' has acquired the stricter meaning of poetry in which there is neither rhyme nor metre.

In modern English poetry there are three main kinds of Free Verse:

(1) Verse which depends on counting syllables, patterns of line length, symmetries of cadence
(2) Incantatory verse suitable for religious verse
(3) Colloquial style which expresses the 'man-of-the-world' attitude

The first kind gives us the effect of a Greek lyric. Blake, Walt Whitman and D.H.Lawrence have made use of the Incantatory verse. Colloquial kind of Free Verse sounds sincere and natural.

The pattern and discipline of Free Verse emerge from internal pattern of sounds, the choice of exact words and the effect of associations.

**XVII The Choice of Words**

Poetry is made of words and obviously the choice of words is important in poetry. Boulton has already discussed importance of words in producing rhythm, rhyme and associative value.

In this chapter Boulton discusses the choice of words for their actual 'intellectual' meaning. The poet works through image, rhythm and logical sequence. These considerations shape his choice of words.

In making a choice of words, the process of polishing is very important. Most polishing is done in search of the most exact and effective word possible in the context. The meaning should be conveyed through precision and concentration. The Imagist Movement in poetry in the twentieth century believes in concentration as the very essence of poetry.

The words that can most easily be altered in polishing a poem are adjectives and adverbs. It has, however, been suggested that whereas an immature poet gains all his best effects of apt description from his adjectives, a mature poet gains effect from verbs. Example Wordsworth's Prelude.

Apt choice of words makes the poem refreshingly original. Originality arises out of careful observation, alert imagination and well-stocked vocabulary. To choose accurate words, the poet should possess a fund of vocabulary.

Originality is one of the perennial delights in poetry. What seems most original is also often what is most true and exact.

**XVIII Two Poems Anatomized**

Poetry is a great art to be loved. Any detailed discussion of a poem must consider verse-form, sound patterns, content, associations, use of repetition, logical sequence and any thing else that is worthy of comment. Finally the critic should give general assessment.

Boulton discusses two poems. The first is Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love"(1600). She says it is a pastoral poem. It is a piece of escape from city life. Though the pastoral convention is refined, there is lack of sincere emotion. Hence the poem need not be taken seriously.

The second poem for discussion is James Shirley's famous "The glories of our blood and state." Boulton calls it subtle and difficult poem. The theme is the inevitability of death. The didactic tone notwithstanding, rich associations make it a mature poem.

**XIX How not to Approach Poetry**

There are always some kind of emotional difficulties that make it painful to approach poetry. Apart from avoiding cliches of criticism, the student should be sensitive, intelligent and capable of self-expression.

There are two main kinds of false approaches. You analyse a poem to please the examiner. This approach may mislead you. However you have no option. Remember that you should analyse a poem with an alert-mind. Thus analysed the poem becomes richer and more fascinating. If you want to enjoy poetry, it is good to be among books, to ask people to read poems to you, to listen to broadcast poetry. Relax and let poetry happen to you.

However we need not accept others' judgement of a poem. One should insist on one's own freedom in understanding and interpretation. A very interesting way to enjoy poetry is to attempt writing poetry. From this effort we learn the skills—including technical–needed to write poetry.

Ignorance is a major stumbling block in our enjoyment of poetry. We should always try to see a poem in its historical setting. And also understand the value system of the period in which the poem was written. This approach will help us a great deal by enriching our appreciation of allusions.

While assessing a contemporary poem we should be very careful. The media impact is overwhelming. In this context contemporary poet faces a great loneliness because of the 'false culture' which mocks at everything that is fresh, sincere, new and interesting. Only new generation of readers can encourage innovative poetry.

Boulton associates love of poetry with cultural development. Each of us has responsibility to develop culture by enjoying poetry.

## 1.19.4. Analysis of a Poem

### DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

Do not go gentle into that good night
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun is flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" is about the thoughts and emotions of varied kinds of men, especially old men, as death waits for them. The poem begins with a negative exhortation "Do not." The poet is asking the reader not to move towards death calmly and quietly, but with passion and rage. The implication is we should live full-some life before the inevitable death engulfs us. Death is described as 'Good night.' 'Good' indicates the absolute necessity of death, whereas 'night' gives a certain image of mysterious darkness. It is important to note here, the poet's purpose in using the adjective 'good'.

Old age spends itself and trembles with emotion and almost fights against death. Old age is personified.

Thinkers and philosophers know very well that death is the only thing that winds up life properly. Hence in their wise sayings they do not take cognizance of sudden fury at the thoughts of death. The phrase "forked no lightning" directs us to this kind of understanding.

As the old age passes by, idealists loudly proclaim that, if given a wider scope of life their good deeds which are 'frail' would have had a bright chance at the day break when everything shows itself in luscious green. The word 'frail' diminishes all human endeavour to limp, ineffectual attempts.

Men of action, as they move towards death, feel immensely sad for they have learnt the lesson of life very late. But men of thought or serious poets, in a sudden 'blaze' of poetic sublimity realize the power of mortality. At the same, they feel happy for having perpetuated evanescent life in their works of art.

