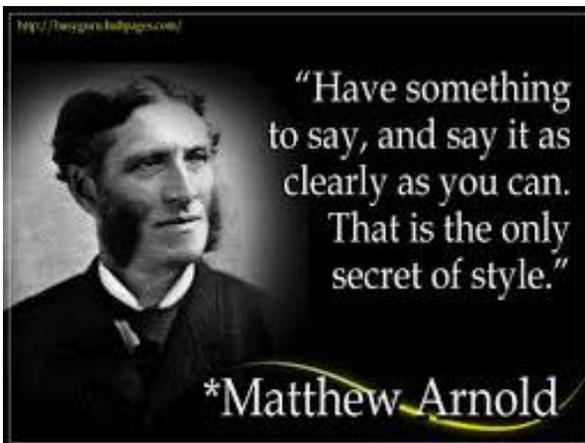




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**CRITICISM I MAEL 504**

**CRITICISM II MAEL 508**



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

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# SEMESTER I

**UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO CRITICISM**

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**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Criticism is something which comes naturally to us. Whenever we encounter something new whether it be a person or a place or an object or a work of art or a book, we instinctively judge it. We may like it or dislike it or we may consider it neither good nor bad. But we do form an opinion about it. More often than not this judgment is based on our personal liking or disliking and we do not apply any objective yardstick for evaluation. This is likely to make our judgment unsound and superficial. It is only when we start analysing our response and put it to the test of some objective yardstick that we succeed in forming an opinion which is informed and organized. Let me explain it to you through an example. You go to watch a film and when you come back your friend asks you how the film was. You say that it was good. He further asks you what was good in it. Now you start thinking and analysing the reason of your response. It was the story that you had liked and also the acting of the hero. And yes, what had particularly impressed you was the photography. In the middle, the film had become a little dull but then the end was good and so on and so forth. Slowly and gradually your muddled impression begins to become clear. In due course you move from pure subjectivity to some kind of objectivity. From a simple statement that you liked the story you begin to analyse what a good story is. This happens when you read a novel or a poem or a short story or a play. If you do not apply any objective yardstick to the literary work before you, your impression is likely to be vague and confused. Literary criticism teaches you how to go through a literary work in an informed manner. This enhances your enjoyment of that work. In this unit you will learn about the fundamentals of literary criticism as in other units of this block you will learn about some of the greatest critics and their works.

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**1.2 OBJECTIVES**

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The unit explains to you what literary criticism is and what are its scope and functions. It also informs you about different types of literary criticism. Finally, it describes some major schools of English criticism.

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**1.3 DEFINITION**

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Though criticism or critical observation must be as old as literature itself, as a discipline it came into existence much later. Early critics like Plato and Aristotle were basically philosophers who made observations about poetry and drama they were familiar with as a part of a much larger intellectual activity they were involved in. Later on, the writers made observations about their own literary activities, thereby separating critical writing from creative writing. In English also the notable critics from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries were all poet-critics – Sidney, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Johnson, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Arnold. It is difficult to say when critic as a separate class came to exist. That the early non-poet critics were not looked upon favourably by the poets themselves is obvious from the comment of Dryden: “. . . the corruption of a poet is the generation of a critic.” (Scott-James 12) However, criticism as interpretation and

evaluation of literature came to be accepted and appreciated as a part of the literary activity. Defining criticism, Walter Pater remarks:

Criticism is the art of interpreting art. It serves as an intermediary between the author and the reader by explaining the one to the other. By his special aptitude and training, the critic feels the virtue of a masterpiece, disengages it and sets it forth. (Prasad 178)

Thus criticism is basically an attempt to reveal the features of a literary work that account for its appeal to us or assigning the reason for its failure to do so. Criticism, according to Matthew Arnold, is “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.” (Prasad 178) In this regard T. S. Eliot says:

Thirty years ago I asserted that the essential function of literary criticism was ‘the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.’ That phrase may sound pompous to our ears in 1956. Perhaps I could put it more simply and more acceptable to the present age by saying to ‘promote the understanding and enjoyment of literature’. I would add that there is implied here also the negative task of pointing out what should *not* be enjoyed. For the critic may on occasion be called upon to condemn the second rate and expose the fraudulent: though that duty is secondary to the duty of discriminating praise of what is praiseworthy. (49-50)

Thus we can define literary criticism as the discipline devoted to the elucidation and evaluation of a work of literature and propagation of sound literary taste.

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## **1.4 SCOPE AND FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM**

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The definitions of criticism must have given you some idea of the scope and functions of criticism. The primary task of criticism has been the judgment of a literary work. Till the 18<sup>th</sup> century literary criticism was by and large concerned with the merits and faults of a literary work in the light of some ancient rules in this regard. But that is not the only function of criticism. David Daiches has elaborated the scope and functions of criticism:

Literary criticism concerns itself with any of several questions. It can ask the philosophical question concerning the nature of imaginative literature . . . . We can ask what literature does, which is to define it in terms of its function and at the same time to suggest its value. We can ask normative rather than descriptive questions, seeking to discover how to distinguish the good from the less good and bad among literary works. . . . We may tackle the psychological problem of how the literary mind operates in creation. Finally, criticism may ask no questions at all, but simply seek to increase appreciation on the reader’s part by any one of the great variety of methods, ranging from objective demonstration of certain qualities to impressionistic (or even autobiographical) revelation of how the work affects the critic. (3-4)

Literary criticism thus may be ontological, functional, normative, descriptive and psychological. In recent times the scope and function of criticism has widened to a great extent. Socio-economic, cultural, historical and linguistic studies have become a part of literary criticism. But in the final analysis the function of criticism is to enhance our enjoyment of literature.

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## **1.5 TYPES OF CRITICISM**

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The type of criticism is basically determined by the function it performs. On the basis of it criticism is broadly divided into three types:

- i. Legislative criticism
- ii. Descriptive criticism
- iii. Aesthetic criticism

### **1.5.1 Legislative Criticism:**

Legislative criticism as the name denotes lays down the rules for the art of writing. It sets down canons, categories and norms of literary compositions. This type of criticism started in ancient Greece and came to England during the Renaissance. The rules framed were not arbitrary but based on the practices of the ancient Greek and Latin poets and dramatists. Legislative criticism is addressed to the writer and not to the reader. In English the criticism written during the Elizabethan age, with the possible exception of Philip Sidney, and a large part the critical works of the eighteenth century may be described as legislative criticism. Some of the notable works of this kind are Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* (1553), George Gascoigne's *Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Rhyme in English* (1575) and George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesy* (1589). Legislative critics held that writing poetry and drama was an art and for achieving excellence in it observance of rules was necessary.

### **1.5.2 Descriptive Criticism:**

Descriptive criticism is the most widely practised form of criticism. It consists of the analysis and interpretation of a particular work or author. Thus it aims at interpretation and evaluation of individual works. Unlike legislative criticism, it is addressed to the reader and not to the writer. The descriptive criticism helps us in understanding and appreciating a literary work better. In this way it enhances our pleasure of reading a poem or a play or a novel or any other work of literature. Dryden is commonly regarded as the father of descriptive criticism in English. In his prefaces he discussed his own works to defend them from attacks on them. Descriptive criticism was the most popular form of criticism in the twentieth century and has remained so in the twenty first century.

### **1.5.3 Aesthetic Criticism:**

Aesthetic criticism is concerned with the creative process and nature of literature. It looks upon literature as an art- a creative activity for its own sake which need not serve any other purpose than giving pleasure like any other art. In English, Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* may be considered the first important work of aesthetic criticism. Dryden also has produced this type of criticism. In the eighteenth century Addison was an important critic to write this type of criticism. But it is with the Romantic critics – Wordsworth and Coleridge that it gets profundity. Coleridge is one of the greatest critics of this form. In the twentieth century I. A. Richards is the most remarkable aesthetic critic.

**Self-assessment Questions:**

- Q1. What does legislative criticism do? To whom is it addressed?
- Q.2. Which type of criticism talks of the nature and process of literary creation?
- Q.3. Why is descriptive criticism the most popular form of literary criticism?

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**1.6 MAJOR CRITICAL APPROACHES**

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Since the very beginning there have been various approaches to literary criticism. In the section dealing with the scope and functions of criticism you saw that a literary critic may adopt any of the several functions of criticism. To suit his purpose he may adopt any approach that will serve his purpose. This has led to the evolution of a large number of critical approaches over the ages. In this section we will know about some of the most prominent critical approaches in English.

**1.6.1 Neo-classical criticism:**

In the latter half of the seventeenth century and practically the whole of the eighteenth century the classical principles of literature derived from the ancient Greek and Latin writers came to hold a complete sway over English literature. That is why this period is known as the neo-classical age. It was held that the classics represented the highest standards of literacy beauty which the English writers had only to follow to attain perfection in their art. There were two main reasons for it. One was the excesses of the Metaphysical poets and the other the unprecedented influence of the French literary modes on the English. The Metaphysical excesses were the direct consequence, as Ben Jonson had feared, of the Elizabethan fondness for the 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. The metaphysical conceit which was an effective means of poetic expression in the hands of poets like Donne, Marvell and Herbert became something wayward and obscure when used by minor poets. This is what made Samuel Johnson remark in his essay on Cowley that the metaphysical poets yoked by violence discordant images and that their poetry was a mere show of learning. In reaction to such literary waywardness the critics of the neo-classical age began to advocate adherence to certain rules of poetic and dramatic composition practised and professed by the ancient classical writers.

The second important reason of the prevalence of the classical taste during this period was the French influence on the English writers. For political reasons France was exercising a strong hold on the political and intellectual life of England. As it happened, French literature of that period was dominated by classical ideals. Writers like Boileau, Rapin and Bossu had established a French classical creed which guided the French writers of that time. Under their influence writers like Dryden and most of the writers of the eighteenth century began to follow the classical models.

The neo-classicists laid more stress on the teaching function of poetry than on the delight-giving or aesthetic. They gave more importance to training in the art of writing than to natural endowment or genius. So far nature and manner of different kinds of writing was concerned, they followed rules 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. This lent them an unquestioned authority. Whatever the ancients said about plot, character, and speech were found to sum up whatever appealed most in nature. It was in this way that they were 'nature methodised' as Pope said of them. Great art thus was that which satisfied the natural test of reason and good taste. Of this test the rules of Aristotle were considered to be embodiment.

Among the kinds of poetry the most important were held to be the epic, the tragedy and the comedy. As each kind was believed to be distinct from the others in its aim, subject matter style and other respects, it had rules of its own, again deduced from 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 Aristotle continued to be the final authority. The rules of tragedy and comedy were also defined in the light of what Aristotle had said. In general, the dramatists 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 would 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. The plot of comedy was to be invented rather than taken from the history. Its characters were to be of lowly rank, typical of their class in their failings.

The major critics of the neo-classical age were Dryden and Johnson, though Addison and Pope have also made critical observations. Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is among the most remarkable critical works in English. Written in the dialogue form discusses the merits of the classical, French and English drama. In it Dryden defends English drama, particularly Shakespeare for his use of tragic-comedy and violation of the rules of unities. Thus Dryden's criticism is partly a restatement of the precepts of Aristotle and partly a deviation from it. Of critical works of Dr. Johnson, *Lives of the Poets* and *Preface to the Plays of Shakespeare* are the most remarkable. Though he is rather harsh on the Metaphysical poets, most of what he says about them is true. Towards Shakespeare, he is a lenient like Dryden.

### 1.6.2 Romantic Criticism:

Romantic criticism, like romantic poetry, was a reaction against the practises of the earlier generation that advocated adherence to classical rules. The romantic writers opposed all regimentation in literature that left nothing to 'freedom and Nature'. They judged a work of art by its end rather than by its means. Unlike neo-classical criticism, Romantic criticism did not seek moral lesson in literature. It judged a literary work by its capacity to "please always and please all"

Romantic criticism agreed with Aristotle in considering delight as the object of literature. But, unlike him, it did not consider that this delight was achieved by a strict application of the rules. The Romantics believed in the power of imagination or the poet's intuitive and emotional reaction to his subject. They also did not regard the 'kinds' of literature as immutably fixed. They tried to use a variety of forms. In short, the Romantic criticism left genius free to pursue its own course, not minding how it did its work so long as it did it well. Coleridge remarked, "Critics are apt to forget that rules are but means to an end; consequently, where the ends are different, the rules must be likewise so".

The Romantic criticism was born out of the sporadic protests of the neo-classical themselves against the rigidity of their creed. Beside the rigid formalism of the neo-classical mode that bred discontent there were other factors that led to the changed outlook. The most important of these was continental influence, particularly that of France and Germany. In France, Rousseau's social and political writings that challenged the established order, not only paved the way for French revolution but also for a revolution in literary taste. His ideas gave rise to the Romantic Movement with its stress on individuality and impatience with 'the arbitrary edicts of legislators'. Most of the English Romantics were influenced by the ideas of Rousseau.

Among the literary influence on the English Romantic Movement that of Germany was the most powerful. In Germany, the two Schlegel brothers and Schelling, in particular propagated the romantic view of art so successfully that it soon affected the course of criticism in the rest of Europe. August Wilhelm Schlegel, hailed in England as 'our national critic', defined classicism as an artistic quest for a beautifully ordered world, and romanticism as a secret longing for the chaos that underlies creation and strives for ever new births. As the world, however is not the orderly thing that classicism makes it out to be, romanticism is 'nearer to the mystery of the universe', Schelling stressed the role of imagination in art which he described as vision and therefore an individual experience of the artist rather than a matter of rules. Both these German writers strove to substitute the aesthetic for the formal criticism of letters. Their influence on Coleridge, the greatest critic of the Romantic age, was profound.

Almost all the writers of the Romantic age- Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey- were critics as well as creative writers. Despite differences, they all shared the basic precepts of romanticism. Wordsworth and Coleridge pioneered the Romantic Movement in England with their *Lyrical Ballads*. It is in the Preface to *the Lyrical Ballads*, particularly its 1802 edition, that Wordsworth has propounded his critical views. His definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of

powerful feelings” which “takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity” virtually sums up the romantic creed of poetry. It is, however, in the *Biographia Literaria* of Coleridge that we find the most elaborate description of the creative process as envisaged by the romantics. Coleridge regards literature, indeed all art, as the product of Imagination. His theory of Imagination modifies the traditional, particularly the neo-classical, view of art as a mere imitation. Since it is the product of imagination which imposes its own reflection on whatever it perceives, art is as much a self-revelation as an imitation, perhaps more the one than the other. For the spirit, in all objects it views, views only itself. Viewed thus, imagination is a psychological process arising from the impact of nature on soul and of the soul on nature, resulting in the fusion of both. Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey have not given any thing as elaborate as the theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge but they have also echoed the romantic sentiments particularly those of subjectivity and imagination in their works.

### 1.6.3 New Criticism:

The twentieth century saw a number of critical theories being applied to the study of literature. A prominent critical theory that emerged during the 1930s and remained influential during the succeeding three decades was New Criticism. It started with some American critics such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate and W. K. Wimsatt. The term, ‘new criticism’ came into vogue after the publication of John Crowe Ransom’s book, *The New Criticism* in 1941, though books like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* (1938), which contained the basic tenets of New Criticism, had appeared earlier. The New Criticism had been influenced in many ways by the critical theories of T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards. The New Critics focused on the text of a literary work and insisted on separating the text from its context which consisted of the autobiographical details of the writer or his socio-cultural background etc. So they held that the ‘word on the page’ was what was important and a critic need not go outside it to interpret a work. Critics like W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley coined terms like ‘Intentional Fallacy’ and ‘Affective Fallacy’. They held that the intentional fallacy with its reliance on authorial intention as it exists outside the work, and the affective fallacy which refers to the effect of a work on the reader were actually outside the purview of literary criticism and were fallacies which should be avoided. The New Criticism considered the content and the form of a good poem to be one in which it was not possible to discuss them by separating them. So they said that a good poem was that which could not really be paraphrased.

### 1.6.4 Structuralism

Peter Barry in his book, *Beginning Theory* (1995) observes:

The arrival of structuralism in Britain and the USA in the 1970s caused a great deal of controversy, precisely because literary studies in these countries had very little interest in the large abstract issues of the kind that Structuralists wanted to raise. The so called ‘Cambridge revolution’ in English studies in the 1920s had promulgated the opposite to all of this; it enjoined close study of the text in isolation from all wider structures; it was relentlessly ‘text based’ and tended to

exclude wider questions, abstract issues and ideas. Structuralism in that sense turned English studies on its head, and devalued all that it held dear for half a century, asking long-repressed questions such as: What do we mean by 'literary'? How do narratives work? What is a poetic structure? (Krishnaswamy et al 126-27)

What is known as Structuralism and Structuralist Literary Theory consists of a number of theories that cut across the traditional disciplinary areas of the humanities and social sciences. In its basic premise it was influenced by the French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure's theories whose *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) was a seminal book in Structural Linguistics. Saussure with his concepts of 'langue' and 'parole' and 'signifier and signified' established that language was a system of arbitrary symbols in which meaning was derived from cultural contexts. Later Structuralist thinkers like Levi Strauss, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida all based their theories on the basic premises of Saussure.

Structuralist literary theory is not primarily interpretive in the sense that it does not provide any system of analysing a particular work. Rather than providing means of getting at the 'meaning' it aims at describing the conditions of 'meaning'. It does not focus on an individual work but attempts to understand the conventions which make literature possible.

### 1.6.5 Feminism

One of the most important critical approaches of the twentieth century is feminism. Basically a socio-political movement for the rights of women, it came to encompass all walks of life. In literature it opened up a whole vista of sensibility and thought. Since ages literature has been the preserve of the male. So the values it has contained and has been propagating have been those of a patriarchal society. At first sporadically but in the twentieth century concerted and vehemently women began to protest against their subjugation by men. The feminists hold that women have been a victim of systematic social injustice and that the inequality between men and women are not born out of biological differences but are culturally conditioned differences in favour of men.

Though as a critical approach to literature, feminist criticism emerged strongly during the 1960s, it has a theoretical background of nearly two hundred years created by such books as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), J. S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* (1949) proved a landmark in Feminist writing. An important objective of the feminist criticism has been to correct the biased representation of women in literature. The feminist critics have shown effectively how the male dominated literatures of the world have projected women as 'man's other' and denied them an independent existence with their own desires, passions and sensibility. That is why they have advocated the promotion of writings by women authors.

### 1.6.6 Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial criticism is yet another approach to literary criticism that has revolutionized the study of literature. As a body of criticism it emerged in 1980s and 90s in such books as Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Words* (1987), Bill Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). It was, however, in Frantz Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that Post Colonial criticism has its beginning. Post-colonialism involves reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonial rule over them as well as re-reading texts produced during the colonial rule, particularly those that record the experiences of colonialism. It underlines two types of narratives: the narrative of power and the counter narrative of the colonized. It discusses the issues of cultural identity and values.

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## 1.7 SUMMARY

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In this unit you have been introduced to literary criticism. You have known that apart from interpreting and evaluating a literary work, criticism also discusses the process of literary creation and norms that govern certain kinds of writing. According to the functions that it performs it has been divided into three broad types – legislative, descriptive and aesthetic. Then you have learnt about various critical movements and approaches. Before the twentieth century there were two major approaches to literature- neo classical and romantic. In the twentieth century with the growth of subjects like linguistics, psychology, sociology and culture studies we find a multiplicity of critical studies. Approaches like structuralism, feminism and post-colonialism completely revolutionized literary studies.

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## 1.8 GLOSSARY

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Discipline – branch of knowledge; subject of study

Elucidation – explanation

Normative – describing or setting standards or rules of language

Ontology – branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of existence

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## 1.9. REFERENCES

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**1.11 MODEL QUESTIONS**

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Q.1 In which category would you put neo-classical criticism – legislative or descriptive?

Q.2. What are the basic premises of romantic criticism?

Q.3. What is the focus of New Criticism?

Q. 4. How does structuralist theory look at literature?

Q. 5. How would you define feminism?

Q.6. Name some of the important postcolonial writers.

**UNIT 2: PLATO**

---

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.2 OBJECTIVES

2.3 LIFE AND WORKS

2.4 MAJOR CRITICAL CONCEPTS

2.4.1 Theory of Idea

2.4.2 Theory of Imitation

2.4.3 Theory of Inspiration

2.4.4 Views on Poetry

2.4.5 Views on Drama

2.5 SUMMARY

2.6 GLOSSARY

2.7 REFERENCES

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

2.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

---

**2.1. INTRODUCTION**

---

When we talk of the classical literature of Europe, we refer to literature written by the ancient Greek and Latin writers. These writers belong to the centuries before the birth of Christ or early centuries after the birth of Christ. The tradition of European, including English, criticism also goes back to these periods. However, these critics were not critics in the sense that we know them to day. They were philosophers who made observations about a large number of subjects, one of which was literature of their time. The earliest of these critics was Plato, the disciple of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. He made some observations about poetry which led to certain basic questions about literature and its place in society. In this unit you are going to read about these very observations.

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**2.2 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to introduce you to basic concepts of literature, its nature, its impact and its functions, as described by Plato. You will also learn about some key terms used in like ‘Imitation’ and ‘Inspiration’, and an age old discussion about the desirability of literature.

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**2.3. LIFE AND WORKS**

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The Greek philosopher, Plato was born in a distinguished Athenian family. The year of his birth is generally considered to be 427 B. C. and he died in the year 348 B. C. At the age of twenty he became a disciple of Socrates, the greatest philosopher of his time. His main interests were philosophy and mathematics. He had some political ambitions but he did not pursue them. In the year 387 B. C. Plato founded his own school known as the Academy where his famous disciple, Aristotle had his training. Plato was one of the greatest thinkers of all time. His thoughts are contained in his work, *Dialogues*, which consists of a number of discourses in the form of dialogue. In each of them Plato expresses his ideas through interlocutors, the chief of whom is Socrates. Some of the most remarkable of the ‘Dialogues’ are *Republic*, *Ion*, *Laws*, *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*. Plato was not a professed critic of literature and his critical observations were generally made along with other observations, mostly philosophical. They are scattered in several books. However, from the point of view of observations on literature, *Ion*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* are important.

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**2.4 MAJOR CRITICAL CONCEPTS**

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Plato was a lover of poetry, particularly that of Homer. But when he looked upon it as a philosopher, he did not approve of it. He has condemned both poetry and drama in his works, but in his very charges against them he has given us an insight into the process and nature of literary creation. He is the first critic to discuss the function of literature. We may not agree with his condemnation of literature, as his celebrated disciple Aristotle did not, but we cannot deny the truth behind most of his observations. The difference

basically lies in the point of view and not in the veracity of observations. We will now discuss some of his major theories on which he based his criticism of literature.

### 2.4.1 Theory of Idea

Plato's views on art, including literature, are bound by his theory of Idea. In the *Republic* he puts forth his theory of *Idea*. He holds Idea to be the ultimate reality. Behind every object in this world whether animate or inanimate, abstract or concrete lies its Idea. For example, if we go back to the genesis of a chair, we are bound to come to the conclusion that behind the first chair in the world there must have been the idea of the chair. So the Idea of the chair is the Reality and the chair itself a reflection of that idea. Through the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon in *The Republic* Plato puts forward his concept:

Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form; do you understand me?

I do.

Let us take any common instance; there are beds and tables in the world – plenty of them, are there not?

Yes.

But there are only two ideas or forms of them – one the idea of a bed, the other of a table.

True.

And the maker of either of them makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea . . . but no artificer makes the ideas themselves: how could he?

Impossible. (313)

From this concept of Idea Plato's theory of Imitation is closely linked.

### 2.4.2 Theory of Imitation

A logical corollary of the theory of Idea was the theory of Imitation. If Idea is the ultimate reality, any other creation whether in art or literature must be merely an imitation. Plato starts with the assumption that all arts are imitative in nature since the artist copies the object he finds around him. The world itself is an imperfect copy of the Original Idea. So anybody who recreates the objects of the world in his art is merely copying a copy. He is reproducing the appearance of an appearance. As a philosopher Plato finds it twice removed from the Truth and so unacceptable. He elaborates his point through conversation between Socrates and Glaucon:

God, whether from choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such ideal beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God. . . . Shall we then speak of him as the natural author or maker of the bed?

Yes . . . in as much as by the natural process of creation he is the author of this and of all other things.

But would you call the painter a creator and a maker?

Certainly not. . . . we may fairly designate him as the imitator of that which the others make.

. . . And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and the truth? (315)

That is one reason why Plato looked with disfavour at literature. As a philosopher he felt it his task to take human beings nearer the Truth and not away from it. Plato is right so far as the imitative nature of art or literature is concerned, but he has taken the thing merely at its face value. He does not look deeper into the process of artistic creation, as Aristotle does. While creating a world of human beings, a writer is not merely copying the actual world as he has seen and experienced it. He also creates the world afresh. The greater a writer is the keener is his insight into the nature of reality. A writer creates not only the world as he finds it but also a world as he imagines it to be without having known it or a world he thinks it ought to be. David Daiches remarks:

It is significant that Plato develops his argument first with reference to the painter, and that he takes a simple representational view of painting. Here the point is clear enough: representational painting *is* an imitation of a specific object or group of objects, and if it is nothing but that, if reality lies not in individual objects but in general ideas or forms, then, from the point of view of the philosopher whose main interest is in apprehending reality, the painter is not doing anything particularly valuable – though on the other hand what he is doing is not necessarily vicious. ( Why it did not occur to Plato that the painter, by painting the *ideal* object, could suggest the ideal form and thus make direct contact with reality denied to ordinary perception, is not easy to see: presumably because he could not conceive of reality as being apprehensible through the senses at all.) (20)

It is from this point of view that Plato looks upon literature also. Just as the painter only imitates what he sees, a writer imitates the world as he sees it. For this reason Plato considers literature as merely imitative and so further removed from the truth.

### 2.4.3 Theory of Inspiration

Plato criticizes literature on the ground of his theory of Inspiration also. He holds that a poet writes not because he has thought long over what he has to say but because he is 'inspired'. He is taken over by the Muse while writing and thus becomes a possessed creature speaking in a divinely inspired frenzy. As a follower of truth, based on reason, Plato could not favour such a sudden outpouring of the soul. In his *Phaedrus* he says:

The third kind is a madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all

other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks he will get into the temple by the help of art – he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the mad man. (Daiches 6)

Plato developed this view at greater length in his *Ion* in which Socrates talking to the rhapsodist, Ion, proves how Muses move the poet who in turn inspires the rhapsodist. Thus they both are passive vehicles, lacking volition of their own:

Thus the muse herself makes people possessed, and from these possessed persons hangs a chain of others, possessed with the same enthusiasm. All good epic poets produce all their beautiful poems not by art but because they are inspired and possessed . . . a poet is a light winged holy creature, and cannot compose until he is possessed and out of his mind, and his reason is no longer in him; no man can compose or prophesy so long as he has his reason. (Russell 5)

The sarcastic tone of the whole dialogue leaves us in no doubt as to what Plato thought of this divinely inspired poetry. Plato may be making fun of the 'inspired' poet, but he certainly gave expression to a belief which was not only prevalent in ancient time but also held sway during the medieval and modern times. Shakespeare in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes his Theseus describe a poet who in his 'fine frenzy' looks from heaven to earth and earth to heaven and gives to 'airy nothing' a local habitation and a name. This in a way was the first romantic theory of poetic creation.

#### 2.4.4 Views on Poetry

As a philosopher Plato was concerned with the creation of an ideal state. An ideal state can only be formed by ideal human beings. So he was suspect of anything that could hinder the growth of a person into an ideal human being and therefore ideal citizen. From this point of view Plato looked with disfavour on poetry. He held that poetry appealed to the emotions of a person and not to his reason. Emotions, being impulses of the moment, cannot be a safe guide like reason. Plato illustrates this with reference to the tragic poetry of his age in which weeping and wailing were indulged to the full to move the hearts of the spectators. This is bound to have a baneful effect on a person because "if we let our sense of pity grow strong by feeding upon the grief of others, it is not easy to restrain it in the case of our own suffering." This is true not only of grief but of lust, anger and other such emotions also:

And the same may be said of lust and anger and all the other affections, of desire and pain and pleasure which are held to be inseparable from every action – in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passion instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue. (*The Republic* 327)

This was one reason why Plato disapproved of poetry. Another reason for his disapproval was its lack of moral concern. Plato could not conceive of art divorced from morality. He did not agree with those who regarded pleasure to be the sole concern of literature or art.

Pleasure ranks low in Plato's eyes. For him it is the pursuit of virtue that makes an individual good and so contributes to the establishment of an ideal society. That is why Plato was against the indifferent treatment of virtue in literature. He often saw virtue coming to grief in the poetry of Homer, Hesiod and Pindar and the plays of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus. He writes:

But most extraordinary of all is their mode of speaking about virtue and the gods: they say that the gods apportion calamity and misery to many good men, and good and happiness to the wicked. And mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them by the gods of making an atonement for a man's own or his ancestor's sins by sacrifices or charms, with rejoicings and feasts; and they promise to harm an enemy, whether just or unjust, at a small cost; with magic arts and incantations binding heaven, as they say to execute their will. And poets are the authorities to whom they appeal, now smoothing the path of vice with words of Hesiod: "Vice may be had in abundance without trouble; the way is smooth and her dwelling place is near. But before virtue the gods have set toil." (*The Republic* 328)

Plato is also against the representation of gods in poetry. Gods and heroes are often represented in poetry and plays in an unfavourable light. They describe gods as unjust or revengeful or guilty of other vices, and heroes under the sway of uncontrollable passion of all kinds – pride, anger, grief or so on. To Plato this is unacceptable: "They must not say both, or try to persuade our young people that the gods breed evils and heroes are no better than men. . . . these things are neither pious nor true. We demand, of course, that evil cannot come from the gods." (*The Republic* 48)

#### **2.4.5 Views on Drama**

During the early ages poetry and drama were not viewed separately. So when Plato talks of poetry he is referring to drama as well. However, because of the different mode of representation – drama being meant to be staged – Plato has made certain observations that apply exclusively to drama. He is aware that drama is addressed to a heterogeneous multitude. So to please a mixed audience the dramatist introduces elements like quarrels, lamentations, imitation of thunder and cries of beasts. Plato holds that these elements arouse baser instincts. They have an unwholesome impact on character. So Plato would like to have these features eliminated from drama.

Sometimes drama leaves an undesirable impact on the actors also. Constantly playing bad characters in plays leaves the actor open to evil impact on his mind. Nor is acting, even of the innocent kind, a healthy influence on him because it leads to the enfeeblement of his own character. On the other hand, as Plato admits, playing the role of virtuous and noble characters exerts a healthy influence on the actor. He imbibes the virtues of a noble character.

Plato was the first to raise the issue of the impact of the tragedy on the audience. He raises the question as to what is there in a painful scene that appeals to us. He comes out with the explanation that indulging in excessive emotions gives pleasure to us. Plato explains

the nature of the comic also. He says that the source of laughter is the incongruity between what a character really is and what he pretends to be.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q. 1. How is Plato's philosophical concept linked with his theory of literature?

Q. 2. What is mimesis? How is literature a mimetic art?

Q. 3. Do you think that a poet writes under the divine inspiration?

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### **2.5 SUMMARY**

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Plato is the first critic in the West who formulated theories about literature. He, however, was not a professed critic; nor was pronouncing judgment on literature his primary object. As a philosopher, he considered Idea to be the Supreme Reality. He considered it to be the prime cause behind every object, whether animate or inanimate, in this world. He held that God first conceived an Idea of the object and then created the object. The object thus is one step removed from its Original Form. Those who make a second copy or successive copies of that object are only imitating its first copy which in itself is a copy of the Idea behind it. Art and literature which reproduce the objects of this world in different mediums, whether of paint or stone or words, are thus imitating an imitation. Anything that took man away from Reality was not acceptable to Plato. Plato criticized literature on other counts as well. Poets described gods behaving in a manner that is not godlike. For example, they show them to be revengeful and deceitful. Thus they create an image of them which is not worth emulating. Plato held that poets composed their works under the influence of a divine frenzy. Thus their thoughts were not the product of a mature understanding and considered reasoning. As a philosopher Plato did not accept anything that could not withstand the test of reasoning. Because of all these considerations Plato did not think a poet to be a member of the ideal republic. And the only kind of literature acceptable to him was the hymns of gods and panegyrics on great men.

