

English Critical Tradition from Aristotle to F.R. Leavis

COURSE CODE: SGB24EG204MC

English Language and Literature (Honours)

Major Course

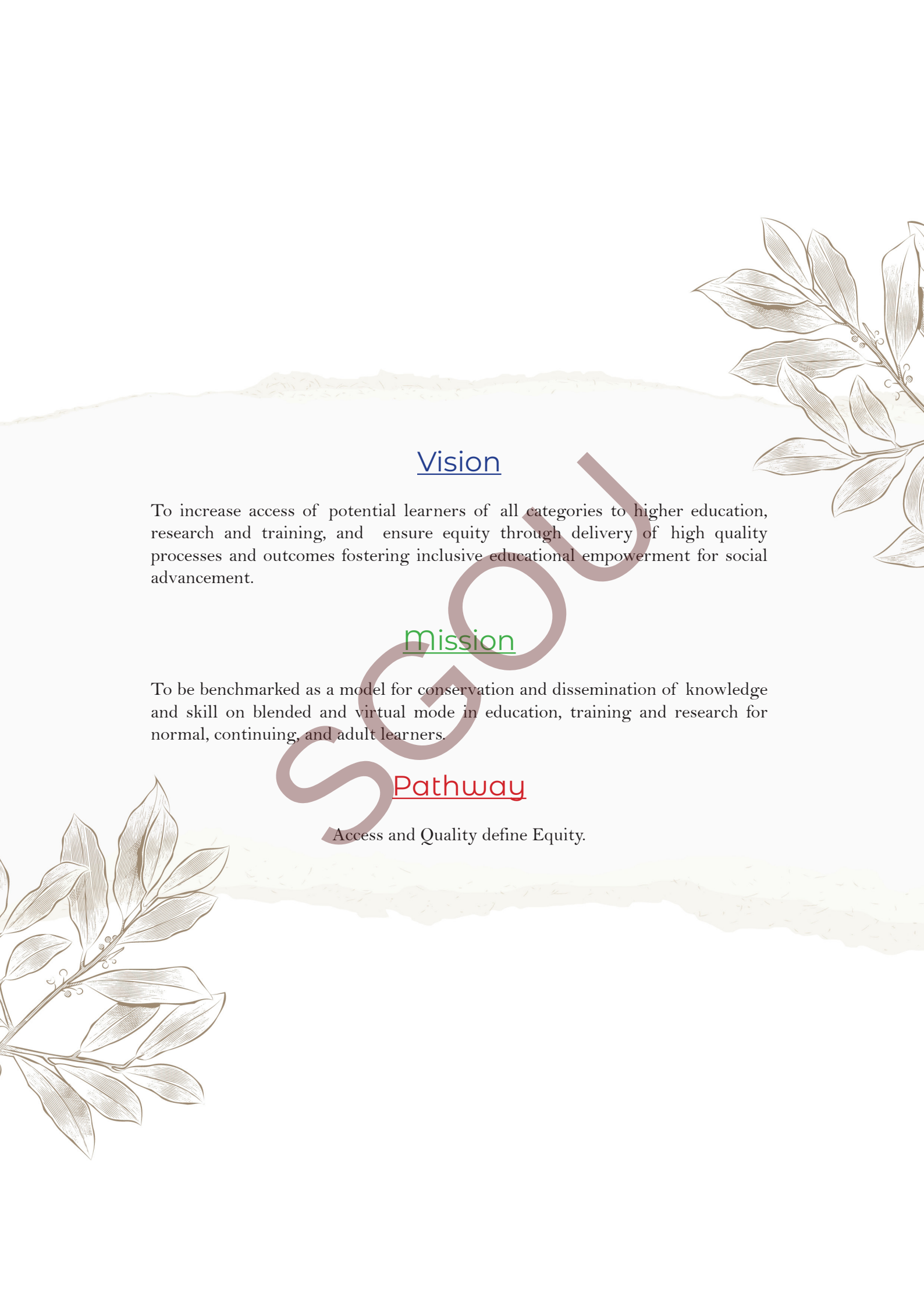
Self Learning Material



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The background features a stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of yellow and green. On the right side, there is a detailed illustration of a leafy branch. A large, faint, purple 'S' shape is overlaid on the page, passing behind the text.

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

**English Critical Tradition
from Aristotle to F.R. Leavis**
Course Code: SGB24EG204MC
Semester - IV

**Four Year Undergraduate Programme
English Language and Literature (Honours)
Major Course
Self Learning Material**



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ENGLISH CRITICAL TRADITION FROM ARISTOTLE TO F.R. LEAVIS

Course Code: SGB24EG204MC

Semester- IV

Major Course

BA English Language and Literature (Honours)

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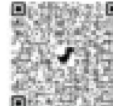
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Dear Learner,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature offered by Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Established in September 2020, our university aims to provide high-quality higher education through open and distance learning. Our guiding principle, 'access and quality define equity', shapes our approach to education. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our academic offerings.

Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

The Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature covers all relevant areas aligned with English language and literary studies. We have incorporated the latest trends in English studies to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum. Moreover, the programme encompasses flexible options for learners to choose from a range of Ability Enhancement Courses, Multi-disciplinary Courses, Value Added Courses, and Skill Enhancement Courses, complemented by discipline-oriented Advanced and Additional Advanced Courses.

Our teaching methodology combines three key elements: Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling, and Virtual modes. This blended approach aims to provide a rich and engaging learning experience, overcoming the limitations often associated with distance education. We are confident that this programme will enhance your understanding of English language and literature, preparing you for various career paths and further academic pursuits.

Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme.

We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor

01-01-2026

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BLOCK - 01

Socio-political and Literary Background I

Unit-1

: Classical to Enlightenment Thought in Literary

Unit-2

: Romantic and Victorian Criticism



Classical to Enlightenment Thought in Literary

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ become aware of foundations of Greek and Roman criticism.
- ▶ analyse Plato's and Aristotle's literary theories.
- ▶ explain Renaissance recovery of classical critical texts.
- ▶ evaluate Neoclassical principles of order, decorum, rules.
- ▶ assess Enlightenment aesthetics of taste, beauty, sublime.

Prerequisite

The Classical Period from roughly 500 BCE through the Hellenistic and Roman ages established many of the core concepts of Western literary criticism, including mimesis, canon, tragedy, rhetoric, decorum, and the sublime. Familiarity with basic Greek history and key figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Horace, and Longinus will help the learner situate early critical ideas within their political, philosophical, and theatrical contexts.

The Renaissance, Neoclassical, and Enlightenment periods reinterpreted these classical models through humanism, rationalism, and emerging aesthetics of taste and genius. Learners should already understand the broad outlines of the Renaissance (humanism, printing, recovery of antiquity), Neoclassicism (reason, rules, imitation of ancients), and the Enlightenment (empiricism, rationalism, "Age of Reason"), plus have a basic awareness of key names such as Dante, Castelvetro, Boileau, Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Burke, Hume, and Kant.

Keywords

Mimesis, Decorum, Sublime, Unities, Vernacular Humanism

Discussion

Introduction to Literary Criticism

Most learners generally consider literary criticism a difficult or abstract subject. This is a form of academic prejudice that prevents us from becoming masters of the subject. First of all we should realise that literary criticism is part of literature itself. Our mastery of literary criticism depends on our familiarity with literature itself. Reading and understanding creative or imaginative literature - poetry, drama, novel, and the like - naturally involve a process of interpretation on the part of those who read them. They are in their own right critics in so far as they have definite, although not clearly or systematically articulated, opinions about the works they read. Responses to literary experience articulated in a systematic manner making use of different tools of analysis are what may roughly be called literary criticism. Over the centuries some form of such criticism has always been there accompanying literary activity. If we often find it difficult and confusing it is mainly because we are somewhat unfamiliar with the terminology that literary theoreticians use. At the same time it is to be asserted that we cannot do without it whether we are casual readers or serious students. Critical awareness can enhance our understanding of literature.