Towards the end of the poem the poet addresses his dead father. The father referred could be poetic or spiritual father. Thomas uses the figure of speech "Apostrophe." Heaven is described as 'sad height.' The poet seeks simultaneously curses and blessings from his absent father. His prayer to his father is to bless him with poetic creativity; and curse him for having occupied the place left by the father. The poet provokes the father-predecessor-poet towards love-hate relationship. The oxymoron functions effectively in this context.

The poet concludes the poem persuading all kinds of people not to glide towards death before fulfilling their promises to larger humanity. The purpose of each life will be continued by posterity. It is an unending process. Hence both life and death are equally acceptable.

Dylan Thomas uses the device of repetition with variation; several words, phrases and full length lines are repeated with appropriate variations. Diction is carefully chosen. Special attention to

key words like gentle, rave, rage, frail, flight, sad height and fierce tears help us to capture the mood of the poem. Several images spilled through the poem contribute to unexpected elegance and evocation.

The poem consists of five tercets followed by a quatrain, with two kinds of rhymes.

On the whole the attitude of the poet is to bring home the value of life by emphasizing the inevitability of death.

## 1.19.5. Sample Questions

(1) What are the difficulties in paraphrasing a poem?
(2) Explain the importance of 'Form' in poetry?
(3) Attempt scansion of the following poem:

**Postscript**

- R.S.Thomas

As life improved, their poems
Grew sadder and sadder, was there oil
For the machine? It was
The vinegar in the poets' cup.

[redacted]marched to the music
Of the [redacted]illion
Mouths opened. Production,
Production, the wheels

Whistled. Among the forests
Of metal the one human
Sound was the lament of
The poets for deciduous language.

(4) Elaborate on the use of Repetition in poetry.
(5) Discuss the main types of poetry.
(6) Write an essay on Traditional Verse forms.
(7) Write a note on 'Free Verse.'
(8) Choice of words is the whole art of writing poetry. Justify.

Author : Y. Somalatha

Lesson - 20

# THE ANATOMY OF PROSE

Marjorie Boulton

## Contents:



## 1.20.1. Objective

- to help the students to appreciate the works of Prose
- to explain some of the rhetorical devices of prose
- to explain some of the important types of prose and its qualities

## 1.20.2. Introduction

Marjorie Boulton informs the reader that The Anatomy of Prose is a companion volume to The Anatomy of Poetry. As for the study of poetry, she could not find a simple book on the study of prose. Hence this companion.

Boulton's experience in the field of literature made her know that everyone reads prose. But, she realized, that most people are shockingly insensitive to prose. Prose is the most popular form of reading. Yet, it is more difficult to study prose critically than poetry. The reasons are, prose is less intense and there are no specific techniques to study prose.

Boulton in The Anatomy of Prose gives the reader some guidance to the elementary, technical analysis of prose. She offers some definitions. Her intention is that the book should serve as a base from which to make further explorations.

## 1.20.3. The General Form of Prose

Boulton begins the section by saying that it is easier to comment on a poem than to learn to make intelligent comments on a prose style.

Prose looks easy. But the form of prose is not obvious. It takes us some time to realize that there are different styles. Most of us read prose than poetry. But when coming to say something critical, we feel more comfortable with a poem than a prose passage. The problem is with prose style.

Boulton points out the differences between prose and verse that cause difficulties in analyzing prose.

1) In poetry, we always find a basic metrical pattern. In prose, the rhythm depends on variation.
2) The function of words is different in prose. In poetry words may be ambiguous or suggestive. In prose words are to be sharply defined, with one meaning at a time. They have utilitarian function. Clarity is a supreme virtue in prose. –
3) Prose has a number of functions. In a competent writer, the function dictates the style. Boulton divides prose into a few main types according to function:

## 1. Narrative

Narrative prose is more popular than any other form of literature. It tells a story in an interesting way. Sometimes it narrates exciting incidents; sometimes it gives a detailed portrayal of character and motive. The style may vary over an enormous range of techniques.

Eg: Flaubert's Madame Bovary; Tolstoy's War and Peace; Austin's Pride and Prejudice.

## 2. Argumentative

Argumentation prose is abstract and intellectual. The function is to persuade the reader to believe something. Eg: Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Good argumentative prose contains sound reasoning as well as emotional appeal. It is never propagandist. It convinces the reader to think about the problem intelligently. Argumentative prose ranges from modest to dogmatic.

## 3. Dramatic

A good deal of prose may be found in drama. Works of Congreve, Sheridan, Synge and Ibsen can be cited as examples for prose drama. Strictly speaking, realistic drama can be written can be written only in prose. Dramatic prose resembles ordinary conversation. Prose drama is imitation of life, yet, like all art forms it is improvement upon real life.

## 4. Informative

The sole function of informative prose is to communicate information. Eg: newspapers, textbooks, encyclopaedias. One cannot search for literary merit or poised style in this kind of prose.

## 5. Contemplative

Essay comes under contemplative prose. 'Essay' deals with diverse topics. In 'Essay' we find a sense of style which makes a pleasurable reading. Famous essayists include Francis Bacon, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb and R.L.Stevenson.

To study prose critically, we should write something in imitation of good style. In this way we can understand the characteristics of style. For this we have to make a very minute study of style. This process enables us to improve our command over English Language, and understand our own style.

