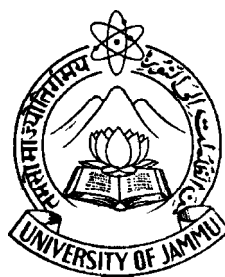


M.A. ENGLISH

SEMESTER : I

COURSE CODE : ENG - 124

***Directorate of Distance and Online Education***  
**UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU**  
**JAMMU**



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**  
**M. A. ENGLISH**

**TITLE OF THE COURSE :**  
**LITERARY CRITICISM**  
**SEMESTER : I**

**COURSE CODE : ENG - 124**  
**UNIT : I - VI**  
**LESSON : 1 - 27**

**2024 Onwards**

***Course Coordinator***  
**Prof. Anupama Vohra**

***Teacher Incharge***  
**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

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**Prof. Anupama Vohra*****Course Coordinator*****Prof. Anupama Vohra*****Teacher Incharge*****Dr. Jasleen Kaur****ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

*We duly acknowledge the reference books/web/internet sources from where the material has been taken for the academic benefit of distance learner.*

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## **WELCOME MESSAGE**

Welcome to PG English Semester I. This course introduces you to literary theory beginning with the Greco Romans and going up to the 18th century British critics. You are advised to consult the books in the library for preparation of Internal Assessments Assignments and semester end examination.

Wish you good luck and success!

**Prof. Anupama Vohra**  
Course Coordinator

<b>Course Code : ENG-124</b>	<b>Duration of Examination : 3 hrs</b>
<b>Title of the Course : Literary Criticism</b>	<b>Total Marks : 100</b>
<b>Credits : 6</b>	<b>(a) Semester Examination : 80</b>
	<b>(b) Sessional Assessment : 20</b>

Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in May 2023, 2024 & 2025

**Objective of the Course :** The objective of the course will be to make the learners study literary theory beginning with the Greco Romans and going up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century British critics. A study of the theorists will acquaint the learners with the main trends of literary history.

#### **Unit-I**

Plato	<i>Extracts from Ion</i>
	<i>Extracts from Republic (Book 2, 3, 10)</i>

#### **Unit-II**

Aristotle	<i>Poetics</i>
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#### **Unit-III**

Longinus	<i>On the Sublime</i>
Sidney	<i>An Apology for Poetry</i>

#### **Unit-IV**

Samuel Johnson	<i>Preface to Shakespeare</i>
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#### **Unit-V**

Alexander Pope	<i>Essay on Criticism</i>
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#### **Unit-VI**

William Wordsworth	<i>Preface to Lyrical Ballads</i>
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### Mode of Examination

The paper will be divided into Sections A, B and C

M.M. = 80

#### Section A Multiple Choice Questions

Q.No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten objectives out of twelve objectives are to be attempted. Each objective will be for one mark. (10×1=10)

#### Section B Short Answer Questions

Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks. (5×2=10)

#### Section C Long Answer Questions

Section C comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in about 300-350 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks. (5×12=60)

#### Suggested Reading

1. Ross S. Kilpatrick : *The Poetry of Criticism : Horace, Epistles II, and Arts Poetica.*
2. Malcolm Budd : *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,*
3. William Kurtz Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks : *Literary Criticism : A Short History.*
4. W.D. Ross and J.A. Smith (eds.) : *The works of Aristotle (Trans)*
5. Aristotle : *The Nicomachean Ethics. (Trans. David Ross.) (Editor Lesley Brown)*
6. Leo Aylen : *The Greek Theater*
7. W.B. Stanford : *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions : An*

*Introductory Study.*

8. Plato : *The Dialogues to Plato.* (Trans. Benjamin Jowett. 5 vols. 3rd Ed.)
9. Plato : *Plato The Symposium* (Trans. W. Hamilton. Penguin)
10. S.H. Butcher : *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art : With a Critical Text. and Translation of the Poetics. With a Prefatory Essay, Aristotelian Literary Criticism.* (4th Ed.)
11. Monroe C. Beardsley : *Aesthetics From Classical Greece to the Present : A Short History.*
12. Wimsatt and Brooks : *Literary Criticism : A Short History.*
13. G.M.A. Grube : *The Greek and Roman Critics.*
14. J.W.H. Atkins : *Literary Criticism in Antiquity.*
15. Charles S. Baldwin : *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic : Interpreted From Representative Works.*
16. Charles S. Baldwin : *Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice.*
17. J.F. D'alton : *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism*
18. Allan H. Gilbert : *Literary Criticism : Plato to Dryden*

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. 1-5**

**SECTION : I-XII**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - I**

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## **PLATO**

### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the lessons 1-5 is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Plato and also Extracts from Ion and Extracts from Republic (Book 2, 3, 10) from the examination perspective.

### **SECTION - I**

1.0 Biographical Note

1.1 Social and Political Background of the Age

### **SECTION – II**

2.0 Plato's life

2.1 Plato's works

2.2 A brief analysis of the works

2.3 The Republic and the Laws

2.4 Myths

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3.0 The Socratic method

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4.0 The Republic

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- 5.3 Analysis of the Myths and the Beliefs in Greek Literature.

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- 7.0 Function of Art in Education : Music
- 7.1 Distinction between poets
- 7.2 Ethical effect of Art
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- 8.1 Socrates' objection to Professional Training of the Guardians
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- 9.1 Critical Summary
- 9.2 Function of Poetry and Art

- 9.3 Nature of Imitation
- 9.4 Three grades of making and three corresponding makers of imitation

#### **SECTION – X : THE SECOND PART OF THE BOOK X**

- 10.0 Immortality of the soul
- 10.1 The Ideal condition of the soul
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- 11.0 Plato's Social - Ethical view of Art
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#### **SECTION – XII : ADDITIONAL NOTES**

- 12.0 Theory of Inspiration
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## SECTION – I

### STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Biographical Note
- 1.1 Social and Political Background of the Age

### 1.0 BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

- 427 B.C. Birth of Plato
- 409-404 Probably on military service
- 404-399 B.C. Attempts to enter politics
- 399 B.C. Death of Socrates, Plato renounces all political ambitions.
  - Visit to Megara
  - Begins to write dialogues
- 395 Probably called up for military service again.
- 387 First visit to Italy & Sicily.
- 375-368 Dialogue of middle period : Republic, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Phaedrus.
- 368-367 Visits Dionysius II at Syracuse.
- 367(380?) (founded Academy)
- 367-366 Visit to Syracuse.
- 361-360 Visit to Syracuse.
- 360 Attended games of July at Olympia.
- 360 Last dialogue : Sophist, Politicus, Philebus, Timaeus, Laws.
- 347 B.C. Death of Plato at the age of 81.

## **1.1 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE AGE**

Plato was born in 427 B.C. in the democracy of Athens, then at the height of her expanding pride and glory. We are talking of the western civilization some twenty-five hundred years ago, it was divided into two opposing leagues of states, the Athenians and the Spartan. Sparta was an aristocracy, conservative and tenacious, having an army without equality on shore. Athens was a seagoing, trading democracy, having a matchless fleet. Athens was an empire of colonies. Sparta was an inland, military aristocracy, ruling territories around itself.

Athens had a government chosen annually by a combination of ballot and lot. Though foreigners, slaves and even women were excluded from politics, every freeborn Athenian was proud of his liberty. The government was run by chosen assemblies and officials. They lived an unparalleled culture. They nourished their arts and literature with noble ideas. Combination of wit, logic and imagination gave way to free thought and speculation, science, religion and philosophy which were the focus of the intellectuals.

Patron goddess Athene had her altar in the temple on the Acropolis. Religious rites and rituals were strictly performed. They worshipped heathen gods, especially nature God Dionysus, the Earth mother Demeter and the Gods of the Forefathers. On the eve of special state festivals, religious duties were performed towards their gods and goddesses. The oracle of Apollo in rocky ravine at Delphi enjoyed mysterious powers. Athenians consulted it in their fortunes and misfortunes sorrows and joys. The citizens were sportive and participated in the Hellenic games held at Olympia in honour of the great Zeus, with great zeal and enthusiasm. A great harmony was visible with all round development of an individual in the state.

Life in Sparta, on the other hand, was austere. The Spartans enjoyed the material gains : luxury, trade, wealth. They looked for the physical body, strived for physical strength, bravery and discipline. The soft corners of the heart were changed into soldiers. Life was like an armed garrison. Spiritual upliftment was ignored.

The Peloponnesian war broke out in 431 B. C. on the question of control of sea routes to Sicily and South Italy. Sparta had enjoyed monopoly on this route until the War continued for nearly twenty seven years; exhausting Athens of its sources, men and material. It submitted to the Spartan government the infamous Thirty for a few months. The year saw a draining out of all the leading democrats of the state. Finally, Athens rose against the Thirty and pushed them out of the city. It again became a democracy but without handing democrats and it lost its faith in its own people. The city split into sections. Hatred grew among the citizens and the old harmony got terribly disturbed. All fields of life received a serious set back.

In the literary field, a trend was prevailing in Greece to train the young men in the arts of public speaking, debates, in the art of political strategies and tactics, to acquaint themselves in the political assemblies, to make a presentable appearance in the court and to fulfil their duties of the posts to which they were appointed. A class of professional teachers, called sophists, had emerged. Though they differed from a conventional teacher a good deal in their methodology of training and the subject matters to be taught, they had the same goal and they received great respect from the common man. Some traditional sophists preferred ancient poets like Homer, others taught codes of patriotism and moral behavior and still new comers advocated the emerging materialistic sciences emphasizing atoms and stars. These scientific minds doubted the presence of any Supreme Being above man, still others denied any knowledge of gods on this earth or any certain knowledge about himself. Some, still more sceptical minds, held the opinion that man built human societies with their various standards of judging man's behaviour in relation to other men, his moral codes of conduct, even religious beliefs, were made for their own conveniences. These conventions kept changing from time to time and also differed from one nation to another. The same crime received different degrees of punishment under different crowns. Thus, each sophist had his individual view to teach through strictly individualized methods. The greedy nature of men remained the same throughout ages, with its five physical senses lurking for satisfaction with whatever means available.

The failure of the war had shaken the religious fervour of the Athenians. Their faith in gods decreased. They realised their helplessness in the hands of unfaithful gods.

The fear of future horrified their lives. Doubts and suspicions developed. The new teachings further disturbed the mental harmony. Mind boggling questions on the existence of man, the origin of the universe puzzled the common man's mind.

Socrates (463 – 399 B.C.) walked in the crowded streets, market places and the gymnasium and talked to the winning ears. He talked about the universe, the life of man, his very place on this earth, and the use of knowledge gained by man in ages. He talked about philosophy to common man. He taught them the art of living as free men. He trained them in the art of self-examination. He wanted them to realise their mistakes and wrong doings in the past which were the main cause of their suffering, and to check them and get rid of bitter discomforts of life. He wanted men to learn to enjoy the golden gleam of good and the sheen of evil. He wanted him to be rational and thoughtful. Rational thinking ought to lead to right living. Socrates was a stone-cutter by trade, having no formal classrooms or books in hand. He neither innovated new theories nor professed like sophists. He believed in God. Only his methodology was unusual. He questioned each and every popular idea. He asked why the universe was made as it was, and he never received any answer for it.

Socrates was condemned to die for corrupting the young minds, to make them question the accepted theories and opinion of their forefathers. He could have escaped death, but unchanging mind brought him close to his end. He left no written documents of his philosophies. His followers collected his words and passed to the modern world. One such disciple was the author of a series of dialogues; which were put in the mouth of this beloved master, Socrates and made him breathe across time and space. This devoted disciple was Plato.

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## SECTION – II

### STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Plato's life
- 2.1 Plato's works
- 2.2 A brief analysis of the Works
- 2.3 The *Republic* and the *Laws*
- 2.4 Myths

### 2.0 PLATO'S LIFE

Plato was born in 427 B. C., in a distinguished Athenian family. Several members of this family had been politically prominent on the anti-democratic side. Plato wished to enter public life. He was twenty-three when the war ended and Athens lost its democratic stand to Sparta.

Plato's attitude towards the leaders of the democracy – i.e., the demagogues is what could be expected. He entered military against Sparta. During the reign of the Aristocratic Thirty, he was invited to join the government. Plato welcomed the chance, but was soon awakened from his sweet dream when he realised that the worst weakness of democracy was nothing but the savagery of the ruling party. On the expulsion of the Thirty and surviving democratic cause left Plato and his surviving relatives without political influence and prospects. The restored democracy was at first moderate in its treatment of the anti-democratic elements who had tried to destroy it. But the accusation, trial and condemnation of his master Socrates, of whom he was a close associate, shook his conscience.

The story is quite likely true that after the execution of Socrates, Plato and others found it politically expedient to take refuge in Megara where Euclido seems to have had some sort of school.

The war had disturbed the routine activities of the city and his hopes of doing something for the democrats to improve the state of things at

Athens, had shattered. He escaped the scene and went abroad for over ten years. He stayed with Dionysius I of Syracuse in Sicily and from his observations in different states he concluded that all ruling governments whether democratic or dictatorial, were bad governors. The plight of the ruled would never end unless some true patriots, having wisdom and philosophical learning came forward with their remedial rules and regulations, plans and policies to save them. Letter VII speaks about frustration of Plato's political ideals and ambitions and it is likely to be true in substance.

Later, probably in the earliest 380's, Plato travelled to Egypt, among other places. In Syracuse in Sicily, Dionysius, the Elder was the military governor, a dictator and tyrant. In between his first and second visits to Syracuse he returned to Athens and founded the Academy in 380's (367?). The date of founding the Academy is still doubtful. Diogenes Laertius in *Life of Plato* suggests that Plato lived in the Academy in 380's. It was also his house. There is evidence of his starting a school in it. He had been informally teaching young men at the Academy before its formal inauguration as a school. The lesson planning was based on the curriculum described in the *Republic* Book VII.

In 367, Plato again visited Syracuse. He was a guest to Dionysius, the younger for a year. Further Plato visited Syracuse on the personal request of Dionysius. He was accompanied by Aristippus, Speusippus, Aeschines and Xenocrates. He returned back to Athens via Olympia, where he attended the Games in 360. His long voyages resulted in physical wreck, as he was 70, but he recovered and continued working at the Academy till 81. He died in 347 B.C.. Speusippus succeeded him as the Head of the Academy.

## **2.1 PLATO'S WORKS**

Plato left behind a mass of writings, of which we possess several letters and at least twenty-five authentic dialogues. Out of his letters thirteen are still preserved. Some are not accepted as authentic but Letters III, VII, VIII, XIII bear the mark of authenticity. Letter VII is considered the most important document of Plato's life. It gives a fairly general account of his career, youth and includes a complete account of his last frustration of political ideals and ambitions and is unsparing of invectives against Dionysius, the younger.



Plato wrote some two dozen compositions, which are known as his Dialogues. A few of these are not really dialogues, but addresses in monologues with a bit of conversational preamble. The *Laws*, on which he was still working when he died, seems to have been in the process of being reconstructed into conversational shape, but this was never completed.

*The Menexenus* seems to be an orthodox funeral oration, to which an incongruous conversational preamble and close were subsequently added. *The Apology* is Plato's version of Socrates' speech at his trial. The *Symposium* is, save for some brief stretches of conversation and debate, a sequence of short orations given by seven different speakers.

The unfinished *Critias* and the *Timaeus* are both addresses in monologue prefaced by a little conversation. There is little philosophy in the *Menexenus*, *The Apology* or the *Critias* and in *The Laws*, except for book X, or in the first six speeches in the *Symposium*; and almost none in the *Phaedrus*. *The Republic* is a mixed bag of writings of which some of the contents like educational requirements and political diagnoses and prescriptions, exhibit Plato as the designer of utopian policies of political reform. The programme of the *Laws* is relatively anti-utopian.

It is customary, and not seriously misleading, to divide Plato's writing career into three periods :

**I Period :** *Lysis*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Hippias Major* and *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias* and *Meno* belong to the early period. A bulk of *Republic* (Book I) or *Thrasymachus* belongs to the first period. Some historians ascribe the *Alcibiades* to Plato. These dialectical dialogues use the Socratic Method, which will be explained later.

With *Thrasymachus*, Book I of *The Republic*, Plato reached the peak of his electric argumentation. But suddenly there was a decline in the technique of lively dramatization in his dialogue. The *Parmenides* becomes fully undramatic.

**II Period :** The middle period saw only a faint trace of Plato's genius as an argumentator. His debates remained no longer duels. The last eight books

of *The Republic* belong to this period. Here itself we come across the famous Theory of Forms, a positive philosophical doctrine.

**III Period :** The third and the last period produced *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus* and *Parmenides*. The later books of the *Laws* also can be included in this period. The date of *Cratylus* is controversial. These dialogues deal with sophisticated and semi-professional issues. *Cratylus*, *Sophist* and *Theaetetus* deal with grammatical and semantic questions about the composition of truths and falsehoods and of the sentences that convey them.

## **2.2 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS**

Plato wrote his Dialogues in order to convey a just idea of the Socratic Method. His sentences seem to flow; he makes no pretence of following any rules or system. An epitome of his works must therefore consist of a very fragmentary selection, from the thoughts and ideas with which they abound. According to Plato, philosophy begins in wonder. The ancients attributed every object and activity of the physical world to God. Poets embodied these myths in a system (like our Vedas) and thus, philosophy emerged from poetry.

Little is known of the theories of the Seven Great Men (Seven Wise Men). Only their abstract ideas were followed by others. Then came Pythagoras with his magical numbers and Democritus with his atomic theory of the origin of the universe. Eclectics idea of an eternal and absolute being was set forth by Parmenides. Plato introduces this honorable Parmenides as an old man in company with Zeno discussing with Socrates, the Doctrine of Idea. This doctrine was the keystone of Plato's philosophy. In his philosophy, he conceives another world of pure and perfect forms, each separate and everlasting, imparting its essence to some object perceptible by the human senses.

The Sophists taught universal knowledge applied to the practical requirements of life, i.e., rhetoric; how to make the worse appear the better reason. According to the Sophists, there is no fixed scale of morality and it depends on one's understanding how to perceive it. Plato however, condemns

this doctrine. The next dialogue between Socrates and Protagoras is on the question of teaching virtue in general and the varieties of virtues on the earth.

In the next dialogue, Socrates discusses Gorgias on the question of the political freedom. Gorgias' theory envisages political freedom to all and political power to a few. In *Hippias*, Socrates argues with the younger sophists on what is beauty? Definitions from different heads fall out, yet no result follows, and the argument is abandoned. On the question who is nobler, Achilles or Ulysses? The Hippias maintain that Achilles is nobler. Socrates objects to it and says that they who do wrong willfully are better than those who do it through ignorance. Next comes *Euthydemus* discussing the use of the palpable and transparent fallacies and extravagant assertions to which Socrates recommends the use of the power of reasoning.

In *Symposium*, Socrates teaches a philosopher that love is a spirit filling the gulf between earth and heaven and that love is not a desire of beauty, but an instinct of immortality. Alcibides speaks of the fascination which Socrates exercised over him. Then Agathon follows with his views on tragedy and Aristophanes on comedy. Socrates continues to hold his strong seat among the philosophers. The debate continues until Agathon and Aristophanes fall asleep.

The scene changes to the stream of the Ilissus. Phaedrus highly appreciates the essay of Lysias. But Socrates insists on accurate definition as the first need of oratory and not at all the essay of Lysias. He insists that speech is superior to letters as letters cannot speak themselves, but spoken words bear the fruit, irrespective of the climate and the nation. In the dialogue entitled *Laches*, Socrates shows that courage is not limited to bravery in the battlefield but it also includes endurance of pain or reproach. In *Charmides*, temperance is the question of the debate.

Next, Socrates alludes to the doctrine of Reminiscence. He opines that the soul is immortal, passes from one body to another, and revives knowledge acquired in a previous state of existence. While he argues with Meno, who inquires whether virtue can be taught. Etymology becomes the focus of the next dialogue with

Cratylus. Socrates admits that things have names by nature and, that only he who adopts this theory will be able to express ideal forms in words. He says that most of the letters have each a distinct meaning; but he admits that language will only convey an impression of the idea, not its soul.

The unresolved question “What is Piety” is raised by Euthyphro. Yet next Theaetetus becomes more philosophical which brings out Socrates’ doctrine of knowledge. Socrates compares himself to a midwife, as he helps young men to bring forth their ideas and principles. To explain the concept of knowledge, he compares souls to waxen tablets on which the impressions are made, which may be clear and indelible or confused and effaced. Thoughts are like birds flying in the sky and one may be confused for the others. Likewise one may approach knowledge but meet ignorance there.

In *Crito*, Socrates answers to the problem of conscientious objection; a man must follow the dictates of his conscience even in defence of the wishes of his own native land. The *Phaedo* is generally considered as a great master piece of literature, in which a positive conclusion is reached. In the *Gorgias*, the speakers follow a destructive criticism and criticize each other’s opinions. However, Socrates comes out with his conviction that moral values must be based on the hard philosophical thinking. Gorgias begin the discussion on the nature of oratory. Then Polus enters the argument and proclaims the benefits brought by oratory; the major one is of the power in the land. Then there is an analysis in the Greek use of words. Thereafter, Calicles who is a politician takes up the argument. He argues on what is natural as opposed to conventional, i.e. the distinction between Nature and Law.

### **2.3 THE *REPUBLIC* AND THE *LAWS***

The *Republic* is the greatest of all Plato’s works, whereby he dreams of an ideal state or constitution. There is a marvellous blending from the resources of art, morality and politics. Plato adopts the conversational tone. Socrates begins by describing how a city springs from the natural needs of men, the basic ones followed by fair humanities of life and in turn followed by the desire to increase property or territory with aggression. But the book is not a treatise

on politics but on morals. A large part of it is concerned with the education of the young man in true philosophy, since the pattern of the ideal and perfect state or Utopia is dependent on the acquaintance with the perfection of the ruling philosophies. Plato lays down rules for the education and physical training of the young and for the choice of guardians of the city who should expect nothing from the state, but highly esteem the unity of state and bridge the gap between poverty and riches. Justice will be practised when wisdom, courage and temperance enter the minds of the people. He, however confesses that even such an ideal constitution is prone to decline with time and the art of battle will start to decay.

His last dialogue *Laws* is the longest. It lacks the fire and spirit of his earlier works. There are speakers, all old men from Sparta, Athens and Crete, who discuss their respective forms of government. Plato adopts the patriarchal theory whereby a single family develops into a tribe and several tribes into the state. He limits the number of citizens to 5040, and each citizen should have enough of the land to raise his family. In his state, the strong should rule and the power is conferred by the casting of the lot. The state should make provisions for various civil amenities and also for education. Plato discusses succession of property, trade, begging, which is to be prohibited, on duties of the judicial men, and on having a supreme council.

## **2.4 MYTHS**

“As being is to becoming, so truth is to faith” is the dictum of Plato’s myths. One of the myths introduces Athens at war with a city founded by Neptune in the island of Atlantis, where, after the battle, both victors and vanquishers are swallowed up by an earthquake. The island itself sinks under the sea. In the Chariot of the Soul, the human soul follows the gods and demi-gods in a chariot to the heaven to find out the absolute idea of truth, beauty and justice. In Creation of Man, he opines that the world being visible, tangible and perishable must be the work of some great cause/power, who put intelligence in the soul, the soul in the body and the body in the universe and let it get going. This great cause also created the heavenly bodies, the Sun, the Moon and the Earth etc. and also time; the most

important among his creations. He created animals from deteriorated human beings, birds from man of sight and innocence, and so on and so forth. In the story, Er, a dead man comes to life on his funeral pyre and relates what his departed soul had seen in the heaven. The Other World deals with the Heavens and Tartarus, and how virtue and evil actions lead man's soul to these ether lands respectively.

Plato left behind him not treatises or heavy text books, but accounts of dramatic conversation between friends; in style that is fresh, spontaneous, humorous and informal. Socrates figures as the presiding genius. Plato never says a word in his own person. He began to write his dialogues under the stimulus of his master's death. His aim was to encompass Socrates' works to benefit the common men by his learning. His predecessors and contemporaries had raised three fundamental questions:

1. Where is the origin of truth?
2. What is the origin of the universe and thereby of man?
3. What was the purpose behind the Creation of man and the world, and his aim in life?

Socrates voices Plato's answers to these questions in his dialogues. He delineates a system of philosophy to make man's thinking sharp, particularly on the questions of human conduct. He implores them to examine things instead of taking them for granted. And he wants them to understand the terms used by them and to face the implications of their ordinary judgement. Thus, we come across a well defined Platonic System of this "Attic Bee" (Plato) as the Athenians called him.

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## SECTION - III

### STRUCTURE

#### 3.0 THE SOCRATIC METHOD

No contemporary testimony tells how the ancients published their compositions. However, it is well evident that their compositions were written by hand. Reading books was a fairly rare thing in absence of press and libraries. Oral transmission was the tradition (as was the case in our gurukuls). The public got to know a new dialogue by hearing the author recite it. It can be compared with the modern method of recitation of compositions on the stage for the audience Symposia, 'Mushayara'.

Plato's dialogues are dramatic in form because they were composed for semi-dramatic recitation to the lay and drama loving audience mostly the young men. A dialogue, therefore had to be short enough not to tax the endurance of its audience. Except for the *Republic* and the *Laws*, all others are short debates.

In this method, pretending to complete ignorance, Socrates queries all and sundry concerning those traditional virtues about which they prided themselves to know. He begins with the need for a definite definition of the term in question. He persists until the speaker gives away a false or irrelevant definition and ultimately arrives at the essential concept. His aim is not to win over an opponent. If an argument is left unsettled, then Socrates assures that it is not the failure of the speaker but the failure of the function of reason to work towards a dialectics. The dialogues mark the talent of Plato as a philosopher and his ability in dialectics.

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## SECTION -IV

### **THE *REPUBLIC***

#### **STRUCTURE**

4.0 *The Republic*

4.1 The Statement of the Argument

4.2 The Main Elements of Society and Man's Nature

4.3 Ion : Person of the Dialogue; Socrates and Ion

#### **4.0 *THE REPUBLIC***

Text consulted Five Great Dialogues : Plato ; translated by Louise Ropes Loomis, Prof. Emeritus of history and philosophy, Wells College, published at London. (D. Van Nostrand Company).

Book II : The life of a well-ordered state and education of its soldier citizens in music and gymnastic, and in right ideas of God.

Participants in the dialogue : Socrates (the narrator), Glaucon, Adeimantus, Polemarchus, Cleitophon.

Scene : In the house of Cephauls at the Peiraeus.

#### **4.1 THE STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT**

At the end of the first Book, Plato makes Socrates confess that they had not arrived at any suitable conclusion or the nature of justice, and that which they had been discussing remained unclear. It is also not clear whether justice is a virtue and that it makes people happy. The whole discussion exemplifies several situations. In Book I, the discussion is in the region of logic.

Book II treads the regions of psychology, analysis, concrete human nature and criticises voice of society and public opinion, as it speaks through its representatives or in the everyday intercourse of social and family life. Here, Socrates becomes an exponent of a new and higher morality. Glaucon and Adeimantus help the transition. Adeimantus describes Glaucon and himself as young



men of the day, who are gifted, and able to flit over the surface of public opinion and draw inferences from it so as to find the true principle of life.

The discussion begins with the classification of good things. This classification is based on two criteria : the distinction of things good in themselves and things good because of their ulterior results. He and Adeimantus are forced in accepting that justice is good in itself and for its results too. But they wish to examine its intrinsic goodness and for that it has to be examined absolutely apart from its results. Morality has to be distinguished from its external or tangible results, always connected with it. Then only the nature of morality one is dealing with is ascertained. Accordingly, Glaucon requires that the distinction between justice and injustice should be represented in its truest light. He will put justice on one side and separate it from its material results, i.e., setting against it all the good things that often go with it but are not really connected with it. Glaucon and Thrasymachus want to convince themselves that a quality should stand for itself and is better worth-living than any other thing that can be set against it.

Both of them want Socrates to answer their queries and judge it by opposing his expression. These queries and views are not their own but they are unable to withstand them and wish Socrates, the great scholar, to maintain. Glaucon represents his troublesome views on the first hand. He thinks morality is a good thing because of its certain good external results. But he finds that these are not the natural good, just a compromise between a greater good and a greater evil; i.e., the greater good is to obtain the same external rewards without justice and the greater evil is to suffer the pinning results of justice. In this way, Glaucon gives a theory of the origin of justice, showing how it arose. Then he maintains that justice is ranked as the second-best thing in life, and that too, mostly against their desires. They would naturally like to be unjust. He argues that here man acts reasonably because it is a fact that all the advantages in life are on the side of injustice. If this is the case, then a question arises, is justice better of the two? And if it is so what does 'good' stands for in this case? Adeimantus expresses two different beliefs : the first is, Be just; for it pays in this and also in the next world, i.e., just man prospers

in both the worlds. Then Adeimantus adds, Honesty is the best policy. Though dissimilar from Glaucon's views, Adeimantus resolves justice into the seeking of external rewards and therefore it leads to the same conclusion, i.e., the really valuable thing is the reputation of justice and not justice itself. This very view is inculcated in ordinary education and in the family life of a man.

Adeimantus expresses his second view as : justice is in itself the best thing in the world but injustice is much pleasanter, and if properly handled can be made to secure satisfactory results. Even gods, when they reach the roots of the matter, indulge in injustice, and this is the most thorough-going demolition of justice, for it asserts that the propounder of justice, its fountain, is itself corrupted.

Thus, Glaucon states that it is in the nature of things that they appear to be pleasant when put to injustice, but men have found by experience that they cannot do it with impunity, and the greatest evil is to suffer injustice without power or retaliation. Men have therefore compromised by making laws and regulations, plus institutions, which save them from the worst evil, but do not secure them the greatest good.

This is the conception of an original contract upon which society is based, emphatically, unhistorical, yet no less influential. The theory is used destructively, as Glaucon applies it, and in a revolutionary interest, to that justice is a matter of contract and convention only, and there is further a most important implication that all law is a sort of artificial violence done to human nature.

And here nature is one of the most ambiguous words :

- (1) Some theorists have held that what is natural in man is what he has most in common with the rest of the animal world.
- (2) Some think that human nature is properly that in man which mostly distinguishes him from rest of the animal world, the 'differentia of a man' not his genus.
- (3) And yet another senses everything that man does is natural to him, law, morality, science, as much as anything else; his nature is all that he does.

When this antithesis between law and nature is made, the antithesis is, so to say, within man. Then how are certain products of human nature distinguished as natural and others as conventional? Conventional as it stands here means certain mutual understanding which a society necessarily employs. That is, all the institutions of the state and of society are forms of mutual understanding. They are emphatical creations, as Socrates explains it, of man. There is no reason why he should not dispense with them if he wished. If the theory of contract is understood in this sense, it is not profitable to dismiss it by saying that it is unhistorical. But still the fact is that a society is based upon contract, in which individual members agree to sacrifice a part of their individuality, or their rights and freedoms so that another can enjoy his. Two men cannot live and work together without surrendering something which they would do if separate, for joint action is not the same as separate action. Then man would be himself minus everything that he is by convention, and that means minus everything in him which the existence of society implies.

(natural) man = Man – Social conventions

Society = Man + Conventions

That is ‘natural’ man without conventions does not exist. Then a theory of justice is set down as something conventional and contrary to nature by Glaucon. It contains the great truth that laws and customs would not exist but for a mutual understanding, although it ignores the significance of this mutual understanding. Man has not only worked out this mutual understanding but has also judged the best to exist in the society.

Secondly, Glaucon states that justice is always observed unwillingly, i.e., public and private, is only maintained by force. The term ‘force’ may include external forces like police and army, rules and regulations on the one hand, and on the other it may include the force of public opinion, the force of principles, ideas, conscience, and so on, i.e., the force that generate inside the civilized man on the other. This force makes itself felt in different ways in different individual cases. Glaucon feels that the man is unwillingly obeying these coercions and going for justice or morality.

Glaucón lastly completes his theory by undertaking the fact that the man has an inward protest for the forces prevailing in the society. And this inward protest of the members of society against these supposed compulsions exercised by law is a natural and justifiable feeling, because the advantages of life are all on the side of injustice. It is possible, he argues, to imagine all the advantages of life secured by the mere appearance of justice without the reality. And this reality of justice can exist without a single element of good fortune with it. With this argument and supposition, Glaucon put up the doubt, what is the real advantage of justice in life?

Adeimantus though is contradictory to Glaucon in expressing his view, but he makes his points clear and supports the points made by Glaucon. He points out that the supporters of justice and morality confuse it with its material results. They say that when a man practices justice in life, he prospers in wealth and luxury and is destined to go to heaven after death and his reward is tasted by his clan. Whereas, the unjust and wicked go to hell and suffer. This is taught by parents and teachers to the children. He supports his statement with Hesiod and Homer, the two great poets.

Next, Adeimantus takes the case of prose writers who think justice and virtue are honorable, but it is very difficult to follow their path. On the contrary injustice and vice can be easily attained and their pleasures can be enjoyed in a short time. Then again, honesty though the best policy, does not bring rewards in plenty as dishonesty does. That is to say that a wicked man is happier than a just man, in any part of the society. Again the most surprising fact put forth by these writers is that gods bless the honest man with pain and misery, and give happiness and joy to wicked.

This general idea of morality as connected with reward, and taken from Eleusinian Mysteries is extended by Adeimantus into a future life. The expectation of reward is made the motive of a good life. The poets sometimes say that the gods are indifferent to justice in this life. There are abundant expressions in Greek literature of such belief in the injustice of the Providence. And this is reinforced by prophets and dealers in Mysteries. They show the path of sacrifices, prayers and ceremonies to win the favour of the gods, for

this life and the next, better than justice does.

Adeimantus refer to two kinds of Mysteries :

- (1) Eleusinian Mysteries is supposed to be founded by Eumolpus. Here Musaeus and his son Eumolpus teach men to expect rewards and punishments of a gross sort in a future life. They encourage a belief in rewards and punishments which tend to weaken belief in the intrinsic worth of moral goodness.
- (2) He talks of the Orphic Mysteries or the Mystery-mongers or wanderers, who pretend to exercise an influence on the gods to obtain dispensations for sin. These Mysteries are associated with the names of heroes, generally with that of Orpheus. Here Adeimantus feels that they encourage the idea that the consequences of an unjust deed can be averaged by sacrifice or ritual. Adeimantus sums up his ideas along with those of his brother Glaucon and says that all of them depend upon the one belief that justice and injustice are to be sought or avoided, not for their own sake, but for the sake of something else. He points out to Socrates, the difficulty in which a common man finds himself. He sees the whole of the public opinion arrayed upon the side of the belief that justice and injustice are to be practised or avoided for some reward in life; and further, by proper skill a man may commit injustice, without forfeiting the material rewards promised to justice. Again he is confused in existence and non-existence of gods. He knows of the gods through the poets, and these poets all represent them open to corruption or taking side of injustice. How can a man save himself from being lured to follow the path of injustice? He can only be saved by some divine unseen grace or inspiration, or by knowing the true nature of justice and injustice.

Socrates is thus, enforced with the duty to explain the intrinsic good and evil values inherited by justice and injustice. With this statement, Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus proposed the doubt which is illustrated in the introductory part of the *Republic*.

## **4.2 THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY AND MAN'S NATURE**

Socrates was entrusted with the investigation of the true nature of justice and injustice, and their value in man's life and effect on his soul. Socrates, being a scholar of more understanding, thinks it proper not to begin by an analysis of man's soul or his inner life. He thinks it correct to look at human nature on a large scale, (and gives the example of a short-sighted person) i.e., in the broad outlines of the state and of society. It is necessary to read the surface and then scratch the layers to dig deep into human truth. In other words, his method is to analyze facts about human nature which are apparent to everybody, and to examine the significance of those facts till he arrives eventually at the innermost principles of human nature of which they are the expressions.

Socrates, the mouthpiece of Plato, assumes that there is an analogy between the individual and the state. The life of the individual is the counterpart of the life of the state or rather the life of the state is the life of the individuals composing it. And Socrates begins with the large scale, the society; its origin and growth.

Socrates, in his enquiry into the origin of the state, does not deal with historical aspects, rather he deals with those aspects of human nature which make society exist. He examines not the stages or the levels by which society has grown up, but how it exists at all; the logical order of growth. He starts with the lowest, (rough stage of society), that aspect of society in which it is an organization for the satisfaction of certain physical needs of its members. Socrates creates an idea of a society, and points out that the necessity or need is the mother of all inventions, including society. This elementary condition is the basis of society and it exists for the production of the necessities of life.

Society depends upon a double fact

1. No man is complete in himself, i.e. he is not sufficient for himself.
2. Other men need him to satisfy their wants. (or he needs other men to satisfy his wants)

Thus, every man is insufficient for himself, but has in him to give to others what they have not got. The relation here is reciprocal; the limitations of an individual are supplemented by the accessories of others and vice-versa. And in this way all men come together to complete each other's picture; for no two men have been made exactly the same. And the society emerges as an organization, for the satisfaction of various human needs. The very fact of individuality organizes men for the state; each man wants others and can contribute something to them. The society emerges, grows and accordingly there is pastoral society, agricultural society, and mechanically industrialized society. Wherein, flourish trade and commerce, export and import, various workshops practised by different classes of producers are required to establish harmony in the society. On some principles of need or want and incompleteness different societies fall into relationship. Finally, a network of societies is formed. But Socrates reminds the question, "Wherein all this could justice be found?" Then he proceeds to trade out the normal and healthy course for the satisfaction of elementary human needs.

Socrates describes, at first, a very simple society for man, which Glaucon calls a little better than that of 'a city of pigs'. He sketches briefly the elements of civilization, social refinement, luxury, and material prosperity. Then there is growth of fine arts, decorative arts and poetry, science of health and medicine. It is clear that with the satisfaction of elementary needs there is expansion of his needs and wants.

Further Socrates discusses the most primary element of human nature; the appetite, which seeks the satisfaction of material wants. Then he adds 'element of spirit' and 'philosophic' to human nature.

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#### **4.3 ION : PERSON OF THE DIALOGUE; SOCRATES AND ION**

Socrates enters into a conversation with Ion in this dialogue. Ion is the rhapsode, who is recognised as the reciter and interpreter of Homer. Ion poses himself as the national educator of Greece.

This is how the conversation goes :

Socrates meets Ion and enquires about his native land. He asks Ion whether he belongs to Ephesus. In reply, Ion tells Socrates that he is a native of Epidauros and also gives information that it is at Epidauros that he had attended the festival of Asclepius.

Socrates further asks whether the Epidaurians hold contests of rhapsodes at such festivals and whether Ion had participated and won any of those contests.

As the conversation advances, we come to know that Socrates first introduces the art of a rhapsode. He envies a rhapsode and the art of a rhapsode. He envies a rhapsode, as rhapsode is continually in the company of good poets and specially of Homer who is the most divine of all poets. A rhapsode should be able to interpret the mind of the poet to his readers. It is possible only if he understands the meaning of the poet and his writings. So the role of the rhapsode is very challenging because he has to understand as well as interpret the writings of a poet and explain it to others.

Socrates points out that a Rhapsode is an interpreter of thoughts and feelings, hence, he should be in a position to explain any poet and not necessarily Homer or any specific poet. It's an art and art has no limits or boundaries. The poets delve on similar theme of war, human society, heaven and hell, gods and heroes. So, a Rhapsode cannot restrict his expression to a particular poet. His skill lies in reading all poets, great or small because to establish a better poet he ought to recognise a lesser one. Here, Socrates argues that he who knows Homer, who is the better, will know Archilochus and Hesoid, who are the inferiors. If a Rhapsode becomes all alive when Homer is spoken of, but goes to sleep at the mention of any other poet, it indicates only his lack of knowledge



of poetry as a whole. The idea is that poetry is an art and art is an organic whole, it is creation and creation takes up parts to produce the whole. So the study of Homer is incomplete without the study of other poets. Art lives and grows irrespective of the individual who creates it. When a man has acquired the knowledge of a whole art, the enquiry into good and bad is one and the same. Socrates explains this by an analogy of other forms of art such as painting and sculpture. A true knowledge of art therefore implies the ability to equally appreciate or criticise a piece of art. A complete understanding of art is required in order to distinguish the good from the bad. So to appreciate the excellencies and defects of an artist, one has to draw a comparison between his art and that of others.

A poet whether 'lyric or epic' is under the divine influence. His mind is possessed by God who speaks his words through the poet. Until the poet receives the divine inspiration, he is just a light - winged holy thing; he lacks invention; he is powerless and unable to utter his oracle. The poet sings not by the rules of art, but by the power divine. So, he is unable to utter strains of more than one kind. Just as holy prophets interpret the mind of God to human beings so does a poet serve as minister of God and delivers the message through his poem. Poets are only interpreters of the gods by whom they are severely possessed.

A rhapsode is at his best and produces the greatest effect when he is not in his right mind, just like an inspired poet. Rhapsode at such moments gets overpowered by the poet whom he is describing. Socrates states that if a Rhapsode (Ion) possesses a gift of speaking excellently about a particular poet, say Homer, then probably it is not an art, rather it is an inspiration. This inspiration is drawn from the divinity that surrounds the great poet. All good poets are inspired. So, the speaking about Homer is an inspiration which exercises a magnetic power like that stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. The stone not only attracts iron rings but also imports to them a similar power of attracting other rings, all of them deriving their power of suspension from

the original stone. In the similar manner, the Muse first of all inspires men herself. These inspired poets serve as a constant source of inspiration for others and thereby a chain of inspired persons is formed.

Ion is so deeply involved in interpreting the poem that automatically his eyes are filled with tears while describing a scene of pity, he himself is horror-stricken while commenting on a tale of horror. The similar effects of joy, sorrow, tear, laughter, horror and wonder are transferred from the rhapsode to the audience and here is a continuous stream of emotions which is passed on from the poet to the rhapsode and from the rhapsode to the listeners. So, the spectator/audience is like the last of the rings, which receive the power of original magnet from one another. The rhapsode and the actors are like the intermediate rings and the poet himself is the first of them. Every poet has some Muse from whom he is suspended. People derive their inspiration from any of these first links, be it Orpheus, Musaeus or those who are possessed by Homer himself.

Ion, the rhapsode is one who is possessed by Homer and whose abilities are inept to interpret other poets. In other words, Socrates means to say that only at inspired moments (and these are moments when the rhapsode is out of his senses), the rhapsode displays skills of interpretation. Once the inspiration is lost, the rhapsode stands powerless. This happens because the rhapsode praises Homer not by art but by divine inspiration.

Socrates asks Ion, "On what part of Homer do you speak well?" Ion replies that he is well-versed in the whole of Homer and he has complete knowledge about the works of Homer. Socrates cleverly shows in the forthcoming conversation that Ion simply has no conception of the meaning of knowledge, but ironically allows him at last to take refuge in the claim to inspiration.

Socrates says that Homer speaks of several arts like those of driving, and medicine. He enquires of Ion whether he is proficient in such arts and whether they are different or one and the same and if they are different, they require different knowledge altogether to understand them. Ion agrees with Socrates' viewpoint. Ion agrees that definitely a driver/charioteer would have

a far better understanding of the art of driving as compared to a rhapsode. Similarly, a physician shall have superior knowledge about the art of medicine as compared to Ion himself. The idea which Socrates conveys through these examples is that every art has a distinct subject and he who has no knowledge of an art can form no judgement of it. So a rhapsode can frame no accurate opinion on the art of medicine or on the art of fisherman or on the prophetic art. Regarding the art of a prophet, Socrates quotes passages from Homer's *Odyssey* and *Illiad* and then convinces Ion that they are the sort of things that are best judged and determined by the prophets. Hence, a rhapsode is ill equipped to interpret all fields of knowledge. He will not know everything and he shall be at a loss to explain all branches of knowledge with equal skill and expertise.

Ion is still of the opinion that a rhapsode can form a better general judgement on the proprieties of character. Ion says that a rhapsode would certainly know what a general ought to say when exhorting his soldiers. Socrates in turn tells Ion that it is quite possible that the rhapsode may have some knowledge of the art of the general. This knowledge, anyhow, could be attributed to other factors, for example, the rhapsode is already learned in the art of horse-riding. So it is actually the art of horsemanship which proves helpful to the rhapsode in understanding the role of the general rather than the art of rhapsody itself. Ion is further trapped in the conversation and made to believe that he being the best of rhapsodes, is also the best of generals.

Socrates extends the question further to ask Ion, if he has the qualities of a good general, why then he is unemployed. Ion tries to dismiss it by saying that he is a native of a slave country Ephesus, Greece and Sparta would not employ him for they have generals of their own. Socrates then refers to Apollodorus, who though a foreigner was chosen by Athenians as their general. The logic behind this discussion is to make Ion realize that if one is knowledgeable, then one would know his art. Ion, the rhapsode is confused about the true nature of his art; his perceptions are vague and only dimly lighted fragments of Homer's art. His vision is blurred and not illuminated by the broad understanding and knowledge of his subject. He is simply posing himself to be a master of Homer. So after all claims of knowing

many glorious things about Homer, Ion emerges out to be a rogue, a deceiver, who is being dishonest. Socrates believes that Ion, the rhapsode has no art and speaks delightfully of Homer only under the inspiring influence of the divine poet himself. Ion finally seeks refuge in the noble inspiration and saves himself from being declared a rogue.

Here Plato neither seriously upholds the traditional view of poetic inspiration nor wholly discards it. He does, however, insist on distinction between rational knowledge and the unaccountable though often precious works of poets. The good nature with which “his Socrates” treats the famous rhapsode makes a high comedy of the dialogue.

On one hand, Socrates shows the development of material comforts and on the other, the rise of War. With the expansion of human wants beyond bare necessity emerged with it, the desire of aggression or the desire to hoard the power or to save one’s own position. Socrates passes immediately from aggression to defense, which is its justification.

The function of the army or military organization is to protect the state against aggression and to help in maintaining law and order in the society. With this, Socrates brings out the reason for the need of armed forces in the state and puts before the audience the natural elements which go to make up the life of human society as it is.

Behind all this organization, there is a need to maintain harmony in the work done by each member of the community, for each type of work needs a specialist and not all are dexterous for the same work. That is to say the principles of ‘division of labour’ and ‘Specialization of functions’ become operative in the society for its proper functioning. Nature has specially adapted people for particular kind of work. People of different nature should get work according to their abilities and capacities. For the perfect society, all its members must work in a harmonious environment fulfilling the basic and required needs of each of its members. Thus, it is important for the production of commodities (including services) to get the right nature (person) for the right work. Here, Socrates turns to the importance of the purpose of guarding the state. He

questions, what sort of nature will make a good 'Guardian' of the state. After a long discussion, he draws the following conclusion :

A good 'guardian' of the state must be a nature good for fighting. It is a nature possessed of 'spirit', the fighting element in human nature, fearless and not to 'be beaten', 'unconquerable'. But a society entirely consisting of 'spirit' cannot exist; for such men would simply tear one another into pieces.

Along with 'spirit', the guardian is required to have an element of attraction. Socrates calls it the 'philosophic element'. It is found in the lower animals. It is something which draws them to what they know and are familiar with. This 'philosophic element' is also present in man and he is attracted to human beings, friends, relations, etc. It is by virtue of this nature that man is attracted to things of beauty or art, or truth or the like. Socrates explains this fact with a simple example of a dog and calls it a Philosopher because it likes those it knows, and instinctively feels at home with them. A man to become good guardian should have this 'philosophic element' which teaches him to have the knowledge of his likes and dislikes by the test of knowledge and ignorance. Love of learning is love of wisdom and love of wisdom is philosophy, according to Socrates.

Finally, Socrates adds swiftness and strength as element of nature in a good guardian.

All men in the society must have in them something of each of the Five Elements of appetite, of spirit, the philosophic element, swiftness and strength, in varying degrees. These are the main elements of society without which human life as it is would not go on. For a society to carry on, animal wants are to be satisfied, men have to protect themselves and men have to feel to be drawn to one another by force of attraction.

The Greek gods practised polymorphism. As described in the fables, they were made to take up any form and shape. Socrates excludes the idea of God having a shape or form, as shape or form are liable to change. While educating children, it is desirable to present God as perfect good, and being good he cannot impose misery or become the cause of evil in the world.

God is absolute truth and cannot lie whether in word or deed.

Though God (or goddess of Greeks) does not change, yet without really changing the form within, they can appear before man in different shapes. That is to say God deludes man, producing false impressions, by practising magic or witchcraft. Thus, God makes man a victim of illusion. Socrates calls it 'lie in the soul' or in ordinary language, self-delusion which is the outcome of ignorance. But both God and men hate lie or self-delusion. Ignorance means being out of harmony with the facts of the world and it is the opposite of truth. No man would wish to live in ignorance or lie.

But God cannot be conceived of as creating illusion either, because He will be the victim of illusion himself or because He is having the elements of 'good' and 'perfect'. The former condition does not apply to God because He is 'absolute truth' and 'perfect'. He does not live in ignorance having no emergencies to meet. That is to say He has no want or need to change or deceive or lie. He is perfectly simple and true both in word and deed.

In one of the passages, Socrates says that all changes occur in the direction of good, i.e. if a thing undergoes change, it is for the better and fairer. God is already perfect, neither deficient in virtue or beauty. If He changes then, He should change for the worse or evil. But such change is detestable to both God and man. God being the fairest and best of all conceivable in the universe, remains absolutely and forever in His own form.

As God is always just and right, He is not the author of evil. The poet while writing of the sufferings of Niobe - the subject of the tragedy - and attributing it to God, is spreading falsehood. But he may say that the wicked are miserable because they are benefited by receiving punishment from God. God being good is not evil. Anything said or sung by the poet as God being the author of evil is fiction, it is "suicidal rumour and impious". Poets and reciters must conform to this principle.

Secondly, God being the fairest and best is not liable to change. Anything attributed to God as creating various forms is a lie and blasphemy against the gods. God being the truest and highest cannot lie to himself, i.e. in the highest

reality, the soul. To keep the lie in the soul is hated by both the gods and men. Those who possess this ignorance in the soul are themselves deceived. And the lie in words is only a kind of imitation and shadowy image of a previous affection of the soul. Therefore, although we admire Homer, we do not admire the lying dream which Zeus sends to Agamemnon; neither will we praise the verses of Aeschylus celebrating falsehood attributed to Apollo. As true worshippers of the gods, we will not allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young. Thus, God is perfectly simple and true both in word and deed, He changes not, He deceives not, either by sign or word, by dream or waking vision and it is in this form that we should write and speak about divine things. The gods are not magicians who transform themselves or deceive mankind in any way. The lying poet has no place in our idea of God and therefore in society.

Socrates sums up this discussion by excluding the lying poet from the society. Still there are certain circumstances under which lying is not detestable. For example, it has a remedial use, working like a medicine on the diseased person. Then it is deliberately used in warfare and is justifiable. True lie is hateful. Justifiable lie is a compromise, a concession to human weakness. Whenever a man has a weakness, he fills it with a lie to cover it. A strong character accepts its weakness and is ready to bear its consequences. Thus, the greater a man, the less he finds the necessity for lying.

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## **SECTION – V**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 5.0 Brief Summary of Book II
- 5.1 Building Human Character in Early Life
- 5.2 Traditional Way of Education : Gymnastic and Music
- 5.3 Analysis of the Myths and the Beliefs in Greek Literature

#### **5.0 BRIEF SUMMARY OF BOOK II**

1. In Book-II, Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus discuss the effect of justice or injustice on the soul of man.
2. Socrates, while explaining this presupposition, begins with looking at human nature at large, in the broad outlines of the society.
3. He analyses the nature and need of organising a human society.
4. Every man must have in him something of each of the three elements, the element of appetite, the element of spirit, and the philosophic elements - the main elements of the society without which human life could not go on as it is.

#### **5.1 BUILDING HUMAN CHARACTER IN EARLY LIFE**

Socrates differentiates between element of spirit and the philosophic element along with swiftness and strength, as higher elements. He has fixed the function of defence as one of the greatest importance in the state. And those who are to discharge this function must be men in whose nature the higher elements are strongly developed. He considers education or training to develop these elements, and nature and nurture essentially go to make up human character. Nature and nurture work together; neither will work in absence of the other.



## **5.2 TRADITIONAL WAY OF EDUCATION : GYMNASTIC AND MUSIC**

Socrates and Adeimantus agree on the traditional way of educating young men to nourish essential qualities in their character. The traditional system of education in Greece had two divisions :

- (i) Gymnastic to train the body; it was in common practice ;
- (ii) Music to train the mind/soul. General culture of Athens included standard literature under music.

Socrates adopted these agencies as the primary means of training in early life and assigned to them a new and deeper significance. He conceived that in early childhood, the main instruments for bringing out what was best in the soul were :

- (i) Literature beginning with stories and fables for children,
- (ii) Poetry follows stories,
- (iii) Music follows with playing and singing,
- (iv) Plastic arts come later.

All these instruments come under the heading 'arts'. Education in arts goes on till manhood, when it is to be succeeded by special physical training i.e. gymnastic, intended to impart fitness to the young men physically for military and other duties which require a strong and healthy physique.

The soul/mind and body reach different stages of growth by different agencies and through different media. The education, discussed by Socrates and Adeimantus in Book II and III, is through these agencies. They act upon the soul at a stage when imagination, fancy, and feelings are working on it.

The ultimate purpose of education or training is to present to the soul, 'The good' under various forms as beauty is 'the good' under a certain form, and truth is 'the good' under certain other form. The greatest thing a man can learn is to see according to a man's observation, the presence of reason and divine intelligence in the world in which he dwells. Socrates persuades

Adeimantus to understand this ultimate point of the growth of man's character that will make him a good guardian and a good citizen of state. And for this, Socrates claims that from its earliest stages education must help the soul to see the good, in all kinds of different ways. Early education should present 'the good' in its various imaginative forms to the soul, so that, their rational forms can follow in the later life.

According to Socrates, in his idea of a good state, early education begins by presenting the highest good, i.e. religious good to the soul in the form of a being who is perfectly good and true. The aim of teaching about such a being is that the soul may be like God as far as possible. Hence, it becomes essential to determine the true nature of 'good' of God, and put it before the receptive minds of children in the clearest and simplest way.

In this system of education, the child begins his training with stories of a mythological kind. These myths treat divine nature, whose very essence is to be good and true. These myths are in poetical forms, viz, Homer's and Hesiod's, and they are about the same object that becomes the study of reason in later part of education. With absolute good and truth, education presents heroic nature, and also human nature, in its highest and truest forms.

Socrates' poems of Homer, Hesiod and other writers, are fed upon which the Athenian/ Greek mind is nurtured in youth. In this dialogue, he is discussing the general principles on which the state is found, and accordingly he is concerned to lay down principles for poets to be observed. Thus, his discussion seems to be a negative criticism of these poets. From the divine nature of the gods, he passes to the semi-divine nature of the heroes and divine men. Parallel to this, the moral principles and virtues to be inculcated in the child are discussed. The two basic virtues are reverence for parents and feeling of brotherhood. In book III, he recognizes virtues of courage, self-control and truth as the cardinal virtues in a grown up man.

### **5.3 ANALYSIS OF THE MYTHS AND THE BELIEFS IN GREEK LITERATURE**

Socrates begins his dialogue with Adeimantus with a startling assertion that the myths are all false myths and beliefs as derived from the great works

of Homer, Aeschylus, Hesiod and others. All literature, howsoever great in artistic form or thought, carries a sense of falsehood if it represents things otherwise rather than they actually are or would have happened. God can never have acted in the human way in which He is represented by the poets and writers. Further, myths represented the divine nature or the gods as doing such things as they are not known to do. That is to say, God is presented as :

- (a) a divine nature acting as a human being, having human feelings and emotions and sharing his weaknesses.
- (b) a divine nature acting out as evil against his own good and true elements as are present in his divine nature.

*Socrates postulates a system of dogma, according to which God is:*

- (a) good and the cause of good alone.
- (b) true and incapable of change or deceit.

Adeimantus accepts these two canons which are directed against certain false ideas of the popular sacred beliefs in the contemporary society.