At the moment we approach the problem from purely practical considerations. We have a list of authors representing various critical schools from the classical Greek and Indian to the twentieth century. Some background reading on your part will surely help to master the topics given. Suggestions for reading include W.H. Hudson's *Introduction to the Study of Literature* (Chapter VI "Study of Criticism and the Valuation of Literature"), relevant sections of M.H. Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, and Wilbur Scott's *Five Ap-*

proaches of Literary Criticism. Familiarisation with critical terms is of vital importance in our study. Various terms relating to historical movements, genres, and other concepts are to be mastered. A general understanding of literary criticism and its functions may be acquired from M.H. Abrams essay on criticism in the opening chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp*. The distinction that he makes is based on the kind of importance we give to what he describes as the "coordinates" of a given work of art. Abrams says "Four elements in the total situation of a work of art are discriminated and made salient, by one or another synonym, in almost all theories which aim to be comprehensive." They are: 1. the work, 2. the artist who produces it, 3. a subject which directly or deviously is derived from existing things - people, actions, ideas, and feelings, material things and events - which is included in the broad sense of the term "nature", and 4. the audience (listeners, readers or spectators). Their interrelationship involves the Universe, the Artist, the Work, and the Audience.

There are four kinds of criticism which are based on these four coordinates.

1. **Mimetic Criticism:** This is the classical approach (Aristotle, Plato) which approaches art as an imitation of external life ('nature').
2. **Pragmatic Criticism:** This focuses on the reader. It tries to discover how far and how successfully certain desired effects can be produced in the reader of a poem by the devices that the author employs. The modern structuralist approach is included in this. Longinus *On the Sublime* takes this approach. Indian classical theories often take this approach.



3. **Expressive Criticism:** This approach bases on the writer as the producer of art. Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' may be recalled. We may also recall Oscar Wilde's statement that all literature is a form of autobiography. This brings in the question of 'sincerity' and has led to questions pertaining to the two personalities of the artist—the poetic personality ('the mind that creates') and the private self ('the man who suffers'). Modern psychological criticism is based on this approach.
4. **Objective Criticism:** This approach takes a work of art as separate from the circumstances or the personality that created it. A work of art is seen as an autonomous thing having a life of its own. It is analysed and understood in terms of its own laws of organisation and its intrinsic qualities such as coherence and inter-relationship of parts. The New Critics and the formalists belong in this class. While this looks like a neat classification we must understand that in a given critic or work of criticism we may come across permutations and combinations. A fifth approach is also distinguished although it is somewhat related to the fourth. This may be called the linguistic approach. This approach seeks to approach literature in terms of close study of the elements of language and principles governing their com-

bination and organisation. The deconstructionists are included in this group.

While reading through each of the authors included in this paper consider where each of the works can be included according to this classification.

Classical Period

The Classical Period represents one of the most influential epochs in the history of Western literature and criticism. Spanning from approximately 500 BCE through the Hellenistic period and into the Roman age, this era witnessed the emergence of critical thinking about literature, art, and aesthetics. The ancient Greeks and Romans provided foundational concepts that continue to shape literary analysis today. This unit explores the critical theories of Plato and Aristotle, examines the nature of Greek tragedy, considers the role of rhetoric, and finally considers the contributions of Roman critics such as Horace and Longinus.

1.1.1 Greek Criticism

Greek criticism emerged as a distinct intellectual attempt during the Classical Period, particularly in Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. This was an age of unprecedented cultural achievement, when democracy flourished, philosophy developed, and the dramatic arts reached their zenith. The Greeks did not possess the modern discipline of literary criticism as we know it today. Instead, critical thought was interwoven with philosophy, rhetoric, and practical concerns about education and citizenship. Early Greek thinkers such as the Sophists and rhetoricians began to examine how language functioned, how persuasion operated, and what made certain artworks effective or beautiful.

The development of Greek criticism was in-

separable from the development of the Greek theatre. The great tragic playwrights such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides, and the comic playwright Aristophanes, were not merely artists but also commentators on society and human nature. The theatre served as a forum for public discourse, and critics gradually began to analyse what made these works powerful and moving. Philosophy, too, played a crucial role. As philosophers wrestled with questions about truth, reality, and the good life, they inevitably turned their attention to the arts and their relationship to these fundamental concerns.

1.1.1.1 Plato and *The Republic*: Art, Ethics, and Idealism



Plato's Philosophy and Critique of Art

Plato (428–348 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher whose influence on Western thought is immeasurable.

His most comprehensive examination of art and literature appears in *The Republic*, a monumental work exploring justice and the ideal state. Although Plato appreciated poetry's beauty, his philosophical conclusions about art were deeply critical. He approached questions about art's place in society through his broader philosophical framework, which emphasised the nature of reality, the sources of genuine knowledge, and the good life. Central to Plato's philosophy is the Theory of Forms, also called the Theory of Ideas. According to this theory, the material world we perceive through our senses is

not truly real. Instead, it is merely a shadow or imperfect copy of a higher, non-material realm of perfect, eternal, unchanging Forms or Ideas. Individual physical chairs in the material world are imperfect copies of the Form of the Chair. This Form is the true reality, the perfect and eternal model of which all material chairs are mere imitations. This metaphysical framework generates Plato's epistemology: true knowledge does not come from sensory perception but from the intellect's grasp of eternal Forms. The senses deceive us by presenting the changing, imperfect material world as truly real. Only through philosophical reasoning and what Plato famously calls ascending from the cave of ignorance into the light of truth can we achieve genuine knowledge. Art compounds this problem of distance from reality: if the material world is already twice removed from true reality, then art is thrice removed from truth and knowledge.

Plato's Attacks on Poetry

Given this philosophical framework, Plato's attack on poetry and art becomes systematic and comprehensible. When a painter creates an image of a bed, he produces a mere image of a material bed, which is itself only a copy of the Form of the Bed. Painting deals exclusively with images rather than reality or knowledge. Poetry suffers from identical defects. The poet, inspired by the Muses, creates images and tales even further removed from truth than philosophical knowledge. In *The Republic*, particularly in Books II and III, Plato raises several specific objections to poetry. First, poets dangerously misrepresent the gods. Rather than depicting gods as sources of all goodness and virtue, poets portray them as petty, vengeful, and morally suspect. This corrupts young people whose characters are still forming, giving them false and immoral representations of divine nature. Second, poetry addresses the emotional and passionate part of the soul rather than the rational facul-

ty that should govern our lives. Tragedy and epic poetry deliberately stir up pity and fear. These emotions ought to be restrained by reason. When audiences watch tragic plays, they indulge in these emotions, thereby weakening their rational faculty and becoming less capable of virtuous action. Third, poetry lacks genuine moral instruction. Rather than consistently rewarding virtue and punishing vice, poetry presents human experience in its complexity without clear moral guidance. This is especially problematic in education, where literature should help shape virtuous citizens. In his dialogue *Ion*, Plato develops another line of criticism: poets do not create through knowledge or rational skill but through divine inspiration. The poet is seized by divine madness and speaks without understanding. The rhapsode who recites poetry is similarly possessed and unreliable. This inspiration may produce beautiful language and moving emotion, but beauty and emotion differ fundamentally from truth and knowledge.

Plato further distrusts pleasure as a legitimate aim. In *The Republic*, he classifies pleasures into two types: base and fleeting pleasures, and noble and lasting ones. The pleasure derived from poetry is often base and deceptive. We enjoy seeing virtuous people punished and vicious people rewarded. This perverse enjoyment corrupts our moral understanding. Given these multiple objections, Plato draws a famous and controversial conclusion: poets should be banished from the ideal state. He makes one narrow exception: if poets could prove that their work teaches virtue and truth rather than mere emotion and false images, they might remain. However, Plato holds little hope for this possibility. The very structure and nature of poetry make it unsuitable as an instrument of truth. In Plato's ideal state, philosophical knowledge and ethical formation through reason should take priority over emotional engagement with art. The state should

educate citizens through rational discourse and philosophical contemplation rather than through the seductive but deceptive pleasures of poetry.