## II The Word

### Vocabulary

When we examine prose, we ought to pay attention to writer's choice of words. A reader may know by close reading whether the author is particularly careful or careless in the choice of words. The choice of words plays a great role in shaping an author's style.

We cannot judge an author's choice of words by reading a short prose passage from his writings. But when we examine the whole work or a large part of the work of an author, we may be expected to have some idea about the general habits of the author in the choice of words.

Study of vocabulary in English language is rewarding. English absorbed vocabulary from many languages. In our study of English prose we should recognize the distinction between two elements

(1) Latin (2) Saxon. 'Latin' element covers Latin, Greek, French [illegible]ian borrowings. 'Saxon' element covers Old English, the Scandinavian and Germanic languages. In general the Latin word is likely to be the long word, the scientific term or the refined word. The Saxon word may be popular, short and sometimes crude. We use them in parallel contexts. In studying the parallel usage we need an etymological dictionary. Still, new words are coming into English language.

English has very rich vocabulary. This makes it possible for the writer to choose words not only for their meaning but also for pattern of sounds and associations, and appropriateness to the context. Emotional force of a passage depends on vocabulary. Vocabulary should be suited to the theme. Vocabulary to evoke emotion is different from vocabulary of officialdom.

Language of reporting should be simple. It should not disguise facts. Technical language is mostly Latinate. Its proper place is only in genuinely technical works. All technical terms have to be specially learnt. Technical terms become jargon only when they are used to obscure the meaning or show superior knowledge. Everyone who intends to read at all should possess a dictionary and know how to use it sensibly.

In studying prose we should consider the exact shade of meaning. And also decide whether the writer has used the best word or only a word that will do. Sometimes a single word gives a vivid picture. A great writer will never try to impress by mere display of rare or difficult words. He draws from his store of words, to express himself vividly. Eg: Milton chooses now a Latinate word, now a rare, now a common, and now a colloquial word to gain the exact effect. Milton's rare words are not showy but vividly concrete and rich in association.

While examining a piece of prose, the reader should look for slang words, dialectic words, coinages, puns, words to shock or avoid shocking, quotations and disguised quotations, archaic words and Biblical words. While the reader finds these in good writers, in bad writers he comes across careless and inaccurate words. After examining single words, we should move on to understand how words are linked to form sentences.

### III The Sentence
### Grammar and Idiom

When we examine a prose passage we should ask the question whether the sentences are grammatical. Grammatical rules help ר form good style, and avoid ambiguities. In English, which is a difficult language, usually the tendency is to commit grammatical errors.

There is a distinction between grammar and idiom. Grammar is a matter of rules. Idiom is less rigid and much difficult to learn. We speak English grammatically, but we get confused in using idiom which is unpredictable and completely irregular. The intricacies of English idiom are such the sentences may be grammatically correct, but idiomatically incorrect. Another difficulty in English is the use of prepositions as they are not really governed by rules. From this we understand logic will not help us write good prose.

A good writer may combine clauses, use parenthesis or repeat a proper name, use active construction to achieve a particular effect and employ ironical mode. Milton, with his classical education, used Latin constructions which appeared more natural than English constructions. The style of a writer shows the influence of some other languages the writer happened to know.

Idiomatic usage reveals the context. But a good writer avoids misuse of idiom and phrases. Idioms that are worn out become clichés. Idiomatic speech differs from social circle to social circle, from profession to profession. Sometimes idioms used by professionals find their way into rest of society.

Some authors like Lamb and Hemingway use highly individual idiom, which is proof of originality. Some very good authors use ungrammatical and unidiomatic language to suit the varied characters in their novels. These deviations have emotional, intellectual and artistic functions.

### IV The Sentence
### Written and Spoken Prose

The distinction between written and spoken sentence is not clear. For example, oratory is prose to be spoken on a particular occasion. Yet many great orators write down their speech in full. Likewise all dramatic prose is spoken prose which is heightened. Nowadays forms of speech are read than listened. Eg: political statements, sermons, expert analysis.

In considering a prose sentence, we must decide whether it is meant to be spoken, meant to be read silently or meant to be considered as a representation of the speech of someone in a novel.

We tend to use longer sentences in writing than in speaking. While speaking we expect the audience to understand at once. According to the requirement the sentences could be long or short, bookish or informal.

Everyone knows that many things are permitted in speech that are not accepted in written prose. Eg: Contractions, slang words. When we examine prose in a novel, the narrative and descriptive passages will be in the novelist's style. But when he uses prose as spoken by various characters, he changes diction suitable to their character, environment, education and personal preoccupations.

The kind of prose used in letters comes midway between written and spoken prose. It has loose construction, trivial context and emotional intensity. Eg: love letters, condolence letters. To gain access to literary merit we should read letters of Keats, Lamb, Wordsworth and Gray. Another form of writing midway between written and spoken prose is the Diary.

The twentieth century writers such as James Joyce, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway have sometime adopted a style near to the colloquial in order to obtain special effects like recording thoughts of people. This type of prose is difficult. It is an attempt to give true impression of both the structure and the contents of human thought. That is, an attempt is made to capture the chaos of human experience and the illogical, incoherent sequence of thought. It reveals psychological truth. It is termed as 'Stream of Consciousness technique.' The danger is, in a lesser writer it may go out of control.