The prominent idea behind the goodness of god is that of beneficence or doing good, and doing good or active goodness. Tales that present God doing evil to men or injuring them are not to be accepted. He deduces a simple logical presupposition that if god is good, He can be the cause of only good and nothing else.

Evil is a necessary ingredient in human life in some sense or other. Only divine nature is absolutely free from evil as it is perfectly good. Human misfortunes are not the work of God, they are not really evils but punishments. God is not the cause of man's misery and men must not be called as miserable, they only receive punishment when they deserve it which makes their lives miserable.

Evil prevailing in this world is the result of man's ignorance. He sees the portion of an object closer to him instead of its gestalt form and this results in completing the whole in his imagination. Ignorance comes in between. It is recommended that they should see everything as 'good', and work or do good in this universe. This is the highest object of knowledge to be attained by him; understanding the world is seeing the good in it.

Socrates arrives at two convictions as follows :

(i) The universe is essentially imperfect, and has element of evil in it; man experiences it as far as he understands it. Reason or the will of God is helpless to make man recognise the falsehood of this evil, i.e. evil resists the action of man's reasoning.

(ii) With the growth of reason and insight, man is able to discern the cause of the presence of evil and its falsehood.

He treats these facts on the equal grounds but does not reconcile them. Socrates, then explains the truth of god to Adeimantus, that is

God is perfect and cannot change. In itself, change can be brought about in two ways; change produced by external or internal factors, and by the will of the person changing.

In the first case, i.e. change produced by external factors, liability to change is a sign of vice or weakness inherent in the body or soul or work of art undergoing a change. The more the element of 'good' possessed by such body or soul or work of art, the least liable it is to change by external influences. A kind of proportion is maintained here. God being the best (greatest good) of things in the universe is least liable to external factors of change. The strength or virtue shows itself in the capacity to remain unchanged by any conceivable circumstances. Only want or need can lead to change. God, being perfect and wanting nothing, according to conception of divine perfection, must not change. Thus, God or divine nature is constant and unchanging according to Socrates, and Adeimantus admits it.

Socrates works out this canon against the stories or fables and ghost stories prevalent in the contemporary Greek society. These stories degraded the divine nature to frighten the children.

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## **SECTION - VI**

### **BOOK III**

#### **STRUCTURE**

##### **6.0 AN INTRODUCTION**

Socrates passes from the education of children (Book-II) to young men in this book. He begins with the inculcation of the feeling of reverence to gods and to parents and of the feeling of brotherly love to all. He lays emphasis on the specific virtues of courage, honesty and self-control. These virtues are presented to the learner's soul as models of heroic types.

At the beginning of dialogue, he does not talk about god, but the divine nature as it appears fused with human nature. The reason is that myths and stories take semi-divine beings and heroes as their characters. Here Gods are affected by human emotions with regard to human beings. Through these, he conceives the highest moral nature to be presented to man in his childhood. He suggests, what poets ought to say by criticising the prevailing conceptions in the society. The dialogue is partly concerned with exposition of moral principles, partly with criticism, but mainly concerned with a system of education.

Socrates perpetually shows points of connection between things apparently very different. Throughout the treatment of these virtues of courage, honesty, temperance and others, there underlines the characteristic Greek idea that excess whether in grief or in joy, in laughter, in appetite, in any passion or emotion is intrinsically bad. Dignity need not be a strong point of their character. The basic view is not that it is bad to feel, but the excess of emotion reacts upon the character and weakens it.

Courage, temperance, self-control and truthfulness are treated in brief. The essence of self-control is obedience to authority, whether to rules, or to the higher self within oneself. Temperance also means control of appetite, lust, avarice, bodily desires, insolence or pride.

## **SECTION VII**

### **TRAINING OF THE SOUL: MUSIC**

#### **STRUCTURE**

7.0 Function of Art in Education : Music

7.1 Distinction between poets

7.2 Ethical effect of Art

7.3 The Soul undergoing Education

#### **7.0 FUNCTION OF ART IN EDUCATION : MUSIC**

Socrates regards education as a gradual nourishment of the soul as it passes through different stages from childhood to manhood. When it passes to a stage in which the artistic sense is distinctly developed, it should know the right and the wrong, as it becomes susceptible to artistic form.

Every art expresses character and thereby affects the character or soul of man - who produces it and in the soul to whom it appeals. An art may differ from another in the medium used by it, but in all there is character, good or bad. Socrates regards the human soul as essentially an imitative thing, a thing which naturally and instinctively makes itself like its surroundings. The art appeals to the soul to such an extent that it makes itself like the characters in whom it is interested. Thus if a poet makes bad copies of the goddess and the heroes in his work, those would produce a negative effect on the national character. Men are naturally imitative, and literally art is one of the things that call out this tendency. And all imitation tends to bear the semblance of reality, while imitating one becomes the thing one imitates.

#### **7.1 DISTINCTION BETWEEN POETS**

Socrates sets out to find out not the right form of literature, but what sort of human nature is worth imitating in it. And he finds out that in human nature what is worth becoming part of one's own character is worth artistic imitation of the realistic kind.

*Then he differentiates between poets as 'good' and 'bad':*

1. The bad poet, though he may be a man of great genius, will throw himself into any and every character. He will reflect both evil and good equally and will thereby become extremely popular with children and especially slaves.

2. The good poet, with a proper sense of what is suitable, will throw himself as much as possible into the good characters, and will represent them dramatically. When he meets with the weaknesses, imperfections, and failures of a great character, he gives them little space. With unworthy characters and objects, on madness, disease or when man falls below himself, the poet spends least of his art.

According to Plato, all the great artists and poets have to be ideal; that which must interest them most must be something above the ordinary level of human life. (A point to be kept in the mind is that no poet comes up to this conception, for none has ever or will set himself to be the educator of the society he has lived in). Thus, the great dramatic genius, whom Plato wishes to be in his state should imitate only the good and the ideal, and not everything that he comes across.

One art differs from another in the medium that it uses, but all share a character, good or bad. Therefore any art can help in education with its goodness by producing a good effect on the character. The same thing applies to music, if it can apply to literature. Though music cannot be put into words, or pictures into words, all art has its medium and laws. Then in all the forms of art, soul speaks to soul. Each art has its own form of sense and this sense makes a contact with the soul of man.

Next, Plato turns to simplicity of art. In music, he objects to the use of many varieties of rhythm, scale etc. That is to say, music can have the same vice which in literature can make indiscriminate imitation of anything interesting. Early poetry is simple and so are earlier characters, one can easily understand their acts, and see what are their feelings and principles. Simplicity is an important quality of character and it does not vanish from life as time goes on. Great characters preserve their concentration and unity of purpose; but it

becomes harder to interpret them. Complexity arises when a great number of elements combine in a harmony which is hard to be analysed or when there is confusion and lack of any principle.

## **7.2 ETHICAL EFFECT OF ART**

Socrates wants reality and genuine characters to flourish. The underlying idea is true enough; great art, like great character, should be simple in the sense of being harmonious. Art should express what is worth expressing or meaningful. He proceeds to extend his conception of the educational power of art to the whole field of art and thereby to the state. He explains the ethical effect of art. In painting and sculpture, in weaving, pottery, embroidery, architecture, and in the whole of organic nature, in fact, wherever there is a sensible force, there is the capacity for beauty and ugliness. This beauty or ugliness, both of figure and sound is associated with the beautiful and ugliness in a character. A soul has certain powers or tendencies which may be called out by its beautiful or ugly environment in which it grows. Among the media through which these tendencies may be brought out are two most important ones, seeing and hearing, through which the soul comes in contact with the exterior world. It is through them, in the first instance, that the soul acquires knowledge. Through them it is brought into conformity with the truth and beauty of the world outside it. The function of the artist is to show the truth and beauty of the world and a genius would track out beauty and grace wherever they are to be found.

Socrates regards rhythm as rational movement arranged upon a certain principle. Similarly, beautiful form is arranged upon a certain principle. And all arts have goodness or badness of rhythm or of form. Then right rhythm or right form is akin on the one hand to reason, rhythm and harmony, and on the other to what is good in human character. Thus, Socrates shows the real relation between art and character. The soul appropriates to itself the characteristics of rhythm, harmony and form, i.e. the soul “learns to read the world” with a view to understanding what is good. The world contains for the first, the real objects as living men and women, and then their images as reflected through different arts using different media as colour (painting), words



(poetry), etc. The ability to learn to read the real world makes one capable to read the art. And it is possible to learn to recognise and to value the good qualities in both the real and the reflected worlds.

### **7.3 THE SOUL UNDERGOING EDUCATION**

In childhood, the soul is completely subject to the senses. Its perceptions are all disordered. Slowly the disordered perception with further training and growing insight is transformed and it develops certain principles. The soul frees itself from the tumultuous influences of its senses. It establishes order and connection in what it perceives and thinks. The earlier knowledge of rhythm, harmony and shape shows itself in later principles or laws, understood by the intelligence. A man who has been educated thus, will have an instinctive sense of what is beautiful and what is ugly. And he may accept both having reason to do so.

Thus, the education of arts is accomplished by presenting to the eye and ear, good works, which will interpret to the soul the beauty of the world and enable it to find it for itself. This is in the widest sense, the education of art. The artist creates an atmosphere of beauty with which the learning soul becomes familiar. Then it develops in itself the power to discern the elements of beauty in widely different forms, thereby making that beauty own.

The man on whom the education of art has its due effect has the keenest perception of beauty everywhere, and he necessarily values beauty of soul far more than beauty of body. Physical beauty is not the expression of the beauty of soul and so it does not move him. According to Socrates, the word ‘artist’ means a man to whom life itself is the highest art and the real artist is the man who can harmonize his own life. He takes moral distinction to be only aesthetic distinction, but he gives beauty, harmony, rhythm, etc. a wider sense than is given by any ordinary thought. With this, Socrates concludes his discussion on ‘art of music’ and moves on to ‘gymnastics’.

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## **SECTION VIII**

### **TRAINING OF THE BODY : GYMNASTIC**

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Socrates' objection to Professional Training of the Guardians
- 8.2 Law and Medicine
- 8.3 Empirical knowledge and knowledge based on principles
- 8.4 Relation between Art and Gymnastics
- 8.5 Principle of Government
- 8.6 The Establishment of the Authority
- 8.7 Public life of the Guardians and Auxiliaries

#### **8.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the plan of educating the guardian of the state, Socrates lays down his idea to train the body along with the soul. Though 'gymnastic' stands for the training of the body, he relates it to different subjects and his thought can be arranged as follows :

- 8.0.1 Simplicity is the primary principle for the training and management of the body as well as the arts. On one hand, it leads to physical health, and on the other to self-control or temperance and sanity in the soul respectively.
- 8.0.2 Then he follows two analogous phenomena - legal proceedings and medicines of which the former is always prominent.
- 8.0.3 He differentiates between the conditions necessary to the training of a good doctor and of a good judge, based on the distinction between soul and body.
- 8.0.4 Through discussion on art and gymnastics, he concludes that both are means of influencing the soul, though on different sides.

The idea of this education is to harmonize the two and thereby produce a harmonious character.

### **8.1 SOCRATES' OBJECTION TO PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF THE GUARDIANS**

Socrates begins with an elaborate system of training to produce a good citizen, soldier or a guardian for the state. He does not approve of the system of training, which aims at producing professional athletes. The latter training results in a body which does not at all suit to a soldier. It produces :

- (i) a sleepy habit, which breaks only when the body is put into exercises. The rest of the time the body is lacking any sort of spontaneous activity of its physical systems. It gets accustomed to a habitual, planned training of its muscles only.
- (ii) a habit of body which cannot withstand any changes of diet and climate, and other changes associated with them. Simplicity of diet is an essential part of gymnastics. The taste of the tongue may lead to several maladies of the body. He condemns all luxuries of life prevailing in his times in the society. Eating habits are directly connected with self-control in the soul, that resides inside the body and a good soul should learn and follow the quality of temperance. Intemperance in the soul produces disease in the body and vice-versa.

### **8.2 LAW AND MEDICINE**

With this, Socrates moves on to his second point on Law and Medicine. When the body is in disease and the soul abounds in intemperance, then law and medicine hold their heads high. When the society is uneducated, it constantly needs law to resolve its conflicts. When individuals fail to keep good health, they need doctor. Here he shows the use of education in a wider sense. The educated man is the person who knows how to manage his own life physically and morally. Socrates criticizes the growing charm of medicine among the rich class, who regard it as a luxury. They give up

their work for the sake of nursing their health. But he suggests that if a man cannot go about his work or business of life, he should better die, as in the case of accidents. A man ought to keep himself in health without the aid of doctors. The craving for this much simplicity in life leads him to a good deal of cruelty, as it has led him to austerity in case of art.

Socrates states that a good doctor must not only possess scientific knowledge of disease, but also a wide experience of it, i.e. he should have experienced ill health in his own person. In this way, his own physical weakness will not affect his soul, the main organ by which he acts on others. In case of a person practising law, i.e. the judge, experiences the mental disease of vice in his own person. It means that the soul is impaired. He judges with his experience. His judgement is limited to cases where he has to deal with persons of similar character and experience to his own. But in cases where motives and conduct are differing, he is at loss.

### **8.3 EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE BASED ON PRINCIPLES**

The above quoted passages distinguish Socrates' opinion on empirical knowledge and knowledge based on principles. Empirical knowledge is based on a certain number of experiences and is limited. It is applicable in situations that bear semblance to the situations from which the experience is gained. The knowledge based on principles is broad and is applicable in all situations, as it uses the knowledge of good and evil, which can be identified in different conditions easily, if a person is aware of the criterion of good and evil prevailing in his society or otherwise. In order to get real Knowledge of the good and evil in human nature, the soul must be kept healthy in mind to understand the evil. Though he sees it in other men comparatively late, he understands it better in comparison to a man who begins by personal experience of evil. That is to say, for the function of judges men have to be trained in good, morally and intellectually to the highest pitch and then in trust to their insight. No line can be drawn between the moral and intellectual elements of nature, both are interrelated, i.e. knowledge is not

an entirely separate part of the mind unaffected by other parts. A man cannot be affected by moral evil in one part of his soul and retain intellectual insight in another part. Intellectual judgement cannot be set apart from its personal character. If the character is affected, the organ of judgement is thereby affected because both are governed by the one and the same soul.

#### **8.4 RELATION BETWEEN ART AND GYMNASTICS**

In his last point, Socrates shows the relation between art and gymnastics. Former is directly concerned with the soul and the latter is directly concerned with the body and indirectly with the soul, for neglect of physical training has a direct influence on character of a man, as the misdirection or neglect of culture has on it. Both are essential parts of a good guardian of the state. A good 'spirit' is developed by the right training of gymnastics. This good spirit expresses itself in courage and manliness or else it leads to hardness and brutality in character. This good spirit developed through gymnastics teaches a man to strive till the last and bear whatever comes on the right path.

The gentle element or the philosophic element in the character is affected by training in arts; if it is rightly developed it makes a man temperate, patient and self-controlled. In case of over-development of the gentle element, the man becomes soft, unstable, effeminate and weak in character. He loses a strong hold on his viewpoints. The gist of the whole debate is that the education or training should harmoniously blend the knowledge of art and gymnastics in the character of the guardian, thereby training the soul and the body of the man of work in harmony in the state.

#### **8.5 PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNMENT**

Socrates next gives an outline of the institutions of an ideal state. The debate is focussed on that stage of the growth of the soul in which the growing young man, for the first time, realizes his true positions in the ideal state. He becomes aware of his duty towards the community in which he lives. The developing soul enters upon practical life and recognizes its subordination to authority. It acts upon principles which it accepts from the authority.

In this passage, Socrates confines himself to the question of selecting the rulers of the state, their followers and from those whose training has been described in the earlier sections. In a society, (therefore in a state) there are people who are authorized to impose authority, beliefs or principles upon those in subordination, i.e. the discussion looks forward to select the governing class.

This governing class is in the true sense, the guardian of the state. And the best guard is one who identifies his own interests with those of the state, for this, all the men undergoing training have to be put to a test to see whether they hold fast the belief, that the thing that is best for them to do, is the most favourable service in the fate of the community. That is, whatever they think or act is for the good of the state.

When a man holds a principle for the good of the state, he must accept without understanding all the grounds of it, for the attitude of a man entering into public life must be to accept certain principles already followed by others. He should uphold tradition. He must be capable enough to resist the influences which are calculated to make him give up his principles. Such a man has to be put to test during his training. Such a principle or idea or belief may be ‘stolen’ or given up either in the lapse of time from intellectual indolence, or because some one persuades him out of it, or under pain or suffering he may be made to give it up or forced out or it may be ‘juggled’ out of him by pleasure or fear. These influences can be used to test the steadiness of the person undergoing training at different stages of his career as a guardian. And that the person who stands the test best must be made to rule—why he is older, because he has learnt the harmonious blending of the elements of soul and of the body. Rhythm and harmony have become a law to him.

All the men undergoing training will be put to such tests and those who stand well to the end will be guardians in the full sense, when they grow older. The younger members following them will be ‘auxiliaries’ and will carry out the principles laid down by the guardians.

The concept can be summarised as follows :

1. A man will serve the state well in proportion if he is ready to devote

himself and give up his own interests to it.

2. A man should be promoted in the public service in proportion to their abilities to bear the responsibilities.
3. Socrates proposes the idea of a system by which the state can continue the education of children into later life.

## **8.6 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AUTHORITY**

Then Socrates discusses the question of Authority. Two questions are examined:-

- (a) How authority is to be established in the state?
- (b) How is it made acceptable to the community at large ?

Socrates describes two essential things which have to be maintained to establish authority :

- (i) The unity of the whole society, and
- (ii) The distinction of the social roles, or functions, i.e. the distinction to the social classes.

The ordinary mass of the people cannot understand the reason behind these principles, but they accept when a myth, or a religious belief is associated with it. They are taught to believe in a story which makes them regard the country they live in as their mother and their fellow-citizens as brothers. And the social order with its distinctions of classes is accepted as a thing of divine institution, established by God (compare the Hindu Society). Socrates maintains that this is not a doubt proof arrangement. There will always be such people who know that this myth is incorrect. They will also reason out that no historical events sanction patriotism and subordination, but such things are in the constitution of human nature. So the rest of the community can be encouraged to believe in a myth and hold up a belief about the order of the community and divine right of kings.

Socrates fully recognizes that in certain cases children do not inherit the same character and ability as their parents. And he also says that each man is

to be assigned a status and a role that suits his character and abilities whatever his parentage may be. He makes it clear that provision must be made for such cases where children are fitted either for higher or for lower social functions than their parents. To him, hereditary principle seems to hold good as a general rule. So he does wish to follow it strictly for the good of the state.

### **8.7 PUBLIC LIFE OF THE GUARDIANS AND AUXILIARIES**

In the later part of the Book-III, Socrates discusses the way of living or the public life of the guardians and auxiliaries. Their life is to be the complement of the system of education. The main aim is to make the person realise that he is first and foremost a servant of the community. His happiness consists in doing his duty.

The well-trained young guardians and auxiliaries, as soon as they enter public life, should have no inducements to neglect the public interest. They should have no houses, land, or any wealth of their own. They should be made to live under a kind of military monasticism (compare housing of the defence forces of modern societies). There has to be absolute discipline in life and work. Sparta and Athens serve as good example in themselves.

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## SECTION – IX

### BOOK X

#### STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Critical Summary
- 9.2 Function of Poetry and Art
- 9.3 Nature of Imitation
- 9.4 Three grades of making and three corresponding makers of imitation

#### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

The transition made in the first half of Book X of *The Republic* to the subject of art and poetry is sudden and unnatural. The last section of the book forming fitting conclusion to the whole work, deals with the immortality of the soul.

#### 9.1 CRITICAL SUMMARY

Socrates continues the dialogue, speaking as the mouthpiece of Plato. He feels that the influence of poetry of his time, especially the dramatic poetry is almost entirely bad. The extravagant belief which prevails in the educational value of Homer and Hesoid and other poets is unjustifiable and pernicious. Socrates tells us that it was claimed for Homer and the tragic poets that they knew all arts, all things related to humans, whether bearing on virtue or vice. They also knew the divine nature. Homer was claimed as the educator of Greece and that a man might direct his whole life by what he learnt from him. Socrates treats this matter as in the utmost degree, a serious one. Homer's works are treated as the Bible of the Greek.

#### 9.2 FUNCTION OF POETRY AND ART

Socrates treats poetry as a great means of tickling the palate of the Athenian demos. It is a mere caterer of excitement. He felt that literature was

written for the sake of pleasure that the mere words gave. Poetry, especially tragic poetry, is classed with rhetoric as a branch of the art of appealing to the crowd. In the olden days, the audience were swayed by the people who knew better than others. Here is an attack on poetry and art. There is the idea in this attack that imitative art from its very nature can only represent what things look like on the surface. If this external structure is thought as complete whole in itself, many people do feel it to be, then they are living in a world of illusion.

### **9.3 NATURE OF IMITATION**

Then there is the feeling that emotions generally stimulated by contemporary art, especially by dramatic poetry, are not worth appealing and stimulating. Socrates accounts the bad effects of art to Glaucon. He is more concerned with the present facts of imitative art. The discussion can be treated as follows :

(a) First, Socrates investigates the nature of the ‘imitation on mimesis’. He starts with the implied postulate that art is imitation, characterizing objectively the nature of art. Socrates starts with the assumption that all arts are “imitative” by nature. The artist imitates the things of this sensuous world as they appear to him. This world itself is an imperfect copy of an ideal archetype. It is not real. Reality exists in the Idea which is Absolute, one and unchanging. The artist, therefore, is concerned with the appearance of the first appearance. He tries to present a distorted image of reality or rather he tries to create an illusion of reality. Thus, he is twice removed from truth. If a poet topics an object produced by another artist/craftsman, then his production is thrice removed from truth. Plato explains this theory of imitation with the help of an analogy between a poet and a painter of a bed. When Glaucon puts a question : Can you tell me what imitation is? For I really do not know, Socrates replies:

“Let us take any common instance; there are beds and tables in the world ---- plenty of them, are there not?” And the discussion initiates. Socrates does not consider whether the artist originates, he thinks of the extremely obvious fact that the artist does not in any case put before the viewers, the

actual objects of real life, but he presents certain appearances only. He represents and in this act of representing, poetry and painting, though very different in most respects, stand on the same footing. The painter uses colours to represent the things and the poet uses words 'like paint'. Poet's words are no more what they describe than painted colours are what they represent. And just like the painter, the poet presents to us what things look like from a partial point of view as is while merely copying something.

#### **9.4 THREE GRADES OF MAKING AND THREE CORRESPONDING MAKERS OF IMITATION**

Next, Socrates states that imitation is a certain kind of production or making and that there are three grades of making and three corresponding makers to be distinguished.

(i) The first grade of making is in the order of nature or original. The only maker of this is God. Here he gives an example of the original table and bed as it is in nature. But there are so many tables and beds, and they are all called as tables and beds. But what Socrates implies is that these are different forms of the one thing after which they are called. Each is meant to be what it is called or what it is meant to be. And it is true that they are not quite what they are meant to be, nor what they are called. Every table has its limitations. Each has its own setting, colour, dimensions and so on and so forth. At any rate it only serves its purpose under certain conditions. This then is the import of the particularity of tables. They all purport to be the same thing. But none of them is that thing (the original table).

Thus, in the ordinary sense, there is a truth about the construction of tables, and the truth of everything must be supposed to exist eternally. And this 'true table' exists in an ideal order of the world which is existing in the mind of the creator. Man only imperfectly apprehends and reproduces it.

(ii) Secondly, there are ordinary artificial things used in life, which are made by the craftsman or artisan; the craftsman makes something like that which God makes.

- (iii) Thirdly, there is a product which consists in the appearance of such things (concrete objects) as the artist makes. Such product is the copy of the object made by a craftsman who has also copied from nature. The maker of this product is the artist, who makes the appearance as man might make it by holding up a mirror before a thing, and copying the image in the mirror.

Here is a distinction of three things – the table made by the creator, a copy of it made by the artisan, and a copy of this copy made by some other man or artist. This leads up to a comparison of the knowledge that the artist possesses of a thing to copy it successfully with that of the other men of the same thing.

The man for whom the craftsman makes any object or instrument, and who knows how to use it, knows most about its nature and what it should be. His knowledge is not of that sort which the artist has of the object he is imitating. The craftsman who is not himself the user of what he makes has not this knowledge either. Still, he has a certain viewpoint or insight about the thing he makes. And he can carry out the directions of the man for whom he makes it. If compared, the knowledge of the artist who can only produce the superficial resemblance of thing is clearly much less than this. The conclusion drawn from this comparison is that what the artist does is a “Play”. This is applicable to all poetic as well as artistic imitation.

Socrates is more concerned with the great poets of his time. He maintains that their work is not the highest kind of work, as they have not done those things which they express through their works (a misunderstanding by Socrates). Socrates contends that the presentation of life in poetry gets hold of a very small part of it, that too, in the most superficial appearance.

Socrates begins with painting an imitation which appeals to the eye. Then he turns to poetry and applies the analogy of painting to it. According to him, the success of painting depends upon its exercising a certain type of chromatic illusion. The painter makes the viewer of a painting to think of a certain object as being in three dimensions when it is really in two dimensions.

It is a mere illusion, where a painter takes advantage of certain illusions of sight. So in poetry, the poet takes advantage of illusions of feeling and emotion (reason for the time being blind) for poetry to have its effect as in tragedy, he allows himself to enter into emotions which he would never give way to in real life. The subject matter which best lends itself to effective representation in poetry is indiscriminate variety of feeling and emotion and not that which is restrained by logic. Thus, poetry nourishes and strengthens a part of the soul which is the source of illusion instead of that which is rational. It is not only by tragedy but also by comedy that such illusive and unworthy feelings and emotions are produced. And Socrates fears that if this is the case, the city will be governed by pleasure and pain, and not by principles and regard for the common good.

He then suggests that in an ideal state, poetry or art must be bound within narrow limits. The themes should be religion and patriotism, i.e. hymns to the gods, and poetry sung on the bravery of great heroes. Further, it is true in a certain sense that the more indiscriminate the artist is in what he appeals to, the easier artistic work becomes. That is to say, it is much easier to excite if the artist does not care, what or how he excites. Socrates comes to the conclusion that nearly all the imitative arts of his time have degenerated into indiscriminate catering for common excitement. He treats art as being this and only this, and serving no noble function. [And in consequence the whole passage remains an attack upon certain development of art rather than an adequate theoretical treatment of it].

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## SECTION – X

### THE SECOND PART OF THE BOOK X

#### STRUCTURE

- 10.0 Immortality of the soul
- 10.1 The Ideal condition of the soul
- 10.2 Good and Evil
- 10.3 Soul's Fate after Death
- 10.4 The Tale of Er
- 10.5 Astronomical concept of Heaven
- 10.6 Musical Harmony of Heavenly Bodies
- 10.7 Free will and necessity
- 10.8 Glossary

#### 10.0 IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

In the second part, Socrates introduces the subject of immortality of the soul and states the doctrine that the number of souls existing must remain constant. He introduces this topic rather abruptly and it is dismissed in a single sentence (He deals it in *Phaedo*). He asserts that the soul is immortal. He says that the true nature and capacities of the soul cannot be seen in its earthly state. The soul in its essence does not die with bodily death. This immortality only belongs to it in its nature and that on earth it is never seen in its true nature. The soul as it exists in union with the human body is emphatically a composite thing. This composition is by no means perfect.

## **10.1 THE IDEAL CONDITION OF THE SOUL**

The soul as it appears in its earthly life is liable to all kinds of internal distraction and inconsistency. The ideal condition of the soul is one of harmony and perfect synthesis. This ideal state is unattainable under the conditions of human life. The original nature of the soul is thus almost entirely obscure like the human form of the sea-god Glaucus in the myths. To see the immortal part of it, the soul has to be looked upon philosophically one with the eternal Super Being in the world.

Socrates regards the world as imposing all kinds of restrictions and hindrances on the life of the soul. And that the fixed stars are made of finer matter and the souls are connected with them having correspondingly finer perceptions. The imagery in which the present condition of the soul is described as one being sunk in the sea and much beaten about and grown over with various extraneous growths, is not mere figure of speech. But the soul, whatever metamorphosis it may undergo when it enters the body, is in the essential part of it, immortal. The Republic, thus may be regarded as a picture of the affections which the soul undergoes and the forms which it assumes in human life; its highest aspirations, its lowest descents, and the intermediate forms of life between them.

## **10.2 GOOD AND EVIL**

The whole dialogue has been devoted to showing that the good and evil of man are the good and evil of the soul. Socrates points out that assuming the moral nature of God, the good soul pleases God. Whatever appliances there may be to the contrary, the good in man or soul, is never neglected by God. Socrates' conclusion that justice is man's true interest, is not drawn from the account he gives of its usual external results. He does not abandon his position that justice is good apart from all outward consequences and nothing else than the healthy life of the soul.

## **10.3 SOUL'S FATE AFTER DEATH**

Socrates insists that whatever is done by the soul on earth has a direct effect upon its future. Under all poetical and mythological forms dealing with

the past and future of the soul, one thought is common to all that the soul is immortal and it has continuity of existence. This continuity adds to the moral responsibility which lies upon the body (person) in which it resides on this earth. Thus, the question arises how to make oneself better and wiser, not for this life alone, but for another as well. Life on this earth is a great process of learning and gaining experience. It is a preparation for the next life of the soul. This is explained through a tale of Er, the Armenian.

#### **10.4 THE TALE OF ER**

Er, the Armenian was sent back to life, after twelve days of his death in the battle. The tale tells his experiences after his death. He saw that the soul immediately after death proceeds to a spot where it is judged. The just souls are seen ascending through an opening in the sky (heaven) on the right hand, to a thousand years of happiness. The unjust souls are seen descending through an opening in the ground (hell) on the left to a thousand years of punishment. Then there is a perpetual stream of souls coming down by another opening in the sky from their sojourn in heaven, others coming up by another opening from the ground below. These returning souls, whether from happiness or from pain go into a meadow to rest there for seven days before choosing a new life upon earth. The recompensation (to the just soul) of the good deed done in life by a man's souls on earth is tenfold after death. And the ordinary punishment allotted to the unjust soul at death is the requital tenfold of the evil done in life. In addition to this, there are other measures of punishment also. Souls with short duration of life on earth are dealt with in different manner. And those who have committed great crimes but held not to have been sufficiently punished when they return after a thousand years, are sent back again. Then there are some incurable sinners who are cast forever into Tartarus. [Note : read *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* for more information]. The punishment of all who are not incurable is of the nature of purgatory. The souls generally return wiser for what they have undergone. On the other hand, the enjoyment of bliss sometimes leads a soul to make a worse choice than it would otherwise make of the life to which it will return in its next life. However, if a soul



being rewarded makes a wise choice and remains a good soul forever in all successive lives in heaven, it at last escapes the necessity of taking a mortal body and remains a soul only.

At the end of the seven day's rest, the souls are brought before the three Fates, the daughters of necessity. Before them, these souls choose a new life for themselves. [The tale describes the spot from which the mechanism of the universe is visible, in detail].

### **10.5 ASTRONOMICAL CONCEPT OF HEAVEN**

Socrates conceives of heaven as a hollow sphere which revolves with a motion of its own. The region of the fixed stars forms its outermost margin or edge. Within this margin are seven other hollow spheres containing the orbits of the sun, the moon and the five planets which were known to the people of his (Socrates) time. These planets or heavenly bodies have various revolutions of their own in the opposite direction to the uniform motion of heaven as a whole. All these eight spheres revolve round the earth at their centre. The whole heaven is bound round with a band of bright light (the milky way).

This astronomical conception of heaven is combined with the old notions of necessity moving the world. Socrates also conceives of destiny or fate being spun by the Fates. The whole hollow sphere, with the seven moving spheres, forms the whole of the spindle of Necessity. It is fastened by the milky way and other bands to the hook of the spindle. The shaft of the spindle passes right through all the eight spheres. Around the point where it enters them, the edges of the spheres are seen as a continuous surface of eight concentric rings. The colours and the relative widths of these are described in accordance with the colours and the relative distance from the earth ascribed to the heavenly bodies which move with them.

The spindle rests on the knees of necessity; the whole mechanism is turned by the three fates :

- (i) Clotho, (ii) Lachesis, (iii) Atropos

The first two, Clotho and Lachesis signify chance. Atropos signifies the

inevitable. The shaft and the hook of the spindle are imperishable and unchanging adamant. But the world, or the whole visible universe (the system of spheres) is partly adamant and partly of other substances. That is to say that the universe partly exhibits uniform and eternal law, and partly irregularity and change.

#### **10.6 MUSICAL HARMONY OF HEAVENLY BODIES**

Further, Socrates introduces Pythagorean idea that the motions of the heavenly bodies make up a musical harmony. The Pythagorean theory emerged from the fact that a relation could be established between the distances of these bodies from the earth, and the intervals between the notes of the scale. This resulted in the origin of the doctrine of the 'Music of the Spheres.' Socrates introduces this idea into his image of the universe. A siren sits upon each of the rings formed by the spheres, and is carried round with it. Each siren sings a single note, and the eight notes make a scale of musical notes. The three Fates, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos sing to the music of the spheres, as follows :

- (i) Lachesis, whose name signifies chance, sings of the past.
- (ii) Clotho, whose name also signifies chance, sings of the present.
- (iii) Atropos, whose name signifies the inevitable, sings of the future.

#### **10.7 FREE WILL AND NECESSITY**

Lastly, Socrates expresses his opinion on Free Will and Necessity. After the rest of seven days, the souls make a choice of new life before the three Fates. The choice which the souls make is the 'all-important' crisis in their history.

In every human life, there is an element of necessity or of chance then there is an element of choice. This idea is applied here to the causes which determine the conditions under which a man is born. The choice taken by the soul is in three orders, as follows:

- (a) In the first place, the lot determines their orders of choice.
- (b) In the second place, however late in the order a soul gets its choice as is proclaimed to them in the name of the Fates. Even the soul that chooses last will have a life worth living, only if it chooses wisely, and

thereafter it lives intently.

- (c) In the third place, when the soul has made its choice of life, it has chosen its destiny. That means he can never reverse the choice-neither what he has once willed to do, nor its consequences. The Fates send with each soul a destiny to attend on it through life and fulfil for it, the destiny it has chosen. [This Socrates speaks of the highest element of the soul as a man's destiny (Timaeus)].

Thus, circumstances, the fact of choice, and the irrevocableness of choice are the three great elements in life. A man's conduct in one phase of existence has a determining effect on his destiny in any future phase. This idea is expressed in the whole myth of Er.

At this choosing of lives, many souls of animals become men and vice versa. In his dialogues, Socrates has been quite serious in the idea of continuity between animal and human life. And a man on this earth (in this life on earth) must be able to learn or find a guide to enable him to learn and discern between good and evil. This will enable him to choose between good and evil. This will enable him to choose the good everywhere and always in his life as he has an opportunity. This will help him in making his soul just or unjust with his deeds. This is the best choice both in life and that which follows after death.

Through many other illustrations, Socrates explain to Glaucon, the importance of the choice made by the soul. A soul must take with it, an adamant faith in truth and right, so that on earth it may be undazzled by the desires of wealth or other allurements of evil.

## **10.8 GLOSSARY**

- Achilles - Son of Peleus and Thetis, great Greek hero of the Trojan war and Homer's *Iliad*.
- Acropolis - The "City Height" or Citadel of a Greek town.
- Acusilaus - A poet mentioned by Plato, otherwise unknown.
- Adeimantus - Son of Ariston; brother of Plato.

- Admetus        - King of Thessaly whose wife, Alcestis died in his place but was restored by Heracles.
- Aegean        - The part of the Mediterranean sea between Greece and Asia Minor.
- Aeantodorus   - Brother of Socrates' follower of Apollodorus, present at Socrates' trial.
- Aegina        - A rocky island in the Saronic Gulf between Attica and Argolis, the legendary home of Aeacus.
- Aeschines     - Son of Lysanis, a devoted follower of Socrates.
- Aeschylus    - One of the three great tragic poets and dramatists of Greece. (525-456 B.C.)
- Aesop         - A slave, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. wrote fables about animals (the source being Indian).

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## SECTION XI

### ADDITIONAL NOTES ON PLATO AND HIS THEORIES

#### STRUCTURE

11.0 Plato's Social - Ethical view of Art

11.1 Plato's Critical Theories

11.2 Theory of Mimesis

#### 11.0 PLATO'S SOCIAL-ETHICAL VIEW OF ART

Plato's main concern was to develop a concept of an ideal state or city. His main focus was not on the architecture of a state, but on the citizens who created this state. His main concern was with the moral effect produced by different arts on the person. In that connection, he dwelt on the part played by poetry in the life of the people in that ideal state imagined by him in *The Republic*. Anything that was supposed to be detrimental to the moral health of society was therefore to be prohibited. When Aristophanes made Aeschylus ask the question : Pray tell me on what ground should a poet claim admiration? He made Euripides reply :

“If his art is true, and his counsel sound;  
And if he brings help to the nation,  
By making men better in some respect.”

This was exactly the criterion of judging any art for Plato also. He was obsessed by the idea of an “ideal state”, and gave vent to his views in a strain of uncompromising idealism in the *Republic*. He upheld the ideal that poetry must subserve an ethical and social purpose. He valued art only in so far as it had a beneficial influence in moulding the life of the good citizen. He states :

“We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity ... let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful. Then will our youth dwell in a land of health, and fair sights and sounds, and receive the goods in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a

health giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason”. Plato wanted only that type of literature to flourish in the ideal state which ultimately led to the idea of the good. The whole discussion resulted in attacks on poetry and there is significance of his attack. Plato’s theory of poetry and his attack on it had a motive. It should be kept in mind that the aim of his literary criticism is frankly utilitarian, that of educating the youth and forming them into good citizens of his ideal state. And for this, he not only deals with the good effects of music, but also with other arts, like gymnastics. It is from this practical point of view that he judges poetry and finds it wanting in many ways. Hence his attacks on poetry.

Secondly, in order to understand his attack on poetry, it is essential to keep in mind, the contemporary state of affairs in Athens :

- (a) It was a time of political decline and dissolution. Education was in a sorry state. The epics of Homer formed an essential part of the school curriculum. They were venerated by the Greeks almost like, The Bible. But in Homer, there are many stories which represent the gods in an unfavourable light. So they were the common objects of hostile criticism on the part of philosophers and educationists. Allegorical interpretation of these stories were considered unconvincing and difficult to understand.
- (b) Courage, magnificence, bravery, heroism, skill in the use of arms on the battlefields, or in cantonments, were the virtues prized highly by the Greeks. Their conception of virtue was different from the later Christian conception of the same.
- (c) The creative impulse had practically died away when Plato came on the scene. The wonderful flowering time of Greek art and literature had come to an end. Literature was immoral, corrupt and degenerate, poetry was decadent and this paved way for much hostile criticism.
- (d) This degeneration had resulted in much heart-searching and reflection. As a result, philosophers and orators were regarded as leading spirits. They gained respect and regard in the community.

They were considered as superior to poets and artists. There was a constant debate between the philosophers and poets regarding their respective significance.

As a matter of fact, much of Plato's destructive criticism of poetry is a sort of special pleading on the behalf of philosophy as being more suitable for the education of the youth. He follows the methods of a clever advocate calling attention to whatever supports his point of view, and ignoring facts of an inconvenient kind. Everywhere he accommodates his reasoning to whatever he had in his hand or mind. He emphasises the evil effects of imitation and emotions, while their possibilities of good, their power of stimulating and elevating human nature are constantly ignored. It is not possible to believe that a man of Plato's understanding could have been blind to these facts, but he was thinking of an ideal state and whatever was its constituent. Thus, his attack on poetry or art must be considered as a pleading and not a judgement with arguments.

Plato's objection to poetry are based mainly on two grounds – the moral and the philosophical. On moral grounds, he passes his strictures on all poetical individuals beginning with Homer. He thinks that they are concerned with an inferior part of the soul :

“..... and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well ordered state, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason.”

Again in Book X (*Republic*, X 605), Plato discusses the demoralising effect of poetry. He says that poetry has the power of harming even the good. It appeals to the baser instincts of man and makes them demoralised.

Likewise, he comments on the pernicious effects of tragedy and comedy. The effects of witnessing a tragedy or a comedy are not only unwholesome but definitely detrimental to the healthy growth of community and to the promotion of virtue and happiness in society.

But Plato does make some allowance for the poets in his ideal state. If they are to be allowed at all, there should be a rigid censorship on what they write. In Book X, he writes :

“The only poetry which ought to be admitted into the ideal state should be in the form of ‘hymns to the gods and praises of famous men.’ For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure and pain will be the rules in our state.”

He thinks that poetry or any other art should not only be pleasant but also useful to state and to man himself. The function of poetry is to influence and mould the human character and to bring austerity and restraint in the life of man. He has in a way discussed the antithesis between art and morality, rather he has moralized art, which has been debated through the ages. But he was not in favour of deliberate didacticism. He does not speak of art as moralistic or that moral suggestion is something external to it. The good that pervades the world must be reflected in it. It must uphold the ideal of the true, the good and the beautiful. This ethical theory of art is far from being called as didacticism. It is substantial in itself as far as the influence of art is concerned on the whole human society where the poet has to play the role of a teacher.

### **11.1 PLATO’S CRITICAL THEORIES**

Plato’s critical theories about poetry namely the theory of Inspiration and the theory of Mimesis (Imitation) have been deduced from his dialogues. The first is based on the traditional view of poetry as pure inspiration and the latter is the outcome of his metaphysics of transcendental reality.

### **11.2 THEORY OF MIMESIS**

Plato regards mimesis as mere imitation or servile copying, and not expressive which is creative. Book X of the *Republic* gives a reasoned and elaborate statement of his views on imitation. He starts with the assumption that all arts are “imitative” by nature. If true reality consists of the ideas of things, of which objects are but reflections or imitations, then the artist imitating the thing of this sensuous world as they appear to him is further removed from the ultimate reality. This world itself is an imperfect copy of an ideal archetype. It is not real.



Reality exists in the Idea which is Absolute, one and unchanging. The artist is therefore concerned with the appearance of appearance. He tries to construct a distorted image, thereby creating an illusion of reality. His imitation is an imitation of an imitation, thus not once or twice but thrice removed from truth. These creations are also the product of futile ignorance. The man, who is imitating, is demonstrating both his lack of useful purpose and his lack of knowledge.

Plato explains his theory with the help of an analogy between a poet and a painter of a bed. This concept of Imitation almost becomes the center of *Republic*. Certain poems, he observes in Book III, simply tell what happened, others actually imitate what happened-dramas, the most dangerous ones, became the most contagious. A man who is to play a serious part in life cannot afford to imitate any other kind of part. It is needless to try to guess how consciously Plato's view had developed by the time he wrote his second discussion on poetry in the *Republic* (Book X).

Thus, the basis of this theory is his general philosophical concept of the universe. Reality, he believed to exist not in physical ephemera but in spiritual entities. With the allusion to the ideal bed, the work of God, he is involved in the platonic metaphysics of transcendental reality.

This theory has been refuted by many, especially by Aristotle. Plato perhaps did not take into account the creative or the imaginative aspect of art. It did not occur to him that the painter by painting the Ideal could suggest the ideal form and thus, make direct contact with reality in a way denied to ordinary people. Further, he did not realise that the artist's creation is his own personal impression of reality. It is not a mechanical representation of it. Poetry also, is not servile imitation or mere copying. It is creative, it is poet's view of reality as he sees it.

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## SECTION XII

### ADDITIONAL NOTES

#### STRUCTURE

- 12.0 Theory of Inspiration
- 12.1 Glossary
- 12.2 Self - Assessment Questions
- 12.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 12.4 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 12.5 Suggested Reading

#### 12.0 THEORY OF INSPIRATION

Plato's view on poetic inspiration has been expressed, most poetically in his *Ion*. The traditional view of poetry current before Plato's time was that the poet or the minstrel was inspired by God and because he was inspired, whatever he sang, was also true. His main purpose was to give pleasure, not to instruct. Plato rejected this conventional logic, in which the poet speaks under the spell of some emotional frenzy. He is a possessed creature, possessed with 'divine madness'. He is therefore not in his right mind when possessed by the muse. Consequently, whatever he speaks lacks moral restraint and is divorced from reason and truth. He cannot, therefore, provide a sane guidance to persons.

Plato objected to poetry on this very basis and questioned the truthfulness of poetry written under the spell of 'divine madness'. He has expressed his views on poetic inspiration at great length in the *Ion* :

"... the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. ... for the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him : when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles."

It is just possible that in these passages, Plato might have expressed the traditional view of poetry accepted by the rhapsodes with his tongue in cheek. This is the most elaborate presentation in the ancient world of the notion of poetry as pure inspiration; a notion which has survived and travelled through history and came down to the modern world though after having undergone many modifications.

The true poet is divinely inspired like prophets and he speaks divine truth. Poetry is not a craft to be learnt and practised at will. It is the result of inspiration, the divine soul speaking through the poet.

Plato says nothing about the poet's lying. It seems that he is all praise for poetry as being the divine truth not in hands of ordinary man. However, the implication ever of this view is that poetry is nothing rational, and that is why even the poet does not often understands his poetry, which he has written in a mood of 'frenzy'.

Therefore, poetry cannot be relied upon as it is not the result of conscious, considered judgement. It is rather an outcome of the irrational and the impulsive within us. Further, poets may express divine truths, but often, by their understanding of ordinary man.

## 12.1 GLOSSARY

Agamemnon	:	Son of Atreus and brother of Menelaus; Kings of Argos and Mycenae; led the Greek forces at Troy; murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra.
Agora	:	The market place of a Greek city.
Ajax	:	Son of Telamon; next to Achilles, the bravest and strongest of the Greeks who fought against the Trojans; committed suicide when he failed to receive Achilles' armor.
Alcinous	:	Wealthy king of the Phaeacians to whom the shipwrecked Odysseus told his story; provided the ship which conveyed Odysseus to his home.

Anaxagoras	:	A Greek philosopher of Clazomenae in Asia Minor (c. 455 B.C.).
Antiphon	:	Of Cephisia, father of Socrates' pupil Epigenes, present at Socrates' trial.
Antisthenes	:	An Athenian ; one of Socrates' pupils who founded the school of the Cynic philosophers.
Aphrodite	:	The Greek goddess of love and beauty ; wife of Ares, god of war; identified by the Romans with Venus.
Apollo	:	God of medicine, music, archery, prophecy, light and youth, often identified with the Sun.
Apollodorus	:	Follower of Socrates
Arcadia	:	A mountainous region in centre of the Peloponnesus.
Archilochus	:	A celebrated Greek poet of 7 <sup>th</sup> century B.C., famous for his biting satires.
Ardiaeus	:	A cruel tyrant of Pamphylia condemned to eternal punishment after death.
Ares	:	Greek god of war; identified with Mars by the Romans.
Arion	:	A Greek poet of the 7th century B.C. celebrated for his hymns to Dionysus, the hero of several legendary exploits.
Ariston	:	Father of Plato, Adeimantus, and Glaucon.
Armenius	:	Father of ER, the Pamphylian.
Asclepiu	:	Son of Apollo, god of healing and medicine; called by the Romans Aesculapiu.
Atalanta	:	An attractive maiden famed as a runner, wife of Hippomenes.
Atropos	:	One of the three fates. The others were Clotho and Lachesis.
Cephalus	:	A wealthy syracusan; lived in Athens as a resident alien; father of Polemarchus and Lysias, the Orator.

Cleitophon	: Son of Aristonymus, an acquaintance of Polemarchus.
Clotho	: One of the three fates.
Croesus	: A king of Lydia in the 6th century B.C., famed for his great wealth.
Cronos	: A brutal titan divinity, dethroned his father Uranus and was dethroned by his son, the greater god, Zeus.
Delphi	: A town in Phocis, Greece, near which Apollo's famous oracle was located.
Epeuis	: Inventor of tricks; maker of the wooden horse by which the Greek warriors entered Troy.
Er (Ur)	: Son of Arminius of Pamphylia, whose soul returned to his body after a brief visit to the lower world.
Euryhylus	: A Greek Chieftain in the Trojan war.
Glaucon	: Son of Ariston and brother of Plato and Adeimantus.
Gyges	: Usurper of the throne of Lydia in Asia Minor about 685 B.C.
Hades	: The dark realm of the dead; or the god presiding over it, whose helmet made the wearer invisible.
Hellas	: Greece
Herodicus	: A Thracian physician of the 5 <sup>th</sup> century B.C.
Hesiod	: A didactic poet of the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century B.C., whom the Greeks often coupled with Homer.
Homer	: The supreme epic poet of Greece, author of <i>Iliad</i> and <i>Odyssey</i> .
Inachus	: A river god of Greece, son of Oceanus.
Lachesis	: One of the three fates.
Musaeus	: A legendary poet of Greece; said to have been a son of Orpheus.

Nemesis	: Greek goddess who brings retribution for sin.
Niobe	: Daughter of Tantalus; her children were all slain by Apollo in punishment for her pride.
Odysseus/Ulysses:	A Greek hero famed for crafty wisdom and for his adventures on his return from Troy.
Orpheus	: The most famous of the legendary bards and musicians of Greece.
Pamphylia	: A narrow district on the south coast of Asia Minor.
Pandarus	: An ally of the Trojans; a great archer, who wantonly broke the sworn truce with the Greeks.
Panopeus	: Father of the contriver of the wooden horse, Epeus.
Patroclus	: Intimate comrade of Achilles; killed by Hector at Troy; Achilles avenged his death by killing Hector.
Pelops	: Son of Tantalus, father of Atreus, founder of the kingdom of Argos in South Greece, from whom the Peloponesus or Island of Pelops received its name.
Phocylides	: A Greek poet and author of maxims in verse of the 6 <sup>th</sup> Century B.C.
Phoenician	: Of Phoenicia, a narrow mountainous strip of Suria along the Mediterranean coast.
Polemerchus	: Son of Cephalus, at whose house Socrates discoursed on the Republic; later murdered by the Thirty Tyrants.
Pramnian	: From M. T. Pramne on the island of Icaria, famous for its wine.
Proteus	: A minor Greek sea god, famous for his ability to change his form at will.
Siren	: One of a group of Greek Sea-nymphs noted for their singing, whose songs lured men to shipwreck and death.
Socrates	: Plato's teacher and the principal figure in his Dialogues (469-399 B.C.)

Sophist	: A teacher of rhetoric, philosophy, politics and the art of successful living.
Sophocles	: One of the three great Greek tragic poets (496-406 B.C.)
Styx	: The river of Hate in the lower world.
Syracusan	: From Syracuse, the most important city of Sicily.
Thamyrus	: A mythical bard of Thrace, blinded by the muses because of his boastfulness.
Themis	: The personification of law and order; sometimes called Zeus' second wife.
Thersites	: The ugliest, loose mouthed private in the Greek army at Troy; flogged for insolence by Odysseus.
Thetis	: A daughter of the sea-god Nereus; mother of Achilles by Peleus.
Thracymachus	: A sophist, who starts the argument with Socrates in the <i>Republic</i> .
Uranus	: The personification of Heaven; son and husband of Earth (Gaea); father of the Titans and Cyclopes; dethroned by his son Cronus.
Zeus	: The king of the Greek gods, son of Cronus; identified by the Romans with Jupiter.

## 12.2 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### PART-II

- Q1. Discuss social and political background of Plato's Age.  
[Ans. See Introduction]
- Q2. Deduce concept of God as discussed by Socrates in the *Republic*.  
[Ans. See section 4.2 and 5.3]
- Q3. Socrates (Plato) conceives that all changes occur in the direction of good. Do you agree? Explain your viewpoint in brief.  
[Ans. See Section 4.2]
- Q4. What were the two traditional ways of education prevailing in Greek society? Discuss any one of them in brief.  
[Ans. See Section 5]

Q5. What should be the ultimate aim of education or training according to Plato? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 5.2]

Q6. What are the main instruments of training a childhood soul ? Explain in brief.

[Ans. See Section 5.2]

Q7. Discuss Plato's views on Greek literature.

[Ans. Section 5.3]

Q8. Delineate the importance of myths in education of a child.

[Ans. Section 4, 5 & 5.3]

Q9. What is Evil? Who is responsible for the origin of Evil in man's life? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 5.3]

OR

Does Evil originate from man's ignorance? Explain.

Q10. 'God is perfect and the universe is imperfect'. Do you agree with Plato? Explain.

[Ans. See Section 5.3]

Q11. What should be the highest object of man's life according to Plato? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 5.3]

Q12. How does Evil act on man's reasoning? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 5.3]

### **BOOK III**

Q1. Plato expresses his views on the function of art in training the soul in Book III. Explain in your own words the nourishment received by the soul from art.

[Ans. See Section 7.0 & 7.1]



Q2. Plato comes out with the imitative nature of the human soul. What is it? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 7.0]

Q3. Plato differentiates poets as good and bad. Do you agree with him? Support your views with suitable argument.

[Ans. See Section 7.1]

Q4. What type of poet is suitable for Plato's *Republic*? Discuss in brief.

[Ans. See Section 7.1]

Q5. What do you understand by simplicity in art? Explain in your own words.

[Ans. See Section 7.1 & 7.2]

Q6. Which two media does the soul come in contact within the exterior world? How should the artist use them in his creations to produce ethical effect on the soul? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 7.2 & 7.3]

Q7. What is the common principle in all arts? Explain what is the relation between art and character? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 7.2]

Q8. The soul 'learns to read the world', how? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 7.2]

Q9. How can music train the soul and make it a guardian of the state? Discuss elaborately.

[Ans. See Section 7.0]

## **SECTION – VIII**

Q1. Why does Plato object to the professional training of the guardians? Explain.

[Ans. See Section 8.1 & 8.2]

Q2. Medicine is a charm among the rich class. Comment.

[Ans. See Section 8.2]

Q3. If a man has a mortal disease let him die without cure, says Plato. Do you agree? Discuss.

[Ans. See Section 8.2 & 8.3]

Q4. How is a doctor's knowledge of medicine different from that of a judge's knowledge of law? Explain.

[Ans. See Section 8.2 & 8.3]

Q5. Differentiate between empirical knowledge and knowledge based on principles. Illustrate your answer.

[Ans. See Section 8.3]

Q6. Do external surroundings effect the growth of human soul? If yes, how?

[Ans. See Section 8.3]

Q7. According to Plato, moral and intellectual elements of nature are interrelated. Do you agree? If not, prove your situation with reasonable argument.

[Ans. See Section 8.3]

OR

One and the same soul governs the moral and intellectual elements. Do you agree?

Q8. Show the relation between art and gymnastics as Plato explains it.

[Ans. See Section 8.4]

Q9. How is the ruler selected for the ideal state of Plato? What is the criterion of this selection?

[Ans. See Section 8.5]

Q10. Who are the auxiliaries and what is their role in the set-up of the ideal state of Plato?

[Ans. See Section 8.5 & 8.7]

Q11. How is a society prepared to establish 'Authority' in it?

[Ans. See Section 8.6]

Q12. How much weightage is given to heritage in the selection of guardians of state by Plato? Explain.

[Ans. See Section 8.6]

### 12.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Plato opines that education helps the soul to develop in itself the power to discern the elements of beauty. Do you agree with Plato? Discuss.
- Q2. Define 'Artist'. Explain his place as a teacher of human soul.
- Q3. Gymnastics is training of both body and soul. Explain.
- Q4. A poet is possessed by "divine madness." Do you agree with Plato's view? Comment.

OR

Poetic inspiration comes from heaven? What is your opinion? Explain.

Q5. Explain Plato's Theory of Imitation.