Although Plato's critique of art seems harsh, it raises some significant questions about the relationship between art and truth, emotion and reason, and the moral function of literature. Later critics have grappled with these issues, and Plato's framework, even when rejected, continues to provoke thought. Some critics have defended art by arguing that it conveys truths that reason alone cannot access. Others have suggested that the emotional engagement with art is not a weakness but a strength, offering forms of understanding and experience that complement rational analysis.

1.1.1.2 The Schools of Rhetoric

Rhetoric, the art of persuasion through speech, held an important place in ancient Greek culture, particularly in democratic Athens. Since political decisions were made through public debate in the Assembly, the ability to speak persuasively was a valuable skill. Rhetoric was taught and studied as a practical art, and theorists developed principles governing effective speech.

The Sophists were itinerant teachers who offered instruction in rhetoric and related subjects. They were often criticised by philosophers such as Plato for teaching rhetoric as a mere art of persuasion, divorced from truth or virtue. The Sophists, according to Plato, were interested only in making the weaker argument appear stronger, regardless of its truth. However, the Sophists also made contributions to the study of language and argumentation. They analysed the structure of arguments, explored the power of language, and examined how meaning is conveyed through words and style.

Greek rhetorical theory developed principles concerning the various parts of an oration and the devices and strategies that make speech effective. Speakers were advised to consider their audience, the occasion, and their purpose. Different types of oratory - political oratory, forensic oratory (used in courts), and epideictic oratory (display oratory for ceremonial occasions) - were distinguished and analysed. Rhetoricians discussed techniques such as the use of metaphor, the arrangement of arguments, the use of emotion, and the establishment of the speaker's credibility.

The study of rhetoric extended beyond politics to encompass literary analysis. Rhetoricians examined how literary works employed similar techniques and strategies to persuade and move audiences. This connection between rhetoric and literary criticism would become increasingly important in later periods.

1.1.1.3 The Hellenistic Period and Critical Development

Following Alexander the Great's conquests, Greek culture spread throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East. The period from Alexander's death in 323 BCE until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 31 BCE is known as the Hellenistic period. During this era, the centre of Greek culture shifted from Athens to new cities, particularly Alexandria in Egypt.

Alexandria, founded by Alexander, became the greatest centre of learning in the Hellenistic world. The library and museum (the Mouseion, or temple of the Muses) collected texts and supported scholars. Alexandria became home to grammarians, poets, scientists, and philosophers who engaged in textual study, criticism, and theoretical enquiry.

Hellenistic scholars, known as Alexandrians or grammarians, made significant contribu-

tions to literary criticism and textual study. Figures such as Aristarchus, Zenodotus, and Callimachus engaged in several important activities. They collected and organised texts, establishing canonical versions of important works such as Homer's epics. They developed methods for textual criticism, seeking to determine the correct reading when different manuscripts presented variants. They wrote commentaries on texts, explaining difficult passages and elucidating meanings. They also engaged in etymological and grammatical studies, examining the structure and meaning of language.

This scholarly work was foundational for later criticism. The methods developed for establishing correct texts and for interpreting difficult or ambiguous passages became standard practice. The notion that certain texts were canonical and worthy of intensive study and preservation was reinforced through this Alexandrian scholarship.

1.1.1.4 Aristotle's *Poetics*

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), a student of Plato, departed from his teacher's philosophy in several fundamental respects. When Plato had denigrated the material world and sensory perception, Aristotle valued empirical observation and saw the material world as genuinely real. When Plato had emphasised abstract Forms, Aristotle focused on particular things and their properties. This difference in philosophical outlook led Aristotle to very different conclusions about art.

Rather than viewing art as a thrice-removed copy of reality, Aristotle understood art as an imitation that could embody universal truths. The artist does not merely copy individual particulars; rather, through careful selection and arrangement, the artist reveals the essential nature and universal patterns present in



human experience. Art, in this sense, can convey knowledge and understanding.

Aristotle's treatise *Poetics* is the foundational work of literary criticism. Unlike Plato's philosophical dialogues, *Poetics* is a descriptive and analytical work. Aristotle examines Greek drama, particularly tragedy, through close observation and draws conclusions about the principles that govern successful artistic creation. The work is remarkably compressed and systematic, setting out definitions, divisions, and observations about the various forms of poetry.

Aristotle analyses the nature and function of art. While his teacher Plato viewed poetry as a false copy of reality that could corrupt society, Aristotle argued that art is a valuable imitation of life that reveals universal truths. He defined poetry as a form of mimesis or imitation that represents human actions and characters in a way that is meaningful. Aristotle famously stated that poetry is more philosophical and serious than history because history merely records specific events that have already occurred. Poetry, on the other hand, describes what might happen according to the laws of probability and creates a broader picture of human experience that applies to all people.

The most significant section of *Poetics* provides a detailed analysis of tragedy and its components. Aristotle identifies six essential elements that make up a tragedy, which include plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. He argues that the plot is the most important element and refers to it as the soul of tragedy. A successful plot must represent a single and unified action that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle insists that the events in a play must follow a logical sequence of cause and effect rather than

happening by chance. This focus on structure ensures that the audience can follow the story and understand the underlying message regarding human destiny and moral choices.

Aristotle also describes the ideal protagonist and the emotional purpose of drama. The tragic hero should be a person of high status and noble reputation who is neither perfect nor evil. This character suffers a downfall not because of vice but due to a significant mistake or error in judgement known as *hamartia*. The plot typically involves a reversal of fortune called *peripeteia* and a moment of recognition called *anagnorisis* where the hero realises the truth. The ultimate function of watching this tragic collapse is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the audience. Aristotle calls this process *catharsis*, which acts as a purgation or cleansing that leaves the viewers with a sense of emotional balance and relief.

1.1.1.5 The Canon and Greek Drama

Aristotle's observations on tragedy are based primarily on the works of Sophocles, whom he seems to have regarded as the greatest tragedian. He also discusses Aeschylus and Euripides, though with somewhat less approval. The works of these three playwrights, along with the comedies of Aristophanes, constitute the corpus of Greek drama that has survived to the present day. Aristotle's analysis helped to establish these works as canonical, as exemplary instances of the tragic and comic forms.

The notion of canon, the idea that certain works are exemplary and should be studied and imitated, emerged partly through Aristotle's critical practice. By analysing what makes certain works successful and examining their principles, Aristotle implicitly endorsed them as models. Later critics and scholars, building

on Aristotle's authority, formalised the canon of Greek drama.

1.1.1.6 Greek Tragedy and the Tragic Playwrights

Greek tragedy emerged in Athens during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. It developed from religious ritual and performance, particularly the worship of Dionysus. Tragic plays were performed at the City Dionysia, an annual festival in honour of the god Dionysus. Initially, these performances were religious ceremonies, but gradually they evolved into more sophisticated dramatic works exploring profound moral, political, and existential themes.

Tragedy served multiple functions in Athenian society. It was entertainment, certainly, but it was also a form of public discourse. The plays explored contemporary political issues, ethical dilemmas, and the relationship between humans and the divine. They were performed before the entire citizen body, making them a means through which the community examined its values and beliefs.