## V The Paragraph

Division into paragraphs is necessary in prose. Paragraph division depends on the meaning of the prose-piece. Meaning demands continuity or break in the paragraph. A single word expresses the smallest idea; a sentence expresses a complete thought; a paragraph is a small group of thoughts that hang together, which should make sense by itself.

Each paragraph treats one aspect of the topic, and leads to the next paragraph. The whole art of paragraphing is connecting various aspects of the topic. Usually, one sentence in a paragraph sums up the gist of the paragraph. This is called key sentence.

Long paragraphs are suitable to some kind of writing like philosophical treatise. In fiction shorter paragraphs are preferred. These are suitable to bring out the essential mood and create the right ambience and put forth a perspective. Short paragraphs that occur in between long paragraphs give the reader relief; because monotony is the death of art.

We expect logical structure in a prose work. Logical structure depends on unity of thought in each paragraph and how they are linked.

## VI Prose Rhythm

One of the differences between mediocre prose and great prose is that great prose has fine rhythm. While in poetry the basic pattern of stresses is important, in prose the rhythm depends entirely on subtle variations.

Th rhythm in prose has very different functions. In the Biblical passages, the rhythm denotes finality and climax. In John Donne's sermons it heightens emotional force. In James Joyce, we find intricate music of prose rhythm. All these rhythms are suited to their contexts.

In analysing prose rhythm, we need not look for repetition and metre. Prose can be scanned by the simple process of marking the stressed syllables. Thus in prose rhythmical analysis is possible but not metrical analysis. Prose rhythms are close to natural speech rhythms.

In modern prose, rhythm tends to suit the emotional atmosphere and subject-matter. The rising rhythm is generally used. It brings readability than falling rhythm. Sometimes a passage of imperfect rhythm could be very much readable and can be considered competent prose.

In understanding prose rhythm we don't need technical terms. It is the ear that guides to what is best in prose. The rhythm is not the whole of artistry in prose. It is difficult to know how a good writer acquires the habit of good rhythm. Some kind of inner pressure seems to give rhythm to prose. Only the final polishing, the removal of lapses, is a conscious process.

## VII Individual and Common Style

There is a distinction between individual and common style. Readable prose without jargon, clichés, ill-constructed sentences, excessive alliteration, monotony of rhythm and defects of style comes under common style. English that any educated adult can learn with a little practice may be called common style.

Individual style is found mostly in writers whose primary interests are literary. It has uniqueness of style. The difference between individual and common style is the difference between art and craftsmanship.

Learning a craft is possible for many people with training. But art is never-ending training aspiring to become perfect. It essentially requires strong natural bent and urge to pursue art. Great art is vocation.

The distinction between craft and art is difficult to make but can usually be felt. There is a good common prose style that may be learnt, and a more intense, individual, exciting prose that is art.

For some purposes common style is suitable. Eg: textbooks, informative books, practical instructions, reports, business letters, newspaper articles etc. Bertrand Russell's prose can be given as an example of good common style.

Great fiction, the works of outstanding essayists and historians, the reviews in the best weeklies, great argumentative prose of the kind which includes a strong appeal to emotion, short stories of experimental type, unusual travel books and most good humorous prose are usually written in a noticeably individual style.

Style is a difficult thing to define, and individual style is harder to define than common style. James Joyce, D.H.Lawrence and Mark Twain have individual styles. Individual style emerges from sensitivity to rhythm, a characteristic choice of vocabulary, inventiveness of phrase and precision. Individuality of style and uniqueness of subject matter can be considered respectively as psychological and functional causes.

Originality of thought will lead to originality of style. When the writer has something new to say, a new style will be devised. Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and James Joyce can be cited as examples. Many good writers developed individual styles in the long course of their literary career. Eg: The style of Virginia Woolf and of Fielding.

## VIII Common Style and Cheap Style

We refer to good, readable prose as common style. That which needs no effort to make is called cheap style. Common style is simple and direct. Cheap style includes long words, hackneyed phrases and vague, indirect expressions. Boulton gives the example of Civil Service letters.

The style of most of advertisements comes under cheap style. Carelessness in choice of words, meaningless exaggerations, misuse of words, vulgarisms, ugly coinages and pseudo-scientific words dilute the style of advertisements into cheap style. However, Boulton states that some modern advertising is quite good in style. It is sometimes even witty or dignified.

Routine humorous articles also use cheap style with misspelling, inappropriate comic words and bad puns. Bad novels or bad love stories are of cheap style. Thrillers with too many exclamatory marks and inaccurate words are other examples. Cheap style gives unnecessary importance to decorations.

## IX Simplicity and Ornamentation

There are virtues of style both in simplicity and ornamentation. An individual style may range from extreme simplicity and directness to the most elaborately decorated style.

Regarding ornamentation there are two fallacies. One is the belief that nothing is beautiful that is not ornamented. Another misconception is any ornamental style is in someway pseudo. Putting aside these incorrect notions, we should understand that ornamentation is never superimposed. It is never an afterthought. It emanates from the organic whole of the work of art.