### 12.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) Plato was the disciple of which great Greek Scholar? \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a) Aristotle
  - b) Socrates
  - c) Alexander the Great
  - d) Aristophanes

Ans :- **b) Socrates**

- 2) Which institution was founded by Plato? \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a) Lyceum
  - b) Academy
  - c) Symposium
  - d) Institute

Ans :- **b) Academy**

3) Plato divides his just society into three classes. What are they?\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Producers, Auxillary , Guardians
- b) Producers, Consumers, Intermediary
- c) State, Senate, Public
- d) King , Public, Labor

Ans :- **a) Producers, Auxillary , Guardians**

4) What does Plato name his just city?\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Elenchus
- b) Lyceum
- c) Dionysus
- d) Kallipolis

Ans :- **d) Kallipolis**

5) What are the three aspects of tripartite soul according to Plato ?\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Truth , Reason, Justice
- b) Justice, Power, class
- c) Honesty, Reason, Truthfulness
- d) Reason, Spirit, Appetite

Ans :- **d) Reason , Spirit, Appetite**

6) In which book, Plato has given the theory of ideas?\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Symposium
- b) Republic
- c) Laws
- d) Phaedrus

Ans :- **b) Republic**

7) What according to Plato is the lowest grade of cognitive activity?\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Imagination
- b) Understanding
- c) Thought
- d) Vision

Ans :- **a) Imagination**

8) Plato also made few comments on drama. Which is not the one? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Its appeal to baser instincts
- b) Its non- moral character (immoral)
- c) Effect of impersonation
- d) Tragic and Comic pleasure

Ans :- **b) It's non-moral character**

9) Which of the following terms best described Thrasymachus? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Platonist
- b) Pre-Socratic
- c) Sophist
- d) Politician

Ans :- **c) Sophist**

10) What was Plato's real name ? \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Ariston
- b) Antiphon
- c) Aristocles
- d) Endymantes

Ans :- **c) Aristocles**

11) According to Plato Justice has \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Only Individual Dimension
- b) Only Societal Dimension
- c) Both Individual and Societal dimensions
- d) None of the above

Ans :- **c) Both Individual and Societal Dimensions**

12) Plato's 'Republic' contains his idea about \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Justice

- b) Theory of State
- c) Theory of Education
- d) All of the above

Ans :- **d) All of the above**

13) What is the meaning of 'Mimesis'?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Copy
- b) Imitation
- c) Both a and b
- d) None of the above

Ans :- **c) Both a and b**

14) Which example was given by Plato in order to justify his views on imitation?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Allegory of Cave
- b) Form of Ideas
- c) Table and Chair
- d) None of the above

Ans :- **c) Table and chair**

15) What are the charges made by Plato against poetry?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Poets are liar.
- b) Poetry is not conducive to social morality.
- c) Poetry is twice or thrice removed from the reality
- d) All of these

Ans :- **d) All of these**

16) What is the myth that concludes Plato's Republic?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Myth of Sisyphus
- b) Myth of Medusa
- c) Myth of Er
- d) Myth of Man.

Ans :- **c) Myth of Er.**

## **12.5 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Annas, Julia (1981). *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
2. Benardete, Seth (1989). *Socrate's Second Salling : On Plato's Republic*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. : 6 - 10**

**SECTION : I-V**

**M.A.ENGLISH**

**UNIT - II**

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## **ARISTOTLE**

### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this Lessons 6-10 is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Aristotle; and Poetics from the examination perspective.

#### **SECTION-I : THE AGE AND LIFE OF ARISTOTLE**

- 1.0 Biographical Sketch of Aristotle
- 1.1 Aristotle's Works
- 1.2 The Background : Social and Political
- 1.3 Aristotle's Life (384–322 B.C.)
- 1.4 Aristotle : A Multi-Dimensional Philosopher

#### **SECTION-II : INTRODUCTION TO *POETICS***

- 2.0 The Introduction
- 2.1 Critical Summary of the *Poetics*
- 2.2 Object of Imitation
- 2.3 The Difference in the Manner of Imitation
- 2.4 The Causes for the Origin of Poetry
- 2.5 The Nature of the Ridiculous
- 2.6 Epic Poetry and Tragedy



### **SECTION–III : TRAGEDY : DEFINITION AND NATURE**

- 3.0 Definition of Tragedy
- 3.1 Elements of Tragedy
- 3.2 The Construction, Magnitude and Unity of Plot  
[Poetic Truth, Simple and Complex Plots, Peripety and Anagnorisis and Suffering]
- 3.3 The Parts of Tragedy
- 3.4 Constituents of a Perfect Tragedy
- 3.5 The Tragic Pleasure
- 3.6 Character
- 3.7 Kinds of Recognition/Anagnorisis
- 3.8 Practical Suggestions for the Tragic Plot
- 3.9 Mastery of Complication and Unravelling
- 3.10 Thought, Diction and Perfection of Style

### **SECTION–IV : EPIC POETRY**

- 4.0 Construction
- 4.1 Kinds of Epic Poetry
- 4.2 Critical Objections Against Poetry and its Defence

### **SECTION–V : CONCLUSION**

- 5.0 Chapter XXVI
- 5.1 Self-Assessment Questions
- 5.2 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.3 Multiple Choice Questions
- 5.4 Suggested Reading

## SECTION-I

### THE AGE AND LIFE OF ARISTOTLE

#### STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Biographical Sketch of Aristotle
- 1.1 Aristotle's Works
- 1.2 The Background : Social and Political
- 1.3 Aristotle's Life (384–322 B.C.)
- 1.4 Aristotle : A Multi Dimensional Philosopher

#### 1.0 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ARISTOTLE

- 384 B.C. – Birth
- 368–67 B.C. – First phase of Aristotle's life at Plato's Academy.
- 347 B.C. – Death of Plato and end of Aristotle's first phase of life.
- 342 B.C. – Aristotle accepted invitation of Philip of Macedonia to teach his son, Alexander.
- 336 B.C. – Queen Olympias murdered King Philip. Alexander accessed the throne. End of second phase of life.
- 335–334 B.C. – Aristotle returns to Athens.
- 334 B.C. – Founded the school, the Lyceum.
- 323 B.C. – Alexander's Death
- 322 B.C. – Aristotle's Death

#### 1.1 ARISTOTLE'S WORKS

*Eudemus*

*Protrepticus*

*On Philosophy*

*On the Good*

*On the Ideas*

*Constitution of Athenians (158)*

*Didascaliae*

*Problems*

*Historia Animalium*

***Scientific and Philosophical Treaties Include :***

1. Philosophical Works

*Metaphysics / Nicomachean Ethics*

*Eudemian Ethics / Magna Moralia*

*Politics / Rhetoric*

*Art of Poetry and Poetics*

2. Psychological Works

*On the soul (De Anima)*

*Parva Naturalia*, including : On Memory and Rominiscenca

*On Dreams/and On Prophesying by Dreams*

3. Physical Works

*Physics / On the Heavens (De Caela)*

*Meteorologics / On the coming-to-be and passing away*

*(De Generatione et corruptione)*

4. Natural History

*De Partibus Animalium (On the Parts of Animals)*

*De Motu Animalium (On the Movement of Animals)*

*De Incessie Animalium (On the Progression of Animals)*

*De Generatione Animalium (On the Generation of Animals)*

*Minor Treaties*

5. Logical Work (*Organon*)

*Categories*

*On Interpretation (De Interpretatione)*

*Topics*

*De Sophisticis Elenchis (On Sophistical Refutations)*

*Prior and Posterior Analytics.*

## **1.2 THE BACKGROUND : SOCIAL AND POLITICAL**

Athens during 400 B.C. and after, was the centre of activity but it was in political decline. Education was in a bad shape. The epics of ancient poets were taught to the students. The position of women was not high in the society. It was a male dominated society. They had neither the right for education nor the right to express their opinion in political, social, economic or religious matters. Slavery was widespread and slaves had no individuality. They were treated like animals, only to work and die for their master.

The sovereign body in the city was the assembly, a mass gathering consisting only of the adult male citizens. Aliens could not acquire any right of citizenship. The virtues admired in Greece were courage, chivalry, clearness, bravery in battle fields.

After Plato's death, Aristotle was expected to be chosen as Plato's successor to head the Academy, but being a foreigner his expectations were belied. So the Philosopher joined his former classmate, Hermeias, in Assos, in Asia Minor. Hermeias had gathered a circle of Platonists. He was interested in hoarding wealth and reconciled it with doing justice to the people of the Kingdom. Aristotle was against this evil design. He stood only for justice. He failed in teaching his fellow, the path of virtue.

Persia and Macedon were enemies and eyed each other with distrust. Suspecting Hermeias of intrigue with Macedon, the Persians kidnapped him but being unable to extract confession from him, they crucified him in 342 B.C.

Again Aristotle became countryless for three years. He got a permanent

home, when finally, King Philip invited him to Pella, the Capital of Macedon to teach Alexander, Political Science and Greek literature. Aristotle lived here till Alexander's succession to the throne. The court of Macedon was barbarous and sinister. Philosophy was practised only in name. The whole Macedonian Court held hauling beasts. No justice prevailed on the scene. Murder, treachery and debauchers were the order of the day. Queen and his son, an untamed cub of a ferocious lion, were mad for power. Revenge was the order of the day, even in filial relation.

In such a turbulent scene, Aristotle was given the task to teach Philosophy and 'Sweetness of Wisdom' to Alexander, who had inherited a dream of conquering the world. After his father's death, he became a practical man and used his military power to campaign against the Greeks. Thus, started his story of world conquest and a long list of victories and spoils.

Aristotle returned to Athens in 335 B.C. when it came under Alexander's rule. Athens, though broken was still the intellectual capital of Hellas. After a long struggle in teaching politics in practical life, he settled down to devote himself to teaching in his own school, the Lyceum.

Meanwhile, his nephew, Callisthenes, who had accompanied Alexander in his campaign, was put to death, when he denied to accept Alexander as God. In 323 B.C., soon after Alexander died at Babylon, Athens took up arms against Macedonia. Aristotle was accused of impiety as revealed from his poem written in praise of Hermeias. To save Athens, he withdrew to Chalcis in Euboea. He died in 322 B.C.

### **1.3 ARISTOTLE'S LIFE (384–322 B.C.)**

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. to Nicomachus, a court physician to Amyntas II of Macedon, at Stagirus in Chalkidice, north-west of Mount Athos. He probably inherited his scientific temper from his father. He had a great liking for physiological study. And his birth had provided him sufficient means to enable him to devote his entire life in search of knowledge.

In 368 B.C., Aristotle, at the age of sixteen, took admission in Plato's

Academy in Athens. When Plato died, his nephew Speusippus, succeeded him as the head of the school. And Aristotle withdrew to Assos, to his friend, Hermeias. He failed in persuading Hermeias to the righteous path, but succeeded in marrying his niece, Pythias. After marriage, he again stuck to his scientific studies.

On Hermeias' crucifixion by the Persians, his wife Pythias wrote a poem "Virtue" in his praise and it was sung at the common table and later in his school, the Lyceum. For three years, Aristotle experimented in biology in Lesbos. Then on King Philip's invitation, he went to Pella to teach Alexander the Great, then thirteen or fourteen. Aristotle taught him philosophy, art of administration and poetry, though Plato disliked poetry as a part of education.

During his stay in the court, Aristotle could not do much to change the barbarians into civilians and when his pupil, Alexander ascended the throne, he returned to Athens in 335 B.C. He laid the foundation of his school, the Lyceum. There was a museum and a library for the students. He taught here the philosophical doctrines based on his own finding. But soon he realised his mistake and he put his whole heart in correcting it. He started learning on a large scale through research. He included every art and science in his curriculum— politics, history, literature, natural science and biology.

In his old age, Aristotle suffered greatly. He lost his wife; his nephew, Callisthenes was put to death by his own pupil, Alexander, who deserted his doctrines of philosophy and instead of living for justice, died for lust of power at Babylon in 323 B.C.

Aristotle had a son by his mistress, Herpyllis. Aristotle was accused of impiety and had to withdraw to Chalcis where he died the next year in 322 B.C. at an age of 62.

#### **1.4 ARISTOTLE : A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PHILOSOPHER**

Aristotle's output had been prodigious. His works are mainly of three kinds, studies of constitutions of different countries, treatises intended for the lectures delivered to his students, and those covering practically all spheres of human knowledge and activity.

In all, he wrote about four hundred volumes, but his published works,

largely dialogues, once admired for their golden style, are now lost. Till 100 B.C. his manuscripts were kept safe by his family from the book grabbing Kings of Pergamum. Then they were sold to Athens.

Three fragments of his poems and some fragments of his letters have survived the time. But the dialogues are more 'exotic writings', along with some other philosophical works. The most important writings are : *The Eudemus*, *The Protrecticus*, *The Philosophy*, *On the Good* and *On the Ideas*. The modern literature is at a loss, as none of these treatises survive today. In all, some summaries and direct quotations and references in later writings give us a hint of genius in these works. In these extracts, it is clear that he never wholly threw off the influence of his teacher, Plato. The earlier writings of this great philosopher were modelled on the Platonic model.

Out of the two hundred titles preserved in the catalogues of Aristotle's writings, only the *Constitution of the Athenians* survives. He had written 158 constitutions of Greek states. The Constitution of the Athenians was rediscovered in Papyrus in 1890. *Didacaliae* is a record of dramatic festivals. *Problems* and *Historia Animalium* are surviving. Aristotle lectured his scholars, while walking up and down, the habit which gave his school the name, *Peripatetic School of Philosophy*. Probably he commissioned his people in the school to collect the research material. These collections survived after his death and later authors derived their ideas from these works.

His scientific and philosophical treatises have received much attention. Some critics take them as lecture notes, while others consider them text-book prescribed for his students.

Some of the treatises are incomplete and the authorship of others is doubtful, yet they constitute an organic whole. Science is divided into practical, constructive and theoretical pertaining to man and his action; constructive – treating of art and laws governing the art form, and theoretical including physics, mathematics and theology. Then there are logical writings, dealing with the method of thought and the laws of reasoning known together

as the *Organon* (instrument). *Organon* consists of six treatises : *Categories* is an analysis and classification of the ten different modes of assertion. *Interpretation* – deals with affirmative or negative sentences, with remarks on words, fit or unfit to become terms. *Topics* deals with the methodologies to enable us to reason from probabilities on any hypothesis and to defend a preposition without contradicting the assertions. Through dialectics, he came to *Logic* and then discovered the principles of the *Syllogism*. He specified four sets of argument : a large collection of authoritative sayings, to study the different connotations in which terms are used to measure the differences and to measure the similarities.

Aristotle used Analytic instead of Logic to name the science of analysing the forms of reasoning. According to him, when a fact emerges, a flash of reason intervenes to establish a law. He does not give much importance to verification of these principles. In logic of science he says that “all intellectual learning arise out of previously existing knowledge”, and that, “it is not necessary that ideas should have a separate existence”. In sophistical confutations he classifies fallacies employed in argument and a fallacy arises from the use of a double meaning. He defines Rhetoric as the art of persuasion; discovering the elements of persuasion attached to an element; viz. the personal factors of speaker and his capacity to attract his listeners through his potent and reasonable arguments.

In ‘Art of Poetry’ (*Poetics*), he deals in full length, with his theory of mimesis admitting the creativeness or the active participation of the poet in the creation of a work of poetic art. Here he presents his most influential idea regarding dramatic art, which will be discussed in the following sections. In ethics, he delineates his theory of human life, man’s action and what should be the good aims of the individual. Earlier he included the citizens’ aims under states’ aims, but later he separated ethics from politics. He talks on happiness, virtue and beauty. He separates ethics from religion, and defines wisdom as an excellence of the intellect. Justice, according to him, depends on the institution of the state. Magnanimity, as said by Aristotle, cares for the beautiful rather than for the profitable. Wisdom is the culmination of philosophic reason and thought is the perfection of practical reason.

Aristotle does not go with Platonic love or passionate attachments



between homogenous persons. In his doctrine of friendship, he gives more importance to the heart and the virtuous friend. A true friend enhances one's sense of personal existence, pours vitality and adds happiness to life. Pleasure is the sense of life, the satisfaction of the senses with their respective stimulus, which should be good, an end in itself, not leading to other dissatisfied sensations.

Poetics treats family as the constituent element in the state. He conceptualises his ideal state. This family element consists of husband-wife, children and slaves. He admits slavery and submission of a race intended by nature to be slave. He dislikes trade and traffic as a means of livelihood. The most practical image of his ideal state is that it must be of small size; all men sharing equal part in its administration; artisan and tradesman should not be its citizens, aliens should not be permitted into its territory, students in public school should learn cultural values whether or not of utility, even music due to its moral and educative influence and its cathartic value should be taught. Property is a natural desire and gives joy to man so it should be obtained and preserved by the citizens.

While discussing the various forms of constitutions, he comes to live on the earth. He talks not of ideal state, but the actual, man-made state. He talks of the merits and demerits of different forms of government, viz. monarchy which degenerates into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, democracy into plutocracy and speaks of a mixed government which develops into a guided democracy. However, he stands for a golden mean.

In his scientific treatises, he deals separately with natural philosophy, biology and metaphysics. In natural philosophy, he enquires into the nature of existences. He makes a distinction between the possible and the actual. In anything that exists in the universe he traces three principles, the matter from which it originates, the nature it possesses and the negations of all other natures. The world to him is real and eternal, for it is created and comes into the actual out of the possible. Beyond the universe, he argues that there is neither space, nor vacuum, nor time. Heavenly bodies are composed of

ether and friction due to their rapid revolution that give them their brightness. Though he accurately imagined the earth to be spherical but he was wrong to consider it motionless in the centre of the universe. In *Generation and Corruption*, he deduced that hot and wet form air, cold and dry form the earth; –cold and wet form water and hot and dry form fire.

In his treatise on biology, Aristotle regards the kingdom of man to begin with the inorganic world developing through the vegetation leading to animal kingdom. To him, the soul of a child is similar to that of a lower animal. In *On the Parts of Animals*, he discusses the formation of tissue from the four elements, namely; fire, water, air and earth, the organs and finally, the organised being. Physiological Tracts deal with the functions of living creatures. Then there are Locomotion of Animals and Generation of Animals and Researches about Animals. According to him, heart is the seat of intelligence, respiration is the process of cooling the organic system, the mouth serves both for feeding and cooling. Brain, for him, is the coldest and wettest part of the body. Altogether his researches on physiological processes are incorrect.

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## SECTION – II

### INTRODUCTION TO *POETICS*

#### STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Critical Summary of the *Poetics*
- 2.2 Object of Imitation
- 2.3 The Difference in the Manner of Imitation
- 2.4 The Causes for the Origin of Poetry
- 2.5 The Nature of the Ridiculous
- 2.6 Epic Poetry and Tragedy

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

*Poetics* is a fragmentary work of literary criticism. It seems to have been written just in the form of a brief note for his personal guidance or for the students at Lyceum. It sometimes appears as a rough sketch for some future detailing. The entire work has not come down to us, it is incomplete, disjoined and at places abrupt and digressive. On the other hand, Aristotle has not harmonised all his doctrines in *Poetics* in a gestalt whole. But even with its defect, Aristotle's *Poetics* remains the most fundamental treatise on the dramatic art.

The Greek text of the *Poetics* was published in 1538 by Trivcaveli. Pazzi published its Latin version. Robortelli published its first critical edition in 1548 and from that time onwards it has been annotated, criticised and interpreted by scholars, of all times and mood, all over the world.

The principles of *Poetics* are strictly based on the literature of the Greeks, as only Greek literature was available in the 4<sup>th</sup> B.C. namely, epic poetry of Homer, dramas of Aeschyles, Sophocles, Aristophanes and Euripides. He had applied inductive method to come to conclusions that

have appealed even to the modern writer and critic, who forgets that these principles were meant for the ancient arts. The *Poetics* has been used by the playwrights and critics of all periods. It has been variously interpreted in the course of its two thousand years of journey. The Renaissance artists regarded it as an absolute monarch to the poets and critics. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Aristotle was regarded as the high priest on all problems connected with literary criticism and aesthetics. Professor Atkins finds Aristotle ‘merely careful to frame a reply to Plato’s indictment’. Dryden wanted to emphasise that a blind adherence to the rules laid down by Aristotle was not advisable: “It is not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides; and, if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind”. Yet the *Poetics* is thought provoking. Aristotle asks the right type of questions and literary theory has grown and advanced by seeking answers to his questions.

For all these reasons, Atkins says, “the Miracle of the *Poetics* is that it contains so much that is of permanent and universal interest”. It remains an important landmark in the history of literary criticism. It represents the final judgement of the Greeks themselves upon two main Greek or Hellenic inventions : Epic poetry and Tragic Drama. And it has a permanent value even today, quite apart from historical consideration. Aristotle’s fundamental assumptions, and the generalisations upon which he mainly insists, are as true of any modern literature as they are of his own.

The *Poetics* contains 26 chapters dealing with the basic principles of tragedy, comedy and epic poetry. Aristotle’s discussion of comedy is only fragmentary. He dismissed epic poetry as the principles applied to epic are only corollaries of those of tragedy and which are inadequate and improper to evaluate an epic. He also regards tragedy as nearly complete form from the artistic point of view. It is an analysis of tragedy that constitutes the main argument in the treatise.

## 2.1 CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE *POETICS*

*Text Consulted— Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art-with a critical text translation of the poetics"*

— by S.H. Butcher

### CHAPTER —1

'Mimesis' or Imitation, according to Aristotle is the common principle of all arts; poetry, comedy, tragedy, dancing, flute-playing, painting or sculpture. His concept of mimesis is broader than that of Plato, in that he includes music among the other modes of imitation. Imitation is not 'copying of mimicry', thrice removed from reality as Plato considers it. It implies creativity. The musician's imitation is not of the superficial but of the inner reality, the very essence. It originates from emotions, moods and underlying passions. Then by including the inner life of man, Aristotle's concept of imitation becomes wider.

Though imitation is the common principle of all between the fine arts, differences can also be observed between them, mainly three, i.e. the medium of imitation, the object of imitation and finally the manner of imitation.

Form, colour and sound are some of the means of imitation used by the artists. Aristotle deals mainly with different kinds of poetry and music of the flute and lyre, in which imitation is produced by rhythm, language, harmony or melody. These can be used either singly or in combination to produce the required effect. Literature however, is the art which imitates by language alone. Aristotle calls art as merely art, without naming it. There was no term, during his age, which stood for literature as a whole. This art imitates in words, either in verse or prose, and if in verse, in one or many kind of metres. Music on the other hand, used only harmony and rhythm. According to Aristotle, poetry need not be written in metre, still it will be poetry. Verse is not a necessary principle of poetry.

Aristotle's imitation does not mean an exact reproduction as accomplished by a photographic plate. It has a significant meaning. It is not mere copying of nature or external objects, but the imitation of the soul of the object, its essence. It is the copying of the inner reality existing in the internal environment that is

original and not at all superficial. Art seeks to imitate an inner landscape or its outward manifestation.

The copying of the inner reality explicates an inspiration, an urge among the audience to fall in tune with the emotion expressed and thus, refine themselves. Such imitation of art leads to new culture and fascination for society. Art thus, produces not only an endearing effect but also utility.

## **2.2 OBJECT OF IMITATION**

In this part, Aristotle deals with the objects of imitation in art. The objects of imitation in poetry are human beings in action. The whole world is not conceived of, as the raw material of art. He excludes landscape except as a background to the human action being imitated. This principle is in agreement with the classical artists and their poetry.

Aristotle is not concerned with visual realism. He is more concerned with the inner realism, like the composer of a pastoral symphony trying to convey a mood of a special pastoral atmosphere to his audience. In dramatic art, imitation of emotions becomes important.

The primary object of poetic imitation is human nature-acting or being acted upon. These acting souls appear more appropriate to narrative or dramatic poetry. As such Aristotle uses the term 'action' to express the mental life to reveal a personality. It has a larger sense. Human action includes every action that goes on inside the mind or heart of the acting being.

These men in action, are represented either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. Though Aristotle mentions the third alternative and gives examples from painting, he does not go into the details. He deals really with the first two alternatives only. Thus, imitation is not a mere reproduction but it involves creative imagination. Poetry is a creative process which can represent men as ideal, or as ridiculous, by exaggerating their bravery or follies, respectively, i.e. they may be idealised or caricatured.

### ***The difference between Tragedy and Comedy***

The distinction between tragedy and comedy lies in the presentation of the men of action in higher types, or lower types respectively. Tragedy idealises man as being better than average man and comedy represents man as worse than average. There is full contribution of creative imagination. It is the imitation of the imaginative conceptions.

## **CHAPTER-III**

### **2.3 THE DIFFERENCE IN THE MANNER OF IMITATION**

Different arts imitate objects in different manners through three modes : narrative, assumed character and plot; the medium remains the same throughout either narration or an assumed character; the plot may be represented dramatically. Many actors participate in the action.

Thus, differences in imitation come under three headings: means of imitation, the objects of imitation and the manner of imitation.

#### ***Classification of poetry on the basis of manner***

On the basis of manner of imitation, poetry is classified as epic, narrative, or dramatic. The same story can be either narrated or acted out by characters. The dramatic method is used in tragedy only. Poems that represent action are termed as drama. Aristotle makes it clear by giving the example of Sophocles, who through the 'higher' characters, represents action like Homer. At the same time, he is like Aristophanes in being a dramatic poet.

Finally, Aristotle sums up the distinction between fine arts on the basis of medium, subject, and manner of imitation. Then, there is the classification of dramatic poetry into tragedy and comedy.

## **CHAPTER—IV**

### **2.4 THE CAUSES FOR THE ORIGIN OF POETRY**

In this chapter, Aristotle traces the origin of poetry, especially the dramatic poetry. He confines his views and observation to dramatic poetry

only. He considers that there are three natural causes behind the origin of poetry, viz, human impulse to imitate things, the natural delight in recognising a good work of imitation, and finally, the instinct for harmony and rhythm which evolves to the metres of poetry.

The first instinct can be compared to the curiosity of the child. In the case of second instinct, it is not only a good or beautiful work that gives delight but the ugly objects also give delight in their beautiful imitations. Things that we simply detest in real life give us delight when we see them artistically reproduced with minute fidelity. Thus, the origin of poetry lies in our natural instincts. Artistic imitation provides authentic pleasures.

### ***Development of Poetry***

Historically viewed, poetry bifurcates feelings according to the individual characters of the composer. The graver spirits imitate the actions of noble man, and the trivial type imitate the action of the baser personality. Traces of their two fold tendency are found in Homer. Later on, this tendency gave rise to separate genres of poetry. The serious poetry came to be known as heroic or epic poetry or tragedy. The poetry of frivolous and meaner nature came to be known as comedy. It constituted of lampoons, satires and invectives.

Tragedy had passed through various stages of development. Aeschylus first introduced a second actor and diminished the importance of the chorus. He assigned the leading part to the dialogue. Sophocles raised the number of characters to three and also added scene painting. Then came the sense of magnitude and dignity. The short plot was discarded for one of the greater compass, and the metre changed to the iambic to suit the stately manner of tragedy. Finally, came the increase in the number of episodes or acts. Having passed through many changes, tragedy found its natural form, and there it stopped. Aristotle gives a logical statement on the successive steps in the history of tragedy.



## CHAPTER—V

### 2.5 THE NATURE OF THE RIDICULOUS

Comedy is the imitation of men worse than the average, not necessarily bad. The ludicrous consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. Thus, the characters are not morally worse, *i.e.* they are not evil. Aristotle considers the ridiculous as a species of the ugly. It is a defect or shortcoming which produces laughter. Aristotle is more serious about tragedy. But for comedy, he does not mention the stages in the development of comedy which he feels are obscure. He only gives some facts about the origin of some of its components.

### 2.6 EPIC POETRY AND TRAGEDY

Epic poetry and tragedy have some things in common. Epic poetry resembles tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher or serious type, or better than the average. Epic poetry is narrative in form, while tragedy represents action in dramatic manner. The metre employed in the epic is uniform throughout, whereas the tragedy employs more than one metres. Again, they differ in their length. The epic's action may be of an indefinite length of time. Its action is not limited by time and may cover a wide sweep of history. But tragedy tries, as far as possible, to confine to a day, —‘single circle of the sun’, or but slightly exceed this limit.

Of their constituent parts, some are common to both, some peculiar to tragedy. All the elements of an epic poetry are found in tragedy, but the elements of a tragedy are not all found in the epic poem. Hence, a judge of good and bad in tragedy can be a judge of the epic too.

In this section, that had led much debate, the critics find their raw material for the three unities of time, place, and action. But Aristotle laid down no hard and fast rule for time and place. It is merely a statement of what he observed, “while confining action to a single circle of the sun”, he uses the phrases ‘as far as possible’ and “something near that”, which show that he was not intending to be rigid about the unity of time. And as for unity of place, he does not mention it at all.

## **SECTION-III**

### **CHAPTER-VI**

#### **TRAGEDY : DEFINITION AND NATURE**

##### **STRUCTURE**

- 3.0 Definition of Tragedy
- 3.1 Elements of Tragedy
- 3.2 The Construction, Magnitude and Unity of Plot
- 3.3 The Parts of Tragedy
- 3.4 Constituents of a Perfect Tragedy
- 3.5 The Tragic Pleasure
- 3.6 Character
- 3.7 Kinds of Recognition/Anagnorisis
- 3.8 Practical Suggestions for the Tragic Plot
- 3.9 Mastery of Complication and Unravelling
- 3.10 Thought, Diction and Perfection of Style

##### **3.0 DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY**

This is the most important section of the treatise, as it defines tragedy and brings out the nature and function of tragedy. Aristotle summarises his observation on tragedy as, “Tragedy is an imitation of an action, that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic moment, the several kinds being in several parts of the plays in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting its catharsis of such emotions.”

This definition analyses the nature as well as the function of tragedy. The object of imitation is action of gravity or seriousness. By magnitude, it implies that it should be long enough to produce the change in fortunes of the hero or

other characters. Then the action should be complete having a beginning, a middle and an end. The medium of imitation is language and all the embellishment it allows. The manner of imitation is dramatic and not narrative.

The function of the tragedy is to arouse pity and fear and purge an excess of emotions of the audience, i.e., provide an outlet for these emotions of pity and fear, which lead to birth of other human emotions. A sense of self accompanying the outlet of emotions gave the most debatable concept of catharsis. Fear and pity cannot be fully suppressed, as Plato thought them to be. Aristotle, thus shows a greater realistic and psychological wisdom by accepting that the relief offered by art can not only be pleasurable but also beneficial. He counterfeits Plato on the argument that art has a dangerous effect on human nature as it might excite emotions, which should be suppressed in the interest of public morality.

### **3.1 ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY**

Tragedy has six constituent elements, three internal and three external. Three internal constituent elements are concerned with the object of imitation—Plot or the arrangement of the incidents or the piece of life, i.e. human actions and experiences which are imitated; Character or dramatic persona are the qualities of the agents of imitation, i.e. ‘virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents’. Thought is required whenever a statement is proved. Thoughts are expressed by the agents of action or it is a general truth enunciated.

Out of the three external elements, two are to do with the medium of imitation—diction or the metrical arrangement of the words, and the melody. The last is the spectacular equipment, or the mode of imitation, by which the story is presented on the stage before the audience.

Plot is the most essential part of drama or poetry; the life and soul of it. Characters of the agents may be drawn with great psychological skill; there may be great poetic brilliance, spectacular presentation, but they cannot make a tragedy. There cannot be a picture without a form or design. Plot is the artistic equivalent of action in real life. And ‘action’ is the expression of

man's rational personality. The characters are not narrated or sketched, but they enact their own story thereby revealing themselves.

Aristotle probably intends to place action and character against one another at two extremes. Indeed, the remark that drama without character is possible could not be taken in a literal sense; i.e. there may be a tragedy in which the character (moral) of the individual agents is so weakly portrayed as to be of no account in the evolution of the action and persons may be mere types. Speeches fall under the arts of Politics and Rhetoric. The diction or words used in expression or speech should be such, which are practically same with verse and with prose. Melody is the greatest of all access ones of the drama, while the spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry.

## **CHAPTER - VII**

### **3.2 THE CONSTRUCTION, MAGNITUDE AND UNITY OF PLOT**

The first and foremost requirement of the ideal plot is that its action should be whole, complete in itself and of a certain magnitude. A whole action is that which has a beginning, a middle and an end. It should not be a mere collection of incidents or episodes. A beginning should stand by itself to initiate further action. It should become a cause of action to take place, but it should be self explanatory, without the requirement of any previous knowledge of happening. Then 'the beginning' should begin from the beginning but at some stage in the life of the hero leading to the tragic action.

The middle of the action must naturally follow the beginning and lead to the appropriate end or catastrophe. The middle action should harmonize the beginning and the end. The end must be casually related to the middle in such a way that it is completely explicable but it should not stand as a cause of further action.

#### **The Magnitude of the Plot**

The magnitude of the plot means that it should be neither too short

nor too long. It implies such a size as may adequately display the agent of serious action passing through the necessary events from happiness to misfortune, or vice-versa. It should not be so long that one forgets the beginning before one reaches the end. Neither should it be so small that its beauty cannot be appreciated. Unless it is of a suitable magnitude the audience cannot appreciate the orderly arrangements of the parts of the whole. It must be long enough to allow a sequence of events within the limits of probability and necessity which can bring about change of fortune.

Aristotle's concept of tragedy is that of an 'organic unity', something already commended by plots. It implies a symmetrical and proportionate relationship between the parts and the whole. The episodes and incidents must have a causal relationship to the whole. And to maintain this relationship, the size/magnitude of the plot has to be maintained at a reasonable length that can be encompassed by memory. Hence, the plot is the very skeleton of the action and so becomes important.

## **CHAPTER—VIII**

### **THE UNITY OF PLOT**

The plot must have a unity. This unity of plot does neither consist in the unity of hero nor in the fact of action dealing with a single hero's life. But the whole life of hero, with his many experiences, deeds and all sorts of actions cannot become a part of the plot. And so a single action is of importance, which bears a past and will lead into future. It is not merely a hero but many others who may get linked with this action. Homer for example, chooses a single action and not merely a single hero. In the *Odyssey*, he did not conceive his plot of everything, that befell on the hero. The artist must choose, and select his raw material from the confused medley of what may befall the hero.

Secondly, the plot should be an organic whole like a living organism. Each part of the organism should have a relationship to the other and to the whole in turn. Similarly, in a tragedy the action should have a causal relation to each episode and finally to the whole such that the transposal of any

episode from it would tend to disjoin and dislocate the whole.

It is probable that Aristotle does not approve of double actions in a play or two actions of opposite nature, one tragic and another comic. He insists upon unity of action and this is the only unity (of action) that he stresses upon, unity of time is not a rigid rule and unity of place he does not mention at all, that appears to be only an inference drawn by later critics.

## **CHAPTER—IX**

### **POETIC TRUTH**

Aristotle has made it clear, at the outset, that poetry is ‘imitation’ but not mere copying of the external appearance. It does not deal with a photographic realism, and the poet’s function is not to describe what has happened, but what might happen, (even should happen) in a given situation and here lies the difference between a poet and a historian, i.e., the poet says what might happen and the historian says what has happened. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history expresses the particular. The poet thus, needs an insight into human nature, a grasp of general principles.

The historian is not concerned with cause and effect or causal relation but with a chronological order of incidents. Poetry is more in accordance with the spirit of philosophy, the instinctive desire to understand the laws of things, how all things are connected together. In history, we cannot know for sure why certain things happened in just that manner. Poetry deals with the inner reality, the core of life, the universal in life, history deals with facts. Hence, poetry is higher in quality and of greater importance than any other art.

Even if the poet selects his material from the real world around him, he is a ‘maker’, i.e. he arranges it according to a design imposing a universal order on it. He establishes a causal connection between the incidents to show how certain things happened. It is the inevitability of sequences of incidents that arouse emotions proper to tragedy. But this he ought to do according to the laws of probability and necessity. He has to represent events in such a

way that there appears a logical connection between them. They should appear as if in the given circumstances, nothing else could happen. He represents the permanent, universal facts of life because he makes poetry transcend the world of appearance, where all is chaotic and confused. There should be a sense of inevitability about the incidents as represented.

Again, the poet is a 'maker' of plots, not verses. It is not necessary for the writer to borrow from traditional myths and names, but he does so for reasons of verisimilitude. The plot does not lie in the incidents or episodes, but in the arrangement or ordering of these. Aristotle condemns the 'episodic plots', in which there are a number of episodes which are not related casually, under the laws of probability and necessity.

The outcome of all this arrangement becomes important, and that is the arousal of emotions proper to tragedy, that of pity and fear, which are aroused best if the element of surprise is added to the occurrence of incidents. Even matters of chance seem marvellous if there is some such appearance of design in them. And emergence of pity and fear lead to other emotions.

## **CHAPTER—X**

### **SIMPLE AND COMPLEX PLOTS**

According to Aristotle, plots are simple and complex. In simple plot, events move forward continuously towards the catastrophe. There is no puzzling situations termed as peripeteia and anagnorisis. Peripeteia is explained as 'reversal of situation' or fortunes and anagnorisis as 'recognition' or 'discovery'. Reversal implies nearly a reversal of intention or deed done in blindness defeating its own purpose like killing an enemy and later discovering him to be a kinsman. Anagnorisis is a state when there is a change from ignorance to knowledge. The two elements go together and both of them please because there is an element of surprise in them. A plot that makes use of them is complex and makes a perfect tragedy.

In complex plot, the hero's fortunes rise to a certain point and then a turning point or climax is reached, at which some sort of discovery leads directly to the change in fortune. They should arise from the structure of the

plot itself, and not enforced from external sources. They should appear probable or necessary, a consequence of the antecedent. Aristotle thinks complex plots to be the best.

## CHAPTER—XI

### PERIPETY AND ANAGNORISIS AND SUFFERING

Peripety (Peripeteia) is a change at some point in the action from one state of circumstances to another; to the opposite state, in a causal manner. It should appear inevitable. It involves the tragic effect of human effort producing exactly the possible result of the intention. Aristotle illustrates his point by giving example :

#### ***OEDIPUS REX***

Discovery is a transition from ignorance to knowledge, recognition of truth of situation, of identity or recognition of the true facts. The tragic effect is the greatest when these occur simultaneously. In *Oedipus Rex*, first under a false notion the son weds the mother—Peripeteia—then the change in fortune takes place from the point when he discovers his true parentage-anagnorisis.

The third element of importance is the suffering. It includes actions of a destructive kind, inflicting pain and giving sorrow, such as murder, torture, wounding, death, and so on; i.e. the tragic incident.

## CHAPTER—XII

### 3.3 THE PARTS OF TRAGEDY

The quantitative parts of tragedy are part of Greek theatrical convention. These are :

1. *Prologue* is the entire part of the tragedy between the beginning and the *parode* of the chorus.
2. *An episode* is one of the entire parts coming between two complete choral songs. It is an Act of modern play.
3. *The exode* is that part which comes after the last choral song and continues to the end of the play.



4. *The choric* song which is divided into :
- a. *The parode* is the entrance song of the chorus.
  - b. *Stasimon* is a choric ode or song.
  - c. *A commos* is a song of lamentation in which the chorus and other actors join.

## CHAPTER—XIII

### 3.4 CONSTITUENTS OF A PERFECT TRAGEDY

Aristotle prefers the complex plot in a tragedy. The plot must be such that it should arouse the emotions of pity and fear. He also rejects three types of plot as unsuitable for the tragic action :

1. that which represents a bad man passing from adversity to happiness. Such a plot is totally unsuitable for tragic action and unacceptable according to the morals governing the society.
2. that which represents a perfectly good man passing from happiness to misery. It would simply shock the audience, when misery is the end of all good, who would like to be a good man.
3. that which represents the doom of an utter villain from prosperity to misfortune. Though it would satisfy the moral sense (since the bad is passing to bad), however, it would not arouse the emotions of pity and fear.

Pity can be aroused only if a man suffers due to ‘unmerited misfortune: and fears’ if he is a man like ourselves.

Aristotle prefers an ideal hero for tragedy, neither too good nor depraved, but an intermediate sort of person. If the hero is a perfect man or utterly depraved, then the identification of the spectator with the hero is not possible and as a result change in his fortunes will not arouse the feeling of pity and fear. Moreover, misfortune is brought about, not through some evil or depravity, but by some error of judgement or frailty. Aristotle calls the human error as *Hamartia*. It is an ‘error of judgement’ or a ‘miscalculation’, rather than any moral shortcoming. The outcome of this error should be suffering, which should be in excess of what he deserves, arousing pity.

Further, such person should be highly placed in society, i.e. a king, a prince or someone from high office to whom the audience can easily attach their emotions. It is his fall from glorious position that arouses emotions of pity and fear. Pity for the change of fortune and suffering in excess to what he deserves, which is a natural corollary and fear for the loss of life even after the hero has undergone a process of catharsis, i.e. he has been purged of his 'error of judgement', that he has realized his error and accordingly reformed himself although it is too late and the damage already done cannot be undone.

Thus, a tragic hero should be a man, neither perfect nor utterly bad; placed highly in society; his misfortune should arise from an error or frailty, and he must fall from the height of prosperity and glory.

Aristotle is against the practice of double action. A tragic plot should stand with a single issue. It should not have two ends with rewards for the good and punishment for the bad. Such ends are suitable for comedy. In tragedy, the single action should have a single end.

## **CHAPTER—XIV**

### **3.5 THE TRAGIC PLEASURE**

The emotions of pity and fear should spring from the inner structure of the plot itself. They may also be produced by scenic effects; i.e. through 'spectacle', the presentation of scenes of suffering and disaster. But this is entirely against the structure of the tragedy. The proper way is that emotions are aroused through the very structure and sequence of incidents in the drama. This mode of arousing tragic pleasure will be artistic and independent of the spectacle.

Aristotle has discussed the specific sources of pity and fear. These sources are : first, when an action of horror involves enemies, there is nothing to arouse pity. Secondly, if persons involved are indifferent to one another, there is no pity involved. The tragic situation is most appropriate when the tragic incidents occur between those who are near or dear to each other. The tragic effect is heightened if the deed is perpetrated in ignorance, and the discovery is made afterwards.

However, the most effective (desirable) situation is one in which the

relationship is discovered just before the deed is to be perpetrated, and hence, the disaster is averted. This seems to allow, rather inconsistently for Aristotle, a happy ending to tragedy. Perhaps he felt the unhappy ending to be more deeply moving as well as more satisfying to our human sympathies.

Aristotle delineates four types of actions leading to disaster. They are derived from the interrelation of two major factors, viz. a tragic deed and the lack of knowledge, i.e. at least in some degree, a part of character. Then it is the inter-relation between anagnorisis, the realisation of the truth and Hamartia. The suffering which is the consequence of Hamartia can be stopped if Discovery or Anagnorisis comes in time. Thus, Discovery, Hamartia and peripety are closely linked with one another. Hamartia is the part of Hero and Discovery and peripety, aspects of the plot. Thus, both character and plot are held responsible for the tragic action and are responsible for the unity of the tragic whole.

Aristotle explains why the great dramatists had continuously resorted to a small number of 'families for their tragic plots'. Just because their stories had situations of horror, crime is being committed by one family member on another. But it is the poet's handling of the traditional material that makes a play, good or bad.

## **CHAPTER—XV**

### **3.6 CHARACTER**

According to Aristotle, there are four requisites of the tragic character, as :

1. The character must be shown to be good. He should not be wicked unless it is absolutely necessary for the plot. The goodness of the character is reflected in his good motives and actions. He, rather condescendingly, remarks that if women and slaves are introduced in a tragic drama, they too, must be shown to be good. The poet should represent men as being better than in real life. But at the same time, human infirmities must not be ignored, because a better character, not a perfect man, is required. In the Greek sense, goodness involves virtues of courage, temperance, magnificence, truthfulness, liberality etc.

2. It must be based on the principle of propriety or appropriateness. Aristotle has created the difficulty of understanding this propriety, as he had not elaborated the concept. But the critics drew an inference that the character must be true to the status he belongs. Thus, manliness would be inappropriate in a woman, and dignity in a slave.
3. Tragic character must be true to life. It is closely connected with the fact that the audience feel special tragic emotions only for characters with whom they identify themselves. And this identification is done with the person who shows correspondence to actual life. Characters should act and speak as they do in natural circumstances.
4. Character must be consistent : A character must be represented in consistent manner throughout a single work. Whatever he says or does should be the natural outcome of his qualities. Just as the incidents are governed by the laws of probability and necessity, so too, are the characters. Also if the poet has to represent an inconsistent character, i.e., an impulsive, rash, cruel character, he should represent him as such in a consistent manner.

Aristotle allows supernatural intervention, such as ghosts, spirits, witches and other mechanical devices only for those events which are not represented in the play.

## **CHAPTER—XVI**

### **3.7 KINDS OF RECOGNITION/ANAGNORISIS**

Aristotle has explained the meaning and importance of Anagnorisis in Chapter II. Here, he discusses six types of Recognition, as follows :

1. **Recognition by sign** or marks, is the least artistic type because it implies reflection. As this is easy to handle, it is frequently employed by dramatists. These signs can be birth-marks, scars acquired after birth, tokens such as necklaces. Aristotle objects to these devices as they are not a natural consequence of the incidents but are external devices and so they are not artistic.

2. **Recognition by turn of incidents/action**—This is the most artistic form of recognition. It grows out from the action itself. It is independent of mechanical artifices like necklaces and signs. It is most credible and startles the audience.
3. **Recognition invented by the poet**—The second type of discovery is one that is introduced by the poet. It is inartistic as the poet introduces it in an arbitrary manner, and it does not evolve naturally and spontaneously from the plot.
4. **Recognition by memory**—When a character sees or hears something, his memory is stirred, and discovery is made. He is led to remember the past, and in this way the discovery is brought about.
5. **Recognition by the reasoning**—The link between incidents is realized through a process of reasoning and this brings about discovery. Here, reasoning should be the necessary outcome of events, and not imported from outside.
6. **Recognition involving bad/obscure reasoning**—Aristotle does not favour this concept. He says that it is a discovery arising from the bad reasoning on the side of the other party. The example cited by him is obscure. And the play he cites for example, is lost.

Anagnorisis is transition from ignorance to knowledge. It includes discovery of whole areas of circumstances, about which there is previous ignorance or misunderstanding.

## CHAPTER—XVII

### 3.8 PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TRAGIC PLOT

The poet is an artist and when he aims at or aspires for a piece of art, he must, first, visualize what he wishes to produce or represent. He should imagine with his mind's eye. It would help him to make his art piece probable, excluding the irrelevant elements from it.

When the poet imagines (imitates) the action, he would experience the emotions with the very gestures and would be able to endow his characters

with the requisite emotions, what in turn would arouse pity and fear in the audience. Thus, imagination would make the poet to live the action in his mind. And with this imaginative experience, he would find it easy to choose his medium of expression of action; i.e. appropriate behaviour, dialogues and situation in the plot.

Aristotle lays emphasis on the 'poetic inspiration' indirectly when he talks about the imagination of the poet. With this imagination, the poet must make a general outline of the whole action to be imitated. And thereby gaps could be filled in by addition of names and events/episodes. Proper names should be given to the personages. The incidents should be so linked as to give way for the origin of Peripety, Anagnorisis and Hamartia. There must be no overlapping but a causal relationship in-between the incidents.

## **CHAPTER-XVIII**

### **3.9 MASTERY OF COMPLICATION AND UNRAVELLING**

This chapter is in continuation with the elements of chapter XVII.

Plot, according to Aristotle, is divided into two parts; the complication and the unravelling or denouement. A good dramatist must manage both, complication and denouement, equally well.

Complication includes all that occurs from the beginning of the action or story to the part which marks the turning part to good or bad fortune of the hero. The denouement or unravelling is that which starts from this change to the end.

For the working of the complication, certain external sources or incidents are introduced which become a part of the whole action and affect the development of the piece. Great tragedies often begin at a later stage; near about the climax and the action proper is highly compressed and concentrated.

Aristotle delineates four species of tragedy on the source of the tragic effect or on the basis of four constituent elements of the tragedy. In the first kind, the plot is complex with peripety, or reversal, and anagnorisis or discovery. The second kind is that of suffering; murder, pain, wounding,

torture, etc. The third is that of character, its nature which is the important source of tragic effect. Lastly, the tragedy which depends for its effect upon spectacle, but in Aristotle's opinion it is not of great merit, as the tragic effect evolves out of fantastic scenes and sensational effects produced by characters, incidents on mechanical devices.

Aristotle suggests to the poet to unite all the four elements to bring out the best tragic effect. He advises the poet to avoid multiplicity of actions in drama. Drama is based on unity of action. And the tragic poet must select a single suitable action, i.e. a certain incident in the ancient myths. An epic has a multiplicity of actions and an attempt to dramatize it would be a failure.

Compactness, coherence and concentration are essential elements to produce dramatic effect, the emotional effect on the audience. Aristotle gives due attention to the role played by the chorus. It must not only sing but also play a relevant part. It should help in conducting the tragic effect.

## **CHAPTER—XIX**

### **3.10 THOUGHT, DICTION AND PERFECTION OF STYLE**

In this part, Aristotle includes thought and diction into the six elements he attributed to tragedy. Thought and diction are closely related. Thought, or the intellectual element includes every effect which has to be produced by speech. Diction falls within the domain of the art of delivery.

Characters express thought through language. It is content of diction. Thought stands by the actors to prove or disprove something. They express their emotions through speech in order to persuade and convince. Emotion is part of thought. Thought is hereby used to maximise or minimise, i.e. to evaluate the importance of a thing or deed. Speech can be used to modulate a thought in such a way that something is made to be seen great, significant, or on the other hand, trivial and unimportant.

Aristotle emphasises the fact that speech or diction should be appropriate to the particular context in which it is used.

## **CHAPTER—XX**

### **DICTION**

Here Aristotle discusses various parts of diction, i.e. the grammatical elements of a language—the letter, syllable, conjunction, article, noun, verb, case and the speech. It is a comment on general use of language, not of the poetic language as such.

## **CHAPTER—XXI**

### **WORDS**

This is further devoted to speech. Here Aristotle explains metaphor, and also the poetic diction. Diction is the selection and ordering of words and images in literary works. These words include words in popular usage, foreign words, metaphorical constructions, ornamental terms, newly coined terms, slang terms, and words that have undergone manipulation, by lengthening, shortening, or by simple variation.

## **CHAPTER—XXII**

### **PERFECTION OF STYLE**

Aristotle opines that the style should neither be too ornate, nor too ordinary. Too much ornamentation will make it gaudy and a riddle-like difficult to understand. If it is too ordinary, it will loose the spirit of seriousness of tragedy and make it below standard. Language and style should be clear. The poet should try to maintain the dignity of the theme of the drama through his diction. He must avoid strange words as well as commonplace words.

Metaphor, as Aristotle observes, is a gift not to be taught. He does not discount poetic inspiration and natural talent in the art of poetry, though the craftsmanship has its role to play. Further he maintains that the iambic verse is quite closely modelled on the rhythm of ordinary speech.



## SECTION-IV

### CHAPTER—XXIII

#### EPIC POETRY

#### STRUCTURE

##### 4.0 Construction

##### 4.1 Kinds of Epic Poetry

##### 4.2 Critical Objections Against Poetry and its Defence

#### 4.0 CONSTRUCTION

The epic poetry narrates an action through verse. In that, it is different from tragedy. Yet there are similarities between the two genres and so is the case in their construction as well. The epic should have a single action, i.e. unity of story. The action should have a beginning, a middle and an end. It should have an organic unity. For *Iliad*, Aristotle commented, because of its plurality of stories, its dramatisation is difficult. He means to say that though the epic allows wide arena, its story should be compressed, it should not include many actors. Again, epic is not like history. So it should not include a great period of time but a certain portion of life only, which could constitute the unity of action. And this unity should be directed towards an end.

Epic poem should also follow the general law of unity. But the drama forms a more compact and serialized whole.

### CHAPTER—XXIV

#### 4.1 KINDS OF EPIC POETRY

Through comparison with tragedy, Aristotle brings out its salient features. Both share many common features. The basis of division in epic is the same as it is in tragedy. It may be simple or complex, or ethical or pathetic. It also requires reversals of intention, anagnorisis and peripety and tragic situations. The 'spectacle' of course is excluded from epic poetry.

Tragedy tries to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun. An epic poem, on the other hand, can be much longer than tragedy. It has no limits to length. Aristotle had merely stated his general observation based on the Greek plays and epics. The extension in length enjoyed by the epic gives it certain advantage over tragedy. Different incidents at different places, involving different characters can be simultaneously represented in epic whereas, it is not possible on the stage. In drama, the events are more directly related to the development of character. It is an organic whole, including all parts essentially linked with causal bonds. In an epic, however, the external facts have a more independent interference.

For metre, tragedy admits a variety of metres. But the epic allows only the heroic metre or hexameter, it being grave and more dignified than the rest. The iambic metre is nearer to ordinary speech and more suitable for the drama. Aristotle opines that the nature has established heroic metre for epic poetry.

In epic, there is more scope for the improbable, as it is not enacted in front of eyes. Hence, anything can be imagined but tragedy requires the marvellous because the improbable cannot be made possible on the stage. If any irrational element or incident is included in the plot of epic or drama, it needs justification. And justification should come through the plot itself (because the artist is not present to explain it) i.e. the plot with its elements.

Aristotle makes a shrewd, deep observation about Homer's epic and finds that he was a master in telling lies in a convincing manner. The effect of fiction is due to a logical fallacy so employed by the author that the spectator or reader accepts the improbable also as possible without putting a load on his reasoning. It depends on poetic illusion. In art, even the unreal is made to be believed as real.

## **CHAPTER—XXV**

### **4.2 CRITICAL OBJECTIONS AGAINST POETRY AND ITS DEFENCE**

In this chapter, Aristotle looks at the work of art from the critics' or readers' point of view. He analyses possible objections that could be put up against a creative work. He analyses the criticism to which poetry is liable. He further suggests how the issue may be solved, and each objection answered.

The poet is an imitator. He can imitate in three ways while he represents an object or action-as they were or they are ; as they are said or thought to be, or as they might have been and they might be. This imitation is done with the help of diction. Then within poetry, there is a possibility of two types of error; viz., a technical error and a factual error. Factual error is due to lack of knowledge of the object or action being described. These are the basic premises, which Aristotle deals within this chapter.

In work of art especially drama, impossibilities should be generally avoided. But if justifiable, they be employed to heighten the effect of grandeur. A mistake arising from the ignorance of some special field of knowledge can be justified if it does not violate poetic truth. It is subject to the poet's wish to represent an object or character or event, as (it) he ought to be, rather than as he (it) is. The poetic end is most important which should not be wounded by any such error.

Then the thing represented by the poet seems irrational, but it may be true at the times when the author wrote, and hence it must be judged for that time only and not extended any further, to make it stand for its defence.

Further, the charge of immorality in the poetic work may arise a conflict. But it must be resolved not as any one real human being's life but in the context of the whole situation presented in the work of art. Morality or immorality should be judged in the light of its context and not in isolation. While using technique of imitation, language can be changed. Here also, the age, the context, the use of language, pronunciation and tone should be kept in the mind. A deeper understanding of these devices is required, before going for any criticism.

Aristotle censures the critics for accusing the artist/ poet of being absurd without first considering all probable alternatives.

**SECTION-V**  
**CHAPTER — XXVI**

**CONCLUSION**

**STRUCTURE**

- 5.0 Chapter XXVI
- 5.1 Self-Assessment Questions
- 5.2 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.3 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 5.4 Suggested Reading

**5.0 CHAPTER XXVI**

Aristotle considers the question of the comparative value of epic and tragedy. Epic with its refined language attracted the cultivated and cultured audience and the critics considered it higher than tragedy; and tragedy with its actions was considered as vulgar. Aristotle beats the charge against tragedy with a strong hand. As in tragedy, gestures can be overdone and seem vulgar so in epic, recital can be vulgarised. Furthermore, the effect of tragedy need not necessarily depend upon acting. Reading a tragedy can easily produce the same effect. Thus, the basis of criticising tragedy because it involves movement and gestures is incorrect.