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### **2.6 GLOSSARY**

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**Mimesis or Imitation:** It refers to the ability of art to copy natural objects, images and actions in art forms.

**Inspiration:** Stimulus born not out of one's reason or imagination but caused by some outside agency particularly divine.

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### **2.7 REFERENCES**

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Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. Kolkata: Orient Longman, 2003 (reprint).

Plato. *The Republic*. Dehradun: Konzept Books, 2010.

Russell, D. A. and Michael Winterbottom. *Classical Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2007 (reprint).

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### **2.8 SUGGESTED READING**

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Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. Kolkata: Orient Longman, 2003.

Prasad, B. *An Introduction to English Criticism*. Madras: Macmillan India, 1965.

Wimsatt Jr., William K. and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1956.

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### **2.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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Q. 1. Assess the contribution of Plato to criticism.

Q2. In his rejection of poetry, Plato has raised certain basic questions about poetry. Discuss.

**UNIT 3:                   ARISTOTLE: *POETICS* 1**

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- 3.1 INTRODUCTION
- 3.2 OBJECTIVES
- 3.3 LIFE AND WORKS
- 3.4 POETICS:AN INTRODUCTION
- 3.5 ARISTOTLE’S CONCEPT OF POETRY
- 3.6 THEORY OF IMITATION
- 3.7 TRAGEDY: ITS NATURE AND FUNCTION
- 3.8 ARISTOTLE ON COMEDY
- 3.9 SUMMARY
- 3.10 GLOSSARY
- 3.11 REFERENCES
- 3.12 SUGGESTED READING
- 3.13 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

**3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The first and one of the greatest names in the history of European criticism is that of Aristotle. He, like his teacher, Plato, was a philosopher and not a critic. But, unlike Plato, he produced a remarkable book of criticism on the nature, forms and functions of literature. His book, *Poetics* has been a landmark of criticism since ages. Though Aristotle did not coin terms like ‘tragedy’, ‘comedy’, ‘epic’, ‘lyric’, ‘plot’ and ‘character’, it is mainly through *Poetics* that they gained currency. They entered with slight variations in nearly all the literatures of Europe. The classification of literature on the basis of the subject matter and its treatment became popular through *Poetics*. The most popular term that Aristotle gave to the study of tragedy is ‘Catharsis’. Through it he explained the function of tragedy. Plato had banished the poet from his ideal republic on the ground that they took men away from the Truth and that they exerted a bad influence on them by making them sway to emotion rather than follow reason. He held that tragedy weakened men. Aristotle refuted the charges of Plato against poetry, which included drama, and explained that literature propounded truth of a different kind and that literature made men better. His *Poetics* remains even today one of the greatest critical treatises in the world. Its definition of tragedy has not been bettered by subsequent critics and its systematic study of this form of drama is still the best.

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**3.2 OBJECTIVES**

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In this and the following unit you are going to read about the *Poetics* and discuss the issues that it raises. This will give you an idea of the major kinds of drama and poetry. It will provide you a detailed analysis of what a tragedy is, what are its constituents and what is its function. You will also learn about terms like ‘plot’ and ‘character’ which are basic to any story.

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**3.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF ARISTOTLE**

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Aristotle was born in 384 B. C. in Greece at Stagira, a small town near Macedonia. His father was a doctor to King Amyntas II of Macedonia. Aristotle may have picked up much of the information that he had about the medical science in his childhood. To this phase is often attributed his intense interest in physical science, particularly biology and physiology. He joined Plato’s Academy in Athens when he was seventeen years old and continued there till the age of 37 first as pupil and then as teacher. It is here that he started writing, though his works of this period have not survived except in fragments. After the death of Plato, Aristotle left the Academy and went to Assos where he lived for three years after which he moved again. Later on, he got the invitation of Philip, the king of Macedon, to become the tutor of his son, Alexander who became a great conqueror. When Alexander became the king in 335 B.C., Aristotle left Macedon for Athens where he founded his school which became famous by the name of the Lyceum, after the grove where it was situated. Here Aristotle lectured to his disciples while walking up and down – a habit from which came out the name the Peripatetic school of philosophy based on the

Greek word for walking up and down. Most of his works were composed at the Lyceum. They seem to be in the form of notes and summaries either prepared for his lectures or based on his lectures. Through fragments or references to them we know that his important works were *Logic*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. It is through his *Poetics* that Aristotle left a lasting impact on the study of literature in centuries to come. Aristotle died in the year 322 B.C.

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### 3.4 POETICS: AN INTRODUCTION

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*Poetics* is one of the most remarkable treatises on literature ever written. It consists of twenty six small chapters. It is not complete as it has come down to us. It is believed to have had a second part which is lost. At places in *Poetics* Aristotle says that this will be discussed later on but he never does so. This gives us the impression that the part where he did so has been lost. Discussion of comedy and that of catharsis are two such topics that *Poetics* merely refers to and promises to treat later on but does not do so. The treatise discusses epic, comedy and dithyramb or lyrical poetry, but it is tragedy that it discusses in detail. Chapters I to V of the *Poetics* give an introductory description of tragedy, epic and comedy as the chief kinds of poetry. It is here that Aristotle also elaborates his concept of imitation, the basic instinct behind all creative arts, including literature. Chapters VI to XXII form the main body of the book. Beginning with the definition of tragedy, it goes on to discuss the constituent parts of tragedy and the function of tragedy. Diction has also been discussed here. The twenty third and twenty fourth chapters deal with the structure of the epic. In the twenty fifth chapter Aristotle goes back to the general description of poetry. The last chapter of *Poetics* gives a comparison between tragedy and epic.

When Aristotle wrote his *Poetics* in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., he based his observations on the literature available to him – the Greek literature. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Greek writers had produced literature of a very high standard. Homer had written epics like *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus had produced remarkable tragedies and Aristophanes wonderful comedies in the fifth century B.C. So Aristotle was familiar with standard literary works of different kinds available in his time and he drew his conclusions and based his principles on them. He drew his conclusions inductively but the posterity looked upon him as a law-giver. The neo-classicists followed him blindly, forgetting that Aristotle was a rationalist whose approach was scientific and not dogmatic. Dryden was right when he said, “Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides: and if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.” All this may be true but such is the greatness of Aristotle’s understanding and insight that the observations he makes about poetry in general and tragedy in particular are still valid.

*Poetics* had not come to the light during the medieval period and so we do not find any reference to it in the writings of this period. It was during the Renaissance when the ancient Greek texts came to light that the world became familiar with this remarkable book. The Greek text of the *Poetics* was published in 1536 by Trincaveli. The first critical edition of it was published by Robertelli in 1548. Since then the work has been translated

in various languages of the world, including English. In English, Hamilton Fife's and S. H. Butcher's translations of *Poetics* are among the most popular ones.

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### **3.5 ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF POETRY**

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Aristotle has devoted the first four chapters and the twenty fifth chapter of the *Poetics* to the discussion of poetry. He first considers the nature of the poetic art. Following Plato, he calls the poet an imitator, like a painter or any other artist. The poet imitates one of the three objects – “things as they were or are, things as they are thought to be or things as they ought to be.” Like Plato, Aristotle also believes that there is a natural pleasure in imitation which is an inborn instinct in man. It is this pleasure in imitation that enables the child to learn his earliest lessons in speech and conduct from those around him. They are imitated by him because there is pleasure in doing it. A poet or an artist also indulges in imitation for the pleasure it affords. There is also another natural instinct helping to make him a poet – the instinct for harmony and rhythm, manifesting itself in metrical composition. It is no less pleasing than the pleasure of imitation.

The main argument of Plato against poetic imitation was that it takes us away from reality. Aristotle contradicted this argument and asserted that instead of taking us away from reality, poetic imitation brings us nearer to it. If reality consisted of Idea, as Plato said, poetic imitation is equivalent to ‘producing’ or ‘creating’ according to true Idea. Hence being a creation according to a true idea, it is nearer to reality. It is this concept of poetic imitation which gives the poet his place in the exalted sphere of philosophy. To prove this Aristotle makes a comparison between poetry and history. He remarks:

It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what may happen what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. (37)

Aristotle asserts that the descriptions of poetry are not mere reproductions of facts but truths embedded in those facts that apply to all places and times.

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### **3.6 THEORY OF IMITATION**

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Aristotle considered mimesis as the driving force behind every art – poetry, music, painting, sculpture and others. He writes:

Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also the Dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ, however, in three respects – the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct. (28-29)

The medium of mimesis, Aristotle notes, is rhythm or language or harmony, either singly or combined. In music harmony and rhythm are employed while in dancing rhythm is the medium of imitation. In literature the writer uses the medium of language. The object of mimesis or imitation in the case of literature is human beings and in drama in particular it is men in action. Since the object of poetic imitation is to represent men in action, poetry can be classified according to the types of men it represents. Men in action can be represented in three ways – as they are or better than they are or worse than they are. Tragedy and epic poetry represent men of higher type, men as better than those in real life. These men are presented on a grand and heroic scale. They have much impressiveness and dignity about them. Comedy represents the men of lower type, men as worse than what they are in real life. These men are represented on a trivial and ridiculous scale, and have an air of meanness about them. Aristotle leaves the third category undiscussed. The reason seems to be that Aristotle based his observations on the Greek literature known to him. And in those days there was no such trend as is known today as the realistic literature which depicts life as it is. The third distinction that marks imitation is the mode or manner of imitation. The poet may imitate the object by narration or by making them move, talk and act before us. While narrating, he may speak in his own person or take the persona of another character. In the epic poetry the poet represents various men in action through their persona. In drama the action is not narrated but presented through enactment.

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### **3.7 TRAGEDY: ITS NATURE AND FUNCTION**

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The definition of tragedy that Aristotle has given is a comprehensive one and takes into account all its aspects. It describes its nature and function. He writes:

Tragedy then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (34)

Aristotle considered all art to be imitative and he considered the object of imitation in literature to be men in action. That is why he describes tragedy as an imitation of an action. The difference between a tragedy and a comedy is that a tragedy imitates serious actions while a comedy imitates trivial or ludicrous actions. Even today we say that tragedy is the representation of the serious side of life while comedy is the representation of its lighter sides. So tragedy is an imitation of serious action. The representation of this action has to be complete. By complete Aristotle means that it should be self-contained, with a beginning, middle and an end. A beginning is that before which the spectator or the reader does not need to be shown anything to understand the action being unfolded before him. The action shown in the beginning should naturally lead to the stage known as the middle of a story. The middle contains the complication in the story. It is here that the conflict in a play reaches its climax. The end shows the resolution of the conflict. In a tragedy the serious action culminates in a serious end. This is what Aristotle means by the

action being complete. This action should have a certain magnitude or length. It should be confined to a reasonable length such as the mind may comprehend fully in one view or within a limited time span. It should be neither too long nor too short but of a proportionate length to contain a proper beginning, middle and end. Since language is the medium of imitation in tragedy, it should be suitable to its high nature. By ornament Aristotle meant rhythm, harmony and song. Rhythm and harmony may be used to develop some part and song some others. They are all used to enrich the language of the play to make it as effective as possible. When Aristotle says that tragedy must be in the form of action and not narration, he is emphasizing the mode of narration in tragedy. While elaborating his theory of mimesis or imitation he had said that literary imitation consists of two modes – narration and enactment of action. In an epic the actions are narrated and in a tragedy they are enacted. This is the most vital difference between epic and drama. In an epic the narrator of the story is the poet while in tragedy the story is presented with the help of live action and speech by characters before the audience. In Aristotle's time drama was enacted and not read. Today we enjoy a play both by reading and watching its live performance. Even then the mode of presentation in drama is not narration but action and dialogue. At the end of his definition Aristotle comes to the function of tragedy. A tragedy evokes the feeling of pity and fear in us. Plato also held this belief but he maintained that it exerted a harmful influence on us. He argued that by arousing the feelings of pity and fear, poetry produced an unhealthy excess of these emotions in real life. It weakened men. If a man wept at the sufferings of others, how would he control his emotions if something untoward happened in his own life? So, according to Plato, poetry, which included drama, exerted a harmful influence on men. Aristotle did not agree with him. He holds that tragedy does not cause an excess of emotions in the audience but a release from these emotions in the end. Aristotle calls it 'catharsis' of these emotions. Pity is occasioned by the undeserved misfortune of the protagonist with whom we identify ourselves. It leads to fear for ourselves in similar circumstances. Thus tragedy extends our emotions outward and through artistic presentation of suffering brings about the catharsis or purgation of these emotions. Aristotle has not elaborated or commented upon catharsis. It is an important omission that we find in the *Poetics* as it has come to us. Perhaps he did so elsewhere but that part has been missing. Lack of any authoritative comment from Aristotle himself has led to a controversy among the scholars whether the term 'catharsis' is to be taken as a term from medicine or philosophy. However, in either case there is no conflict about the impact of tragedy on us which is to lead us to psychic harmony.

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### 3.8 ARISTOTLE ON COMEDY

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Aristotle in his *Poetics* refers to all kinds of poetic forms known in his time, but it is only tragedy that he discusses in great detail. In the beginning of Chapter VI he says: "Of the poetry which imitates in hexameter verse, and of comedy we will speak hereafter." (33) Though he refers to comedy in his treatise several times, he does not discuss it in detail. Most probably the section on comedy is lost. However, in Chapter V he does give a definition of comedy and discusses its origin. He says:

Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type – not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain. (33)

Aristotle then comments on the history of comedy. He says that unlike that of tragedy, the history of comedy is rather obscure mainly because it was not treated seriously. He writes:

It was late before the archon granted a comic chorus to a poet: the performers were till then voluntary. Comedy had already taken definite shape when comic poets, distinctly so called are heard of. Who introduced masks or prologues or increased the number of actors – these and similar details remain unknown. As for the plot, it came originally from Sicily: but of Athenian writers Crates was the first who, abandoning the ‘iambic’ or lampooning form, generalized his themes and plots. (33)

This is the most detailed description that Aristotle gives of comedy. He does not describe its constituent parts as he does in the case of tragedy. Nor does he talk of its impact on the spectators.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q.1. What is mimesis? What is the relationship between mimesis and art?
- Q.2. What is the importance of *Poetics* in the history of criticism?
- Q.3. What is Aristotle’s definition of tragedy?
- Q.4. What does Aristotle say about comedy?

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### **3.9 SUMMARY**

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Aristotle is the first great European critic. He was a disciple of Plato but he differed from his teacher in his basic concept of literature. Like Plato he also held that mimesis or imitation was the basic instinct behind all art, including literature. But, unlike Plato, he did not believe that poetry being an imitation of an imitation took men away from Truth. Nor did he accept that as it fed upon emotions, it weakened men. Aristotle’s *Poetics* provides a comprehensive description of tragedy. No doubt Aristotle based his description of tragedy on the Greek tragedies that he was familiar with, but what he says is largely true of tragedy even today. His definition of tragedy is the most comprehensive definition of tragedy till date. *Poetics*, as it has come to us, is not complete. It seems that some of its part has been lost. For example Aristotle talks of elaborating upon his concept of comedy and catharsis, but does not do so in this treatise. Aristotle holds that tragedy arouses the feelings of pity and fear in us, but he also believes that it ultimately purges us of the excessive flow of these emotions and thus restores our psychic balance. This he regards as the function of criticism.

**3.10 GLOSSARY**

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Treatise: written work dealing formally and systematically with a subject

Inductive: drawing general conclusions from particular instances

Renaissance: the revival of art and literature under the influence of classical styles in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries

Metre: the rhythm of a piece of poetry determined by the number and length of feet in a line

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**3.11 REFERENCES**

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**3.12 SUGGESTED READING**

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Prasad, B. *An Introduction to English Criticism*. Madras: Macmillan India, 1965.

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**3.13 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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Q.1. Write a note on the contribution of Aristotle to criticism.

Q.2. Describe Aristotle's concept of mimesis.

Q.3. Write a critique of Aristotle's views on poetry.

Q.4. Elaborate Aristotle's definition of tragedy.

**UNIT 4: ARISTOTLE: *POETICS* 2**

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 OBJECTIVES

4.3 CONSTITUENT PARTS OF TRAGEDY

4.4 PLOT

4.4.1 Structure of the Plot

4.4.2 Types of Plot

4.5 TRAGIC HERO

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4.9 REFERENCES

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4.11 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

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**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the last unit you were introduced to Aristotle's most famous work, *Poetics*. You knew how Aristotle refuted the charges of his teacher Plato against poetry and how, while agreeing that imitation is the prime inspiration behind poetry, he asserted that it did not take men away from Truth but presented Truth at a different level. He also argued that poetry, which included drama, did not weaken men but made them better. You read the definition of tragedy in the last unit and discussed the various points it covered. You have also known the views of Aristotle on comedy. *Poetics* presents a comprehensive description of different aspects of tragedy. Terms like 'hamartia' and 'catharsis' that it has given have become important critical tools for the discussion of tragedy. Aristotle's description of plot, character, unities and tragic hero has conferred on him the status of a law-giver.

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**4.2 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit will introduce you to the constituent parts of tragedy. You will learn in detail Aristotle's views on plot and character. It will also tell you about the different kinds of unities in drama which became a law for the neo-classical dramatists. You will also learn about Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero. Finally, you will discuss in detail the most famous term that *Poetics* has given – catharsis.

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**4.3 CONSTITUENT PARTS OF TRAGEDY**

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Aristotle was a scientific observer and he has described the various features of tragedy very categorically. After giving a definition of tragedy, he enumerates its constituent parts. He writes:

Every tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality – namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song. Two of the parts constitute the medium of imitation, one the manner, and three the objects of imitation. (34)

Plot, character and thought are the objects a tragedy imitates. Diction and song are the medium it employs for imitation; and spectacle is the manner of imitation in a tragedy. Aristotle names these parts in the order of importance that they have in tragedy. The plot or the arrangement of the incidents comes first. Tragedy, as Aristotle puts it, is “an imitation of an action”. So plot is of paramount importance in a tragedy. Aristotle calls it the soul of tragedy and goes on to add that there cannot be a tragedy without plot though there can be one without character. He asserts that without action unfolded by the plot there can be no tragedy. One may string together a set of speeches expressive of character but they will not be able to produce the essential tragic effect if they are not well-knit in the chain of dramatic incidents. Thus a well-constructed plot is essential for tragedy. Moreover, it is the plot which provides the necessary emotional turns for tragic effect in a

tragedy. Character is subordinate to action because it is the product of action. It, however, does not mean that there can really be a tragedy without character. There cannot be an action without an agent. So Aristotle does not mean character in the sense of agent of action. He probably meant it in the sense of the moral quality that forms a character. That is why S. H. Butcher suggests in his *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine art* that there may be a tragedy in which the moral character of the individual agents is so weakly portrayed as to be of not much account in the evolution of the action. It is, however, better not to emphasize too much the statement that there can be a tragedy without character. What Aristotle is doing here is to underline the importance of plot. Character, in any case, is second important constituent part of tragedy. Thought comes third in order of importance. By thought Aristotle means the mental and emotional expressions of the characters in a plot. He writes – “Third in order is Thought – that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in the given circumstances. “ (35) To express these thoughts and emotions the dramatist uses diction which is the fourth constituent part of tragedy. It is the medium through which he imitates the action and thought. Song is the other medium that he uses for this task. The sixth part of tragedy is spectacle which is the manner in which the imitation takes place. Spectacle is the stage representation of the action. Aristotle observes:

The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on the poet. (35-36)

In this way, a tragedy consists of the imitation of plot, character and thought through the medium of language and song in the manner of the spectacle.

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## 4.4 PLOT

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Plot, as we have discussed above, is the most important part of tragedy according to Aristotle. Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities but it is in our actions – what we do – that we are happy or unhappy. So plot occupies the utmost importance in a tragedy.

### 4.4.1 Structure of the Plot

Aristotle first talks of the artistic arrangement of the plot. An ideal plot should have, first, *unity of action*. By unity of action Aristotle means that the dramatist should choose only those actions, and not all, in the life of the hero which are intimately connected with another and appear together as one whole. The structural union of the parts should be such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. There may be many more actions in the life of the hero- there are in every man's life – but unless they have something to do with the tragedy that befalls him, they

are not relevant to the plot and will all have to be kept out. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference is not an organic part of the whole. It follows therefore that the events comprising the plot will concern only one man and not more. For if they concern more than one man, there will be no necessary connection between them, as the actions of one man cannot be put down to another. Their introduction in the same story must therefore disturb its unity. When all the actions of the same man cannot be included in the plot there cannot be any sense in including the actions of another man between which there cannot be any similarity. For the same reason the episodic plots are the worst. Aristotle remarks:

Of all the plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot 'episodic' in which episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence. Bad poets compose such pieces by their own fault, good poets to please the players; for as they write show pieces for competition, they stretch the plot beyond their capacity, and are often forced to break the natural continuity. (38)

Casually and only once Aristotle mentions what has come to be called the *unity of time* i.e. conformity between the time taken by the events of the play and that taken in their representation on the stage. 'Tragedy', he says, 'endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit, whereas the epic action has no limits of time'. (39) From this the older critics were led to believe that for a good tragic plot it was necessary to select an event or events that happened within twenty-four hours or so in the life of the hero, so that when represented in about one-fourth of that time on the stage they may not appear unnatural, as they would if the plot takes a longer time. But Aristotle nowhere insists on this as a condition of a good plot. He merely states the prevailing practice, but he is not unaware of the fact that, in this particular matter, 'at first the same freedom was admitted in tragedy as in epic poetry'. The *Unity of place* i.e. conformity between the scenes of the tragic events, which was deduced as a corollary from the so-called unity of time, is not mentioned by Aristotle at all. However, the neo-classicists later on made these unities – those of action, time and place – a cardinal principle of tragedy. This necessitated the remark by Dryden, who was himself a classicist, that Aristotle had derived his models from the Greek tragedies before him and had he seen the English tragedies he might have changed his mind. The examples of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jacobean dramatists were there before Dryden who had realized that great tragedies could be written even without adhering to the principle of unities.

Tragedy evokes in us the emotions of pity and fear. We pity the undeserved suffering of the hero and fear the worst that may happen to him. It is therefore necessary for a good tragic plot to arouse these emotions. This can be done only when the incidents show a change of fortune from good to bad and not from bad to good. The unhappy ending is the only right ending because this is the most tragic in effect.

#### 4.4.2 Types of Plot

Aristotle classifies plots into two categories – simple and complex. In a simple plot the story moves in an uncomplicated pattern. For the distinction between the two types of

plots Aristotle uses two terms – ‘peripetia’ and ‘anagnorisis’. Peripetia has been explained as ‘reversal of intention or situation’ and anagnorisis is ‘recognition’ which is born out of a change from ignorance to knowledge. Commenting on peripetia Aristotle says:

Reversal of Intention is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity. Thus in Oedipus, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his alarms about his mother, but by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect. Again in Lynceus, Lynceus is being led away to his death, and Danaus goes with him, meaning to slay him; but the outcome of the action is that Danaus is killed and Lynceus saved. (39)

Aristotle, citing examples from two Greek tragedies, makes it clear how a dramatist shows the reversal of both intention and situation. About ‘recognition’ he says:

Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a reversal of intention, as in Oedipus. There are indeed other forms. Even inanimate things of the most trivial kind may sometimes be objects of recognition. Again, we may recognize or discover whether a person has done a thing or not. (39)

Aristotle holds that reversal and recognition are the features a dramatist uses to produce the feeling of pity and fear and these are the features that differentiate a simple plot from a complicated plot. A complicated plot is that which uses these features effectively and a simple plot, on the other hand, lacks them.

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#### **4.5 TRAGIC HERO**

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In the discussion of the Plot you have seen how Aristotle insists that the actions of a tragedy should be related to the life of one person. This is important because the object of a tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the spectators and this can be done only if the plot is confined to the actions of one person. Otherwise the emotions will lose their force. This consideration makes the choice of the tragic hero limited to a person whose actions are liable to produce these emotions in the spectator. A tragic hero should be a good man because unless he is good our sympathies cannot lie with him. We cannot pity a bad man. Thus an evil person cannot be a tragic hero. The hero, however, should not be a perfectly good man driven from prosperity to adversity, because his wholly undeserved suffering will not arouse a feeling of pity but of shock. Aristotle says:

It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense, nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be

exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains then the character between these two extremes – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice and depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes or other illustrious men of such families. (39-41)

The key term used by Aristotle in his description of the tragic hero is ‘hamartia’ or what has been translated as ‘error or frailty’.

#### 4.5.1 Hamartia

‘Hamartia’ is a Greek word which has become quite current in the description of a tragic hero. It is an error of judgment which may arise from ignorance or some fatal shortcoming. Aristotle uses this term in his *Poetics* to describe the reason behind the down fall of the tragic hero. This is also a key term to understand the arousal of the emotions of pity and fear. As mentioned by Aristotle, we cannot experience these emotions in the case of the downfall of a perfectly good man; nor are these emotions aroused when we witness the downfall of a wicked person. We sympathize with a person who is basically good but who becomes the victim of hamartia. Hamartia is attributed to ‘hubris’ – a kind of pride or overconfidence that leads to the violation of a moral law, the disregarding of the divine warning etc. in *Oedipus Rex* the hamartia of Oedipus is two-fold – the slaying of his father is the result of his impetuosity, and his marriage with his own mother is the result of ignorance. It is because of hamartia that Oedipus met his tragedy. The Elizabethan dramatists also imputed the cause of tragedy to hamartia. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* meets his tragic end because of his error of judgment and rashness of temperament.

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#### 4.6 CATHARSIS

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The term which Aristotle gave to the discussion of tragedy and which subsequently came to be applied to all kinds of serious literature is ‘catharsis’. The term occurs in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy but he does not elaborate it anywhere in the treatise as it has come down to us. He promises to explain it elsewhere but either he forgot to do so or the part where he did it has been lost. It is, however, through catharsis which has been translated as ‘purgation’ or ‘purification’ in English that Aristotle defends tragedy and indeed literature in general against the charges of Plato. Plato held that poetry, which included tragedy, weakened men by evoking excessive emotions in them. Aristotle agrees that it evokes emotions which in the case of tragedy are pity and fear but the function of tragedy is to effect the proper purgation of these emotions.

The translation of the Greek word ‘catharsis’ or ‘katharsis’ into English has not been unanimous. It has been translated as ‘purgation’ by some and ‘purification’ by others. It is better to keep the word ‘catharsis’ as a technical term, simply transliterating it from Greek

into English, as Bywater has done. Any attempt to translate it by one single English word prejudices the whole interpretation. There has been a controversy whether the term is to be treated as a metaphor from religion or medicine. It was accepted as a medical term by the Renaissance critics and later on systematically expounded by Jacob Barnays in 1857. Barnays maintained that catharsis was a medical metaphor referring to the idea of purgation in the medical sense. Just as the purgative purges the body of the undesirable dross, tragedy purges the mind of the excessive emotions of pity and fear, first by exciting them and then providing them an emotional outlet. The result is a pleasant relief. In this way tragedy helps us in gaining an emotional balance. Critics like F. L. Lucas objected to this interpretation and held that “the theatre is not a hospital.” One goes to watch a tragedy not to be cured of emotions but to get pleasure. So they give the term a religious interpretation and hold that both Plato and Aristotle have referred to emotions as frenzy. They assert that in his definition of tragedy Aristotle talks of the ‘proper’ catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear, meaning thereby that the mind is properly relieved of the emotional frenzy.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q.1. In how many constituent parts does Aristotle divide tragedy? What is their order of importance?

Q.2. What does Aristotle mean when he says that there can be tragedy without character but not without plot?

Q. 3. What are unities in tragedy? Which unities does Aristotle talk of in *Poetics*?

Q.4. What is hamartia?

Q. 5. What is catharsis?

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### **4.7 SUMMARY**

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After giving the definition of tragedy, Aristotle mentions the constituent parts of tragedy. Plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle are the parts of tragedy. Among them the first three are the objects of imitation; the succeeding two are the medium of imitation and the final part is the manner of imitation. Aristotle mentions them in order of importance that they have in tragedy. He calls plot the soul of tragedy and goes to the extent of saying that there cannot be a tragedy without plot, though there can be one without character. He classifies plots into two categories – simple and complex and considers a complex plot better than a simple plot. A complex plot has the elements of peripetia and anagnorisis. Peripetia is the reversal or intent or situation while anagnorisis is the recognition of peripetia. A good plot should have a proper beginning, middle and end. Aristotle considers episodic plot to be a weak plot. The function of tragedy is to evoke the emotions of pity and fear in the spectator. So the hero of a tragedy should be one who could evoke these feelings. According to Aristotle, a tragic hero should be good

but not eminently good. If he is not good we cannot feel pity for him nor fear that worse may happen to him. But if he is completely good his suffering will not evoke the feeling of pity but that of shock. A bad person cannot be the hero of a tragedy because in that case his suffering would give us pleasure. Thus an ideal tragic hero is a person who is good but not eminently good and his downfall is because of Hamartia i.e. an error of judgment of some frailty.

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**4.8 GLOSSARY**

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Diction: the choice and use of words in speech or writing.

Spectacle: visually striking performance or display

Frenzy: a state of uncontrolled excitement

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**4.9 REFERENCES**

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**4.10 SUGGESTED READING**

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**4.11 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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Q.1 Describe the constituent parts of tragedy, as mentioned in the *Poetics*.

Q. 2. Discuss in detail Aristotle's views on plot.

Q.3. Write a critical note on the ideal tragic hero as per Aristotle.

Q. 4. Write a critical note on catharsis.

**UNIT 5: LONGINUS**

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.2 OBJECTIVES

5.3 AUTHOR AND THE WORK

5.4 SUBLIMITY IN LITERATURE

5.4.1 DEFINITION

5.4.2 SOURCES OF SUBLIMITY

5.4.3 GRANDEUR OF THOUGHT

5.4.4 GRANDEUR OF EMOTION

5.4.5 USE OF FIGURES

5.4.6 NOBLE DICTION

5.4.7 DIGNITY OF COMPOSITION

5.5 FEATURES DESTRUCTIVE OF SUBLIMITY

5.6 ESTIMATE OF LONGINUS AS A CRITIC

5.7 SUMMARY

5.8 GLOSSARY

5.9 REFERENCE AND SUGGESTED READING

5.10 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Literature, particularly telling stories and making songs, is as old as human civilization. However, all stories and all songs have not been the same. Some have left a deep and lasting impression on a civilization – some indeed have even crossed the boundaries of time and nation and come down to us – while others could not withstand the test of time. Moreover, some works of literature have always moved the readers or the audience while others do not have the same impact. The question as to what makes a work of literature great has always interested critics. The first remarkable theory in this regard has been the theory of sublimity put forward by Longinus. In this unit you are going to read about the concept of the sublime in literature. Before Longinus the critics regarded the function of poetry to be either to instruct or to delight or to do both and that of prose to persuade. Longinus went beyond this and held that great literature moves us. Thus, according to him, the purpose of literature is to transport. It is this quality of literature that makes it sublime.

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**5.2 OBJECTIVES**

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The unit will introduce you to one of the greatest critics of ancient Europe. It will tell you about the elements that raise a work of literature to the level of greatness. We shall also enumerate what, according to Longinus, is there in it that moves us and makes a work of literature sublime.