Whether ornamental or simple, the function of style should be the criterion of its fitness. Sometimes ornamentation will be out of context, Eg: cookery book. Sometimes simplicity would be absurd, Eg: in praising a dead hero, on a great occasion, in a solemn religious service. In these contexts ornamentation with figures of speech, alliteration, long sentences and massive rhythms will be suitable.

The reader should be careful not to confuse archaism with ornamentation. What is archaic in our time was in vogue in the past. The language of the Bible, Shakespeare and Bunyan may sound unusual. It is not ornamental. It is the language of the past, hence archaic.

To achieve simplicity is not easy. Simple style is always direct. Sometimes it could be individual style. Boulton gives several examples for simple, individual style. Excerpts from Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Jawaharlal Nehru, Somerset Maugham and John Earle are given. Simple, direct style pictures a situation and renders to it the right kind of emotion.

Ornament in style makes use of figures of speech. We need not think elaboration is necessary for ornamentation. A concise style could be ornamental. In epigrammatical style conciseness itself is ornamental. Eg: Bacon's essays.

The greatest period for ornate style was Elizabethan and Jacobean period. There have been writers of ornate style in all periods. Eg: Shakespeare, Bacon, Donne, Lamb, Dickens, Fielding, Johnson, Conrad, Woolf, Joyce and Lawrence.

## X Subdivisions

### (A) Objective and Subjective

While examining prose style, we should consider how far it is objective or subjective. Objective means not letting the personal feelings of the author into the work. Subjective means the work is coloured by personal feelings of the author.

We may have complete objectivity in scientific books. Autobiographical works are largely subjective. Argumentative prose or fiction will be somewhere between the two.

In literary criticism there are two kinds of subjectivity and objectivity. One kind pertains to style and the other to moral or psychological issues.

**(1) Objective (style)**

Description in this excludes the author's feelings.

**(2) Subjective (style)**

In this kind 'tone' is important. Description is only an excuse to put forth author's own feelings.

**(3) Subjective (psychological)**

In this description is given without any comment on personal feelings or reference to 'I.' Yet the description is affected by author's strong, inner feelings.

**(4) Objective (psychological)**

The writer treats the 'I' objectively. He observes his own feelings as a psychologist and tries to understand them.

However, the reader should be careful not to assume that everything that omits mention of personal feelings is entirely objective or anything full of 'I' is wholly subjective. An honest recognition of personal limitations makes the work objective, whereas reckless generalization might make the work subjective. A very common and useful literary device is to use the most objective style for purposes of psychological subjectivity. This paradox of style is difficult to comprehend.

Complete objectivity in anything – political pamphlets, religious tracts, historical writing etc – except mathematics is probably an illusion. A responsible literary critic engaged in close study of prose style, must also be something of a psychologist. He should probe into workings of the mind of the author by analysing the style.

## XI Subdivisions

### (B) Abstract and Concrete

There are two kinds of words in any language – 1) abstract 2) concrete. Concrete words describe concrete things, and abstract words describe abstract ideas. This difference has an important effect on prose style.

Abstract ideas arise from the faculty of reason. Usually human mind perceives by means of the senses. It finds it difficult to grasp abstract thought. When preference is given for the abstract words to the concrete words, the writer should give concrete examples in order to make the meaning

Moreover, no language can ever be completely abstract. It is full of buried metaphors. Metaphors are concrete and palpable. From this we understand abstract words are concrete metaphors.

In prose, abstract changes to the concrete and concrete changes to the abstract. Hence, both abstract and concrete words have their own place of importance depending on their suitability to the context. We use abstract words in philosophy and psychology, whereas we use concrete words in science and technology.

There are really two quite different kinds of concrete language. One is straight description, which is a product of observation or visualization. The second is metaphorical, a product of imagination. We find examples of concrete observation in Defoe, Fielding and Hemingway. We find examples of concrete imagination in the sermons of Donne, in Jungian psychology and in the philosophy of Plato.

Abstract language with abstract ideas is ambiguous. It could be different for different people. People have alarmingly different ideas about such words as freedom, sin, duty, love and truth. Hence we need to be more critical in examining abstract language than in examining concrete language.

## XII Subdivisions

### Realism, Romance and Unreality

Sometimes we may fail to appreciate a good piece of prose because we approach it looking for the wrong things. This is because we prefer some types of prose writing to others. A writer selects a theme. The rhythm of the sentences, the length of sentences, the choice of words and even the type of punctuation will be dictated by the selection of theme.

The writer chooses some aspects of the subject he wishes to treat in detail and ignores everything else. For example, in a love theme, he leaves out the tasks of earning a living and running a home.

Two great divisions of fiction are the realistic and the romantic. Realism attempts to portray things as they are. Certain painful aspects of life like poverty, war, injustice, diseases and political problems are depicted in realistic writing. To be realistic in true sense we must have a feeling for truth and a sense of proportion.

Romance is different from realism. But it is still sincere and genuinely artistic. Malory's Morte Darthur is the best English example of pure romance. Romance takes the sense of honour as the main spring of life. It has in it heroism, mercy, devotion to lady love, loyalty to group and loyalty to God. Modern life and the disillusionment arising from the aftermath of two world wars have forced us away from romance. We recognize a complexity of life with a multiplicity of moral and psychological shades of meaning. The nearest equivalent to romance in modern life is the high-grade detective story.