Aristotle puts tragedy on a higher plane than the epic, because it has all the epic elements- the serious subject, plot, diction, thought which give more pleasure, i.e. spectacle and melody. He comes to the conclusion that the alleged defects of tragedy are not essential to it. Its positive merits entitle it to the higher rank.

**5.1 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Examine critically Aristotle's definition of tragedy. What according to him, are the formative elements of a tragedy ?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.0, 3.1)

Q.2 What, according to Aristotle, are the elements that constitute a proper tragedy? Are they essential and equally important? Discuss.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.1)

Q.3 What are the various types of plots discussed by Aristotle? What is his conception of the ideal plot?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2)

Q.4 'Episodic plots are the worst', elucidate.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2)

Q.5 Critically examine Aristotle's conception of organic unity or wholeness of plot.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2)

Q.6 Define Aristotle's concept of the ideal tragic hero. What are the four essentials of successful characterisation?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.3, 3.4, 3.6)

Q.7 Examine critically Aristotle's view of tragic hero. And also show to what extent it is relevant to the modern concept of the tragic hero.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.4, 3.6)

Q.8 What does Aristotle mean when he says that 'there can be a tragedy without character, but none without plot'?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.1)

Q.9 'Plot is the soul of tragedy', explain.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.1)

Q.10 Discuss critically Aristotle's conception of Catharsis, or the functional and emotional effects of tragedy.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.0, 3.5)

Q.11 What, according to Aristotle, is the proper pleasure of tragedy?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.5)

Q.12 What, according to Aristotle, is the nature of poetic truth ? Elucidate.

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2)

Q.13 What are the three dramatic unities? Why are they necessary?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2)

Q.14 Explain the organic unity of a plot of tragedy ?

Ans. (See Section III : 3.2, Chapter VIII.)

Q.15 Bring out the salient features of similarity and difference between epic and the tragedy, as stated by Aristotle.

Ans. (See Section IV : 4.1.)

## **5.2 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the concept of unity of action in an imaginative composition, with reference to Aristotle's theory.
2. What is Dramatic Relief ? On what grounds Aristotle oppose the mingling of the tragic and the comic. Explain.
3. Write short notes on – Tragedy - Comedy, Unity of Time, Dramatic Relief, Catharsis, Hamartia or Tragic Flaw, Tragic hero, Anagnorisis, Peripeteia.
4. "Aristotle's doctrine of imitation requires both extension and limitation", elucidate.
5. How can the concept of Recognition / discovery be worked out in tragedy ?

## **5.3 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

- 1) Greek scientist and philosopher 'Aristotle' was born in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a) 382 BC
  - b) 384 BC
  - c) 386 BC
  - d) 380 BC

Ans :- **b) 384 BC**

2) Who was the famous disciple of Aristotle ? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Socrates
- b) Alexander the Great
- c) Ptolemy
- d) Plato

Ans :- **b) Alexander the Great**

3) What was the name of the school, established by Aristotle? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Lyceum
- b) Academy
- c) Gymnasium
- d) Alcemium

Ans :- **a) Lyceum**

4) Which of the following is not one of the six elements of the tragedy according to Aristotle? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Character
- b) Plot
- c) Reversal
- d) Spectacle

Ans :- **c) Reversal**

5) In the view of Aristotle metaphysics is referred \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Natural Philosophy
- b) First philosophy
- c) Epistemology
- d) Teleology

Ans :- **a) Natural Philosophy**

6) Anagnorisis is a term used by Aristotle for describing \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Moment of discovery by the protagonist.
- b) Reversal of fortune for the protagonist.

- c) Happy resolution of the plot.
- d) Convergence of the main plot and the sub plot.

Ans :- **a) Moment of discovery by the protagonist**

7) The soul of tragedy, according to Aristotle is\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Thought
- b) Character
- c) Plot
- d) Spectacle.

Ans :- **c) Plot**

8) The word “Catharsis” signifies \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Pontification
- b) Personification
- c) Purgation
- d) Publication.

Ans :- **c) Purgation**

9) Peripetia means\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Purgation of emotion
- b) tragic flaw
- c) Reversal of fortune
- d) Recognition of error

Ans :- **c) Reversal of Fortune**

10) What does Aristotle mean by imitation?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Imitation of an action
- b) Mimicry of Man
- c) Death of Hero
- d) Catharsis

Ans :- **a) Imitation of an action**



11) The opposite of hyperbole is \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) meiosis
- b) inversion
- c) anagnorisis
- d) synecdoche

Ans :- **a) meiosis**

12) The term “poetic justice”, to designate the idea that the good are rewarded and the evil punished was devised by \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Aristotle
- b) John Dryden
- c) Thomas Rhymer
- d) Ben Jonson

Ans :- **a) Thomas Rhymer**

#### **5.4 SUGGESTED READING**

The complete works of Aristotle in English may be found in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, W.D. Ross, ed., 12 vols. (Oxford, 1908-1952).

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No.: 11 - 14**

**SECTION : I-VII**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - III**

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**LONGINUS**  
**ON THE SUBLIME (DATES NOT KNOWN)**

**OBJECTIVES**

**SECTION I**

- 1.0 Chronological Table

**SECTION II**

- 2.0 Works of Longinus

**SECTION III**

- 3.0 Identity of the Author

**SECTION IV**

- 4.0 Introduction to *On The Sublime*
- 4.1 Critical Summary of the Text
- 4.2 Definition of Sublimity
- 4.3 Craftsmanship and Sublimity
- 4.4 Art of the Sublimity
- 4.5 Sublime : True and False
- 4.6 Sources of the Sublime
- 4.7 Pathways to achieve Sublimity
- 4.8 Decline of Great Literature

## **SECTION V : Additional Notes**

- 5.0 Longinus' 'Concept of Sublime'
- 5.1 Sublimity : Distinction and Excellence in Expression

## **SECTION VI**

- 6.0 Incidental Topics Raised in the Book
- 6.1 Practical Criticism
- 6.2 Longinus, The Critic
- 6.3 His Romanticism
- 6.4 The Value of His Criticism

## **SECTION VII : Model Questions and Answers**

- 7.0 Self-Assessment Questions
- 7.1 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.2 Multiple Choice Questions
- 7.3 Suggested Reading

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of Lessons 11-14 is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Longinus and also his work On The Sublime from the examination perspective.

## SECTION I

### STRUCTURE

#### 1.0 CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Dates unknown

1st or 3rd Century A. D.

1st Century A.D. Dionysius Longinus (rhetorician)

3rd Century A.D. Caesilius Longinus (Philosopher rhetorician)

## SECTION II

### STRUCTURE

#### 2.0 WORKS OF LONGINUS

*On the Sublime* (Peri Hypsous)

*On the Sublime* is a collection of the ancient Greek philosopher and critic Dionysius Longinus.

The work discusses the concept of the sublime in literature and writing, underscoring what makes writing powerful and exceptional.

## SECTION III

### STRUCTURE

#### 3.0 IDENTITY OF THE AUTHOR

We do not know for certain who wrote the Treatise traditionally known as *On the Sublime*. Some scholars ascribe it to Dionysius Longinus, a rhetorician of the first century A.D. and others ascribe it to Caesilius Longinus, a philosopher rhetorician of the third century A. D. As a matter of fact, the real author of the treatise is still a matter of controversy.

Francis Robortello, who first presented the work to modern readers in 1554, attributed it to Dionysius Longinus of Halicarnassus. Then arose the tradition that the work was a production of Caecilius Longinus, friend of Plotinus, Founder of Neo-Platonism, teacher of Porphyry at Athens, and unfortunate counsellor of the rebellious Palmyran Queen Zenobia. But the internal evidence, especially the range of quotations and allusions, from Homer to Caecilius and other Augustan rhetorician sufficiently argues for a Greek rhetorician at Rome (Dionysius ) in the first century. No reference to the essay from either Classical or Medieval times survives.

## SECTION : IV

### *ON THE SUBLIME*

#### STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Introduction to *On the Sublime* (Peri Hypsous)
- 4.1 Critical Summary of the text
- 4.2 Definition of Sublimity
- 4.3 Craftsmanship and Sublimity
- 4.4 Art of the Sublimity
- 4.5 Sublime: True and False
- 4.6 Sources of the Sublime
- 4.7 Pathways to achieve sublimity
- 4.8 Decline of Great Literature
- 4.0 INTRODUCTION TO *ON THE SUBLIME* (PERI HYP SOUS)

As the identity of the author remains shrouded in mystery so is the date of its composition. To compound our problems, the manuscript is incomplete. One-third of the original text is lost and what has come down to us is an imperfect copy of the original, mutilated and lacking coherence at several places. With some unfortunate gaps, the usual English version of the title itself is misleading : the key term *Hypsous*, does not really mean sublimity as is understood. Wordsworth is closer to the point when he writes: “Longinus treats of animated, impassioned, energetic, or, if you will, elevated writing.”

Despite gaps, the broad outline of the work is, however, clear and the work is of singular merit. There is no difficulty in understanding the main idea of the author. It is unique in its interpretation of the classical spirit, its sanity, its compelling enthusiasm, its freshness, and its unerring insight into essentials of art.

The treatise *On the Sublime* has wielded an immense influence on the development of critical thought from Boileau to the early nineteenth century.

#### **4.1 CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE TEXT**

Longinus adopts a very homely method in this treatise. In the very beginning, he addresses a young friend Postuminus Terenianus (identity unknown) and points out the inadequacies of the treatise. He remarks :

“It fell below the dignity of the whole subject, while it failed signally to grasp the essential points and conveyed to its reader but little of that particular help which it should be a writer’s principal aim to give.”

Here Longinus points out two things :

- (i) The treatment of the subject, and
- (ii) The revelation of the method

#### **4.2 DEFINITION OF SUBLIMITY**

Longinus endeavours to define sublime :

“Sublimity consists in a certain distinction and consummate excellence in expression and it is from this and no other source that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality and renown.”

Sublimity in literature does not persuade, it carries the reader away, almost irresistibly. Sometimes it might express itself through a single phrase like a flash of lightning, what Longinus means by the word ‘Sublime’ is ‘elevation’ or loftiness, all that raises style above the ordinary, and gives to it distinction in its widest and truest sense.

#### **4.3 CRAFTSMANSHIP AND SUBLIMITY**

Longinus says with repeated insistence that “the effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport.” He distinguishes between craftsmanship and sublimity. He strongly regards that it is the result of sublimity that transport arises. It is not literary artifice alone or the craftsmanship merely, which can germinate transport

bifurcating between craftsmanship and sublimity. Longinus has aptly remarked:

“We see skill in invention and due order and arrangement in matter, emerging as the hardwon result not of one thing, nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas sublimity flashes forth at the right moment, scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of orator in all its plenitude.”

#### **4.4 ART OF THE SUBLIMITY**

In this chapter, Longinus endeavours to answer whether there is such a thing as an art, the sublime or lofty. In this connection, he points out there are some who hold that those are entirely in error who would bring such matters under the precepts of art. They think that sublimity is a gift of nature and it has nothing to do with art. They say : “a lofty tone is innate and does not come by teaching; nature is the only art that can compass it.” Works of nature are, they think, made worse and altogether feebler when widened by the rules of art.

These views may be countered by two arguments:

- First, nature needs the help of some method to control its wild impulses.
- Second, the very fact that there are some elements of expression which are in the hands of nature alone, can be learnt from no other source but art. Art is to nature as good counsel is to good fortune. The expression of the sublime often needs the spur, but it also needs curb which is put by art alone.

Longinus gives his own view:

“But I maintain that this will be found to be otherwise if it be observed that, while as a rule sublimity is free and independent in matters of passion and elevation. Further neither is the original and vital underlying principle in all cases but system can define limits and fitting seasons and can also contribute the safest rules for use and practice.”

Knowledge has to guide sublime, when it goes its own way, when it suffers to be unstable and unballasted, when it is left at the mercy of mere momentum and ignorant audacity. It is true that it often needs the spur, but along with the curb. Longinus means that nature is necessary but it must be guided and helped by art.

#### 4.5     **SUBLIME: TRUE AND FALSE**

There are some defects of style which tend to spoil the sublime effect. These faults are turgidity, puerility, parenthesis and frigidity. All these faults emerge from the craze for novelty of thought. It is necessary to find out means by which these faults may be avoided. For this, it is essential to have a clear knowledge and appreciation of the true sublime. The real sublime uplifts our soul. It gives us joy and exalts our spirits. The more we read it, the more we enjoy it. Every time it evokes new ideas and feelings. It never grows stale. The true sublime “pleases all and always.”

False sublimity is marked by bombast language. Longinus supports his argument with a passage from Aeschylus to distinguish between false and real sublime:

Quell they the oven's far flung splendour - glow  
Ha, let me but one hearth - abider mark -  
One flame - wreath torrent - like I'll whirl on high  
I'll burn the roof, to cinders shrivel it' -  
Nay, now my chant is not of noble strain.

Tasteless *turgidity* is not to be appreciated even in a tragic play. Most especially in a tragedy, it is not allowed that there should be anything pseudo-tragic. He strongly maintains that, evils are the swellings, both in the body and in diction. They are inflated, unreal and threaten with the reverse of its aim, “for nothing is drier than a man who has the dropsy.”

*Puerility* is another vice, emerging from parade and pomp of language, tawdry and affected and frigid. While turgidity desires to transcend the limits of the sublime, the defect which is termed puerility is the direct anti-thesis of elevation, for it is utterly low and mean and the most ignoble vice of style.

*Frigidity* is a by-product in the process of creation of the ‘sublime.’ When passions and thoughts are not carried on true and faithful lines, they get a departure from the sublime and they drab forcibly into the quagmire of



unreality/pseudo-sublime. When a pedant tries to affect ‘miraculously elevated’ and when he is in constant search of such ‘odd and uncanny’ triflings to produce the so-called sublime, the execution of thoughts and passions become so faulty and affected that it looks quite shabby and unscholarly on the part of a pedant to take recourse to all such literary artifices.

When there is the cheap display of passion unwarranted by subject and the occasion, there is no sublime. Instead of passion, merely intoxicated emotions come forward and prevailing upon the intellect that they compel the pedant to give these a “materialized form”. Longinus says: “All these ugly and parasitical growth arise in literature from a single cause, that pursuit of novelty in expression of ideas which may be regarded as the fashionable craze of the day”

On account of the above vices, there ensues a gradual decay in sublime.

#### **4.6 SOURCES OF THE SUBLIME**

The Chief theoretical challenge of the essay, however, lies in a basic layout of a five-fold division of the “sources” of sublime. These five, announced and briefly defined in chapter – VIII, are:

- (i) The power of conceiving great thought (noeseis), the ability to grasp grand conceptions, which is only possible if the author is a truly noble soul. In this context, he quotes from Homer and from the Books of *Genesis* in the Bible. He cites an ode by Sappho (Greek lyric poetess, 580 B.C.).

Nobody can produce a sublime work unless his thoughts are sublime. Sublimity, says Longinus, “is the echo of greatness of soul ..... It is impossible for those whose whole lives are full of mean and servile ideas and habits, to produce anything that is admirable and worthy of an immortal life. It is only natural that great accents should fall from lips of those whose thoughts have always been deep and full of majesty.” Stately thoughts belong to the loftiest minds. That is, persons with mean ideas cannot produce anything that is admirable and worthy of immortality. The great writer must have genuine nobility of soul.

Therefore, he who would attain distinction of style must feed his soul on the works of the great masters, as Homer, Plato and Demosthenes, and capture

from them some of their own greatness. This reflects the classicism of Longinus. However, Longinus is not in favour of mere imitation but that “men catch fire from the spirit of others”, i.e. it is capturing something of the ancient spirit, the vital creative force which had gone to the making of the earlier masterpieces; and its effect he describes as that of illumination to the lofty thoughts.

This conception of grand ideas can be made effective by a suitable treatment of material, to bring home to the readers, the conception of the author, effectively and forcefully.

- (ii) Vehement and Impetuous Passion: Longinus promises a separate treatise on the vehement and inspired emotion, which has unfortunately not survived.

Longinus asserts that nothing contributes more to loftiness of tone in writing than genuine emotions. He says, “I would confidently affirm that nothing makes so much for grandeur as true emotions in the right place, for it inspires the words, as it were, with a wild gust of mad enthusiasm and fills them with divine frenzy.” It is for this reason that he prefers *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* and Demosthenes to Cicero. But the emotions have to be ‘true emotions’ and in ‘the right place.’

Lofty conception and strong passion are inseparable. Both are essential for producing the sublime effect. The first represents the creative urge and the second represents the expressive urge. Later, the romantics emphasized the importance of these two sources in the form of imagination and inspiration.

- (iii) Figures: For the third source, Longinus says that sublimity may derive from effective and unobtrusive use of rhetorical figures. He considers figures of speech very important. He devoted nearly one-third of his work to it. Here Longinus shows great discrimination and originality of thinking in his treatment of the subject. He tells that these devices of thought and speech, if judiciously employed, contribute to sublimity in no mean degree. The grandeur of a figure, however, depends on “its being employed in the right place and the right manner, on the right occasion, and with the right motive.” It strengthens the sublime and the sublime supports it.

A figure is at its best when the very fact that it is a figure escapes attention. Art lies in concealing art. This concealment is possible only if art is associated with beauty, sublimity, and passion. Thus, Longinus believes that figures are not “arbitrary devices invented by rhetoricians for mechanical application but rather a natural means of giving to style an element of fine surprise, something rooted in genuine emotion, responsive to the artistic sense of man, and thus capable of explanation in terms of human nature.” They are essential when the nature of the theme makes it allowable to amplify, to multiply or to speak in the tones of exaggeration or passion. To overlay every sentence with ornament is very pedantic. When a figure of speech is unrelated to passion, it creates a suspension of dishonesty and is divorced from sublimity.

Longinus figures out some important factors that make for sublimity, as:

- (a) Rhetorical question, (b) Asyndeton or the omission of conjunctions,
  - (c) Hyperbaton or inversion, (d) Periphrasis, (e) Polyptota,
  - (f) Diatyposis Regression, (g) Hyperbole
- (a) *Rhetorical questions* are used to make the speeches more effective and impressive. They stimulate a natural outburst of passion. They make the language not only more elevated but also more convincing. But they should spring from a natural outburst of passion and should be inspired by the occasion. Strong passion gives spontaneous birth to relevant words and their arrangement, which adds to their impetuosity of effect. (b) *Asyndeton* consists in broken sentences. In this figure, the conjunction between words and clauses is omitted. (c) *Hyperbatons* are departures in the order of expressions or ideas from the natural sequences, and they bear the very stamp of vehement emotion. Longinus says that “men moved by passion want to express themselves in disjointed fashion, skipping from subject to subject, indulging in irrelevancies, rapidly turning now this way, now that, thus setting at defiance by their unexpected movements the recognized laws of normal and logical speech. When a person speaks under the stress of a strong passion the logical order tends to be broken and he jumps from one thought to another. This figure, gives a touch of reality to speech and produces the effect of originality.

And art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature hits the mark when she contains art hidden within her.” (d) *Periphrasis* adds greatly to the beauty of expression. But if it is not handled with discrimination, it tends to degenerate into a trivial and burdensome expression. Great restraint is, therefore needed in the use of this figure. (e) *Polyptota* is an excellent weapon of oratory based on the changes of cases, tenses, numbers, genders, etc. They diversify and enliven exposition, thereby impart beauty, vigour, and elevation to style. These figures may involve the following changes; (a) Plural for singular and vice-versa; (b) Present for the past; (c) Interchange of persons; (d) Change of case, gender, number etc. (e) *Anaphora* or repetition adds to the weight and dignity of expression. (f) *Diatyposis* is based on vivid description.

Main contention of Longinus is that if figures are properly treated, they are a valuable means of giving emotional quality to style, and heightening the expression.

- (iv) Nobility of Diction : Longinus says that the source of sublime may be found in ‘notable language,’ including metaphor and simile and other verbal embellishments. It includes choice and arrangement of words. The discussion of diction is incomplete because four leaves of this part of the treatise are lost. However, Longinus says that when suitable and striking words are used, they have “a moving and seductive effect,” and lend “grandeur, beauty and mellowness, dignity, force, power, and a sort of glittering charms” to the style. They breathe voice into dead things. “Beautiful words” he adds, “are in truth the very light or illumination of thought”; and it may be said that it is here that Longinus approaches the masteries of art. But he sounds a word of caution to the writers. He says, “It should be noted that imposing language is not suitable for every occasion. When the object is trivial, to invest it with grand and stately words would have the same effect as putting a full-sized tragic mask on the head of a little child.” Stately words must be used very carefully; otherwise they will make the whole expression artificial and puerile. Ordinary and striking words should be preferred, but they should always add to the gravity of the subject matter.”

Proper use of metaphors is pleaded by Longinus, at the proper time, “when the passions roll like a torrent and sweep a multitude of them down their resistless flood.” There cannot be any hard and fast rule regarding the number of metaphors to be used in a given passage when the passion is strong, the reader or the audience is swayed and hardly cares to count the use of metaphors. All impassioned expression involve the use of metaphors and the metaphors contribute to the sublime.

- (v) Harmony in Composition: Finally, Longinus cites the general dignity and elevation of style as a source of sublimity; this extends from the particular arrangement of the words to the broad structure of the work, where he insists on the well-established concepts of organic unity, though it is notably lower on his list of priorities.

Harmonious composition blends thought, emotion, figures, and words themselves – the preceding four elements of sublimity. Such an arrangement has not only “a natural power of persuasion and of giving pleasure but also the marvellous power of exalting the soul and swaying the heart of men.” It makes the audience or the reader, share the emotions of the artist.

Longinus is of the view that if the elements of grandeur be separated from one another, the sublimity is scattered and made to vanish but when organised into a compact system and still further encircled in a chain of harmony they gain a living voice by being merely rounded into a period. It is the sense of harmony that gives an organic structure to a work of art.

Periodic structure has its own effect in securing sublimity. Excessive brevity sometimes spoils the sublime effect. Triviality of expressions, the use of vulgar words and idioms, and low and undignified vocabulary tend to disfigure sublimity.

A harmonious composition alone sometimes makes up for the deficiency of the other elements. A proper rhythm is one of the elements in it. Negatively, deformity and not grandeur is the result, if the composition is either extremely concise or unduly prolix. The one cripples the thought and the other overextends it.

When Longinus discusses the sources of the sublime, he does not hesitate to mention among them those that belong to art or literature. He realizes the

importance of both nature and art in creating sublimity in literature, as nature provides the “Spur” and art puts the “curb” on fancy going astray. The greatness of art lies in their happy union.

#### **4.7 PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE SUBLIMITY**

Longinus has delineated certain paths to achieve sublimity. Some of them are : (1) Great souls, (2) Proper selection and organisation of material, (3) Amplification, (4) Imitation, (5) Imagery or proper handling of figures.

Sub section 4.6 deals with the main sources of sublimity. Sub section 4.7 gives a hint of the additional sources which are important in the process of creation of a work of art.

‘Great thoughts spring from great souls’, men with servile ideas cannot produce immortal literature. The truly eloquent must be free from low and ignoble thoughts. Wise and systematic selection of the subject matter, its medium of expression and the harmonious combination of events, emotions, passions and feelings along with the artifices used by the creature into a single whole also produce sublimity. Amplification or the accumulation of all the relevant details of the subject, imports power and magnitude to the style. Amplification embraces a multitude of details, many ideas and words. In comparison, sublimity consists in elevation, often comprised in a single thought. It is qualitative concept as compared to amplification, which is a quantitative concept.

Ancient masters of art are the standards of excellence and their imitation and emulation leads to the thoughts of sublimity. In the process of creating a piece of art, the creator should put three questions before himself :

- (i) How would Homer or Plato have expressed a particular idea.
- (ii) If Homer or Plato were to listen to what he composed, what would be their reaction;
- (iii) How would all future ages endure those expressions.

The above questions will serve as a touchstone of sublimity and will stimulate the creator to infuse his art with those emotions, which will lead the beholder to the height of sublime thoughts.

Rhetorical images, while presenting vivid description and poetical images in captivating the emotions and feelings of the reader lead him to sublimity. Images are drawn from the proper handling of the figures in the whole set-up of the work. The proper figure in right place, on the right occasion, in the right manner and with a right motive, need many hardships on the part of the writer, but the outcome is the highest and purest expression of emotions which touch those of the reader and he feels one and the same with the piece of art and enjoys sublimity.

Figures should be used in a natural manner. The artificiality of figures rouses suspicion and irritation. It distracts the reader. Art lies in concealing art. “Wherefore a figure is at its best when the very fact that it is a figure escapes attention.”

Low and undignified vocabulary also tends to disfigure sublimity. Broken and agitated movement of language spoils the sublime effect. Excessive conciseness of expression also tends to lower the sublime, ‘since grandeur is marred when the thought is brought into too narrow a compass’. Ill-sounding words and vulgar idioms should be avoided.

On the defects of style, Longinus says, “All these ugly and parasitical growths arise in literature from a single cause, that pursuit of novelty in expression of ideas which may be regarded as the fashionable craze of the day. The defects in the art trap spring for the most part, from the same sources as the good points. Hence, while beauties of expression and touch of sublimity and charming elegancies withal, are favourable to effective and wholesome composition, yet these very things are the elements and foundation, not only of success but also of the contrary.” For example, to call a woman, a thorn of eye or to call the eyeball ‘the princess of the eye’ for the sake of novelty will create not sublimity but frigidity.

#### **4.8 DECLINE OF GREAT LITERATURE**

Longinus thinks that it is characteristic of human nature to find fault in the age in which one lives. And this nature results in the decline of the merits of art. It is the moral decline of the people. People have

started attaching more importance to the materialistic values of life and they only go forward for praise, money and pleasure. The true passion and emotions are lost. Man ignores his original human nature. He suppresses it to come up with the artificial man-made standards of the society, which have show but no spirit. And Longinus believes that great literature springs from great and lofty souls and not from those with whom the world is too much.

However, some critics felt that the decline of the truly great literature was due to the lack of incentive which democracy provided to the men of genius in earlier times.

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## SECTION V

### ADDITIONAL NOTES

#### STRUCTURE

5.0 Longinus' Concept of Sublime

5.1 Sublimity : Distinction and Excellence in Expression

#### 5.0 LONGINUS' CONCEPT OF SUBLIME

"Great utterance" says Longinus "is the echo of greatness of the soul." It is impossible that those whose lives are trivial and servile should flash out anything wonderful and worthy of immortality. Great literature is thus, the creation of instinctive genius. Thoughts that are lofty and awe-inspiring find their natural expression in exalted phrase. Such loftiness of thought is normally a gift of nature rather than an acquired quality. But art can help in putting a curb on the wild and licentious tendencies of nature. Fine writing, according to Longinus, needs the spur as well as curb. Both nature and art are necessary for the creation of the sublime.

Great thoughts spring from great souls. The truly eloquent must be free from the low and ignoble thoughts. Men with mean and servile ideas cannot produce immortal literature or art. Great minds can lead the path to sublime. So the first source of the sublime is the grasp of great thoughts. A thought, even when it is not uttered, is at times admirable or sublime. Such is the silence of Ajax in *Odyssey*. The spirit is generous and aspiring in Browning and Wordsworth. There is true eloquence.

The sublime thought is expressed in the grand style, and such a thought comes from the true souls. Longinus observes; "the lawgiver of the Jews having formed an adequate conception of the Supreme Being, gave it adequate expression in the opening words of his "Law," "God said let there be light and there was light," etc. Longinus then ponders over the constitution of the sublime.

"The sublime consists in a certain loftiness and consummateness of language, and it is by this and this only that the greatest poets and prose writers have won pre-eminence and lasting fame." And;

“For a work of genius does not aim at persuasion, but ecstasy of lifting the reader out of himself. The wonder of it, wherever and whenever it appears, startles us; it prevails where the persuasive or agreeable may fail; for persuasion depends mainly on ourselves, but there is no fighting against the sovereignty of genius. It imposes its irresistible will upon us all.

Then he says,

“Where there is only skill in invention and laborious arrangement of matter a whole treatise, let alone a sentence or two, will scarcely avail to throw light on a subject. But the sublime at the critical moment shoots forth and tears the whole thing to pieces and like a thunderbolt, and in a flash reveals all the author’s power.”

Here is the most perfectly definite statement of a doctrine of sublime. The sublime effect of literature, for Longinus is attained not by argument, but by revelation or illumination. Its appeal is not through the reason, but what we should call imagination. Its effect upon the mind is immediate, like a flash of lightning upon the eye.

The transport to the elevated zone is, as Longinus believes, both subjective and objective. It is subjective in a double sense; it springs from a lofty soul and at the same time it places much stress on the power of introspection in a reader. The value of the work is to be ultimately stressed by its power to carry away a reader. There is, however another implication. There are some elements of style and structure, which definitely contribute to the grandeur and elevation of a work. Since the quality of transport is the result of the grandeur and passion of the work of art, partly, contributed by art, the quality may be objective also. Here Longinus comes close to the modern critic.

To Longinus, the function of literature was more than delight or moral instruction. It was to rise the soul to sublimity. He discovered that the masterpieces of Greek classical literature of Homer, Sappho, Pindar or Aeschylus, were great for a different reason altogether for their sublimity. It is the test of the great literature; its capacity to move the reader to ecstasy – caused by an irresistible magic of speech, a condition of trance–spell boundness

by what the writer says, he can neither think nor feel except what the artist makes him think or feel. And such a work has the quality of sublime.

### **5.1 SUBLIMITY : DISTINCTION AND EXCELLENCE IN EXPRESSION**

According to Longinus, sublimity is an eminence and excellence of language. It carries the reader to the height of lofty thoughts. This sublimity appears in a timely, vigorous expression, which induces in the listener/reader a mood of a trance. In this mood, he loses his own identity and is swayed by an irresistible power, becomes one with the work of art and is far away from the physical existence of his body. Such a sublime expression illumines the subject chosen for discussion or presentation.

Merely good and noble emotions or passions do not create sublimity. If the great passions are not properly regulated, there will be chaos. They have to be curbed and regulated properly. Similarly, genius gets spoilt if it is not well-controlled by art. It is through art that proper evaluation of genius can be arrived at. And to save oneself from the risks and dangers, which lead to the negative side of sublimity, teaching or guidance is necessary. These dangers are turgidity, puerility, parenthesis and frigidity. All these presuppose a misdirected craze. Longinus seeks to tell how they can be avoided.

Hence, the sublime is related to the grasp of language. For it, one needs proper handling of diction. (Please consult the related sections).

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## SECTION : VI

### STRUCTURE

- 6.0 Incidental Topics Raised in the Book
- 6.1 Practical Criticism
- 6.2 Longinus, The Critic
- 6.3 His Romanticism
- 6.4 The Value of His Criticism

### 6.0 INCIDENTAL TOPICS RAISED IN THE BOOK

Apart from the principal subject indicated by the title of the work, many incidental topics, allied with literature and its artist are discussed by the author in his characteristically cogent and well-informed way. Sections xxxiii-xxxvi, for example, are devoted to the consideration of the interesting question whether the final judgement of the quality of a work of art should rest on the lofty but imperfect excellence or on the flawless workmanship; if faulty genius should get precedence over immaculate mediocrity or vice versa. The author personally believes that lofty genius is far removed from flawlessness, and correctness generally incurs the risk of pettiness – ‘In the sublime, as in great fortunes, there must be something which is overlooked.’ Low and average talents remain, as a rule, free from errors because they never run the risk or seek to scale the heights, while ‘great endowments prove insecure because of their very greatness and even Homer nods at many places’. Yet the author’s conviction remains unshaken that excellence higher in quality, the ‘brave disorder’ of genius, should always be voted in the first place because of its sheer elevation of spirit and nobility of soul, if for no other reason. Many illustrations follow to clinch this conviction but we have space only for one which refers to the comparative estimate of Hyperides and Demosthenes, two of the most celebrated orators of antiquity. The former has a number of excellences and remains flawless by all rules of grammar and principles of rhetoric; but he falls far short of the supreme dignity of the latter who is lacking in a whole list of the virtues which contribute to the beauty of a

discourse. "But Demosthenes draws, as from a store, excellences allied to the highest sublimity and perfected to the utmost; the tone of lofty speech, living passions, copiousness, readiness, speed and that power and vehemence of his which forbid approach. Having absorbed within himself these mighty gifts which we may deem heaven-sent (for it would not be right to term them human) he routs all comers even where the qualities he does not possess are concerned, and overpowers with thunder and with lightning the orators of every age. One could sooner face, with unflinching eyes, a descending thunder-bolt than meet with steady gaze his bursts of passion in their swift succession."

This admiration of the highest excellence in composition as compared with an all-pervading accuracy is easily accountable if we remember the quality and composition of the human mind and the design of Nature in framing it. Nature has created man and placed him in the vast universe to be the spectator of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirant for honour. So she implanted in his soul the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and above the human height. "Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth."

No wonder, therefore, that by a natural impulse we admire not the small stream, clear, sparkling and useful though it may be, but a mighty river; not tiny flame kindled with our own hand, but the heavenly fires though they are oft shrouded in darkness, and are dilated with wonder and awe to behold the craters of Etna (the great volcano) "whose eruptions throw up stones from its depths and great masses of rock and, at times, pour forth rivers of that pure and unmixed subterranean fire."

So manifestations of the sublime in literature, though far removed from faultlessness, rise nonetheless above what is mortal; that all other qualities prove their possessors to be men but sublimity raises them near the majesty of God; and that, while immunity from errors relieves from censure, it is grandeur that excites admiration. It is needless to add that a single touch of the sublime

redeems a multitude of petty errors in writers, like Homer, Plato and Demosthenes. Hence, it is that their greatness is still preserved from the fangs of envy and perversity of judgement and shall remain intact 'as long as earth's waters shall flow, and her tall trees burgeon and bloom'. Yet, art is needed for the correction and guidance of sublimity, for it is the conjunctions of nature with art which tends to ensure perfection. In the concluding section of the treatise, the author pauses to examine the causes responsible for 'so great and world-wide a dearth of high utterance' in his age despite the presence of men naturally gifted and well-equipped with knowledge and art. Should we agree with the general verdict that democracy and freedom are the foster mothers of art and imaginative literature and with their disappearance large discourse languishes like plants in stony soil? The author, however, has, what seems to him to be, a more convincing argument to offer. He attributes the decline of letters to 'those passions which occupy, as with troops, our present age and utterly harry and plunder it'. Love of money and love of pleasures have made the people their thralls or drowned us body and soul in their depths. These two vices open the gates to others and pave the way for the general corruption of mind and character and thus blast all love of real greatness and glory. He mournfully states that among the banes of nature, which our age suffers from, 'one must reopen that half-heartedness in which the life of all of us, with few exceptions is passed; for we do not labour or exert ourselves except for the sake of praise or pleasure, never for those solid benefits which are worthy objects of our own efforts and of the respect of others'. The main drift of the argument points to the dictum that great literature and little minds go ill together.

## **6.1 PRACTICAL CRITICISM**

The treatise *On the Sublime* has a large and liberal infusion of practical criticism designed to support the theoretical arguments of the author. He does not only refer to the nature of sublimity but provides illustrations of it from the best known authors, ranging from Homer to Cicero. The process naturally results in brief but extremely suggestive and cogent expositions of the essential qualities of poets, orators, dramatists and prose writers. But the most remarkable feature of this criticism is the employment of the comparative method which is not only pervasive but also admirable and illuminating. The best illustration of the author's characteristic mode and quality of style is afforded by the

passage dealing with the comparison between Demosthenes, the master of Greek eloquence, and his Roman counterpart, Cicero :- “Demosthenes is characterised by sublimity which is for the most part rugged; Cicero by profusion. The former through vehemence— and in his speed, power and intensity – can consume, as it were, by fire and carry all before him like a thunderbolt or flash of lightening. Cicero, on the other hand, after the manner of a wider-spread conflagration, rolls on with all devouring flames, having within him an ample and abiding store of fire, distributed now at this point, now at that, and fed by an unceasing succession”.

An interesting variation of this criticism is seen in the comparative study of the Homeric epics and their eventual ascription to two different phases of the author’s artistic career. *Iliad*, for him, is the expression of Homer’s maturity, while *Odyssey*, of his old age. He observes, “*Iliad*, which was written at the height of his inspiration, is full of action and conflict, while the *Odyssey*, for the most part, consists of narrative, as is characteristic of old age. In *Odyssey* Homer may be likened to a “sinking sun, whose grandeur remains without its intensity”. He goes on to remark that in the latter poem his sublimities are fitful and there is not the same profusion of accumulated passions, nor the supple and oratorical style, packed with images drawn from real life. Here the reader perceives the ebb and flow of greatness, and a fancy rowing in the fabulous and the incredible, ‘as though the ocean were withdrawing into itself and were being laid within its own confines’. Apart from this prevalence of the fabulous over the real, the reader also notices a tendency towards the delineation of characters and manners, another symptom of the decline of his genius.

At the same time, we notice in his practical criticism an anticipation of what is known as analytical method, that is the analysis of passages and single pieces so as to discover the appropriateness of words, epithets, and images, and their combined effect to produce the peculiar impression desired by the author. The best known example of this method is certainly the brief suggestive analysis of one of the love lyrics of Sappho, which occurs in section X. A single remark will suffice the purpose here: Uniting contradictions, she is, at one and the same time hot and cold, in her senses and out of her mind,

for she is either terrified or at the point of death. The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions”.

## **6.2 LONGINUS, THE CRITIC**

One of the memorable remarks, which abound in the treatise *On the Sublime*, refers to the dignity of the critic’s office – ‘Judgement in literature is the final fruit of ripe scholarship’. Here the reader of the book may find the essence of his own impression wrought by the performance of Longinus as a critic of literature. The book reveals not only the catholicity of his literary taste and wide range of his learning, but also the sanity and soundness of his judgement and his keen insight into the secrets and sources of the lasting appeal of great literature. The treatise is “a veritable store-house of quotations, illustrating excellences and defects both of manner and of matter, both of form and spirit. Reference is made to as many as fifty Greek writers, whose dates range over something like a thousand years. The author’s quality as a critic is most decisively seen in his preference of the best”. His sensitiveness to the examples of sublimity in his favourite authors is as remarkable as the readiness of his trained critical faculty to discover ‘the why and wherefore’ of his taste. Thus, his method becomes an illustration of Coleridge’s remark that the function of good criticism is ‘not merely to point out the merits of a composition, but also to lay down the principles of good writing’.

In his theoretical discussion, he re-interprets some of the old principles and prescribes not a few of his own inventions, which are of abiding interest and permanent value. His remarks about the significance of nature and art, the comparative estimate of imperfect genius and flawless mediocrity; his attitude towards the two extreme types of style, turgid and meretricious (Asian) and low and homely (Attic), are all agent and illuminating. In his practical criticism, he employs the methods which may appeal to the modern minds, because they have become the common tools of critics these days. We have already referred to his application of comparative and analytical methods. Here we mark a great advance over Plato and Aristotle who were familiar with only one language and could not summon to their aid the



objective standard which is furnished by the critic's acquaintance with types of compositions in many languages. Longinus has shown familiarity with three languages at least, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and this perhaps explains the catholicity of his taste and his boldness in pointing out the errors and blemishes in the writings of the greatest masters.

### **6.3 HIS ROMANTICISM**

With Longinus, the classical criteria of literary perfection undergoes a change. It had been supposed hitherto by the Greek and Roman critics alike that if a writer followed the rules of the art, as deduced from the practice of the ancient masters, he could, with due help from nature, attain to perfection. 'The whole tendency of classical criticism is in this direction. The provision of large numbers of positive rules inevitably suggests – to the feebler minds, at any rate – that if you do not break these rules it will be all right with you. The nervous terror of excess has an even stronger influence in the same direction.' Much of Longinus' own criticism follows this very line – his attempt to reduce sublimity 'to the dry bones of rule and precepts' and the injunctions he lays down for the use of the artistic aids to sublimity, which read like those laid down by Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, and the rest. But in at least three ways, Longinus breaks with this tradition. His new test of literary excellence, transport, is one. Instruction, delight, and persuasion, all of which kept the reader within the bounds of reason, summed up the classical ideal of literary perfection. Into this, Longinus introduces 'the storm and fury of a romantic movement' by admitting the full play of the passions in the production of a masterpiece. This freedom is the very basis of the romantic temper. It is impatient of rules and follows its own bent. But it is true that Longinus does not leave it entirely free. He lays down rules for its guidance, based on nature's own practice. 'Mere grandeur', he says, 'is exposed to danger when left without the control of reason and the ballast of scientific method. For the great passions need the curb as often as the spur'. He therefore tempers romance 'with what is sanest in classicism'. Secondly, as stated earlier, his protest against the traditional limitation of the number of metaphors to not more than two at a time is in a romantic strain. In doing so, he rises above 'the narrow inductions of his predecessors' to appreciate literature dispassionately. Finally, while the classicists

judged a work by its 'faultlessness' or close conformity to rules, Longinus sees no merit in it, if it does not at the same time lead to sublimity. 'Suppose', he says, 'we assume the existence of a writer who is really immaculate and unimpeachable, is it not worthwhile in this connection to raise the general question, whether in poetry and prose we should prefer grandeur with some attendant faults, or a style of mediocre quality, which never stumbles and is always free from error?' And the answer he gives is as illuminating as the question. 'Perhaps it is inevitable,' he says, 'that the low and average natures remain as a rule free from faults and secure of blame, because they never run a risk and never aim at heights. In great natures, on the other hand, their very greatness brings them insecurity.' So he prefers the 'faulty' Homer to the 'faultless' Apollonius, the 'faulty' Demosthenes to the almost 'faultless' Hyperides. 'Correctness', he says, 'escape censure; but sublimity commands positive reverence. Each of these supreme authors often redeems all his mistakes by one sublime and happy touch'. The observance of the rules, consequently, is no criterion of perfection, and this is what romanticism much later will say too. Scott-James therefore rightly calls him 'the first romantic critic'.

#### **6.4 THE VALUE OF HIS CRITICISM**

It has already been stated that much of what Longinus says had been said by others before him. In his remarks on the use of figures, choice of words, ornamentation of language, and artistic arrangement of the whole, he follows Aristotle and the rest. These were more or less the commonplaces of the art of rhetoric which every rhetorician had to take note of. In his scientific approach, too, he resembles Aristotle : he says nothing that he has not fully observed and analysed for himself. But in his main thesis – his theory of transport – he rises above all his predecessors, Greek or Roman. Here he transcends all rules and pleads for a purely aesthetic appreciation of literature. He admires the Greek classics not because they observe the rules of their 'kind' – sometimes they do not – but because they excite, move, transport, elevate. And any art that does so is sublime even though it might be faulty in form. Homer is great for all his formal blemishes. Longinus, therefore is still for the Greek standards of excellence but he measures these more by their spirit than their form. To catch the former, which is elusive, is a higher thing

than to imitate the latter, which is just a matter of rule and compass. This is love of the classics with a difference – aesthetic rather than formal, romantic rather than classical. But his aesthetics are ultimately grounded in the thoughts and emotions of noble minds. For none of the others can produce literature that is sublime. He sees an intimate connection between the greatness of soul and the greatness of speech. Here he shows himself a disciple of Plato, to whom also excellence in art was but a reflection of excellence of character. Longinus, thus, is three characters in one : a classicist in taste, a romanticist in temper, and an idealist at heart. His conception of sublimity partakes of each of these three elements. Through it, he interprets classicism anew to his own age, offers a hand to the future romanticists, and gives a meaning and purpose to art by allying it with what is noblest in human nature.

The importance of Longinus lies in the fact that he asked different questions from those asked by Plato or Aristotle. He was more concerned with the peculiar effect that poetry exercises on its readers by rousing their passions. He knew of Plato's and Aristotle's view that poetry yielded a peculiar pleasures of its own. He also knew Horace's idea that poetry instructs, delights and persuades. He knew of a great poet like Homer's gift of making men glad; of a great dramatist like Aristophanes' power "to make men better in some respects"; and finally of the rhetorician's gift to persuade men by means of harmonious language and most skilfully arranged argument. But from his personal experience, Longinus feels that great literature does something more than merely instructing, delighting and persuading; there was something in the experience of literature which was beyond the scope of this formula.

Being a student of Plato he must have recalled that passage in the *Ion*, where Plato gives expression to his Theory of Inspiration :

"The Muse first of all inspires men herself ..... For all good poets, epic as well as lyric compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains. For the poet is a light and winged and

holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and 'his mind is no longer in him; when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles'".

It was on the basis of his theory that the poet is an inspired person who utters forth song when he is not in his right mind, that Plato condemned him as an irrational person who by appealing to the emotions of people misleads them. Longinus, taking the same stand, and believing in the theory of inspiration that the poet is a "possessed" person, discovered that it is here that the strange power of the poet and his art lies. He did not try to probe the source of the power, but was more concerned with its effect on the audience or readers. He found that the highest type of poetry, which is lofty and sublime, has the effect not of mere pleasure of persuasion, but of ecstasy, and transport – "lifting out of oneself". This passion, intensity, exaltation, transport was the fundamental condition of the sublimity in literature. Giving his definition of the sublime in literature, Longinus says :

"The Sublime consists in a certain loftiness and consummateness of language, and it is by this only that the greatest poets and prose-writers have won pre-eminence and lasting fame."

And he goes on:

"For a work of genius does not aim at persuasion, but ecstasy—or lifting the reader out of himself. The wonder of it, wherever and whenever it appears, startles us; it prevails where the persuasive or agreeable may fail, for persuasion depends mainly on ourselves, but there is not fighting against the sovereignty of genius. It imposes its irresistible will upon us all."

"Where there is only skill in invention and laborious arrangement of matter, a whole treatise, let alone a sentence or two, will scarcely avail to throw light on a subject. But the Sublime at the critical moment shoots forth and tears the whole thing to pieces like a thunderbolt, and in a flash reveals all the author's power."

This discovery of Longinus that great literature transports, and that this sublime effect of literature is attained, not by argument but by revelation or illumination, is the first 'effective' theory of literature. According to Longinus, the value of a work of literature is assessed by introspection on the part of the reader; if he is carried away, transported, moved to ecstasy by the grandeur and passion of the work, then the work is good. Now because this sensation of being moved and transported is enjoyable, and because it results from nobility and grandeur in a work of literature, Longinus connects the pleasures of literature to the highest human faculties. The Greek word sublime can be translated in English as height or elevation, and the qualities which are associated with literature are capable of instantaneously creating in the reader a sense of being carried to new heights of passionate experience. According to Longinus, the greatest virtue of a piece of literature is sublimity. It is this virtue which makes a work, truly impressive in spite of certain minor defects in it. And to be sublime is the ultimate justification and function of literature.

Proceeding further, Longinus explains that great literature is that which has the power of exciting and arousing the reader not only once but repeatedly. Moreover, it should produce this impression among men "of different pursuits, lives, ambitions, ages and languages." Only then its greatness is beyond question. Though being the first romantic critic, Longinus did not plead for licence, but tried to impose classical discipline on the poets as well as critics. Just as he laid down for the critic that "the judgement of literature is the long-delayed reward of much endeavour", so he also insisted that the poet must study to master the technique of his art. "Nature", it is true, is the first thing. Nature must "supply". But Nature cannot dispense with Art, whose function is to "regulate". He wants that even the greatest of poets who are endowed with poetic genius, of the highest order, should also be cautious that no blunders may creep in their writing even from oversight. Speaking of Homer, he says that he had "observed not a few errors in Homer and the other great writers," and hastens to add that he is "not in the least pleased with such blunders". He warns the poets against the use of bombast, affectation and conceits, and reminds them that these defects can be traced to one common cause – in thought—an orgy in which the present generation revels." He also insists on the choice of words, the ornament of style, and dignity of composition.

But after discussing these external trappings of literature, Longinus comes back to his main point that a literary work can be considered great only by its effects on the reader of moving him to passionate excitement. He repeats his assertion : “I would confidently affirm that nothing makes so much for grandeur as a true emotion in the right place, for it inspires the words, as it were, with a wild gust of mad enthusiasm and fills them with mad frenzy.” The purpose of literature is to move, excite, elevate, transport, and it is the duty of the critic to see how this is achieved by showing which elements are best suited to produce this result. Believing that a great writer must have genuine nobility of soul, Longinus also pointed out : “It is impossible that those whose lives are trivial and servile, should flash out anything wonderful and worthy of immortality.” Milton later expressed the same view when he said : “He who would not be frustrate of hope to write well ought himself to be a great poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourable things”.

From what has been stated above, it is clear that Longinus was great original critic, who discovered something new and different from what Plato and Aristotle had discovered. He succeeded in opening men’s eyes to new aspects of literature. His manner of presenting his point of view is also enthusiastic, subjective and lively – features which are not present in the works of earlier critics. His great treatise *On the Sublime*, is characterised by sincerity, generosity of judgement and scholarly modesty. It shows also the author’s directness of vision and an instinct for seeking the basic principles of literature.

The greatest contribution of Longinus as a critic was that in an age of confused standards, he turned men’s attention to the ideals of Greek classical art. Unlike Horace and other Roman critics who were more concerned with the technical and formal tendencies of classical literature, Longinus alone succeeded in recapturing its very spirit, and explaining its unchanging principles. Thus, he may be termed as the best exponent of the genuine classical spirit. He was also the first romantic critic, because he was the first to emphasise that a great piece of literature has in it that sublimity and loftiness which transports, moves, carries away, and lifts the reader out of himself. But his romantic

enthusiasm did not allow licence and unrestrained liberty. Having a classical training, he maintained the balance between genius and unimpassioned hard work, and laid stress on the need for fitness, selection and a fine adjustment of means to ends. He may therefore be considered as the last of classical critics who had the touch of romanticism in him. Thus, he anticipates much that is modern in critical work. His concern with the essence rather than with the form of literature, his understanding of the part played by imagination and the feelings in a creative work, his efforts at literary interpretation and appreciation, and his catholic outlook, are no doubt 'modern' tendencies in criticism, which re-appeared after a lapse of centuries of dry and formal criticism.

Longinus combined within him the faculties which were characteristic of the greatest of his predecessors – Plato and Aristotle. Like Aristotle's, his approach to literature was analytical based on existing Greek literature, and he used the inductive, psychological and historical methods. But he also had the spiritual fervour and idealism of Plato for whom he had the warmest admiration. It is this wonderful combination of opposite qualities, - analytical rationalism and impassioned enthusiasm – which has given him a unique position in the history of literary criticism. By revealing some of the fundamental aesthetic truths about literature, he has exercised a lasting and stimulating influence in the field of literary taste. In his treatise *On the Sublime*, there is no dead matter; on the other hand, there is much in it that is vital, expressed in a memorable fashion. He is also one of those critics whose style is worthy of their thought. Like Plato, he is full of rich metaphors, compounds and poetical expressions. There is no doubt that Longinus is one of the world's greatest literary critics.

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**SECTION VII**  
**MODEL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**STRUCTURE**

- 7.0 Self-Assessment Questions
- 7.1 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 7.3 Suggested Reading

**7.0 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Write a note on the contribution of Longinus.
- Q.2 Examine critically Longinus' definition of the Sublime. What are his views regarding the nature of the Sublime ?
- Q.3 Show that "the sublime is certain loftiness and distinction in style". What are the sources of sublimity ?
- Q.4 The sublime arises when, "noble and lofty thoughts find their natural expression in a lofty language". Elucidate.
- Q.5 What, according to Longinus, are the vices of the sublime ?
- Q.6 Explain the point : 'sublimity is the echo of a noble mind'.
- Q.7 What are the five sources of sublimity ? Explain their nature.
- Q.8 Longinus greatly emphasizes the use of figures in literature. Comment.
- Q.9 What are the different devices of language to be used in literature to attain sublimation of emotions and passions, according to Longinus?
- Q.10 Examine Longinus' discussion of the use and misuse of metaphor and metaphorical description.
- Q.11 How does Longinus distinguish the true sublime from the false one? Explain in your words.
- Q.12 "Though Longinus was the first to expound the doctrines upon which romanticism rests, he turned and tempered them with what is sanest in



classicism” (James-Scott). Analyse his conception of the sublime and substantiate the truth of this opinion.

Or

Discuss Longinus as the first romantic critic.

- Q.13 What according to Longinus, is the criterion of excellence in a great work of literature ?

Or

Sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression.

- Q.14 ‘*On the Sublime* shows a radically different approach from Aristotle’ (David Daiches). Discuss.
- Q.15 Comment on the contribution of Longinus to literary criticism.
- Q.16 Pope eulogises Longinus as “bold Longinus”, an ardent judge, the fountain of “great sublime”. What is your opinion ?
- Q.17 Discuss Longinus as classicist in taste, a romanticist in temper, and an idealist at heart.

## **7.1 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

### **Q. Define Sublime and its Sources**

Ans. Who Longinus was and when he lived are alike unknown. But the famous treatise, *On the Sublime*, is generally attributed to him, although it is sometimes doubted, too, whether it was written by a person of that name. For the manuscripts of the work, particularly the Paris manuscript of the tenth century which the later ones seem to follow, mention what look like three names, ‘Dionysius or Longinus’ and ‘Dionysium Longinus’, which neither singly nor combined belong to any known person. The uncertainty of the date of the work has added to the difficulty. Some believe it to be a work of the third century A.D., identifying the author with Caesilius Longinus, Minister of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra (a Syrian protectorate of Rome); and some maintain that

it could not have been written later than the first century A.D., in which case the identity of the author cannot be established for the reason already stated. He was a Greek and a rhetorician, in either case is beyond dispute.

But no book has more jealously borne its author's name on its title than *Longinus On the Sublime*, as the treatise is more properly called. It is written in Greek and addressed, like Horace's *Ars Poetica*, to one Postumius Terentianus, obviously a Roman, of whom nothing is known. As it has come down to us, it is not whole and at least one-third of it is missing. But even the parts that remain, though disconnected, are enough to place the author by the side of Aristotle in the logic and penetration of his judgements. While his declared subject is rhetoric, its central 'argument' is : what constitutes sublimity in literature.

### **Sublimity in Literature**

Before Longinus the function of literature, especially poetry, was to instruct or to delight and prose was to persuade. As Scott-James aptly puts it, 'to instruct, to delight, to persuade-all the efforts of all the inspired bards, of all the brilliant historians, eloquent orators, and profound philosophers of the world had been summed up in that formula of three words. Longinus found this three-word formula wanting. For he discovered that the masterpieces of Greek classical literature – the epics of Homer, the lyrics of Sappho and Pindar, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the orations of Demosthenes-, while they no doubt did all this, were great for a different reason altogether – their Sublimity. 'Sublimity', he says, 'consists in a certain distinction and consummate excellence in expression, and it is from this and no other source, that the greatest poets and prose-writers have gained their eminence and immortal fame. The effect of a lofty passage is not to convince the reason of a reader to transport him out of himself. Invariably an admirable speech casts a spell over us and eclipses that which merely aims at persuasion and pleasure'. No instruction or delight or persuasion therefore is the test of great literature but transport-its capacity to move the reader to ecstasy-caused by an irresistible magic of speech. If he is spell-bound by what the writer says, so that he can neither think nor feel except what the writer thinks or feels, the work has the quality of the sublime. Whether it is

good to be so moved – the question that troubled Plato-is not Longinus’ concern except indirectly, as we shall see. But it is by its moving power that literature attains to sublimity, not by its power to instruct or to delight or to persuade. For all these, more or less, require the willing cooperation of the reader, whereas ‘the influences of the Sublime act with an irresistible might and get the upper hand with every hearer (or reader) whether he will or not’. So compelling, in other words, is the power of speech when it is sublime or truly lofty that it not only pleases but excites, moves, transports, elevates. And it does so not once but every time it is heard or read. ‘In general’, says Longinus, ‘those examples of sublimity which always please and please all are truly beautiful and sublime. For, when men, who differ in their habits, and have different tastes, pursuits and aspirations, and are of different ages, hold the same view about the same writing, then this unanimous verdict of such discordant judges, gives irresistible authority to their favourable verdict.’