Aeschylus

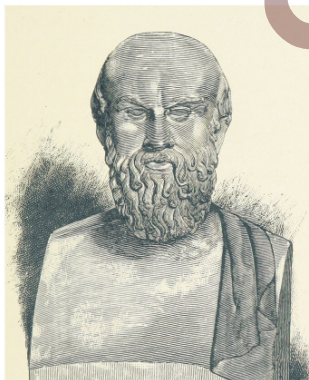


Fig1.1.2 Aeschylus
(525–456 BCE)

He introduced the trilogy form, creating plays that explored a theme or story over three related works. His surviving plays include *The Oresteia* (a trilogy consisting

of 'Agamemnon', 'The Libation Bearers', and 'The Eumenides'), *Prometheus Bound*, and *The Suppliants*.

Aeschylus's work is marked by grandeur and sublimity. His themes often involve the relationship between humans and the gods, the consequences of hubris, and the possibility of justice and reconciliation. His plays frequently depict suffering as a path to wisdom and understanding. The language is elevated and densely poetic. Aeschylus is less concerned with psychological complexity of individual characters than with the larger cosmic and moral dimensions of human action.

Sophocles



Fig1.1.3 Sophocles
(496–406 BCE)

His surviving plays include *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Electra*, *The Women of Trachis*, and *Philoctetes*.

Sophocles excels in the construction of plot. His plays typically involve a central character who confronts a moral or existential crisis. Through a series of events, often marked by irony and reversal, the character comes to a fuller understanding of their situation. Sophocles often employs dramatic irony, wherein the audience knows more than the characters, creating tension and deepening the emotional impact. His most famous work, *Oedipus Rex*, proves this technique. The audience knows from the outset that Oedipus has unwittingly

fulfilled a terrible prophecy, whilst Oedipus searches for the truth in ignorance. The gradual revelation of what he has done creates a powerful tragic effect.

Sophocles is also known for his portrayal of character. His protagonists are often complex, capable of nobility and tragic flaw in equal measure. They elicit both sympathy and judgement from the audience. Sophocles explores the limits of human knowledge and power, suggesting that mortals are subject to forces beyond their control and understanding.

Euripides

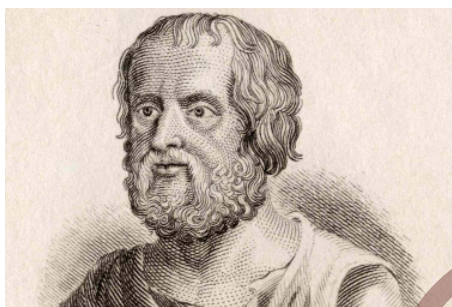


Fig1.1.4 Euripides (480–406 BCE)

Euripides (480–406 BCE) represents a later development in Greek tragedy. His plays, such as *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *The Bacchae*, *Trojan Women*, and *Ion*, often challenge conventional morality and explore psychological realism. His characters are frequently ordinary people confronting extraordinary circumstances, or individuals driven by powerful emotions such as love, jealousy, or revenge.

Euripides is often viewed as more modern and more sceptical than his predecessors. His plays frequently question received wisdom and explore the gap between appearance and reality, between what people claim and what

they actually do. He is interested in the motives and inner lives of his characters. His dialogue is more naturalistic and less formally elevated than that of Aeschylus or Sophocles. Some ancient critics considered Euripides inferior to Sophocles because he seemed to lack the grandeur and sublime beauty characteristic of earlier tragic drama. However, his psychological depth and willingness to question conventional values have made his works increasingly appreciated in modern times.

Aristophanes and Greek Comedy

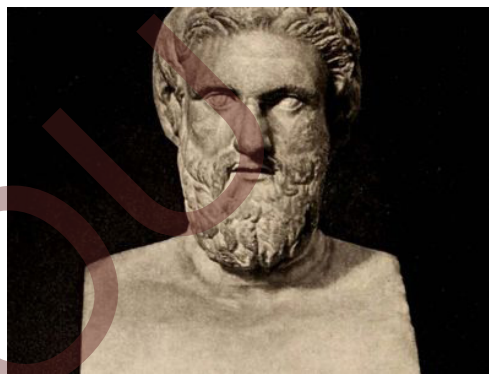


Fig1.1.5 Aristophanes (446–386 BCE)

Aristophanes (446–386 BCE) is the principal surviving Greek comic playwright. His surviving plays include *The Frogs*, *Lysistrata*, *The Clouds*, and *The Wasps*. Greek comedy, as exemplified by Aristophanes, is quite different from tragedy. It employs satire, absurdity, and humour to address contemporary political and social issues. Aristophanes frequently mocked famous figures, including the philosopher Socrates in *The Clouds*. His plays often involved fantastic plots and situations, yet they served as a form of social commentary. Comedy provided a space for the airing of grievances and the questioning of authority in ways that might not be possible in more formal settings.

1.1.1.6 Latin/Roman Contributions to Criticism

Following the conquest of Greece by Rome, Greek culture greatly influenced Roman intellectual life. However, the Romans also developed their own literary traditions. The Augustan Age (27 BCE to 14 CE) was considered the golden age of Latin literature, during which poets such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid flourished.

Horace and Ars Poetica



Fig1.1.6 *Ars Poetica*

Horace (65–8 BCE) was a Roman poet and literary theorist. His most important critical work is *Ars Poetica* (The Art of Poetry), originally addressed as an epistle to the Piso family. In this work, Horace offers practical advice to aspiring poets on matters of style, decorum, and craft. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, who approached criticism from a philosophical standpoint, Horace approached it from the perspective of practising artists and the conventions of the craft.

Horace emphasises the importance of decorum, the principle that each type of poetry should observe appropriate conventions of diction, metre, and content. Different types of dramatic characters should speak in appropriate language. A king should not speak like

a peasant, and vice versa. Horace also stresses the importance of planning and revision. A poet should not rush to composition but should think carefully about the subject matter and the overall structure before beginning to write. Even after completing a work, a poet should set it aside and revise it carefully.

Horace advocated for originality in style and execution rather than in subject matter. He acknowledged that there are few truly new subjects; rather, the skill lies in how a subject is handled. He recommended that poets read widely and learn from the ancients, but they should not merely imitate. Instead, they should absorb the wisdom of the ancients and forge their own path.

Horace also stressed the importance of the marriage of instruction and pleasure, or what he terms the useful and the pleasurable. A poem should both teach and delight. This principle, often summarised as “docere et delectare” (to teach and to delight), became influential in later critical theory.

Horace’s *Ars Poetica* was hugely influential. Roman critics and later medieval and Renaissance critics frequently cited it. During the Neoclassical period in France and England, Horace’s principles were revived and adapted. Critics such as Boileau and Pope emulated Horace’s work and based their own critical treatises on his principles.

Longinus and On the Sublime

Longinus, also known as Dionysius Longinus, was a Greek critic who lived in the first century CE. Although little is known of his life, his critical work *On the Sublime* (or *Peri Hypsous*) is one of the most important works of classical literary criticism.

In *On the Sublime*, Longinus explores the concept of the sublime, which he distinguishes from the beautiful. The sublime is the qual-

ity of greatness and grandeur in language and thought that produces a powerful emotional effect on the reader or listener. The sublime elevates and transports the audience, producing a sense of awe, admiration, and even terror.

Longinus identifies several sources or causes of the sublime. The first is the power of conceiving great thoughts. The ability to think and imagine on a grand scale produces sublime expression. The second is the arousal of powerful emotions. Strong feeling naturally finds sublime expression. The third is the appropriate use of figures of speech, including metaphor, hyperbole, and personification. The fourth is nobility of diction, the choice of elevated and appropriate language. The fifth is the arrangement and composition of words, the harmonious ordering of sounds and meanings.

Longinus provides examples drawn from Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, and other classical authors. He praises Homer's description of the shield of Achilles for its vividness and power. He discusses Demosthenes' rhetorical power. He explores how great writers achieve the sublime through their choice of words, their management of syntax, and their overall artistic vision.