Romance is essentially simple. Realism is an attempt at a complete portrayal of reality. Romance is a portrayal of inspiring aspects of reality.

Apart from realism and romance, there is something like unrealism in fiction. While great art demands strenuous mental efforts and emotional shocks, unrealism needs nothing. It can be called

'escape' reading. Crime novels, trivial novels, scientific fiction, unscholarly historical novels and popular magazines come under this category. Escape reading is not worthwhile.

It is the realistic novel which makes demands both on the writer and the reader. It requires sincerity and craftsmanship. It is artistic. It could have psychological or moral purpose. In Realism of the highest order, while the treatment of the situation is realistic, much of the imagination of the writer goes into it. Eg: H.G.Wells's The Invisible Man and George Orwell's Animal Farm.

## XIII Subdivisions

### Some Special Conventions

Prose has different styles. As they defy classification into categories, we accept them as conventions.

**Rustic Convention**

In Rustic convention simple people are portrayed as speaking their own rather naïve, simple and often ungrammatical language.

**Euphemism**

The characteristics of the style are lavish use of alliteration, sing-song rhythm, rhetorical devices and similes drawn from natural history and ancient legends.

**Epigrammatic**

An epigrammatic style runs in separate sentences, each packed with meaning.

Eg: The style of Bacon.

**Tough Style**

This style is full of slang and racy colloquialism. Sentences are generally short. We find Tough Style in American fiction.

**Stream of Consciousness**

The style known as Stream of Consciousness is important in modern fiction. It is an attempt at an accurate copying of the processes of thought. Eg: Joyce's Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake.

**Biblical**

This style imitates the rhythm and sentence structure of the Bible. Eg: The style of John Bunyan

**Fugue**

Fugue in prose might be compared with repetition in poetry. It is the repetition of a word or phrase in slightly different rhythmical and sense contexts in order to emphasize it.

**Allusive**

Some styles are very allusive. To appreciate them to the full requires wide reading and plenty of general knowledge.

**Parallelism**

It is another special kind of prose style. Eg: He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

In a sense it could be argued that the style of every individual author is his or her own separate convention, if the style is at all individual.

Style of prose translation is very important. This is because great books are read by cultured English reader in translation. Styles in translation differ as much as styles in the original language or in the language of the translation. Translated work has its own merit as a work of literature.

## XIV Subdivisions

**Prose for its own sake**

In most of prose writing content is more important than style. When content is given importance it comes under functional prose such as textbooks, encyclopaedias and reports. When it is not functional, it is fiction for relaxation – where the concentration is on story and characters, not on style.

In some prose writers like Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt, the style itself is the very reason for writing. Trivial topics are rendered in polished prose. From this we understand though the matter is trivial, it could be delightful due to the manner of telling it. Some writers like William Cowper cultivate prose style for its own sake — to amuse and please the reader. This playful technique is used by Sterne in Tristram and Shandy, a novel in which the content is unbearable.

## XV The Historical Approach

The art of prose writing has its own history. When we examine prose of different periods from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century, we understand the changes that took place in prose over these periods.

**Fourteenth Century**

The prose of fourteenth century is perfectly comprehensible. But the verb-endings and word-form are no longer used in present day English. Hence the prose of this century sounds archaic.
Eg: Wycliffe's Translation of The Bible.

**Fifteenth Century**

We find directness and simplicity in the fifteenth century prose. It is sensitive to rhythm. It uses alliteration for ornamental purposes.
Eg: Malory's Morte Darthur.

**Sixteenth Century**

It was an age of conscious experiment in prose. The style is simple Euphuism,(already discussed in Ch.XIII) is a favourite style of the period.

**Seventeenth Century**

Mature techniques were introduced into the style of prose. Varied individual styles were developed. Prime importance was given to ornate style. But plenty of simpler styles existed. Eg: Works of Sir Thomas Browne; Abraham Cowley.

**Eighteenth Century**

The eighteenth century has been called an age of prose. There were marked individual styles. Use of antithetical sentence was a favourite with the writers. Simplicity and clarity were often regarded as chief merits.
Eg: Works of Edmund Burke

**Nineteenth Century**

With the Romantic Movement, ornateness was favoured. Ornate style was used to bring different effects: ironical, solemn and academic seriousness. Eg: Works of P.B.Shelley.

The later nineteenth century had very much ornate prose. Eg: Works of Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold. It was a great age of the novel.

**Twentieth Century**

Most of the twentieth century prose was experimental. The writers attempted scientifically accurate description of physical sensation. Eg: Works of Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh.

Twentieth century prose is worthy of close study. It contains puns, compound words suggesting multiple meanings, foreign words, enchanting rhythm and complicated pattern of association. Due to these stylistic devices the prose of the twentieth century is more like poetry. Eg: Joyce's **Finnegan's Wake**

While examining a prose write-up, we should keep its historical setting in mind. We should remember: 1) Literary history is full of action and reaction; for instance, a period of very ornate prose may be followed by a reaction in favour of extreme simplicity or vice versa. 2) Several trends may be at work in the same period. 3) Great writers often find themselves out of harmony with their own times.