### **The nature of the work**

*On the Sublime* is a Greek document in epistolary form addressed to a person named Postumius Terentianus and is designed to serve as a corrective to an earlier but imperfect treatment of this topic in a work composed by one Caecilius. The ‘sublime’ is the equivalent of a Greek word which means ‘elevation’ and the work is mainly designed to explore the sources of this quality in literary compositions, both in prose and poetry, though the professed aim is ostensibly the treatment of oratory or rhetorical discourse. At the outset the author observes that, ‘for many, sublimity is the product of natural gift and so beyond the purview of the precepts of art: yet genius often needs ‘curb as well as spur’ and art is the best instrument for discovering the working of nature and regulating the innate energy in a writer or speaker along proper lines to make it expressive and effective in the maximum degree possible. Just as a man of fortune needs the help of good counsel to preserve his possessions, so art is necessary for keeping genius out of the harm’s way’.

### **Sublimity defined**

The artistic treatment of ‘sublimity’ commences with a general definition of the quality in terms of its effects on readers or listeners. ‘Sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in composition’ which alone has given to the

greatest poets and writers the title of 'their eminence and immortality of renown'. The effect of the elevated language on the audience is not persuasion but transport. Our persuasions we can generally control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Craftsmanship toils hard to build the composition, 'whereas sublimity, flashing forth at the right moment, scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of an orator in all its plenitude.'

### **The false sublime**

The true sublime can best be explained by distinguishing it from its false variety; so the author proceeds to enumerate the forms of the pseudo-sublime into which the genuine one may degenerate in unskilful authors. The first mark of the false sublime is turgidity or bombast of language. "Evil are the swellings, both in the body and in diction, which are inflated and unreal, and threaten us with the reverse of our aim; for nothing, they say, is drier than a man in dropsy." Then comes puerility, which is the direct antithesis of sublimity, and arises from the pedants fondness for the parade of a pomp of language which is, essentially, tawdry and affected and so frigid. Another aspect of false sublime is the cheap display of passion unwarranted by the subject and the occasion and, in consequence, wearisome to others. "All these ugly and parasitical growths of novelty in the expression of ideas which may be regarded as the fashionable craze of the day."

### **The mark of true sublime**

'Our soul is instinctively uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard'; and this not once or twice, but repeatedly. 'For that is really great which bears a repeated examination and which it is difficult, rather impossible, to withstand, and the memory of which is strong and hard to efface. In general, consider those examples of sublimity to be fine and genuine, which please all and always. For when men of different pursuits, lives, ambitions, ages, languages, hold identical views on one and the same subject, then that verdict results, so to speak, from a concert of discordant elements makes our faith in the objects of admiration strong and unassailable'.

## **The sources of the sublime**

Both nature and art, says Longinus, contribute to sublimity in literature. There were those who held that ‘the sublime is innate and cannot be acquired by teaching; nature is the only art for producing it.’ They even believed that a writer’s natural powers were ‘enfeebled by being reduced to the dry bones of rule and precepts’. But Longinus found that howsoever free and independent Nature might be, she worked according to a system which it was the business of Art to bring to light. Art, thus, far from working against nature, cooperated with it to the same end. “Art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature hits the mark when she contains art hidden within her.” With this as his premise, Longinus finds five principal sources of the sublime, the first two of which are largely the gifts of nature and the remaining three, the gifts of art (1) grandeur of thought, (2) capacity for strong emotion, (3) appropriate use of Figures (4) nobility of diction and (5) dignity of composition or a happy synthesis of all the preceding gifts. All these presuppose ‘as a common foundation an indispensable preliminary gift-the command of language’. It remains to see what Longinus means by each.

### ***Grandeur of Thought***

Nobody can produce a sublime work unless his thoughts are sublime. For ‘sublimity is the echo of greatness of soul.... It is impossible for those whose whole lives are full of mean and servile ideas and habits, to produce anything that is admirable and worthy of an immortal life. It is only natural that great accents should fall from the lips of those whose thoughts have always been deep and full of majesty’. Stately thoughts belong to the loftiest minds. Mostly they are innate, a natural condition of the writer’s mind and heart, but they can also be acquired by a proper discipline – chiefly by dwelling constantly on whatever is noble and sublime, and by emulating the example of the great masters. Elucidating the latter, Longinus says, ‘it is good for us too, when we are working at some subject which demands sublimity of thought and expression, to have some idea in our minds as to how Homer might have expressed the same thought, how Plato or Demosthenes would have raised it to the Sublime, or, in history, Thucydides. Emulation will bring those great examples before

our eyes, illumining our path and lifting up our souls to the high standard of perfection, imaged on our minds.’ In this linking sublimity of expression with sublimity of thought, Longinus assigns a higher purpose to the resulting ‘transport’ that would appear at first sight. It signifies a transport caused by the noblest thoughts finding their natural expression in the noblest language. So the question raised earlier- whether it is good to be transported out of oneself – is answered here. It is good because literature that takes such hold on us is nurtured on whatever is noble and sublime in life and literature. It has an elevating effect both morally and artistically. It is true that Longinus nowhere speaks of this ecstasy as being morally good or bad but since greatness of thought is its first condition, it cannot but be uplifting in the moral sense also. There is a close resemblance here between Longinus and Milton. Milton also believed that if anyone wanted to be a great poet, he ‘ought himself to be a true poet, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things.’

### ***Capacity for Strong Emotion***

What Longinus says of this second natural source of sublimity is unfortunately lost. At the end of the book, he proposes to deal with the subject in a separate treatise, of which nothing is known. But there are scattered remarks in the work which throw light on what he thought of emotions as an important factor in sublimity. At one place, for instance, he says, ‘I would confidently affirm that nothing makes so much for grandeur as true emotion in the right place, for it inspires the words, as it were, with a wild gust of mad enthusiasm and fills them with divine frenzy’. It is for this reason that he prefers the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* and Demosthenes to Cicero. Like stately thoughts, stately emotions, it may be assumed, also belong to the loftiest souls. They equally lead to loftiness of utterance. But they have to be ‘true emotions’ and ‘in the right place’. Even with the Platonic proviso, Longinus here challenges Plato’s general distrust of emotions as men’s guides. With what they can do in the hands of Homer and Demosthenes, he seems to say, they deserve a better deal. While Aristotle had justified them by their *cathartic* effect, which is more

a moral than an aesthetic consideration, Longinus values them primarily for the aesthetic transport they cause, though this transport may ultimately be found to be morally uplifting. He therefore, offers a more artistic explanation of the emotional appeal of literature than Aristotle, and one truer to fact than Aristotle's.

### *Appropriate Use of Figures*

Of the artistic aids of sublimity, the figures of speech occupy the largest space – nearly one-third of the treatise. This is not surprising because, as stated earlier, Longinus' primary concern is oratory in which a happy or unhappy use of figures of speech makes all the difference. But he considers them chiefly for the part they play 'in producing grandeur'; with their other effects, that other rhetoricians emphasised, he is not much concerned. In the first place, he does not regard them as an unnatural imposition on speech, thrust in just for ornaments' sake. By introducing an element of strangeness into what one speaks or hears everyday, they satisfy a basic demand of human nature – that for a pleasant surprise. But it is true also that there is an element of artifice in them that 'tends to raise suspicion in the mind of the reader .....that the speaker is treating him like a silly boy and trying to outwit him by cunning figures'. This handicap, however, disappears in a style that is already elevated in other ways, for while they heighten the effect of elevation, the elevation in its turn helps to conceal their artifice, as the light of the sun eclipses dimmer lights. 'A figure, therefore, is effective only when it appears in disguise', that is to say, when it is shaded by the brilliance of style. In a plain style, it makes all the show, throwing the rest of the utterance into the shade.

The chief figures that make for sublimity are the rhetorical question, asyndeton, hyperbaton, and periphrasis. The rhetorical question is either a statement in question-form that suggests its own answer (as : 'Who is here so base, that would be a bondman ?', with its implied answer 'None'), or a rapid succession of question and answer (as : 'Is America in rebellion? Wales was hardly ever free from it. Have you attempted to govern America by penal statutes? You made fifteen for Wales'.) It makes a straight appeal to the

passions. Asyndeton is a speech in which words or clauses, which should be ordinarily connected by conjunctions, are left unconnected, as in : ‘Now where is the revenue which is to do all these mighty things ? *Five-sixths repealed – abandoned-sunk-gone-lost for ever*’; where the rapid flow of the unconnected verbs suggests the excited mood in which they are uttered and which is likely to induce the same mood in the hearer or the reader. Hyperbaton is an inversion of the normal order of words, suggestive of a disordered utterance made under an emotional strain and falling with a like effect on the hearer or the reader. When Macduff, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, for instance, comes at the appointed hour to call on Duncan and finds him lying dead in a pool of blood in his bed-chamber, only broken words can fall from his lips that, however, explain his bewilderment more effectively than if they had followed their normal order :

O horror! Horror! Tongue nor heart  
Cannot conceive nor name thee!

‘Tongue’ here is the subject of ‘name’ and ‘heart’ the subject of ‘conceive’ but not only ‘tongue’ seems to go with ‘conceive’ and ‘heart’ with ‘name’ but each of these subjects seems to go with both the verbs. In spite, however, of this apparent disorder, or rather because of it, the meaning of the speaker is expressed as no other order could express it. Lastly, periphrasis is a roundabout way of speaking. Among its commonplace examples are ‘fair sex’ for womankind and ‘better half’ for wife. These have long ceased to have any charm of novelty. But there are examples of it that impart loftiness to speech. Here is one from Shakespeare’s *Othello* where Othello has rudely shocked Desdemona by calling her a whore. She and Emilia complain of it to Iago, Emilia repeating the very word used by Othello, but Desdemona’s modesty quails before a word so vulgar. So she uses a periphrasis :

Desdemona : Am I that name, Iago ?  
Iago : What name, fair lady ?  
Desdemona : *Such as she says my lord did say I was.*



In this way, then, figures aid the effect of sublimity but, once again, they are best used when they seem to arise naturally from the context.

### ***Nobility of Diction***

Then like all rhetoricians, Longinus turns his attention to diction ‘which comprises (a) the proper choice of words and (b) the use of metaphors and ornamented language’. Four leaves of this part of the book are unfortunately lost but in what remains his main argument has been sufficiently stated. Words, when suitable and striking, he says, have ‘a moving and seductive effect’ upon the reader and are the first things in a style to lend it ‘grandeur, beauty and mellowness, dignity, force, power, and a sort of glittering charm’. It is they that breathe voice into dead things. They are ‘the very light of thought’-a radiance that illumines the innermost recesses of the writer’s mind. But ‘it should be noted that imposing language is not suitable for every occasion. When the object is trivial, to invest it with grand and stately words would have the same effect as putting a full-sized tragic mask on the head of a little child’. This necessitates the use of common words which, when inelegant, make up for it by their raciness and forcefulness.

Among the ornaments of speech, Longinus considers metaphor and hyperbole. While much of what he says on each had been said by others before him – Aristotle, Theophrastus, Quintilian – in one particular comment on metaphor he strikes a new note. Aristotle had limited the number of metaphors to not more than two at a time and the limitation had since become an important rule of rhetoric. Longinus finds no justification for it whatever. Metaphors being the language of passion, passion alone, and no arbitrary rule, can determine how many have to be used at a particular time. No writer when he is impassioned has time to count the number of the metaphors he is using, nor has a reader when he is carried away by an impassioned utterance. Here is the first romantic protest against the supposedly inviolable sanctity of rules. It goes without saying that he is atone with his Greek and Roman predecessors in considering the metaphor a valuable aid to sublimity in style. On hyperbole, he has just this observation to make that it should be the natural outcome of emotion and that, like all great art, it should ‘appear in disguise’. Used in this way, it also lends distinction to style.

### ***Dignity of Composition***

Lastly, Longinus considers the arrangement of words. It should be one that blends thought, emotion, figures, and words themselves – the preceding four elements of sublimity – into a harmonious whole. Such an arrangement has not only ‘a natural power of persuasion and of giving pleasure but also the marvellous power of exalting the soul and swaying the heart of men’. It makes the hearer or reader share the emotions of the speaker. But ‘if the elements of grandeur be separated from one another, the sublimity is scattered and made to vanish but when organised into a compact system and still further encircled in a chain of harmony, they gain a living voice by being merely rounded into a period’. A harmonious composition alone sometimes makes up for the deficiency of the other elements. A proper rhythm is one of the elements in this harmony. Negatively, deformity and not grandeur is the result if the composition is either extremely concise or unduly prolix. The one cripples the thought and the other overextends it.

### **7.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1) Who was Longinus? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Greek rhetorician
- b) Greek philosophical critic
- c) Both a and b
- d) None of these

Ans :- **c) Both a and b**

2) On the Sublime was originally written in language \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Latin
- b) Greek
- c) Old English
- d) German

Ans :- **b) Greek**

3) In the essay, Longinus enumerates \_\_\_\_\_ principle sources of Sublime language.

- a) Four
- b) Five
- c) Six
- d) Seven

Ans :- **b) Five**

4) Which is the second source of Sublimity? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Genuine thinking
- b) Great courage
- c) Genuine emotion
- d) Great Thinking

Ans :- **c) Genuine emotion**

5) The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning the successive clause is called \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Anaphora
- b) Metonymy
- c) Assonance
- d) Hyperbole

Ans :- **a) Anaphora**

6) How does the false sublimity arise? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) by the defects of sentence arrangement
- b) by using bombastic style
- c) by the defects of diction
- d) by the defects of style

Ans :- **d) by the defects of style**

7) According to Longinus, the \_\_\_\_\_ should not be mechanical and forceful.

- a) Words
- b) Figures of Speech
- c) Sentences

d) None of these

Ans :- **b) Figures of Speech**

8) According to Longinus, \_\_\_\_\_ should match with the grandeur of subject, thought and lofty style.

a) Sublime

b) Passion

c) Power

d) Perfection

Ans :- **b) Passion**

9) Which conceit is a type of timidity or the bombastic use of language? \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Conceit of vocabulary

b) Conceit of falsity

c) Conceit of turgidity

d) None of these

Ans :- **c) Conceit of turgidity**

10) Which is the fourth source of Sublime according to Longinus ? \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Diction

b) Passion

c) Grandeur

d) Style

Ans :- **a) Diction**

11) *On the Sublime* is written in \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Narrative Form

b) Descriptive Form

c) Epistolary Form

d) None of these

Ans :- **c) Epistolary Form**

12) Sublimity has been defined as\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) excellence of language
- b) uplifting effect
- c) intensity of thought
- d) grandeur of thought and intensity of feeling expressed in appropriate language.

Ans :- **d) grandeur of thought and intensity of feeling expressed in appropriate language.**

### **7.3 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Garrett, Martin. Ed. *Sidney: the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1996
2. Daran, Robert (2015). *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Stephen Halliwell, *Pseudo-Longinus on the Sublime*. (2022), Oxford University Press.

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. 15-16**

**SECTION : I**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - III**

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**SECTION -I**

**SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554-1586)**

**STRUCTURE**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Writer and his Works
- 1.3 The ‘Argument’ of his Book
- 1.4 His Classicism
- 1.5 The Value of his Criticism
- 1.6 Recapitulation of the lesson
- 1.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.8 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 1.9 Suggested Reading

**1.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lessons 15-16 is to give the learner an overview of the life and works of Sir Philip Sidney and to explain the main argument of his book.

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Sir Philip Sidney is often cited as an archetype of the well-rounded “Renaissance man”: his talents were multifold, encompassing not only poetry and

cultivated learning but also the virtues of statesmanship and military service. He was born into an aristocratic family, was eventually knighted, and held government appointments which included the government of Flushing in the Netherlands. He was involved in a war waged by Queen Elizabeth I against Spain and died from a wound at the age of 32. His friends included the poet, Edmund Spenser. Sidney wrote a pastoral romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1581) and he was original in producing a sonnet cycle in the English language, influenced by the Italian poet Petrarch, entitled *Astrophil and Stella* (1581-1582).

Sidney defended the courtly pleasure of poetry as promoting warrior service. But, aware that the newly emerging intellectual and bureaucrat class had somewhat displaced the warrior class in importance in the absolutist state, Sidney (like many aristocrats bent on preserving their status as against the rising class of "new men" in the absolutist state) adopted humanist and protestant conceptions of aristocratic function, urging these as source of political and cultural authority. But, while adopting the humanist ideals of self discipline, industry and intellectual profit, the aristocracy demonstrated their status and their difference from their subordinate class through their access to pleasure.

These emphasis are reflected in Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*, which like aristocratic ideology advance alternative forms of social authority without relinquishing the previous ones. Spenser helped to "organise the distinction between poetic and courtly pleasure," paving the way for "the appearance of the category of the aesthetic in a newly organized distinction between elevated poetic pleasures and stigmatized material ones."

The defense of poetry had been undertaken aggressively by Boccaccio in his *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*. Following Boccaccio's endeavour, notable defenses of poetry were undertaken by writers such as Joachim Du Bellay and Sir Philip Sidney. Such Apologies and defenses have been obliged to continue through the nineteenth century into our own day, highlighting the fact that the category of the "aesthetic" as a domain struggling to free itself from the constraints of theology, morality, politics philosophy and history was in part a result of Renaissance poetics.

## 1.2 THE WRITER AND HIS WORKS

Sir Philip Sidney was the model of an Elizabethan courtier and gentleman. Mortally wounded at the battle of Zutphen and thirsty with excess of bleeding, he passed on the bottle of water, brought to him, to a poor soldier in the same agony of thirst and death, saying, 'Thy need is greater than mine'. When therefore Stephen Gosson dedicated his *School of Abuse* to him, he merely contented himself with rebutting his arguments in his *Apology for Poetry* without even so much as naming him anywhere in the book, 'disdaining to requite a compliment with an insult'. It was not 'in the goodness of that nature to scorn'. But that the *Apology* was intended as a reply to the *Abuse* admits of no doubt whatever. For Sidney's line of defense closely follows Gosson's line of attack.

Gosson has indicted poetry on four counts: that a man could employ his time more usefully than in poetry, that is the mother of lies, that is the nurse of abuse, and that Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal commonwealth. Sidney replies to each one of these charges, drawing copiously, in the absence of critical authorities in England, on the ancient classics and the Italian writers of the Renaissance: in particular, on Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch, among the Greeks; Cicero, Virgil, Horace and Ovid, among the Romans; and Minturno, Scaliger, and Castelvetro, among the Italians. There was not only no criticism in England when Sidney had to fight the battle of poetry but there had been no great poetry either, with the solitary exceptions of Chaucer, and drama was still in its swaddling-clothes. While these handicaps did not, of course, stand in the way of his effective defense of the art of poetry, they did affect his critical outlook, as we shall see.

## 1.3 THE 'ARGUMENT' OF HIS BOOK

Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1580-1581) is in many ways, a seminal text of literary criticism. It is not only a defense but also one of the most acclaimed treatises on poetics of its time. While its ideas are not original, it represents the first synthesis in the English language of the various strands and concerns of renaissance literary criticism, drawing on Aristotle, Horace, and more recent writers such as Boccaccio and Julius Caesar Scaliger. It raises issues such as the value and function of poetry, the nature of imitation, and the concept of nature-which were



to concern literary critics in numerous languages until the late eighteenth century. Sidney's writing of the *Apologie* as a defense of poetry was occasioned by an attack on poetry entitled *The School of Abuse* published in 1579 by a Puritan minister, Stephen Gosson.

Sidney's *Apology* is not a reply to Gosson but much more. It is a spirited defense of poetry against all the charges that had been laid at its door since Plato. Sidney's method is that of a logician: he examines it in whole and in parts, considers the points in favour and the points against, and then sets forth his main thesis that far from being despised it deserves 'the laurel crown.' It is the oldest of all branches of learning, 'whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges' being superior to philosophy by its charm, to history by its universality, to science by its moral end, to law by its encouragement of human rather than civic goodness. Among its various species, the pastoral pleases by its helpful comments on contemporary events and life in general, the elegy by its kindly pity for 'the weakness of mankind and the wretchedness of the world,' the satire by its pleasant ridicule of folly, the comedy by its ridiculous imitation of the common errors of life, the tragedy by its moving demonstration of 'the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded', the lyric by its sweet praise of all that is praiseworthy, and the epic by its representation of the loftiest truths in the loftiest manner. Neither in whole nor in parts, thus, does poetry deserve the abuse hurled on it by its detractors.

Then Sidney turns to the four charges levelled against it by Gosson. Taking the first that a man might better spend his time than in poetry, he says that 'if it be, as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move there to so much as poetry, then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed'.

Next, to say that the poet is a liar is to misunderstand his very purpose. The question of veracity or falsehood arises only where a person tells of facts, past or present. The poet has no concern whatever with these; he merely uses them to arrive at a higher truth. As a poet, therefore, he can scarcely be a liar, howsoever much he may like to be one.

The third charge that, 'it abuses men's wit, training it to wanton sinfulness and lustful love' is particularly applied to the comedy and sometimes also to the lyric, the elegy, and the epic, into all of which the love elements enter. But granting that love of beauty is a beastly fault and one deserving hateful reproach, will it not be more correct to say that it is not poetry that abuses man's wit but man's wit that abuses poetry? For, there can be poetry without sinful love. The nature of a thing is determined not by its misuse but by its right use.

The fourth charge that associates Plato's great name with the condemnation of poetry is without foundation also, for Plato there is no fault with poetry which he considered divinely inspired, but with the poet of his time who abused it to misrepresent the gods, although even in this misrepresentation that merely gave vent to popular beliefs. 'So as Plato, banishing the abuse, not the thing, not banishing it, but giving due honour unto it, shall be our patron and not our adversary'.

#### **1.4 HIS CLASSICISM**

##### **Respect for Rules**

Sidney's *Apology* is the first serious attempt to apply the classical rules to English poetry. He wanted poetry to be to England what it was to ancient Greece and Rome in the former of which the poet was revered as a 'maker' comparable to the Heavenly Maker, and in the latter as a "prophet" or one gifted with foreknowledge of things. It could not be this unless Englishmen conceived worthily of it and set before themselves worthy models to follow. These, Sidney found in the works of the ancients, though he is not without admiration for the great writers of Renaissance Italy- Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. All his pronouncements therefore have for their basis either Plato or Aristotle or Horace. In his repeated stress on the teaching function of poetry he follows Plato, 'whom, of all philosophers, I have ever esteemed most worthy of reverence'. There is a passing reference, too, to his theory of ideas and to his belief that the flesh hampers the soul in its progress to perfection. In his definition of poetry, he follows both Aristotle and Horace. 'Poesy' he says 'is in art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimesis with this end, to teach and delight'. In all the rest his chief guide is Aristotle as interpreted in Castelvetro's edition of the *Poetics*, published in 1570.

Aristotle had stressed only the unity of action as an important condition of a well-knit plot; the unities of time and place are nowhere explicitly stated by him, to say nothing of their being given a place of importance in the plot. But the Renaissance interpreters of Aristotle, particularly Castelvetro, saw them clearly implied in the unity of action and some of his indirect statements to this effect, to which reference has been made earlier.

For a plot to be well-knit, they argued, it was necessary for it to be confined to a 'single revolution of the sun', or twenty four hours, casually mentioned by Aristotle, and, as a corollary of it, to a single place of action. Following Castelvetro, Sidney also insists on the observance of the unities of time and place, along with that of action, in English Drama. *Gorboduc*, (the first English tragedy written jointly in 1561 by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, also the first English play to employ blank verse) which he praises highly for its Senecan technique and which in fact was the only tragedy of note written till his day, could not yet serve 'as an exact model of all tragedies', for it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days and many places, inartificially imagined.

For the same reason, Sidney has no patience with the newly developed tragicomedy, even though it had the approval of Scaliger and Castelvetro, to whose judgment he otherwise deferred. While Aristotle says nothing about it, for it was unknown to the Greeks, it is clearly ruled out of order by the condition of the unity of action, requiring only one set of events to be represented - those arousing pity and fear - and by the consequent requirement, on the same grounds, on unhappy ending. As but third-rate plays of this sort had been produced till Sidney's time, he denounces them all as, 'these gross absurdities... neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration (fear and pity), nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained. It needs to be pointed out here that Sidney's whole critical outlook in these two matters

of the unities and the tragi- comedy was affected by the absence of really good English plays till his time. If he had seen the romantic drama in its prime instead of in its rude and chaotic infancy, he would have readjusted his theories to embrace the masterpieces of Marlowe and Marlowe's greater successor.

For, if with all his preference for the unrhymed classical metres he could be moved, 'more than with a trumpet', by the old English ballad of *Chevy Chase*, owing nothing whatever to classical influence, how highly would he not have been moved by the glories of Elizabethan poetry and drama, had he but lived to see them? For with all his adoration of the classics he was still an Elizabethan at heart, one who is more himself in his lyrics and sonnets than in his *Apology* where he is only 'his master's voice'.

### **His Advocacy of Classical Metres**

Sidney's membership of the 'Areopagus' has already been noted. To it must be attributed not only his praise of unrhymed classical verse but the more extreme view that verse, i.e. metre, is 'but an ornament and no cause to poetry, sith there have been many most excellent poets that need never versified and now swarm many versifiers that need never answers to the name of poets.... It is not rhyming and versing that make the poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier'. Poetry according to him is the art of inventing new things, better than this world has to offer, and even prose that does so is poetry. But, once again, a classical scholar though Sidney was, he was born an Englishman and an Elizabethan and so could not easily get over his native love of rhyme or verse.

It was for this reason that the ballad of *Chevy Chase*- 'the old song of Percy and Douglas' - moved him powerfully whenever he heard it, although the classical scholar in him is ashamed to confess this 'barbarousness.' He concedes, too, that verse is a superior form of expression to ordinary prose. 'The Senate of Poets', he says 'hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them, not speaking words as they chance ably fall from the mouth, but peyzing (weighing) each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject.' Then, it is

positively defended for its sweetness and orderliness and being best for memory the only handle of knowledge, it must be in jest that any man can speak against it. And, finally the scales are held even between the unrhymed classical metres and the rhymed English. While the former was 'no doubt more fit for music.... and more fit lively to express diverse passions.... the latter likewise with his rhyme, striketh a certain music to the ear: and, in fine, sith it doth delight, though by another way, it obtains the same purpose.' By these steps, Sidney's love of the classics is ultimately reconciled to his love of the native tradition.

### **1.5 THE VALUE OF HIS CRITICISM**

Though Sidney professes to follow Aristotle, his conception of poetry is different from Aristotle's. To Aristotle, poetry was an art of imitation for the natural pleasure imitation affords. To Sidney it is an art of imitation for a specific purpose it imitates 'to teach and delight.' Those who practice it are called makers and prophets 'for those indeed do merely make to imitate and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger and teach to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved, which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there no idle tongues to bark at them'. It is as an incentive to virtuous action 'the ending end of all earthly learning', and not as an art that poetry is declared superior to philosophy, history, science and law. Their final end is also the same but in promoting it they fall far short of poetry.

Sidney also unconsciously differs with Aristotle in the meaning he gives to imitation. While imitating nature the poet, 'lifted up with the vigour of his own invention,' not only makes things better than they are in Nature but often quite new, 'forms such as never were in Nature'. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden-true lovers, more constant friends, braver warriors, more just rulers, more excellent men. So poetry is not so much an art of imitation as of invention or creation. It creates a new world together for the edification and delight of the reader.

This brings Sidney, unconsciously again, close to Plato. Plato had found fault with poetry for being an imitation of an imitation - for imitating the

objects of nature that themselves were an imitation for their ideal patterns. According to Sidney also, the poet imitates not the brazen world of nature which is itself an imitation of its ideal pattern but the golden world of the Idea itself. 'For any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *Idea* or 'fore – conceit' of the work and not in the work itself or original idea and not its imperfect copy that he sees in nature. So Plato's chief objection to poetry is here answered in full and it is surprising that the idea did not occur to Aristotle. Sidney echoes Plato again when he says that the final end of poetry, as of all learning, 'is to lead and draw us to as high perfection as our degenerate souls made worse by their clayey lodgings can be capable of.' It is Plato's doctrine of the heavenly soul coming to reside in an earthly body and shaping it to its own likeness. In this way Sidney makes poetry what Plato wished it to be - a vision of the idea itself rather than its copy and a force for the perfection of the soul. The *Apology* therefore is not only a reply to Gosson but also, albeit unwittingly to Plato.

## 1.6 RECAPITULATION OF THE LESSON

- I. Poetry to be defended as it has come under attack.
- II. Poetry has been man's first source of inspiration:
  - A. Great philosophers have been poets (including Plato)
  - B. Poetry in Greek and Roman times meant "Maker"/ prophet.
- III. Sidney: "All philosophers (natural and moral) follow nature, but only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, does grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature...Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as different poets have done, neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees..."
- IV. The poet as a creator: Poetry and man—the poet's talents stem from the fact that he is able to create from a pre-existing idea called the fore-conceit. Poetry is the link between the real

[nominalism] and the ideal [realism] worlds. Poets therefore take part in the divine act of creation.

- V. Poetry defined: “Poetry therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle terms it in the word mimesis—that is to say a representing, counter-feiting, or figuring forth to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture with this end, to teach and delight.”
- VI. “Since then poetry is of all human learnings the most ancient, and of most fatherly antiquity, from whence other learnings take their beginnings, since it is so universal that no learned nation does despise it...since both Roman and Greek gave such divine names to it, the art of prophesying the other of making,...the poet only, only brings his own stuff, and does not learn a conceit out of a matter, but makes matter for a conceit, since neither his description or his end contains any evil, the thing described cannot be evil; since his effects be so good as to teach goodness, and delight the learner of it; since therein...he doth not only far pass the historian, but, for instructing, is well right comparable to the philosopher, for moving leaveth him behind him, since the HOLY SCRIPTURE hath whole parts poetical, and that even our Savior Jesus Christ, vouchsafed to use the flower of it;...”
- VII. Poetry discussed in its effects and kinds: The true poet is one who creates “Notable images on virtues, vices...with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by...” The ultimate end of this is, “...to draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls...can be made capable of.” Man can thus enjoy what makes him divine. Poetry has a moral purpose, therefore, consisting in leading men to truth by integrating, not dividing knowledge.
- VIII. History teaches and so does philosophy, but the poet is superior to both, since history deals with facts and records, ultimately heresy, and the philosopher describes abstractions that often do not relate to the world as most people understand it.

- IX. “Now does the peerless poet perform both [the functions of the philosopher and the historian]. For whatsoever the philosopher says should be done, he gives a perfect picture of it is someone by whom he presupposes it was done; so he couples the general notion with the particular example. The poet affects feelings and does not just give examples. The philosopher teaches, but he teaches obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teaches them that are already taught...” the poet is the right popular philosopher... “Poetry is more philosophical than history, as the historian is trapped with facts. The poet uses the facts of the historian, but he makes them more noble by using the imagination in the creative process. The poet then can teach virtue—which is one of the central functions of tragedy—evil men who experience evil fortune end in disgrace.”
- X. The poet moves men: philosophers teach as well, but the poet can move men to desire the good for action is greater than knowledge. Thus the philosopher is concerned not only with the end (truth), but making the means of achieving this end pleasant. Poetry is even capable of making the unpleasant like war and horror pleasant in terms of the means through which it is presented.

The previous comment (X) about the means a poet uses suggests the importance of the creative process in writing poetry. One of Plato’s arguments was that the very danger of the poet was that he could use creative means to ensnare his listeners—something Plato himself knew and used in his own writing.

The next section from Sidney deals with the creative process. The terms he uses are very important and will appear in later periods:

### **POETRY AND NATURE**

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied on any such subjugation, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention doeth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or quite anew...gods, Cyclops etc. Nature’s world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.



## POETRY AND MAN

For every understanding person knows that the skill of each artificer stands in the idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath the idea is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them; which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are won't to say by them that builds castles in air.

## THE POET AS A CREATOR

Neither let it be deemed too bold a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honor to the heavenly maker of that maker, who having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the work of that second nature, which in nothing he shows so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he brings things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit makes us know what perfection is, but our infected will keeps us from reaching unto it.

### 1.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What is Sidney's contribution to English criticism?
2. Why did Sidney express his apology for poetry?
3. Why does Sidney compare the work of philosophers and historians to that of poets?

Ans. The philosopher is presented in a rather bleak manner, clothed in black, a sober man who is against anything that may bring joy. Likewise, the historian is presented as surrounded by dust and books. Sidney presents these thinkers this way in order to contrast their work with the joy and delight inspired by poetry. While Sidney admits that all three arts are focused on the improvement of man, he wishes to emphasize that poetry is best-suited to this task. While philosophy is dry, and historians can only tell you what *did* happen, rather than what *should* have happened, poetry can draw on the lessons of both to show man the truth of what

should be and how one should act. Sidney believed that learning needed to be accompanied by a healthy dose of pleasure to make lessons more palatable. Thus, he presents philosophers and historians as out-of-touch and humorless.

4. What is “The Apology of Poetry” by Philip Sidney about?
5. Why does Sir Philip Sidney focus on the creator rather than the creation in ‘*An Apology to Poetry*’?
6. Give the main argument of Sir Philip Sidney ‘*An Apology to Poetry*.’

### 1.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1) *An Apology for Poetry* is a work of\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Literary criticism
- b) English literature
- c) Russian literature
- d) Formal criticism

Ans :- **a) Literary criticism**

2) *An Apology for Poetry* is written by\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Philip Larkin
- b) John Keats
- c) John Dryden
- d) Philip Sidney

Ans :- **d) Philip Sidney**

3) *An Apology for Poetry* is also known as\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) The Defence of Poesy
- b) The Apology of Poery
- c) The Poet’s Reply
- d) The School of Abuse

Ans :- **a) The Defence of Poesy**

4) What is not true about *An Apology for Poetry* ?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) It was written approximately in 1580
- b) It was first established in 1595
- c) It was written by Elizabethan poet Philip Sidney
- d) All are true

Ans :- **d) All are true**

5) *An Apology for Poetry* by Sidney was written as immediate response to\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Plato's Republic
- b) Stephen Garron's *The School of Abuse*
- c) Aristotle's Poetics
- d) None of these

Ans :- **b) Stephen Garron's *The School of Abuse***

6) True poets must teach and delight: This view of Sidney dates back to\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Plato
- b) Horace
- c) Aristotle's
- d) Longinus

Ans :- **b) Horace**

7) According to Sidney, poetry is\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Speaking picture
- b) Art of imitation
- c) It alone transcends nature
- d) All of these

Ans :- **d) All of these**

8) According to Sidney, which was the first of the arts, coming before philosophy and history ? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Drama
- b) Poetry
- c) Epistle
- d) Oral Tradition

Ans :- **b) Poetry**

9) Sir Philip Sidney, set out to restore to its rightful place among the arts \_\_\_\_ .

- a) Drama
- b) Painting
- c) Poetry
- d) Novels

Ans :- **c) Poetry**

10) Sidney advocates a place for poetry within the framework of \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Aristocratic state
- b) Poor state
- c) Unprivileged state
- d) Both a and b

Ans :- **a) Aristocratic state**

11) Sidney in his works An Apology for Poetry praises who “in the misty time could see to clearly” \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Aristotle
- b) Chaucer
- c) Spencer
- d) Plato

Ans :- **b) Chaucer**

12) Sidney's usage of metaphoric language in his work is identified in modern days as\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Semiotics
- b) Linguistics
- c) Rhetoric
- d) Assonance

Ans :- a) Semiotics

### 1.9 SUGGESTED READING

1. Sidney, Philip. *A Defense of Poetry and Poems*. London: Cassell and Company, 1891.
2. Lewis, C. S. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954.
3. Garrett, Martin. Ed. *Sidney: the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1996
4. Craig, D.H. "A Hybrid Growth: Sidney's Theory of Poetry in *An Apology for Poetry*." *Essential Articles for the Study of Sir Philip Sidney*. Ed. Arthur F. Kinney. Hamden: Archon Books, 1986.
5. Sidney, Philip. *The Sidneys of Penhurst*, London : S.H. Bousfield and Company, 1901.
6. Sidney, Sir Philip. *The complete works*, ed., A. Feuillerat, Cambridge University Press, 1923.

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. 17-18**

**SECTION : I-III**

**M.A.ENGLISH**

**UNIT - IV**

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**SAMUEL JOHNSON:**  
***PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE***

**STRUCTURE**

**OBJECTIVES**

**SECTION - I**

**The Triumph of Classicism**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Earlier Neo-Classical Trends
- 1.2 The Rise of Classicism
- 1.3 The French Classical Creed

**SECTION II**

- 2.0 Johnson's Life and Work

**SECTION III**

- 3.0 *Preface to Shakespeare*
- 3.1 Examination Oriented Questions
- 3.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 3.3 Suggested Reading

**1.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lessons 17-18 is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Samuel Johnson and also to explain the main arguments in his *Preface to Shakespeare*.

## 1.1 EARLIER NEO-CLASSICAL TRENDS

It has been seen that in the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages, the staunchest advocates of classicism in England were Sidney and Ben Jonson. It has been seen too that between them there is this difference that while the former only preached classicism without following it up in his own practice, the latter did both. But even he did not want English literature to be an unquestioning slave of the classics. "Truth", he said, 'lies open to all' and it lay open to English writers too, if they could but hit upon it. Nor was he or Sidney a neo-classicist in the full sense of the term, for while both admired a thing here and a thing there in the Greek and Latin Classics, neither formulated any definite theory of poetry or drama, the two widely practised forms of their age. They just expressed themselves in favour of some of their rules as useful guides for English literary endeavour. In the age that followed, that of Charles I, Milton was similarly undecided. As a learned classical scholar, he declared rhyme as 'the invention of barbarous age,' followed Theocritus and Moschus in his *Lycidas*, Virgil in his *Paradise Lost*, Sophocles and Euripides in his *Samson Agonistes*. Yet the spirit in them all is that of liberty from all bondage, for, as Augustine Birrell says, 'he was never a submissive anything.' His adoration of the classics is limited to their form only; in treatment, he is to use his own words 'sensuous and passionate' in the native English tradition – that of Spenser and Shakespeare, both of whom he honored. This was all of the classics that English literature knew till the first half of the seventeenth century.

## 1.2 THE RISE OF CLASSICISM

In the later half of the seventeenth century and practically the whole of the eighteenth- The Augustan ages, as they are called - the classics came to exercise a complete hold over English literature. It was even believed that they represented the highest standards of literary beauty which English writers had only to follow to attain perfection in their art. To this end, therefore they directed all their energies, conveniently forgetting what their own predecessors – Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare had achieved without any direct aid from them. There were two chief reasons for it. One was the excesses of the metaphysical poets and the other the unprecedented influence of the French literary modes on English. The metaphysical excesses were the direct consequence, as Ben Jonson had feared, of the Elizabethan fondness for liberty in literary matters. Kept within bounds naturally by gifted writers, it degenerated into

license in the hands of the less gifted. For natural thoughts they substituted far fetched ones or 'conceits' and for graceful metres a complicated system of versification in which rhymes were so wide apart that they had to be searched for and lines made to scan with difficulty. To read the poetry became a painful toil because the conceits made it difficult to understand and the complex metres difficult to please.

It was just at this moment that England for a variety of reasons, came under the influence of France. Charles I had married a French princess who brought not only 'a colony of courtiers and wits' with her but also the French language. Her sons Charles II and James II, each of whom succeeded to the English throne after the Restoration often inter-related their English with French, whence it became the fashion for everyone of note to do so. Dryden, in particular, exploited the device to win royal favour. During the Civil War between Charles I and the Parliament, as the fortunes of the king declined not only Charles II but many writers of Royalist sympathies sought refuge in France-Waller, Denham, Davenant, Cowley, Evelyn, all of whom returned to England later, imbued with French culture. For France in the later half of the seventeenth century was 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form' in manners, morals, food, dress and above all, literature to the whole of Europe. With a powerful king, Louis XIV, on the throne, who took the same interest in letters that Augustus had taken in ancient Rome, its writers commanded the same respect in the field of learning as its generals did in the field of battle or its statesmen in the field of diplomacy. And each new victory in battle or diplomacy was a feather in the cap of its literature too, which began to appear brighter than it otherwise would merely in consequence of it. It was the day of France in every sphere in Europe. Now French literature, since 1630 had been steadily moving in the direction of the classics. With the discipline in all spheres of life introduced by Louis XIV, it gradually evolved a classical system of its own, to which the name 'neo-classical' is applied to distinguish it from the original creed, of which it is but an adaptation rather than an exact copy. It was finally expounded by Boileau in his *Art Poétique*, published in 1674. It appealed to the English writers for the way out it showed from the metaphysical confusion and, to some extent, for the encouragement it received from the Court, itself dominated by French influence.

### **1.3 THE FRENCH CLASSICAL CREED**

The fullest statement of the French Classical creed is to be found in Boileau's *Art Poétique*, Rapin's *Reflections* and Bossu's *Treatise on Epic Poetry*.



It concerned poetry alone, for which it framed a set of rules, ultimately based on those of Aristotle, though their immediate source was the sixteenth century Italian interpreters of Aristotle – Scaliger, Castelvetro, Minturno, Vida and others. These rules were, firstly, for poetry in general and secondly for its ‘kinds’. The general rules laid more stress on the teaching function of poetry than on the delight giving or aesthetic, and more, similarly, on training in the art of writing than on natural endowment or genius. Whence proceeded further rules to perfect the poet in workmanship, consisting mainly of those laid down by the ancients particularly Aristotle. Followed blindly at first out of mere reverence for antiquity, these were later discovered to be rooted deep in reason or good sense which lent them an unquestioned authority. In whatever they said of plot, character and speech, thus, they were found to sum up whatever appeared most in nature (i.e. life) in events, men, and their language. It was in this way that they were ‘nature methodized’ as Pope said of them, echoing Rapin. Nothing therefore that failed to satisfy this natural test of the rules of Aristotle were considered the highest embodiment.

Among the ‘kinds’ of poetry, the most important were held to be the epic, the tragedy and the comedy, though Boileau briefly discusses other kinds too-the elegy, the ode, the sonnet, the satire, and the epigram. As each ‘kind’ was believed to be distinct from the others in its aim, subject matter, style, and other respect, it had rules of its own, again deduced from the earlier classical theories which it was necessary for every poet to follow. The epic, which Aristotle had considered inferior to the tragedy, was held to be superior to all ‘kinds,’ although in the matter of its rules he continued to be the final authority: in the choice of a proper fable and characters and the appropriate use of the supernatural, episodes, sentiments and language. To these, however, Bossu added the proviso that the epic must inculcate a moral, and others that the fable should be drawn from a historical event, neither too remote nor too modern in time, to allow sufficient freedom of treatment to the author. The latter proviso is more or less a corollary of Aristotle’s own rules in this behalf. An interesting controversy arose over the introduction of the pagan Greek and Roman Gods and Goddesses in the epics now to be written by Christian authors. Would it not amount to defying divinities not recognized by Christianity? And so should not modern writers employ Christian mysteries in their epics? Aided by his good sense, Boileau solved the question by

observing that the epic looked most like itself with pagan mythology and with no other. It was an embellishment that could not be replaced by any other, as indispensable to it as its very form.

The rules of the tragedy and the comedy were similarly defined. In general, they were to observe the three unities, probability in plot and character and propriety in sentiment, expression and other parts. In tragedy, the plot was to be borrowed from history, the tragic hero was to be a person of high rank whose ruin must excite pity and fear, the play was to consist of five acts, and not more than four characters were to appear on the stage together. Rapin explained tragic pleasure as the agitation of the soul arising from the emotions of pity and fear rather than as *catharsis* resulting therefrom. With this difference only, the rest is all Aristotle either as such or by implication. The same, more or less, is true of the rules of the comedy. Its plot was to be invented instead of being borrowed from history; its characters were to be of lowly rank, typical of their class in their failings; its raillery was to be of a refined sort; and it was to have no tragic intermixture anywhere. Rules were framed for the other 'kinds' too but Aristotle was most pressed into service in these three major kinds.

It is worth to note here that while neo- classicism was the prevailing mood of France in this age, at least two of its great writers, Corneille and Saint Evremond, were not in harmony with the spirit of the age. Endowed with reason and good sense no less than the rest, they came to a different conclusion altogether. Arguing that Aristotle's observations were based only on the writings produced till his time, Corneille declared that they could not necessarily be valid for those produced later and should not therefore be regarded as binding on all ages and nations. He wanted them to be followed in their spirit rather than in their letter. Saint Evremond also protested against the 'troublesome constraint' of Aristotelian rules that left 'Nothing to freedom and nature.' 'There is nothing so perfect,' he said 'as to rule all ages and nations.' These ideas too were not without their effect on the neo-classical movement in England particularly in its earlier stages, while they were exploited to the full a hundred years later when there was a revolt against the neo- classical tradition.

## SECTION -II

### STRUCTURE

#### 2.0 JOHNSON'S LIFE AND WORKS

Samuel Johnson was born in 1709, at the village of Lichfield in England. His father was a provincial bookseller. Johnson was unfortunate to contract scrofula (disease of the eye that makes you myopic) in infancy from his nurse. So his eyesight was impaired very early in life. Otherwise, he grew up as a boy of unusual physical health and robustness. He also had from early life the habit of reading for long hours. He became a voracious reader. Despite poverty, his father sent him to a college of Oxford, where he remained only for two years (1728-29). He had to leave his studies without a degree. However, in that “nest of singing birds” (Oxford), he distinguished himself for his pride as well as for his learning. Recalling these poverty-stricken days in his later life, when tutors and students loved him and thought of him “a gay and frolicksome fellow,” Johnson said : “Sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolick. I was miserably poor, and thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all authority.” Poverty drove him back to Lichfield without a degree. For six years, he remained a schoolmaster or bookseller. But he remained all along a rapid and desultory (unsystematic) reader.

Johnson became a published author in 1731 when his Oxford friends printed without his consent, his Latin version of Pope's *Messiah*. In 1735, a friendly bookseller employed him to translate a book on Abyssinia. In the same year, he married a widow twice his age, to whom he remained devoted even after her death in 1752. By 1737, he had also written a tragedy, *Irene*, whereupon he left school-teaching, hoping for a better career. Johnson trudged up to London in 1737 with one of his favourite pupils, named David Garrick. Thereafter, he remained in London all his life. He became a Londoner, with he and the city becoming almost identical with each other. While in London, he made amusing and useful friends. Richard Savage was one

of them whose *Life* Johnson wrote in 1744. It was Savage who initiated him in the seamy life of hack writer. Another was Edward Cave, proprietor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Cave gave him all sorts of employment, such as the preparation of the semi-allegorical and an almost illegal accounts of the "Senate of Lilliput." This work gave the public some notion of the speeches made in the House of Parliament. Still another friend of Johnson was Thomas Osborne, a bookseller in London, who used Johnson's erudition for preparing a catalogue of the famous Harleian Library. Johnson also wrote Preface for *The Harleian Miscellany* (1744). Although all this was hack work for a writer of Johnson's (later) stature, it made him famous both as poet and scholar.

After all, it was poetry which had drawn Johnson to London. But his *Irene* remained unacted until 1749, when David Garrick, by then famous as an actor and in power at Drury Lane theatre, produced it. The tragedy, though valued for its moral seriousness, aroused no tears. As a poet, Johnson made his reputation on another piece. His now famous satire, *London* was published in 1738. It is an imitation of Juvenal's third satire, and came out on the same day as Alexander Pope's *Epilogue* to his satires. Although the work of a new poet, Johnson's poem compared very favourably with that of Pope. Both the poets attacked in their respective poems the corruption of the times in typical fashions. Johnson's picture of London in the poem is, however, not comparable to what he depicted in his *Life of Savage*. In the latter, we also find the best account of the Grub-street existence. In 1747, at Garrick's request, Johnson also wrote a prologue for the opening of the season of Drury Lane theatre, which was remarkable for its pungent and imaginative statements by way of dramatic criticism. In just sixty-two lines, Johnson incisively sketched the development of English drama with specially remarkable lines devoted to neo-classical tragedy.

In 1749, came out Johnson's most famous poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, expressing pessimism, which as much permeates the poem as it did his life. The vanity of literary or scholarly fame is coloured by personal feeling in the following couplet from the poem :

There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.

Johnson seems to have at the back of his mind, here, writers like Savage who had died in a debtor's jail, and Johnson's own collaborator on *The Harleian Miscellany*, William Oldys, who had remained in Fleet prison for debt from 1751 to 1753. Among several patches of beautiful lines, there is also the following on "gold" :

For gold his sword the hirling ruffian draws,  
For gold the hirling judge distorts the laws;  
Wealth heaped on wealth, nor truth nor safety buys,  
The dangers gather as the treasures rise.

The magnificent and marmoreal gloom of the couplets about Charles XII remind one of later conquerors :

He left the name, at which the world grew pale,  
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.

Johnson was capable of commanding this stately eloquence, but tenderness of strong personal emotion left him inarticulate. Even his quiet lines, *On the Death of Dr. Robert Level*, who remained for many years a member of Johnson's household, lack intimacy.

Although he has left behind at least two memorable poems (*London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*), Johnson was essentially a man of prose. He himself realized it and devoted himself to his prose work, never looking back to his early years of poetry. He rightfully won high reputation as a scholar and as a prose moralist. His major reputation as a scholar rests on his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which had brought him fame in his own time. Johnson had a naturally defining mind. His definitions of words were generally excellent, although now we chiefly remember his jocose or erratic examples cited by Boswell and others. These were at times merely playful. Quite often, they only aired Johnson's cherished prejudices. For instance, he defines *lexicographer* as "a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the significance of words." *Network* is defined as "anything rearticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections." Johnson kept up his feud with the Scots in defining *oats* as "a

grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.” And *Whig*, tersely, “is the name of a faction.” After 1762, when through his Scottish Prime minister, Lord Bute, King George III, bestowed a pension on Johnson, the joke was on the Doctor because of his definition of *pension* as “an allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England, it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.”

In 1765, the volumes of Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare’s plays appeared. While the volumes were attacked in part as coming from a pensioner, they were well received and greatly stimulated scholarship concerning Shakespeare. Johnson’s contribution was of course, less textual than it was interpretative and historical. He traced many sources for the plays. His notes on individual passages were usually sound and illuminating. It was frequently provocative of comment by others. The preface was one of the best pieces of prose Johnson wrote-incisive and sensitively phrased. Its doctrine was sensible rather than new. Johnson’s statements concerning the nature of Shakespeare’s genius and work are more complete and more explicit than those of his predecessors. They are generally admirable. Three things are notable : (1) Johnson appeals to the imaginative basis of literature in attacking the unities : “the objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Anthony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more.” Johnson then goes on to give an exposition of imaginative truth, forcing those who talk of the “distrust of imagination” to read him again. (2) His conception of general nature is here well expressed. He likes Shakespeare because “Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident.” Thus, to Johnson nature is essential humanity, accidental or minute detail. “Just representation of general nature” requires the elimination of irrelevant detail. As he remarks in the famous passage in *Rasselas*, the poet does not present *all* details or even irrelevant details such as the “streaks of the tulip,” but rather “such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind.” The chosen detail must induce imaginative recall. In his opinion, the art demands that sort of imaginative recall which serves to lead one to general truth. (3) Dr Johnson, is in regard to Shakespeare, as with regard to all literature,

moralistic in his approach. To him, Shakespeare is a great moral teacher, but only by accident, not by effort. In general, like any other of his tribe (Dryden, Pope, or Addison), Johnson had an extensive conception of Shakespeare's defects. As ever, he is a judicial critic, and must find fault. But he has an equally keen eye for excellences as well.

Apart from these works of scholarship, Johnson had earned an early reputation as a moral essayist. That was even before either the *Dictionary* or the edition of Shakespeare appeared. His basic principle in all his writings, prose as well as poetry, was : "He who thinks reasonably must think morally." In 1748, for instance, Johnson had contributed to Dodsley's *Preceptor* an allegory called *The Vision of Theodore, the Hermit of Teneriffe*. He himself once said that this work "was the best thing he ever wrote." It combines allegory with moral precept. Around this time in his writing career, Johnson also tried his hand at a periodical essay. He launched in 1750 his *Rambler*, which is considered only next to *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*. *Rambler* continued until 1752, going into 208 numbers, and brought an early reputation to Johnson. From 1750 to 1760, he contributed to a newspaper, *The Universal Chronicle*, a series of nearly a hundred essays called *The Idler*. Then, he also contributed essays in *The Adventurer* (1753-54). Besides, he wrote book-reviews and articles for various magazines during the same period.

Johnson's best piece of moral prose is, perhaps, his *History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. This work was an Oriental apologue, related to the sort of thing he had occasionally done in *The Rambler*. But *Rasselas* is closer to heart and more significant than any other of this sort he had written before. It was rapidly written in January, 1759, and hastily published in April to defray the funeral expenses of his mother. The work is considered Johnsons' most appealing presentation of his ideas on the vanity of human wishes, and on the impossibility of complete happiness in the imperfect human lot. His ideas on the subject can be summed up as under : Animals can eat, sleep and be content. But man, who is both animal and immortal, is torn by desires that this world cannot satisfy. For man, a "stagnant mind" is brutal, a restless mind inevitable, and hence unhappy. Johnson's *Rasselas* has its mood in common with Voltaire's *Candide*, although while Voltaire is content to ridicule the optimism of Leibniz and Pope, which

(Voltaire mistakenly seems to believe) denies the existence of evil, Johnson is not so much concerned with the “system of things,” or with universal harmony, as he is with the imperfect ability of man to adjust himself to practical life. In his *Rasselas*, Johnson pays his homage to pastoral life, to the hermits’ solitary flight from temptation, to monastic life, to Stoic pride, to the life according to nature, and to many more paths of happiness.

After Johnson started receiving pension in 1762, he wrote much less than before. However, he still produced two major works after that year. One of these is his *Journey to the Western Islands* (1775), which is an account of a long-projected tour with Boswell, which he finally made in 1773. Johnson by then was already sixty-four years old. His book was later shaded by Boswell’s own *Tour of the Hebrides* (1785), which excels precisely because Boswell can present the picturesqueness of Johnson as well as of Hebrides. But Johnson’s book shows his eye for detail and depth of moral reflection inaccessible to Boswell. The net result of the journey was to confirm Johnson in his opinion that Macpherson’s Ossian was a fraud and that primitive life and institutions were loathsome. He had experienced “simplicity” and found it “a native of the rocks.” He did make some attempts to restrain his anti-Scottish prejudices but his wit always broke through. In fact, it is these caustic passages of his unmatched wit that made his work popular in England and increased, though temporarily, his vogue.

His second and last work of these later years, after he became recipient of state pension, was the series of prefatory *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81). This has survived as easily as his best prose work. Johnson began the work in his sixty-eighth year and completed in his seventy-second. He wrote, as a commissioned writer for certain booksellers, fifty-two lives. The choice of poets and the order in which the lives were to be written was not of Johnson; the booksellers decided it. But the writing was Johnson’s. He was devoted to both poetry and “the biographical part of literature.” Once he told Boswell, “the biographical part of literature is what I love most.” In literature, Johnson valued “what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use,” and he found that in biography. He had a sense of both the universality and diversity of mankind, and advocated the presentation of minute biographical facts. The enforced brevity of his *Lives*, however, precluded



the use of much minute detail. Hence the *Lives* excel not so much for their intimacy as for their solid judgment and their terse, finished phrasing. They abound also in authoritative enunciations of general wisdom, such as the following (concerning education) : “We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance.”