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**5.3 THE AUTHOR AND THE WORK**

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There is still a controversy about the identity and period of Longinus. The treatise that has come down to us bears the title, “Longinus on the Sublime”. So the writer is one Longinus but who this Longinus was and when he lived are still not certain. The Paris manuscript of the tenth century, which the later ones generally follow, mentions the writer as “Dionysius or Longinus” as well as “Dionysius Longinus”. Now whether Dionysius and Longinus are two different persons or the same is not clear. The problem is compounded by the fact that the name or names do not suggest any known scholar. The issue of the period of this treatise is also undecided. Critics like R. A. Scott James regard it to be a work of the third century A. D. They identify the author with Cassius Longinus, Minister of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. Other critics, like J. W. H. Atkin and W. K. Wimsatt Jr., consider it to be a work of the first century A. D. *On the Sublime* has been written in Greek and this makes Longinus to be Greek writer. It is addressed to one Postumius Terentius whose identity likewise has not been established. The treatise as it has come down to us is not in a complete form. It seems as if a considerable part of it is missing. Nonetheless, the treatise even in its present form is a remarkable work of criticism.

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## 5.4 SUBLIMITY IN LITERATURE

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The concept of ‘to instruct, to delight and to persuade’ about the purpose of literature did not satisfy Longinus. It failed to account for the powerful impact of literature on the audience/ reader. He agreed that literature delighted us. It enlightened us and it also influenced our thought. But this is not all that literature does. When we read a great work of literature it lifts us out of ourselves. It makes us forget ourselves and keeps our emotions and imagination captive. Longinus calls this power of literature ‘sublimity’.

### 5.4.1 DEFINITION

Longinus was a rhetorician and so in his definition of ‘sublime’ in literature, he lays emphasis on the excellence of discourse. He writes:

Sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source than this that the greatest of writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown. The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport. (Smith 65)

Longinus compares the impact of the ‘sublime’ literature to that of lightning. It flashes and makes everything visible to us in a moment. This ability of a writer is neither only a gift of Nature nor purely an art that he has learnt. No one who is not born with a talent for it can create sublime literature, but this innate talent has to be cultivated by learning the art of it.

Longinus holds that merely a desire to write something novel does not give birth to sublimity. It often leads to certain defects which spoil the sublime effect. Longinus lists four such defects – turgidity, puerility, false emotion and frigidity. While turgidity is an endeavour to go above the sublime, puerility is the sheer opposite of greatness.

### 5.4.2 SOURCES OF SUBLIMITY

Longinus holds that both nature and art create sublimity. He does not agree with those who hold that “the sublime is innate and cannot be acquired by teaching; nature is the only art producing it.” (78) Longinus found that the power to transport was a gift of nature but it had to be cultivated by art. He says, “Art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature hits the mark when she contains art hidden within her.” (78) He lists five sources of sublimity which bestow upon a speech or a work of literature the power to move the reader or the audience. They are grandeur of thought, capacity for strong emotions, appropriate use of figure, nobility of diction and dignity of composition. Of them the first two are the gift of nature and the others are cultivated by art.

### 5.4.3 GRANDEUR OF THOUGHT

The first source of the sublime is the capacity for grand thoughts. Sublimity, says Longinus, is “the echo of a great soul”. That is why he lists grandeur of thought as the first source of sublimity. He writes: “For it is not possible that men with mean and servile ideas and aims prevailing throughout their lives should produce anything that is admirable and worthy of immortality.” (72) Grand thoughts lift the audience/ reader out of himself.

He forgets his petty concerns and is filled with those grand thoughts that he has come across. Grand thoughts come to lofty minds and such minds are the gift of nature. However, grand thoughts can also be acquired by dwelling constantly on whatever is noble and sublime and by following the examples of great masters. 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 examples before our eyes, illuminating our path and lifting our souls to the high standard of perfection, imaged on our minds. (73)

In this way though great minds are born, great ideas can also be imbibed from great masters. Grand thoughts have an elevating effect both morally and artistically on the audience/ reader.

#### 5.4.4. GRANDEUR OF EMOTIONS

Longinus lists grand or strong emotions as the second source of sublimity. Unfortunately, what he has said about it is lost. At the end of the book he proposes to deal with the subject in a separate treatise but that treatise has not come down to us. It is only through his stray remarks that we gather what he thought about it. 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.” (Prasad 56) It is for this reason that he prefers *Illiad* to *Odessey* and Demosthenes to Cicero. The capacity for intense emotions is also something that only nature can give. Strong emotions of an orator or writer can move us strongly. Longinus does not agree with Plato that emotions have a harmful effect on us and they weaken us. He, on the contrary, believes that strong emotions make us sublime.

#### 5.4.5 APPROPRIATE USE OF FIGURES

While grand thoughts and strong emotions are natural sources of sublimity, Longinus lists certain artistic sources that make a speech or a work of literature sublime. Among them an appropriate use of figures of speech is the most prominent artistic device. Longinus describes this very elaborately in his treatise. He was a rhetorician and so he knew that in oratory a happy or unhappy use of figures of speech made all the difference. In his treatise he, however, is not concerned with the various uses the figures of speech can be put to. He describes them as an aid to sublimity. So he first holds that they should not be used for the purpose of ornamentation. By introducing an element of strangeness into what one speaks or hears every day, the figures of speech satisfy a basic urge of human nature – that for a pleasant surprise. B. Prasad notes:

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. (57)

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 plain style it stands as an oddity.

Some important figures of speech that create sublimity are the rhetorical question, asyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis. The rhetorical question is either a question which suggests its own answer or a rapid succession of questions and answers. For example, in the question ‘Who is there so base that would be a bondman?’, the answer ‘None’ is already implied. A succession of questions and answers are used to make the speech more effective. They evoke a natural outburst of emotions. In asyndeton the conjunctions between words or sentences are left out to give the statement a force. The words tumble out without connection in a kind of stream, almost getting ahead of the speaker. Longinus gives the example of Xenophon’s speech: “Engaging their shields, they pushed, fought, slew, died.” Hyperbaton is the inversion of the normal order of words in the sentence. The use of hyperbaton suggests a mind under extreme stress or excitement when a man forgets the normal sequence of words and they come out in disorder. Longinus writes:

It is a very real mark of urgent emotion. People who in real life feel anger, fear or indignation, or are distracted by jealousy or some other emotion . . . often put one thing forward and then rush off to another, irrationally inserting some remark, and then hark back again to their first point. They seem to be blown this way and that by their excitement, as if by a veering wind. They inflict innumerable variations on the expression, the thought, and the natural sequence. Thus hyperbaton is a means by which, in the best authors, imitation approaches the effect of nature. (Russell 166 -67)

Periphrasis is a roundabout way of speaking. For example, ‘fair sex’ means womankind and ‘better half’ is used for wife. When overused it becomes commonplace and loses its charm but when used for the first time they are capable of charming us.

#### **5.4.6 NOBLE DICTION**

The fourth source of the sublime is noble diction. Diction and thought are closely related. Selection of appropriate words is essential for making an effective communication. It is the language of a composition that brings grandeur, beauty, magnificence and power to it. If thought and emotion are the soul of a composition, language is its body. Hence Longinus lists noble diction as a source of sublimity. Longinus writes:

The choice of correct and magnificent words is a source of immense power to entice and charm the hearer. This is something which all orators and other writers cultivate immensely. It makes grandeur, beauty, old-world charm, weight, force, strength, and a kind of lustre bloom upon our words as upon beautiful statues; it gives things life and makes them speak. (172)

Diction, which comprises ‘the proper choice of words and the use of metaphors and ornamented language’, is ‘the very light of thought’. The use of heightened language suits

only a sublime composition. 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.” So he advocates the use of noble diction in a serious composition only. Among the ornaments of speech Longinus considers metaphor and hyperbole. While much of what he says about both has been discussed by earlier critics – Aristotle being one of them – also, he has added something of his own. For example, Aristotle restricts the use of metaphors to two at a time, but Longinus finds no justification for it. Metaphors being the language of passion, passion alone and no arbitrary rule should determine the number of metaphors to be used on any occasion. Here is, as B. Prasad puts it, “the first romantic protest against supposedly inviolable sanctity of rules.” (60) However, Longinus is 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 natural outcome of emotion.

#### **5.4.6 DIGNITY OF COMPOSITION**

The fifth source of the sublime is the harmonious arrangements of the words. A dignified composition should be one that blends thought, emotions, figures and diction into a unified 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 reader/ audience share the thoughts and emotions of the writer/ speaker. A harmonious composition alone sometimes makes up for the deficiency of any of the elements. An ideal composition is the one which takes care of its content. It is neither shorter nor longer than it is required to effectively communicate its content.

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#### **5.5 FEATURES DESTRUCTIVE OF SUBLIMITY**

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Longinus in his treatise has also mentioned certain features which he considers to be destructive of sublimity. Of them the first that he mentions is bad and affected rhythm. He writes:

Nothing is so damaging to a sublime effect as effeminate and agitated rhythm . . . they turn into regular jig. All the rhythmical elements immediately appear artificial and cheap, being constantly repeated in a monotonous fashion without the slightest emotional effect. Worst of all, just as songs distract an audience from the action and compel attention for themselves, so the rhythmical parts of speech produce on the hearer the effect not of speech but of rhythm (Russell 183)

The second feature that is detrimental to sublimity is what Longinus calls the ‘chopped up’ style. He says “Phrases too closely knit are also devoid of grandeur, as are those which are chopped up into short elements consisting of short syllables, bolted together, as it were, and rough on joints”. (183) another feature destructive of sublimity is excessive brevity of the composition. Excessively cramped expression also does damage to sublimity. It, as Longinus puts it, “cripples grandeur to compress it into too short a space.

On the other hand, anything developed into an unreasonable length also falls flat. As sublime diction is a source of sublimity, undignified vocabulary destroys sublimity. It jolts us out of our rapture and leaves a bad taste. Longinus says, “It is wrong to descend, in a sublime passage, to the filthy and contemptible, unless we are absolutely compelled to do so. We ought to use words worthy of things.” (185)

**SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q.1. What does Longinus mean by sublimity?
- Q. 2. How many sources of sublimity does Longinus mention? Name them.
- Q. 3. Which sources of sublimity, according to Longinus, are the gift of nature and which can be acquired by art?
- Q. 4. What are the figures of speech that confer sublimity on a composition?
- Q. 5. Which features of composition are destructive of sublimity?

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**5.6 ESTIMATE OF LONGINUS AS A CRITIC**

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Longinus occupies an important place among the ancient European critics. Saintsbury calls him the greatest of late Greek critics. Lascelles Abercrombie calls him the first comparative critic of literature. R. A. Scott-James regards him as the first romantic critic. To David Daiches the importance of Longinus lies in the fact that he asked quite different questions about literature from those asked by Plato or Aristotle. These remarks show Longinus’s contribution to criticism. The greatest contribution of Longinus to the study of literature was that he gave a new dimension to the existing concept of the function of literature. As pronounced by Plato, Aristotle, Horace and other important critics of the Greco-Roman period the function of poetry, including drama, was to instruct or delight or do both and that of prose and oratory was to persuade. This formula described what literature did or was supposed to do, but it did not account for the appeal and impact of literature. It was Longinus who for the first time pointed out that literature, great literature at least, moved us and lifted us out of ourselves. In his description of the elements that gave force to a work of literature or piece of oratory he did not say much which was not said by earlier writers, including Aristotle. Features like use of figures, heightened diction and ornamentation of language were known and standard features of rhetoric with which every rhetorician was familiar. It is in his theory of sublimity and ‘transport’ that Longinus differs from his predecessors. B. Prasad says about it:

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. (63)

Longinus holds that a great work of literature lifts the audience/ reader out of himself. So it is not the power to teach or entertain or persuade but the power to move that makes a work sublime. It has the power to make one wonder. It is Longinus's theory of transport that makes R. A. Scott- James call him 'the first romantic critic'. But Longinus may be a romantic in spirit, in training he is a classicist. Scott- James himself says:

Though he was the first to expound the doctrines upon which romanticism rests, he turned and tempered them with what is sanest in classicism. Whilst he pointed the way to the storm and the fury of a romantic movement, he himself, with singular critical judgment, set up the danger posts, and reimposed the classic discipline. (87-88)

Longinus knew that great literature was as much the product of literary art as of a great mind.

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### **5.7 SUMMARY**

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Longinus's *On the Sublime* is one of the greatest critical works of the Greco- Roman period. The identity or the writer or the period of the work has not been finally established but it was written some time between the first and third century A. D. and the writer was a Greek rhetorician. Before Longinus, the critics first took the object of literature – poetry and drama to be precise - to be teaching. The highest literature made one better. Later on critics added entertainment to the task of teaching. The task of prose or oratory was considered to be that of persuasion. It was Longinus who asserted that the greatness of literature lay in its power to transport. It affected us deeply and lifted us out of ourselves. It is this power of literature that made it sublime. This sublimity of literature is as much a creation of natural abilities as that of art. Longinus has listed five sources of sublimity – grand thoughts, intense emotions, noble diction, proper use of the figures of speech and proper composition. Of these, the first two are the gifts of nature and the remaining the product of art.

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### **5.8 GLOSSARY**

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Greco-Roman: belonging to the periods of Greek and Roman civilizations

Sublime: of the greatest, most admirable kind.

Transport: overcome by emotions.

Move: cause to have very powerful feelings.

Treatise: long written work dealing systematically with one subject

**5.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING**

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**5.10 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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- Q. 1 What, according to Longinus, is sublimity? What are the sources of sublimity?
- Q.2. Explain how sublimity is both a gift of nature and a product of art.
- Q. 3. Would you consider Longinus to be a Romantic critic?

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Sir Philip Sidney

6.4 Renaissance Criticism

6.5 *An Apology for Poetry*

6.5.1 Summary

6.6 Summing Up

6.7 References

6.8 Terminal and Model Questions

**6.1 INTRODUCTION:**

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This unit will introduce you to the ideas propounded by the Renaissance critic Sir Philip Sidney. An understanding of his critical ideas will enable you to understand the importance, characteristics and various forms of poetry and drama. Most importantly you will know the function and role of poetry in common human life.

**6.2 OBJECTIVES:**

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of poetry and literature in life.
- Analyse the role of poetry and drama in shaping the society.
- Evaluate the position of poetry in human life and society.

**6.3 SIR PHILIP SIDNEY**

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Sir Philip Sidney was born on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1554, at Renhurst, Kent. He received his early education under Thomas Ashton at Shrewsbury School and later he went to Christchurch, Oxford. It was at Oxford that he came into direct association with eminent scholars like Edward Dyer, Richard Hakluyt, William Camden and Fulke Greville. After leaving Oxford, Philip Sidney travelled for around four years in Europe. He returned to England in 1575 and became a member of Elizabeth's court and in 1578 wrote a masque, *The Lady Of May*, in her honour. He also went on diplomatic missions to Europe. After a little exile he was made the Member of Parliament and was knighted in 1582. He never forgot his youthful infatuation for Penelope Doveureux who was married to Lord Rich. Sidney's earnest and passionate love was rendered in his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*.

In 1586, he was mortally wounded at Zutphen and died after twenty six days. He was buried with great honour at St Paul's Cathedral. The news of his death was received in England with great dismay and several elegies were written as a tribute among which the most memorable is Spencer's *Astrophel*. As a prolific writer Philip Sidney was popularly known for his works like *Arcadia*, *Astrophel and Stella* and *An Apology for Poetry*. In criticism his *An Apology for Poetry* was a monumental work which defended poetry against the Puritan attackers.

**6.4 RENAISSANCE CRITICISM**

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The fall of Constantinople in 1453 by the Turks caused the flight of Attic scholars towards the West with their rich treasure of ancient Greek and Roman art and literature.

These refugees took shelter in Italy which became the new center for learning. This led to an atmosphere which gave birth to Renaissance or the revival of ancient Greco-Roman learning of culture, art and literature. Theology was the main concern of medieval Europe hence life was theocratic. Other kind of literature was looked down upon with suspicion as pagan, sensuous and immoral, and if at all, was justified only allegorically. But with Renaissance a change crept into literary studies and criticism which now witnessed an emphasis on secular rather than on theology. The great works of antiquity were translated into great numbers and were broadcasted all over Europe with remarkable degree of reception. English scholars flocked to Italy to learn this new knowledge. The *Ars Poetica* of Horace had been known throughout the middle ages and now during the Renaissance it wielded a wide and far reaching influence on literary theory and criticism in France, Italy and England. But the greatest effect was unleashed by Aristotle's *Poetics*.

The chief characteristics of literary criticism during the Renaissance were mainly shaped and influenced by Italian colour and hue. In the first stage it was clearly rhetorical and a clear example of it was Wilson's *Art Of Rhetoric in 1553*. The book was called by Warton as the first systematic book of criticism in English language. This was followed by Roger Ascham's *Schoolmaster* in 1568. The second stage was of classification of poetic forms and metrical studies. Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy* is the first systematic classification of poetic forms and subjects of rhetorical figures. The group of poet-scholars known as Aeropagus by their studies and classification of the practical questions of language and versification, dealt with the very tendencies which Ascham had been attempting to counteract. Sidney was a member of this group.

The second stage was followed by a stage philosophical and apologetic criticism. The best exponent of this kind of work was Sidney's *Defence Of Poetry* in 1595. All these works as indicated by their titles are all defenses of poetry and literature against puritan's attacks on it. Required by the exigencies of the moment to defend poetry in general, these authors set out to examine the fundamental grounds of criticism of poetry and to formulate basic principles. In this attempt they, consciously or unconsciously, sought aids from the critics of Italy, and thus commenced in England the influence of the Italian theory of poetry.

The fourth stage of Renaissance criticism ran up to half of the seventeenth century and Ben Jonson was the main literary figure of this period. It was the stage of clear classicism. Sidney's contemporaries had studied the general theory of poetry, not for the purpose of enunciating rules or dogmas of criticism, but chiefly in order to defend the poetic art and to understand its fundamental principles. With Jonson the study of the art of poetry became an indispensable guide to creation; and it is this element of self-conscious art, guided by the rules of criticism, which distinguishes him from his predecessors.

The fifth and the final stage of evolution of Renaissance criticism was partly the age of Neo-Classicism. During this period the Italian influence was replaced by the French influence. Rationalism, the restriction of literature to the imitation of nature, with the further limitation of nature to the life of the city and the court, and the confinement of imagination to wit, characterize literary inquiry during the whole period. Dryden and pope were the leading critics of this period.

A brief survey of all these five stages of evolution of Renaissance criticism makes it clear that the third stage was the most important stage, when there was much thinking over the nature and function of poetry, and an English theory of poetry was formulated. Poetry and all imaginative literature, continued to be justified allegorically, as in the middle ages. The conception of poetry and the function of a poet was all time high. Poets were regarded as spiritual legislators and reformers; the function of poetry was considered to delight as well as to instruct.

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## 6.5 AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

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*An Apology for Poetry* was the result of an excruciating critical diatribe *The School Of Abuse* by Stephan Gosson which was against the poetry and drama of the age. Stephan attacked the poetry and the unbridled pleasure of literature with puritan thoroughness. He dedicated his work to Philip Sidney. When Philip Sidney wrote his *Apology For Poetry*, he had in his mind Stephan's treatise as he wished to vindicate poetry and drama against the onslaughts of the Puritans. This work was written before 1581 but remained in manuscript till 1595. In 1595 it was brought out in two editions, one for Henery Olney with the title *An Apology for Poetry*, the other for William Ponsonby under the title *The Defence Of Poesie*. This work is classical in spirit but romantic in treatment. Philip Sidney took all inspiration from the ancient classics and the Italian renaissance writers. He drew on the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Plutarch, Ovid, Virgil, Dante and Boccaccio.

### 6.5.1 Summary

The treatise may be divided into four sections. In the first section conventional reasons are given why poetry should be especially valued, and this is followed by arguments of a more palpable or convincing kind based on an exposition of the nature and usefulness of poetry itself. Sidney then proceeds to discuss the current objections against poetry and the work is brought to a close with remarks on the state of English poetry and drama in his own day.

### Antiquity and Universality of Poetry

The first plea advanced by Philip Sidney for the recognition of poetry is based on its antiquity, its universality, and the high esteem in which it had been held from the earliest times. Poetry, according to Sidney, "in the noblest nations and languages that are known, have been the first light given to ignorance, and first nurse whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge's." The earliest Greek philosophers and historian had been really poets. "Let learned Greece in any of her manifold sciences be able to show me one book before Nusaeus, Homer and He said, all three nothing else but poets. Nay let any history be brought that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus, and some other are named. Who having been the first of that country that made pens deliverers of their knowledge to their posterity, may justly challenge to be called their fathers in

learning.... so as Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry to build Thebes and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people. So among the Romans were Livius Andronicus and Ennius; so in the Italian languages the first that made it aspire to be a treasure-house of science were the poets Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch; so in our English were Gower and Chaucer.” He regards Plato as essentially a poet and says, “And truly even Plato whosoever will considered, shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and his strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of poetry.” Philip Sidney then takes the help of etymology, and calls attention on the reverence paid to the poets, first by the Romans who called them *Vates*, a prophet or seer and secondly by the Greeks who call him by the word *poiein*, which means ‘maker’ or ‘creator’, a description suggestive of divinity and therefore above all others.

### Nature and Definition of Poetry

Then Philip Sidney discusses the nature of poetry. First he treats poetry in general and then its different forms. Discussing the general he includes apparently all imaginative literature whether written in prose or verse. Dealing with the qualities of a poet he says, “that is not rhyming or versing that maketh a poet as a long gown does not make a man an advocate, but is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by.” There is an element of inconsistencies in his view here. At another place he says that, “the exquisite observing of the number and measure of a word did seem to have divine force in it.” He was following Aristotle and most of the Italian critics in denying verse to be the essential element in poetry. In practice however he believed that verse, if not the essence, was at least a necessary and inseparable element of poetry, and it is significant that when he deals with contemporary poetry, he confines his attention to the composition in verse.

Poetry in his view is essentially an art of imitation but by imitation Philip Sidney implies something more than mere copying or a reproduction of the facts of life. He has described the poet as maker and therefore he either transmutes the real, or attempts an entirely new creation. The poet, “lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quiet anew, forms such as never were in nature.” Thus poetic imitation is an exercise of the creative faculty. Poets have created a world which is better and more beautiful than this real world of nature. He writes in lyrical strain that “Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely, her world is more brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.” In other words it is more than mere illusion. The created world is the ideal world. The poet in his flight, he explains, “ranges into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.” Here Sidney follows Aristotle. According to Philip Sidney the poet treats solely of things as they ought to be and according to Aristotle the poet’s material consists of “things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be”. Apart from this both agree that in poetry we find something more than mere representation of real life, and that it expresses truth of the highest kind.

**Kinds of Poetry**

Philip Sidney then notes the several kinds of poetry, and adopts the traditional classification of religious, philosophical and poetry which deals with the imaginative treatment of human life. Among the philosophical poets Sidney notes David, Solomon, Moses and Deborah in their hymns. Among the classical poets he notes, Orpheus, Amphion and Homer. Among the Philosophical poets he notes Tyrteus, Phoclydes, Cato, Lucretius, Malinius, Pontalenius, Lucan and others. Then he takes up the third kind of poets, who imitate to teach and delight, and calls them the right poets. These may be subdivided into many other kinds---heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral and certain others. This classification is based partly on the subject matter, and partly on the metrical considerations.

The most important and difficult part of his essay comes in matter of justifying the values of poetry against the charges of Stephan Gosson. He has to defend the value of poetry in the intellectual life of the community. His plan is to enquire into the efficacy of all imaginative Art and Sciences, and by a comparison of their various effects on the human mind to assign poetry its place in intellectual values. The end of all learning, he agrees, is to know, "and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying of his own divine essence." But he regards natural sciences, like astronomy as serving sciences and thinks that they can do little in lifting up man's inner being. This lifting up can be done only by the mistress knowledge, that is the knowledge of men's self. Then the ultimate end of knowledge is not only well knowing, but also well doing. "Since the end of all earthly learning is virtuous action. Poetry does so easily and with guarantee of complete success.

**Poetry as Superior to History and Philosophy**

As the end of all knowledge is the teaching of virtues, Philip Sidney moves ahead to examine how far philosophy and history contribute to it. He admits that both philosophy and history play their parts in the teaching of virtue. Philosophy does it by precepts. It teaches us the nature of virtue by means of analysis and definition and by bringing about its general categories and specific results.

The method of history is quite different from that of philosophy. Philosophy teaches virtue by precept, history does it by example. A historian does not give us a theoretical analysis of virtues but he takes concrete examples of virtuous men from the past ages, and in this way illustrates to us what virtue really is. But there are defects in both these methods. Philosophy and History both work in a different way and therefore both lack the good points of the other. The philosopher dealing with abstract rules and precepts can only be understood properly by old persons who are already learned. He cannot guide the youths, because they will not be able to understand him properly. The historian on the other hand, is so tied to the particular truth of things and not the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore less fruitful doctrines. Poetry is superior to both philosophy and history because it combines the function of both. The poet takes up the abstract rules and universal truths or philosophy, and illustrates them by vivid and concrete examples in the manner of the Historian.

It may be said that images and pictures of poetry are only fictitious and imaginary therefore less important than the characters of history which are real. Sidney gives a reply to this notion also by taking the help of Aristotle. Poetry, he says deals with the universal consideration and history with the particular. The world represented by poetry is an ideal and perfect world, a world more intelligible than the world of experience. Poetry deals with what ought to be and therefore transcends nature without contradicting her. Now we can say that poetry represents virtue in a way which is intelligible to everybody. The poet is indeed the right philosopher.

#### **Four Specific Charges against Poetry**

The clear purpose of the present treatise was to provide answers to the four major charges laid down by the eminent puritan of the day, Stephan Gosson. Sidney examines them one by one carefully and convincingly. The four charges were: that it is a sheer waste of time and that there are many other fruitful disciplines where a man might better spend his time by learning something useful for life; that it is the mother of lies and the nurse of abuse, infecting us with base desires and has thus a degrading and enfeebling influence and that Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal state.

The first of these charges that a man might spend his time in a better way than poetry, he dismisses briefly by saying that it has been established that poetry is supreme in the teaching of virtue. He denies firmly the second charge that poetry is the mother of lies. Astronomers, Physicians, historians and others, may and often do make mistake by making false statements, but the poet never does so, “for the poet, he nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth.” The aim of the poet is not to tell us, “what is or is not, but what should or what should not be.” The poet in this way does not deal with fact but fiction, yet fiction embodying truth of an ideal kind. He also gives a reply to the third charge that by treating love themes and its amorous conceits, poetry causes wantonness and has an effeminate influence on its readers. In the beginning he agrees that a vicious treatment of love is found in earlier poetry abuseth man’s wit, but instead man’s wit abuseth poetry. This is not the poetry but the abuse of poetry and shall the abuse of a thing make the right thing odious.” Then he also gives an answer to the belief that poetry fosters in men an indulgence in fancy and a disinclination for action that has weakened the material fiber of ancient days. He asks when actually were those ancient days, “since no memory is so ancient that hath the precedence of poetry.” He approves by many examples that poetry has always been the companion of the camps and has always been appreciated by the men of action.

Sidney has the biggest difficulty in replying to the fourth charge against poetry, i.e Plato’s rejection of poetry. As Plato for him was the most “worthy of reverence and the most poetical of all the philosophers.” He makes a reference to the ancient conflict between philosophy and poetry; how philosophers after extracting their wisdom from poetry, started condemning it. “for indeed after the philosophers had picked out of the sweet mysteries of poetry the right discerning of the true points of knowledge, they forthwith began to spurn at their guidance, like ungrateful prentices who were not content to set up shops for themselves, but sought by all means to discredit their masters.” Then

he tries to prove that Plato was not an enemy of poetry. In fact Plato objected to the false conceptions of the God, and the atheism which he found in ancient poetry and also the poets of his time. "Plato found fault that the poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the Gods, making light tales of that unspotted essence, and therefore would have not the youth depraved with such opinions." In this way Plato was not against poetry itself, but against its abuse. Then he refers to Plato's description of the *Ion* as a light and winged and sacred thing and says that this was Plato's real attitude to poetry.

### **Diction and Style**

Sidney also discusses the diction and style of contemporary poetry and finds it in worse condition. The writers aimed at eloquence, apparelled or rather disguised, in a courtesan like painted affection, they tried to write in an affected and grandiose style and used "so far-fetched words, that they may seem monsters and thus strangers to poor Englishmen." The reason of this practice he attributes to the earlier rhetorical studies, and the writer's craze to imitate the classical style. But the right way of acquiring such a style is not to keep up note books and make use of the words and phrases used by them, but to understand the spirit and methods of the great classics, "by devouring them whole, and make them wholly theirs." By trying to cast sugar and spice upon every dish that is served to the table, the writers might obtain a seeming fineness, but they could not persuade the readers which was the true end of their writings.

### **English language and Prosody**

Sidney takes up English language and prosody itself and thinks that it is a fit medium of literary expression. It is no doubt, "a mingled language' having many foreign elements in it, but this according to him, is for the better, having enriched it all the more. It is comparable with any language in the world "for uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind, which is the end of the speech. The last thing taken up by Sidney is the possibility of reforming English prosody along classical lines. There are two methods of versifying, ancient and modern. "The ancient marked the quantity of each syllable and according to that framed his verse: the modern observing only number, with some regard of the accent, the chief life of it standeth in that like sounding of the words, which we call rhyme." He however refrains from making any definite statement on the questions as to which of the two is better. Both have sweetness and majesty. And then the English language according to him is fit for both kinds.

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## **6.6 SUMMING UP:**

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In the present unit we started by learning the background of Renaissance criticism. We discussed how Sidney took the charge to defend poetry against the puritan attack. We learnt how he manages to bring poetry to a dignified position as a discipline of knowledge better than History and Philosophy.

**6.7 REFERENCES**

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[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

**6.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. What prompted Sidney to write *An Apology for Poetry*?
2. What are the four charges that Stephan Gosson made on Poetry.
3. What arguments Sidney give to prove the superiority of poetry over History and Philosophy?
4. Do you agree with the fact that Sidney appears to be a Classicist in training but romantic by taste in *Apology*?
5. Write an essay on Sidney as a critic.
6. How does Sidney defend Plato's banishment of poets from his ideal state?

**UNIT 7: ALEXANDER POPE**

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7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Introduction to Neo Classical Criticism

7.4 Alexander Pope as a critic

7.5 An Essay on Criticism

7.6 Preface to Shakespeare

7.7 Summing Up

7.8 References

7.9 Terminal and Model Questions

**7.1 INTRODUCTION:**

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In the earlier unit we discussed the critical ideas of Sir Philip Sidney, now we will learn the critical ideas developed by Alexander Pope. Like Sidney Pope was also a phenomenal poet of his time. Unlike Sidney, Pope here provides general instruction to writers of poetry. He was not just a defender but a revivalist of classical precepts of poetry.

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**7.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- Appreciate Pope as a critic
- Understand the nature of neo classical criticism
- Understand the ideas related to criticism developed by Pope

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**7.3 NEO-CLASSICAL CRITICISM**

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We have already discussed Neo Classicism as a concept and its general characteristics in the book on poetry. Let us now go through the critical ideas and tradition developed during this period.

After the immense development of English criticism during the Renaissance, criticism in England underwent a period of degeneration. This was due to the fact that people's energy was dissipated by political and religious conflicts that culminated in the Civil War and the execution of the English king, Charles I. The Restoration of monarchy with King Charles II in 1660 resulted in a state of social stability and once again the climate was favourable for a productive period in the field of literary criticism. The Italian influence which dominated England during the Renaissance was replaced by the French influence.

Neo-classicism actually began in France for which the credit goes to Boileau (1636-1711). He extremely influenced the English Neo-classical critic Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Boileau stressed the significance of reason; he recommended that the poet should write according to the rules of reason. Boileau greatly admired the ancient Greek and Roman writers and advised poets to follow their rules and imitate their style. He emphasized that the poet should always keep decorum and propriety which could be attained by following the ancient classical writers. In words of Alexander Pope:

First follow Nature and your judgment: frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same.