One important aspect of Longinus's theory is his emphasis on the emotional and psychological effects of literature. He is less concerned with formal rules and more concerned with the power of language to move and transform the reader. The sublime cannot be reduced to a set of rules or formulas; rather, it emerges from the interaction of natural talent, emotional depth, and artistic skill.

Longinus work had little immediate influence in the classical and medieval periods, but it was rediscovered during the Renaissance and

became hugely influential during the eighteenth century, particularly in Britain. Critics such as Edmund Burke and Kant were influenced by Longinus ideas about the sublime. The concept of the sublime, refined and developed through Longinian theory, became central to Romantic aesthetics and continues to influence literary and aesthetic theory today.

Other Roman Critics

In addition to Horace and Longinus, other Roman figures contributed to critical thought. Cicero, though primarily known as an orator and philosopher, wrote about rhetoric and style. Quintilian, a Roman teacher of rhetoric, wrote *Institutio Oratoria* (Institutes of Oratory), a comprehensive treatise on rhetorical education that also touches on literary matters. These works, along with those of Horace and Longinus, formed the basis of classical critical theory.

The Classical Period established the foundational concepts and principles that continue to govern literary criticism today. Plato's critique of art, whilst harsh, raised enduring questions about the relationship between art and truth. Aristotle's systematic analysis of poetry and tragedy provided a framework for understanding literary forms and effects that has proved remarkably durable. The works of Greek playwrights exemplified principles of dramatic construction and emotional power. Greek rhetoric and later Hellenistic scholarship contributed methods and concepts for analysing language and interpreting texts. Roman critics such as Horace and Longinus adapted and developed Greek ideas, introducing new emphasis on craft and the sublime. Together, these contributions established criticism as a sophisticated intellectual discipline and provided concepts and vocabulary that later critics would employ, adapt, and contest.

Understanding the Classical Period is essential for understanding the entire subsequent history of literary criticism.

1.1.2 Renaissance, Neoclassical, and Enlightenment Periods

The Renaissance, Neoclassical, and Enlightenment periods represent important stages in the development of Western literary criticism and aesthetic theory. These eras witnessed the recovery and reinterpretation of classical learning, the establishment of new critical principles grounded in reason and order, and the emergence of philosophical frameworks that would shape modern thought. The Renaissance, roughly spanning the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, marked a rebirth of interest in classical antiquity after the perceived darkness of the Middle Ages. The Neoclassical period, extending from the seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries, attempted to apply classical principles to contemporary literary production. The Enlightenment, overlapping with and extending beyond Neoclassicism, brought a new emphasis on reason, empirical observation, and systematic philosophy. Together, these periods transformed criticism from a subsidiary activity concerned with the elucidation of established texts into a sophisticated intellectual discipline with its own principles, methods, and theoretical frameworks. Understanding these periods is essential for comprehending how modern literary criticism developed and for recognising the classical foundations upon which contemporary critical practice rests.

1.1.3 The Renaissance Period and the Birth of Renaissance Criticism

The Renaissance, a term literally meaning rebirth, refers to the cultural and intellectual movement that emerged in Italy during the fourteenth century and gradually spread throughout Europe. It represented a deliberate

and self-conscious attempt to revive classical learning and to model contemporary culture on classical antiquity. The Renaissance was facilitated by several factors: the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 prompted the flight of Greek scholars to the West, bringing with them Greek manuscripts and classical learning. The development of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440 made texts widely available and facilitated the circulation of classical works. Economic and political developments in Italy, particularly the wealth and patronage provided by merchant families such as the Medici, created conditions favourable to intellectual and artistic achievement.

The Renaissance represented a shift from medieval concerns with theology and the after-life towards an increased focus on the classical world, human potential, and the natural world. Humanism, the intellectual movement at the heart of the Renaissance, emphasised the study of classical languages, literature, and philosophy as a means of understanding human nature and achieving human excellence. Renaissance thinkers valued the wisdom of the ancients and sought to recover and preserve classical texts that had been lost or neglected during the Middle Ages. At the same time, Renaissance thinkers were not merely antiquarians seeking to recreate the past; they sought to adapt classical learning to contemporary conditions and to achieve a synthesis of classical and Christian thought.

Birth of Renaissance Criticism (1498)

The European Renaissance is historically marked by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. This event forced numerous Greek scholars to flee westwards as refugees. These scholars were well versed in ancient Greek and Roman art and literature. They sought shelter in the capital cities of various European countries, particularly in Italy. Ita-



ly subsequently developed as a major centre for humanistic studies. This migration paved the way for the Renaissance, which was a revival of ancient Graeco-Roman culture, art, and literature. The theological outlook that had flourished during the Middle Ages ended abruptly with this new awakening. As the general outlook shifted from theocratic to secular, there was a corresponding change in literary theory and criticism. Scholars edited, translated, and distributed the great classical works of antiquity across Europe. Young English gentlemen travelled to Italy to study these ancient masterpieces and returned home filled with admiration for their aesthetic beauty. The invention of the printing press further accelerated this awakening by facilitating the widespread availability of ancient literature and critical texts.

The *Ars Poetica* of Horace remained very popular throughout the Middle Ages. During the formative period of the Renaissance, it exerted a far reaching influence on literary criticism in England, Italy, and France. Although the *Poetics* of Aristotle was largely unknown in the medieval age, Robortello edited it with a Latin commentary in 1548. It was translated into Italian the following year and became a dominant force in Renaissance criticism. The editions and translations of works by Aristotle, Plato, Horace, and other Greek masters sparked a period of intense theoretical activity. This era of criticism remains one of the most conspicuous periods in literary history

The Four Stages of Renaissance Criticism

1. The Rhetorical Phase

In this initial phase, the critical method involved asking questions to lay stronger emphasis rather than to evoke a reply. The Preface to the work of Mallory by Caxton is considered the first piece of literary criticism

in the English language. A trio of school masters known as the Tudor Critics performed critical work by the middle of the fifteenth century. These critics were Thomas Wilson, John Cheke, and Roger Ascham. Wilson followed the tradition of Cicero and published his *Art of Rhetorique* in 1553. He stressed the necessity for plain language and the apt use of words. Cheke insisted that the English language should be kept clean and pure without mixing words from other languages. Roger Ascham published *The Schoolmaster* in 1568. This critical work showed the influence of Italian theories. During this phase, critics gave more emphasis to form and style as the distinguishing features of literature. The result was the evolution of a new prose style in the English language.

2. Classification and Metrical Studies

This stage focused on the classification of poetic forms and the study of metre. *The Art of English Poesie* (1589) by Richard Puttenham (1520–1601) is a critical discussion that deals mainly with the formal aspects of English poetry. The *Letters* of Gabriel Harvey (1550–1631) and the *Discourse of English Poetry* by Webb represent the first two systematic attempts to introduce classical metres into English poetry.

3. Apologetic Criticism: Sir Philip Sidney

This phase is marked by a predominance of Italian influence, especially that of Scaliger. The *Apology for Poetry* (also known as *The Defence of Poesy*) by Sir Philip Sidney is a critical work that embodies the spirit of this method. Observations of criticism during the Elizabethan period reveal that there was much thinking regarding the nature and function of poetry. The English theory of poetry was formulated during this period. Society regarded

poets with high esteem as spiritual legislators and social reformers. The dual function of poetry was to delight and to instruct. Critics believed that poetry of the highest order could achieve perfection only through divine instinct because it is a heavenly gift. Spingarn, a well known American critic, noted that there was some similarity in the point of view of those who attacked and those who defended poetry during the Elizabethan age. Both sides admitted that the abuse of poetry should be disparaged rather than poetry itself. They differed chiefly because one side insisted almost entirely on the ideal perfection of the poetic art, while the other laid stress on the debased state into which it had fallen.