Well before he secured leisure through pension, Johnson had securely established his reputation as a conversationalist. He had met Boswell in 1763, and thereafter we naturally find more records of his talk. In 1764, the Club was founded, where Johnson had the best conversation of his time. Sir Joshua Reynolds was the first to propose the Club. The original members of the Club included Reynolds, Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, and their lesser friends in the circle. As Boswell records, “they met at the Turk’s Head in Gerrard-street, Soho, one evening in every week at seven, and generally continued their conversation till a pretty late hour.” Other than charter members (those who joined later), in Johnson’s day, were Bishop Percy, Garrick, Joseph and Thomas Warton, Fox, Gibbon, and Adam Smith. In 1773, Boswell himself was elected a member. Thus, Johnson enjoyed the company of the most interesting personalities of his time. Conversation was Johnson’s greatest pleasure. Since he suffered almost all his adult life from melancholia, in a way conversation was also an anodyne. Increasingly, he hated to be alone (his wife had died in 1752). So talk was medicinal to his mind. It prevented near-madness. Given his temperament, conversation was bound to be mercurial. When Johnson once said to Boswell, “Well, we had a good talk,” Boswell’s reply was, “Yes, Sir, you tossed and gored several persons.” Generally, however, Johnson was, as Malone reports, “as correct and elegant in his common conversation as in his writings.” Boswell, too, concludes his *Life of Johnson* with the opinion that in conversation Johnson was essentially a virtuoso, who in a group delighted in showing his dexterity even to the extent of making sophistry acceptable. But talking more privately, or on topics concerning which he had settled convictions, he was genuinely and constantly sincere. He himself admitted that he often “talked for victory.”

Although he wrote a good deal on religion and politics, he was most at home in literary criticism. Not that he was always without fault or weakness in

his criticism, but he was generally sound in sensing the merit of a writer or a work. His weakest side as critic, is revealed in his blindness and prejudice in respect to Milton, his neglect of the Elizabethans (except Shakespeare), and his dislike of his own contemporary writers. His strength as a critic lies in his directness and clarity of insight, in his defined and articulate thinking, in his insistence (typical of his age) that life is the best commentary on art. He quotes Bacon as saying, "Books can never teach the use of books." And he himself adds : "The student must learn to reduce his speculations to practice, and accommodate his knowledge to the purposes of life." For him, the function of criticism was "to form a just estimate" of a work. The critic-judge must understand the case before him and the principles, rules, or laws applicable to it. Principles or rules are essential but relative. They are "the instruments of mental vision, which may indeed assist our faculties, when properly used, but produce confusion and obscurity by unskillful application." In other words, principles were an aid to perception, but no substitute for it. Several times Johnson speaks of "the cant of those who judge by principles rather than perception."

The real enemies of just criticism were, however, as Johnson saw it, not the rules so much as "the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription." His view of the nature and function of poetry remains of his age. In his view, its end is "to instruct by pleasing." Since poetry is the work of genius ("that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgment is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates".) In his view, genius includes invention, imagination, and judgment. Johnson, while affirming that "no man ever yet became great by imitation" of his predecessors merely, believes that genius must be trained by study. As he insists, "The highest praise of genius is original invention." Imagination, to Johnson, in the context of poetry, is a vivifying and delightful faculty. It objectifies truth, recombines experience, "and produces novelty only by varied combinations." As he insists in *Rasselas*, the poet "must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place." For Johnson, poetry was the most important thing in the world, next only to religion and morality. It was, in fact, the attendant and indispensable servant of both religion and morality. No

doubt, Johnson's prejudices were strong. But his values of sense, power, morality, novelty, and durability, are sound and judiciously applied.

Johnson's criticism is especially valuable in his comments on diction, where he is both competent and interesting. He is, no doubt, a purist, which makes him condemn the artificial re-creation of Latinate idiom that Milton used in *Paradise Lost*. In his view, Dryden forced language to the very "brink of meaning" and loved to "hover over the abyss of unideal vacancy." Hence he prefers Pope to Dryden in the matter of diction. Johnson, as did Wordsworth later, also objected to Gray's artificiality or inexactness of diction. It is, however, Johnson's own prose style, in which he wrote his literary criticism, which is, perhaps, the greatest of his achievements. It constantly and aptly expresses the essential directness of his mind. A typical bit of his idiom is his characterization of Otway's bottle companions: "Their fondness was without benevolence, and their familiarity without friendship." This style, as shown here, has significant balance, conscious structure and rhythm. It also has pithiness, the phrasal compactness of his sentences are normally brief. Besides, it has exquisite precision in its choice of abstract nouns. It also has an illusion of Latinity. By habit, he writes in abstract terms, and such terms tend to seem Latin even when they are not. His fondness for polysyllables produced the heaviness of style that has usually been called Johnsonese.

Thus, Johnson, in his various forms of prose as well as in his poetry not only represented his age at its best but also dominated and guided it in the matters of literary tasks and judgement. We may not care to read his *Dictionary* today, but we do read him, and quite seriously his *Preface to Shakespeare* and *Lives of Poets*. Also, we may not include him among the greatest English poets of all times, but if we have to know the poetry of the "Age of Johnson," we cannot ignore his poetry either. We may disregard his minor poems in that context, but we cannot effort to ignore his major poems like *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. When all is said and done, we have to concede that Johnson remains in both the history of literary criticism as well as of English prose, a landmark of great significance.

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## **SECTION - III**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **3.0 Preface to Shakespeare**

#### **3.1 Examination Oriented Questions**

#### **3.2 Multiple Choice Questions**

#### **3.3 Suggested Reading**

#### **3.0 PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE**

Many issues are taken up in more details in Johnson's renowned 'preface' to his addition of Shakespeare's plays. Three basic concerns inform this preface, how a poet's reputation is established; the poet's relation to nature; and the relative virtues of nature and experience of life as against a reliance on principles established by criticism and convention. Johnson begins his preface by intervening in the debate on the relative virtues of ancient and modern writers. He affirms that the excellence of the ancient author is based on a "gradual and comparative" estimate, as tested by "observation and experience." If we judge Shakespeare by these criteria- "length of duration and continuance of esteem" - we are justified, thinks Johnson, in allowing Shakespeare "to assume the dignity of an ancient," since his reputation has survived the customs, opinions, and circumstances of his time ( 60-61).

Inquiring into the reasons behind Shakespeare's enduring success, Johnson makes an important general statement: "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature" (61). Once again, by "general nature," Johnson refers to the avoidance of particular manners and passing customs and the foundation of one's work on the "stability of truth," i.e. truths that are permanent and universal. And it is Shakespeare above all writers, claims Johnson, who is "the poet of nature: the poet that holds up his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not molded by the accidents of time, place, and local custom; rather, they are "the genuine progeny of common humanity" and they "Act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated." Other poets, says Johnson, present a character as an individual; in Shakespeare, character "is commonly a

species.” It is by virtue of these facts that Shakespeare’s plays are filled with “practical axioms and domestick wisdom...from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence” (62).

In contrast with the “hyperbolical or aggravated characters” of most playwrights, Shakespeare’s personages are not heroes but men; he expresses “human sentiments in human language,” using common occurrences. Indeed in virtue of his use of his durable speech derived from “the common intercourse of life,” Johnson views Shakespeare as “one of the original masters of our language” (70). Though Shakespeare “approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful,” the events he portrays accord with probability. In view of these qualities, Shakespeare’s drama “is the mirror of life”(64-65).

Johnson now defends Shakespeare against charges brought by critics and writers such as John Dennis, Thomas Rymer, and Voltaire. These critics argue that Shakespeare’s characters insufficiently reflect their time period and status, that his Romans, for example, are not sufficiently Roman, and his kings not sufficiently royal, Johnson retorts that Shakespeare “always makes nature predominate over accident; and... he preserves the essential character,” extricated from accidental conventions and the “causal distinction between tragedy and comedy”. Johnson acknowledges that Shakespeare’s plays “are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; 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.” The ancient poets selected certain aspects of this variety which they restricted to tragedy and comedy respectively; whereas Shakespeare “has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition” (66-67). It is here, in his defense of tragicomedy that Johnson appeals to nature as a higher authority than precedent. He allows that “Shakespeare’s practice is contrary to the rules of criticisms...but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied...and approaches nearer than

either to the appearance of life.” Moreover, says Johnson, the mixed genre makes for greater variety, and “all pleasure consists in variety”(67). Johnson also points out that when Shakespeare’s plays were first “edited” in 1623 by members of his acting company, these editors, though they divided the plays into comedies, histories, and tragedies, did not distinguish clearly between these three types. And through all of the three forms, Shakespeare’s “mode of composition is the same; an interchange of seriousness and merriment,” and he “never fails to attain his purpose” (68).

Johnson does concede, however, that Shakespeare had many faults. His first defect is that he is “more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose.” Johnson acknowledges that from Shakespeare’s plays, a “system of social duty” may be culled. The problem is that Shakespeare’s “precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good and evil,” leaving his examples of good and bad actions “to operate by chance.” And it is always a writer’s duty, Johnson insists, “to make the world better” (71). Among other faults of Shakespeare cited by Johnson are: the looseness of his plots, whereby he “omits opportunities of instruction or delighting”; the lack of regard for distinction of time or place, such that persons from one age or place are indiscriminately given attributes pertaining to other eras and locations; the grossness and licentiousness of his humor; the coldness and pomp of his narrations and set speeches; the failure to follow through with scenes that evoke terror and pity; and a perverse and digressive fascination with quibbles and wordplay (71-74).

There is one type of defect, however, from which Johnson exonerates Shakespeare: neglect of the classical unities of drama. Johnson takes this opportunity to elaborate on his earlier cynicism regarding these ancient rules. To begin with, he exempts Shakespeare’s histories from any requirement of unity; since these are neither tragedies nor comedies, they are not subject to the laws governing these genres. All that is required in these histories is that “the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural and distinct. No other unity is intended” (75). Johnson argues that Shakespeare does observe unity of action: his plots are not structured by a complication and denouement “for this is seldom the order of

real events, and Shakespeare is the poet of nature.” But he does observe Aristotle’s requirement that a plot have a beginning, middle, and end.

For the unities of time and place, however, Shakespeare had no regard, a point on which Johnson defends Shakespeare by questioning these unities themselves. Like Corneille, he views these unities as having “given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor” (75-76). Johnson sees these unities as arising from “the supposed necessity of making a drama credible.” And such a requirement is premised on the view that the mind of a spectator or reader “revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.” The unity of place is merely an inference from the unity of time, since in a short period of time, spectators cannot believe that given actors have traversed impossible distances to remote locations. Such are the grounds on which critics have objected to the irregularity of Shakespeare’s drama. In Johnson’s eyes, such premises are themselves spurious : in a striking counter –argument, he appeals to Shakespeare himself as a counter –authority, asserting : “It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality: that any dramattick fable in its materiality was ever credible” (76). Spectators, Johnson observes, are always aware, in their very trip to the theater, that they are subjecting themselves to a fiction, to a form of temporary self-delusion. And we must acknowledge that, “if delusion be admitted,” it has “no certain limitation”. “If we can believe that the battle being enacted on stage is real, why would we be counting the clock or dismissing the changing of places as unreal? We know, from first to last, that “the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players” (77).

Imitations give us pleasure, says Johnson, “not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind” (78). Johnson concludes that “nothing is essential to the fable, but “unity” of action,” and that the unities of time and place both arise from “false assumption” and diminish the variety of drama (79). Hence these unities are “to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction,” the greatest virtues of a play being “to copy nature and instruct life.” Johnson is well aware of the forces arrayed against him on these points, and that he is effectively recalling “the principles of drama to a new examination”(80). Yet his strategy is both to argue logically, against the incoherence of the unities of time

and place and to set up Shakespeare as an alternative source of authority as against the classical tradition. Ironically, his own views are thus sanctioned by a playwright to whom he himself has painstakingly accorded the dignity of a classic.

Johnson broadly agrees with the tradition that Shakespeare lacked formal learning; the greater part of his excellence “was the product of his own genius.” In contrast with most writers, who imitate their predecessors, Shakespeare directly obtained “an exact knowledge of many modes of life” as well as of the inanimate world gathered “by contemplating things as they really exist” (89). He demonstrates clearly that “he has seen with his own eyes; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind.” In summary, the “form, the characters, the language, and the shows of the English drama are his” (90). Johnson also shrewdly points out that Shakespeare’s reputation owes something to his audience, to its willingness to praise his graces and overlook his defects (90-91). In this text, Johnson’s appeal to nature and direct experience and observation over classical precedents and rules, as well as the assessment of Shakespeare as inaugurating a new tradition effectively sets the stage for various broader perspective of the role of the poet, the poet’s relation to tradition and classical authority, and the virtues of individualistic poetic genius. His assessment of Shakespeare is backed by a laborious editing of his plays.

### **3.1 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. What is the theory of three unities and how does Shakespeare violate it?

Ans. The theory of three unities, originating from Aristotle’s ‘Poetics’, mandates unity of action (a single, self-contained plot), time (events within a single day), and place (a single setting). Shakespeare’s plays often violate these unities. For instance, ‘Macbeth’ features multiple locations and spans more than a day, while ‘King Lear’ includes complex subplots. Samuel Johnson defends Shakespeare’s disregard for these unities, arguing that audiences understand the fiction of plays and can easily adjust to shifts in time and place.

2. What is the importance of Samuel Johnson’s *Preface to Shakespeare*?



Ans. Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare" is important for its astute literary criticism and insights into Shakespeare's work. Johnson's methodology of comparing Shakespeare to other playwrights set a precedent for literary criticism. His influential conclusion is that Shakespeare's characters mirror real human nature, making them timeless and relatable to all of humanity. Johnson's work remains valued for its depth and analytical approach.

3. Why does Samuel Johnson value comedy over tragedy in "Preface to Shakespeare"?

Ans. In Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare", he doesn't value comedy over tragedy, but rather highlights Shakespeare's natural aptitude for writing comedic scenes. Johnson observes that Shakespeare's comedies feel instinctual and effortless, often surpassing expectations. On the other hand, Shakespeare's tragedies, while skillful, appear to be more labor-intensive, always seeking opportunities to inject comedy. Johnson also notes that the comic characters are more realistic and relatable, portraying a truer reflection of life.

4. Discuss the merits and defects of Shakespeare according to Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare."

Ans. According to Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare," Shakespeare's main defects include a lack of moral instruction, crude language, offensive puns, anachronisms, and melodramatic speeches. However, Johnson praises Shakespeare's originality, his departure from classical conventions, his lyrical use of the English language, and the powerful, enduring emotions in his works. Johnson also emphasizes understanding Shakespeare in the context of his contemporaries and the state of English literature during his time.

### **3.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

- 1) Dr. Johnson was born in which year? \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a) 1708
  - b) 1711
  - c) 1710

d) 1709

Ans :- **d) 1709**

2) Who is the writer of Johnson's famous Biography?\_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Goldsmith

b) Boswell

c) Dryden

d) Gibbon

Ans :- **b) Boswell**

3) Dr. Johnson's most ambitious work which took eight years to complete was\_\_\_\_\_ .

a) The Vanity of Human Wishes

b) London

c) Dictionary of the English Language

d) Lives of the English Poets.

Ans :- **c) Dictionary of the English Language**

4) What was the name of the Periodical which Johnson Started in imitation of the Spectator \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) The Awakener

b) The Grumbler

c) The Rambler

d) The Morning Star

Ans :- **c) The Rambler**

5) Samuel Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare was published in\_\_\_\_\_ .

a) 1765

b) 1798

c) 1782

d) 1794

Ans :- **a) 1765**

6) In Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson defended Shakespeare's use of \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Tragedy

b) Drama

c) Comedy

d) Tragic Comedy

Ans :- **d) Tragic Comedy**

7) According to Johnson what type of drama did Shakespeare write with much labour? \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Comedy

b) Tragedy

c) Melodrama

d) Farce

Ans :- **b) Tragedy**

8) Shakespeare's character portrays \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Humanity

b) Wickedness

c) Immoral behaviour

d) Cunning

Ans :- **a) Humanity**

9) Johnson said that Shakespeare often surpassed expectation or desire when he wrote \_\_\_\_\_ .

a) Tragedy

b) Comedy

c) Revenge Comedy

d) Tragi Comedy

Ans :- **b) Comedy**

10) Johnson said that Shakespeare showed no regard to \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Three unities
- b) Unity of Time
- c) Unity of Place
- d) The unity of time and place

Ans :- **d) The unity of time and place**

11) Shakespeare was the man who of all modern and perhaps ancients poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul, was said by\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) John Dryden
- b) Dr. Johnson
- c) Alexander Pope
- d) Jonathan Swift

Ans :- **a) John Dryden**

12) Preface to Shakespeare by Johnson is divided into\_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Four parts
- b) Two parts
- c) Three parts
- d) Five parts

Ans :- **c) Three parts**

### **3.3 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Johnson, Samuel (1765), *Mr. Johnson's Preface to His Edition of Shakespear's Plays*.
2. Wain, John (1974), *Samuel Johnson*, New York : Viking Press.

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. 19-22**

**SECTION : I -V**

**M.A.ENGLISH**

**UNIT - V**

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**ALEXANDER POPE**  
***ESSAY ON CRITICISM (1711)***

**SECTION - I**

**OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lessons 19-22 is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of Alexander Pope and also to explain the main arguments in *An Essay on Criticism*.

**STRUCTURE**

**ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)**

- 1.0 Life and Works : Introduction
- 1.1 Works
- 1.2 Foremost Poet of the Day
- 1.3 His Translation of Homer
- 1.4 Critical Works

**SECTION - II**

- 2.0 Literary Tendencies of the Age
- 2.1 The Early Eighteenth Century : The Height of Neo-Classicism
- 2.2 The Neo-Classical Creed

### **SECTION - III**

- 3.0 His Critical Works
- 3.1 Analysis of *An Essay on Criticism*
- 3.2 Rules for Good Critic
- 3.3 Critical Guidelines
- 3.4 His Praise for Shakespeare

### **SECTION - IV**

- 4.0 Classicism
- 4.1 Function of Criticism
- 4.2 Art of Writing (Literature)
- 4.3 Classical Legacy
- 4.4 Imitation
- 4.5 Contribution

### **SECTION - V**

- 5.0 Additional Notes
- 5.1 The Kinds
- 5.2 Self-Assessment Questions
- 5.3 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 5.4 Suggested Reading

## SECTION -I

### STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Life of Alexander Pope : Introduction
- 1.1 Works of Alexander Pope
- 1.2 Foremost Poet of the Day
- 1.3 His Translation of Homer
- 1.4 Critical Works

### 1.0 LIFE OF ALEXANDER POPE : INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope was born on 21 May 1688 in the city of London, where his father is believed to have worked in the wholesale linen trade. Nothing is known for certain of the boy's early years, except that his physique was never good. As a result of too much study (so he thought), he acquired a curvature of the spine and some tubercular infection, which limited his growth – his full-grown height was four feet six inches-and seriously impaired his health. He struggled to ignore these handicaps – and indeed he could honestly protest at times that he was

The gayest valetudinaire

-Most thinking rake, alive, -

but it was inevitable that his deformity and his poor health should interfere with his activities throughout what he pathetically calls 'this long Disease, my Life', and should increase his sensitiveness to mental and physical pain.

Pope's parents left London to live at Binfield, in Windsor Forest when their son was about twelve years old. They made this move, in all probability, because they were Roman Catholics, for to be a Catholic at this time was to lay oneself open to suspicion and persecution. Several laws were passed forbidding Catholics to live within ten miles of London, preventing their children from being taught by Catholic priests, and compelling them to forfeit two-thirds of their estates or the value thereof. And of course they were prevented from serving in Parliament or holding any office of profit under the Crown.

## 1.1 WORKS OF ALEXANDER POPE

Though his home was in Windsor Forest, Pope must frequently have been in London, since before he was twenty he had begun to make friends with many of the chief men of letters of the day, such as Congreve, Wycherley, Garth, and Walsh. With Walsh, whom Dryden had called the ‘best critic of our nation’, he entered into correspondence on the subject of versification, and to Congreve and others he showed the manuscript of his *Pastorals*, which a few years later (1709) were to become his first published work. The nine years from 1708 to 1717 were experimental years for Pope. He was busy attempting a variety of poetical ‘kinds’ to try where his strength lay. Following the steps of Boileau (and, of course, of Horace) he tried his hand at a poem about the writing of poetry, and produced the *Essay on Criticism* (1711). Boileau’s *Le Lutrin* (1674) and Garth’s *Dispensary* (1699) suggested to him the idea of a mock epic, which he fulfilled in *The Rape of the Lock* (1712). And with Denham’s *Coppers Hill* (1642) in mind, he attempted a ‘local poem’, a ‘kind’ in which the landscape to be described recalls historic and other associations; this poem, called *Windsor Forest*, was published in 1713. Two of many more experiments may be mentioned— the *Eloisa to Abelard*, and imitation of Ovid’s *Heroical Epistles*, and the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, modelled on the elegies of Ovid and Tibullus.

## 1.2 FOREMOST POET OF THE DAY

But Pope was recognized as the foremost poet of his day. He had made a wide circle of friends in London, and several enemies as well. With Swift, whom he had met about the year 1712, with Gray, Dr. Arbuthnot, the Earl of Oxford, and others, he formed the Scriblerus Club whose members met (until 1714) to compose joint satires on pedantry and false learning. He also knew Steele and Addison. But though he admired Addison’s work, Pope could never become intimate with him. They were temperamentally antipathetic. Addison, slightly supporting a rival translation of Homer, and some hypersensitiveness on Pope’s part provoked the famous ‘character’ which Pope sent to Addison and later printed as a character of Atticus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*.



### 1.3 HIS TRANSLATION OF HOMER

The translation of Homer was now absorbing all his energies. The first four books of the *Iliad* were published in 1715, and the translation was completed in 1720. The *Odyssey*, for which he enlisted the help of Broome and Fenton, was published in five volumes in 1725 and 1726. The Homer of Pope's translation is powered, but that is no more than to say that Pope was translating him to suit the taste of the times, as Chapman had previously translated him to suit the taste of the Elizabethans. Pope's version, in spite of its faults of taste and scholarship, remains the most readable of all translations of Homer.

The labour had been great, but the reward was great too. No poem had ever sold so well before. Pope's financial position was secured.

*'Thanks to Homer,' he wrote, 'I live and thrive  
Indebted to no Prince or Peer alive.'*

Having presented Homer, the greatest of the Ancients to his contemporaries, Pope next turned his attention to the greatest of Shakespeare in 1725. Here, Pope had treated Shakespeare much as he treated Homer; he had made him conform to modern standards of taste in some degree, at any rate by removing the more obvious blemishes which Shakespeare had committed. Some of Pope's contemporaries had not approved of his translation of Homer – 'It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope', the great scholar, Bentley, had remarked, 'but you must not call it Homer'. Similarly, disapproval was expressed of the edition of Shakespeare. In particular, a scholar named Theobald exposed its deficiencies in a book called *Shakespeare Restored*. Pope was peculiarly sensitive to such attacks upon his work – and to attacks upon his character – of which many had been published during the past fifteen years. Dennis, a friend of Dryden and a critic of some repute, had published a damaging series of *Remarks* on most of Pope's publications, having been spurred to do so by an indiscreet allusion to his irascibility which Pope had slipped into the *Essay on Criticism* (11, 585 ff.). And many smaller fry had joined in to bait him. Pope was now determined to repay them. But he comforted himself by reflecting that he was maintaining the highest literary

standards and that his enemies were pedants and other persons devoid of spirit, taste, and sense. This is the line of defence which he assumed in *The Dunciad* (1728), a mock-epic like *The Rape of the Lock*, but more sombre, often more magnificent, and less easily appreciated. To make his satire on pedantry the sharper, he re-issued the poem in 1729 with an elaborate mock commentary of prefaces, notes, appendices, indexes, and errata, as a burlesque of scholarship. In his poem, his enemies are preserved like flies in amber. We need notes today to discover who they were, but even without notes it is not difficult to see what defects and stupidities these poor wretches represent.

#### 1.4 CRITICAL WORKS

In the winter of 1730, Pope told his friend Spencer of a new work which he was contemplating. It was to be series of verse epistles, of which the first four or five would be on 'The Nature of Man' and the rest would be on Moderation or 'the Use of Things'. This work was never completed, but though Pope was more than once deflected from it, he never abandoned the intention till the end of his life. An epistle from one of the later sections was the first to be published. This was *Of Taste* (1731), now known as *Moral Essay, Epistle IV*, and was addressed to his friend, Lord Burlington, the famous amateur architect. This poem which is one of the most characteristic works of Pope's maturity, presents an entertaining selection of examples of false taste in architecture and landscape gardening, and concludes with some suggestions for a worthier use of money. Within the next four years, three more *Moral Essays* were published as well as a group of four epistles entitled *An Essay on Man*, which was intended to serve as the introduction to the larger work which Pope had in view. The *Moral Essays*, with their brilliant observations of human nature, provide better reading than the *Essay on Man*, in which Pope is concerned to vindicate the doctrine that 'whatever is, is right'. But the reader of the *Essay on Man* will be rewarded by finding much that is beautiful and much proverbial wisdom, that 'springs eternal in the human breast'; he will surely enjoy, the stately opening of the second epistle, which recalls Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is Man' but without any fear of what the comparison may reveal.

The pedant and the hack writer had been the main objects of Pope's attack in *The Dunciad*. In these later poems, his attack is mainly directed against debauchery and corruption, those vices which the temperate and open-hearted man most cordially abhors. The corrupting power of money is constantly Pope's theme. And as time goes on, he becomes more and more certain that political corruption is the source of all other corruption. The materialistic standards of the commercially minded, the bribing of Parliamentary electors, the horse laugh at honesty, the contempt of the patriot, when this state of affairs is encouraged by Walpole and his government, it is no wonder that higher standards cannot prevail, and that

*with the silent growth of ten per Cent,  
In Dirt and Darkness hundreds stink content.*

In the *Imitations of Horace*, therefore, and in the *Epilogue to the Satires*, political satire becomes of growing importance and it is political satire directed not merely by Pope's inward conviction but by his friend Bolingbroke, who had returned from exile to conduct the opposition to Walpole. In the last years of the seventeen-thirties, Pope had gathered around him all the most promising members of this opposition, and he had become their poet laureate.

He lived to see Walpole's fall from power, but he had ceased writing political satire with the *Epilogue*, because, as he said, 'Ridicule has become as unsafe as it was ineffectual'. He thought of returning to the *Essay on Man* once more, but he was deflected from it once again by a task to which he had always given much deliberation, the correction of his poetry. *The Dunciad* was enlarged by the addition of a fourth book (1742) and thoroughly revised (1743), Theobald being dethroned and another enemy, Colley Cibber, the actor dramatist, being set up to rule the Dunces in his stead. Changes of a less momentous nature were being made in other poems, but Pope did not live long enough to see them all published. He died of an asthmatical dropsy on 30 May 1744, in his fifty-third year.

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## SECTION - II

### STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Literary Tendencies of the Age
- 2.1 The Early Eighteenth Century : The Height of Neo-Classicism
- 2.2 The Neo-Classical Creed

### 2.0 LITERARY TENDENCIES OF THE AGE

The age of Pope witnessed the culmination of certain tendencies which had their origin in the early Renaissance, when the treasures of classical antiquity, especially Latin masterpieces of literature, criticism and rhetoric, 'swam into the ken' of the scholars of Western Europe. Their excellence was at once recognized and the worship of the ancients, the essence of neo-classicism began to spread in Italy, France and England. The next step was the formulation of rules and precepts drawn from their critical works for poetry in general and its principle kinds like drama and epic-in particular. But during the Renaissance, literature in England, at least, proceeded recklessly along its own line and the counsels of the critics mostly fell upon deaf ears. Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the fervour of the Renaissance and Reformation was not only on the decline but came to be distrusted and the nation was anxious to settle down in peace and quiet after all the 'sound and fury' of the years of civil commotion. The climate was favourable for the reception of the neo-classical rules and precepts which were already current in France, in a more severe and inflexible form. But in England, the influence of Shakespeare and other great Elizabethan dramatists, combined with the patriotic liberalism of Dryden, the tallest literary figure of the age, and also of Longinus, the exponent of the sublime, prevented the complete entrenchment of neo-classicism. After his death, the tide of neo-classicism flowed on with greater force and smoothness, but not as freely and irresistibly as it did in France, though in that country also the protest against the supremacy of rules was by no means feeble or fearful. The sporadic departures from the neo-classical norm, in the form of the recognition of *taste* in criticism, superiority of the irregular but original genius over the 'correct' talent,

appreciation of sublimity and high flight of imagination in the literary works, acceptance of enthusiastic love of all that is grand in literature and external Nature, as commended by Longinus, and belief in the elusive graces fetched from sources beyond the reach of art, and faith, tardy and halting at first, in creativity of Imagination, were like so many chinks and cracks in the edifice of neo-classicism. In course of time, they began to widen and grow in magnitude till at last they undermined the very foundation of the critical system which had dominated the literary scene in Western Europe for about two centuries.

## **2.1 THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY : THE HEIGHT OF NEO-CLASSICISM**

The early eighteenth century, though it did not produce any single figure in the field of criticism as tall, comprehensive and many-sided as Dryden, was yet remarkable for the expansion and diffusion of the critical temper. The literature of the period is full of references to this fact and many a fling is directed by the poets at a savage and snarling critics ready to pounce upon and maul the new poem fresh from the press. Swift presents a vivid but caustic picture of criticism in his *Battle of the Books*. He calls it “a malignant Deity, extended in her Den, upon the numberless volumes half devoured. At her right hand sat Ignorance, her father and husband...at her left Pride, her mother, dressing her up in the scraps of paper herself had torn. There was Opinion, her sister, light of foot, hoodwinked, and headstrong, yet giddy and perpetually turning. Around her played her children, Noise and Impudence, Dullness, and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry and Ill-manners. The Goddess herself had claws like a cat, her head and ears and voice, resembled those of an Ass”. The violence of critical controversies in the age was at once a reflection and, at times, the outcome of the virulence of the party-spirit in politics. Ned Ward is only telling a blunt truth in the following lines of *Hudibras Redivivus*, No. 1 :-

*For he that writes in such an Age,  
When Parties do for pow'r engage,  
Ought to chuse one side for the Right,*

*And then, with all his wit and spite  
Blacken and Vex the opposite.*

But it would be a great mistake to think that the age was a paradise merely of petty criticasters and sour-natured pedants. In fact, the best criticism of the period was inspired by a noble desire to formulate the rules and precepts, proper for the development of literature and art of writing, which were drawing larger numbers of votaries in view of the sudden improvement in the status of able writers, resulting from the rise of political parties and also a wider reading public, anxious to grasp at all the instruments of refinement and culture. A writer of an earlier age has aptly described the importance of good writing :

*Of all those arts in which the wits excel  
Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well.  
No kind of work requires so nice a touch  
And, if well finished, nothing shines so much.  
Mulgrave-Essay on Poetry*

Apart from the significance which was being attached to rationalism or light of Reason alike by Science and Empirical Philosophy, certain local factors played an important part in fostering the critical spirit in literature. There were, for example, clubs and coffee-houses where persons of identical tastes and interests could gather to talk and rub brains in delightful bouts of wit. In some coffee-house, young wits might gather round a veteran of the profession, listen to his mature reflections and take part in a discussion on some new work or the rules appropriate to the various kinds of poetry. Then, there were Magazines and Periodicals, aiming at the information of the public mind and cultivation of the public taste, offering convenient spaces in their columns to critical essays, reviews and letters. The most important section of the population namely the trading middle-class, which was growing in prosperity and influence, was daring or enterprising only in its vision of commercial expansion and the world-market for its goods, but in its general attitude to society it was imbued with a passion for peace, order, balance and discipline. This spirit finds a clear reflection in the growing love for the neoclassical discipline in literature and a corresponding movement in religion which came to be known as Deism.

Neo-classicism, however, concealed diverse and at times, contradictory strains beneath its seemingly consistent façade, and in England it demonstrably was never as rigid and as widely pervasive as in France. But the period under consideration marks its height in England and it is the proper place to analyse the various elements which entered into its compositions.

## 2.2 THE NEO-CLASSICAL CREED

(i) The starting point of neo-classicism is the precept ‘follow Nature’, which is contained in the following well-known couplet in Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* :

*First follow Nature, and your judgement frame.  
By her just standard, which is still the same.*

The precept ‘Follow Nature’ was by no means free from ambiguity and was used by critics in different senses in various contexts. A few of the implications of the term ‘Nature’ may be given as follows :-

- (a) It may represent the external reality or objects to be imitated by the artist. In this sense ‘follow Nature’ meant achieving versimilitude.
- (b) ‘Nature’ may also mean ‘general human Nature’, the typical qualities of a class. Positively it referred to the qualities and attributes common to men of all ages and climes; but negatively it implied the exclusion of all that is merely local, incidental, personal and singular. The poet should describe the general properties in man as well as in external Nature and exclude minute details and subtle shades as unimportant for his art.
- (c) This may be narrowed down to the natural qualities and characteristics of men of various ‘ages’ and professions. The precedent is already there in the reduction of the Aristotelian ‘universal’ to the typical in terms of the different ages –boyhood, youth, maturity and old age in Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. When Rymer criticised Shakespeare for violating Nature in *Othello*, by presenting Iago, a soldier, as crafty and scheming, he was involving this sense of Nature.

- (d) From this sense, the transition was easy to the idea of 'Nature' as it should be. Imitation then became a process of idealization through the selection of all that is best and beautiful in Nature. Dryden was one of the advocates of this view.
- (e) 'Nature' may also mean the cosmic order, *natura naturans* or a quasi-divine power manifested in the universe. Its attributes were generally described, in this period, as simplicity, order, regularity and perfect adaptation of means to ends. The artist was to imitate these traits in his work. Pope underlines this point in the following lines :-

*Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
Life, force and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source, and end and test of art.*

- (ii) The precept which followed quickly at the heels of 'follow Nature' is given by Pope as follows :-

*Be Homer's works your study and delight  
Read them by day, and meditate by night  
You then whose judgement the right course would steer  
Know well each ancient's proper character.*

The 'ancients', however, were neatly identified with Nature to avoid the contradiction of following two masters.

*Those rules of old discovered, not devis'd  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised  
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem:  
To copy Nature is to copy them.*

It means that the ancient writers and law-givers of Greece and Rome had discovered certain laws of Nature and incorporated them clearly and systematically in their works. They 'methodised Nature' and, as such, deserve the allegiance and obedience of later critics and writers.



It was this consideration which led the Italian and French critics in the 15th and 17th centuries to formulate and codify a set of rules governing the poetic kinds of genres which were to be observed by the practitioners, especially of Drama and Epic, two of the most distinguished kinds of poetry. The poetic form was to be broken into parts, the fable, the characters and the style, each of which had its regulating principles. Already, in the Restoration era, Thomas Rymer had described it to be the function of a good critic to take a book 'to pieces to consider the whole structure and economy of it'. This method is seen prominently at work in Addison's examination of *Paradise Lost* under various heads as prescribed by Le Bossu and other French critics of the period.

But almost all the critics held in common in theory at least, that there are certain graces in a work of art beyond the reach of rules and reason which generally constitute the deeper and more mysterious element of beauty and can be clearly felt but never systematically stated or scientifically analysed. Besides this, most of them evinced an awareness of the well-known remark of Longinus that mere correctness was a mark of mediocre talent, while great genius was apt to lose its way, at times, in its soaring flight. Even great Homer nods at places.

- (iii) Neo-classicism stressed the value of the ideal of correctness, the perfect following of Nature, which required a careful balancing of fancy and judgement. Fancy may kindle the flame but it is judgement alone which can 'tend the fire and make it burn clear and bright', without wasting itself in uncontrolled flame. Pope says :

*The winged courser, like a generous horse,  
Shows most true mettle when you check its course.*

This also meant a recognition of the necessity of art in the composition of a good poem or prose work.

*'True ease in writing comes from art, not chance  
As those move easiest who have learnt to dance.'*

The artist was to master the rules of the game to play it successfully and with grace. Part of this artistic discipline lay in the avoidance of 'enthusiasm', in controlling the 'pulse that riots and blood that glows'. The head was to control the heart and the stream of poetry was 'to be full without overflowing'. Moderation rather than excess was to be the mark of a cultured artist, and 'good sense', his very backbone.

- (iv) The artist was advised to deal with universal truth and general ideas which were by no means inexhaustible and had already been rendered familiar by the host of poets and writers. There was practically little scope for the originality and novelty of thoughts and the centre of gravity must be of necessity shift, to the beauty and freshness of expression. The point is made by Pope in a well-known couplet :

*True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,*

*What oft was thought but never so well expressed.*

This duty of dressing out familiar truths in striking words and expressions to make them attractive often meant, in actual practice, the skill of turning out trite platitudes and commonplaces in a neat and pointed language.

- (v) The artist was to proceed in this task as a member of the human society, interested not in the display of his private feelings and idiosyncrasies, but appealing to the judgement of his audience. The audience was generally supposed to comprise men of taste, learning and cultivated intellect, but, at times, it was clearly identified with persons of simple and unsophisticated disposition, representing human nature in its pure and universal aspect. The poet's function was supposed to be to teach and delight or to mix instruction and recreation. In many cases, the didactic aim of art was given priority over its aesthetic appeal and the emphasis rested, by implication, on the observance of the law of poetic justice or the distribution of rewards and punishments in accordance with the merits and demerits of characters. But quite early in this period, the above aim of literature was crossed by its affective

function, that is, power to move the heart or arouse the passions. The clearest expression of this emotional appeal is found in the interpretation of the tragic *catharsis*. Dryden had already stated the function of tragedy, in the light of the contemporary French interpretation, to be the softening of the obdurate pride and hardness of heart by the arousal of pity and fear; and Dennis was the earliest exponent of this theory in the eighteenth century. To him, “poetry is an art, by which the poet excites passion... in order to satisfy and improve, to delight and to reform the mind. The more passion there is, the better the poetry”.

- (vi) There was naturally a good deal of speculation about the style and diction appropriate to poetry as distinct from ‘the other harmony of prose.’ In this connection, Addison’s remark that a poet should take particular care to guard himself against idiomatic ways of speaking and words of common, domestic, low and ludicrous associations, is pertinent to recall. Chesterfield also observed, “We are refined, plain manners, plain dress and plain diction will not do for us.” Virgil was thought to be the best exemplar of the art of describing common things in an uncommon way, thus, ‘swain’ and ‘nymph’ invaded the domain of pastoral poetry, where the verdant wood became peopled with ‘feathery warblers’, and the ‘silver streams’ with ‘scaly foals’, while ‘wooly creatures’ spread over the ‘velvet plain’ and gentle Zephyrus kissed the ‘wavy’ wealth of the ‘golden year’. Apart from circumlocution and personification, the most remarkable device for heightening the poetic style was the introduction of the deities of the frozen classical mythology. Their presence in the English gardens was too prominent to be ignored even by the commonest observers, and the writers of the age did not fail to draw pointed attention to this phenomenon. “While infidelity has expunged and Christian theology from our creed, taste has introduced the heathen mythology into our gardens”. Poetic style could also be heightened through the employment of the Homeric

device of compound words and compound epithets or adjectives which add elevation and sonorous pomp to the lines. The basic ideal was clarity and generality of expression combined with smoothness and elegance, resulting from the combination of apt words and accepted flowers of rhetoric. This demanded the exclusion of all technical terms of science and arts, and all the absurdities of the Gothic age, such as the crowding of the canvas by a multiplicity of minute details and the use of fantastic or far-fetched analogies.

Nothing, however, will be further from truth than to suppose that all poetry was written in this heightened style. Decorum required different manners for different kinds of poetry. In satire, the style was to share the properties of the polished conversation with added point and pungency and variation could easily be achieved in accordance with the subject and the mood of the poet. But in Pastorals and the translations of classical epics, in the serious reflective poems and in odes the 'gaudy' phraseology was more frequently in evidence. Having this fact in mind, it will not be improper to dissent from the conviction of Gray that the 'language of the age can never be the language of poetry.' The best poetry of the day indeed, was based upon the living language of the age, which by deft handling and manipulation was made to yield a variety of expression. Just as the wig of a gentleman was cut into a diversity of shape but served ultimately to reduce and formalize the infinite variety of the human face, so the neo-classical poets linked the apparent varieties of expression to the basic unity of the current language of the cultivated society. Their mistake, if any, lay in the confusion, to use the words of Babbitt, between 'noble language and the language of nobility'.

This brief analysis of the various assumptions of neoclassicism in the early eighteenth century will serve to underline the divergence of the principles brought together under a single system, which will be further clarified by the consideration of the individual critics.

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## SECTION : III

### STRUCTURE

- 3.0 His Critical Works
- 3.1 Analysis of *An Essay on Criticism*
- 3.2 Rules for Good Critic
- 3.3 Critical Guidelines
- 3.4 His Praise for Shakespeare

### 3.0 HIS CRITICAL WORKS

Pope as a critic is remembered more for his *Essay on Criticism* than for his other critical writings, which include the *Preface to the Works of Shakespeare*, *The Art of Sinking*, *The Imitation of the Epistle of Horace to Augustus*, and *The Preface to the Translation of the Iliad*. It is the *Essay on Criticism* that contains his most considered canons of literary taste, ‘announced in youth indorsed and emphasised in age.’<sup>1</sup> It is modelled on Horace’s *Ars Arte Poetica*, and Boileau’s *L’Art Poetique*. Its subject like theirs is literary theory; it is also a treatise in verse exemplifying the method of Horace and divided into parts like *De Arte Poetica* and *L’Art Poetique*.<sup>2</sup> Its English precedents were [Sheffield’s (Earl of Mulgrave’s) *Essay on Satire* and *Essay on Poetry*, Roscommon’s *Essay on Translated Verse*, and Granville’s *Essay upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* – all written in verse. It is not without significance, however, that Pope calls it, not an essay on poetry as all these treatises were, but an essay on criticism]. For Pope’s chief concern in this essay is not so much the poet as the critic, not so much the art of poetry as the art of criticism. Even so, it is an epitome of the chief precepts of all these poets and what is more, of those of the Greek, Latin and French masters on whom many of these poets themselves drew –Aristotle, Quintilian, Longinus, Bossu, Rapin and others. There is hardly any observation in it that may be

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1. George Saintsbury : *A History of English Criticism*, P.188.*Poetica*, *Vidas De*

2. *De Arte Poetica* is divided into three books, and *L Art Poetique* into four cantos.

called Pope's own : in the words of Lady M. Wortley Montagu, who was one of Pope's friends, 'it was all stolen'. It is divided into three parts. The first (lines 1-200) makes general observations on the art of criticism : in particular, that it depends on natural endowment, training in the craft, and study of the rules and great works of antiquity. The second part (lines 201-559) enumerates the causes of wrong criticism, moral, psychological and literary, of which the last named form the backbones of the whole discussion. The last part (lines 560-744) lays down rules for the critics, mentioned for the purpose the best ones of their class from Aristotle to those whom Pope considered great in his own country.

### 3.1 ANALYSIS OF *AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM*

*An Essay on Criticism* (1711) is a poem in the tradition of Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Scattered here and there over the text and frank paraphrases of lines from Virgil, Cicero and Quintilian, and evidence of reliance on the French critics, Boileau and Rapin.

The *Essay* is neither notably systematic in its approach nor thorough in its analysis, but the sheer polish of Pope's couplets is such that the whole poem has an air of authoritative guidance from a master who is vastly superior to his subject and exudes commonsense. Pope's opening declaration is that it is just as ignorant to judge badly as to write badly, and even more damaging because it is a matter of misleading readers instead of merely boring them, and there are ten bad critics to one bad writer.

*Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
And censure freely who have written well.*

Pope thus, seemingly embraces the doctrine that only poets are fit to be critics, and after some fairly rough treatment of the fools and failed writers who turn critic, he sets out the qualifications of the true critic. He must know his own limitations, and he must 'follow Nature'- 'At once the source, and end, and test of Art'. Wit must be restrained by judgement and this is where the ancient rules can help.

*Those Rules of old discovered, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd.*

For they were not imposed arbitrarily in a theoretical vacuum. They were derived as just precepts from the great examples and the critics who formulated them did a direct service to poetic inspiration. A thorough knowledge of the ancients is thus a pre-requisite of criticism. Virgil is cited as a young poet determined to write a world masterpiece and discovering that 'Nature and Homer were...the same'.

Pope however, distances himself from those who recommend a slavish adherence to the ancient rules and models. In poetry, there are 'nameless graces which no methods teach', and the end may justify the means when 'lucky Licence' goes beyond what the rules permit. Indeed when poetic inspiration breaks through the 'vulgar bounds' to 'snatch a grace beyond the reach of art', it can go straight to the heart and possess it.

*Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend.*

On this theme (by which, one feels, Pope manages to recover the cake he has eaten) he rises to a paean of praise for the great poets, begging a spark of inspiration from them in his modest task :

*To teach vain Wits a science little known,  
T'admire superior sense, and doubt their own.*

At this point there is a break, and the reader may naturally feel that the neoclassical critics, in spite of having started out as favourites, have lost the first round of points. Pope turns now to examine the various impediments to true critical judgement : pride, inadequate knowledge ('A little learning is a dang'rous thing'), and piecemeal judgement instead of survey of the whole. Thus, there are critics who measure only in terms of elaborate conceits, ignoring the fact that

*True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.*

Others focus only on the style, ignoring the fact that

*Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
Appears more decent, as more suitable.*

But most judge only by the degree of metrical smoothness, ignoring the fact that

*'Tis not enough no harshness given offence,  
The sound must seem an Echo to the sense.*

In exemplifying this point, Pope displays his verbal and metrical virtuosity in contrasting descriptions of smooth breezes, toilsome labours, and swift-footedness. It is characteristic of his method that his images are inspired both by phrases from the Italian poet Marco Girolamo Vida (1485-1566) and by lines from Dryden's *Aeneid*.

### **3.2 RULES FOR GOOD CRITIC**

Pope also directs his fire at critics obsessed with sectarian defence of the ancients or of the moderns, critics who adapt their views to the topical trend, and those who fawn on the output of aristocrats. And he ends his second section with an attack on those envious writers who, having got to the top of the tree, do their best to disparage others, and with the demand that there should be no tenderness about harsh condemnation of literary obscenity.

In the third section of the poem, Pope lays down rules for the good critic. He must be frank and truthful, hold his peace when he is not sure of himself, and speak diffidently even when he is confident. It is not good voicing truths bluntly, for people must be taught without their sensing that they are being instructed. The critic must not be niggardly with his advice nor restrain himself so politely that he is unjust. There is no need to fear that fair criticism will anger wise writers, Pope adds, and takes the opportunity to pillory John Dennis :

*But Appius reddens at each word you speak,  
And stares, tremendous with a threatening eye...*

There is no doubt that Dennis eventually became touchy and irascible. Pope calls him 'Appius' disparagingly, for his tragedy *Appius and Virginia* (1709)



was a failure, in spite of the fact that it exploited his new method of making thunder. When later, Dennis found the management using his invention in a production of *Macbeth*, he protested in anger that they had ‘stolen his thunder’.

Pope argues that some poets are so bad that it is best to restrain comment on them. There are blockheads among the critics too. Having demolished both, Pope characterises the good critic : ‘unbiased, learned, well-bred, sincere, modestly bold and humanly severe’, and the portrait leads him to survey great critics of the past; Aristotle, Horace, Dionysius, Petronius, Quintilian and Longinus. Their age of learning was succeeded by an age of superstition, and eventually by the revival represented by Erasmus, Raphael and Vida. It is at this point that Pope shows his allegiances again. As learning advanced over the northern world, he claims, it was mostly in France that ‘critic-learning’ flourished, where Boileau ruled in the lineage of Horace.

### 3.3 CRITICAL GUIDELINES

The chief critical guides have been expressly mentioned by him in the last section of the poem :-

First, Aristotle –

*The mighty Stagirite first left the shore,  
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore :  
He steered securely, and discovered far,  
Led by the light of Maeonian star.*

Then, Horace –

*Horace still charms with graceful negligence,  
And without method talks us into sense;  
Will, life a friend, familiarly convey  
The truest notions in the easiest way.  
He, who supreme in judgement, as in wit,  
Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,*

*Yet judged with coolness, tho' he sung with fire,  
His precepts teach but what his works inspire.  
Then come Rehetoricians of Rome-  
In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find  
The justest rules and clearest method join'd.*

Then 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 the great sublime he draws.*

The catalogue closes with French critics headed by Boileau. The opening section is devoted to criticism, its use and abuse, which is followed by the enumeration of the precepts such as 'follow Nature', 'let Homer's work be your delight', the ancient rules are 'Nature methodised.'

But –

*Some beauties yet no precepts can declare  
For there's a happiness as well as care,  
Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true critics dare not mend.  
Whoever thinks a faulties piece to see,  
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.  
In ev'ry work regard the writer's end,  
Since none can compass more than they intend.*

The ideal of correctness evokes the following lines :-

*True ease in writing comes from art not chance,*

*As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.*

*'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence*

*The sound must seem an echo to the sense.*

The rest of the essay is mainly taken up with an advice to critics, the virtues they should cultivate and the faults they must shun. But Pope is especially interested in repeating the neo-classical commonplaces in a pointed and striking way :-

*Expression is the dress of thought, and still*

*Appears more decent, as more suitable*

*A vile conceit in pompous words expressed*

*Is like a clown in regal purple dressed.*

*For different styles with different subjects sort,*

*As several garbs with country, town and court.*

And the utility of rules :-

*'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;*

*Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;*

*The winged courser, like a generous horse,*

*Shows most true mettle when you check his course.*

It ends with a reference to Pope's tribute to the ancients :-

*Hail, bards triumphant; born in happier days,*

*Immortal heirs of universal praise!*

*Whose honours with increase of ages grow,*

*As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;*

*Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,*

*And worlds applaud that must not yet be found !*

### **3.4 HIS PRAISE FOR SHAKESPEARE**

"In all this there is nothing new, and Pope intended there should be nothing new. He was stating only the accepted wisdom of his day. But the

brilliance of the statement kept his precepts in vogue long after their early vitality had evaporated. It was this vogue fully as much as any essential falseness of the doctrine that later enraged romantic critics.”<sup>1</sup> Pope’s practical criticism is neither prolific nor varies and a mere glance at his attitude towards Homer and Shakespeare will suffice our purpose here. He singles out Homer’s power of ‘invention’ as the most striking and distinctive quality deserving of universal praise and institutes a fine comparison between him and Virgil only to show the superiority of the Greek poet of nature over the Latin poet of art, which was very influential in determining the preference of the age for Homer.

In Shakespeare, he praises the power of vivifying characters and the passions of the human heart, and falls in line with the liberal, though by no means consistent, opinion of his age in the bold proclamation, “To judge of Shakespeare by Aristotle’s rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another.”

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1. Sherburn, George: *A Literary History of England* : Vol. III, p.843

## SECTION : IV

### STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Classicism
- 4.1 Function of Criticism
- 4.2 Art of Writing (Literature)
- 4.3 Classical Legacy
- 4.4 Imitation
- 4.5 Contribution

### 4.0 CLASSICISM

In his criticism, as in his poetry, Pope follows the classical tradition. In the *Essay*, in fact, he does little more than sum up the critical tenets of the neo-classical school of poetry that began with Waller and Denham and gained ground with Dryden and Addison. Thus, while he defines criticism as ‘true taste’, which is a gift of nature, he would have it guided by ‘those rules of old’ which ‘learned Greece’ discovered in human nature and which therefore are ‘but nature methodized’. Since they were immediately deduced from the practice of the ancient masters, a study of their works was equally essential to the formation of this true taste :

*Be Homer’s works your study and delight,  
Read them by day, and meditate by night.*

The same advice, it will be recalled, had been tendered by Horace to the would-be writer. These two requirements then-study of the ancient models and knowledge of their technique-form the very basis of Pope’s critical theory. They make not only for a great critic but also for a great writer. In them is to be found all that is most natural in the art of writing – in fable, character, thought, expression. They therefore deserve a place of honour both in the scheme of criticism and in that of writing :

*Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
To copy Nature is to copy them.*

Even where some deviation from them becomes necessary to promote their very end – that of effective writing – it must have some ancient ‘precedent to plead’. In other words, while the ancients were free to violate their own rules to ‘snatch a grace beyond the reach of art’, the moderns even in such ‘lucky licence’ must be tied to the apron-strings of the ancients. Classicism can go no further.

The masters of criticism whom the critic is to emulate are also all the same school – those who ‘licence repressed, and useful laws ordained’: Aristotle, Horace, Dionysius, Petronius, Quintilian, and Longinus, among the ancients; and Vida, Boileau, Sheffield, Roscommon, and Walsh among the moderns. The mention of Longinus, sometimes called the first romantic critic, need not cause any surprise, for Pope would have him followed for ‘his laws’- the rules he laid down for achieving sublimity in style. Among the English critics he chooses only those sounder few

*Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,  
And here restor’d Wit’s fundamental laws.*

It is surprising, however, that Pope preferred Sheffield, Roscommon, and Walsh as critics of Dryden whom, as a poet he praises quite a number of times in the *Essay*.

#### **4.1 FUNCTION OF CRITICISM**

To Pope, criticism is no more than the art of judging aright. A critic is born to judge, as a poet is born to write. To be able to discharge this duty, he has to be naturally gifted, properly trained, and well versed in the rules of the ancients. It is the application of these laws to the work of an author that his skill lies. No one, in Pope’s opinion, can do this work better than one who is an author also :

*Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
And censure freely who have written well.*

As we have seen, Ben Jonson was of the same opinion. ‘To judge of poets’, he said, ‘is only the faculty of poets’. Dryden too felt the same way but

he had good sense enough to see the other side of the argument. So he made but this observation only : poets themselves are the most proper though not the only critics. Pope's condition therefore is not only difficult to fulfilment but equally opposed to facts, since Aristotle, from whom all his school of criticism derived its rules, was a critic without ever being a poet. If however, judgement by rules is allowed to be the only function of a critic, no one can object to the other learned, disinterested, and free from all those ills that beset right judgement, such as pride, envy, caprice, and the like. He particularly condemns judgement by parts rather than by the whole –by, say, the number of striking thoughts in a work, or its language, or the smooth flow of its verses. For

*In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts  
Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;  
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,  
But the joint force and full result of all.*

This leads him to define a perfect critic :

*But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,  
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
Unbiass'd or by favour, or by spite;  
Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right;  
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere,  
Modestly bold, and humanly severe :  
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
And gladly praise the merit of a foe ?  
Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;  
A knowledge both of books and human kind:  
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;  
And love to praise, with reason on his side?*

Once again, the judicial function of criticism here is all too apparent. St. Beuve, the French critic, was however, so struck by the 'sheer good sense'

of these lines that he wanted every professional critic to frame and hand them up in his study.

#### 4.2 ART OF WRITING (LITERATURE)

The *Essay* makes a few observations on the art of writing too, which also recall the utterances of the earlier critics. The best of these are those on wit, diction, and verse. Following Dryden more than Addison, and Sheffield even more than Dryden, Pope offers his own definition of the term :

*True Wit is nature to advantage dress'd,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.*

He conceived it as a familiar idea, aptly expressed – a natural image decked out with all the beauty of art. It was all that a poet in Pope's day was expected to do and which Pope's own poetry does. To Dr. Johnson, however, it appeared an inadequate interpretation of the term, for it 'reduced it from strength of thought to happiness of language'. Wit, to him, implied an idea 'which though not obvious is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just.' It will be seen that it is just a compromise between Pope's requirement of familiarity and Addison's insistence on surprise as an essential element of wit.

The observations on diction are all culled from Horace and Quintilian. Pope is all for the customary in the choice of words : they should be neither too new nor too old, as neither of the two can be easily understood. Quintilian's advice in this matter to choose 'the oldest of the new, and the newest of the old' is thus repeated by Pope:

*Be not the first by whom the new are try'd,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.*

In the matter of expression too, he follows the beaten track. It should not be mere verbiage, for

*Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.*



It should, on the contrary, be ‘the dress of thought’, suited to it in every respect. Pompous words, thus, are no more suitable to a vile conceit than regal purple to a clown :

*For different styles with diff’rnt subjects sort,  
As several garbs with country, town, and court.*

True expression, finally, is one that illumines its idea as the sun illumines the earth :

*It gilds all objects but it alters none.*

Once again, its purpose is to show ‘Nature to advantage dress’d’.