Nature, according to neo- classical writers has more than one sense. It may mean the external world with its well-ordered and harmonious system. It also means human nature, the common qualities which all men have. Furthermore, it means the Divine power which governs the universe. In addition, it means the rule and ideals of the great classics since

they are as perfect as nature. Neo-classicism is also characterized by a strong emphasis on "correctness," "good sense," "sound reason," "decorum," and "order." One more characteristic of Neo-classicism is that it stresses the significance of style and poetic diction. The language of poetry, for Neo-classical critics, should be distinguished by poetic diction which is a particular and elevated kind of language.

English Neo-classicism (1660--1780) may be divided into three stages. The first stage covers the Restoration age (1660-1700) where Neo-classicism tends to be moderate and liberal. The eminent critic of this period is John Dryden (1631-1700). His most significant work is "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668) which demonstrates his liberal neo-classical principles. Though Dryden admires the ancients and respects their rules, he does not strictly imitate them. He is against blind imitation of the ancient works of art. His purpose is to make some sort of compromise between ancient rules and the modern experiences.

The second stage of English Neo-classicism covers the four decades of the eighteenth century which witnessed the peak of Neo-classicism. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) is the outstanding critic of this period. "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) is Pope's major critical work. Pope intended the essay, as the title suggested to be a treatise in which he formulates his critical principles. The essay is of great importance since it sums up the tenets and idea of Neo-classicism.

The third stage of English Neo-classicism covers the last four decades of the Augustan age. During this stage, Neo-classicism gradually began to lose its strength. The major critic of this stage is Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) who is a liberal neo-classical critic. He never follows rules rigidly. Dr. Johnson is well-known for his "Preface to Shakespeare" (1785) and "The Lives of the Poets" (1779) which testify to his great ability as a brilliant practical critic.

The chief features of Neo-Classicism may be classified as below:

1. The precept "follow nature" is at the very centre of the neo classic creed. Nature is but not just confined to the concept of external nature but encompasses many more ideas. It means external reality which the poet must imitate and hence follow nature becomes realism or verisimilitude. Secondly nature also means general human nature i.e. qualities that are general to all human beings throughout the world. Thus the poet must deal with the universals and not with the particular, the individual or the particular. Next it means the typical qualities of a particular age, country or sex. And the poet must be true to type. Nature also means the principal or the power that governs the universe. Order, regularity, harmony were supposed to be the qualities of this power, and so literature must also have them. Lastly to follow nature also meant to follow the rules of the ancient masters, for they were based upon nature:

The rules of the old discovered not devised.  
Are nature still, though nature methodised.

2. By following these rules the nature would be followed automatically. Therefore the ancient must be our, 'study and delight'. The ancients simply methodized nature and so they must be followed in every particular. Hence it was that certain rules were framed for the composition of poetry, and certain other rules for its particular kinds, and artists were expected to write according to those rules. It was supposed that great literature was rules emerge as one of the cardinal features of Neo-Classicism. Critics judged works of literature on the bias of these rules, and writers created on that basis. Much was made of the three unities, and they were considered, a must for all dramatic writing. Tragi-comedy was condemned as a mongrel breed on the ground that Aristotle had prescribed that there should be no mingling of the tragic and the comic.
3. Emphasis was laid on correctness, good sense and reason. The artist must follow the rules correctly and any exuberance of fancy or emotion must be controlled by reason or sense. A balance must be maintained between Fancy and judgment. The head must predominate over the heart. Moderation was the golden rule of the life and of literature and pope advises the same following his favourite critic Boileau.
4. The poet must deal with universal truths and general ideas. As universal truths, in their very nature, were limited, originality and excellence in respect of content was not always possible. Hence writers must say what they had to say in the best possible manner:

True wit is nature to advantage dressed  
What oft was said but never so well expressed.

5. The function of poetry was to delight and to instruct. The didactic function was concerned more important than the aesthetic one. It was with this end in view that poetic justice was considered necessary, the poet must suitably reward the virtue and punish vice. Dryden and others too recognized that the function of poetry is also to move the heart. Thus tragedy must purge the soul of pride and hardness of heart. "Commiseration and admiration" were now considered to be proper function of tragedy.
6. Style, diction and decorum were emphasized upon much. It was supposed that there was a difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry which should be noble and elevated. Virgil was held out as the ideal and personification and circumlocution were resorted to impart dignity and elevation to the diction. They also aimed at clarity of thought and expression and avoided all possible obscurity. Decorum was maintained by sticking to right use of words and style for various kinds of poetry. For instance different styles were used for satire and epic poetry. All men including the poet speak the same language and if at all there is a difference it depends on the pitch and intensity of emotion.

Neo-Classicism has its own merits and Matthew Arnold was right in calling it "an admirable and indispensable age." It discourages erratic genius and as Scott-James points out, "The Neo-Classical critics added much that is essential to culture and fixed all the

important truisms without which we can hardly begin today to discuss the art of literature.”

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#### 7.4 POPE’S IDEAS AS A CRITIC

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For details on Alexander Pope’s life and poetic achievements refer to the Book II on poetry. Here we shall concentrate on the critical writings by Pope.

Alexander Pope is admittedly the most outstanding poet of the Neo-Classical age, the age which stood for certain well marked literary, political and social qualities. Some of the features of the age were, order and harmony, conformity to rules, adherence to decorum and correctness, avoidance to excesses romanticism, submission to the authority of Greek and Latin authors of antiquity. Besides this the classical ideals of terseness, neatness, finish of form, condensation and elegance were also followed strictly. In theory and practice both Pope and his school laid great stress on finished form, definite diction and style, fixed rules and rimes---the literary ideals of the illustrious ancients like Homer, Virgil and Horace.

Though Pope knew small Latin and less Greek, he imbibed the classical spirit in his writings by self-study. Right from the beginning he was drawn to the classical literature and started ‘lipping in numbers’ an imitation of Virgil’s *Georgics* and later of Homer’s epics. He translated Homer’s two epics with lot of care and pain. Speaking of the ancients in the *Essay on Criticism*, he writes thus:

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,  
Are nature still but nature methodised  
Nature, like liberty, is but strained  
By the same Laws which first herself restrained.

As a true Classicist, Pope identifies Nature here with the rules of old framed by learned Greek. After a few lines in the same poem, he further asserts:

Be Homer’s works your study and delight  
Read them by day and meditate by night;  
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,  
And trace the muses upward to their spring.

After a reading of these lines it can be clearly said that Pope strived for classical adherence.

Correctness is the touchstone of the kind of poetry Pope wrote. The famous critic of the day, William Walsh, had advised Pope to turn to it with all his heart and to make it his study and aim. In the pursuit of his ideal, Pope discarded liberty, the onrush of emotion in art and evolved a number of rules for his own practice and for those who followed him. The noted critic E. Albert says, “Correctness means avoidance of enthusiasm; moderate opinions moderately expressed; strict care and accuracy in poetical technique; and humble

imitation of the style of the Latin Classics.” Shakespeare and the Romantics naturally fall beyond this definition, but Pope considered even Dryden vivacious, energetic and copious. Though the Roman classics and Horace were the great forces working upon the mind and art of Pope, he attached no less importance to the Greeks and their works. In his concern, “to be correct”, Pope conformed to the classical rules and models and pursued the ideals of moderation and good sense in literature. He strained every nerve of his to attain the perfection of form and the flawlessness of heroic couplet. He never hesitated to alter or rewrite his poems for the better. We know that the enlarged version of *The Rape of the Lock* is the outcome of his second thought, and that he went on revising and adding to *The Dunciad* of 1728 until the very end of his life.

Pope has written at great length on criticism and his chief critical works are: 1. *Essay on Criticism*, 2. *Imitations On The Epistles Of Horace To Augustus*, 3. *His Letters*, 4. *Preface to the edition of Shakespeare’s Plays*.

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### 7.5 AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM

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Pope wrote “An Essay on Criticism” when he was 23; he was influenced by Quintillian, Aristotle, Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, and Nicolas Boileau’s *L’Art Poétique*. Written in heroic couplets, the tone is straight-forward and conversational. It is a discussion of what good critics should do; however, in reading it one gleans much wisdom on the qualities poets should strive for in their own work. In Part I of “An Essay on Criticism,” Pope notes the lack of “true taste” in critics, stating: “’Tis with our judgments as our watches, none / Go just alike, yet each believes his own.” Pope advocates knowing one’s own artistic limits: “Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, / And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.” He stresses the order in nature and the value of the work of the “Ancients” of Greece, but also states that not all good work can be explained by rules: “Some beauties yet, no precepts can declare, / For there’s a happiness as well as care.”

In Part II, Pope lists the mistakes that critics make, as well as the defects in poems that some critics short-sightedly praise. He advocates looking at a whole piece of work, instead of being swayed by some of its showier or faulty parts: “As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit, / T’ avoid great errors, must the less commit.” He advises against too much ornamentation in writing, and against fancy style that communicates little of merit. In his description of versification, his lines enact the effects of clumsy writing: “And ten low words oft creep in one dull line,” and “A needless Alexandrine ends the song, / That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.” In Part III, Pope discusses what critics should do, holding up the “Ancients” as models, including Aristotle (the “Stagirite”) who was respected by the lawless poets: “Poets, a race long unconfin’d and free, / Still fond and proud of savage liberty, / Receiv’d his laws; and stood convinc’d ’twas fit, / Who conquer’d nature, should preside o’er wit.”

**General Outline**

The essay may be described as falling into three parts, with the following subdivisions:

**I. General qualities needed by the critic (1-200):**

A. Awareness of his own limitations (46-67).

B. Knowledge of Nature in its general forms (68-87).

1. Nature defined (70-79).

2. Need of both wit and judgment to conceive it (80-87).

C. Imitation of the Ancients, and the use of rules (88-200).

1. Value of ancient poetry and criticism as models (88-103).

2. Censure of slavish imitation and codified rules (104-117).

3. Need to study the general aims and qualities of the Ancients (118-140).

4. Exceptions to the rules (141-168).

**II. Particular laws for the critic (201-559):**

Digression on the need for humility (201-232).

A. Consider the work as a total unit (233-252).

B. Seek the author's aim (253-266).

C. Examples of false critics who mistake the part for the whole (267-383).

1. The pedant who forgets the end and judges by rules (267-288).

2. The critic who judges by imagery and metaphor alone (289-304).

3. The rhetorician who judges by the pomp and colour of the diction (305-336).

4. Critics who judge by versification only (337-343).

Pope's digression to exemplify "representative meter" (344-383).

D. Need for tolerance and for aloofness from extremes of fashion and personal mood (384-559).

1. The fashionable critic: the cults, as ends in themselves, of the foreign (398-405), the new (406-423), and the esoteric (424-451).

2. Personal subjectivity and its pitfalls (452-559).

## III. The ideal character of the critic (560-744):

A. Qualities needed: integrity (562-565), modesty (566-571), tact (572-577), courage (578-583).

B. Their opposites (584-630).

C. Concluding eulogy of ancient critics as models (643-744).

(Adapted from [www.ourcivilization.com](http://www.ourcivilization.com))

The following points are made by Pope in this versified treatise on the art of poetry very much in the manner of Horace's *Ars Poetica*:

1. The chief critical guides in his opinion are Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian and Longinus among the ancients. Among the critics of his own age, he owes allegiance to Boileau and the other critics of his school. The literary models he set before us are Homer and the other ancients who in his opinion are all immortal and imperishable. Obviously pope has all the respect of a neo-classic for rules and authority of the Ancients. Following the great line of tradition Pope was concerned much with the true nature of much debated term 'wit' the word wit is used for forty-six times. He defines wit as:

True wit is nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought but never so well expressed.

In Pope's view the pleasure of poetry largely depends on polish, wit, grace and liveliness which clothed the commonplace truths in an artistic framework, but Dr Johnson later thought that any definition of wit must include the newness or vitality of thought. Pope maintains that there are two kinds of wit—false wit and true wit. He advises his readers:

Regard not them if wit be old or new,  
But blame the false, and value still the true.

2. The most important critical precept of pope is to 'follow nature'. To follow the classical rules which have been derived from the ancients is to 'follow nature'. Evidently it is not Wordsworth's concept of nature---an ennobling and vivifying force, 'a healing balm' and 'food for future years'. Pope first observes that 'Nature to all things fixed the limits fit/ And wisely curbed proud man's pretending wit.' Nature is presented as the storehouse of 'life force and beauty' and as the embodiment of just supply and genuine works. To evolve a fair and universal standard of judgment pope advises the critic to go to nature which is the precepts of ancient masters. The word nature is used for twenty-one times. Pope however admits that literary beauty is possible even without the close following to the precepts, and in this way he asserts the native independence of English temperament. He writes in the *Essay*:

Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend  
And rise to faults true critics dared not to mend.

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see  
Thinks but what never was, nor is, never shall be.

3. Pope proceeds by giving certain rules about ease in writing and correctness of composition,

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance  
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

It is not enough that, “Nor harshness gives offence/ the sound must seem an echo to the sense.” Pope lays great stress on correctness of expression. Expression is the dress of thought, and a thought / Appears more decent as more suitable in a noble language:

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 lastly Pope tells us about the virtue of restraint in literature:

The winged courser, like a generous horse,  
Shows most true mettel when you check in course.

### Analysis

Saintsbury says, “All Pope seems to have done is to take the arts of Horace, Vida and Boileau, to adopt as many principles as he understood, and as he could mould into his sharp antithetic couplets, to drag their historical illustrations, head and shoulders, into his scheme without caring for the facts, and to fill in their embroider with critical observations and precepts, sometimes very shrewd, almost always perfectly expressed, but far too often arbitrary, conventional and limited.” Regarded as a manual of the art of Pope’s own poetry, the *Essay* is not merely an interesting document but also a really valuable one. Its caution against the desertion of nature in the direction of excess, or the unduly fantastic, is sound to this day: and its eulogies of ancient writers, though perhaps neither based on very extensive and accurate first-hand knowledge, nor especially appropriate to the matter in hand, contain much that is just in itself.

While much of pope’s essay bemoans the abyss into which the current literary criticism has fallen, he does not by any means denounce the practice of criticism itself. While he cautions that the best poets make the best critics and while he recognizes that some critics are failed poets, he points out that both the best poetry and the best criticism are divinely inspired:

Both must alike from heaven derive their light,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write.

“The weakest point in ‘*The Essay*’ is the treatment of rules, licenses and faults,” writes Saintsbury. Pope admits that ‘it is possible to snatch beyond the rules of art’. By this admission he clearly says that the appreciation of rules is not inevitable. Again he says that he must criticize, “With the same spirit that the author writ”. In other words, the critic

must examine a poem under the light of the spirit which actuated its creation; if every artist is a law unto himself then we have no right to criticize an artist according to fixed rules. It means that application of fixed rules is not necessary, rather it implies that the rules are superfluous.

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### **7.6. PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE**

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Besides *Essay on Criticism*, *Preface to Shakespeare* is another critical work of Pope. This is an artistic rumination on the plays of Shakespeare and displays at once wisdom and folly, good sense and bad sense. Both are combined in Pope's criticism of Shakespeare. He left Dryden much behind who had said that it was a folly to judge Shakespeare by applying the rules of Greek masters. Pope recognizes Shakespeare's power over the passions, that Shakespeare's art is based on universal passions which have always moved mankind, and that he had intuitive knowledge of the world and that of human nature. His well-known remark about Shakespeare is very sensible: "To judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another country." But on the other hand he also commented that, "Shakespeare kept bad company, that he wrote to please the populace, that he resembles an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture, where many of the details are childish, ill paced and unequal to its grandeur." Such criticism is unfair and unjust, for we should not denounce Shakespeare or any other writer by the worst he has written. Rather one should judge him by the best produced by him. Nobody can be uniformly good, believes Homer, 'even good Homer nods at times.'

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### **7.7 SUMMING UP:**

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In this unit we discussed Pope as a critic who followed and modified the rules of classical according to the need of the age. Pope's position as a critic can be described fairly, as being a sort of compromise between the supposed followers of the ancients, and those who look on poetry as an expression of the general taste and caste of the thought of the time. He selects certain rules from the ancients according to his likes and dislikes. But these rules are not discovered through a first-hand reading in Aristotle, but at second hand from Boileau or at the most in Horace. The classics were very little studied in that age, at least by those who busied themselves most with modern literature. In this respect, Pope is no exception to his age. The rule of the ancient, not in their purity but in mutilated form, is all that he has to stand by. Sometimes he does break the rules but those moments are rare and of very short duration. What is unmistakable throughout is his wholehearted acceptance of the classical creed, though he makes allowance for certain unavoidable deviations there from.

**7.8 REFERENCES**

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**7.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss Pope as a Neo-Classical critic.
2. In the *Essay on Criticism* Pope sets out his standards both of literary creation and of critical practice.” Examine the statement with examples.
3. Discuss the concept of Nature in Neo-classical trends.
4. Throw light on some of the trends of Neo-classical criticism.
5. What is correctness and how did Pope elaborate it?
6. Bring out the salient ideas of *Essay on Criticism* in brief.

# SEMESTER II

**UNIT 1****AN INTRODUCTION TO ROMANTIC CRITICISM**

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1.1. Introduction

1.2. Objectives

1.3. Romantic Criticism: An Introduction

1.4. The Romantic Epistemology

1.5. The Romantic Theory of Art

1.5.1. Imagination

1.5.2. Inspiration

1.5.3. Organicism

1.5.4. Emotion and Intuition

1.6. Lyricism in Romantic Poetry

1.7. Some Modern Critics on Romanticism

1.8. Let Us Sum Up

1.9. References

1.10. Terminal and Model Questions

**1.1. INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous block you were given an insight into Neo Classical criticism. Neo Classicism was the revival of the classical style in literature. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the decorous imitation of the classical models started being viewed as mechanical, artificial and impersonal and slowly ebb out, giving way to a freedom of individual and self-expression. This was the beginning of Romanticism. In this block you will be reading about Romantic criticism. Romantic criticism posited a very different view of poetry, with focus on human subjectivity, spontaneity and imagination. In this Unit you will be acquainted with the origin and the salient features of Romantic literary criticism. The next two units will be dedicated to Wordsworth and Coleridge, the two most influential critics of the School of Romanticism. We will be discussing the major literary influences of their lives and see how these two stalwarts explored their own “imaginative truths.”

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**1.2. OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- Trace the origin and major influences of Romantic criticism
- Discuss the salient features of Romantic criticism
- Explain the meanings of some key terms associated with Romanticism

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**1.3. ROMANTIC CRITICISM: AN INTRODUCTION**

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A critical study of any literary work cannot be studied in isolation as it is influenced by a number of factors-social, cultural, political and the like. In the same vein, Romantic criticism cannot be understood in seclusion. In order to develop an insight into it, we need to understand its historical, political and cultural backgrounds as well. Thus, we begin this Unit with a brief introduction to Romanticism as an understanding of Romanticism will help you in comprehending Romantic criticism in a better manner.

Romanticism was a continental phenomenon that emerged in the 1790s. It has its roots in the reformatory French Revolution which stood for ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. As a movement, Romanticism began in France and Germany and later spread to other parts of Europe. According to Goethe, it originated in some discussions between him and Schiller. However, the movement owes its popularity to the German critic A.W. Schlegel and the French writer Madame de Stael. The term Romanticism was used for the first time by Thomas Carlyl with reference to the proto Romantic Movement, the Sturm and Drang (Storm and Stress) which focused on subjectivism and individualism. The “Sturm and Drang” movement laid the foundation of the German Romantic Movement and subsequently influenced other eminent writers like Rousseau, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft who trod the same path.

The term Romantic criticism applies to all critical activities that had been taking place around the middle of the eighteenth century. Romantic criticism, like Romanticism was a reaction against Neo Classicism, and refers to a particular style of writing which focuses on individualism, subjectivism, imagination and experimentation. It begins with the affirmation of individual worth and culminates in universal brotherhood. In diction too the Romantic critics prefer the primitive and the naturally spoken word over the formal and affected word.

Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, (1798), and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) are the pillars of Romantic criticism. However, most modern critics are of the opinion that Romanticism was a continental phenomenon and as Wordsworth's and Coleridge's works were only a continuum of the Aesthetic theories of seventeenth and eighteenth century German and English writers, should not be treated as watershed in literary criticism.

René Wellek explores the contributions of the great German philosophers like Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, F. W. J. Schelling and Novalis and acknowledges their influence on the English Romantics. All these great minds contributed in some way or the other in the shaping of the Romantic consciousness in England. For instance, from Novalis the English Romantics acquired the notion that "the poet was a member of a special breed, exalted beyond any other human being." Similarly, from Jochen Schulte-Sasse, the English Romantics picked up various elements of Romantic thought and developed them to suit the English temperament.

In his *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth came out with his much celebrated statement about poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". This statement echoes Wordsworth's sentiments about the nature and scope of poetry and blazed new trail for poetry and breathed freshness into the mimetic poetry of the Neo Classical age.

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#### **1.4. THE ROMANTIC EPISTEMOLOGY**

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The epistemology of the Romantic theory is quite different from the one that governs the mimetic or the imitative-rationalist one. The chief constituents that govern the Romantic epistemology are:

- the active projective view of human self or mind
- distrust of reason
- emphasis on individualism

The mimetic view of art is that the human mind is a passive recipient of the external impressions and has no role in modifying them. Plato uses the example of a mirror which reflects the external reality. Aristotle uses the example of human mind being like wax taking on the impression of signet ring. This analogy of human mind being akin to a

mirror and been seen a passive receptor continued from ancient times till the eighteenth century as it suited the empirical worldview of the age.

The mimetic view of man was that an individual was not important and was seen in relation to human race. Dr. Johnson expressed this view in the following words, “the business of the poet is to examine, not the individual but the species; ...” Furthermore, the Neo-classicists also attached great value to reason and considered it to be man’s “sole guide and saviour”. However, the Romantic theory of knowledge questions this view. For a Romantic, human mind was not a passive recipient but an active and projective element. The Romantics were of the view that man is an individual and autonomous entity whose mind has the potential of not only modifying what it receives but also has the capacity of recreating it. Thus, they focused on individualism and were totally against generalization. William Blake expressed his views regarding this in the following words, “To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To particularize is the lone distinction of merit.”

The Romantics including Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge renounced the conviction that any truth could be directly deduced logically and were of the notion that logic had a limited role in life and could not be regarded as an infallible guide. They believed in the power of intuition and chose it over reason as their guiding beacon. Furthermore, the Romantics also denounce John Locke’s analogy of comparing the human mind being to a *tabula rasa* or a blank slate. *Tabula rasa* is the epistemological theory that individuals are born without built-in mental content and that their knowledge comes from experience and perception. This idea was anathema to the Romantics who believed in the mysteries of the prenatal connections.

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### **1.5. THE ROMANTIC THEORY OF ART**

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The Romantics reject the view held by the Classicists that poetry is the art of imitation or at best interpretation and emphasises on the inner dimension of the individual artist. The Romantic or expressive theory of art states that poetry is first and foremost creation and that it is not governed by external forces as thought by the classicists and the pragmatic critics. It is determined by the inner impulse and creative imagination of the poet.

All the Romantics agree on the view that poetry is an expression of inner feelings, however, they differ on points of detail. For instance, for Wordsworth poetry was “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, for Coleridge “all fine arts are a revelation of the inner world of man”, Shelley defined poetry as “the expression of imagination” and Byron calls poetry “the lava of imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake.” The ideas of Imagination, Inspiration, Organicism and Emotion are central to the Romantic Theory of Art.

We will now be discussing these key ideas one by one. An understanding of these ideas will help you in understanding the Romantic Theory of Art in a better way.

### 1.5.1. IMAGINATION

In the eighteenth century, there was no room for creative Imagination in poetry and it was merely regarded as a mechanical exercise in which the poets followed certain rules laid down by their predecessors and any piece of poetry which violated the rules was looked down upon. However, with the coming of the Romantics, Imagination took centre stage in poetry. This was in stark contrast with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. The Romantics regarded imagination as “a mysterious creative faculty” that transcended reason. William Blake, who was also a great mystic, denies the existence of everything but Imagination and regards It to be Supreme. For him, Imagination is some divine power operating in the human mind. Blake rejects Plato’s theory of “knowledge as recollection and art as imitation.” In his *Preface* Wordsworth states:

Imagination in the sense of the word... has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.

This statement is in clear opposition to the mechanical view of Imagination held by the Neo Classicists of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth later writes:

..the Imagination also shapes and creates....by innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into Unity and dissolving and separating Unity into number... alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers.

Besides Wordsworth, other Romantic critics also recognise the importance of Imagination in poetry. Coleridge also recognises the importance of the role of Imagination in the creation of poetry and in his view Imagination is that creative power “which dissolves, diffuses and dissipates” in order to “recreate”. Coleridge also distinguishes between Imagination from Fancy. He calls Fancy “essentially mechanical” and something that “receives all its materials ready – made from the law of association”. Whereas, Imagination, he states is essentially creative. He advises the poets to “paint to the Imagination, not to the Fancy.”

Following the footsteps of the great Romantic masters like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats and Shelly also emphasize upon the importance of the role played Imagination in the creation of art. Shelley begins *A Defence of Poetry* by making a distinction between reason and Imagination. Like his predecessors, he also places Imagination above reason and defines poetry as ‘the expression of Imagination.’ Like Shelley, Keats also places Imagination on a higher pedestal and calls it to be “a surer guide to Truth than reason”. Furthermore, just like Blake, he sees Truth in the form of beauty which secures the place of Imagination as Supreme Reality. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats writes, “I am certain of nothing but the holiness of heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth....The Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream-he woke and found it Truth.”

The Romantics lay stress on the role played by Imagination in the process of creating poetry. The beauty of Wordsworth's poems like "Tintern Abbey" and "There was a Boy" lies in perceiving the world through the eyes of Imagination. In other words, Imagination transforms a mundane object into a haloed one. In the words of Coleridge, Imagination aims "to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." Coleridge further highlights the importance of Imagination in his poem "Dejection: An Ode". The poem is a dirge on the gradual loss of the poet's imaginative powers as a result of which he is unable to appreciate the beauty of Nature. He therefore concludes:

I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within  
O Lady! We receive but what we give,  
And in our life along does nature live  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

In the words of G.R. Malik, for the Romantics, Imagination "was an indefinable and mysterious faculty. Blake defies and Coleridge presents it as a human analogy of the divine act of creation" which links Imagination with Inspiration.

### **1.5.2. INSPIRATION**

Inspiration is another key concept of the Romantic Theory of Art. From times immemorial the poets have drawn inspiration from Gods. In the case of Greeks it was Apollo and the Muses who acted as sources of Inspiration for the poets, King David, composed psalms on being divinely inspired, in our tradition too, Goddess Saraswati is invoked before any literary quest is undertaken.

The following lines taken from the poem "Kubla Khan" give an excellent account of poetry written under divine inspiration:

Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'would win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle around him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of paradise.

Other Romantics like Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats also held the view that the meeting of the Muse and the poet results in inspired poetry.

### 1.5.3. ORGANICISM

Organicism is the doctrine that views everything in the cosmos holistically. Organicism plays a pivotal role in theories of Metaphysics, literature and life-sciences. In Romanticism, Organicism is often used as a synonymously with Holism. Organicism developed in Germany during the heydays of German Romanticism and later on proliferated into the English soil.

In literature, Organicism is the use or advocacy of literary or artistic forms in which the parts are connected or coordinated in the whole.

The Romantics did not just keep an organic view of life but also approached their works in a holistic manner. The Romantics saw their works as living entities and not just mechanical artefacts. Their focus was to create works of art that had the propensity for evolution unlike the Neo Classicists who focused on the outer more than the inner constituents of their works. Being an Organicist, William Blake rejects Edmund Burke's Theory of Art which dichotomizes between conception and execution. The Romantics often use metaphors from the plant and animal world to describe the Unity of a piece of art. For instance, Coleridge draws analogy between a plant which derives nutrition from sunshine, water and manure and a poem which draws on the various key components to attain growth.

### 1.5.4. EMOTION AND INTUITION

Emotions play a vital role in the development of Romantic thought. The Romantics wrote poetry through intuitions and instincts rather than reason and you will seldom find a piece of work which lacks in emotions. Emotions are those instinctive and intuitive feelings that the Romantics nurtured and which in turn guided them. In a letter to Southey, Coleridge compares the flow of emotions in a poem to the movement of breeze through the leaves and also points out to the presence of emotions harmonious blend a work of art while its absence leads to chaos.

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## 1.6. LYRICISM IN ROMANTIC POETRY

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The dominance of a genre in any period is determined by the spirit prevalent in that age. For example, as the Greeks considered gods to be Supreme and man a puppet of fate and attached utmost importance to external reality, drama, and in particular tragedy, became the highest form of art for them. Similarly, the realistic and mechanical viewpoint of the Neo classical age resulted in the development of genres such as epic, prose-satire, comedy of manners and long, didactic, verse essays. As Romanticism was a reaction against Classicism, the focus of the Romantics shifted from objectivity, form and artificiality to subjectivity, individualism and emotions. The Romantics saw the reality that lay outside man as a hurdle in man's freedom of expression and devoted all their energies in inculcating the qualities of the heart. William Blake rejected the Neo-classical verse-forms as 'fettered poetry', and was of the opinion that "fettered poetry fetters the human race." Similarly, Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is also considered to be the manifesto of freedom of expression as it lays emphasis on spontaneity, sincerity and

natural expression of feelings as opposed to the Classical standards of reason and intellect.

As Romanticism was all about personal feelings and emotions, the poetry form that suited the Romantic temperament the most was the lyric as lyric as a poetic form expresses intense personal emotions the best. It further stands in contrast to the narrative poetry and verse drama, both of which relate events in the form of a story. Sonnets, odes and elegies are some other important kinds of lyric poetry. The Romantics regarded lyric as the most poetic and the purest of all forms of poetry. The Romantics experimented with the lyric form to a great extent and in their hands it received an unprecedented freedom, flexibility and intensity. Romanticism is all about lyricism and it so dominated the Romantic age that its narrative poems and dramatic works are also characterized by it. However, lyricism interfered with the working of other literary forms and also with their narrative continuity and objectivity. It is for this reason that drama fared the worst in the Romantic age in spite of manifold theatrical opportunities that seemed available in the genre in the Age. As the Romantics was essentially lyrical in temperament, the plays written by the Romantics failed to be genuine dramatic works. Wordsworth's play *The Borderers*, Coleridge's *Remorse* and Keats's *Otho the Great* failed to carve a niche in the world of drama. Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain* and Shelly's *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* are dramatized poems but are wanting in real dramatic tension and conflict. Nonetheless, it was Shelly's play *The Cenci* that made a place for itself in the field of drama.

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### 1.7. VIEWS OF SOME MODERN CRITICS ON ROMANTICISM

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Listed below are the views of some prominent critics on Romanticism. These have been provided to you so that you have an idea of how Romanticism fared in Modernist and Postmodern critique.

Northrop Frye's endorsed Romanticism and his critical theory is essentially Romantic as it gives "primary place to Imagination and individual feelings." He was also of the view that Romanticism had "a healing energy or a conception of creativity that could unify the mental elements in the creative process." Frye gained international fame with his *Fearful Symmetry*, a reinterpretation of Blake. Frye's attempt to reinstate the Romantics was carried a step further, however, with some reservations, by the American critics of the Yale School like Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hills Miller and Paul de Man.

The American literary critic M.H. Abrams is well known for his work on Romanticism. His study of the Romantics in *The Mirror and the Lamp* is a landmark in many ways. In this book he expresses his view that "until the Romantics, literature was usually understood as a mirror, reflecting the real world, in some kind of mimesis; but for the Romantics, writing was more like a lamp; the light of the writers' inner soul spilled out to illuminate the world." Furthermore, Abrams used the phrase 'apocalypse of the Imagination' to describe the particular achievement of Romantic writing.