4. Classic Method of Criticism

Ben Jonson was the principal practitioner of the classic method of criticism. For Jonson, the study of the art of poetry became an inseparable guide to creation. This element of self-conscious art guided by the rules of criticism distinguished him from his predecessors.

The Rediscovery of Aristotle's Poetics

One of the most significant developments in Renaissance criticism was the recovery and translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a work that had been lost to the Western world for centuries. During the Middle Ages, *Poetics* had survived in Arabic translations and commentaries, but it was not widely known in Western Europe. The recovery of the Greek text and its translation into Latin and the vernacular languages of Europe occurred gradually during the Renaissance.

Giorgio Valla's Translation of 1498

Giorgio Valla (1447–1500), an Italian humanist and scholar, produced a Latin translation

of Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1498. This translation was significant for several reasons. First, it made Aristotle's critical theory available to Western European scholars in a language they could read. Second, Valla's translation, though not without errors and limitations, attempted to render the Greek text accurately and to explicate its meaning. Third, the appearance of this translation stimulated interest in Aristotelian criticism and prompted further translations and commentaries.

Prior to Valla's translation, the primary source for classical critical theory available in the West was Horace's *Ars Poetica*. The recovery of *Poetics* provided access to a more systematic and comprehensive critical theory. Aristotle's distinction between genres, his analysis of tragedy, his discussion of plot and character, his concept of mimesis, and his theory of catharsis, all these ideas now became available to European critics and had a transformative effect on critical thought.

Subsequent Translations and Commentaries

Following Valla's translation, other translations appeared. Alessandro de Pazzi produced a Latin translation, and Bernardo Segni translated the work into Tuscan, one of the Italian dialects. These translations facilitated the diffusion of Aristotelian ideas. Moreover, scholars began to write commentaries on *Poetics*, seeking to explicate difficult passages and to apply Aristotle's principles to contemporary literature. Italian critics such as Ludovico Castelvetro, Giovan Giorgio Trissino, and others engaged in detailed analysis of *Poetics* and sought to draw out the implications of Aristotelian theory for the practice of contemporary drama.



1.1.4 Italian Renaissance Criticism

Castelvetro and the Codification of the Unities

Ludovico Castelvetro (1505–1571) was one of the most important Renaissance critics. His detailed commentary on *Poetics*, published in 1570, became immensely influential. In this work, Castelvetro systematised and codified principles derived from Aristotle, most notably the three unities of action, time, and place. Whilst Aristotle had discussed the unity of action and had mentioned that tragedies typically occur within a single day, Castelvetro developed a rigid formulation of all three unities as binding rules for dramatic composition.

The unity of action requires that a drama should have a single, coherent action. The unity of time stipulates that the events depicted in a play should occur within a single day or at most within a span of time that could plausibly be represented on stage. The unity of place requires that all events should occur in the same location. These unities, derived from and elaborated upon Aristotelian principles, became central to Neoclassical dramatic theory, particularly in France. They were presented as rules that should govern dramatic composition, and adherence to them came to be seen as a mark of classical propriety and good taste.

The Spread of the Unities

From Italy, the principles of Neoclassical criticism, including the three unities, spread to France. French critics and dramatists, particularly those working in the seventeenth century, embraced these principles and developed them further. The three unities became dogma in French Neoclassical drama, and French critics such as Jean Chapelain defended them as rationally derived principles essential to dramatic excellence. From France, these ideas

eventually reached England, where they influenced English criticism and drama, though English playwrights and critics often resisted strict adherence to the unities.

The Question of Vernacular Literature

One of the important issues addressed by Renaissance critics and theorists was the legitimacy of literature in the vernacular languages. Throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance, Latin was the language of learning and high culture. Greek and Latin were the languages in which the greatest works of antiquity were written. The question arose whether literature composed in the vernacular languages, Italian, French, English, Spanish, and others, could achieve the dignity and excellence of classical literature.

Dante and the Defence of the Vernacular

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), though technically a medieval figure, was an important precursor to Renaissance thinking on this question. Dante, himself a great poet who wrote in Italian rather than Latin, composed *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Eloquence in the Vernacular), a treatise defending the use of the vernacular for literature. Dante argued that the vernacular language, being the natural language of the people, could be as suitable for literary composition as Latin. His own masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, composed in Tuscan, one of the Italian dialects, demonstrated that the vernacular could achieve great literary and philosophical expression.

Renaissance Assertions of Vernacular Literature

Renaissance thinkers built on Dante's defence of the vernacular. Italian Renaissance critics and writers, proud of the achievements of Italian literature and eager to assert Italian cul-

tural superiority, argued that Italian literature rivalled or exceeded classical literature. They pointed to the works of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and others as evidence that the vernacular could achieve excellence. This assertion of the vernacular's legitimacy was important not only for literature but also for the emergence of distinct national literatures and national identities.

Italian Critical Texts and Methods

Renaissance criticism developed new methods and approaches to the analysis of literature. Critics engaged in close reading of texts, both classical and contemporary. They analysed the structure of works, examining how plots were constructed, how characters were developed, and how effects were achieved. They drew on classical critical principles but sought to apply them to vernacular literature. Renaissance critics also engaged in comparative analysis, examining how contemporary works compared to classical models and how different languages and traditions approached similar subjects.

The recovery of classical texts and the study of classical authors led to the development of philology and textual criticism. Scholars sought to establish correct versions of classical texts, noting variants and attempting to determine which readings were authoritative. This careful scholarly work contributed to the development of more rigorous methods of textual analysis and interpretation.

1.1.5 The Neoclassical Period

The Neoclassical period extends from the late seventeenth century through the eighteenth century, with some critics extending it into the early nineteenth century. This period was characterised by an emphasis on reason, order, and the imitation of classical models. Neoclassicism was not merely a literary move-

ment but a broader cultural and philosophical movement that influenced architecture, visual art, philosophy, and politics. Neoclassical thinkers valued clarity, proportion, harmony, and the observance of established rules and conventions.

The emergence of Neoclassicism was shaped by intellectual developments of the seventeenth century, particularly the work of René Descartes and the development of rationalist philosophy. If reason could uncover the principles governing the natural world, as suggested by the scientific revolution associated with figures such as Isaac Newton, then reason could also uncover the principles governing art and literature. Neoclassical critics attempted to establish rational principles of literary composition derived from the practice of classical authors and from philosophical analysis.

The Influence of French Neoclassicism

France became the centre of Neoclassical criticism in Europe. French critics and theorists developed and systematised Neoclassical principles, and French cultural prestige ensured that French critical ideas exerted enormous influence on critics in other nations, particularly in England. Key French critics included Jean Chapelain, who defended the three unities; Abbé d'Aubignac, who wrote an important treatise on dramatic composition; and most importantly, Nicolas Boileau.

Nicolas Boileau and *Art Poétique*

Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711) was perhaps the most influential French critic of the Neoclassical period. His *Art Poétique* (The Art of Poetry), published in 1674, became the canonical statement of Neoclassical critical principles. Written in verse, *Art Poétique* sets forth principles governing poetic composition across various genres. The work is modelled on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and like Horace's



work, it offers practical advice to aspiring poets about matters of form, decorum, and style.

Boileau emphasises the importance of reason and the observance of rules. Poetry should be composed according to rational principles and established conventions. Different genres have different appropriate forms and styles. The poet should study the classics, learn from the ancients, and observe the rules that have been proven effective through classical practice. Boileau argues for the three unities and for other rules of dramatic propriety. He emphasises the importance of clarity and the avoidance of obscurity. The purpose of poetry is to please, but pleasure should be achieved through the refined representation of human nature rather than through gaudy display or sensational effects.

Boileau's *Art Poétique* was immensely influential. It was frequently translated and widely read. English critics and poets took it as a model and sought to adapt its principles to English conditions. Alexander Pope, the greatest English Neoclassical poet and critic, was profoundly influenced by Boileau and modelled his own critical works on Boileau's example.