In versification, Pope, in the first instance, condemns cheap musical devices, such as equal syllables, open vowels, expletives, excessive use of monosyllables, stale rhymes, and the needless resort to the Alexandrine. In the next place, he points out what right versification is. It is not all of a piece even in the same poem but varies according to the requirements of the thought : now it is smooth, now slow; now harsh, now sweet. The very sound of its words often suggests their sense. A noteworthy feature of the lines in which Pope deals with versification is that they themselves are an apt illustration of the good and bad devices they speak of : to use Dr. Johnson’s words, they are written in ‘representative metre’. The use of the Alexandrine thus, is derided in a line which is an Alexandrine itself :

*That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.*

It may even be said that the happy use, Pope himself makes of this device here, lessens the force of his derision of it. In the same way, the soft motion of a gentle breeze or the smooth flow of a quiet stream and, by way of contrast, the furious roar of the waves striking against the shore are cunningly imitated in the following two couplets :

*Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;*

*But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.*

Here Pope may be said to hold out a hand to the poets of the Romantic Revival and the Pre-Raphaelites, with whom such onomatopoeic effects are more common.

#### **4.3 CLASSICAL LEGACY**

At a few places in the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope shows his awareness of the limitations of the neo-classical system to provide for all the beauties of the literary art. A blind imitation of the rules of the classics, he says, does not necessarily make for greatness in literature. For a work of genius often has

*nameless graces which no methods can teach,  
And which a master-hand alone can reach.*

Here Pope has to admit the superiority of inspiration over art, although he calls it 'lucky licence' – a deviation from rules, no doubt, but to the same end : to gain the heart of the reader. Pope is, however prepared to treat it as a rule of the art, albeit an unwritten one. And thus, unconsciously, he throws overboard his whole code of criticism, where under his critic 'proceeds without remorse.....and puts his laws in force'. But Pope has a classical precedent in Quintilian to justify his stand. It was he who first drew the attention of sticklers for rules of graces 'that lie beyond the reach of art' – words which Pope himself employs.

Not only this, he even seems to hint, like Dryden, that the classical rules cannot be binding entirely on all ages and nations, as tastes differ from age to age and country to country. For his critic is enjoined to know not only the writer's design and intent but also the religion, country, (and) genius of his age, without all of which

*at once before your eyes,  
Cavil you may, but never criticize.*

Since all these are not the same in all ages and climes, how can the same rules apply to them all? Pope does not, of course, say as much in the

*Essay* but read in the context of a famous passage in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, his meaning does appear to be this. 'To judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rule', he says there, 'is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another'. Here Pope's recognition of a different mode of writing from that of the classics is unmistakable. Dryden with all his love for the classics had also expressed his 'desire to be tried by the laws of his own country'. If therefore there can be different laws for different countries, what special sanctity can attach to the laws of the ancients ?

#### 4.4 IMITATION

*Essay on Criticism* reveals the fact that Augustan wit and Augustan poetry has nothing to do with originality. The true poet should say things in a new way, but the idea that he can say things that have never been said before, that he can be totally original, is a post-Romantic one. For the Augustan poet, there are only a few irrefutable human truths, and they have been discovered long ago. The idea that anyone can come up with original truths is merely an indication of man's presumption and pride. All a living poet can do is to reinterpret the validity of established truths as they apply to the modern world :

*True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,  
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest* (297-8)

A person who claimed to be original was looked on with some suspicion. Indeed the noun, an 'original', was a term of abuse reserved for laughing at eccentric and singular persons.

Instead of trying to be original, the Augustan poet assimilated his knowledge of the past into his awareness of the present. Dryden praises the young Anne Killigrew's poetry by saying that :

Such noble vigour did her verse adorn  
That it seem'd borrow'd where 'twas only born.

*(To the Memory of .... Mrs Anne Killigrew, 75-6)*

Although her poetry had the limitation of being original, it had such vigour that it at least seemed to have the excellence of imitating the ancients.

The Augustan poet then, sees imitation as more important than originality. But this does not mean that he feels duty bound simply to copy earlier writers. 'Those who say our thoughts are not our own because they resemble the Ancients', wrote Pope in the Preface of his *Works*, 1717, 'may as well say faces are not our own, because they are like our fathers'. True imitation involves both borrowing and recasting. The youthful Pope, writing to his friend William Walsh in 1706, said :

'I wou'd beg your opinion too as to another point : it is how far the liberty of Borrowing may extend ? I have defended it sometimes by saying, that it seems not so much the Perfection of Sense to say things that have never been said before, as to express those best that have been said oftenest; and that Writers in the case of borrowing from others, are like Trees which of themselves wou'd produce only one sort of Fruit, but by being grafted upon others, may yield variety. A mutual commerce makes Poetry flourish; but then Poets like Merchants, should repay with something of their own what they take from others; not like Pyrates, make prize of all they meet'.

Pope read widely in the literary field, especially in his youth. He not only read widely in Classical and English literature, but he also wrote imitations of earlier English poets including Chaucer and Spenser, and translations of earlier classical poets, including Homer, Virgil, Ovid and Horace. This was an essential part of his apprenticeship as a poet for, as he put it to Spenser, 'my first taking to imitating was not out of vanity, but humility. I saw how defective my own things were, and endeavoured to mind my manner by copying good strokes from others'.

So imitation is a way for a poet to give depth and authority to his writing. The poet does not simply rely on his own opinion, he calls on acknowledged classical masters to support his case. He searches for a peculiarly appropriate classical equivalent to the modern subject he wants to write about, or for a peculiarly appropriate modern equivalent to the classical poem he wants to adapt, and then fits his treatment to the overall organization of the classical poem. This relationship between the present and the past can be handled in a variety of ways. It can either be used to add emphasis to the

condemnation of the present as in Oldham's *Satire in Imitation of the Third of Juvenale*, where London is shown as not only bad but as bad as Juvenale's Rome, or it can be used ironically to undercut the present by creating a contrast with the past. The outstanding example of such a usage of Pope's *Imitation of Horace*, Epistle II, i (To Augustus) where the compliments sincerely paid by Horace to Augustus are ironically paid by Pope to George Augustus Hanover.

#### 4.5 CONTRIBUTION

It has already been said that there is little original in Pope's *Essay*. Its only merit lies in felicitously collecting together the most important of those precepts that make up the neo-classical system. It served his age in the same way as *Ars Poetica*, *De Arte Poetica*, and *L'Art Poétique* did theirs. Here was the genius of the age of Pope epitomised : 'what often was thought (and even acted upon), but ne'er so well expressed'. It also acted as a healthy check on the wayward tendencies growing in English poetry. But it neither raises nor answers any important question on poetry or the art of writing : on its nature, function or value. These were raised and answered for him by the authorities whose views he has strung together. Thus, we are to suppose, though Pope does not explicitly state it, that to him poetry is an art of imitation, that its function is both to delight and to instruct, and that its value is to be judged by the extent to which it 'gains the heart', though the further question to what extent it is to be judged by this standard alone-a purely aesthetic standard remains unanswered. What is unmistakable throughout is his wholehearted acceptance of the classical creed in spite of the allowance he makes for unavoidable deviations therefrom.

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## SECTION V

### STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Additional Notes
- 5.1 The Kinds
- 5.2 Self-Assessment Questions
- 5.3 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 5.4 Suggested Reading

### 5.0 ADDITIONAL NOTES

Pope's *Essay on Criticism* is one of the most important and helpful documents for an understanding of Augustan literary principles. Although most of this poem was written when he was only twenty or twenty one, it hardly deserved the scorn poured on it by De Quincey who called it 'the feeblest and least interesting of Pope's writing, being substantially a mere versification, like a metrical multiplication table of common places the most mouldy with which criticism has baited its rat-trapes'. It is true that there is nothing especially new in what Pope says, but that is also its merit. It is an extremely thorough and often memorable account of the Augustan critical position, and preferring Dr. Johnson's words to those of De Quincey, 'exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactic composition – selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precepts, splendour of illustrations, and propriety of digression'.

### 5.1 THE KINDS

When we first read a new poem today, we tend to come to it with certain accepted ideas concerning what is and is not good poetry. We expect, for example, that a good poem will be fresh and striking in its imagery, will use everyday colloquial language, and will offer a full expression of the poet's own feelings. But these are peculiarly post-Romantic criteria, and although an eighteenth-century reader also judged poetry according to certain pre-conceived criteria, he would not have approached a new poem with anything like so narrow a set of pre-conceptions. He would have a different set of criteria for

different *kinds* of poems. He would have read a new poem much as sixteenth and seventeenth century readers had done before him.

So far as Renaissance was concerned, particular kinds of poetry demanded particular kinds of subject matter. The epic, for example, required an elevated subject of a grand scope, while the epistle required a familiar subject of a more parochial scope. There was a wide variety of possible kinds of poetry, just as there was a wide variety of possible kinds of subject matter, but each kind made its own special rules and demands on the poet. What was appropriate for one kind of poetry might be totally inappropriate for another. This is what is meant by the concept of decorum.

The different kinds of poetry had different degrees of importance. Just as the Renaissance world fell into an ordered hierarchy, the Great Chain of being in which all existence from the human to the inanimate had its fit place, so the literary kinds, ideally, fell into an ordered hierarchy in which each kind had its fit place. In practice, however, the order was never as strict or as clear cut as this comparison suggests, and there was considerable difference of opinion about the correct ordering of the kinds. In the sixteenth century, we find the kinds ordered, in such works as *Julius Caesar*; Scaliger's *Poetics*, 1561, or George Puttenham's *Art of English Poesie*, 1589, so that hymns and paeans are the highest kind of poetry, because of their divine subject matter, while incantations, epigrams and ditties are the lowest. I have begun by mentioning the sixteenth century belief in the doctrine of the kinds because it shows us that Pope in his acceptance of the doctrine was, as in so many other things, faithful to the past. Furthermore, we know that he was familiar with Scaliger's work in particular, for he told Spence in 1739 that 'Scaliger's *Poetics* is an exceeding useful book of its kind, and extremely well collected'.

The main difference between the seventeenth and eighteenth century ordering of the kinds and that of the Renaissance, concerns the much higher valuation that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave to the epic. The epic was pre-eminently the major literary kind, and any poet aspiring to greatness should have written one. For this reason, if no other, Spenser and Milton were accepted as the great English poets and although Dryden and Pope, who were

accounted the next greatest, failed to write their planned epics (Dryden's was to be on King Arthur, and Pope's on Brutus, the legendary founder of Britain) they did the next best thing by writing translations of the two greatest epics in any language. The more one reads of post-Restoration poetry, the more one becomes aware of the very great degree to which the epic shaped and formed it. Without the idea of the epic in the background, *Mac Flecknoe*, *Absalom and Achitopel*, *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*, would have been impossible. Each of these poems constantly alludes to, quotes from, imitates, parodies or mocks specific lines and incidents from the great epic of Homer, Virgil and Milton. One can only fully appreciate the satiric wit of the poems when one has a knowledge of the epics on which they are based.

Pope tried his hand, not always with equal success, at a great number – the mock epic, the georgic, the pastoral, the dream vision, the didactic, the heroic epistle, the elegy, the familiar epistle, the formal verse satire, the moral epistle, the prologue, the epilogue, the ode, the epigram and the epitaph. What matters is that the reader should be aware that each kind of poem Pope writes, has a different tradition behind it, and therefore a different framework in which it needs to be viewed. This is important because Pope expects the reader to recognize the tradition in which he is writing and then to admire the way in which he gives it a new turn. Where the nineteenth or twentieth century poet hopes the reader will think his poem original and new, the eighteenth century poet considers that he had failed if he ignores tradition by being too original.

At the same time, as the doctrine of the kinds created certain formal expectations it also allowed an inventive poet to create surprise by breaking those expectations in unusual ways. This of course, is the basis of the mock epic where the poet uses an elevated form for unsuitable subject matter. In *The Rape of the Lock*, a trivial event is treated with a mock seriousness that is totally inappropriate to its importance. The same sort of deliberate un-relatedness between form and subject lies behind many Augustan satiric writings. Gay's 'Newgate Pastoral', *The Beggar's Opera*, and Swift's mock aubade, *A Description of the Morning*, are two cases in point. In both these works, the success of the satire depends not only on the readers' recognizing the fact that form and the subject are at odds with each



other, but also in his implicitly knowing how the literary kinds of the pastoral and the aubade would be correctly handled. The reader's appreciation of the poem is increased through his self-esteem in recognized distortion that has taken place.

Another way, in which an awareness of the doctrine of the kinds helps in an appreciation of Pope's poetry, concerns the readers being responsive to the possibility of a shift in kinds, even within a single poem. Pope never allows the kinds to become so mixed that the overall effect is one of confusion, but he does frequently move into a style that is appropriate to a kind other than that in which he is writing. For instance, in his *Imitation of Horace, ii vi*, which tells the famous story of the town and country mice, Pope writes in the familiar and colloquial language appropriate to the formal verse satire. Then suddenly, in describing the home of the town mouse, he shifts into a mock epic language that is strictly inappropriate to the kind of poem he is writing :

*Behold the place, where if a Poet  
Shin'd in Description, he might show it,  
Tell how the Moon-beam trembling falls  
And tips with silver all the walls :  
Palladian walls, Venetian doors,  
Grottesco roofs, and Stucco floors :  
But let it (in a word) be said,  
The Moon was up, and Men a -bed,  
The Napkins white, the Carpet red :  
The Guests withdrawn had left the Treat,  
And down the Mice sate, tete a tete.*

(189-199)

The transition from the elegant pictorial language of the trembling moonbeams that tip the walls with silver in the first six lines to the curt and clipped telegraphic language, that perfectly captures the style of Swift, in the last five lines, shows a wonderfully urbane turn of wit.

## 5.2 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Q.1 Discuss neo-classical elements of *An Essay on Criticism*.

Ans. (See Section 2.3; III)

Q.2 How does Pope rate earlier critical guides ?

Ans. (See Section 3.3)

Q.3 What is Pope's conception of poetry ?

Ans. (See Section 2.3; 4.3)

Q.4 What is the function of criticism ?

Ans. (See Section 4.2- 4.5)

Q.5 In what way did the Age influence Pope as a critic ?

Ans. (See Section II.)

Q.6 Write a short essay on Pope as a critic.

Ans. (Consult Section II & III.)

Q.7 Discuss Pope's contribution to criticism.

Ans. (See Section 4.4 & 4.5)

## 5.3 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1) When was Alexander Pope born?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 1680
- b) 1688
- c) 1685
- d) 1689

Ans :- **b) 1688**

2) In which age did Pope write?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) The Restoration Age
- b) The Romantic Age

- c) The Neoclassical Age or Augustan Age
- d) The Victorian Age

Ans :- **c) The Neoclassical Age or Augustan Age**

3) Pope wrote his poetry in\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Blank verse
- b) Iambic Pentmetre
- c) Free verse
- d) Heroic Couplets

Ans :- **d) Heroic Couplets**

4) According to Pope which is the ultimate end of poetry?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Aesthetic Pleasure
- b) Didacticism
- c) Emotional Fervour
- d) Beauty of Nature

Ans :- **b) Didacticism**

5) When was An Essay on Criticism first published?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 1702
- b) 1705
- c) 1709
- d) 1711

Ans :- **d) 1711**

6) What are the qualities of a good critic, according to Pope?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Follow ancient writers
- b) He should be objective, unbiased and honest
- c) Courageous, humble and friendly
- d) All of the above

Ans :- **d) All of the above**

7) Whose ideas did Pope copy in his essay?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Dryden
- b) Plato
- c) Horatian ideas
- d) None of these

Ans :- **c) Horatian ideas**

8) “Be Homer’s works your study and delight / Read them by day and mediate by night.”\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Sindy
- b) Pope
- c) Dryden
- d) Ben Johnson

Ans :- **b) Pope**

9) Pope’s Essay on Criticism is divided into\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 3 parts
- b) 2 parts
- c) 4 parts
- d) 5 parts

Ans :- **a) 3 parts**

10) Alexander Pope has an undying craving to conform to the laws of\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) neo-classical tenacity
- b) Prose and reason
- c) nature
- d) none of the above

Ans :- **c) nature**

11) “A critic is born to judge as a poet is born to write . To be able to discharge this duty he has be naturtally gifted properly trained and well versed in the rules of the ancients” Who has observed this?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Dr. Johnson
- b) Arnold
- c) Pope
- d) Eliot

Ans :- **c) Pope**

12) In whose work did Pope find 'unequalled fire and reapture' \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Aristotle
- b) Virgil
- c) Homer
- d) Dr. Johnson

Ans :- **c) Homer**

#### **5.4 SUGGESTED READING**

1. *An Essay on Criticism* at the Eighteenth Century Poetry Archive (Ecpa).
2. Mack, Maynard (1985). *Alexander Pope : A Life*. Yale University Press.

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## **WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**

### **STRUCTURE**

23.0 Objectives

23.1 Biographical detail

23.2 Main Works of Wordsworth

23.2.0 Main Characteristics of his writing

23.2.1 Works

23.2.2 The other works

23.2.3 *The Prelude*

23.2.4 *The Excursion*

23.2.5 “Laodamia”

23.2.6 Sonnets

23.3 The Romantic Age/Age of Wordsworth (1798-1850)

23.3.0 The Social Background

23.3.1 The French Revolution (1789 - 1793)

23.3.2 Literary Background of the Romantic Age

23.3.3 The Romantic Movement

23.3.4 Romanticism

23.3.5 Return to Nature: A Key Note of Romantic Literature

23.3.6 Medievalism: A Prominent Characteristic of the Romantic Movement

23.4 Examination Oriented Questions

23.5 Suggested Reading

## **23.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with the main works and characteristics of the writings of William Wordsworth. The lesson also deals with the introduction of the Romantic age.

### **23.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DETAIL**

- 1770 : Wordsworth born in Cumberland.
- 1775 : Admitted to Ann Birkett's Infant School, Penrith where his maternal grand-parents lived.
- 1776 : Put at Cockermouth Grammar School.
- 1776 : Declaration of American Independence.
- 1778 : William's mother, Ann died.  
Admitted to Hawkshead Grammar School; Studied there till 1787.
- 1783 : William's father, John Wordsworth died.
- 1787 : William admitted to St. John's College Cambridge.  
He studied there till 1791.
- 1790 : His first travel to France, visited Paris, Orleans and Blois.
- 1791 : Awarded B. A. degree on 27th January, his second visit to France, fell in love with Annette Vallon.
- 1792 : Returned to England, became father of a daughter, shocked to hear about the reign of terror in France after the Revolution on 14.7.1789.
- 1793 : Published *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*, went on a walking tour to Bristol, Stonehedge, Salisbury, Tintern Abbey and then to Wales.

- 1795 : Settled at Racedown, Dorsetshire; met Coleridge.
- 1797 : Went to see Coleridge at Nether Stowey; left Racedown and settled at Alfoxden.
- 1798 : *Lyrical Ballads* published in September.
- 1799 : Second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in April, Wordsworth settled at Dove cottage, Townsend, Grasmere.
- 1802 : Married Mary Hutchinson at Brompton near Scarborough on Oct. 4.
- 1803 : First tour of Scotland and met Sir Walter Scott.
- 1805 : His brother John was drowned.
- 1806 : Stayed at Coleorton, Leicestershire from October to the Summer of 1807.
- 1807 : Poems in *Two Volumes* published.
- 1808 : Moved from Dove Cottage to Allan Bank, Grasmere.
- 1809 : *The Convention to Cintra* Published.
- 1811 : Shifted from Allan Bank to Rectory, Grasmere.
- 1812 : Death of two of his children.
- 1813 : Settled at Rydal Mount; appointed Stamp Distributor for Westmorland.
- 1814 : Second tour of Scotland; the poem entitled *The Excursion* published.
- 1815 : *Laodamia Poems* in two volumes and another poem *The White Doe of Rylstone* were published.
- 1816 : Thanks giving Ode, and A letter to a Friend of Robert Burns published.
- 1818 : *Two Addresses to Freeholders of Westmorland* was published.
- 1819 : “Peter Bell” was published although it had been composed in 1798; another poem ‘The Waggoner’ was also published (composed in 1805).



- 1820 : “The River Duddon” - a Series of Sonnets second and Miscellaneous Poems, published; edition of *The Excursion* was brought forward; fifth travel to the continent, and tour of Switzerland, the Italian Lakes and Paris.
- 1822 : Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820 and Ecclesiastical Sketches were published.
- 1823 : Sixth tour of Europe, particularly of Netherlands.
- 1827 : Poetical works in five volumes, third collected edition published.
- 1828 : Seventh tour of Europe particularly up the Rhine.
- 1829 : Tour of Ireland.
- 1830 : A ride from Lancaster to Cambridge.
- 1831 : Third tour of Scotland.
- 1832 : Poetical Works in four volumes, fourth collected edition published.
- 1835 : Yarrow Revisited and other poems published; *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England* also published.
- 1836-37 : Poetical works In Six volumes; fifth revised collected edition.
- 1838 : The Sonnets of William Wordsworth collected in one volume were published.
- 1841 : Revisited *Tintern Abbey* and Alfoxden at the age of 72.
- 1843 : Appointed Poet Laureate of England after Southey’s death.
- 1844 : Kendal and Windermere Railway: Two letters reprinted from the Morning post.
- 1845 : Poems, one volume; sixth collected edition.
- 1847 : Ode performed in the Senate House, Cambridge.
- 1848 : Poems, Volume VII published; its full title being *Poems chiefly of Early and Late years*;  
Resigned the office of Stamp Westmorland ; received a pension of \$ 300 from Civil List.

1849-50 : Poetical works, six volumes.

1850 : Died at Rydal Mount, on 23<sup>rd</sup> April,  
Buried in Grasmere Churchyard.

*The Prelude* published after his death is acknowledged as the greatest work of Wordsworth and it established him as the greatest poet of Nature.

## **23.2 MAIN WORKS OF WORDSWORTH**

### **23.2.0 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS WRITING**

1. Love for Nature, Childhood and Common Man.
2. Mystic Note.
3. Poetry as spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.
4. Language of the common man for poetry.
5. Message of the French Revolution.
6. Equality, liberty and fraternity as the undercurrent in his poetry.
7. Reflective Poetry.
8. Freedom from neo-classical poetic diction, absence of appeal and reason and display of dry intellectuality.

### **23.2.1 WORKS**

Wordsworth began his career as a poet at an early age. His earliest poem, *The Vale of Esthwaite*, composed in 1780-87, was not published. At the University, he composed 'An Evening Walk' (1793) and 'Descriptive Sketches' (1793). He composed 'Guilt' and 'Sorrow' (1795), The '*Borderers*' (A Tragedy in verse, 1795) and 'The Ruined Cottage' (1796). These poems reveal his love for nature. His greatest contribution lies in heralding Romantic Movement in English literature. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) ushered in this new era of romanticism in poetry. The first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* consisted of

twenty three poems, of which nineteen were from Wordsworth's pen and four from Coleridge's. This *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is a landmark as an exposition of poetic theory. In it, Wordsworth made bold and categorical statements regarding the nature of poetry, the function of criticism and the role of the poet as a creative artist. The *Lyrical Ballads*, written in collaboration with S. T. Coleridge and published in 1798, contain poems such as :

- (i) *Goody Blake*
- (ii) *The Thorn*
- (iii) *The Idiot Boy*
- (iv) *Tintern Abbey*
- (v) *A long extract from Guilt and Sorrow*
- (vi) *It is the First Mild Day of March*
- (vii) *I heard A Thousand Blended Notes*
- (viii) *Expostulation and Reply*
- (ix) *The Tables Turned*
- (x) *We are Seven*

The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1801) contains some new short poems, and a long poem, *Michael* by Wordsworth. A third edition was also published.

### **23.2.2 THE OTHER WORKS**

- (i) *Peter Bell* (1798)
- (ii) *The Prelude, I & II* ( 1800)
- (iii) *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807)
- (iv) *Poems, Two Volumes* (1815)
- (v) *The White Dove of Rylstono* (1815)
- (vi) *Thanks Giving One* (1816)

- (vii) *Peter Bell ; Waggoner* (1819)
- (viii) *The River Dudden - a series of Sonnets* (1825)
- (ix) *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent : Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822)
- (x) *Poetical Works, four Volumes* (1832)
- (xi) *Poetical Works, VI Volumes* (1836-37)
- (xii) *Poems Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842)
- (xiii) *Poetical Works, VI Vol.* (1849-50)

### **23.2.3 THE PRELUDE**

The Prelude is an autobiographical poem consisting of fourteen books. With the encouragement of Coleridge, Wordsworth planned a long philosophical poem to be called *The Recluse*, which was never completed. The Prelude was intended to form a part of *The Recluse*. It was commenced in 1799, completed in 1805 and published posthumously in 1850. A full picture of the poet's life and doings comes before the reader's eyes as he goes through *The Prelude*. The theme of the poem is the growth of a poet's mind. It gives a feel of the central habit of experience out of which all his poetry comes out. Wordsworth intends to reveal the genesis and nature of that experience which made him a poet. It was that unique relationship between his mind and his world in which he most deeply and vividly lived. The poem throws light on the influence of the French Revolution on Wordsworth. His early enthusiasm, his sympathies and his revulsion from France are all portrayed in it. It is also the critical document in Wordsworthian Criticism. "The Prelude is much more than an autobiography", says Abercrombie.

### **23.2.4 THE EXCURSION**

This long work is a middle section of a projected three-part poem 'on man, on nature and on human life'. The Prelude is the introductory part. The Excursion is the second part, which is only in a fragment. It runs in nine books and was published in 1814. It is based on the poet's love for nature. It is full of delightful and superb pictures of the face of Nature. It also reveals

the mystical intuitionist and the mystical attitude of the poet towards nature is also unfolded in it. *The Excursion* has no poetic unity. The dramatic structure in it is quite unconvincing. The poet protests against science and her 'brutish slavery' to the subject, her subjection to sense, her indifference to beauty and her contempt for imagination. He criticizes her general materialism and lack of spiritual insight. But, at the same time, he acknowledges her beneficent work in the practical application of her results.

### 23.2.5 "LAODAMIA"

Published in 1814, the poem is founded solely on classic myth, and elaborated strictly in classical manner. Wordsworth said of the poem: "It cost me more trouble than almost anything of equal length I have ever written". The poem raised the problem of the right relation between Impulse and Law.

"Laodamia" has besought the gods to restore Protesilaus, her dead husband his sight. The boon is granted, but her husband is to remain only for three hours. Protesilaus advises her to control her passions and to mourn meekly on his departure. But Laodamia's passion is too strong and when her husband departs, she falls dead in her palace.

The poem airs the pathetic tone, and advocates sublime serenity. The texture of the thought has the smoothness and solidity of marble. Its diction is chaste, its manner stately, its form antique as it treats a classical myth. The classical form has been successfully blended with the modern spirit and subordinated without doing any harm to it.

The Ruined Cottage, or The Story of Margaret, written in 1797, and subsequently embodied in *The Excursion* (Book 1) is a harrowing tale of misfortune befalling a cottager and his wife. The husband leaves his home and joins a troop of soldiers going to a distant land. The wife stays on, pining for his return in increasing wretchedness until she dies and the cottage falls into ruin.

Resolution and Independence, composed in 1802 and published in 1807, also known as *The Leech Gatherer*, was based on a meeting recorded in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*, with an 'old man almost double', whose trade was to gather leeches. Its mixture of elevated language and sentiment with prosaic details is peculiarly Wordsworthian

that led Coleridge to comment on its 'inconsistency of style'. Wordsworth's own comments on his use of imagery in the poem as well as 'the conferring, the abstracting, the modifying powers of the Imagination' in his 1815 *Preface* are of great interest.

The Solitary Reaper composed in 1803 and published in 1807 has its source in his friend Thomas Wilkinson's book *Tour to the British Mountain*, in which he had mentioned about a song sung by a reaper bending over her sickle. During his Scottish tour with his sister Dorothy, Wordsworth had often seen the solitary reaper. So he composed the poem, based on an imagery and experience tallying with Wilkinson's experience summed up in the words : "Long after it was heard no more". The poem is a lyric experiencing an intense personal emotion derived from the highland girl's sweet voice singing a song in the dialect of the highlands.

The Father of Man/Rainbow was composed when he was 31 and it contains those now almost too familiar lines. Apparently they summed up for him, then and later, the whole process of growing up. The special doctrinal importance that he attached to them is shown by their being prefixed to the section of his poetical works devoted to "poems referring to the period of childhood". The last three lines also reappear as an epigraph to 'Intimation of Immortality', the poem that expounds the consolatory function of "Recollection of Early Childhood." A childhood, in which the elements of continuity are provided by rainbow, has an uncomfortable sound. But by ordinary standards, Wordsworth's childhood was exceptionally discontinuous.

This was perhaps one of the reasons why he came to ascribe an almost mystical importance to rainbow, stars, clouds, hills, lakes, animals and other elements of nature. In a world in which human satisfactions did not recur, they recurred. Natural piety may have been at bottom a substitute for the emotional security of a happy family life. With nobody left to love him, Wordsworth fell in love with nature.

### 23.2.6 SONNETS

Wordsworth composed 523 sonnets. His sonnets earn him the title of a great sonneteer in English poetry. As a sonneteer, his merits are simply remarkable. He received the Petrarchan vogue of writing sonnets. Yet like a great poet he freed himself from the rules of Petrarch, whenever he likes. He retains his originality as a sonneteer and treats the form as he thinks fit in the light of his artistic creed. The influence of Milton is clearly felt. The sonnets have strength and flexibility. There is also a controlled intensity of feeling.

Sonnet, On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress, was the first sonnet composed in 1787. It was published in *The European Magazine*, Vol. XI. The two most remarkable sonnets composed in 1802 were entitled: *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*, and *Milton, Thou should'st Be Living At This Hour*. The series of Duddon Sonnets was composed between 1806-1820 and published in 1807. Ecclesiastical sonnet were composed mostly in 1821 and published in 1822.

Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order were composed in 1831 and published in 1835. *Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death* were composed in 1839-40 and published in 1841. Industrial sonnets were published in different poetic volumes. Probably, *Why should we weep or mourn, Angelic Boy*, was his last sonnet published in 1850.

Wordsworth's sonnets are a mixture of Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet. His love for sonnets is evident from his *Sonnet on Sonnets* (1827), where he asks the critics not to scorn the sonnet, as it has been employed by Petrarch, Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Being an original artist, he made experiments in this form. He also enlarged its sphere to treat Nature and personal, religious, even political themes in it. In *Why Art thou Silent*, he treated a love theme. In *The World is Too Much with Us* he protests against materialistic industrialism and there is a plea for more intimate communion with nature. Other sonnets also include *Thoughts of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland* (1807), *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* (1802), *London or Sonnet to Milton*, *To Toussaint L'Overture* (1802 - 1803), *Composed by the seaside, Calais*, on

the Extinction of the Venetian Republic (1802 - 07), Nuns Fret Not At Their Convert's Narrow Room (1806 - 1807), Scorn Not at the Sonnet (1827), Most Sweet It is with uplifted Eyes (1833 - 35).

### **23.3 THE ROMANTIC AGE/AGE OF WORDSWORTH (1798-1850)**

#### **23.3.0 THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND**

The last decade of the 18th century and the opening decades of the 19th century constituted an era of rapid social changes. This rapid social change arose from the writings of the French intellectuals, writings which circulated freely in Europe, from the increasing interference of science in the life of man, i.e. scientific discoveries and their possible practical applications. Along with it, America set up an example of setting up a constitution without hereditary legislators. Then there were philosophical speculations courting the perfectibility of man.

This social change was accelerated by the French Revolution (1789-1799), the French War (1793-1815) and The Battle of Waterloo. The forces generated by this Revolution shook the very foundation of the European Society.

The major sources for rapid social change of the English society also included the Industrial Revolution. The 19th century is often described as an age of science - the epoch when mechanization finally took full control of human ways of life and scientific rationalism assumed almost equal predominance in man's thinking. A series of scientific inventions rapidly gave extensive industrial development to England. The invention of the steam-engine (1765) and the subsequent invention of new machines for weaving, spinning and the like brought about a great change in the industrial forefront. The factory system, made possible by the introduction of new machinery, was taking the place of the cottage industry. New centres of population established around the factories and the mines. New social classes that of labourers and manufacturers developed while the working classes suffered great hardships. Machines replaced the working hands and many men were out of employment. The new industrial class owned the sources of income and acquired power and prestige.



New scientific methods of farming led to an increase in the number of large holdings thereby leading to a speedy decrease in the number of small farmers, who lost their independence gained with the end of feudalism. They had to move to the industrial centres in search of livelihood and added themselves to the large population of the cities and towns. The resulting social conditions, both rural and urban were appalling. The English society was divided into capitalist and labourer classes. The labour class had little protection from exploitation by the mill owners, who strived for maximum profit in their business.

### **23.3.1 THE FRENCH REVOLUTION (1789-1793)**

The French Revolution had driven out the aristocracy from power in France. It was truly a democratic movement politically to wipe out the existing monarchy notorious for its tyrannical rule over the French masses, who were actually wallowing in utter poverty.

Louis XVI, king of France (1774-1793) was the greatest tyrant of his times in Europe. The monarch, the royal family members, lords and ladies, barons and dukes and landlords, all were known for their callousness, arrogance, folly, short-sightedness and indifference to the welfare of the people, their recalcitrant attitude could not but lead to a nation-wide revolution which excited the violence of mob. Those who protested against their injustice were cast in the Bastille, the great prison in Paris. Girls and women were gang-raped by landlords and privileged aristocrats every day. Gradually the oppressed got united together in a mob. This French mob cried for *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*. On 14th July, 1789 the mob attacked the Bastille, captured it, freed all the prisoners, and razed it to the ground. Similar uprisings at different places forced Louis to flee Paris. On gaining power, the revolutionaries tried to get rid of the king, who was later executed in July 1793. Then a reign of terror was imposed on France. The French Revolution soon took a violent turn and many of the royal family members and aristocrats were guillotined. In its earlier stages, it won the sympathy of liberals all round the world. But as it became more and more bloody in its methods, and as France was engaged in wars outside its borders, which resulted in its fall

into Napoleon's hands in 1802, its friends abroad lost faith in it and finally supported the combination of nations that brought about the fall of the empire of Napoleon and once again the Bourbon monarchy came into power.

England had a monarchical form but democracy was the basis of Government, where everyone could enjoy the three ideals mentioned above. Cries of Liberty, Equality and Individual freedom came from all parts of the world, and this could not but have its impact on English society. It was an age of disillusionment for liberal minds. It was also a period of greed on the part of the newly rich industrialists and social reforms were demanded on all sides. With the end of wars, the soldiers returned and added to the list of unemployed men. Reforms became the need of the hour. Reform bills were introduced in the Parliament. New economic forces came into play. The agricultural and mercantile England was transformed into an industrial one. The far reaching social changes caused by this transformation made political reorganization an imperative necessity. The Reform Act of 1832 broke the political monopoly of the old aristocracy and a new and numerous middle class, who represented the commerce and capital steadily gained political power.

By 1837, Queen Victoria came to the throne and England settled down to a long period of scientific progress and enjoyed a middle class economy. But the labour class began to clamour for recognition and demanded extension of the franchise. The Chartist Movement (1837-49) was the outcome, which demanded for manhood suffrage and other social reforms. The social consciousness was deeply stirred. Attention was diverted to the needs of the working class as against those of the privileged few. The working conditions were improved, humanitarianism spread and the Parliament executed various reform acts to fight out the sorrows and sufferings of the poor and the wretched. Orthodox social conventions were broken down; freedom of thought and action came to play its role in the life of the common man. The Chartist Movement died out with these reforms. Franchise was extended with the enforcement of the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884-85. Thus, English democracy started its journey onward with a steady speed.

On the religious front, the scientific progress caused a great religious upheaval of the age. Ancient religious thoughts were shaken with the approach of the new dogmas. The doubting minds started exploring the truth in the old dogmas. Traditional landmarks were swept away. Beliefs of all the classes were deeply stirred by the spirit of speculation and unrest and the religious revivals initiated in the High Church movements. Then there was also unceasing protest against materialism to which science seemed to have led.

### **23.3.2 LITERARY BACKGROUND OF THE ROMANTIC AGE**

In England of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Pope ushered in his poetic school called The Neo-Classical Movement and laid down certain poetic rules to be scrupulously followed by its adherents. Intellect and reason became dominant and predominated over instinct and imagination. Dr. Johnson, a close disciple of Alexander Pope, gave the principles of prosody, a mandatory authority by his scholarship and eminent position in the field of English letters. This School was quite popular for nearly a century until the 'Pre-Romantic Poets' came to write about the beauty of Nature in their poetical compositions. Eighteenth century poetry was town-poetry which completely avoided a reference to Nature and its role in human life. It looked as though Pope and adherents of Neo-Classicism had tyrannized over the realm of poetry. To make matters worse, Dryden and Pope brought in the heroic couplet for poetical composition and blank-verse which had been perfected by Shakespeare and Milton was banished completely from the scene.

Neo-classicism laid emphasis on a social, political or a religious theme which could be corrective of men and manners. It approved of a personal theme if it could raise a satire, an elegy or an epistle etc. Further it approved of fancy which is imagination in a subdued form. Neo-classicists commanded the poets to focus their attention on the themes of the urban society and represent them with the help of fancy in the urban language and in the sweetest manner possible. But the minds could not follow these rules for a long time and began to disobey the commands of Neo-Classicism. The poets, therefore wanted a movement to end the tyranny of the Neo-classicism. And the change coincided with the French Revolution came to be known as the Romantic Movement or Romantic Revival.

### 23.3.3 THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

The Romantic Movement, also called the Romantic Revival or the Romantic Revolt, had already set in before Wordsworth took his step forward. The first romantic element which came into prominence was the emotional theme of Nature. James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) reflected this theme through his poems, viz. *Winter* (1726), *Summer* (1727), *Spring* (1728) and *Autumn*.

Subsequently, Collins, Gray, Percy, Chatterton and Macpherson freed their imagination from all kinds of restraints and represented imaginary things in their verse. Thomas Gray in his *Elegy written in A Country Churchyard* (1750), and William Collins in his *Odes* (1747) made description of objects of nature and brought into prominence the second romantic element, viz. personal sentiment. Both of them gave rise to an imaginative idealization of personal emotion.

Bishop Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* revived the romance of the Middle Ages. *Rowley Poems* (1768) of Thomas Hatteton and *Ossian* (1760) of James Macpherson showed that poetic imagination was already awakened in men of letters. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* (1770) reflected the genuine sentiment in the poets of his age. Pathos and humanitarianism also found expression in the literary work. George Crabbe's poem, *The Village* (1783) reflects an intense feeling of pity for the poor villagers. It also impregnated the need for intellectual justice.

Personal emotions were treated by Robert Burns and William Blake. Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1784) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) introduced the note of mysticism. Imagination, sentiment and nature, after having been worked out by Gray and Collins in sketchy forms took the forms of emotion, description of nature and free imagination in Crabbe, Burns and Blake. Evidently the poets of romantic age broke down the barriers of tyrannic reign of Neo-Classicism. Free themes, free imagination, free rhyme schemes, free poetic feelings started breathing in the literary world. And this world came to be known as the Romanticism. William

Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge took over the command of the Romantic movement and fought against the inane and lifeless verse of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The two poets decided to bring forward a joint effort viz. *The Lyrical Ballads* characterized by love of nature, instinct, imagination, and intuition in a proportioned degree. Intellect and reason were not altogether missing, however those were much subdued. The Romantic Movement was in the nature of a strong protest against the Eighteenth Century classical tendencies of correctness, adherence to rules, appeal to reason and intellect, poetic diction and the dominance of the heroic couplet.

#### **23.3.4 ROMANTICISM**

The term 'Romanticism' has been variously defined by different writers. Walter Pater calls it the 'addition of strangeness to beauty' while Theodore Watts - Dunton defines it as, "the Renaissance of Wonder". The sense of wonder became dominant in English poetry with the entry of romanticism. Abercrombie emphasizes the subjective element of romanticism when he says, "Romanticism is a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate upon inner experience". Victor Hugo considers romanticism as "Liberalism in Literature". For Beers and Phelps, it is "the re-awakening of the Middle Ages." Legouis and Cazamian emphasize the emotional and imaginative aspects of romanticism. They call it, "an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked and directed by the exercise of imaginative vision".

According to Herford, romanticism, "was an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility. At countless points the universe of sense and thought acquired a new potency of response and appeal to man, new capacity of ministering to, and mingling with his richest and intensest life".

According to William J. Long in romanticism, "There are various other characteristics of Romanticism, but these six - the protest against the bondage of rules, the return to nature and the human heart, the interest in old Sagas and medieval romances as suggestive of heroic age, the emphasis upon individual genius, and the return to Milton and

the Elizabethans, instead of to Pope and Dryden, for literary models - are the most noticeable and most interesting”.

The romantic movement was the expression of individual genius rather than of established rules. In consequence, the literature of the revival is as varied as the characters and moods of different writers. Works of Pope, for instance, give a general impression of sameness, as if all his poems were made in the same machine. On the contrary, in romantic literature there is endless variety. Nature and man living in it are as new as if they have never been studied before. There is intense human sympathy and a consequent understanding of the human heart. Howard was working for the prison reform, Wilberforce for liberating the slaves, Gray wrote his ‘short and simple annals of the poor’, and Cowper sang:

*My ear is pained,  
My soul is sick with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled,  
There is not flesh in man's obdurate heat,  
It does not feel for man.*

Romanticism had its peculiar originality, strength, and its peculiar limitations, like any other movement. Its chief glory lay in the extraordinary intimate and subtle interpretation of the world of external nature and of that other world of wonder and romance which the familiar comradeship of nature generates in the mind of man. Thus, Wordsworth conveys the loneliness of the hills and mountains, Keats conveys the embalmed darkness of gloomy shades and winding mossy routes, and Shelley conveys the lameless energies of the west wind.

#### **23.3.5 RETURN TO NATURE: A KEYNOTE OF ROMANTIC LITERATURE**

The ‘Return to Nature’ played a very prominent part in the revival of romanticism. The poets wanted to return to the free and invigorating life

of the world of leaves and flowers from the suffocated and crowded city atmosphere of the neo-classical literature. The romantics sought the mystery and wonder which lurked behind the face of the common objects of Nature. They draped the world with the new light of imagination. In Thomson's *The Season*, nature came into her own for the first time, in which nature instead of remaining subordinate to man, is made the central theme. Then Gray, Crabbe, Burns and Cowper emerged on the scene. They were charmed by newness of things and presented them in delightful colours. Blake and Wordsworth presented a child-like sense of wonder. How innocently Blake asks in "The Tyger", "When the stars throw down their spears, And Water'd heaven with their tears, Did He smile His work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" The romantic poets dealt with the joys of Nature and the elemental simplicities of life lived in a closer contact with Nature. They depicted the lives of the common people, Shepherds and cottagers in a language as close as possible to ordinary speech. They sang about birds and flowers, hills and forests, streams and glades, wind and bower. But the pre-romantics treated only the external charms of nature, they did not give to her a separate life and soul. It was Wordsworth who sang of the life and soul of the Nature, for whom common objects such as a solitary reaper, a cuckoo, a skylark and daffodils breathed a sense of wonder. He defines the soul of Nature as "A motion and a spirit, that impels All thinking things, all objects of all thought, And rolls through all things - - - (*Tintern Abbey*, II) Cowper, however, is very near to him when he sees, "A Soul in all things and that soul is God". Wordsworth's love of Nature was strengthened by Rousseau's definition of Nature.

#### **23.3.6 MEDIEVALISM: A PROMINENT CHARACTERISTIC OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT**

The Middle Ages were essentially romantic, full of colour and pageantry, magic and mystery, love and adventure. The romantics turned towards the Middle Ages for inspiration and novelty. For them, these ages were suffused with beauty, love, wonder and adventure, and their

dissatisfaction with the present conditions of life allured them towards the Middle Ages. Not only were the ancient masters studied, but old English metres and poetic forms were revived. Though all the romantic poets were not medievalists, yet a great number of them - Coleridge, Scott and Keats, sought inspiration from the Middle Ages.

Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* fired the imagination and stimulated a new interest in the medieval ballad form. It later inspired Coleridge, Scott and Keats. Chattertan's *Rowley Poems* also influenced the reader. Macpherson's Ossianic poems, one in matter and spirit wildly romantic, filled with supernatural love and washed in sentimentalism and melancholy, Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Coleridge's *Christabel* and Keat's *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* are suffused with the medieval atmosphere.

#### **23.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- a) Briefly discuss William Wordsworth as a Romantic poet.
- b) Give the characteristics of Wordsworth's writings.
- c) Discuss the literary background of Romantic Age.

#### **23.5 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Hunter Davies, *William Wordsworth : A Biography*, Frances Lincoln, London, 2009, ISBN 978-0-7112-3045-3.
2. Wordsworth, William (4 January 1810). "French Revolution". *The Friend*. No.20. Retrieved 8 June 2018.

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***A PREFACE TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS***

**STRUCTURE**

24.0 Objectives

24.1 Introduction to *The Preface*

24.2 The 'Advertisement'

24.3 Critical Analysis of *The Preface*

24.3.0 Wordsworth's composition of *Lyrical Ballads* as an Experiment

24.3.1 Aim of writing *The Preface*

24.4 Theme / Content of Poetry

24.4.0 Humble and Rustic Life; Colouring of Imagination; A Selection of Language used by Men

24.4.1 Each Poem in *Lyrical Ballads* has a purpose

24.4.2 Poetic Creation

24.4.3 Feelings are more important than Action and Situation

24.4.4 Improvement of Taste and Trend required

24.4.5 Rejection of Personification of Abstract ideas

24.4.6 Poetic Diction is not essential

24.4.7 Not much difference between the language of verse and that of prose

24.4.8 Affinity between Metrical Composition and Prose

- 24.4.9 Emergence of Dissimilitude
- 24.4.10 What is a poet?
- 24.4.11 The Poet's Duty
- 24.5 Relation between Poetry and Science
  - 24.5.0 Poetic Language
  - 24.5.1 Metre Heightens Pleasure
  - 24.5.2 Metre Adds to Pleasure
  - 24.5.3 Metre Reduces Pain
  - 24.5.4 Similitude in Dissimilitude
  - 24.5.5 Emotion Recollected in Tranquility
  - 24.5.6 Errors committed by Wordsworth in his Poems
  - 24.5.7 Language of Real Life is no Guarantee of Excellence
  - 24.5.8 Hasty Judgement is a Mistake
- 24.6 Appendix on Poetic Diction : A Summary
- 24.7 The Essay Supplementary to the Preface, 1815
- 24.8 Reader's Judgement may be Biased
- 24.9 Quality of a Good Critic
- 24.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 24.11 Suggested Reading

## **24.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with William Wordsworth's critical work "*A Preface to Lyrical Ballads*".

### **24.1 INTRODUCTION TO *THE PREFACE***

*A Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, a critical work flowed out of Wordsworth's pen. It is generally believed that the joint publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 marked the formal inauguration of the English

Romantic Revival. The first hint to *The Preface* was given in the introductory note or 'Advertisement' to the 1798 edition of the *Ballads*. This note was later absorbed into the 1800 *Preface*. In 1802, appeared another version with additional matter and an Appendix on poetic pleasure. In 1850 came out the final version of the *Preface* which is now regarded as the standard text. *The Lyrical Ballads* are significant for three reasons. The volume contains some of the best poems in English, namely, *Tintern Abbey*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Michael* etc. Then it marked a reaction against neo-classical poetry, by initiating Romantic Revival. Thirdly, Wordsworth's conception of nature, function and language of poetry had crystallized, along with those of Coleridge and they were embodied in the *Preface*.

#### **24.2 THE 'ADVERTISEMENT'**

A brief foreword to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* simply introduces the detailed argument of the *Preface*, that was in the stock.

The main points made by Wordsworth in the 'Advertisement' are as follows :

1. The themes of poetry can be found in every subject which can interest the human mind, i.e. there is nothing 'unpoetic' or 'undignified' about the material of poetry if it is interesting.
2. The poems were written as an experiment to "ascertain how far, by fitting material arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart", i.e. how far the language of conversation of real people is suitable to the purpose of poetic pleasure.
3. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern (neo-classical) writers will not find the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* to their taste. Some will even hesitate to call them 'poems' as they will be puzzled by their originality and strangeness.

4. It was therefore, desirable on the poet's (Wordsworth) part to make a statement of his plan and purpose; and also to explain some of the chief reasons which determined him in the choice of his purpose.

Thus, the *Preface* is a critical document of abiding significance. Wordsworth speaks of his aim in writing the *Preface*, which was neither to give an elaborate account of his theory of poetry nor to make a systematic defense to his poems that were of a new kind, both in theme and style, and therefore, he could not enforce them without a word of introduction to his readers. But through this introductory piece, he sought to bring out drastic revaluation of earlier poetry so that his own poetry may be properly appreciated. It is the theme that dominates the poems and the same is his argument against poetic diction.

In his poems, Wordsworth had deliberately deviated from the standard current during his day. Public taste in literary matters, particularly in poetry, had deteriorated. The language of poetry was artificial and meritorious, 'gaudy and inane'. Poetry, according to Wordsworth, should narrate, 'the short and simple annals' dealing with the common incident in the language of the common man. In doing so, he would allow his imagination to play a significant role in order to heighten the effect. People in their poverty are unsophisticated; they live and talk naturally, and they are unsophisticated in the expression of emotion. There is a native dignity in their language and that is because they are in close and constant touch with all that is best and beautiful in nature. Contemporary language, meanness and triviality are away from them, therefore Wordsworth broke away from the contemporary approach.

The neoclassical poets wrote under the stress of real events and passions and their language was powerful and figurative. Later poets, eager to produce the similar by real events aimed at effect, strained the passions excited and further strained the language of poetry with the result that poetry came to suffer from artificiality. Stereotyped expressions entered the language of poetry, which degenerated into jargon. These expressions, miscalled poetry, came to stay and it became a fashion with poets to resort

to this established 'poetic diction'. Wordsworth reacted against the conventions of neo-classical poetry by saying that metre is an aid to poetry and right expressions are paramount. Metre is secondary, and sense and sensible language are all important.

The *Preface* was originally designed to be a joint venture by Wordsworth and Coleridge. On September 30, 1800, Coleridge informed Daniel Stuart that, "the *Preface* contains our joint opinion on poetry". But later, on July 29, 1802 he informed Southey that, "Although Wordsworth's *Preface* is half a child of my own brain and arose out of conversations so frequent that with few exceptions, we could scarcely either of us, perhaps, positively say which first started any particular thought, yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth".

It is probable that Coleridge did not see the *Preface* in its final shape, or else he would not have opposed Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction in the *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth himself later modified some of the statements as he had realized that his views on diction had "so little application to the greater part, perhaps, of the collection, as subsequently enlarged and diversified, that they could not with any propriety stand as an Introduction to it".

### **24.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *THE PREFACE***

(A Note on Wordsworth's original text)

#### **PARA - 1-2**

#### **24.3.0 WORDSWORTH'S COMPOSITION OF *LYRICAL BALLADS* AS AN EXPERIMENT**

In his *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth composes a new type of poetry and introduces them to his readers as a part of his experiment. He wanted to find out whether the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, and fitted in a material arrangement, could provide to the reader the kind of pleasure which is the function of a poet to provide, and he concludes

that he has been able to please a larger number of readers than he had expected by his poems.

#### **PARA - 3**

##### **24.3.1 AIM OF WRITING *THE PREFACE***

Wordsworth did not pay any heed to his friends who had advised him to write a systematic defense of the theory upon which these poems were written. Wordsworth did not accept the advice, as it would have added to the labour utilized in producing an elaborate document on the one hand and on the other, it would have occupied much space, so he did not think it desirable. However, he had to introduce his poems which are materially different from those which had over bearing themes, and also different from those which were in vogue at that time (Wordsworth's time).

#### **PARA - 4**

By the act of writing in verse, an author commits himself formally to gratify certain established habits of association. These habits have naturally differed from age to age and time to time. For instance, there has been a great difference in the expectations of readers from poets existing in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher from those existing in the ages that followed, i.e. in the age of Donne and Cowley, in the age of Dryden, and in the age of Pope. The poems written by Wordsworth would appear to many readers as not fulfilling the expectations of the readers of his time, i.e. whose expectations from poetry were different from those which Wordsworth had in mind. Readers who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of the poets of the time, would in fact, find it difficult to recognize these poems as poems. They would not understand in what sense the compositions produced by Wordsworth could be called "poetry". For this reason, it is necessary to state what his purpose in writing these poems was.

## **PARA - 5**

### **24.4 THEME/CONTENT OF POETRY**

#### **24.4.0 HUMBLE AND RUSTIC LIFE; COLOURING OF IMAGINATION; A SELECTION OF LANGUAGE USED BY MEN**

The main aim that Wordsworth had in mind while writing these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men. At the same time, Wordsworth desired to colour those incidents and situations with his imagination, so as to present the ordinary things to the reader in an unusual light. Furthermore, he wanted to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of human nature. But he wants to trace them chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.

Wordsworth chose humble and rustic life for treatment in these poems because in such a life the essential passions of the heart find suitable conditions to grow and attain their maturity and find adequate expression. Man leading a humble and rustic life is under less restraint. They speak a plainer and more emphatic language.

He chose the 'humble and rustic life' because there is the elementary feeling of human beings existing in a state of greater simplicity and which may therefore be more accurately observed and more forcibly communicated. Another reason for choosing humble and rustic life was that the manners of rural life germinate from elementary feelings; they are more easily comprehended and are more durable because of the character of rural occupations. In such a life the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.

The language, too, of these people has been adopted in these poems because such people hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived. The rural people

also convey their feelings and notions through simple and unelaborated expressions, because these people are less under the influence of social vanity as compared to people in urban region. However, Wordsworth does not use this language in its original form, but takes care to purify it of its defects and of all causes of dislike and disgust. Such a language, arising out of repeated experiences and regular feelings, is more permanent and a more philosophical language than that which is generally employed by poets. It has been the practice of poets to separate themselves from sympathies of readers by indulging in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to provide food for fickle appetites which the poets have themselves created. In other words, Wordsworth had departed from the kind of language generally employed by the poets.

#### **PARA - 6**

##### **24.4.1 EACH POEM IN *LYRICAL BALLADS* HAS A PURPOSE**

Wordsworth, while dealing with poems composed by some of his contemporaries, found that their poetry did not bear any purpose. They had introduced into their poems a meanness and triviality, both of thought and language. Such a defect in a work of creation is discreditable to the author than the use of false refinement or arbitrary innovation. Wordsworth claims that his poems are distinguishable from the popular poetry of his time by the fact that each of his compositions has a worthy purpose and a meaning. Along with this, he also reveals that his work is not preplanned, i.e. he did not always begin to write a poem with a purpose, formally conceived in advance. His poems embody a purpose due to his habits of meditation. His habit of meditation had so prompted and regulated his feelings that his descriptions of objects automatically carried a purpose with them. The objects of his prolonged meditation excited those feelings which found expression in his verse.

##### **24.4.2 POETIC CREATION**

Further, he says that all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Good poetry on any variety of subjects can be



produced only by a man who possesses a more than usual organic sensibility and, at the same time, who is also capable of deep and prolonged thinking over those themes. Our thoughts, which are indeed, the representatives of all our past feelings, modify and direct our feeling, which originate in continued influxes. And by analysing the inter-relations of these feelings, we discover what is really important to human beings. Repetitive and continuing act of contemplation develops a link of our feelings with important themes or subjects. It would then result in the enlightenment of the readers' understanding, thereby strengthening and purifying of his affections, with the description of the objects and expression of the sentiments relating to those objects. Thus, poetry writing is a spontaneous process. It needs a lot of previous thinking over the theme and an unusual organic sensibility.

**PARA - 7**

**24.4.3 FEELINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ACTION AND SITUATION**

Along with the purpose, feeling is important to a poem. In this respect, Wordsworth says that his poems are different from popular poetry of his time, for in his poetry feeling is more important than the action and situation.