The works of contemporary scholars on the efficacy of Romantic literary theory suggests that many of the Romantic critics were far ahead of their times, and acted as archetypes

for the twentieth-century thinkers. One example is provided by Kathleen M. Wheeler, who states that “Coleridge's concept of polarity, of opposition, is in many ways anticipatory of Derrida's concept of difference ... for Coleridge, as for Derrida, relations and oppositions form the substances of experience.” Similarly, according to Eliot, “Wordsworth is really the first, in the unsettled state of affairs in his time, to annex new authority for the poet, to meddle with social affairs, and to offer a new kind of religious sentiment which it seemed the peculiar prerogative of the poet to interpret.”

However some of the modern day critics like F.R. Leavis and Cleanth Brooks do not hold the Romantics in high esteem and seriously question their contribution in literary history. Cleanth Brooks, went to the extent of declaring Shelley “too resilient to irony to function as a model for a new poetics.” Nonetheless, by and large, Romanticism continues to hold sway in the present times as the present time literature carries forward the legacy of the Romantics.

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### **1.8. LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit you have learned:

- the difference between Neo Classicism and Romanticism
- the salient features of Romanticism
- the key components of the Romantic Theory of Art
- the role of lyricism in Romantic poetry

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Write a note on the intellectual forces that helped in the shaping of Romanticism.
2. Write a note on Lyricism in Romantic Poetry
3. Write a short note on the Romantic Theory of Art.

### **ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Refer to Section no. 1.3.
1. Refer to Section 1.6
2. Refer to Section no. 1.5.

**8.9. REFERENCES**

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Malik, G.R. *Literary Criticism and Theory: Romantic Criticism* New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Open University. Print.

Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature* London, 1956. Indian Edition, Orient Longman, 11967). Print.

Nagarajan, M.S. *English Literary Criticism and Theory* Hyderabad, 2006. Orient Longman. Print.

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**1.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. In what ways was Romanticism different from Neo Classicism?
2. Are you a Romantic or a Classist by temperament? Give reasons for your answers.

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Objectives

2.3. Wordsworth on Poetry

2.4. Salient Features of Poetry According to Wordsworth

2.5. Wordsworth's Characterization of a Poet

2.6. The Value of Poetry

2.7. Poetic Diction

2.8. Coleridge's Views on Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction

2.9. Let Us Sum Up

2.10. Answers to Check Your Progress

2.11. References

2.12. Terminal and Model Questions

**2.1. INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous Unit you were introduced to Romantic criticism. You read the general characteristics of Romanticism and saw how it stood in contrast to Classicism. You were also introduced to the Romantic Theory of Art and saw the role played by Intuition, Imagination and Inspiration in the shaping of Romantic thinking.

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**2.2. OBJECTIVES**

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In this Unit we shall discuss some of the main aspects of Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry with reference to his seminal work *Lyrical Ballads*. Besides this, in this Unit we will also be discussing Wordsworth's views on the concept of poetry and poetic diction and Coleridge's estimate of Wordsworth as a poet.

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**2.3. WORDSWORTH ON POETRY**

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Wordsworth was primarily a poet and is chiefly remembered as one. His contribution as a literary critic may be slender yet it is a significant one. Before the Romantics, poetry conformed to rules set by the classicists and was judged on the same parameters. It mainly focused on rules, forms and outward appearance which resulted in rigidity and artificiality. It was Wordsworth who for the first time doctored the soul of poetry and breathed freshness and substance to it. His *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is hailed as the unofficial manifesto of the English Romantic Movement and continues to inspire the poets of the present time as well.

Wordsworth discusses his views on poetry and the poetic diction in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. In the previous unit we read that Wordsworth built his theory as a reaction against the affectedness and rigidity of the poetry of the eighteenth century poetry. He disapproves of the Neo Classical Theory of Poetry which arranges different kinds of literature in a hierarchy, each with its own appropriate subject matter and also the elevated poetic diction which he considered to be artificial and rigid.

Wordsworth came out with his three seminal critical works within a span of seventeen years, i.e. between 1798 and 1815. His *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800 and 1802), the three-part *Essay upon Epitaphs* (1810) and the prefaces to *The Excursion* (1814) and to the *Poems* (1815) are three landmark books that have had a tremendous influence in English literary criticism.

The *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is Wordsworth's most celebrated critical work. It is an essay composed by Wordsworth for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. It is regarded as the most genuine expression of ideas of English Romanticism. In the words of M.S. Nagarajan, "We see that Wordsworth in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) speaks as a representative man speaking to his fellow subjects." As Wordsworth is the poet of common people, he chooses themes and situations from "humble and rustic life" and expresses them "in a selection of language really used by men." However, in order to

provide colour to his writing, he adds the element of Imagination and “to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature chiefly as regard the matter in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.” (438) Wordsworth, like his fellow Romantics, emphasised on the importance of Imagination in the process of poetic creation as he believed that it had the power to transform the mundane.

Wordsworth was also of the opinion that poetry should deal with the “essential passions of the heart”. It is for this reason he selects the language and the experiences of the rustic and the common people as in his view the rustic and the humble “constantly communicate with the best objects in the world of Nature from which the best part of the language is originally derived” and should be represented in poetry. In this way, Wordsworth is pitted against the Neo Classical poets for whom poetry was all about affectation and grandeur.

In the *Preface* Wordsworth says:

...all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: but 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, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feelings are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.

Wordsworth, in a later passage of the *Preface* modifies his idea further when he writes,

I have said poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. Hence two things are to be observed: spontaneity and powerful feeling. The one ensures unhindered experience of the other an energy which conveys feeling spontaneity.

The emphasis in this statement is on the spontaneous overflow of emotions. Moreover, the role played by the rational mind is also highlighted as emotions are continually directed by thoughts as well. Wordsworth, as a poet himself let emotions settle and mellow down in the mind until they were ready for delivery.

For Wordsworth, poetry was not merely an intellectual activity. It was all about personal feeling and not mere craftsmanship as thought by the Classists. For him substance was more important than form. In his “*Essay Supplementary to the Preface*” (1815 edition),

Wordsworth wrote that poetry is “the reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the Imagination”. Such poetry has a sensitizing effect and possesses the power to transform man.

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**2.4. SALIENT FEATURES OF POETRY ACCORDING TO WORDSWORTH**

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**1. Rejection of the Neoclassical Form of Poetry:**

Wordsworth casts off the artificial and rigid Aristotelian doctrine which was adopted by the Neo classical poets of the eighteenth century. He urged the poets to associate themselves with real life and real people. He loathed the “gaudiness and inane phraseology” of the eighteenth century writers and derides the poets who, “separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.”

**2. Stress on Simplicity:**

Wordsworth rejected the affectedness of eighteenth century poetry and advocated simplicity both in theme and treatment. As mentioned earlier, he chose subjects from “humble and rustic life” and used the language of common men for he believed that the language of the lower and middle class could express the fundamentals of human nature. Wordsworth was not one of those poets who would sit alone in his ivory tower and write high flown poetry. In his view a poet “must come out into the light of common day, share in the joys and sorrows of common men and women, and write for their pleasure.” His poem like “Lucy” and “The Leach Gatherers”, “The Reverie of Poor Susan” and “Michael” highlight the virtues of simple village folks. However, this view expressed by Wordsworth brings him under scrutiny. For instance, Scott-James lashes out at Wordsworth when he says that “the flesh and blood of a rustic is not more human than the flesh and blood of a townsman, and his emotions are not more profound” and reproaches him for focusing only on the rural folks for by doing so Wordsworth narrows down his range as he tends to exclude many essential elements of human experience which are beyond the purview of a “rustic and humble life.”

**3. Focus on Thought:**

Wordsworth is considered to be the first English critic who considered the nature of poetry as a creative process. Besides laying stress on Spontaneity, Intuition, Imagination, Inspiration, Idealism and Individuality, he also laid stress on the element of thought in the process of creating poetry. In his words, “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, had also thought long and deeply.” Accordingly, to Wordsworth, the poetic process is a complex one and poetry of highest degree cannot be produced without serious contemplation.

#### 4. Focus on Imagination:

Wordsworth regards Imagination as “a mysterious creative faculty” which transcends reason. William Wordsworth like fellow Romantic William Blake regarded Imagination to be Supreme. For both the poets, Imagination was something divine operating in the human mind. According to the Romantics, Imagination is a pre-requisite for any kind of creation. In his ‘Preface’ Wordsworth states,

Imagination in the sense of the word as giving title to class of the following poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.

#### 5. Poetry as a source of Pleasure:

Wordsworth goes against the Neo Classical view that poetry should both instruct and delight, as he believes that the function of poetry is to give pleasure of a noble and exalted kind, pleasure which results from understanding and sympathy. If, at all, it instructs, it should do it indirectly, by purifying one’s emotions, uplifting the soul, and bringing one nearer to Nature.

#### 6. Organicism:

Organicism is another key constituent of Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry. Organicism is synonymous with Holism as it too views the entire cosmos as a whole and considers that its functioning cannot be fully understood in the study of its component parts separately. Wordsworth speaks of his work of art being an organic whole. It is through most of the characters of Wordsworth’s poems in *Lyrical Ballads* that one can perceive the oneness between their world and Nature. They celebrate harmony of man with Nature. Poems like “Idiot Boy” and “We are Seven” “Tintern Abbey” besides taking up the theme of Organicism, shed light on the mysterious connection between man and Nature.

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### 2.5. WORDSWORTH’S CHARACTERIZATION OF A POET

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According to Wordsworth, the poet is not just another ordinary human being. He is “an uncommon man, gifted in many ways and in some ways superior to the common folk”. He does not merely present facts but writes with the “necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man.” He further characterises poet as an extremely sensitive man “endued with more than lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the going-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.”

This quality enables a poet to experience the emotions of himself as well as of others. In this regard he says that “the poet’s main qualifications are not in matters of craft or technique; he is a poet because his feelings allow him to enter into the lives of others and to translate passions into words that please.”

Thus, the poet is a social being with a responsibility. He is a man who is capable of voicing the experiences of others with lucidity and at times by blending his own feelings with that of the character’s. Wordsworth writes “Every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing.” Wordsworth also believed that a poet is gifted with an extraordinarily strong Imagination so that “he is affected by absent things as if they were present.” Wordsworth also sees the poet as a profound thinker who possesses more than usual “organic sensibility”. Wordsworth was of the opinion that a good poet should possess both thought and feeling as they complement each other.

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## **2.6. THE VALUE OF POETRY**

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In the earlier section of this Unit you read that Wordsworth gave due importance to the subject of poetry. For him poetry was not just about form as seen by the Classicists, but an organic composition which had the capacity of stirring up the emotions of the reader, leaving him a transformed being. Wordsworth was aware that the poet’s medium is language and that ‘language and human mind act and react on each other.’ Wordsworth was strictly against the Neo Classical poets who gave importance to diction at the cost of substance. Furthermore, Wordsworth says that the poet’s art is the acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe. The value of poetry lies in the fact as ‘it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure’. Wordsworth says that for an Anatomist no matter how ‘painful the object is with which Anatomist’s knowledge is connected, he feels his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge’. For Wordsworth man and nature are adapted to each other, and the ‘mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature and thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies converses with general nature.’ Wordsworth says that although both the man of science and the poet, are always on a quest for truth, the difference lies in the fact that ‘a man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude whereas the poet sings a song in which the whole of mankind joins him and rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion’. Thus, the value of poetry lies in the fact that it facilitates the entire mankind to comprehend truth and knowledge.

Further, Wordsworth says that the value of poetry lies in the fact that it is ‘the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge’ and is ‘the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science’. He says that “poetry, in spite of the geographical, climatic, linguistic and customary differences, binds together everything that is violently destroyed.” Thus, poetry is instrumental in bringing together the entire human society. For Wordsworth, poetry is the “first and last of all knowledge- it is as immortal as the heart of man”. Wordsworth further says that ‘If the time should ever come when what is now

called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.” Thus, Wordsworth traces the spiritual element of poetry and places it above science and reason. In his view poetry is of immense importance for the spiritual elevation of human race. Nonetheless, he does not consider science as the enemy of poetry but complementary to it.

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## 2.7. POETIC DICTION

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In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth also puts forward his views on diction. Ever since its publication, the *Preface* has been a much debated and criticized section of the book. On a careful examination of the title of this book, we can observe that the title *Lyrical Ballads* is an oxymoron. Whereas, on the one hand, the *Preface* speaks of the book being a lyric with high classical and cultural associations, presenting the emotions of the speaker, on the other hand, it also declares the book a ballad, a narrative folk song. It has a fixed form and meter with alternating lines of four and three syllables, with rhyming alternate lines.

The book was part of an experiment in which the two poets chose songs of common people but elevated them into a new subjective and sophisticated poetic form.

Wordsworth in his ‘Essay on Epitaph’ wrote that “language is not the dress of thought but its incarnation.” In Wordsworth’s opinion each poet experiences things in a unique way because of which his way of expression is different from others. Therefore, there is no prescribed poetic style that the poets can follow. Wordsworth laments the fact that his predecessors talked of a general poetic diction characterized by known stylistic devices and figures of speech. According to Wordsworth the Neo Classical poets considered their style as “infallible”; however, their style was formal and quite rigid and full of artificiality. Whereas, Thomas Gray was of the view that ‘the language of the age is never the language of the poetry’ and John Dryden considered the language of the king and his courtiers to be the best, Wordsworth rejected these principles and held them to be affected and stagnant. He declared that in place of the artificial stereotyped poetic diction practised by the Neo Classical poets he would prefer to use the language of middle and lower class people for their language, like their way of living, is “most natural and free from all artificiality.” T.S. Eliot, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, has pointed out that “Wordsworth’s rejection of the aristocratic language was motivated by democratic impulses.” Wordsworth was not averse to using metaphors and figures of speech in a poem but believed that they should be blended properly in the poem and should not just serve as ornaments.

In Wordsworth’s view, “If the poet’s subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures.” Thus, in saying that poetry should be in the language of rustic people, he meant that poetry should be free from the hackneyed artificial poetic diction as it was seen in the

preceding age. Wordsworth was in favour of direct language and opposed the “giddy and inane phraseology” of the classists. For instance, Wordsworth preferred to call a fish a fish instead of calling it “a member of the finny tribe”, as the classists did.

In Wordsworth’s selection of the language of common men and women, we can also witness his democratic outlook. You know that the French Revolution had a profound influence on the thinking of the Romantics, in particular, on Wordsworth’s. For Wordsworth, the *Preface* was an expression of his ideas of freedom, democracy and experimentation. Moreover, to put it in his own words, he wanted to get away from “the inane and giddy phraseology of existing poetry.” However, we must keep in mind that Wordsworth selected the real language of ordinary men and women in a state of “vivid sensation”, which means that he was not just talking of the ordinary uninspired speech of the common people, but focused on the language used by them when they are seized by powerful feelings. As Wordsworth chose this new subject matter, it was natural that a new language was needed to express this new subject matter which marked a turning point in English literature.

Furthermore, Wordsworth was a democratic poet, much influenced by the French Revolution, and was of the view that the poets should not just write for themselves but for the entire humankind. In order to arouse real sympathy for ordinary people, the poet “must descend from his lofty mountain” and express himself in their language. However, in the entire discussion one must always keep this in mind that Wordsworth did not oppose the use of meter in poetry altogether. In his view “the use of meter helps to restrain the powerful emotions aroused by the subject matter.” Wordsworth writes that the “more pathetic situations and sentiments which have a greater amount of pain connected with them may be better endured in metrical compositions than in prose.” Hence, justifying the use of verse in poetry.

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## 2.8. COLERIDGE’S VIEWS ON WORDSWORTH’S THEORY OF DICTION

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Wordsworth and Coleridge are often discussed together. Not only were they great friends but they also collaborated together in the most celebrated Romantic critical work *Lyrical Ballads*. It would be interesting to note that this slim volume of poetry that came out in two editions was taken out to make a bit of cash for the Wordsworths, William and Dorothy, who had planned a trip to Germany with Coleridge. Coming back to Coleridge’s view on Wordsworth, Coleridge considered Wordsworth to be the greatest poet of his age. In a letter he wrote that Wordsworth was the only man “to whom at all time and in all moods of excellence I feel myself inferior”. In yet another letter he writes, “I feel myself a little man by his side”. As a poet, he found Wordsworth’s greatness in “the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the subjects observed; and above all the original fight of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations.”

In spite of this reverence Coleridge had for Wordsworth, the two poets were radically different from each other in their creative powers and perception of poetry. Coleridge has

a poetic diction unlike that of Wordsworth and relies more heavily on Imagination for poetic inspiration. He also incorporates religion into his poetry as a result of which Coleridge's poetry is said to complicate experiences whereas Wordsworth views as very simple and very commonplace. Although Coleridge endorsed Wordsworth's views on poetic diction in the beginning, but later found many faults with it. Coleridge was of the view that Wordsworth was fully justified in his criticism of the artificiality and unnaturalness of a poetic diction which hindered rather than helping in capturing the creative impulses of the poet's experience. However, he disagrees with Wordsworth view that the language of poetry should be "the language of natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings."

Wordsworth chooses the language of low and rustic people because he considered their language simple and natural, having the capacity to voice the emotions of entire humankind. Furthermore, Wordsworth did not make any distinction between the language of prose and poetry. Coleridge as a critic objected to these two views, and also to some other views expressed by Wordsworth for the reasons which he elaborates as follows:

As regards the first statement, i.e. the choice of rustic characters and life, Coleridge points out, first, that not all of Wordsworth's characters are rustic. Characters in poems like "Ruth", "The Brothers", are not low and rustic. Secondly, their language and sentiments do not necessarily arise from their occupation. According to Coleridge, even if these characters would have dwelt in the city away from Nature they would have similar sentiments and language. In the opinion of Coleridge, "a man will not be benefited from a life in rural solitudes unless he has natural sensibility and suitable education. In the absence of these advantages, the mind dulls and a man grows, 'selfish, sensual, gross and hard hearted'."

With reference to the second statement made by Wordsworth, Coleridge objects to the view that the best part of language is derived from the objects with which the rustic communicate on a daily basis. According to him, "First, communication with an object implies reflection on it and the richness of vocabulary arises from such reflection." However, the rural conditions of life do not require any reflection; for this reason the vocabulary of the rustics is poor. They are only capable of expressing limited emotions as their vocabulary is limited. Coleridge was also of the opinion that the best part, of a man's language does not result merely from communication with nature, but from education, for education ennoble the mind and is instrumental in shaping new thoughts and ideals. Furthermore Coleridge avers that whatever is expressed by the rustics is not derived from nature, but from The Bible and from the sermons of noble and inspired preachers. Wordsworth asserts that the language of poetry is "A selection of the real language used by men and that that there was no essential difference between the language of prose and poetry". However, to this Coleridge retorts that "Every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings." "This means that every man's language has, first, its individual peculiarities; secondly, the properties common to his class: and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use. Thus, no two men of the same class or of different classes speak alike, although both use words and phrases common to them all, because in the one case their natures are different and on the other their classes are different."

To Wordsworth's argument about having no essential difference between the language of poetry and prose, Coleridge replies that there ought to be, an essential difference between both the languages and gives a number of reasons to support his view. According to Coleridge, "First, language is both a matter and the arrangement of words. Words both in prose and poetry may be the same but their arrangement is different. This difference arises from the fact that the poetry uses metre and meter requires a different arrangement of words." For Coleridge, metre is not a "mere superficial decoration", but an essential "organic" part of a poem. He believed that even the metaphors and similes used by a poet were different from the ones used in prose. Hence, there is bound to be an 'essential' difference between the arrangement of words of poetry and prose. He argues that there is this difference even in those poems of Wordsworth which are considered most "Wordsworthian". Furthermore, Coleridge was of the opinion that the language of prose and poetry are not identical and so they cannot always be interchangeable. Thus, Coleridge refutes Wordsworth's views on the themes and language of poetry.

Despite the fact that Coleridge was critical of Wordsworth's views on his Theory of Poetry, the two were great friends and collaborators. The critic Francis Geoffrey, said of to these two veterans that irrespective of their differences Wordsworth and Coleridge stood for "brotherhood", thus living by the motto of the French Revolution, the movement that formed the bedrock of his thought.

The *Preface* was well appreciated by most of the critics for its democratic ideas, direct and plain style, and persuasive manner. However, at places the text seems rather disorganized and loose in the presentation of ideas. Most of the critics are of the opinion that Wordsworth often returns to the same concern and gives different if not contradictory ideas on the same matter. However, in spite of its many shortcomings Wordsworth's Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* made an outstanding contribution to literary criticism. Wordsworth became a source of inspiration for the poets of the coming generations. Keats, Shelley and Byron in his early years sought inspiration from him. William Hazlitt compared the *Preface* to the "dawning of spring."

The achievement of Wordsworth as a critic can be summed up in the following words of Rene Wellek:

Wordsworth... holds a position in the history of criticism which must be called ambiguous or transitional. He inherited from Neo-Classicism a theory of the imitation of nature to which he gives, however, a specific social twist: he inherited from the 18th century a view of poetry as passion and emotion which he again modified by his description of the poetic process as "recollection in tranquillity". He takes up rhetorical ideas about the effect of poetry but extends and amplifies them into a theory of the social effects of literature, binding society in a spirit of love. But he also adopts, in order to meet the exigencies of his mystical experiences, a theory of poetry in which Imagination holds the central place as a power of unification and ultimate insight into the Unity of the world. Though Wordsworth left wily a small body of criticism, it is rich in survivals, suggestions, anticipations and personal insights.

**2.9. LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit you have learned about:

- Salient features of Wordsworth's poetry
- Wordsworth's views on poetry and poetic diction
- Coleridge's views on Wordsworth's Theory of Diction.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. In which year was *Lyrical Ballads* published?
2. *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* became the unofficial manifesto of a literary movement. Name the Movement.
3. Which historic event helped in shaping Wordsworth's ideas as a critic?
4. Name the poet with whom Wordsworth collaborated in *Lyrical Ballads*?

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**2.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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- A1. 1798
- A2. The English Romantic Movement
- A3. The French Revolution
- A4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Note: To know the answers of question numbers 5 & 6, please refer to the relevant sections.

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**2.11. REFERENCES**

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- BBC Radio 4, In Our Time, Melvyn Bragg and his guests on *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge

**2.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS:**

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1. Give an estimate of Wordsworth as a critic in your own words.
2. According to Wordsworth, what are the characteristics of a poet?
3. What are Wordsworth's views on poetic diction?
4. In what ways do Wordsworth and Coleridge differ in their views on poetic diction?

3.1. Introduction

3.2. Objectives

3.3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a Literary Critic

3.4. The German Inspiration

3.5. Coleridge's Theory of Fancy and Imagination

3.6. Coleridge's views on Poetry and The Poet

3.7. A Comparison between Wordsworth and Coleridge as Critics

3.8. Coleridge's contribution in the Field of Romantic Criticism

3.9. Summary

3.10. References

3.11. Terminal and Model Questions

**3.1. INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous two Units you were introduced to Romantic criticism and Wordsworth as a literary critic respectively. You saw how the Romantic Movement emphasised on individual freedom and autonomy. Romantic criticism shifted the focus of literature from form, artificiality, rigidity and objectivity to freedom, individualism, emotions and spontaneity. You were also introduced to Wordsworth and his theory of poetic diction. In this Unit you shall be introduced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was not only Wordsworth's friend and collaborator but also a great Romantic poet and critic.

In this Unit we shall be discussing Coleridge's view on poetry with special reference to his Theory of Imagination.

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**3.2. OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between:
  - (i) Fancy and Imagination
  - (ii) Primary Imagination and Secondary Imagination
- Compare and contrast Wordsworth and Coleridge as critics
- Appreciate Coleridge's contribution in the field of literary criticism

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**3.3. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE AS A LITERARY CRITIC**

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Coleridge's reputation as a critic mainly rests on his seminal critical work *Biographia Literaria*. *Biographia Literaria* was the only critical work which was published during Coleridge's lifetime. Besides *Biographia Literaria*, he also delivered seven major lectures on criticism of which just three survive. It was Coleridge's endeavour to establish the principles of writing and throughout his life he engaged himself in establishing these principles of writing rather than furnishing the rules on passing judgement on what had been written by others."

Coleridge occupies a prestigious place among English literary critics. Saintsbury admires him and rates him with Aristotle and Longinus. He praises him in the following words, "Coleridge is the critical author to be turned over by day and by night...Begin with him, continue with him, come back to him after an excursion, with a certainty of suggestion, stimulation, correction edification." (341)

As mentioned in the previous two Units, Romanticism was a continental phenomenon and was first propounded by German philosophers like Schelling, Schlegel, Fichte. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge were profoundly influenced by these philosophers so much so that he has often been charged with plagiarism. Coleridge too acknowledges the

influence, especially that of Schelling and Schegel and proclaims to be ‘a High German Transcendentalist’ himself.

Let us now examine his major critical work *Biographia Literaria*, a book which Coleridge describes as ‘the least of what I have written concerns myself personally.’ Ever since its publication the book has both fascinated and annoyed the readers. The ambivalent quality of the book is best described by Symons as “ *Biographia Literaria* is the greatest book of criticism in English, and one of the most annoying in any language.”

Coleridge began *Biographia Literaria* as a literary autobiography but ended up in discussions about Kant, Schelling and Coleridge’s perspective criticism of Wordsworth’s poetry and a comprehensive statement on creative Imagination which comprises his most important contribution to literary criticism and theory. Coleridge has attempted a passionate and awe-inspiring work on Aesthetics, its philosophical foundations and its practical application. His work has been a source of inspiration for critic of all shades and ages. However, the book, as has already been told, had its share of criticism, beginning with Coleridge himself who ironically referred to the book as an ‘immethodical miscellany’ and a ‘semi-narrative’ (B.L. i 64, 110). T. S. Eliot saw in the book a ‘state of lethargy’ produced by ‘the disastrous effects of long dissipation and stupefaction of (Coleridge’s) powers in transcendental metaphysics’. The book, nonetheless, has great value when it comes to modern criticism. The whole of Coleridge’s views on Aesthetics, his definition of poetry, his idea of the poet and his poetical criticism revolves around his Theory of creative Imagination. From this point of view Chapters XIII and XIV of *Biographia Literaria* are most significant. In 1834, Thomas De Quincey declared, “I can assert, upon my long and intimate knowledge of Coleridge’s mind, that logic, the most severe, was as inalienable from his modes of thinking, as grammar from his language.” Let us now take a look at Coleridge’s Theory of Fancy and Imagination.

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### **3.4. THE GERMAN INSPIRATION**

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In the beginning of the Unit on Romantic Criticism you were briefed that Romanticism was a continental phenomenon which originated in Germany and influenced the Romantic writers immensely. Coleridge being no exception to it. As a matter of fact, the German influence on Coleridge was so strong that he echoed the emotions of the German philosophers especially Schelling and Kant. Coleridge owes his literary obligation to Lessing, Schiller and his philosophical obligation to Kant, Fichte, and Schelling.

Coleridge freely derives a number of his key terms and distinctions from German thought. He borrows from German thought “the conception of the ideas that views all experience as not merely general notions, but as form of mental image or impression.” Another idea which is by and large German in origin is that “the symbol and the mind both participate in common spiritual life and that the experience of the beautiful is a consequence of this participation.”

Coleridge's biggest philosophic influence is Kant. Coleridge recognizes the Kantian distinction between Reason and Understanding and this distinction is the foundation of his speculation on the nature of Fancy and Imagination.

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### 3.5. COLERIDGE'S THEORY OF FANCY AND IMAGINATION

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In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge discusses the Theory of Imagination which he based on the distinction between Fancy and Imagination. He points out to this distinction in chapter IV of *Biographia Literaria* when he says, "Repeated meditations led me first to suspect ...that fancy and Imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power." Coleridge distinguishes between Fancy and Imagination by calling Fancy as something "mechanical" and "determined by the law of association", something which merely assembles and juxtaposes images without transforming them. Whereas, Imagination modifies and shapes the images into a new whole. Thus, in Kantian terms, we can say that it is not just a "reproductive faculty" but is also has creative powers.

Coleridge distinguishes between the two in the following words:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The Primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The Secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

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

Later, John Ruskin in his *Modern Painters* also elaborated upon this concept and explained the difference between the two in the following words, "The Fancy sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail. The Imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail." (Vol. 2, Section 2, Chapter 3).

After distinguishing between Fancy and Imagination, Coleridge subdivides Imagination into Primary and Secondary Imagination. In his words, "The Primary Imagination I hold

to be the living power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.”

Thus, according to Coleridge, Primary Imagination is merely the power of receiving impressions of the external world through the senses, the power of perceiving the objects of sense, both in their parts and as a whole. It is a spontaneous act of the mind; the human mind receives impressions and sensations from the outside world, unconsciously and involuntarily, imposes some sort of order on those impressions, reduces them to shape and size, so that the mind is able form a clear image of the outside world. This develops a clear insight. Primary Imagination is universal, it is possessed by all.

The Secondary Imagination is a peculiar trait of the artist. However, it may be possessed by others also. It is the Secondary Imagination which makes artistic creation possible. Secondary Imagination is more active and conscious; it requires an effort of the will, volition and conscious effort. It works upon its raw material that are the sensations and impressions supplied to it by the Primary Imagination. By an effort of the will and the intellect the Secondary Imagination selects and orders the raw material and re-shapes and re-models it into objects of beauty. It is the ‘esemplastic’ power which is the power that unifies and results from knowledge, experience and intuition. The Secondary Imagination is the basis of poetic activity. It is the power which harmonizes and reconciles opposites. Coleridge calls it “a magical, synthetic power”. This unifying power is best seen in the fact that it synthesizes or fuses the various faculties of the soul- perception, intellect, will, emotion- and fuses the internal with the external, the subjective with the objective, the human mind with external nature, the spiritual with the physical. Through this unifying power, “nature is coloured by the soul of the poet, and soul of the poet is steeped in nature.” “The identity” which the poet discovers in man and nature results from the synthesizing activity of the Secondary Imagination.

The Primary and Secondary Imaginations do not differ from each other in kind. The difference between them is one in degrees. The Secondary Imagination is more active, more a result of will, more conscious and more voluntary than the primary one. The Primary Imagination is universal while the secondary is a peculiar privilege enjoyed by the artist.

Imagination and Fancy, however, differ in kind. Fancy is not a creative power at all. It only combines what is perceived into beautiful shapes, but like the Imagination, it does not fuse and unify. The difference between the two is the same as the difference between a mechanical mixture and a chemical compound. In a mechanical mixture, a number of ingredients are brought together. They are mixed up, but they do not lose their individual properties. In a chemical compound, the different ingredients combine to lose their separate identities and form something new. A compound is an act of creation; while a mixture is merely a bringing together of a number of separate elements.

Thus, Imagination creates new shapes and forms of beauty by fusing and unifying the different impressions it receive from the external world. Fancy is not creative. It is a kind of memory; it randomly brings together images, and even when brought together, they continue to retain their separate and individual properties. They receive no colouring or

modifications from the mind. It is merely mechanical juxtaposition and not a chemical fusion. Coleridge explains the point by quoting two passages from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. The following lines from this poem serve to illustrate Fancy:

Full gently now she takes him by the hand  
A lily prisoned on a goal of snow  
Or ivory in an alabaster band  
So white a friend engirds so white a foe.

In these lines image are drawn from memory, but they do not interpenetrate into one another. The following lines from the same poem illustrate the power and function of Imagination:

Look how a bright star shooteth from the sky  
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

For Coleridge, "Fancy is the drapery of poetic genius but Imagination is its very soul which forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."

Coleridge owed his interest in the study of Imagination to Wordsworth. But Wordsworth was interested only in the practise of poetry and he considered only the impact of Imagination on poetry; Coleridge, on the other hand, is interested in the Theory of Imagination. He is the first critic to study the nature of Imagination and examine its role in creative activity. Secondly, while Wordsworth uses Fancy and Imagination almost as synonyms, Coleridge is the first critic who not only differentiates between Fancy and Imagination but also distinguishes between the Primary and Secondary Imaginations. Coleridge's treatment of the subject is, on the whole, characterized by greater depth and philosophical subtlety which is his unique contribution to literary theory.