The Italian and French Influence on England

England, during the Restoration period (following the return of Charles II to the throne in 1660) and the subsequent Neoclassical period, came under the considerable influence of French culture. English writers and critics who had fled to France during the English Civil War and the Puritan Commonwealth returned with French ideas and tastes. French literature, particularly the drama of Molière and Racine, was admired and imitated. French critical principles, as formulated by Boileau and others, were adopted and adapted by English critics.

However, England did not simply adopt French Neoclassicism wholesale. English critics and dramatists often resisted strict adherence to rules, particularly the three unities. They valued the achievement of English drama, particularly the Elizabethan drama of Shakespeare, and were reluctant to condemn Shakespeare for violating classical rules. This tension between admiration for classical principles and defence of English literary achievement characterised much English Neoclassical criticism.

1.1.6 English Neoclassical Critics: Dryden, Pope, and Johnson

John Dryden (1631–1700)



Fig1.1.7 John Dryden (1631–1700)

John Dryden stands as the father of English criticism and a pivotal transitional figure between the Renaissance and the full Neoclassical period. As a versatile poet, dramatist, and translator, he used his critical prefaces and essays to establish principles for English literature. His most significant critical work, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668), is structured as a dialogue that debates the merits of classical, French, and English drama. In this work, Dryden defends English playwrights like Shakespeare and Ben Jonson against the strict formalism of French critics. He argues that while the French strictly observed the classical rules, English drama possessed a liveliness and variety that made it superior. He respected classical principles but was not a slave to them, maintaining that the primary purpose of poetry and drama is to delight and instruct the audience.

Dryden's critical legacy is defined by his liberal interpretation of classical rules, particularly regarding the three unities and the mixing of genres. He boldly argued that the unities of time, place, and action were not absolute laws but guidelines; violating them allowed English dramatists to create richer, more complex portrayals of human life. He similarly defended tragicomedy, the blending of serious and comic elements, asserting that such variety provides a more complete representation of nature and relief from heaviness. Beyond



Fig1.1.8 Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

drama, Dryden formulated an influential theory of translation, distinguishing between metaphrase (literal), paraphrase (interpretive), and imitation (adaptation). He advocated for paraphrase as the balanced approach, where the translator captures the spirit of the original author

without being constrained by word-for-word accuracy.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

Alexander Pope was the undisputed literary leader of the eighteenth century and the quintessential voice of Neoclassical ideals. Despite facing social and educational exclusion as a Roman Catholic, he achieved immense prestige through his poetic genius. His seminal critical work, "An Essay on Criticism" (1711), is written in brilliant heroic couplets and outlines the standards of taste and judgment. In this poem, Pope famously equates "Nature" with the "Ancients," arguing that to study the classical masters of Greece and Rome is to study Nature itself. He emphasises that critics must possess good breeding and learning, and that poets should generally

follow the established rules of art. However, Pope also acknowledges that great writers can sometimes "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art," suggesting that genius can occasionally transcend formal precepts.

Pope applied these critical standards to the works of others, most notably in his "Preface to the Works of Shakespeare" (1725). In this assessment, he praises Shakespeare as the poet of nature who possessed an intuitive grasp of human character, despite lacking formal education. Pope defends Shakespeare's genius but also criticises his faults, such as the use of bombast and puns, attributing these errors to the playwright's need to please a common audience. Pope's own creative works, such as "The Rape of the Lock" and "The Dunciad", exemplify his critical values in practice. Through the use of the mock-heroic form, he employed sharp satire to attack bad writing, false learning, and cultural dullness, championing the necessity of order, reason, and genuine artistic merit.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)



Fig1.1.9 Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

Samuel Johnson, often called Dr. Johnson, was the dominant intellectual figure of the later eighteenth century. A man of immense learning, he is best known for his monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which helped standardise

English usage. As a critic, Johnson was a staunch Neoclassicist who valued reason, order, and moral truth, yet he remained independent and refused to follow rules dogmatically. His major critical contributions are found in his "Preface to Shakespeare" (1765) and

Lives of the Poets (1779–1781). Johnson prioritised “sense” and meaning over mere formal perfection. He believed that the ultimate duty of literature was to communicate truth and promote virtue, evaluating works based on their ability to endure and speak to the universal human experience.

In his practical criticism, Johnson famously defended Shakespeare against the rigid application of the three unities. He argued that the unities of time and place were not essential to drama because the audience is always aware they are in a theatre; therefore, a play’s action can credibly span years or move between cities without confusing the viewer. While he defended Shakespeare’s structural freedom and characterisation, Johnson was critical of the bard’s fondness for wordplay and verbal conceits, which he felt detracted from serious moments. In *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson applied similar scrutiny to the Metaphysical poets, criticising their forced wit and lack of genuine feeling. Throughout his work, he maintained that literature must be a faithful mirror of life, guided by a strong moral compass.

1.1.7 The Concept of Wit in Neoclassical Criticism

The concept of wit was central to Neoclassical criticism and requires explanation. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wit referred not primarily to humour or joking but to intellectual brilliance, imaginative power, and the apt expression of ideas. Wit involved the perception of unexpected resemblances between different things, the ability to express thoughts with elegance and precision, and a kind of intellectual liveliness and ingenuity.

Neoclassical critics debated what constituted true wit and how it differed from false wit or mere wordplay. Pope’s definition of true wit as “what oft was thought, but ne’er so well

express’d” emphasises the importance of novelty not in the thoughts themselves but in the expression. True wit involves expressing common or traditional ideas with such elegance and precision that they seem fresh and new. False wit, by contrast, involved mere verbal conceits, puns, and unexpected juxtapositions of words without corresponding elevation of thought.

This distinction between true and false wit reflects broader Neoclassical concerns about the relationship between form and content, between expression and meaning. Good literature should achieve a perfect unity of form and content, with each supporting and enhancing the other. The expression should be appropriate to the thought, neither diminishing it nor exaggerating it.

1.1.8 Enlightenment Criticism

Enlightenment criticism was defined by the attempt to apply the systematic methods of reason and science to the study of art and literature. Thinkers of this era sought to move beyond personal preference to establish objective principles for aesthetic judgment. They asked fundamental questions about the nature of beauty and how it is perceived, attempting to develop systematic accounts of aesthetic experience. Significant contributions came from figures like Hugh Blair, whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) offered a structured approach to literary style and eloquence, and Alexander Gerard, who developed theories on the nature of genius and taste. This period marked a shift where literary criticism became a disciplined inquiry governed by standards of “good sense” and “nature,” rather than merely following ancient authority or arbitrary rules.

A major focus of Enlightenment criticism was the categorization of aesthetic experiences, particularly the concepts of the Beautiful, the

Sublime, and the Picturesque. David Hume, in “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757), argued that while taste varies, it can be refined through practice and freedom from prejudice, allowing for a consensus among cultivated critics. Edmund Burke further advanced this by distinguishing the “Beautiful” (smoothness, delicacy, harmony) from the “Sublime” (vastness, power, terror). Later, the concept of the “Picturesque” was added to describe rough, irregular beauty in landscapes. These categories provided a new vocabulary for criticism, helping to explain the shifting appreciation for wild nature and laying the groundwork for the Romantic movement that would follow.

Intellectual and Historical Background

The Enlightenment, often called the “Age of Reason,” was a sweeping intellectual movement that dominated the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historically, it was driven by a rejection of traditional authorities—such as religious institutions, the monarchy, and hereditary aristocracy—in favour of rational inquiry and individual liberty. The intellectual model for this movement was the Scientific Revolution, led by figures like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton. Enlightenment thinkers believed that just as observation and mathematical reasoning had uncovered the laws of the physical universe, similar methods could be used to understand human society, ethics, and culture. This confidence in the scientific method encouraged a widespread belief that human life could be improved through education and the application of reason.