**PARA - 8**

**24.4.4 IMPROVEMENT OF TASTE AND TREND REQUIRED**

According to Wordsworth, the human mind possesses the capability of being excited without the use of gross and violent stimulants. One human being is superior to another in proportion as he possesses this capability of being excited. And a poet can render his services to human kind, i.e. his readers by trying to produce or enlarge this capability. But Wordsworth observes that the poets of his time are not rendering this service and the result is that a false taste has come into existence. The valuable works of older poets like Shakespeare and Milton have been

pushed into the background by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and large number of idle and extravagant stories in verse. There has been a degrading taste in man which craved for some outrageous stimulation. Wordsworth has tried to improve the taste and trend in his own modest way by his poems.

#### **PARA - 9**

#### **24.4.5 REJECTION OF PERSONIFICATION OF ABSTRACT IDEAS**

Wordsworth then reveals his process of creation of poetry. He acquaints his readers with the style which he has employed in the writing of his poems. He says that he has completely rejected personifications of abstract ideas. He claims that his purpose was to imitate, and as far as possible to adopt the very language of men. He wants to imitate the nature as it is. Personifications of abstract ideas are certainly not a natural or regular part of that language. Wordsworth usually avoided personification but made use of it only when prompted by passion.

#### **24.4.6 POETIC DICTION IS NOT ESSENTIAL**

Wordsworth has taken pains to avoid the use of what is generally called "Poetic Diction". This was a step further in his attempt to bring the language of his poems near to the language of men. Another reason for his avoiding 'poetic diction' is that the pleasure which he wanted to provide to the readers is of a kind that is very different from that which many people expect from it. Wordsworth claims that he has at all times tried to look steadily at his subject. Consequently, there is little falsehood of description in his poems, and his ideas have been expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. It seems he has avoided the trend followed from generation to generation by the poets. The phrases and figures of speech held as the common inheritance of poets is avoided by him. He even ignores those expressions which are in themselves improper and disgusting on account of their content.

**PARA - 10**

**24.4.7 NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LANGUAGE OF VERSE AND THAT OF PROSE**

Wordsworth then goes on to enunciate another principle of his poetic theory. He says that the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily in no way differ from that of good prose, except with reference to the metre. Not only that, some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly in the 'language of prose when prose is well written'. Wordsworth asserts that it is possible to demonstrate the truth of his principle by quoting innumerable passages from the writings of all poets, including Milton. However, he contents himself by quoting only a short poem of Gray. He points out that in Gray's sonnet the language of those lines which have any value does not differ from that of prose. The only exception in the poem is the rhyme that has been used, as there is no rhyme in the prose. He quotes that the word 'fruitless' has been used where 'fruitlessly' would have been used in prose.

**PARA - 11**

**24.4.8 AFFINITY BETWEEN METRICAL COMPOSITION AND PROSE**

In Wordsworth's view, there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and that of verse. There is a perfect affinity between the language of metrical composition and prose composition. They both speak by and to the same organs. It may be said that both these compositions are clothed in the same material. Their affections are kindred and almost identical. The same human blood circulates through the veins of both poetry and prose.

**PARA - 12**

**24.4.9 EMERGENCE OF DISSIMILITUDE**

Wordsworth prefers as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men for the kind of poetry he recommends to be written

by poets. The true taste and feeling involved in the process of selection, constitutes in itself a distinction far greater than would at first appear to be the case. This type of selection will entirely separate the verse from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life. In case, the metre is superadded to this language, it would create a dissimilitude. This dissimilitude in turn would be sufficient only to gratify a rational mind. No other distinction is necessary when the poet speaks through the mouths of his characters. Neither elevation of style nor any of its supposed ornaments is essential. The reason is, if the poet has chosen his theme judiciously, it will automatically lead him to those passions which need a dignified, variegated and well embellished language at his disposal.

In such a state, the poet must make use of the language, which is naturally suggested by the passion, instead of any foreign splendour of his own. This will produce its due effect on the reader.

#### **PARA - 13**

Wordsworth says that if his conclusion be admitted and carried out, the judgement of the readers concerning the works of the greatest poets, ancient or modern will be far different from what they are at present, both in our praise and in our condemnations. By admitting reader's conclusions, our moral feelings influencing these judgements or being influenced by them in turn will be corrected and purified.

#### **PARA - 14**

##### **24.4.10 WHAT IS A POET?**

Further, Wordsworth asks the question; "What is a poet; to whom does he address himself; and what language is to be expected from him." Wordsworth observes that a poet is a man endowed with a lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness than common people possess. The poet keeps a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than the common people have. A poet is a man pleased with his own volitions and passions. He rejoices more than other people in the spirit of life that is

in him. He enjoys contemplating similar passions and volitions as are manifested in the activities of the universe, and he creates them where he feels the void. In addition, he also has a disposition which affects him more than it does to other human beings by absent or invisible things as if they were present. A poet is able to conjure up emotions almost similar to those produced in the acting out of real events. He shows readiness in expressing his ideas and feelings more than other people do. He is also capable to express those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate excitement.

#### **PARA - 15**

No matter how great a poet is, he will still fall short of the language used by him under the actual pressure of those passions which the poet produces in himself.

#### **PARA - 16**

When a poet describes and imitates passions, he is doing something like a mechanical act because he is not expressing the true passion as it is felt by him, rather he is trying to imitate exactly his own feeling but as is the inadequacy of language, one is unable to express the feeling as it is in heart and mind. Therefore such imitation is desirable. Sometimes he will even confound or identify his own feelings with those feelings, so that there is almost no distinction between them. The only distinction is in the modified language used by him to give pleasure. For this, he will go for selection of language to remove all that is painful or disgusting in the passion. He will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature. And he will realize that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be comparable with those which are derived from reality and truth.

#### **PARA - 17**

#### **24.4.11 THE POET'S DUTY**

Wordsworth disapproves of the idea that poetry is a matter of amusement and idle pleasure. Wordsworth quotes Aristotle, who had

said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writings, and confirms his view. The object of poetry is truth, not individual and local truth but general and operative truth. The poetic truth does not stand upon external testimony. It is carried alive into the heart through passion by poetry itself. Hence, this truth is its own testimony. Poetry is the image of man and nature.

The obstacles which a biographer and historian face in the way of truth are much greater than those faced by the poet who understands the dignity of his art. The poet writes to give the reader immediate pleasure. The reader is possessed of the same information which may be expected of him (not as a lawyer, as a physician, as a sailor, as an astronomer or as a natural philosopher, but) as a man.

That is to say, a reader need not possess any specialized knowledge in order to derive pleasure from poetry.

#### **PARA - 18**

Producing immediate pleasure for the reader is an acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe. It is in no way a degradation of the poet's art to produce this pleasure. Further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man. It is again a sympathetic feeling towards the grand elementary principle of pleasure by which the reader knows and feels, and lives and moves. Whenever human beings sympathize with pain, the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. A poet takes man and objects surrounding him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure. He considers man in his natural surrounding and in a natural self and this observation immediately excites in him sympathies which are accompanied by an over-balance of enjoyment.

#### **PARA - 19**

### **24.5 RELATION BETWEEN POETRY AND SCIENCE**

A poet considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other.

He considers the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. And thus, a poet prompted by this feeling of pleasure, converses with nature in general, as the man of science does with a particular part of nature. The knowledge gained by both the poet and the man of science is pleasure. But while the knowledge of the poet clings to the reader as a necessary part of our existence, the knowledge of the man of science is personal and individual. The man of science seeks truth as remote and unknown benefactor enjoyed by him in his solitude. The Poet, on the other hand sings and all human beings join him. He rejoices in the presence of truth as man's visible friend and hourly companion. A poet is emphatically a man who looks before and after. He is the rock of defence for human nature, an upholder and preserver, carrying relationship and love wherever he goes. In spite of racial, geographical or cultural differences, the poet binds together the whole human society by passion and knowledge. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge; poetry is immortal. If the labours of the scientists should ever create any material revolution in the world, the poet will be ready to carry sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself. The remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, the mineralogist, will be proper objects of the poet's art. If ever the time comes when science becomes perfectly familiar to mankind, the poet will land his divine spirit to help the transfiguration. He will welcome it as an inmate of the man's household.

#### **PARA - 20**

#### **24.5.0 POETIC LANGUAGE**

The remarks so far made by Wordsworth apply to poetry in general but more particularly to those parts in which the poet speaks through his characters. These parts will be defective in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, i.e. if coloured by a poetic diction.

The distinction of language should not be sought in the dramatic parts of poetic composition. Then it can be said that distinction of language becomes necessary where the poet speaks in his own person. But that is not true, as the poet differs from other men only in degree. He has a greater power to think and feel without any external stimulus and

a greater power of expression than a common man has. He thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. Thus, the poetic language cannot differ from the real language of man. And so long as he is only selecting from the language used by men, he is treading upon safe ground. Therefore he needs to descend from his illusioned height and express himself as other men do.

#### **PARA - 21**

##### **24.5.1 METRE HEIGHTENS PLEASURE**

According to Wordsworth, human feelings are the same as regards metre. The distinction of metre is regular and uniform. Whereas in the case of poetic diction, the reader is entirely at the mercy of the poet, in case of metre, certain laws have to be obeyed by the poet. Metre is neither arbitrary nor capricious like poetic diction.

Metre heightens and improves the pleasure which coexists with passion. In the case of poetic diction, the poet and the reader have to submit to those laws that do not coexist with passion.

#### **PARA - 22**

##### **24.5.2 METRE ADDS TO PLEASURE**

Wordsworth says that there is no essential difference between the language of metrical composition and the language of prose. Then a question may be asked to him as to why he has chosen the verse form for his own composition. His answer to this question is that he has written in verse because metre adds to the pleasure which is produced by a poet's treatment of passion. Though prose can also describe a subject vividly, yet metre, by the consent of all nations, superadds to the charm of a description. Further metre is not necessarily to be accompanied with other artificial distinction of style because metre by itself is enough to add to the charm of a description. Moreover, as only a very small part of pleasure given by poetry depends upon metre, it implies that other artificial aids need not be utilized to add to this pleasure. Poems written on humble subjects, employing simple style have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation.



## **PARA - 23**

### **24.5.3 METRE REDUCES PAIN**

Poetry aims at producing excitement along with an over-balance of pleasure. But excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind, during which ideas and feelings do not succeed each other. However, if the words which produce this condition of excitement be powerful in themselves, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper limits. Metre, being regular has the power to reduce, even eliminate pain and to diminish excitement. Situations and sentiments, having excessive proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition especially in rhyme. In prose, they may not be endurable. Further, Wordsworth supplies examples from Shakespeare in order to elaborate his viewpoint.

### **24.5.4 SIMILITUDE IN DISSIMILITUDE**

Wordsworth says that he does not have the space to analyse various causes upon which pleasure derived from metrical language depends. But he describes pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of activity of the human mind and its chief feeder. All the passions associated with the sexual appetite take their origin from this principle. Our taste and moral feelings depend upon the accuracy with which we perceive similitude in dissimilitude and vice-versa. The very principle is applicable to the consideration of metre also, which affords much pleasure to the reader listener.

## **PARA - 25**

### **24.5.5 EMOTION RECOLLECTED IN TRANQUILITY**

Wordsworth states very emphatically that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and goes on to elaborate this statement. Poetry 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. And then begins, successful composition, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on. But the emotion, of whatever kind, and whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures. And during this state of describing any passions, the mind will be in a state of enjoyment. Then emerges the complex feeling of delight from the music of harmonious metrical language followed by the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre and the perception of language loosely resembling real life. This feeling of delight is very important as it tempers the painful feelings always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of deeper passions. Thus metre serves an important purpose in contributing to the total pleasure.

#### **PARA - 26**

#### **24.5.6 ERRORS COMMITTED BY WORDSWORTH IN HIS POEMS**

Here Wordsworth goes on to admit that there is a possibility that he may have committed certain errors in writing his verse. There is a possibility that he may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects. His language may frequently have suffered from arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases. He may have produced, in some cases, feelings of the ludicrous in his readers, by means of expressions which he thought to be tender and pathetic. He is willing to take all reasonable pains to correct such errors. But he would not like to make any corrections for the sake of a few individuals. Towards such a step the author has to convince himself, for he cannot make any alternations in his work without injuring himself, as his own feelings and emotions are his support as well as manifestation of his will. As for the critic, he should remember that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the poet, and perhaps to a much greater degree than the latter.

**PARA - 27**

**24.5.7 LANGUAGE OF REAL LIFE IS NO GUARANTEE OF EXCELLENCE**

Wordsworth then advises the readers to read the poetry in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature. But language alone cannot be the criterion to judge a poem. There may be poems in which the language does resemble that of real life but which are worthless. In the two stanzas quoted by him from Dr. Johnson and from 'Babes in the Wood', the words and their order do not differ at all from the most ordinary conversation. But while the stanza from '*Babe's is admirable*', the other is an example of extremely contemptible writing. Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible because the matter expressed in it is such. It is lacking in sense. It is neither interesting in itself nor can it lead to anything interesting. In it, the images do not originate in that sane state of feeling that arises out of thought.

**PARA - 28**

**24.5.8 HASTY JUDGEMENT IS A MISTAKE**

Wordsworth appeals to his readers to judge a poem by their own feelings. They should not be suggestive. They should not disapprove a poem just because others did so. This phenomenon should be ridiculed as it is destructive of all sound judgement. The reader being an individual, should appreciate a poem individually.

If an author has produced a favourable impression upon the reader of his talent by any single composition, the reader should not be hasty in condemning him for his another composition which has failed to stand his tastes. It is possible that the reader may have misjudged the second composition. An accurate taste in poetry, as well as all the other arts, is an 'acquired' talent which can only be achieved by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best of composition. The reader, therefore, should be careful in making his judgements.

#### **PARA - 30**

Wordsworth also says that, in order to enjoy the poems, which he is offering to the reader, it would be necessary for the reader to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed in poetry. His poetry is quite different from the kind of poetry which has been popular for a long time. Thus the reader would have to give up old habits in order to enjoy the new ones, just like old friends have to be infrequented in order to develop new associations.

#### **PARA - 31**

Finally, he says that if his purposes were fulfilled, a species of poetry would be produced which can be called genuine poetry. Such poetry would be genuine in kind and it will interest mankind permanently and, furthermore, it will be important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations.

### **24.6 APPENDIX ON POETIC DICTION: A SUMMARY**

Wordsworth is keen to give his readers an exact idea of the phrase Poetic Diction, as it has been conceived by him. The earliest poets of all nations, says Wordsworth, generally wrote from passions excited by real events. They wrote naturally and as men, they felt powerful. As a result, their language became daring and figurative. In succeeding ages, they found that the influence of such a language was very powerful. In an attempt, out of desire to produce the same effect without being animated by the same passion, they set themselves to a mechanical adoption of those figures of speech. They made use of those figures of speech, sometime with propriety, but frequently they applied them to feelings and thoughts with which those figures had no natural connection. As a result, a language was gradually produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation. However, distorted language was received with admiration. As a result, the poets who had been previously content with misusing only expressions which at first had been inspired by real passion, carried the misuse still further. They started inventing and introducing phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative

language of passion. These new phrases deviated in varying degrees from good sense and nature. This stage marked the emergence of 'Poetic Diction'.

The language of earlier poets differed materially from ordinary language because it was the language of extraordinary occasions. But it was still a language in some degree really spoken by men. It was a language which the poet himself must have uttered had he been affected by the same emotions in similar situations. To this language, metre of kind was soon super-added. The addition of metre separated the real language of poetry still further from common life. In course of time, however, whoever took upon himself to write in metre began to introduce less or more of the adulterated phraseology. With the progress of refinement, the poetic diction became gradually more and more corrupt. It pushed out of sight the plain humanities of nature and began to depend upon a miscellaneous collection of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics and enigmas. Thus the true and the false were inseparably interwoven until, the taste of reader became gradually perverted. This language was received as a natural language. This extravagant and absurd diction became a source of pleasure for the reader. One of the reasons for the reader's pleasure was his self-love or his vanity in thinking that by feeling pleased with this diction, he would be raising himself to the level of the writer.

Wordsworth quotes a stanza from Dr. Johnson and another from a Biblical passage. The absurdity of poetic diction may be illustrated by a comparison of the above stanzas. Dr. Johnson's stanza is an example of poetic diction while the Biblical passage is written in simple and graceful language.

Wordsworth concludes with the following principle: In works of imagination and sentiment, in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or in verse, they require one and the same language. Metre is only something additional to poetic language, and poetic diction is quite needless. That is to say that there is little difference between the language of prose and poetry, subject only to the condition that the poet makes a selection of language, according to his need and purpose from the real language of man. Poetic diction should be avoided by a poet. And metre is merely incidental to poetry, and not essential and indispensable.

#### **24.7 THE ESSAY SUPPLEMENTARY TO THE PREFACE, 1815**

People read poetry mostly during the years of their youth. Subsequently, their interest in poetry declines or is diminished greatly because of domestic cares or business activities. Sound judgement of poetry is rare. Even men of ability do not possess a sound judgement. They may acquire great proficiency in the affairs of their business, but their judgement of poetry remains immature because they discontinue reading poetry in their advanced age. When such persons read a new poem, which does not have any particular merit, they are yet likely to be charmed by its false excellence. And because of their lack of judgement, they admire extravagance and misused ornaments in new poetry. Such lovers of poetry are incapable of enjoying true poetry. They feel attracted by absurdity and extravagance but not by wisdom of the heart or by the grandeur of the imagination. They will be enchanted with the fantastic poetic diction, instead of a pure and refined scheme of harmony.

#### **24.8 READER'S JUDGEMENT MAY BE BIASED**

Judgement of readers is biased according to their mental setup. People with religious inclinations try to find in poetry the truths in which they are themselves interested. If any poet has expressed certain views and opinions about religion with which such readers do not agree, they will condemn the poet.

Religion makes up for the deficiencies of reason by faith. Poetry makes up for the deficiencies of reason by passion. Religion deals with what is infinite, and its ultimate trust is supreme. Poetry is ethereal and transcendent, but it cannot sustain its existence without the help of visible and concrete images. Thus poetry which deals with sacred subjects is subject to great distortion. And those who are pious and religious-minded, become subject to great blunders in their judgement of poetry.

#### **24.9 QUALITY OF A GOOD CRITIC**

It is difficult to find competent critics who can pronounce right judgements upon new poetry. The mind of a good critic must be at once poetical and philosophical. His understanding must be strongly disciplined. He must possess a

calm mind undisturbed by any selfish motives. He must have a natural sensibility which has acquired correctness without losing anything of its quickness. He must have a judgement that cannot be deceived into admiring anything which is unworthy of admiration. Even with all these qualities, man may not be able to become a true and reliable critic if he has a palsied imagination and a strong heart.

As such, the number of competent judges of poetry is really very small. This fact is borne out by a vast amount of evidence from history. For instance, many excellent poems were neglected for long periods of time, while poetic works of an inferior kind often won great popularity, even though this popularity afterwards proved to be short lived. In order to prove that great poets have generally been neglected in the beginning and have been recognized as being great only in the long run, Wordsworth proceeds to make a rapid survey of the history of poetry of the preceding two hundred years or so.

#### **24.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- a) Write a critical note on Wordsworth's choice of themes from humble and rustic life for the writing of poetry.
- b) Summarize Wordsworth's views on the themes proper to poetry.
- c) Assess the value of *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* as a piece of literary criticism.
- d) "To bring my language near to the language of men" was Wordsworth's objective as writing his poems. Discuss the reasons which led Wordsworth to formulate this view.

#### **24.11 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Berman Douglas Scott (1999). '*The Seduction of Systems.*' The Critical reception of William Wordsworths preface to 'Lyrical Ballads', 1800-1820 (Thesis). Pro Quest 304540675.
2. Wordsworth, William. "Lyrical Ballads, with other Poems, 1800, Volume 1". Project Gutenberg. Retrieved 2024-02-15.

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## **WORDSWORTH'S SURVEY**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Wordsworth's Survey
- 25.2 Duty of a True Poet
- 25.3 *Preface* : A Manifesto of Romantic Poetry
- 25.4 Two Objectives of Poetry
- 25.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 25.6 Suggested Reading

### **25.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with Wordsworth's survey of various poets and writers.

### **25.1 WORDSWORTH'S SURVEY**

Spenser's great poem *The Faerie Queene* was pushed into the background by an inferior epic poem *Creation*, written by a French poet, Dubartes. Spenser, says Wordsworth, had a genius of a higher calibre than even that of Aristotle. Even in Wordsworth's own time, Spenser was not known beyond the limits of the British Isles.

Shakespeare certainly achieved recognition in his own time, and people were delighted with his dramas. He did keep the taste of his audience in view while writing his plays. But he did not acquire any extraordinary fame in his time. Other



writers of a much inferior merit were also as popular as Shakespeare. Further late, the dramas of Beaumont, Fletcher and Shadwell were more popular than those of Shakespeare. Though Shakespeare did command the love of the audiences, he failed to receive the intellectual praise of his time.

Even in the age of Pope, he had not yet acquired the popularity, due to him. This public indifference to Shakespeare shows that the public did not have a mature judgement in the domain of poetry. The French critics, as well as, the Italians were unable to appreciate the poetic beauties of Shakespeare. Only Baron Grimm, the French Critic, was able to appreciate his supremacy in the field of poetic drama. However, the Germans showed a better understanding of the nature of his genius.

Wordsworth deplores the fact that the sonnets of Shakespeare were not appreciated by George Steevens when he edited these sonnets. These sonnets, containing a large number of exquisite feelings expressed in the most appropriate and felicitous language, failed to arouse any enthusiasm for a long time.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a great epic, but it did not attain much popularity during Milton's own life-time. *Paradise Lost* made slow progress in achieving popularity. His sonnets were spoken of by Dr. Johnson with contempt. Lord Chesterfield does not even mention the name of Milton in his letters to his son.

Alexander Pope certainly achieved a vast reputation during his life-time. But his popularity was due to certain artificial devices of which he made a plentiful use. Having achieved great success with his Pastorals, he was tempted into thinking that Nature was not to be trusted, at least in pastoral poetry. Though his Pastorals contain detestable passages, they were read with delight and were thought to be just representations of rural manners and occupations.

Thomson's poem, *The Season*, acquired an immediate fame. But it has a special reason for this Nature, that had been ignored by poets for a long time, appealed to the readers in this poem by providing refreshing imagery. But, apart from this, Thomson wrote in a style to which the readers were accustomed. His style in this poem was vicious, and the false ornaments which he employed greatly appealed to the readers of his time. *The Caste of Indolence* did not prove popular at all, though it was written in an excellent style and endowed with harmonious verse and pure diction.

Collins received no applause from his readers. Thomas Percy's *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* was an excellent work, which was condemned by Dr. Johnson but greatly admired by the German writer Burger, who translated it into German. James Macpherson, the author of the *Ossianic Poems*, won a widespread fame in spite of any merit in his poems. The imagery, in these poems, according to Wordsworth, is spurious. By contrast, the influence of Percy has been great, not only in England but also in Germany.

Dr. Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* provides another proof of the neglect into which great poets had fallen. Dr. Johnson has included the biographies of a large number of inferior poets, and has left out some of the greatest names in the history of English poetry, namely Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney and even Shakespeare.

Wordsworth then speaks about the kind of reception that his own poems have met. He says that he is satisfied with the response which his poems have evoked. He is sure his labour will get its reward and these poems will prove to be enduring.

## **25.2 DUTY OF A TRUE POET**

Next, he proceeds to offer another generalization that every great and original author has been faced with the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed. But it is a difficult job, as the poet has to break the bonds of custom. He has to overcome the prejudices of false refinement, and dislodge the dislike, which results from the inexperience of the readers. He has to rid his readers of the pride which makes them feel superior to other men because of their higher social status. That is to say, he has to create a feeling of humility in them so that they may be purified and elevated.

Taste is a passive faculty in a human being. In order to make it effective, the poet has to energize the mind of the reader. The reader in turn, too has to make extra efforts to develop his taste for poetry and his judgement of poetry.

The original poet is a man of genius whose function is to widen the sphere of human sensibility for the delight, honour, and benefit of human nature. But passivity on the part of the reader can not aid and heighten his sensibility. The reader should be capable of participating in both the pathetic and the sublime emotions aroused by poetry.

Pathos can be simple and direct, and complex along with meditative pathos and enthusiastic pathos. Sublime is very remote from the daily routine of human life. Thus, it is very difficult for the reader to acquire the right taste for poetry, and the poet has to make efforts to help the readers to develop the right taste.

No original poet should expect immediate popularity for his work. Extravagance and superficial ornaments appeal to the common readers quickly, but true and original poetry takes a long time to be appreciated. Sublime thoughts do not evoke responses immediately.

In every period of history, vicious poetry of some kind or the other has excited a more enthusiastic admiration than good and original poetry. However, vicious poetry is, in course of time, forgotten completely, while the true poet gets recognition in the long run and endures for ever. The original poet has consolation that his poem will ultimately be recognized and will endure for ever.

Wordsworth concludes his essay by distinguishing between the people and the public. He feels as much deference as the public deserves, but to the people he owes his devout respect which he offers willingly and readily. The public may go wrong in its judgment of poetry, but the people can never go wrong. True and original poetry attains permanence because of the sound judgement of the people.

### **25.3 PREFACE : A MANIFESTO OF ROMANTIC POETRY**

It is generally believed that the joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 marked the formal inauguration of the English Romantic Movement. The first edition appeared in 1798, the second with additional poems and a preface in 1800, and the third in 1802. *The Lyrical Ballads* is significant for three reasons:

1. The volume contains some of the best poems in English - *The Ancient Mariner*, *Tintern Abbey*, *Michael*, *We are Seven*, etc.
2. *Lyrical Ballads* marked a reaction against neoclassical poetry.
3. Between 1798-1800, Wordsworth's conception about nature, function and language had crystallized.

These conceptions springing from his experience as a reader and an artist are embodied in his *Preface*.

In his *Preface*, Wordsworth sets forth his views on poetry. He had deliberately deviated from the standards followed by his fellow poets. Public taste in literary matters, particularly in poetry, had deteriorated during his age. The language of poetry was artificial, 'gaudy and inane'. Poetry, according to Wordsworth, should narrate '*the short and simple annals of the poor*'. His object in his poetry is to deal with common incidents in the language of the common man. In doing so, he would allow his imagination to a full play in order to heighten the effect. He deliberately chooses the life of the poor man and the rustic, for it is in that condition that life is seen in its primitive simplicity. Poor people in that state are unsophisticated. They live and talk naturally and they are unrestrained in feeling and expressing emotion. Their passions are elemental and in the intensity of their emotions, they are very close to Nature's most beautiful and enduring aspect. There is a native dignity in their language, because they are in close and constant touch with all that is the best and beautiful in Nature. Their language is the authentic expression of their repeated genuine experiences. Contemporary poetry suffered from artificiality of language, meanness and triviality, and Wordsworth broke away from it.

Each and every of his poems, says Wordsworth, has a purpose, flowing naturally from the thoughts and feeling he sincerely expressed. If a poet had thought deeply and long over life and its problems, his poems will, besides being a record of his most intimate feelings be redolent of high purpose. In his poems, Wordsworth puts feeling in the forefront. Action and situation are of interest for the feeling or mood generated by them. The mind is a delicate instrument as Aeolin's harp for any wind to play upon. To elevate the mind, to make men mentally more alert, responsible and more discriminating, is a laudable ambition, especially when at a time, men's minds had sunk low and were plunged in listlessness and torpor. That was the State of English people in his day. The people living in crowded cities craved for sensation and thrill. They had ceased to be simple and natural, and writers pandered to the public taste. There was no attempt to stem the rot and Wordsworth resolved to stop it, who had deep faith in human nature. The human mind is sensitive to pure, noble impulses and he was confident that the process of deterioration could be arrested.

The poet, as Wordsworth states, is not a superman. The difference between the poet and the rest of the mankind is not of kind, but of degree. The poet is endowed with a similar heart. He is moved by the same experience as the rest of mankind. But he is gifted with a deeper insight into the springs of human thought and action. He has a more sympathetic and sensitive mind, a more lively imagination. He is capable of conjuring up emotions and experiences by the exercise of his imagination and these are as powerful as those aroused by real events.

#### **25.4 TWO OBJECTIVES OF POETRY**

1. The object of poetry is the ascertainment and portrayal of truth. Poetry is a kind of philosophical writing concerned with truth. It is self-evident truth which does not warrant any external testimony. Poetry is the reflection of the nature and spirit of man. If a poet understands the greatness and dignity of poetry, he will convey the truth unerringly. But the truth must be conveyed pleasingly.
2. The enjoyment of pleasure is another object of poetry. We seek pleasure at every truth and our sympathies are directly or indirectly connected with pleasure. The poet observes man and his reaction to his surroundings, to the complexities of events and sensations of which he is a part. These are compounded of pleasure and pain. But the dominant emotion is one of pleasure or “an overbalance of enjoyment”. The poet is aware of this and so aims at evoking those reactions which make for pleasure in the reader. Poetry, as Wordsworth observes, “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity”. “Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. It is as immortal as the heart of man”. The poet is ‘the rock of defence for human nature’ and ‘the upholder and preserver’ of that fine spirit which is expressed in poetry. Such descriptions underline the Romantic idealization of poetry and the poet. The poet brings out those forces which are universal and bind all men. He sings a jubilant song in which all men can join. He transcends limitations of time, space, creed and nationality and enforces truths which are of universal relevance. When that is the true nature of poetry and when such a dignity is attached to the role of a poet, it is deplorable that poets should go in for cheap artifice and tawdry ornamentation.

As for the style of poem, Wordsworth had employed the speech of the common man. Personification, which is pardonable, if used in moderation, but indefensible, if overdone, was rejected by him. He has also eschewed 'Poetic diction', which was the bane of the neo-classical poetry. It has grown stereotyped and conventional. Wordsworth strongly holds that there can be no essential difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry, when prose is well written. Both are designed to communicate the ideas, feelings, hopes, fears and aspirations, felt by man. In form, they may be different but basically, in spirit they are not. The language of poetry should be the language employed by men and women, and if a poet only used that language selectively, i.e. with discrimination and sense, it will be free from coarseness or vulgarity; and if meter and rhyme supplement, the effect will be pleasing where the poet speaks through his characters (drama), he must use the language they would employ. That alone would be easy and natural and therefore effective. And if the poet chooses his words judiciously, his language will be adequate, dignified and enriched with figures of speech and expressions of passion which come naturally.

If the language used by the common people should be used in poetry, what is the necessity to embellish it with metre? In his answer to this question, Wordsworth justifies the use of metre. Pleasure plus excitement is the end of poetry. Excitement implies that the ideas and feelings suggested in the poem may not be produced in the reader's mind in the proper order. The reader in excitement is likely to be thrown off his balance, especially if the language of the poem is powerful. In such a contingency, metre exercises a smoothing, restraining influence on the reader. Metre makes pathetic situations more endurable. In the case of a poet whose language or general treatment of the theme is inadequate, metre makes amends for his shortcomings. Metre imparts the quality of "*Similitude in dissimilitude*" to poetry. Wordsworth develops his idea in the light of his definition that 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility'.

At the time the reader experiences an emotion, its effect may be powerful, even violent. After a while it loses its edge. When the mind is serene, the same experience returns to the reader and is accompanied by an element of pleasure.

What might have been originally painful, in retrospect, becomes pleasurable. When the process of recollection is at work, a sensitive poet feels like setting it in verse. The poet should convey the approximate feeling in a realistic manner to make it produce pleasure. Rhyme and metre come for the aid. Metre makes the language, employed in composition, dissimilar enough to the language of real life, to temper or regulate the flow of emotion.

At the same time, it is accompanied by pleasing sensations. This is “*Dissimilitude in similitude*” the language of real life modified by metre to produce pleasing effect.

The ancients wrote under the influence of real events and passions. Their language was powerful and figurative. Later poets, eager to produce similar effects, simulated the passions excited by real events. They aimed at final effect, for which they started using decorated language. The result was artificiality in poetry; stereotyped expressions entered the language of poetry, which degenerated into jargons. It became a fashion with poets to resort to this stereotyped ‘poetic diction’. Wordsworth reacted against the conventions of this neo-classical poetry. He came out with his Theory of Poetry.

## **25.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- a) Write a critical note on Wordsworth’s views about poets.
- b) “Meter is but adventitious to composition (in poetry)”. Discuss.

## **25.6 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth : A Life*. Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 132-133.
2. *Lyrical Ballads : With a Few other Poems (led)*. London : J.&A. Arch. 1778. Retrieved 13 November 2014. via archive.org

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**NATURE OF POETRY & PROCESS OF POETIC CREATION****STRUCTURE**

26.0 Objectives

26.1 Wordsworth's Views on the Nature of Poetry and the Process of Poetic Creation

26.2 Function of Poetry

26.3 Conclusion

26.4 Examination Oriented Questions

26.5 Suggested Reading

**26.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with Wordsworth's view on the nature of poetry, the process of poetic creation and function of poetry.

**26.1 WORDSWORTH'S VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF POETRY AND THE PROCESS OF POETIC CREATION**

Poets and critics of all ages have tried to explain their theories of poetry. In keeping with the tradition, Wordsworth, too, expounded his theory of poetry. By publishing the *Lyrical Ballads* in collaboration with Coleridge in 1798, he inaugurated the romantic movement in English poetry. He, therefore, occupies a very important place in the history of English poetry. With him, began a new era in English poetry. Wordsworth propounded his theory of poetry in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (2nd Edition, 1801), in which he categorically answers several questions. Three of them are:



- i. What is poetry ?
- ii. What is the function of poetry ?
- iii. What is poetic creation?

He begins by saying that some of his friends have advised him to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which his poems have been written. Then he adds that his poems are characterized by his feelings with a worthy purpose.

As regards the nature of poetry, Wordsworth clearly states that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” In other words, poetry proceeds from the internal feelings of the poet. It is a matter of passions, moods and temperament. True poetry cannot be written without the proper mood and temperament. A poet cannot compose at other’s sweet will, but it must flow out involuntarily and willingly from the soul of the poet. It is generated in the heart and never in the mind. As has been well said, “The clear springs of poetry must flow freely and spontaneously - it cannot be made to flow through artificially laid pipes.” Wordsworth realizes that he may be misunderstood, and the people may think that a poet composes his poem at a moment when an external object or thought excites powerful feelings in him. Therefore, he modifies his statement as follows:

“... and though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings”

Wordsworth implied that true poems worth the name were never produced by the poet in the heat of direct inspiration from the inspiring objects. On the other hand, they were produced after the poet had, with a calm mind, thought over the initial feelings “long and deeply.”

Then he re-states his theory of poetry as follows:

“I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity.”

Here, he first defines the content of poetry through an implied symbol. He represents poetry as a stream of over-flowing powerful feelings. Since the heart is the seat of feelings, the stream of poetry comes from the heart. But it cannot be produced consciously and by an effort. For it springs from a natural state of emotion and is hence “spontaneous.”

But, this theory was severely criticized in his own age and modern critics have also rejected it. For if it is accepted, Alexander Pope ceases to be a poet. Pope’s poetry is a vehicle of thought and thought is a result of elaboration, not spontaneity. Wordsworth’s theory also disapproves of such poetry which is dominated by a thought produced by poetic sensibility. The theory hence does not seem to be sound enough.

The second clause defines the origin of poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquillity.” Now, if “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” it should spring from the initial emotion of the poet. So critic remarks that Wordsworth speaks of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” But in the same breath, he also speaks of it as taking “its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.” The two statements seem to contradict each other. How will one reconcile the two statements?

The answer comes from Wordsworth himself. He explains “The emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity 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.”

A critical analysis of the above passage can lead us to the conclusion that Wordsworth’s process of poetic creation consists of five stages:

Observation, Recollection, Contemplation,  
Emergence of the purified emotion and composition.

For Wordsworth, the process characteristically begins in a state of calm, with the remembering of some past emotional experience. Excitement gradually increases until the poet is almost reliving the experience yet with a difference; the present reaction is kindred to, not identical with, that of the past. The difference is that the

emotion has now been modified by thought and related to many past thoughts and feelings. The germinal experience has, in fact, been or is in the process of being understood and evaluated, and it is by this means that the ensuing poem acquires its, 'worthy purpose.' Thought and emotion, conscious and unconscious elements continue their intimate interaction until the, 'spontaneous overflow,' begins, i.e., until these elements are ready to combine in a poem and begin the work of shaping it.

Herbert Read does not question the validity of this part of Wordsworth's theory. He remarks:

".... good poetry is never an immediate reaction to the provoking cause; that over-sensation must be allowed time to sink back into the common fund of our experience," there to find their level and due proportion. That level is found for them by the mind in the act of contemplation.

("The True Voice of  
Feeling")

Most other critics are of the view that Wordsworth's theory of poetic creation describes his own practice and process. It cannot be called universal and all-embracing. Shelley, for example, would not allow the heat of his emotion to become cold. He would compose his poem when his emotion was intense and his imagination was hot. Robert Burns also employed a similar method. Wordsworth sought to represent not "the tumult but the depth of the soul." So he loved to sit in the "long barred silence," contemplating the submerged feelings and images in his mind. His two great poems *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* were the results of his emotions recollected in tranquility. The great 'Immortality Ode' had its origin from the memories of the poet's childhood days recollected in tranquility.

"At the state of contemplation, memory plays a very important role. As, during the interval, the mind contemplates in tranquility, the impression received by it, is purged of the non-essential elements, accidents or superfluities, is "qualified by various pleasures." This filtering or selection is very slow; time and solitude are essential. And the emotion is universalised. Then follows the integration of memory by the poet. The emotion revives in "the mind itself". It is very much like the first emotion, but is purged of all superfluities and constitutes a, "State of Enjoyment."

Wordsworth points out that in the process of contemplation, “tranquillity disappears.” During the creation, the poet has to “passion anew” and doing this he is terribly exhausted. If process of creation is carried out longer rather smoothly, it carries joy with it or “An over balance of pleasure” or on the whole, “The mood of imaginative creation is enjoyment itself.” According to Wordsworth, the creative process is natural.

The state of composition comes finally, when the poet has to convey to others that, “overbalance of pleasure,” or his own, “state of enjoyment,” to others. The poet differs from ordinary individuals not merely in his greater sensibility, but also in his capacity to communicate his experience to others, and to communicate them in such a way as to give pleasure super-added.

## **26.2 FUNCTION OF POETRY**

According to Wordsworth, the function of Poetry is to give pleasure. The poet is himself in a “State of Enjoyment,” and it is his duty to communicate his own enjoyment to his readers. But poetry is not mere entertainment, a diversion for a patron’s idle hours. “It is” Wordsworth says, “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science.” To be incapable of a feeling for poetry, in the true sense of the work, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God. Its mission is to,

“Arouse the sensual from their sleep of death, and win the vacant and the vain to noble raptures”.

Through his own poetry, he hoped, “To console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier, to lead the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, and be securely various.” This pleasure, he points out, results from various causes, viz.:

- i) The music of harmonious material Language.
- ii) The sense of difficulty which the poet has overcome in producing his poems.
- iii) The blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or meter of the same or similar construction.
- iv) A perception constantly renewed of language closely resembling that of real life and yet, in the super- addition of the meter, differing from it widely.

All these causes produce a complex feeling of delight. Even when for them subject is painful in itself, it must be so treated that it would result in an, “Overplus of pleasure.”

### **26.3 CONCLUSION**

Wordsworth said that his object in the poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* was “to choose incidents and situation from common life and to relate or describe them in a selection of language really used by them.” Wordsworth and Coleridge considered neo-classical poetry to be an outrage upon traditional poetry characterized by emotion, imagination and spontaneity. Such material and manner of writing can alone touch one and all and contribute to unify human race through an exquisite experience. Unlike the neo-classical, Wordsworth brought poetry within the reach and understanding of common man. It was no longer exclusively written for the townsman. Thus poetry is the harbinger of love and affection, tolerance and accommodation and above all mode of refinement and culture, which is the true function of poetry. While the political revolution swept over France and Europe in general for a democratic set up, a literary revolution was brought about by these two poets to revive romantic poetry of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. In the *Preface* when they proposed a new theory of poetry, the attention was focused upon the subject and style of poetry - matter and manner in other words. Sensibilities and tranquillity of mind are also essential for the composition of great poetry. Shelley and Keats could write spontaneous poetry.

### **26.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- a) Discuss the function of poetry according to Wordsworth.
- b) Discuss Wordsworth’s theory of poetry and poetic creation.

### **26.5 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Fussell, Paul (1965). *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. Random House.
2. Adams, Stephen J. (1997). *Poetic designs : an introduction to meters, verse forms and figures of speech*. Broadview. ISBN 978-1-551111-129-2.

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**COURSE CODE: ENG 124**

**LESSON No. : 27**

**M.A.ENGLISH**

**UNIT - VI**

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## **THEORY OF POETIC DICTION**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Theory of Poetic Diction
  - 27.1.0 The Theory
  - 27.1.1 Criticism
  - 27.1.2 Conclusion
- 27.2 Wordsworth's Views on Metre in Poetry
- 27.3 Wordsworth's Views on the Themes Proper to Poetry
- 27.4 Examination Oriented Questions
- 27.5 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 27.6 Suggested Reading

### **27.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction.

### **27.1 THEORY OF POETIC DICTION**

#### **27.1.0 THE THEORY**

Wordsworth rebelled against the neo-classical school of poetry, characterized by artificiality, sophistication and inane style. A genius could

not but rebel against poets who ignored the impact of Nature on man's mind and soul, and also essential characteristics of poetical composition as imagination and emotion. Wordsworth brought forth his Theory of Poetic Diction. It was propounded in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (2nd edition, 1801). In the *Preface* to the first edition (1798), he just remarked:

“The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adopted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.”

In the 2nd edition, his theory of poetic diction properly appeared. He says:

“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 this was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of the imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect... . Humble and rustic life was generally chosen. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects... because such a language is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is ... substituted for it by poets...”

The rustic language in its simplicity is highly emotional and full of passions. It is charged with the emotions of the human heart which are expressed without any reservations and inhibitions resulting from social vanity. They honourably communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived. Through the use of such a language, essential truths about human life and nature can be more easily and clearly communicated. The rustics are in communication with the beauty and grandeur of nature. The best part of their language is derived from such communication, and so it is noble and poetic. It is capable of giving the highest poetic pleasure.

Then, after a long rambling discussion, he quotes a sonnet of Gray to show that the languages of prose and poetry are not essentially different from each other. Gray, according to Wordsworth, was at the head of separation between prose and metrical composition; and Gray was, more than any other writer, curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction. He then makes a bold statement:

“It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.”

When we examine Wordsworth’s state regarding poetic diction, the following propositions catch our attention:

1. The language of poetry or that of prose is one and the same essentially. Words of prose and poetry are not clearly demarcated, so that words which can be used in prose can find place in poetry and vice-versa. “What Wordsworth means is that the words used in conversation, if they are properly selected, would provide the rough frame-work of the language of poetry, that looks different from prose because it is heightened by feeling and emotion.” When the poet is truly inspired, his imagination will enable him to select from the “language really used by men.”
2. It should be the language of men in a state of vivid sensation. The language used by the people in a state of excitement should form the language of poetry.
3. The language of poetry should be the language “really used by men”, but it should be a selected one and purified of its defects. Only selected and chosen words, which are used in common parlance, can serve the purpose of poetry.
4. Nevertheless, it should be given the colouring of the imagination. The poet should give the colour of his imagination to the language employed by him in poetic composition. Combined together, these four propositions count as basic principles of Wordsworth’s theory



of poetic diction. With close adherence to his theory, he introduced simplicity, ease and also something of banality in some of his poems. But it became pretty difficult for him to stick strictly to his theory when he came to splendid poems as *Ode on Immortality*, *Laodamia*, *Tintern Abbey* etc. in which without the use of his theoretical principles he certainly scaled the heights of poetic grandeur and sublimity. Raleigh made a significant remark:

“It has been argued that when he writes, he breaks his own rules, and when he writes ill, it has been implied, he keeps them. But the fact is that he hardly ever observes his own rules, and the poems in which he most nearly observes them are often among his best.”

#### **27.1.1 CRITICISM**

Wordsworth's theory raised a storm of criticism. The first man to criticise it, was S.T. Coleridge, his own friend. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge discusses the theory in detail. He points out that the key word to Wordsworth's theory is “Selection”. He remarked, “Wordsworth's chief error was to extend his theories to include all poetry. No theory, however, subtly argued and cogently phrased, can be comprehensive enough to hold good for poetry in general. Wordsworth's deductions from the limited scope of his doctrines were rather extravagant.” Coleridge states that a language purged from local and class peculiarities was not different from any other language. Further, the use of metre in poetry necessitated the use of a language different from the ordinary language. He concluded that there is and there ought to be, an essential difference between the two languages, of prose and of poetry. The use of metre is as artificial as the use of poetic diction and if one is allowed, it is absurd to forbid the use of the other. Both are equally good sources of poetic pleasure. Then other critics joined the issue. Herbert Read remarked:

“It is equally true that there are many poems which contradict the theory as an inclusive generalization. The mistake is to imagine that any theory of poetry, which descends to accidentals of diction and metre can be universal in its scope.”

Soon it was pointed out that Coleridge had made a mistake. For Wordsworth's theory clearly implies that the selection of the language will be made by the poet himself. And in the ultimate analysis, such selection will be made by his poetic imagination from the stock of language of common man. The language of his poetry will therefore be quite different from the language of "Commonsense."

Whatever may be the shortcomings of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, it cannot be denied that he rendered remarkable service to poetry by effectively putting an end to the use of "false poetic diction, the worth of all the diseases which have afflicted English poetry." Wyatt :

"It cannot be denied that he (Wordsworth) did a valuable service; he took stock of the language of poetry, cleared out a lot of old rubbish which had long ceased to have any but a conventional poetic value, and made available for poetic use, many words that had long been falsely regarded as unpoetic."

Shelley, too, supported Wordsworth's idea and writes in his *Preface to Cenci*:

'I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that, in order to move man to true sympathy; we must use the familiar language of men... . But it must be that real language of men in general, and not that of any particular class to whose society that writer happens to belong.'

Garrod has put up an admirable defence of Wordsworth's theory. He remarks:

"The language of poetry... comes from imagination. The imagination operates freely whether upon the visualized objects which are its materials, upon the language which is its principal, instrument, only after that there has already been operated a selecting faculty."

How far did Wordsworth succeed in putting his theory into practice? When Wordsworth wrote his poems for *Lyrical Ballads*, he fully satisfied the tenets of his theory. He could be very simple, direct and colloquial; his

language was diversified of all obscenity and obscurity. His *Lucy Poems*, *Matthew Poems*, *Michael*, etc. are all exemplary poems glorifying his poetic diction. When he came to write his sublime poems, to dedicate to the Western world, his sublime ideas on nature and God and his manifestations, previous birth etc., namely *Tintern Abbey*, *Ode to Immortality*, *Laodamia* etc., he could not follow his diction. He had to give it up in favour of pompous words which alone would convey the spiritual idea best. What is beyond reason and what can be apprehended by spiritual growth cannot be stated in very plain language.

### **27.1.2 CONCLUSION**

But such liberty that Wordsworth takes in no way contradicts his theory of spontaneity. By advocating the use of the language of common man, he does not suggest that the common man's language is deficient in expression of spiritual aspects or reason. On the contrary, the common man also uses pompous words, however only sometimes, and they also understand their value. Plain language is not the objective of Wordsworth rather it is the language of common man which offers him, varieties of expression out of which are selected words and phrases by the subconscious mind under imaginative faculty when mind and heart overflow with powerful feelings.

## **27.2 WORDSWORTH'S VIEWS ON METRE IN POETRY**

Wordsworth regards metre as merely adventitious to poetic composition. In other words, he does not think metre to be indispensable to poetry. But he does regard metre as being highly desirable. He admits that, of two descriptions of passions or manners or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times whereas the prose is read once. Although, according to him, there is no essential difference between the language of prose and the language of metrical composition, he has written in verse because there is a charm which exists in metrical language. The preface to the '*Lyrical Ballads*', says Garrod, "is quite as much a defense of the employment of metre in poetry as a protest against the use of poetic diction."

Metre obeys certain laws to which both the poet and the reader willingly submit because they are certain that metre can heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with the passion. Metre, according to Wordsworth, helps to diminish the pain which might be caused to the reader by descriptions of pathetic and moving situations and incidents. The end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. But ideas and feelings do not, in the state of excitement, succeed each other in the accustomed order. It is therefore necessary to have something regular in poetry, something which can restrain the passion. This something is metre. Metre has a tendency to divest language, to some extent of its reality. That is the reason why the pathetic situations and sentiments, having a greater proportion of pain, can be endured by the reader in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, but not in prose. Thus Wordsworth presents metre as one of the forces that remove the passions of poetry to a suitable "aesthetic distance."

Further, it is a general principle that the mind derives pleasure from the perception of "similitude in dissimilitude". When we have received some pleasure from reading a work written in rhyme or metre, we shall automatically derive similar pleasure from another work written in rhyme or metre, because of an association of ideas. It is this principle which is the basis of our pleasure derived from simile and metaphor.

Metre is regular, while a poem has a number of other varied elements. However, Wordsworth has not developed this point in detail. The point was elaborated by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge does not regard metre as absolutely essential to poetry. He says that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre. However, he too believes metre to be useful, and even necessary, for the writing of poetry.

He points out that metre and rhyme may sometimes be used only as a help to memory. School boys and other remember the number of days in different months with the help of a well known verse. Verse gives a certain pleasure because of the recurrence of sounds.

Wordsworth persists in regarding metre as something "adventitious" a kind of polish or varnish applied to the surface of poetry, but not as an essential

part of its substance. He actually imagines that the earliest poets may not have used metre at all, that it was a later embellishment, an after thought. He himself had no good command on metre. There are many memorable lines in Wordsworth, but none that we remember for the mere beauty of their sound. As it was, his metrical innovations were few and unsuccessful, for the most part he struck to accepted measures only.

### **27.3 WORDSWORTH'S VIEWS ON THE THEMES PROPER TO POETRY**

The Neo-classical poetry was very artificial and unnatural and extremely limited in its themes. It was confined to the city life; the artificial and unnatural life of the aristocrats. The beauties of nature and the humble life was rejected by these poets. Wordsworth reacted sharply and sought to increase the scope of poetry.

In the *Preface*, he tells us that he had chosen Low and rustic life for treatment in his poems. In humble and rustic life, the essential passions of the persons are less under restraint and therefore express themselves in a plain and more emphatic language. The elementary feelings of human beings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity and can therefore be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated. The passions of humble men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature. Thus, in Wordsworth's opinion, persons living in the countryside and pursuing rural occupations are the best fitted for portrayal in poetry because these people live in an environment which is more favourable to the growth and development of the essential passions of the human heart and because in this environment people do not suffer from any inhibitions.

Therefore they speak a plainer and more forceful language. The corruption of the civilized society made him choose his subjects from humble life. He collected all the traces of vivid excitement which were to be found in the pastoral world. He treated the everyday life, to open out "the soul of little and familiar things". In *We Are Seven*, he talks with the little girl who tells him of her brothers and sisters. In *The Idiot Boy*, he catches a boy bewildered by the beauty of a waterfall. Then there are leech-gatherer, shepherd, poor cold Goody Blake, Lucy as the main characters of his poetry.

Thus Wordsworth showed that even in the poorest lives, there was matter for poetry, and they could stir the imagination and move the emotions. He was the first to show the possibilities of poetry lying in these hitherto neglected and despised subjects.

Through the “incidents and situations of humble life”, Wordsworth enlarged the scope and range of poetry. He made a whiff of fresh air to blow through the suffocating atmosphere of contemporary poetry. This life was intimately in sympathy with nature. He believed that a poet is essentially a man speaking to man. So he has to appeal to the heart and mind of man. He must study human nature and try to understand, “the primary laws of our nature”. In humble and rustic conditions of life, man is more natural, and a proper subject of study for a poet who must write, “On man, on nature, and on human life”. The former, leech-gatherer, the reaper, represent human life reduced to its simplest. For the same reason, he glorified the child and stressed the value of childhood memories and experiences.

Feelings and passions of humble humanity are not peculiar to them but are common to all mankind. They are universal and permanent. They will last as long as human nature lasts, and are not subject to fluctuations from age to age or society to society. Their emotions are noble and permanent because their souls have been moulded by the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. In one of the Lucy Poems, Wordsworth refers to the education of nature and, the vital feelings which nature confers on those who live close to her. But Wordsworth has been criticized for limiting the scope of poetry.

#### **27.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Wordsworth’s views that humble and rustic life should be chosen for treatment in poetry.
2. “There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”. Discuss.
3. “In spite of Coleridge’s attack on it, there still remains something true and valuable in Wordsworth’s theory of poetic diction”. Discuss.
4. Sum up and comment on, Wordsworth’s theory of diction.

5. Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* has been called a historical document of abiding importance. Comment

### 27.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1) When was William Wordsworth born?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 23 April, 1564
- b) 7 April, 1770
- c) 9 December, 1608
- d) 14 August, 1867

Ans :- **b) 7 April, 1770**

2) Wordsworth belonged to\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Age of Chaucer
- b) Elizabethan Age
- c) Shakespearian Age
- d) Romantic Age

Ans :- **d) Romantic Age**

3) Wordsworth was popularly known as the poet of\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Lake District
- b) Lancashire Region
- c) Wessex Region
- d) None

Ans :- **a) Lake District**

4) Wordsworth's *Prelude* is\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Autobiographical Poem
- b) Philosophical Poem
- c) A Narrative Poem
- d) Drama

Ans :- **a) Autobiographical Poem**

5) The first edition of this work was published in the year\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 1792
- b) 1798
- c) 1800
- d) 1802

Ans :- **b) 1798**

6) The second edition of Lyrical Ballads was published in the year\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) 1800
- b) 1802
- c) 1805
- d) 1807

Ans :- **a) 1800**

7) Wordsworth gives much importance to which part of poetry?\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Fancy
- b) Language
- c) Feeling
- d) Imagination

Ans :- **b) Language**

8) In the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth's purpose was to imitate and adopt the very language of\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) the neoclassics
- b) metre
- c) men
- d) the classics

Ans :- **c) men**

9) The function of poetry is both to instruct and delight, but for wordsworth it is to give\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) exaltation
- b) pleasure



- c) dictation
- d) purgation

Ans :- **b) pleasure**

10) The dominant theme of Wordsworth's Preface is \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) poetic diction
- b) poetic argument
- c) poetic criticism
- d) poetic license

Ans :- **a) poetic diction**

11) To Wordsworth, poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, emotions recollected in \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) images
- b) tranquility
- c) simple life
- d) sensation

Ans :- **b) tranquility**

12) According to Wordsworth, what is not essential to poetry? \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Metre
- b) Imagination
- c) Talent
- d) Rhyme

Ans :- **a) Metre**

13) The only difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry is \_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Use of Rhythm
- b) Use of Words
- c) Use of feeling
- d) Use of metre

Ans :- **d) Use of metre**

14) The Principal object in the Lyrical Ballads was to choose incidents and situations from\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Urban life
- b) Agrarian life
- c) Common life
- d) Genteel life

Ans :- **c) Common life**

15) According to Wordsworth, poetry is the first and last of all\_\_\_\_\_ .

- a) Wisdom
- b) Truth
- c) Inspiration
- d) Knowledge

Ans :- **d) Knowledge**

#### **27.6 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood : Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London, 1920
2. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 1928.
3. Appendix to Wordsworth's preface, "*By what is usually called poetic diction.*"
4. Jams A. W., Hafferman, "Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry".
5. G. M. Harper, "William Wordsworth, His Life, Works, and Influence" .
6. George Saintsbury, "A History of English Criticism".
7. J. C. Smith, "A Study of Wordsworth".
8. Herbert Read, "Wordsworth".
9. Stephen Prickett, "Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Lyrical Ballads" .
10. David Diaches, "Critical Approaches to Literature".
11. M. Arnold, "Essays in Criticism-II. Series"

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