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### 3.6. COLERIDGE'S VIEWS ON POETRY AND THE POET

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Coleridge's perception of poetry is very different from that of Wordsworth's. Coleridge points out to this difference between his contributions and those of Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads*. He writes, "my endeavours would be directed to persons and characters supernatural- Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand,...gives charm of the novelty to things of everyday" (*Biographia Literaria*, ch. xiv). It proves that Coleridge's idea of poetry was different from that of Wordsworth's. Wordsworth even criticized some of Coleridge's stylistic approaches and this proves that Coleridge developed and approved of a poetic diction different from that of Wordsworth's. Wordsworth says of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, "The poem of my friend has indeed great defects," and that "the principle person has no character... (the mariner) does not act, but is continually acted upon....the events have no necessary connection".

Coleridge's definition of poetry and the poet arises from his views on Imagination. To him Imagination is vital to poetry and central to poetic style. He believes that high quality poetry is the result of Imagination being involved in the process of creating poetry. Coleridge first makes a distinction between 'poetry' and 'poem'. Poetry is a term which is

used widely and covers most of the forms of arts whose primary task is to impart pleasure through the medium of beauty. In his essay entitled *On the Principles of General Criticism* (*Biographia Literaria*), he writes:

All the fine arts are different species of poetry.... They admit, therefore, of a natural division into poetry of language (poetry in the emphatic sense, because less subject to the accidents and limitation of time and space); poetry of the ear, or music; and the poetry of the eye, which is again divided into plastic poetry or statuary and a graphic poetry or painting. The common essence of all consists in the excitement of emotion for the immediate purpose of pleasure through the medium of beauty; herein contradistinguishing poetry from science, the immediate object and primary purpose of which is truth and possible utility.

Coleridge has no reservations in including even unrhymed imaginative writing as poetry. ‘The writings of Plato and Bishop Taylor, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without meter...The first chapter of Isaiah (indeed a very long portion of the whole book) is poetry in the most emphatic sense’. This is in contrast with Wordsworth’s views on the subject. Wordsworth advocates verse as the appropriate medium of poetry. The question arises as to how can one distinguish this type of poetry from poem proper? To this Coleridge says that the poem proper combines the same elements, as are found in imaginative prose compositions, in a different manner because it aims at a different object. At times, the object may be merely to aid recollection as in ‘Thirty Days Hath September’. Sometimes the purpose may be higher like the communication of truth and such communication may delight but the delight produced in this manner is not the immediate end, but is indirectly obtained while pleasure is the immediate end of poetry.

At times, pleasure may be the immediate end of a work not metrically composed. In that case will the addition of rhyme allow these works to be called poems? The answer is that nothing can permanently delight, which does not contain in itself the reason why is it so and not otherwise. Coleridge defends meter and is of the opinion that “if meter is added, then all other parts should be made constant with it.” However, he also states that meter must be organic and not a mere ornament. According to Coleridge, a poem is “that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth: and from all other species (having this object in common with it ) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as it is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part” (479). Coleridge calls such a poem a legitimate poem, “the parts of which mutually support and explain each other.” He further states that such “Organicism” is a result of a corresponding organic process whose source is none other than the poet. For Coleridge, there was no distinction between the poet and poetry and he considered both the same.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their worth of dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of Unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of Imagination.

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**3.7. A COMPARISON OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE AS CRITICS**

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Although we associate both Wordsworth and Coleridge with Romantic criticism and both were good friends too who collaborated with each other on the production of *Lyrical Ballads*, but the two had creative differences. In this section we will be shedding light on these differences that shed them apart from each other.

Firstly, Wordsworth's range is limited in scope as he confined himself to humble and primitive subjects and diction. Coleridge, on the other hand has a vast range. He was more philosophical and there is more scope for formal concerns like shape, form and embodiment and for that reason he is often called a "system builder".

In the Preface Wordsworth says that he "chooses incidents and situations from common life" and in doing so he selects language used by ordinary men for Wordsworth felt that such a language had a number of advantages. According to Wordsworth, the simple rustic language is charged with emotions and passions and such a language communicates essential truths of human life in a much better way. On the other hand, Coleridge's view on poetic diction was different. He did not approve of Wordsworth's concept of poetic diction. He pointed out, "first, that a language so selected and purified, as Wordsworth suggests, would differ in no way from the language of any other men of common sense. After such a selection there would be no difference between the rustic language used by men in other walks of life."

Furthermore, Wordsworth advocates the use of meter, i.e. a particular order and arrangement of words which alters the arrangement of words in poetry and makes it different from that of prose. This difference in poetic language is also evident in the poetry of Wordsworth also. Therefore, Coleridge concludes that there is, and ought to be, an essential difference between the language of prose and poetry.

Coleridge was also of the opinion that the use of meter 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.

Coleridge also objected to the use of the word "real" made by Wordsworth. He writes:

Every man's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man's language has, first, its individualities; secondly, the common properties of the class to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use. For, 'real', therefore, we must substitute, 'ordinary' or *lingua communis*.

Coleridge did not agree with Wordsworth on the point that the best part of our language is derived from Nature. In his view, language resulted from words and called words "abstract nouns and concepts". According to him the experience field of the rustics was narrower, therefore it was limited in vocabulary and incapable of expressing loftier thoughts.

There was also a difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge in their conception of Imagination. For Wordsworth, Imagination is the creative faculty of the mind that has the

power to transform things and also makes one see the ordinary things in a new light. In his *Preface* to the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth says of Fancy and Imagination that Fancy and Imagination ‘evoke and combine, aggregate and associate’. On the other hand, Coleridge categorized the ‘mind’ into two distinct faculties- ‘Imagination’ and Fancy.’ For him Imagination and Fancy were two different things. Rene Wellek points out to the difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge’s concept of Imagination and fancy when he says:

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge make the distinction between Fancy, a faculty which handles, ‘fixities’ and ‘definite’, and Imagination, a faculty which deals with the ‘plastic, the pliant and the indefinite’. The only important difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge is that Wordsworth does not clearly see Coleridge’s distinction between Imagination as a ‘holistic’ and fancy as an ‘associative’ power and does not draw the sharp distinction between Transcendentalism and Associationism which Coleridge wanted to establish.

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### 3.8. COLERIDGE’S CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF LITERARY CRITICISM

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Coleridge is one of the greatest literary critics, and his greatness has been almost universally recognized. Coleridge occupies, without any reservations, the first place among English literary critics. Saintsbury, after a careful scrutiny of all the major critics, eliminates all save three critics and concludes, ‘So, then there abide these three-Aristotle, Longinus and Coleridge.’ According to Arthur Symons, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* is, ‘...the greatest book of criticism in English.’ I.A.Richards considers him as the forerunner ‘of the modern science of semantics’.

Coleridge, a great philosopher and a litterateur, occupies an important place amongst philosophers and literary critics. Prior to Coleridge, the Neo Classical critics judged poetry on the basis of the rules set by the Classists. Coleridge, however, did not judge with fixed rules in mind. As a matter of fact, he does not pass any judgement, but gives his point of view to a work of art. His criticism is “impressionistic- romantic”, “a new kind of criticism, a criticism which dealt a knock –out blow to Neo-classic criticism, and paved way for modern criticism.” Thus, he can be called a precursor to New Criticism.

Coleridge was the first to introduce psychology and philosophy into literary criticism. He was interested in the study of the process of poetic creation and for this purpose, heavily relied on philosophy and psychology. He made philosophy the basis of literary inquiry, and thus was instrumental in bringing philosophy, psychology and literary criticism together.

Besides Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination, which you have read in the earlier section, Coleridge is also well known for yet another of his most original contribution in the field of literary criticism. This is the theory of “Willing Suspension of Disbelief”. Coleridge was of the view that “during the perusal of a poem or the witnessing of a play, there is

neither belief nor disbelief, but a mere suspension of disbelief.” Although this theory is a controversial one, it still has contributed greatly in the development of criticism.

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**3.9. SUMMARY**

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In this Unit you read about Coleridge, the critic. The Unit focused on some aspects of Coleridge’s critical theory like the Theory of Imagination and saw how he essentially differentiates between the fancy and Imagination- fancy, which he labels as something arbitrary, whereas he labels Imagination is a creative force. You also read Coleridge’s views on poetry and the poet and saw how he sees no difference between the two. In this Unit we also made a comparative analysis of Wordsworth and Coleridge as literary critics.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Write a note on the German influence on Coleridge.
2. Distinguish between Fancy and Imagination.
2. Distinguish between Primary Imagination and Secondary Imagination.
3. Distinguish between Wordsworth and Coleridge as critics.

**ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

- 1, Please refer to Section no. 3.4.
2. Please refer to Section no. 3.5.
3. Please refer to Section no. 3.5.
4. Please refer to Section no. 3.7.

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**3.11. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Write a note on Coleridge's concept of Imagination.
2. Explain Coleridge's views on poetry and the poet.

**UNIT 4: MATTHEW ARNOLD**

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- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Objectives
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- 4.12. Terminal and Model Questions

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The impact of scientific discoveries and inventions left a lasting impact on Victorian society. This unit first discusses the features of Victorian ethos in order to make you better appreciate the critical opinions of Matthew Arnold. Next, we introduce you to some major critical works and concepts of Arnold.

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**4.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit, you will be able to analyse

- The main features of Victorianism
- The impact of science on Victorian Literature
- The impact of social thinkers on the literature of Victorianism
- Matthew Arnold and classicism in his works
- Matthew Arnold and narrative discussion about his style
- Representative features of Arnold's thought and style
- Touchstone method of Matthew Arnold
- Satirical and critical trends in Matthew Arnold

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**4.3 THE VICTORIAN BACKGROUND**

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Victorian Age in the history of English Literature runs from 1832 to 1901. It was an age of rapid flux and baffling complexity. Moody and Lovett opine,

Never before, not even in the troubled seventeenth century had there been such rapid and sweeping changes in the social fabric of England: and never before had literature been so closely in league or so openly at war, with the forces of social life.

It is very easy to sum up an age in a formula; but it is particularly difficult to sum up in this fashion the Victorian age. The words of A. C. Ward are very apt when he says,

One of the irritating characteristics of the Victorian age is its refusal to be covered by any of the commendatory or derogatory labels from time to time attached to it. It was an age of faith and age of doubt; an age of morality and hypocrisy, of prosperity and poverty, of idealism and materialism, of progress and decline, of splendour and squalor. It was a solemn age yet it produced more humorous writers than any other single period: it was advanced in intellect yet immature in emotion. Though as a historical period, it lasted for more than sixty years,

disintegrating forces were pecking at its foundations forty years or more in advance of Queen Victoria's death in 1901.

It is now clear that the literature of the age reflects this complexity and is also influenced by it. The development of science and the progress of democracy are two most important features of Victorianism. The rapid development of physical science in the Victorian Age transformed the material environment of the people and both directly as well as indirectly made itself felt in the literature of the age. The age witnessed a great outpouring of scientific literature. Such epoch-making works as Darwin's *Origin of Species* came out in this age. But more important than such direct influences was the indirect and almost highly determining influence which the rapid development of physical sciences exerted on the Victorian literature.

No doubt, Victorian scientists started 'seeing' much in Nature, but not in the Wordsworthian sense. To them, Nature was non-human as a spider or a weed which is cut up and lectured upon.

The development of science was instrumental in nurturing, even among the literary writers, a peculiar scientific temper. Some of them even resorted to scientific methods in their literary works. For example, Tennyson followed the scientific method of description which puts a premium on the accuracy of details. His nature poetry is like the work of an inspired scientist. In the historical literature of the age also the scientific temper seems to be at work. Carlyle, who was bitterly opposed to science in other ways, adopted the scientific method of discovering and orientating accurate facts to the psyche of an age. The method of induction and rigorous research was essentially scientific.

In the realm of fiction too, the invisible hand of science was definitely at work. That is why Rickett remarks,

In fiction the scientific spirit is no less discernible; the problems of heredity and environment preoccupying the attention of the novelists. The social problems of the earlier Victorians, of Charlotte Bronte, Dickens, Kingsley and Reade, give place to points in biology, psychology and pathology. The influence of Herbert Spencer and of Comte meets us in the pages of George Eliot: while the analytical method of science are even more subtly followed in the fiction of George Eliot, the early writings of Mrs. Humphrey Ward and the intimate Wessex studies of Thomas Hardy.

Thirdly, the development of science caused a marked spiritual disturbance which often took the shape of scepticism and sometimes of patent agnosticism. Mid-Victorian poetry is particularly shot with the tincture of this spiritual disturbance caused by the sudden crumbling of the age-old edifice of Christian values.

The development of science led England to the Industrial Revolution which started in 1760s but found its real climax only during the Victorian age. This revolution brought in the economic and social changes arising out of the replacement of industries carried on in the home with simple machines by industries in factories with power-driven machinery.

### 4.3.1 The Industrial Revolution and its impact on Victorian Society

The Industrial revolution ushered in an era of unprecedented prosperity. But on the debit side, it converted the 'merry England' into a sooty and squalid England. It also gave rise to a number of social problems which are the inevitable bane of industrialisation. With the conversion of the agrarian economy into industrial economy was created, on the other hand, a new class of privileged mill owners and big industrialists and, on the other, a huge horde of ill-clothed and ill-fed labourers whose rights were yet to be protected by legislative measures. There was a virtual exodus of people from the country to the numerous towns which had started resounding with the grind and buzz of heavy machinery. The policy of 'laissez faire' as expounded first by Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* was seized upon by the Victorian political economists like Mill, Malthus and Ricardo, who applied it to the working of the new industrial system. This application was tantamount to the denial of all rights to the labour class except perhaps the right to starve. Mayhew in his work *London Poor* paints a harrowing picture of the miserable life of the working classes of Victorian London.

### 4.3.2 The Progress of Democracy

The whole progress of English political history is a movement from uncompromising royalism to uncompromising democracy. In the Victorian age, this shift was considerably accelerated under the impact of various operating factors. It is important to keep in mind that it was not only the scientific field but also the political arena that affected Victorianism. Starting with the 1832 reforms, several reform bills were enacted which progressively granted voting rights to more and more people.

The impact of democracy on literature is quite evident. There was a rapid expansion of the reading public who became the new patrons of literature. The writer was therefore compelled to cater to these new classes of readers.

### 4.3.3 Sex and Domestic Life in Victorian England

As regards sex, the Victorians were extremely prudish. Even a trivial impropriety of dress would send the Victorian martinets into paroxysms of rage. They were indeed very touchy about sex which they treated with a hush-hush and hidden manner. Even Thackeray, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and others who were stark realists in everything else, did not lift the lid off the animality of their characters. They approached the beast of sex very gingerly and with gloves on. Thackeray, who gives in *Vanity Fair* an interesting career of a smart little meretrix, does not show even by suggesting the little animal that is in her. All this is done to avoid shocking the feelings of his readers. Victorian parents were quite domineering. Mr. Mudstone's cruelty to David Copperfield is an instance of the authority which a Victorian father exercised.

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**4.4 MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822-1888)**

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Matthew Arnold was born in December 1822, at the Thames-side village of Laleham, near Staines. He was the eldest son among the nine children of Thomas Arnold, the famous Headmaster of Rugby who founded the modern public school system in England. Arnold owed much to his father's influence, his high sense of duty, his intellectual honesty and lofty moral ideals, though in many respects, there was little common between the son and the father. Arnold has given a very nice portrait of his father in *Rugby Chapel*.

At the age of thirteen, Matthew Arnold was admitted to Winchester School where he did not feel happy. Therefore, later he was brought to the Rugby School of which none but his own father, Dr. Arnold was the headmaster. He proved himself to be an unusually intelligent and devoted student from the earliest student career. In 1840, he won an open scholarship at Balliol College, Oxford. Both at school and college, Arnold was very popular and respected by his contemporaries. At Oxford, he took the Newdigate Prize for a poem on Cromwell. His chief friends at Oxford were the poet Clough, Arthur Stanley, J. D. Coleridge and J. C. Sharp. The most intimate of these was, of course, Clough, who was three years his senior at Rugby and also scholar of Balliol and Fellow of Oriel. On Clough's death at Florence in 1861, Arnold wrote his famous pastoral elegy *Thyrsis*.

Arnold started his career as a fifth-form master at Rugby. In 1851, he was appointed an Inspector of Schools, a post which he held with great distinction for thirty five years. Arnold threw himself in this somewhat prosaic task with his characteristic earnestness and devotion.

Matthew Arnold started his career as a poet with the publication of *The Strayed Reveller and other poems* by 'A' in 1849. It was a highly original and modern experiment in free verse on a Homeric theme. But as for the public was concerned, it was a still born volume. The author himself withdrew it from the market. This volume contained many prominent poems. Its second volume also came after three years in 1852. This second volume shared the fate of its predecessors, being withdrawn before fifty copies were sold, as the author was dissatisfied with the title piece. This volume was again published in 1867 at the request of Robert Browning. Matthew Arnold appended a preface in which he propounded his theory of poetry. This was recognized even in his own day as the most important contribution to literary criticism since Wordsworth's famous treatise *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. This placed Matthew Arnold at the height of his literary reputation. He was recognised not merely as a poet but a poet with a new theory of poetry of abiding importance.

Arnold wrote a series of essays and lectures with a purpose. As an Inspector of Schools, he came in close contact with the people of various sections. He was also confronted with a number of social, political and religious problems. He was convinced that he could not appeal to general public until he abandoned the medium of verse and adopted prose as a vehicle of establishing contact with larger masses. Consequently he started writing essays and critical views on various problems. Arnold also gave a series of excellent lectures *On the Translating of Homer*. But he gained popularity outside the academic world with the

publication of the first series of Essays in Criticism in 1865. In 1867, he published the famous essay *On the Study of Celtic Literature*.

Arnold rose to be the spokesman of the spirit of scepticism of his age. He was baffled to note that the established social and religious values and institutions were gradually crumbling down under the impact of science and utilitarian philosophy. He attributed it largely to the inadequacy of Christianity as presented to us in the conventional form to satisfy present day needs. Matthew Arnold commented Christianity as a static and spent up force. Like Carlyle, he believed that religion must be dynamic and not static. He was of the view that religion is morality tinged with emotion. He interpreted God as that stream of tendency by which all things strive to fulfil the law of their being. To him religion meant conduct which is three quarters of life and the way to the knowledge of truth lies on the road of right doing.

Arnold believed that the remedy of the widespread frustration of his age lay in the revival of true culture. The revival of culture meant the revival of love of beautiful. It was in this sense that he pleaded for the revival of fine arts, especially poetry. He described it as the religion of the future. He said,

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed, which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.

In 1883 a pension was granted to Arnold. He had now been relieved of his official responsibilities. Therefore, following the example of Dickens, Thackeray and other literary celebrities, Arnold went to America in 1883 to deliver a series of public lectures. These lectures, though successfully published later on, were not a great success.

In 1886 Arnold retired from the department he had served so faithfully for thirty-five years. Two years later he died very suddenly of heart failure while running to catch a train at Liverpool.

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#### **4.5 ARNOLD'S PURPOSE OF CRITICISM AND THE VICTORIAN SPIRIT**

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Matthew Arnold was both a distinguished poet and a prose writer. He wrote on topics such as literature, education, politics and religion. But whatever topic he handled, his

approach was always critical and more often than not, constructive. The same critical attitude is discernible in much of his poetry. As Iago said of himself, Arnold too, is “nothing if not critical.” All of his critical work, it may be pointed out, is of a piece. Criticism, whether literary or social or political or educational, performs, according to Arnold, the same function and demands the same qualities of intelligence, discrimination, knowledge and disinterestedness. Criticism is nothing if it is not related to life. Life is the main thing. So Arnold’s criticism of literature, society, politics and religion all tends towards being a criticism of life. So does his poetic activity. Thus criticism with Arnold denotes a comprehensive activity which embraces all the departments of life. He himself defines criticism as “the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.” Thus criticism with Arnold is a definite kind of approach to life. J. D. Jump observes:

Writing on literature, education, politics and religion, he tries to encourage a free play of the mind upon the material before it and so to help its readers to get rid of any stock notions and pieces of mental petrification which may be hampering their thought.

In other words, Arnold stood for the annihilation of all tyrannical dogmas, prejudices and orthodox notions. That there was a pressing need for such a campaign in England cannot be gainsaid. Many critics say that Arnold inherited the teacher’s instinct and he was profoundly influenced by his sense of what his country needed. To be useful to England, was always one of his greatest ambitions; and he knew that England was always one of his greatest ambitions; and he knew that the way to be useful was to supply that wherein England was deficient. It explains his donning of the mantle of a critic.

#### **4.5.1 The Bearing of Arnold’s Criticism on Life and Society**

As a critic, Arnold is best known as a literary critic. But his literary criticism has a close bearing on society and life in general. He was extremely impatient of the slogan “Art for Art’s Sake” which was raised by the Pre-Raphaelites, aesthetes and some other groups. Consequently, his literary criticism is submerged in the criticism of society. According to him, “Poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism.” According to him, criticism should be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent and ever widening in its knowledge and scope. In his own literary and critical essays, he is often led specifically to social criticism. For example, in his lectures on Homer, he expatiates upon the frailty of intellectual conscience among his countrymen. In short, we can say that Arnold is a critic of his age even while he engaged in literary criticism.

#### **4.5.2 Arnold’s Social Criticism**

It is a very popular remark by Arnold that “poetry is, or should be a criticism of life.” This remark has given rise to a debate among numerous critics. But there are critics who think that such a remark is quite absurd and meaningless.

But when we look closely at it, we find that Arnold has shown his true wisdom in establishing this theory. All things that pass through literature are closely connected with the original ground of a realistic life. The remark that literature is the mirror of society

also reveals the same fact. The main objective of Arnold in his critical observations is to lay stress on the study of society. *Culture and Anarchy* by Arnold lays bare the same philosophy. This pattern of social revelation has come to be known as Arnoldian manner. His study of social views reveals that he always considered the good and positive aspects of society in a most complete and refined manner. Arnold's melancholic temperament is also visible sometime in his works. He is highly pessimistic and negative about the outcome of life. There is thus a great variation between Keats and Arnold, for example. The former escapes from life and the latter resigns to it.

#### **4.5.3 Attitude towards Religion and Politics**

Arnold's thought is best expressed in his attitude towards formal religion and politics. In religion, he had no creed. He could not believe in formal Christianity. He disbelieved in the divinity of Christ and had his doubts too about the immortality of the human soul. But he had read the Bible deeply and devotedly and come to the conclusion that conduct was all-important, that it was three fourth of life. Thus he defined God as a stream of tendency which makes for righteousness. Arnold's negative attitude towards religious dogma is closely connected with his position in history. The French revolution had shattered the old feudal world and so a new world had arisen from ruins of feudalism. He was standing on the frontier of two faiths.

#### **4.5.4 Science and Faith in the works of Arnold**

Like many other Victorian writers, Arnold expresses in his work the conflict between science and faith of which his age was a witness. The unprecedented development of experimental science had come to shake the very foundations of Christianity by calling into question the *Genesis* and much else besides. Arnold felt that he was breathing in a kind of spiritually suffocating atmosphere. Like Janus, he looked both ways. But neither like T. H. Huxley could he align himself completely with the new mode of thinking nor could he cling to the ruins of a crumbling order. Spiritual disturbance often manifesting itself in despair was the natural outcome of such a predicament. Arnold found himself shuttlecocking between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born. This desperate groping for something like a firm moral stance finds expression in much of his lyrical poetry.

The writings of Arnold suggest that he was keenly aware of the terrible confusion caused by the conflict between science and faith, between advancing materialism and retreating Christianity.

According to Arnold, that which the time demands above all things is the discovery of some shore, not false or impossible, towards which to steer. We need some Columbus to guide us over a trackless ocean to a new continent which he discerns, though we cannot. The misfortune of our age is that we can find no such pilot.

Arnold never conceived himself to be capable of succeeding where Goethe had failed. On the contrary, he rather teaches that the problem had grown so complex that hardly any wise person could suffice for its solution. This feeling of almost insuperable difficulty is the secret of Arnold's melancholy. It gives a sense of brooding pause, almost of the

paralysis of action to his verse. It is the secret of his attraction to some, and of an alienation amounting almost to repulsion between him and many others. It makes him, in verse as well as in prose, critical rather than constructive.

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#### **4.6 CULTURE AND ANARCHY**

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*Culture and Anarchy* is considered as the leading literary work of Matthew Arnold. Among his works dealing with social and political questions, the pride of place must go to *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) which undoubtedly was part in response to the mass agitations preceding the passage of the Reform Bill of 1869. The Victorian age is generally known as an age of peace and prosperity and most of all, of political stability in spite of the many unsuccessful attempts made on the life of Queen Victoria. At the same time, Arnold saw some anarchic forces at work. According to Arnold, anarchy is necessarily antonymous to culture. When everybody is bent upon doing as one likes, culture is in danger.

In more clear words, it can be said that culture is a social passion of doing good. It is also a fact that Arnold was really a literary figure of reformative temperament. The perfect negative of culture is anarchy.

Arnold was in favour of democracy but he desired that the transition to democracy should not be allowed to destroy the social edifice. He was against unchartered freedom which allowed all to have their own ways. We also notice him supporting a firm state-power to hold such anarchic tendencies in check. The state should not be representative of any single class, because all individual classes have been depraved by the contagion of materialism.

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#### **4.7 THE CLASSICAL LEANINGS IN ARNOLD'S CRITICISM**

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Arnold may be regarded as at once the complement and the corrective of the great critics of the Revolutionary epoch. He thought that Romanticism had been overdone and a new classicism was needed. He did not want to revive the classicism of eighteenth century. He said that Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry; they are classics of our prose. The poetry of that age was composed in their wit while genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul. It is thus clear that Arnold was conscious of the limitations of poetry of the eighteenth century, but at the same time he had no sympathy with the imagination of the Romantic poetry.

He always advocated a happy balance between the two approaches. He was thus never a lover of Shelley. Arnold was by nature unsympathetic towards the romantic poetry. In the case of Coleridge, he was conscious of his faults as of his merits. For him, Elizabethan drama was steeped in humours and whimsicalities and the style of Shakespeare was quite often fantastic and false. According to him, Milton was a safer model than the greatest of dramatists.

The Middle Ages repelled him by their grotesqueness, conceits and irrationality. Romance encourages eccentricity and a romantic poet exhausts his energy on the beauty of single lines or passages. He does not look to the beauty or perfection of the poem as a whole and does not care for the total impression. He held the view that the Pre-Raphaelites did not understand that the peculiar effect of Nature resides in the whole and not in the parts. The evils of the romantic tendency were innate in the English people and the corrective is Classicism. He found Greek literature dominated by the idea of the perfection of a poem as a whole. The characteristics of the ancient Greeks were calmness, cheerfulness and disinterested objectivity. Above all, he found the grand style in Dante and Milton. He was deeply impressed by the architectonic faculty of Milton, who had a sense of the whole, which modern poets lacked. The grand style, he holds, is rare in modern literature. The calmness and cheerfulness of the Greeks will be the only remedy for the sick hurry and divided aims of modern life.

It was his persistent utilitarianism that led him to France rather than to Germany for instruction. France may not soar to the height of Shakespeare or Milton, but France possessed openness of mind, clarity of thought and lucidity of expression. Arnold attempted to do the same in England. His poetry also reveals clarity, lucidity and exactness of meaning.

#### **4.7.1 Arnold as a Classical Critic**

Matthew Arnold is essentially a classical critic. As a critic, he believed that England had Hebraised too much and must now be Hellenised. He did not like romantic vagueness or exuberance either in thought or in language. He insisted upon the vital necessity of regarding the whole. The perfection of the poem as a whole, not the beauty of isolated passages, was his ideal. The essence of his classicism is thus to be found in his lucidity of expression, restraint and proportion. He is classical or Greek in his insistence that there shall be a definite thought which shall be lucidly expressed. However, his thought is always modern. He does not share the paganism of Keats or Swinburne but he is truly classical in manner, in definiteness of thought and lucidity of expression. His style is uniformly lucid and one can find in it the pure lines of an Ionian sky.

Another classical aspect in Arnold's poetry is seen in his use of Homeric simile. As it has already been noticed, this simile is very pronounced in *Sohrab and Rustam*. The similes are long and they introduce details which are irrelevant for the purpose of comparison but have a pictorial value and an interest of their own. The simile of the wet diver or the poor drudge who with numb blackened fingers makes her fire is good not so much for its illustrative value but for its picturesqueness. There is something like the stately utterance of Milton in *Sohrab and Rustam*, in which poem he makes the nearest approach to his conception of the Grand style.

By his own poetical examples and by his critical canons, he drew attention back from the beauty of detail to the artistic whole, to the eternal qualities of ancient writings from the neo-classic travesty of them. He was basically right in his contention that harmonious proportion, unity and design are not to be found in *Idylls of The King* or in *The Ring and the Book*.

### 4.7.2 Arnold and the Grand Style

In his essay, *On Translating Homer*, Arnold emphasizes the notion of the grand style. He had used the phrase earlier in the preface to his *Poems* and had declared that the ancients were its masters. He also used this phrase in his essay *On Milton*. Arnold mentions Homer, Dante and Milton as the great masters of the grand style. He says that Shakespeare could not always write in this style. He defines the grand style in the following manner: "It arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject." He also added that affectation or artificiality would be fatal to grand style. It may be noted that Dante fulfils all the conditions laid down by Arnold for grand style. But his definition does not apply so well in the case of Milton or Homer. Homer is not always simple, not always serious and Milton too, is not always severe. His definition of the grand style is really a fresh formulation of classical restraint or severity, definiteness, proportion and perfection of form against romantic vagueness. Arnold's definition clearly shows that the grand style is a harmonious blending of two elements which are sublime thought and sublime expression. That which interprets life to us, which edifices, elevates, consoles and sustains us is sublime in thought. And that which expresses this sublime thought with felicity, force, rapidity and plainness is sublime in expression. Rapidity, plainness and directness of diction and syntax, plainness in thought and nobility are the essential attributes of the Grand Style.

### 4.7.3 Interdependence of Thought and Style

Arnold believes that sublime thought and sublime expression, the two elements that constitute the grand style are interdependent. The superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement making its style and manner. These two elements are in steadfast proportion to each other. It was on account of this function of the grand style in the creation of great poetry that Arnold advocated its need from his earliest critical essays. He believed in the permanence of the grand style. In his opinion, grand style is the essential quality of great poetry. Great subjects always require this style.

According to Arnold, the ancient authors were the masters of the grand style. Homer, Virgil, Sophocles, Dante were the unsurpassed champions of the grand style. Homer, the greatest of the Greek poets, was the unparalleled master of rapidity, plainness and directness of diction and plainness in thought and nobility. They attained their great results by penetrating themselves with some noble and significant action. It is in view of this fact that Arnold recommends their great poetry as the touchstone to judge the degree of sublimity in modern poetry. Arnold is of the view that the ancient masters of the Grand Style are the only sure guide to modern poets. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which high poetical quality is present or wanting there.

### 4.7.4 The Touchstone Method

Arnold would probably agree that his method of comparing passage with passage is not a sufficient test for determining the value of a work as a whole. We have seen that he

himself insisted that we must judge a poem by the total impression. But there is no reason why we should not extend his comparative method, not resting content with detached judgement from isolated passages but comparing the whole impression we have in our mind of one work with the whole impression that has been stamped upon our minds by a masterpiece. The comparative method is an invaluable aid to appreciation in approaching any kind of art. This is just as true of fiction as of poetry, of painting as of literature. It is not only thus to compare the masterpiece and the lesser work, but the good with the not so good, the sincere with the not quite sincere and the clever with the too clever by half.