4) Experimentalism and traditionalism, will always at any given moment be found side by side. And both are necessary to the vitality of art. 5) All experiments grow out of traditions. All traditional styles were born by experiment. Some experiments are failures. Some traditions can become exhausted.

## XVI The Science of Rhetoric

Prose uses figurative language to discuss emotion. Figurative language comes under rhetoric, which can be understood as the art of persuasion. There are a number of rhetorical devices which, not only poets but prose writers employ. Rhetorical devices help to make truth plainer and arouse desirable emotions.

In the study of rhetoric or figures of speech, English language has borrowed a great many terms from Latin and Greek. Knowledge of Figures of Speech helps us to appreciate a prose work.

### Metaphor

It is the most important figure of speech, in which one thing – idea, place, person – is compared to another, without acknowledging the comparison in words.

Eg: My Children are jewels.

**Simile**

It makes a comparison using 'like', 'as' and other such words. Simile is used in order to make something clear or as an ornament.

Eg: He drinks like a fish.

**Personification**

It is a special kind of metaphor in which some object, place or abstract idea is turned into a person with human attributes. Eg: India is concerned about growing corruption.

**Metonymy**

This means 'change of name.' Eg: Bacchus stands for drinking.

**Synecdoche**

In this, part of something is used to symbolize the whole.
Eg: All hands are busy.

**Euphemism**

It is the device of using a substituted expression to disguise some fact or idea that is distressing, offensive or embarrassing.
Eg: Anil's friend has 'passed away.'

**Transferred Epithet**

An adjective which is properly attached to one word is transferred to another.
Eg: Winged-trees.

**Hyperbole**

It is a deliberate exaggeration for the sake of effect.
Eg: I nearly died of laughing.

**Pun**

A play upon words, usually for comic effect. A good pun in the right place may be amusing and clever.

**Onomatopoeia**

Language in which the actual sound of the words suggests their meaning.
Eg: The bees are buzzing and humming.

**Irony**

This is one of the most important figures of speech in English. Irony is saying one thing while meaning another. The tone of voice or form of words shows what is intended. Irony of situation is famous with Thomas Hardy and Somerset Maugham.

**Antitheses**

Emphasizing ideas by placing them in clear, direct contrast is called Antithesis.

**Epigram**

A short pointed saying with a touch of wit is epigram.
Eg: Essays of Bacon

**Paradox**

A statement that on first hearing sounds self-contradictory, but contains essential truth.
Eg: More haste, less speed.

**Oxymoron**

Compressed expression juxtaposing contradictory words and ideas.

Eg: an open secret

**Rhetorical Question**

A question that assumes its own answer. It is an effective device in oratory.

**Apostrophe**

Speaking to a person or thing when not present.

Eg: Keats's address to the Nightingale in "Ode to a Nightingale"

**Climax**

The arrangement of words, ideas and so on in order of increasing importance.

**Anti-Climax**

The arrangement of words, phrases, ideas so that the very last item is of less importance than those that have gone before.

The other important rhetorical devices in prose are Analogy, Inversion, Understatement, Repetition, Colloquialism and Literalism.

## XVII A Word about Writing Prose

Only when we have tried to write competent prose do we appreciate the skill of those who have written great prose. Choosing and organizing words is a difficult task. Attempting to write good prose helps in our mental development.

In good prose style, it is not only correctness of grammar and idiom but more is needed. Here are a few guidelines for those who aspire to write good prose:

1) English grammar and idiom should be learnt properly.
2) Acquiring large vocabulary is necessary. For this a sensible use of dictionary must be learnt.
3) One should become conscious of words and interested in words.
4) Intelligent self-criticism is a necessity. One should cultivate the habit of re-reading in order to correct mistakes. Reading our own prose aloud is a good test.
5) Skill in rhythm excludes jingles, clumsy alliterations, polysyllables, anti-climaxes and ambiguities. The length of sentences should be varied, and too many long words should not appear in one sentence.
6) The writer should see that the words are truthful. Untruthfulness arises from bad English – errors of punctuation, misplaced participles, misplaced relative and personal pronouns, misplaced "onlys", double negatives, pedantry etc,.

The way to acquire standards in writing is to read. We should read good authors from many periods and with many different styles.

### 1.20.4. Analysis of a Prose Passage

After having read Marjorie Boulton's The Anatomy of Prose, invariably we are motivated to examine any given piece of prose keenly. Let us analyse a prose passage to verify our own competence in reading prose:

Excerpt from V.S.Naipaul's An Area of Darkness :

Afternoon now, and train's shadow racing beside us. Sunset, evening, night; station after dimly-lit station. It was an Indian railway journey, but everything that had before seemed pointless was now threatened and seemed worth cherishing; and as in the mild sunshine of a winter morning we drew near to green Bengal which I had longed to see, my mood towards India and her people became soft. I had taken so much for granted. There, among the Bengali passengers who had come on was a man who wore a long woollen scarf and a brown tweed jacket above his Bengali Dhoti. The casual elegance of his dress was matched by his fine features and relaxed posture. Out of all its squalor and human decay its eruptions of butchery, India produced so many people of grace and beauty, ruled by elaborate courtesy. Producing too much life, it denied the value of life; yet it permitted a unique human development to so many. Nowhere were people so heightened, rounded and individualistic; nowhere did they offer themselves so fully and with such assurance. To know Indians was to take a delight in people as people; every encounter was an adventure. I did not want India to sink; the mere thought was painful. (242-43)