Arnold has provided us with an excellent example of how to use the comparative method and he has enabled us to see that it may be fruitful in the highest degree when employed by a critic of exceptional tact. Some of us may feel that in his famous distinction between the historic, the personal and the real estimates of literature. It is true liking to attach greater importance to a work than a more detached critic would allow it. But it should be remembered that a piece of literature means much to us. We are always in danger of getting less than the utmost from any work of art.

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#### **4.8    ARNOLD'S STYLE**

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Arnold's prose is essentially the prose of a poet. In the main, his verse belongs to the earlier and his prose to the later part of his literary career. In such cases, it is almost always found that accomplishment in verse coming first shapes and conditions the subsequent accomplishment in prose. The poetic career of Matthew Arnold was a training ground in more than one sense, for his career in prose. No English prose writer, therefore, for quite half a century attained to so high a position in pure literature as Matthew Arnold. In regard to technical essence and distinction of style, we should probably have to go back to Dryden before finding his equal or superior.

The style of Matthew Arnold was eminently fitted for the purposes of criticism. All the prose works of Arnold are critical. His criticism is mainly literary, but alongside of the literary criticism, there runs a vein of social, political and religious criticism. The critical temper naturally gave Arnold a tone of mild satire and sarcasm. In this respect he closely resembles Chaucer and Addison, and yet he is essentially different from either of them. He mildly ridicules his contemporary social, economic, political and religious follies and malpractices. Sarcasm is the dominant tone of all his prose writings. The prose writing of Matthew Arnold is full of spicy flavour and piquant satire.

There are some peculiar mannerisms in style of Mathew Arnold. He employs certain set mechanical devices to produce effect in his style. Most of these mannerisms are so marked and so often repeated that they can hardly escape the attention of a careful reader. His first trick is to repeat almost identical phrases and sentences again and again in the course of a single essay and then essay after essay. A popular mannerism with Arnold's way of writing is that he inserts Greek, Latin and French words, expressions, phrases and quotations in the midst of his sentences. And it is rarely that he cares to give the English equivalent to those foreign extracts. He writes on the presumption that his readers are as well conversant with foreign languages and literature as he himself. This makes his style

weighty, but to the general reader, it poses a real difficulty. This difficulty creates a real problem to the general reader when Arnold explains and illustrates his comparative method of criticism.

The beauty of Arnold's style is that in spite of its marked mannerisms, it cannot be parodied. The devices he employs are clear-cut and not very subtle either, yet his style cannot be imitated.

It follows that Arnold was a great stylist. Though not quite free from some typical mannerisms, and a certain amount of affectation and pedantry, his style contains all the graces of his verse, all the force of his intellect. It is true that Arnold will hardly be popular with the public, yet he remains one of the greatest forces in the history of English prose.

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#### **4.9 SUMMING UP**

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In this unit, we have studied

- The life and major works of Matthew Arnold
- Major critical theories of Matthew Arnold

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#### **4.10 REFERENCES**

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*Matthew Arnold and His Relation To The Thought Of His Time* by Dawson

*The Literature of Victorian Era* by Hugh Walker

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#### **4.11 SUGGESTED READING**

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*Survey of English Literature, 1800-1880* by Oliver Elton

*History of Criticism, Vol. III* by Saintsbury

*English Literature In The 19th Century* by Hudson

*British Victorian Literature* ed. by Shiv K. Kumar

*Matthew Arnold-A Critical Portrait* by Stefen Collini

*Arnold and Homer* by T. S. Osmond

*Matthew Arnold* by Lionel Trilling

**4.12 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss the main features of the Victorian period
2. Trace the impact of Science and 'Industrial Revolution' on Victorian Literature.
3. Discuss the classical temper in Arnold's critical writings.
4. Write short notes on
  - a) The Grand Style
  - b) The Touchstone Method
  - c) Arnold's attitude towards politics and religion

**UNIT 5****AESTHETICISM AND WALTER PATER**

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5.1 Introduction

5.2 Objectives

5.3 Aestheticism

5.3.1 Aesthetic Literature

5.3.2 Aesthetic Movement and Decorative Art

5.3.3 Aestheticism and Irrationalism

5.4 Walter Pater

5.4.1 Pater's Influence

5.4.2 Pater's Method and Style

5.4.3 Roger Kimball on Aestheticism and Pater

5.5 Summing Up

5.6 References

5.7 Suggested Readings

5.8. Terminal and Model Questions

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this Unit, we shall discuss the concept of 'Aestheticism' and its impact over English literature, especially in the light of Walter Pater. This Movement highlighted the decorative style. There is a close connection between modern fashion and decorative style of Literature. In this way, Aestheticism is a relevant term representing the age and its temperament.

## 5.2 OBJECTIVES

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This unit presents a close link between literature and modernism. After reading this Unit, you will be able to comment on

- Aesthetic Literature and its growth
- Aesthetic Movement and its connectivity with Renaissance
- Irrationalism
- The impact of Aestheticism on English Poetry
- Walter Pater as an Aesthete

## 5.3 AESTHETICISM

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Aestheticism is a late 19th century movement, influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites and inspired by the writings of Sir Walter Pater, especially his two books, *Studies in the History of Renaissance* (1873) and *Marius—The Epicurean* (1885).

In these two books, Walter Pater lays stress on the value of ecstatic experience. Aestheticism was also inspired by the French doctrine of Art for Art's Sake. Oscar Wilde was the most important aesthete whose novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) was a product of this movement. Since the movement lacked a programme, it had its influence on a variety of writers of different characters: the naturalistic novelist George Moore; the Celtic poet W. B. Yeats; a Catholic convert poet Lionel Johnson, and an ardent supporter of 'Art for Art's Sake', Swinburne. The aesthetes took out a periodical which they named *The Yellow Book*, mainly on account of the fact that French novels that were considered 'daring' were printed on yellow pages. Its main illustrator was Aubrey Beardsley. The artificialities of this movement were ridiculed in the 'Punch'.

This movement originated in France where its chief pioneers were Baudelaire and Gautier. It was originally a reaction against the utilitarian cult of beauty; and it stressed the autonomy of art. In England, Ruskin presented a moralistic view of art which was objected to vehemently by Whistler. Pater emerged as the chief pursuer of beauty in art though he was misjudged for being a promoter of the licentious *Decadent School of*

*Poetry*, which he was not because his aesthetic theory was based strictly on the principles of austerity, and intellectual and spiritual beauty. His famous essay ‘On Style’ makes a clear distinction between good art and great art. He opined that the Bible, *Paradise Lost*, *Divine Comedy* and *Le Miserables* are the examples of great art. In the beginning of the 19th century, Keats and Shelley also emerged as the great worshippers of beauty though the term ‘Aesthetic’ is not strictly applied to their poetry.

In a conclusive manner, we can say that ‘Aestheticism’ or the ‘Aesthetic Movement’ was a 19th century European art movement that emphasized aesthetic values more than socio-political themes for literature, fine art, the decorative arts and interior design. Generally, it represents the same tendencies that symbolism or decadence represented in France, or Decadentismo represented in Italy, and may be considered the British version of the same style. It was part of the anti-19th century reaction and had post-romantic origins, and as such anticipates modernism. It was a feature of the late 19th century from about 1868 to about 1900.

### 5.3.1 Aesthetic Literature

The British decadent writers were much influenced by the Oxford Professor Walter Pater and his essays published during 1867-1868, in which he stated that life had to be lived intensely, with an ideal of beauty. His text entitled *Studies In the History of Renaissance* (1873) was very well regarded by art-oriented young men of the late 19th century. Writers of the Decadent movement used the slogan “Art for Art’s Sake” (L’art pour l’art), the origin of which is debated and often discussed. But in opposition to this view, some people hold that Aestheticism was invented by the philosopher Victor Cousin, although Angela Leighton in the publication *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism And The Legacy Of A Ward* (2007) notes that the phrase was used by Benjamin Constant as early as 1804. It is generally accepted to have been promoted by Theophile Gautier in France, who interpreted the phrase to suggest that there was not any real association between art and morality.

The artists and writers of Aesthetic style tended to profess that the Arts should provide refined sensuous pleasure, rather than convey moral or sentimental messages. As a consequence, they did not accept John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold’s utilitarian conception of art as something moral or useful. In place of it, they believed that Art did not have any didactic purpose; it need only be beautiful. The Aesthetes developed a cult of beauty which they considered the basic factor of art. They were of the view that life should copy Art. They also considered nature as crude and lacking in design when compared to Art. The main characteristics of the style were: suggestion rather than statement, sensuality, great use of symbols and synesthetic effects: that is, correspondence between words, colours and music. Here it is noticeable that music was used to establish mood. Predecessors of the Aesthetics included Keats and Shelley, and some of the Pre-Raphaelites. In Britain, the best representatives were Oscar Wilde and A. C. Swinburne, both influenced by the French Symbolists and James McNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The style and these poets were satirised by Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* and other works such as F.C. Burnand's drama *The Colonel* and in comic magazines such as *Punch*. Compton Mackenzie's novel *Sinister Street* makes use of the type as a phase through which the protagonist passes as he is influenced by older decadent individuals. The novels of Evelyn Waugh, who was a young participant of aesthete society at Oxford, describe the aesthetes mostly satirically, but also as a former participant. Some names associated with this assemblage are Robert Byron, Evelyn Waugh, Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford, A. E. Housman and Anthony Powell.

### 5.3.2 Aesthetic Movement and Decorative Arts

The primary element of Decorative Art is utility. The convenient but trite maxim 'Art for Art's Sake', identifying art or beauty as the primary element in other branches of the Aesthetic Movement, especially Fine Art cannot apply in this context. Decorative art must first have utility but may also be beautiful. Decorative art is dissociated from Fine Art.

Important elements of the Aesthetic Movement have been identified as Reform and Eastern Art. The Government Schools of Design were founded from 1837 onwards in order to improve the design of British goods. Following the Great Exhibition of 1851 efforts were intensified and Oriental objects purchased for the schools teaching collections. Owen Jones, architect and Orientalist, was requested to set out key principles of design and these became not only the basis of the schools teaching but also the propositions which preface *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), which is still regarded as the finest systematic study or practical sourcebook of historic world ornament.

Jones identified the need for a new and modern style which would meet the requirements of the modern world, rather than the continual re-cycling of historic styles, but saw no reason to reject the lessons of the past.

Production of Aesthetic style furniture was limited to approximately the late nineteenth century. Aesthetic style furniture is characterised by several common themes such as:

- Ebonised wood with gilt highlights
- Far Eastern influence
- Prominent use of nature, especially flowers, birds, leaves and peacock feathers

As aesthetic movement decor was similar to the corresponding writing style in that it was about sensuality and nature, nature themes often appear on the furniture. A typical aesthetic feature is the gilded carved flower, or the stylized peacock feather. Coloured paintings of birds or flowers are often seen. Non-ebonized aesthetic movement furniture may have realistic looking.

In 1882, Oscar Wilde visited Canada where he toured the town of Woodstock, Ontario and gave a lecture on May 29 entitled: "The House Beautiful". This particular lecture featured the early Aesthetic art movement, also known as the "Ornamental Aesthetic" art style, where local flora and fauna were celebrated as beautiful and textured. A gorgeous example of this can be seen in Annandale National Historic Site, located in Tillsonburg,

Ontario, Canada. The house was built in 1880 and decorated by Marry Anne Tillson, who happened to attend Oscar Wilde's lectures in Woodstock and was influenced by it. Since the Aesthetic art movement was only prevalent from about 1880 until about 1890, there are not very many examples of this particular style left nowadays.

### **5.3.3 Aestheticism and Irrationalism**

The philosophers of irrationalism and aestheticism formed a cultural reaction against positivism during the early 20th century. These perspectives opposed or deemphasized the importance of the rationality of human beings. Instead, they concentrated on the experience of one's own existence. Part of the philosophies involved claim that science was inferior to intuition. Art was considered especially prestigious as it was considered to represent the noumenon. The style was not accepted greatly by the public, as the social system generally limited the access of art to the elite. Some of the proponents of this style were Fyodor Dostoevsky, Henry Bergson, Lev Shestov and Georges Sorel. Symbolism and existentialism derived from these philosophies.

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## **5.4 WALTER PATER (1839-1894)**

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Walter Horatio Pater was an English essayist, critic of art and literature and writer of fiction. He was born in Stepney in London's East End. He was the second son of Richard Glode Pater, a physician who had moved to London in the early 19th century to practice medicine among the poor. Dr. Pater died while Walter was an infant and the family moved to Enfield, London. Walter attended Enfield Grammar School and was individually tutored by the headmaster.

In 1853, he was sent to The King's School, Canterbury, where the beauty of the cathedral made an impression that would remain with him all his life. He was fourteen when his mother, Maria Pater, died in 1854. As a schoolboy, Pater read John Ruskin's "Modern Painters", which helped inspire his lifelong attraction to the study of art and gave him a taste for well-crafted prose. He gained a school exhibition, with which he proceeded in 1858 to Queen's College, Oxford.

As an undergraduate Pater was a reading man with literary and philosophic interests beyond the prescribed texts. Many critics of great reputation like Flaubert, Gautier, Baudelaire and Swinburne were among his early favourites. Visiting his aunt and sisters in Germany during the vacations, he learned German and began to read many German philosophers. In spite of his inclination towards the ritual and aesthetic elements of the church, he had little interest in Christian doctrine and did not pursue ordination. After completing Graduation, Walter Pater remained in Oxford and taught classics and philosophy to private students. His years of study and reading now paid dividends: he was offered a classical fellowship in 1864 at Brasenose on the strength of his ability to teach modern German philosophy and he settled down to a university career.

### 5.4.1 Pater's Influence

Toward the end of his life, Pater's writings were exercising a considerable influence. The principles of what would be known as the Aesthetic Movement were partly traceable to him, and his effect was particularly felt on one of the movement's leading proponents, Oscar Wilde, who paid tribute to him in *The Critic as Artist* (1891). Among art critics influenced by Pater were Roger Fry, Kenneth Clark and Richard Wollheim. In literature, some of the early modernists such as Proust, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and Stevens admired his writing and Pater's influence can be traced in the subjective stream of consciousness novels of the early twentieth century. In literary criticism, Pater's emphasis on subjectivity and on the autonomy of the reader helped in preparing the way for the revolutionary approaches to literary studies of the modern era.

### 5.4.2 Pater's Method and Style

In this section, we shall discuss the method and style of Walter Pater which is perfectly in the manner and trends of aestheticism. Walter Pater's critical method was outlined in the *Preface to the Renaissance* (1873) and refined in his later writings. In this critical work, Pater argues initially for a subjective, relativist response to life, ideas, and art as opposed to the drier, more objective, and somewhat moralistic criticism practised by Mathew Arnold and others. Pater himself remarks,

The first step towards seeing one's object as it really is to know one's own impression, to discriminate it and to realise it distinctly. What is this song or picture, this engaging personality in life or in a book to me?

When we have formed our impressions, we proceed to find the power of forces which produced them. In other words, Pater moves from effects to cause which are his real interests. Among these causes are original temperaments and types of mind but Pater did not confine himself to pairing off a work of art with a particular temperament. Having a particular temperament under review, he would ask what the range of forms was in which it might find expression. Some of the forms will be metaphysical doctrines, ethical systems, literary theories, religions and myths. The scepticism of Walter Pater led him to think that in themselves, all such systems lack sense or meaning, until meaning is conferred upon them by their capacity to give expression to a particular temperament. Walter Pater is of the opinion that theory, hypothesis and beliefs depend a great deal on temperament because they are mere equivalents of temperament. Sometimes Pater's critical method seen as a quest for impressions is really more a quest for the sources of individual expression.

Pater was much admired for his prose style, which he strove to make worthy of his own aesthetic ideals, taking great pains and fastidiously correcting his work. He kept on his desk little squares of paper, each with its ideas, and shuffled them about attempting to form a sequence and pattern. Edmund Gosse on the style of Walter Pater writes,

I have known writers of every degree, but never one to whom the act of composition was such a travail and an agony as it was to Pater. He was so conscious of the modifications and additions which would supervene that he always wrote on ruled paper, leaving each alternate line blank.

Unlike those who were caught by Flaubert's theory of the unique word and the only epithet... Pater sought the sentence and the sentence in relation to the paragraph and the paragraph as a moment in the chapter. The numerous parentheses deliberately exchanged a quick flow of rhythm for pauses, for charming little eddies by the way. As a result, Pater's style, serene and contemplative in tone, suggests, in the words of G. K. Chesterton, a vast attempt at impartiality.

### 5.4.3. Roger Kimball on Aestheticism and Pater

Roger Kimball, a great critic, presents his ideas on the theory of aestheticism and the contribution of Walter Pater to it. He says that despite Pater's enormous reserve, there is a direct line of descent from *The Renaissance* (which was first published in 1873) to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and other such turn of the century manifestations of arty decadence. Mario Praz was right to identify Walter Pater as the forerunner of the Decadent Movement in England. Especially in his early years, Walter Pater liked to think of himself as a champion of Pagan virtues. But an underside of Pagan vices cling firmly to Walter Pater's prose. G. K. Chesterton perceptively noted the duality that accompanies the championship of paganism. A man loves Nature in the morning for her innocence and amiability, and at nightfall, if he is loving her still, it is for her darkness and her cruelty. He washes in dawn at clear water, as did the Wise Men of the Stoics, yet, somehow at the dark end of the day, he is bathing in hot bull's blood, as did Julian the Apostle.

We know that Walter Horatio Pater was born in 1839, the second son and third child of Richard and Mary Pater. His father, a surgeon, died very shortly. In 1854, his mother also died. Pater was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and then at Queen's College, Oxford, where he read widely but took an indifferent degree. As we know that Walter Pater and all her brothers and sisters were living under the eye and care of his aunt named Elizabeth. She also died in 1862 and he set up house in London with Clara and his elder sister Hester. In 1864, he won a provisional fellowship to Brasenose College, Oxford. The fellowship was confirmed the following year and Pater settled into the pattern he would maintain for the rest of his life. Cared for by his maiden sisters, he shuttled quietly between Oxford and London, made occasional trips to the continent and devoted himself to reading, writing, teaching and aesthetic refinement. His circle of friends included Edmund Gosse, Mr. and Mrs. Humphry Ward. In the summer of 1865 Walter Pater's first visit to Italy was a revelation. He found rich sources of renaissance and aestheticism in many pieces of literature. It was then that he began to associate the Italian Renaissance with freedom and abundant sensuous life. In effect, the Renaissance, for Walter Pater named not a historical period but a state of mind, a promise of fulfilment.

Although he was homosexual clearly by disposition, Walter Pater's fastidious nature—what Christopher Ricks called his greed for fineness—forbade anything so obvious as a love affair or a sex life. He was one of those semi-monastic types that the English

Universities breed; vowed to an academic discipline but cherishing an intense originality, painfully repressed and incomplete but in the narrow field of their art somehow both sound and bold. In the event, Walter Pater contented himself with a few passionate friendships and an ardent contemplation of youthful male beauty wherever it chanced to present itself.

Aesthetes embraced Pater's expostulation. The young Oscar Wilde declared that *The Renaissance* was the golden book of spirit and sense, the holy writ of beauty. Others were not so enthusiastic. No one was more shocked by the scandal that *The Renaissance* precipitated than Walter Pater himself. He did not abandon his aestheticism. But he did attempt to modulate it. In the second edition of *The Renaissance*, he dropped the conclusion altogether. Later, he restored it, but with cosmetic modifications and a note informing readers that he had worried that it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall. When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published, Walter Pater took the opportunity to distinguish his version of Epicureanism from Oscar Wilde's. Walter Pater tried to provide a portrait of the true Epicurean.

For Walter Pater, one's own impression trumps meaning. And it is a curious irony, as the critic Adam Philips has observed, that although Pater insists on the value of discrimination and accurate identification of the critic's impressions, he exploited the invitation of inexact words.

Walter Pater looked at an object under the sign of pleasure, not of truth. The Paterian imagination seeks relations in place of duties. It follows that Pater practised consciousness not as a mode of knowledge but as an alternative to knowledge. One of the ways in which Pater was antinomian, was in his being ready to think that understanding was not everything. The chief was his pleasure in feeling alive. In Pater's sense, Aesthetic criticism deals not with objects and works of art but with the types of feeling they embodied. In other words, what matters for Pater are states of feeling, not the Truth?

In a conclusive way, we can say that the sense of freedom is indeed the essence of aestheticism but is the cold and lonely freedom of the isolated individual. The part of Aestheticism which should not be recovered, is its concern for the particularity of form in every work of art. The problem is that although aestheticism begins by emphasizing form, it ends by dissolving form into the pleasurable sensations that Pater valued. In this sense, Aestheticism is the enemy of the intrinsic. Donoghue criticized Eliot's essay on Pater as extravagant and cruel. But Eliot was right. The theory of "art for art's sake" is valid in so far as it can be taken as an exhortation to the artist to stick to his job. It never was and never can be valid for spectator, reader or auditor.

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## **5.5 SUMMING UP**

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In this Unit, we have studied –

- Meaning and definition of Aestheticism
- The Aesthetic Movement and its connectivity with decorative art

- A comparative study of Aestheticism and Irrationalism
- Special study of Walter Pater as an aesthete
- A critical observation by Roger Kimball in relation to Aestheticism and Walter Pater

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**5.6 REFERENCES**

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*Walter Pater: Lover of Strong Souls* by Denis Donoghue

Aestheticism. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aestheticism>. web

Walter Pater. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Pater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Pater)

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**5.7 SUGGESTED READING**

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*Willa Cather And Aestheticism* by Ann Moseley And Sarah Cheney

*The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture In Late Victorian England* by Talia Schaffer

*Aestheticism, Nabokov and Lolita* by David Andrews

*Aestheticism* by Leon Chai

*Aestheticism And Deconstruction:Pater, Derrida And De Man* by Jonathan Loesberg

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**5.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. What do you understand by the term Aestheticism?
2. What was the effect of Aesthetic movement on English literature?
3. What is the importance of Aesthetic visual arts in English literature ?
4. How can we say that there is a close relationship between irrationalism and Aestheticism?
5. Explain in details the Aesthetic style of Walter Pater.

**UNIT 6****T. S. ELIOT**

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- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 T. S. Eliot: About the Critic
- 6.4 “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
- 6.5 “The Function of Criticism”
- 6.6 Eliot’s Critical Concepts
  - 6.6.1 Dissociation of Sensibility
  - 6.6.2 Objective Correlative
- 6.7 Summary
- 6.8 References
- 6.9 Terminal and Model Questions

**6.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous unit we read about the critical method developed by I.A.Richards which led to the development of New Critical approach. Following the same line, in this unit, we will discuss the ideas of another leading critic T.S.Eliot. Largely renowned for his poetical works like *The Waste Land*, Eliot is also accredited for developing some new concepts of critical approach. In this unit we will discuss his famous essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* and his critical concepts like “The Dissociation of Sensibility” and “The Objective Correlative”.

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**6.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss Eliot as a critic
- Explain his ideas expressed in his critical essays
- Understand his concept of tradition
- Understand concepts like Dissociation of Sensibility and Objective Correlative

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**6.3 T. S. ELIOT**

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Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) a playwright, literary critic and one of the best known poets of twentieth century was born in St Louis, Missouri. He studied philosophy at Harvard College from 1906 to 1909 and later at Sorbonne from 1910 to 1911. Later he settled in London, and became a member of the Anglican Church and a British citizen in 1927, preferring to renounce bank, later as an editor with the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. Some of his best known works are, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Gerontion* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also known for his seven plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). Along with his literary achievements he also made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism, strongly influencing the school of New Criticism. His major books of criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

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**6.4 TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT**

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T.S. Eliot in his influential essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, shares his perspective on the function of poetry in the literary canon. He is able to sum up his thesis in this short sentence: “The emotion of art is impersonal”. Like Wimsatt and Beardsley,

Eliot does not believe in the use of poetry as an interpretation of the poet's thought and feelings. In addition, he believes that the poet's role in writing poetry is not to express his own emotions through the medium of his poems, but to create literature that reflects in some way what came before it and can seamlessly attach itself to history.

He begins the first section of his essay by stating that the word "tradition" is almost never used in criticism of literature as a positive term. It is always used as an adjective rather than a noun, and it is considered almost derogatory to mention a writer's work as "too traditional". Eliot laments at the lack of the existence of "a tradition", and seeks to establish one. He states that critics often search for something in a poet's work that sets him apart from others, asserts his individuality, and makes him unique. However, the best part of a writer's work in Eliot's eyes is the part that pays tribute to those who came before him, immortalizing their literary footprints. He says that "the parts in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously", are the parts of the poet's work which are the most individual.

While supporting the emphasizing of tradition and history in writing, Eliot is not advocating a mechanical or blind repetition of writers that have been established as "good". He acknowledges that something original is better than something that has already been done. Thus, literary tradition means something more than just passing something on, or doing something the exact way for generation after generation. In fact, unlike most traditions it does not come easily or feel inherent. It must be worked towards, and one must cultivate "a historical sense". That is, learning about the works of the past so that they become a part of one's present until he can experience both simultaneously. Once a poet does this, then he can write so that his literature holds something of the past as well as something of itself.

Eliot states that no poet has a value in and of himself, but can only be valued as a part of the whole that is himself and those who have come before him. His new work, if heavily affected by all old works as it should be, will then affect those works in return and form an entirely new tradition to be absorbed and adapted by those who come after him. This altering of each existing order of tradition will be a never-ending process, constantly adding new writers and new works into its mixture, and changing to make room for new ideas and original perspectives that will shed light on those that have already been established. Once a new piece is added into the mix, all of the previous pieces will have to be reread and reinterpreted by the light of the new piece. Sometimes nothing will change at all, sometimes there will only be a slight revelation, and sometimes everything will be turned around completely.

It is for this reason that poets must separate themselves from their poetry. Poetry that is to become part of the canon cannot be so personal that it excludes others, because then there is no definite reference point for future poets, and no room for comparison to past ones. Eliot believes that the best poet, the one truly worthy of becoming a part of the tradition, is the one who can feature intense emotion in his writing while keeping his own emotions from influencing it at all. The best poet can employ his poems as vehicles of emotional complexity, working on both emotions he has felt and those he has never felt, in a way

that gives the reader access to feelings with which they can sympathize and recognize without having to have actually experience them.

In the last part of his essay, Eliot says: “To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim...” He feels that this is the only way to truly judge whether a poem itself is good or bad. He then sincerely expresses his wish that more people were able to recognize emotion that derives its meaning from the poem and the poem only, and is completely alienated from the history of the poet. This he calls, “significant” emotion. He concludes by stating that the only way for an artist to master the skill of using significant emotion in his work is to live not only in the present, or only in the past, but to live in the past and present combined and to create a living past.

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### ***6.5 THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM***

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“The Function of Criticism” was written by Eliot as the result of a literary controversy in 1919. A famous romantic critic Middleton Murray published an essay challenging Eliot’s views expressed in his essay “Romanticism and Tradition”. This essay “Function of Criticism” is a reply to the essay written by Murray.

Eliot begins his essay stating or repeating his views which he had already expressed in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Eliot repeats that there is a close bond [relation] between the present and the past in the world of literature, as in the other fields of life. In other words we continue the work of the past. But it does not mean total dependence on the past. Eliot calls the bond with the past as a kind of tradition. All literary works from the time of the ancient masters like Homer to the present generation form a single tradition. A writer’s significance or importance is measured in relation to this tradition.

By criticism Eliot means the analysis of literary works. Criticism can never be an autotelic [directed towards an end in itself] activity. This is because criticism is always about something. So that ‘something’ is to be considered. The main aim of criticism is the clear explanation of literary texts and the correction of taste. But often critics try to differ from one another. This happens because of their prejudices and eccentricities. Eliot holds the view that critics should conform and co-operate in the common pursuit, of true excellence. Even in this troubled situation, there are some critics who are useful. It is on the basis of their works that Eliot intends to establish the aims and methods of criticism.

In the second part of his essay on ‘the Function of Criticism’ Eliot mentions Middleton Murray’s views on Classicism and Romanticism. Murray makes a clear distinction between the two and states that one cannot be Romanticist as well as a Classicist at once. Eliot does not agree with this view of Murray. Murray seems to make it a national or a racial problem, suggesting that the genius of the French is classic and that of the English is romantic. Eliot does not agree with the view of Murray who says that the English as a nation are romantics, humourists and non-conformists and the French are naturally classical.

In the last part of the essay Eliot discusses the problem of criticism in all its manifold aspects. He makes fun of Matthew Arnold who rather bluntly distinguished between the critical and the creative activities. Eliot blames Arnold for not considering that criticism is of great importance, in the process of creation itself. In Eliot's view an author's self criticism is the best kind of criticism. He says that some writers are better creative and superior to others, only because their critical faculty is superior. They are able to criticize their own composition even at the time of composing them. The result is that the composition is corrected and refined. He does not agree with the view that the great artist is an unconscious artist. He argues that critical activities and creative activities cannot be separated. The most important qualification of a critic is that he must have a very highly developed sense of fact. Eliot agrees that it is a rare gift. The critic must be able to give an insight into a text. He argues that impressionistic criticism is false and misleading.

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## **6.6 ELIOT'S CRITICAL CONCEPTS**

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### **6.6.1 The Dissociation of Sensibility**

Eliot's theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' may be said to be an attempt to find some kind of historical explanation to the dissolution of the tradition of unified sensibility which found its perfection in the writings of Dante and Shakespeare. The unified sensibility was a sensibility which was the product of a true synthesis of the individual with the traditional, of feeling with thought and of the temporal with the eternal. It was not only representative of the mind of Europe but also of the traditions of European thought and culture. But unfortunately, according to Eliot, the traditions of unified sensibility were suddenly disrupted in the seventeenth century as a result of a split in the creative personality of the artist, for which he formulated his famous theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility.'

For Eliot, as with Coleridge, poetry is a union of opposites but whereas Coleridge explains that this reconciliation of opposites is brought about by the synthetic power of the secondary imagination, Eliot replaces the words 'secondary imagination' by the words 'unified sensibility' to express the operation of the poet's mind. Eliot assigns primacy to the poetic sensibility which for him is the basis for writing poetry.

By 'sensibility' Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impression. He means much more than that. By 'sensibility' he means a synthetic faculty, a faculty which can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse into a single whole the varied and disparate, often opposite and contradictory experiences, the sensuous and the intellectual.

The great Elizabethans and early Jacobean had developed a unified sensibility. That is why they were widely read, and their thinking and learning modified their mode of feeling. Such a fusion of thought and feeling is to be found in the poetry of Donne as well as in much of modern poetry, but it is lacking in the poetry of Tennyson. The fact is that after Donne and Herbert a change came over the mind of England. The poets lost the capacity of unifying thought and feeling. The 'unification of sensibility' was lost, and a

‘dissociation of sensibility’ set in. After that the poet can either think or they can feel; there are either intellectual poets who can only think, or there are poets who can only feel. The poets of the 18th century were intellectuals, they thought but did not feel; the romantics of the 19th century felt but did not think. Tennyson and Browning can merely reflect or ruminate but cannot express their experience poetically.

Eliot writes:

Tennyson and Browning are poets and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating desperate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, and fragmentary. The latter fails in love, or reads Spinoza and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (The Metaphysical Poets).

The Metaphysical poets like the Elizabethans have a unified sensibility. They were the successors of the Elizabethan dramatists. Like them, the Metaphysicals, too, could be simple, artificial, difficult or fantastic. Then came Milton and Dryden and their influence was most unhealthy, because as a result of their influence there set in a ‘dissociation of sensibility’ from which English poetry has recovered only in the modern age. Both Milton and Dryden were great poets and they rendered important service to the cause of poetry. Under their influence, the English language became more pure and refined. But at the same time, the feeling became cruder. It is for this reason that the feeling expressed in Gray’s *Country Churchyard* is cruder and less satisfying than the feeling expressed in Marvell’s *Coy Mistress*.

There was another effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden, an effect which was indirect and which manifested itself at a later date. Early in the 18th century the poets lacked a balance and they reflected. By ‘reflection’ Eliot means that they ‘ruminated’, they ‘mused’, they ‘mediated poetically’; they enjoyed the luxury of dwelling upon some feeling, but could not express that feeling poetically. In some passages of Shelley’s *Triumph of Life* and Keats’ second *Hyperion*, we find a struggle toward a unification of sensibility. But Shelley and Keats died young and their successors, Tennyson and Browning, could only reflect. They meditated upon their experiences poetically, but failed to turn them into poetry. The Metaphysical poets certainly had their faults. But they had one great virtue. They tried, and often succeeded in expressing their states of mind and feeling in appropriate words and imagery. They had ‘unified sensibility’ and they could find verbal equivalents for it. They were, therefore, more mature and better than later poets.

### **6.6.2 Objective Correlative**

The theory of the ‘objective correlative’ is undoubtedly one of the most important critical concepts of T. S. Eliot. It exerted a tremendous influence on the critical temper of twentieth century. In the concept of the ‘objective correlative’, Eliot’s doctrine of poetic

impersonality finds its most classic formulation. Eliot formulated his doctrine of the 'objective correlative' in his essay on "Hamlet and his Problems".

According to Eliot, the poet cannot communicate his emotions directly to the readers, he has to find some object suggestive of it and only then he can evoke the same emotion in his readers. So this 'objective correlative' is "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." It is through the objective correlative that the transaction between author and reader necessarily takes place. For this object is the primary source of, and warrant for, the reader's response whatever that may be; and it is also the primary basis for whatever inferences we may draw about what it is that the "author wanted to say." Briefly speaking, what Eliot means by his doctrine of the objective correlative is that a great work of art is nothing but a set of conceptual symbols or correlatives which endeavour to express the emotions of the poet, and these symbols constitute the total vision of the creative artist.

Eliot himself defines 'objective correlative' as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula" for the poet's emotion so that "when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked." For example, in Macbeth the dramatist has to convey the mental agony of Lady Macbeth and he does so in "the sleep-walking scene", not through description, but through an unconscious repetition of her past actions. Her mental agony has been made objective, so that it can as well be seen by the eyes as felt by the heart. The external situation is adequate to convey the emotions, the agony of Lady Macbeth. Instead of communicating the emotions directly to the reader, the dramatist has embodied them in a situation or a chain of events, which suitably communicate the emotion to the reader. Similarly, the dramatist could devise in Othello a situation which is a suitable objective correlative, for the emotion of the hero. Hamlet is an artistic failure for here the external situation does not suitably embody the effect of a mother's guilt on her son. The disgust of Hamlet is in excess of the facts as presented in the drama.

It becomes apparent that it is neither the intensity of the emotion nor the greatness of its components that determines the poetic quality of a poem but what matters is the intensity of the fusion, nor one of the ways in which the poet achieves this intensity is through the embodiment of an emotion in a concrete object. That is why Matthiessen interprets the term 'objective correlative' to mean a situation or image which represents the poet's emotion. Furthermore, the theory of the 'objective correlative's is thus based on the assumption that every poem cannot only be broken into its correlatives but the correlatives can be pieced together to form a larger whole.

What Eliot may have had in mind was that the emotions of poetry should be provided with motives, or that the responses of the poets should be responses to a defined situation. The actions, gestures and words of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep arouse the same sense of anguish in the readers as they do in Macbeth himself, and hence his words on hearing of his wife's death seem quite inevitable and natural under the circumstances. This is also the case with the anguish of Othello. This is so because the external action and situation are quite adequate for the internal emotion. But this is not so in Hamlet. There is no object, character, situation or incident which adequately expresses the inner

anguish. He suffers terribly, but his suffering is far in excess to the character and situation as presented in the play. A similar situation in real life would not arouse equally intense emotion in normally constituted people. In other words, Shakespeare has failed to find a suitable 'Objective Co-relative' for the emotion he wanted to convey. Herein lays the real source of the artistic failure of Hamlet.

Different critics have explained the phrase 'objective correlative' in different ways. For Cleanth Brooks, 'objective correlative' means "organic metaphor", for Sister Mary Cleophas Costello "the intensity of meaning-structure". Eliseo Vivas takes it as a vehicle of expression for the poet's emotion; Allan Austin treats it as the poetic content to be conveyed by verbal expression.

Eliot's theory of the objective correlative reminds us of Aristotle as well as the French symbolists. Like Aristotle, Eliot is of the opinion that it is not the business of the poet to 'say' but to 'show', not to present but to represent. In other words, Eliot's concept of the objective correlative is based on the notion that it is not the business of the poet to present his emotions directly but rather to represent them indirectly through the 'objective correlative' which become the formula for the poet's original emotions. One of the reasons why Eliot admires Dante's poetry is that Dante's was 'a visual imagination,' because he attempted 'to make us see what he saw,' because he did not lose his grasp over 'the objective correlative.'

Eliot had learnt from the French symbolists that emotion can only be evoked; it cannot be expressed directly. Mallarme contended that poetry is not made of ideas but of words, and explored the potentialities of words as modes of evocative suggestion. Eliot's theory was also anticipated by Ezra Pound in "The Spirit of Romance." Pound admitted that in the ideographic process of using material images to suggest immaterial relations, the poet has to be as impersonal, as the scientist: "Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like, but equations for the human emotion." In Pound's phrase "equations for the human emotion," we find Eliot's objective or relative foreshadowed.

The theory of the 'objective correlative' is also a continuation of the views of the Imagists. As Eliot himself explains in his *Introduction to the Selected Poems* by Marianne Moore, 'the aim of imagism...was to induce a peculiar concentration upon something visual, and to set in motion an expanding succession of concentric feelings.' Thus the ideas of the Imagists are similar to those of Eliot contained in his theory of the 'objective correlative'; it is not the poet's aim to set in motion his original emotion but 'to induce a peculiar concentration upon something visual'.

The basic idea in Eliot's theory of the 'objective correlative', that the emotions in poetry are embodied in an object, owes much to the romantics. For example, Coleridge points out 'that images however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature...do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by predominant passion, or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion.' Wordsworth also says much the same thing when he says 'that poetry proceeds from the soul of man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the

external world'. In the Victorian Age, Ruskin elaborated the idea further when he pointed out that great poets represent the object as it is, the same time conveying their emotion. In the twentieth century both Hume and Pound expounded the theory that the poet should choose something external to represent his emotions, and they stressed the need for accuracy and concreteness of the object that would be symbolic expression of the emotions of the poet.

It is generally agreed that the term 'objective correlative' was probably borrowed from Washington Allston's Lectures on Art. Although the idea contained in the doctrine of the objective correlative is traceable to a number of critics, there is no doubt that Eliot gave to the phrase its unique currency and elaborate interpretation. The phrase 'objective correlative' has become the recognised term to signify the way emotion is expressed through a work of art.

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## **6.7 SUMMARY**

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Eliot's influence as a poet and critic has been enormous on the later critical thought. His contribution towards ideas regarding the integrity of poetry, the process of poetic composition, the importance of tradition in relation to individual talent, the relation of the past and the present, and the fusion of feeling and thought, helped in the development of a new stream of critical thought. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" presents a view of the great artist as part of tradition. Eliot strongly denies poetry being an expression of emotion, and lays stress on its impersonality. He used the phrase "the objective correlative" to describe how emotion should be represented in literature. His essay, "The Function of Criticism", discusses the tools, like "comparison and analysis" which have been used by most New Critics in their analysis of literary texts.

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## **6.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss T.S.Eliot's achievement as a critic.
2. Discuss Eliot's views on the role of "Tradition" in artistic genius.
3. What do you understand by "dissociation of sensibility"? Explain.
4. How is "objective correlative" necessary for expression of emotions?
5. Discuss the function of criticism as defined by Eliot.

**UNIT 7:****I. A. RICHARDS**

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7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Background

7.4 I.A. Richards

7.5 Principles of Literary Criticism

7.6 Four kinds of Meanings

7.7 Practical Criticism

7.8 Summary

7.9 References

7.10 Terminal and Model Questions

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**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the earlier unit we discussed the development of the New Critical thought, its principles and major proponents. Now we will study about one of the major contributors of the New Critical thought, I.A. Richards. In his book *The New Criticism* (1941), John Crowe Ransom begins his chapter on Richards by saying, “Discussion of *The New Criticism* must start with Mr. Richards. The New Criticism very nearly began with him.” In this unit, you will read and understand critical essays by Richards, and analyse his achievement as a critic.

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**7.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Understand I. A. Richards as a critic
- Discuss his life and major works
- Analyse his contribution to New Critical thought

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**7.3 BACKGROUND**

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New Criticism developed as a thought mostly as a reaction against the beliefs of prevailing Positivism. Positivism in literary criticism is summed up by Taine’s famous slogan of “race, milieu, and moment”. Taine said that a literary text should be regarded as the expression of the psychology of an individual, lived, and of the race to which he belonged. All human achievements can be explained by reference to these causes. Literary criticism was devoted to the causal explanation of texts in relation to these three factors. Critics paid attention to the author’s life, his immediate social and cultural environment, and any statements he made about why he wrote. Research was directed towards the minute details of the writer’s life, and tracing sources. Critics were not interested in the features of the literary text itself except from a philological and historical viewpoint. They disregarded questions concerning the value or the distinctive properties of literature, since these could not be dealt with in a factual or historical manner. Twentieth century criticism reacts against this extrinsic approach to literature. Now attention shifts from the author to the text and the reader.

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**7.4 I. A. RICHARDS**

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I. A. Richards, (Ivor Armstrong Richards) (born Feb. 26, 1893, Sandbach, Cheshire, Eng.—died Sept. 7, 1979, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire), was an English critic, poet, and teacher who was highly influential in developing a new way of reading poetry that led to the New Criticism and that also influenced some forms of reader-response criticism.

Richards was educated at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and was a lecturer in English and moral sciences there from 1922 to 1929. In that period he wrote three of his most influential books: *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923; with C.K. Ogden), a pioneer work on semantics; and *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929), companion volumes that he used to develop his critical method. The latter two were based on experimental pedagogy: Richards would give students poems in which the titles and authors' names had been removed and then use their responses for further development of their "close reading" skills. Richards is best known for advancing the close reading of literature and for articulating the theoretical principles upon which these skills lead to "practical criticism," a method of increasing readers' analytic powers.

During the 1930s, Richards spent much of his time developing Basic English, a system originated by Ogden that employed only 850 words; Richards believed a universally intelligible language would help to bring about international understanding. He took Basic English to China as a visiting professor at Tsing Hua University (1929–30) and as director of the Orthological Institute of China (1936–38). In 1942 he published a version of Plato's Republic in Basic English. He became professor of English at Harvard University in 1939, working mainly in primary education, and emeritus professor there in 1963. His speculative and theoretical works include *Science and Poetry* (1926; revised as *Poetries and Sciences*, 1970), *Mencius on the Mind* (1932), *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934), *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), *Speculative Instruments* (1955), *Beyond* (1974), *Poetries* (1974), and *Complementarities* (1976). His verse has been collected in *Internal Colloquies* (1971) and *New and Selected Poems* (1978).

A student of psychology and philosophy along with literary forms, Richards concluded that poetry performs a therapeutic function by coordinating a variety of human impulses into an aesthetic whole, helping both the writer and the reader maintain their psychological well-being. He valued a "poetry of inclusion" that was able to contain the widest variety of warring tensions and oppositions.

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## **7.5 PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM**

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I. A. Richards in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* sets out to establish a theoretical framework for criticism which would free it from subjectivity and emotionalism. Richards proposes a psychological theory of art as it helps to order our impulses.

He dismisses the concepts of something special in aesthetics and does not believe that the emotion dealt in literature as extra ordinary. Earlier to this it was believed that art experience was a special kind of experience, in a class of its own, not to be compared with the experiences of ordinary life. But Richards feels that there is no such special mode. He considers aesthetic experience as not a new or different kind of thing; but similar to ordinary experiences. He mentions ordinary activities like putting on clothes or walking down to an art gallery, to emphasize his point that art experience is not of a fundamentally different kind; art experience is more complex, and more unified. It is possible to analyse art experience, and examine its value in term of ordinary life, because it is a special state cut off from ordinary life.

Richards maintains that criticism should not concern itself with the avowed or undeclared motives of the artist. Richards believes that the mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. It is dangerous to try to analyse the inner workings of the artist's mind by the evidence of his artistic work. It is not possible to verify what went on in the artist's mind, just as we cannot be sure what goes on in a dreamer's mind. Very often, the most plausible explanations of the artist's mental processes may be quite wrong. To prove this point, Richards takes up Coleridge's famous poem, *Kubla Khan*. It is well known that Coleridge wrote it under the influence of opium. Richards points out that the explanation is much simpler: Coleridge was influenced by Milton. Richards examines lines 223-283 from *Paradise Lost*, Book IV. He quotes many lines from Milton's poem to establish it as the source of the underground river, the fountain, and the Abyssinian maid "singing of Mount Abora" of Coleridge's poem. Richards brings up this example to show the difficulties of speculating about the poet's mental processes; he feels that it would be a wrong application of psychology.

Richards believes that the arts can improve the quality of lives by communicating valuable experiences. He believes the "The arts are our storehouse of recorded values". He gives a very high place to the artist.

Literary criticism should concern with value: Richards believes that "Art for Art's sake" is wrong. He declares, "The critic is as closely occupied with the health of the mind as the doctor with the health of the body". He says that it is wrong to consider value a transcendental idea. Metaphysical or ethical considerations should be kept out of literary criticism. He proposes a psychological theory of value. Richards says that the function of the arts is to organize our impulses; the effect of art is "the resolution, inter-animation, and balancing of impulses". In some respects, Richards's theory seems similar to Aristotle's catharsis, which suggested that the function of tragedy was to restore emotional balance.

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## **7.6 THE FOUR KINDS OF MEANINGS**

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I. A. Richards was the first critic to bring to English criticism a scientific precision and objectivity. He was the first to distinguish between the two uses of language – the referential and the emotive. His well-articulated theory is found in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*. The present extract is from his *Practical Criticism* which speaks about the four kinds of meaning. Richards is remembered for his modern way of teaching and studying literature. New criticism and the whole of modern tensional poetics derive their strength and inspiration from the seminal writings of Richards. Richards begins the extract by pointing to the difficulty of all reading. The problem of making out the meaning is the starting point in criticism. The answers to 'what is a meaning?', 'What are we doing when we endeavour to make it out?' are the master keys to all the problems of criticism. The all-important fact for the study of literature or any other mode of communication is that there are several kinds of meaning. Whether we speak, write, listen, or read, the 'Total meaning' is a blend of several contributory meanings of different types. Language – and pre-eminently language as it is used in poetry has several

tasks to perform simultaneously. Four kinds of functions or meanings as enlisted by I.A. Richards are the following:

1. Sense
2. Feeling
3. Tone
4. Intention.

### **Sense**

‘We speak to say something and when we listen we expect something to be said. We use words to direct our hearers’ attention upon some state of affairs, to present to them some items for consideration and to excite in them some thoughts about these items’. In short, what we speak to convey to our listeners for their consideration can be called ‘sense’. This is the most important thing in all scientific utterances where verification is possible.

### **Feeling**

The attitude towards what we convey is known as ‘feeling’. In other words, we have bias or accentuation of interest towards what we say. We use language to express these feelings. Similarly, we have these feelings even when we receive. This happens even if the speaker is conscious of it or not. In exceptional cases, say in mathematics, no feeling enters. The speaker’s attitude to the subject is known as ‘feeling’.

### **Tone**

The speaker has an attitude to his listener. ‘He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate recognition of his relation to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. Thus ‘tone’ refers to the attitude to the listener.

### **Intention**

Finally apart from what he says (sense), his attitude to what he is talking about (feeling), and his attitude to his listener (tone), there is the speaker’s intention, his aim (conscious or unconscious) - the effect he is endeavouring to promote. The speaker’s purpose modifies his speech. Frequently, the speaker’s intention operates through and satisfies itself in a combination of other functions. ‘It may govern the stress laid upon points in an argument. It controls the ‘plot’ in the larger sense of the word. It has special importance in dramatic and semi dramatic literature. Thus the influence of his intention upon the language he uses is additional to the other three influences.

If we survey the uses of language as a whole, predominance of one function over the other may be found. A man writing a scientific treatise will put the ‘sense’ of what he has to say first. For a writer popularising some of the results and hypotheses of science, the principles governing his language are not so simple; his intention will inevitably interfere

with the other functions. In conversation, we get the clearest examples of the shifts of function, i.e. one function being taken over by another. Towards the end of the essay, I. A. Richards says that it is much harder to obtain statements about poetry than expressions of feelings towards it and towards the author. Very many apparent statements turn out to be the indirect expressions of Feeling, Tone and Intention

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## **7.7 PRACTICAL CRITICISM**

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I. A. Richards' "Practical Criticism", published in 1929, is one of those that started New Criticism and with it, a whole new attitude toward literary criticism. Richards as a Professor at Cambridge University gave out 10 or so poems to his class, without telling them who wrote each or what it they were called, and told everyone to respond in writing in whatever way they wanted to. So at the end of this experiment he has hundreds of these responses, what he calls "protocols" for some reason, and "Practical Criticism" is his analysis of the responses. He approaches the whole thing very scientifically: he sifts through the protocols and finds the problems that his students have with each poem, then identifies them. He says there are ten (10) obstacles that get in the way of the real meaning of a poem, from plain misunderstanding to the reader's own random associations (which he calls "irrelevant"), to more philosophical hurdles like the question of whether a poem is good if it preaches a political or moral viewpoint that you disagree with. The following are the obstacles pointed out by Richards:

- The difficulty of making out the plain sense of poetry – a large number of readers failed to understand it, both as a statement and as an expression.
- The difficulties of sensuous apprehension – many readers do not appreciate the sound, the rhythm and movement of the text.
- The problems of imagery, primarily visual imagery – some readers have a poor imaging capacity
- Mnemonic irrelevancies – the reader remembers some personal experience which is not relevant to the poem.
- Stock Responses – the reader may have fully prepared views and emotions, which are simply triggered off by the poem. He does not respond to the poem in question – he already has a ready – made response.
- Sentimentality – the reader may be too emotional.
- Inhibition – the opposite extreme to sentimentality, the reader experiences less emotion than he ought to.
- Doctrinal Adhesions. Poetry may contain or imply certain beliefs about the world, or at least seem to contain certain views. A clash between the reader's own views, and the views he finds expressed in the poetry, are a fertile source of erratic judgment.

- The effects of technical presuppositions. When some poem succeeds by using a certain technique, we expect similar themes to be handled with the same technique, and do not respond when a new or different technique is used. The converse is also true – if a technique has failed in one case, we jump to the conclusion that the technique itself is useless. Many readers make this mistake of confusing cause and effect.
- General critical preconceptions. The reader may have preconceived notions about the nature and value of poetry. Whether these preconceptions are conscious or unconscious, they create an obstacle between the reader and the poem.

He asserts the need for a student to learn how language works, which means studying “the kinds of meaning that language handles, their connection with one another, their interferences”. Richards believed that when we remove the obstacles in the way of the poet communicating with the reader, he will be open to the poet’s mental condition and can experience the poem properly.

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### **7.8 SUMMARY**

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Richard’s emphasis on the close reading of text considering it as an autonomous entity, and his example of a criticism that is practical, was enthusiastically taken up by the New Critics. This inspired Empson, a student of Richards, to develop a model for a study of multiple meanings in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). William Empson (1906-1984) defines ambiguity as “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions” and classifies it into seven types representing advancing stages of difficulty.

In his *Practical Criticism*, Richards carefully distinguishes between the sense, feeling, tone and intention of a text. We discussed in this unit that according to Richards the content and form of a text cannot be studied in isolation from the expression. Content is not something that can be discussed in isolation from the expression. We discussed in brief the most influential critical works by Richards which paved a way for the development of a new form of literary criticism.

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### **7.10 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss the achievement of Richards as a critic.
2. What ideas does Richards provide in *The Principles of Literary Criticism*?

3. Discuss the Four kinds of Meanings as explained by I.A.Richards.
4. What are the obstacles mentioned by Richards in Practical Criticism?
5. Discuss the influence of Richards on later critics and criticism.

**UNIT 8: NEW CRITICISM**

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8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 New Criticism

8.3.1 Defining New Criticism

8.3.2 New critical formalism

8.3.2.1 The heresy of paraphrase

8.3.2.2 Intentional and affective fallacy

8.4 Principles of New Criticism

8.5 Major proponents

8.5.1 T. S. Eliot

8.5.2 I. A. Richards

8.5.3 Cleanth Brooks

8.5.4 F. R. Leavis

8.6 Summary

8.7 References

8.8 Terminal and Model Questions

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**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

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By now you must be aware of the literary critical traditions. In this unit we will study the development about the New Critical thought. The unit will cover the development and the major proponents of this school of thought.

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**8.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- Define the concept of new criticism
- Understand the basic assumptions of this school of thought
- Understand the development of this critical tradition
- Explain the approach towards literary texts
- Name the major proponents of this school of thought

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**8.3 NEW CRITICISM**

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New Criticism is an approach to literature which was developed by a group of American critics, during the years following the first World War. The New Critics wanted to avoid impressionistic criticism, which risked being shallow and arbitrary, and social/ historical approaches which might easily be subsumed by other disciplines. Thus, they attempted to systematize the study of literature, to develop an approach which was centered on the rigorous study of the text itself. They were given their name by John Crowe Ransom, who describes the new American formalists in *The New Criticism* (1941).

**8.3.1 Defining New Criticism**

The New Criticism is a type of formalist literary criticism that reached its height during the 1940s and 1950s and that received its name from John Crowe Ransom's 1941 book *The New Criticism*. New Critics treat a work of literature as if it were a self-contained, self-referential object. Rather than basing their interpretations of a text on the reader's response, the author's stated intentions, or parallels between the text and historical contexts (such as author's life), New Critics perform a close reading, concentrating on the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character or form. New Critics emphasize that the structure of a work should not be divorced from meaning, viewing the two as constituting a quasi-organic unity. Special attention is paid to repetition, particularly of images or symbols, but also of sound effects and rhythms in poetry. New Critics especially appreciate the use of literary devices, such as irony, to achieve a balance or reconciliation between dissimilar, even conflicting, elements in a text.

Because it stresses close textual analysis and viewing the text as a carefully crafted, orderly object containing formal, observable patterns, the New Criticism has sometimes been called an "objective" approach to literature. For instance, reader-response critics see meaning as a function either of each reader's experience or of the norms that govern a particular interpretive community, and deconstructors argue that texts mean opposite things at the same time.

The foundations of the New Criticism were laid in books and essays written during the 1920s and 1930s by I. A. Richards (*Practical Criticism* [1929]), William Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity* [1930]), and T. S. Eliot ("The Function of Criticism" [1933]). The approach was significantly developed later, however, by a group of American poets and critics, including R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and William K. Wimsatt. Although associated with certain principles and terms—such as *affective fallacy* (the notion that the reader's response is relevant to the meaning of a work) and *intentional fallacy* (the notion that the author's intention determines the work's meaning)—the New Critics were trying to make a cultural statement rather than to establish a critical dogma. Generally southern, religious, and culturally conservative, they advocated the inherent value of literary works (particularly of literary works regarded as beautiful art objects) because they were sick of the growing ugliness of modern life and contemporary events. Some recent theorists even link the rising popularity after World War II of the New Criticism (and other types of formalist literary criticism such as the Chicago School) to American isolationism. These critics tend to view the formalist tendency to isolate literature from biography and history as symptomatic of American fatigue with wider involvements.

Adapted from *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* by Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray

### 8.3.2 New Critical formalism

New Criticism is distinctly formalist in character. It stresses close attention to the internal characteristics of the text itself, and it discourages the use of external evidence to explain the work. The method of New Criticism is foremost a close reading, concentrating on such formal aspects as rhythm, meter, theme, imagery, metaphor, etc. The interpretation of a text shows that these aspects serve to support the structure of meaning within the text.

The aesthetic qualities praised by the New Critics were largely inherited from the critical writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was the first to elaborate on a concept of the poem as a unified, organic whole which reconciled its internal conflicts and achieved some final balance or harmony.

In *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), Cleanth Brooks integrates these considerations into the New Critical approach. In interpreting canonical works of poetry, Brooks constantly analyzes the devices with which they set up opposing these and then resolve them. Through the use of "ironic contrast" and "ambivalence", the poet is able to create internal paradoxes which are always resolved. Under close New Critical analysis, the poem is shown to be a hierarchical structure of meaning.

### 8.3.2.1 The heresy of paraphrase

Although the New Critics do not assert that the meaning of a poem is inconsequential, they reject approaches which view the poem as an attempt at representing the "real world." They justify the avoidance of discussion of a poem's content through the doctrine of the "Heresy of Paraphrase," which is also described in *The Well-Wrought Urn*. Brooks asserts that the meaning of a poem is complex and precise, and that any attempt to paraphrase it inevitably distorts or reduces it. Thus, any attempt to say what a poem means is heretical, because it is an insult to the integrity of the complex structure of meaning within the work.

### 8.3.2.2 The intentional and affective fallacies

In *The Verbal Icon* (1954), William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley describe two other fallacies which are encountered in the study of literature.

The "Intentional Fallacy" is the mistake of attempting to understand the author's intentions when interpreting a literary work. Such an approach is fallacious because the meaning of a work should be contained solely within the work itself, and attempts to understand the author's intention violate the autonomy of the work.

The "Affective Fallacy" is the mistake of equating a work with its emotional effects upon an audience. The new critics believed that a text should not have to be understood relative to the responses of its readers; its merit (and meaning) must be inherent.

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## 8.4 PRINCIPLES OF NEW CRITICISM

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In the words of F.R. Leavis, New Critics focus strongly on "the words on the page." New Critics want to know how the work speaks itself through the words on the page, figures of speech and symbols.

New Critics are interested in how the parts of a text relate to create

- Harmony
- Order
- Tension
- Paradox
- Ambivalence
- Ambiguity

New Critics are primarily concerned with the language (verbal meaning) and the organisation (overall structure) of a text.

New Critics solely focused on poetry and not fiction. Although there have been attempts to apply New Criticism to fiction based works, poetry in their main focus.

New Criticism dealt with how a work can be read objectively and accurately by examining the structure and form. Therefore, New Critics conclude that there is one single or correct interpretation of a text.

New Criticism is not concerned with external circumstances like the

- Biography of the author
- Historical context
- Social conditions at the time of production
- Effects on the reader and
- They have a minimal interest in the content of the text (message/ideas)

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## **8.5 MAJOR PROPONENTS**

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### **8.5.1 T. S. Eliot**

According to Selden, T. S. Eliot was the single most influential figure behind New Criticism. His essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, written in 1919 was a building block for much Anglo-American criticism. In his essay, Eliot argues that writers must have ‘the historical sense,’ which can be seen as a sense of tradition. Tradition to Eliot is the presence of the past. It is not the knowledge of specific events in history, but rather an encompassing feeling of past literature, which inspires the writer to write originally and with the spirit of the past in mind. In this way, the writing is not repetitious and handed down from the immediate predecessors, but is new material merely written in the spirit of the past. Eliot says that whenever a new work is written it will be compared to the past and that the value of existing works will be readjusted to accommodate the new work: this is conformity between the old and the new. Therefore, a poet should be aware that they will be judged by the standards of the past and compared to works that are thought to be ‘good.’

Aside from tradition, the other issue Eliot raises in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* is the likening of writing to science and the detachment from emotion that a writer must have while writing in order to achieve this scientific state. Eliot declares that “the business of the poet is not to find new emotions but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all”. Eliot does not think that poetry should be personal and that most of it should reflect conscious and deliberate thought. Further Eliot argues that “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality”.

Basically in his writing Eliot emphasised “‘science,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘impersonality,’ and that the poem should be the object of analysis, not the poet. Eliot also claimed that the poem should contain the ‘essence’ of tradition based on the great works of the past” (Selden 15).

### **8.5.2 Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893-1979)**

Certain elements of the works of I. A. Richards were essential to the development of the New Criticism movement. Well-known works by Richards include *The Meaning of Meaning*, *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*. One of the essential elements found in these works is Richards’ concept that poetry is psychological and not cognitive. Richards also pays a great deal of attention to the use of language in poetry. According to Richards: “It has to be recognised that all our natural turns of speech are misleading, especially those we use in discussing works of art. We become so accustomed to them that even when we are aware that they are ellipses, it is easy to forget the fact”.

Essentially, poetry is all well and good, but it has no real connection to the world. Its purpose is psychological rather than cognitive.

### **8.5.3 Cleanth Brooks**

In *Modern Poetry and The Tradition*, Cleanth Brooks discussed his beliefs on the critical revolution, which he thought was about to happen if not already started. He believed that there were two extreme types of critics and poets: the traditionalists and modernists. In *The Well Wrought Urn*, Cleanth Brooks discusses how he believed that new critics should be objective and scientific in their criticism and in practice relate the work in question to the cultural matrix out of which it came. Brooks believed that poetry should be a statement of ‘Carpe Diem’ or seize the day and that poetry should not mean but be, if the poem had an outside meaning than the reader was distracted from the actual poem. Brooks also discussed paradox as the most important language and literary convention in poetry. Brooks argued that the paradox must be sophisticated, witty, and bright in order to enhance poetry. Brooks believed that paradox should be intellectual rather than emotional.

Brooks believed that metaphorical language should not and could not be used as decoration or ornamental but it *was* the poem, to remove it (the metaphorical language) would be to destroy the poem; as a result a poem cannot be reduced to paraphrasing.

### **8.5.4 F. R. Leavis**

F.R. Leavis was a teacher at Cambridge University. Many of the other New Critics lived in the United States. For Leavis, living across the ocean in England gave him a different, if related, perspective. F. R. Leavis was not entirely a New Critic, but his close analysis of the poem itself (“the words on the page”) and his belief that a poem should be self-sustaining (its reason for being should exist only inside its text and meaning), make him important to New Criticism. Leavis’s major influences include T.S. Eliot and Matthew

Arnold and his major works include *The Common Pursuit*, *The Great Tradition*, *Revaluation*, and *Education and the University*.

While New Criticism was especially dominant in the 1940s and 1950s, Leavisite criticism became especially dominant in the 1970s. Leavis became, according to *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, "the major single target for the new critical theory of the 1970s and beyond" (Selden, 23). Leavis's criticism did not have a clearly defined theory, (in fact he refused to define his theories at all), but it was based on a "common sense" approach which dealt closely with the text of the poem.

Leavis believed that there were "great works" of literature, therefore remaining a strong supporter of an existing canon. He also had defined ideas about what poetry was and what was not. He did not hesitate to dismiss many popular authors as non-poetic. Tennyson, Lang ("The Odyssey"), and Browning were a few of those who he dismissed as writing in poetic form, but not writing true poetry. Leavis's criticism had a sense of the past. It related historical context to the poem and poet. The era that the poem was written in and the types of poetry that were being composed in that particular era, he believed, had an effect on the poetry that was composed, the ideas behind it, and the shape/form of that poetry. Historical and social backgrounds were not a focus of Leavis's criticism. However, the focus of Leavis's criticism was always on the text in terms of words and how they related to one another, (their ambiguities and contrasts).

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## **8.6 SUMMARY**

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In this unit we tried to present New Criticism in a nutshell. We studied the development of New Criticism its principles and its major proponents. New Criticism in a sense gave new direction to literary critical practices and concentrated on the quality and the details of the text rather than the author and other external factors.

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## **8.7 REFERENCES**

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- Davis, Robert Con. *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Longman, 1994.
- Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism*. Blackwell.
- Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Prentice Hall, 1997.
- [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

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## **8.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. What have you understood by the term New Criticism?
2. Trace the development of the New Critical thought.
3. Discuss the role of I.A.Richards in the development of New Criticism.
4. What are your views regarding the method adopted by the new critics?
5. Explain the basic principles of New Criticism.