To begin with, the prose passage chosen for analysis is descriptive with hidden metaphors. "Train's shadow racing" indicates the speed of the train and the time of afternoon. There is a pattern revealing the diminishing of light — "sunset, evening, night." When the author says "it was an Indian railway journey" we conclude that he is an outsider to India. Initially he thought of the journey as pointless, but now thinks of it as "worth cherishing." This shows the change of author's attitude. Here parallelism is used as a device.

The author, an outsider to India, was looking forward eagerly to have a glimpse of "green Bengal." The adjective "green" packed in itself everything about rural Bengal. He himself commits the change of mood about India. He had begun to soften towards India and its people.

Here is the author's observation of a Bengali, a man with fine features and elegance. His approval — "India produced so many people of grace and beauty" is instantly negated by "producing too much life, it denied the value of life." And again swiftly turns round to affirm India using words like "unique" "heightened" "individualistic" "assurance." The writer's observation and experience throw him from one end to the other. He, simultaneously approves and denies India. Here is what we call paradox.

The concluding sentences of the passage affirm his enthusiasm about India. "To know India was to take delight in people as people; every encounter was an adventure." The last sentence reveals his immense love for India: "I did not want India to sink; the mere thought was painful."

The passage is from Naipaul's travelogue An Area of Darkness (1964), in which he recorded his experiences of his first visit to India. Naipaul's ancestors belonged to India, hence his curiosity and love for the land. On the other hand the Caribbean and the British background has made him a 'critical' outsider.

The style is simple and direct. Apt diction, hidden metaphors and a few rhetorical devices enhance the power of Naipaul's prose. The tone – varying from point to point – indicates his doubts, dilemma and desires regarding India. In spite of the changes of mood, there is cohesion and excellent organization of thought. It is a piece of highly commendable prose.

## 1.20.5. XVIII Suggestions for Further Reading

Boulton advises the students to read real works in a real way. Novel is a serious art form worth reading. Apart from the genre of novel there are other kinds of prose writing – travel books, biographies, autobiographies, letters, diaries, scientific books, books of humour, fantasy and parody. Essays are particularly valuable since essays depend more on style than any other form of literature.

The student should not forget to read the dramatic prose of Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw. It is impossible to appreciate English literature without a good knowledge of The Bible.

Boulton emphasizes that reading broadens the mind, stimulates intelligence and helps us to develop concentration.

## 1.20.6. Sample Questions

(1) What are the main types of prose?
(2) How do you describe the art of paragraphing?
(3) Write about individual and common style?
(4) Why is it essential to pay more attention to abstract language than concrete language?
(5) Elaborate on realistic prose.
(6) Write an essay on some special conventions used in prose.
(7) What do you understand by 'historical approach' in the study of prose?
(8) Analyse the following prose passage from Jawaharlal Nehru's An Autobiography

Distressed with the present, I began thinking of the past, of what had happened politically in India since I began to take some part in public affairs. How far had we been right in what we had done? How far wrong? It struck me that my thinking would be more orderly and helpful if I put it down on paper. This would also help in engaging my mind in a definite task and so diverting it from worry and depression. So in the month of June 1934 I began this 'autobiographical narrative' in Dehra Gaol, and for the last eight months I have continued it when the mood to do so has seized me. Often there have been intervals when I felt no desire to write; three of these gaps were each of them nearly a month long. But I managed to continue, and now I am nearing the end of this personal journey. Most of this has been written under peculiarly distressing circumstances when I was suffering depression and emotional strain. Perhaps some of this is reflected in what I have written, but this very writing helped me greatly to pull myself out of the present with all its worries. As I wrote, I was hardly thinking of an outside audience; I was addressing myself, framing questions and answering them for my own benefit, sometimes even drawing some amusement from it. I wanted as far as possible to think straight, and I imagined that this review of the past might help me to do so. ( 559-60)

Author : **Y.Somalatha**

(కత్తిరించి పంపవలెను)

## అధ్యాపకుల, విద్యార్థుల సలహాలు, సూచనలు :

అధ్యాపకులు, విద్యార్థులు ఈ స్టడీ మెటీరియల్‌కు సంబంధించిన సలహాలు, సూచనలు, ముద్రణ దోషాలు తెలియపరచినచో, పునర్ముద్రణలో తగు చర్యలు తీసుకొనగలము. తెలియపరచవలసిన చిరునామా : డిప్యూటీ డైరెక్టర్, దూరవిద్యా కేంద్రం, ఆచార్య నాగార్జున విశ్వవిద్యాలయం, నాగార్జున నగర్ - 522 510.

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(కత్తిరించి పంపవలెను)

(కత్తిరించి పంపవలెను)

(కత్తిరించి పంపవలెను)