Philosophically, the background of the Enlightenment was shaped by two main schools of thought: Empiricism and Rationalism. Empiricists, such as John Locke and David Hume, argued that the human mind begins as a blank

slate and that all knowledge comes from sense experience. Rationalists, like Descartes and Leibniz, emphasised that certain truths could be discovered through pure reason alone. Despite their differences, both schools shared a conviction that reason, not tradition, was the ultimate path to truth. This intellectual foundation created an environment where critics felt empowered to analyse literature and art through logical principles and psychological observation rather than simply accepting the dogmas of the past.



Fig1.1.10 Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is a pivotal figure who bridged the gap between Enlightenment rationalism and the emerging Romantic sensibility. In his seminal work, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant attempted to establish a

philosophical foundation for aesthetics. He argued that aesthetic judgments are unique because they are “disinterested” – meaning they are purely about the pleasure of the experience, separate from any desire to possess or use the object. Kant proposed that when we call something beautiful, we are not just stating a personal preference (like liking a specific food); we are making a “universal claim,” implying that others *ought* to find it beautiful too. He explained this through the concept of the “free play” of the imagination and understanding, where our mental faculties interact harmoniously without being restricted by rigid logical concepts.

Kant also provided a profound analysis of the Sublime and the nature of artistic Genius. He differentiated the “Beautiful,” which relates to form and harmony, from the “Sublime,”

which arises from confronting something vast or powerful that exceeds our imagination, pointing the mind toward the infinite. Furthermore, Kant defined “Genius” as the innate mental disposition through which nature gives the rule to art. According to Kant, a true genius does not merely follow existing rules

but creates original work that serves as a new model for others. These ideas, particularly the autonomy of art and the creative power of the genius, were revolutionary, deeply influencing Coleridge and the Romantic movement, and establishing the basis for modern aesthetic theory.

Recap

- ▶ The Classical Period (c. 500 BCE onwards) saw Greek and Roman thinkers lay the foundations of Western literary criticism
- ▶ Plato in *The Republic* attacked poetry as thrice removed from truth, morally dangerous, and oriented to emotion rather than reason
- ▶ Plato’s Theory of Forms and suspicion of pleasure shape his demand to banish poets from the ideal state unless they prove moral usefulness
- ▶ Aristotle’s *Poetics* revalues art as meaningful mimesis capable of conveying universal truths more philosophical than mere history
- ▶ Aristotle defines tragedy through six parts (plot, character, thought, diction, melody, spectacle) and stresses unified, causally coherent plot as its “soul”
- ▶ Tragedy aims at catharsis, purging pity and fear through the fate of a noble but flawed protagonist experiencing hamartia, peripeteia, and anagnorisis
- ▶ Greek tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) and comedy (Aristophanes) served as civic forums for exploring moral, political, and religious questions
- ▶ Hellenistic Alexandrian scholars developed textual criticism, commentary, and canon formation, fixing authoritative versions of works like Homer
- ▶ Horace’s *Ars Poetica* stresses decorum, craft, revision, and the twin aims “to teach and to delight” (docere et delectare)
- ▶ Longinus’s *On the Sublime* analyses grandeur in language arising from great thoughts, strong emotion, figures, noble diction, and composition
- ▶ The Renaissance recovers Aristotle’s *Poetics* (e.g., Valla’s 1498 Latin translation) and fuses classical theory with humanism and vernacular assertion
- ▶ Castelvetro codifies the three unities of action, time, and place, which French and later English Neoclassicists debate and adapt
- ▶ Neoclassicism in France and England (Boileau, Dryden, Pope, Johnson) emphasises reason, rules, clarity, genre propriety, and “nature” understood via the ancients
- ▶ Enlightenment criticism (Blair, Hume, Burke, Kant) theorises taste and classifies the Beautiful, Sublime, and Picturesque as distinct aesthetic modes

- Kant's *Critique of Judgment* grounds disinterested aesthetic judgement, the Beautiful versus the Sublime, and the concept of Genius as rule-giving originality

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *The Republic*?
2. Which term describes art as imitation?
3. Who authored *Poetics*?
4. What is the tragic "error" called?
5. What term names emotional purgation?
6. Which Roman wrote *Ars Poetica*?
7. Who wrote *On the Sublime*?
8. Which critic codified the three unities?
9. What principle links pleasure and instruction?
10. Which Italian poet defended the vernacular?
11. Who authored *Art Poétique* (French Neoclassic)?
12. Which English critic wrote *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*?
13. Who wrote *An Essay on Criticism*?
14. Which Enlightenment philosopher analysed taste and beauty?
15. Who wrote *Critique of Judgment*?

Answers

1. Plato
2. Mimesis
3. Aristotle
4. Hamartia
5. Catharsis
6. Horace
7. Longinus
8. Castelvetro
9. Decorum
10. Dante
11. Boileau
12. Dryden
13. Pope
14. Hume
15. Kant

Assignments

1. Discuss Plato's critique of poetry in *The Republic*, explaining how his Theory of Forms and educational concerns shape his verdict on art.
2. Analyse Aristotle's account of tragedy in *Poetics*, focusing on plot, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catharsis with reference to a Greek play.
3. Examine the Renaissance recovery of *Poetics* and evaluate how figures like Castelvetro transformed Aristotle's flexible observations into rigid Neoclassical rules.
4. Compare Horace's doctrine of decorum and "to teach and to delight" with Longinus's concept of the sublime as emotional elevation.
5. Evaluate how Enlightenment discussions of taste, the Beautiful, and the Sublime (Hume, Burke, Kant) prepared the way for Romanticism's challenge to Neoclassicism.

Suggested Reading

1. Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Malcolm Heath. Penguin Classics.
2. Horace. *Ars Poetica*. In *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. Loeb Classical Library.
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Unit 2

Romantic and Victorian Criticism

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ become aware of Wordsworth's theory of language and emotion
- ▶ analyse Coleridge's distinction of imagination and fancy
- ▶ evaluate Keats's concept negative capability
- ▶ assess Arnold's criticism of life principle
- ▶ examine Aestheticism's art for art's sake

Prerequisite

The Romantic period (c. 1790s–1820s and beyond) emerged as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism and Neoclassical restraint, privileging emotion, imagination, individuality, and nature over reason and order. Key figures including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and German Romantics like Goethe and Friedrich established new aesthetic principles centred on the creative power of imagination, the spiritual significance of nature, and the authentic expression of feeling through natural language.

The Victorian period (1837–1901) inherited Romantic ideas whilst grappling with industrialisation, social change, and the decline of traditional religious authority. Critics including Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde debated literature's moral function, with Arnold defending criticism as a moral and cultural force whilst Aesthetes asserted art's autonomy from moral purposes. The learner should be familiar with the historical and philosophical contexts of both periods, possess awareness of key Romantic and Victorian texts, and understand the tension between Romantic emotionalism and Victorian social responsibility.

Keywords

Imagination, Spontaneity, Nature, Culture, Aestheticism

Discussion

The Romantic and Victorian periods represent two of the most transformative epochs in the history of English literature and criticism. The Romantic period, spanning roughly from the 1790s through the 1820s and beyond, emerged as a reaction against the rationalism and neoclassicism of the eighteenth century. It privileged emotion, imagination, individuality, and the power of nature over reason, order, and classical restraint. The Victorian period, lasting from 1837 to 1901, witnessed England's emergence as an industrial and imperial power, and its literature grappled with questions of morality, social responsibility, progress, and the individual's place in an increasingly complex society.

These two periods, though distinct in many respects, are united by their engagement with fundamental questions about the nature of art, the role of the artist, and the function of literature in society. The Romantic poets and critics sought to reimagine what literature could be and to establish new principles of aesthetic judgment. Victorian critics inherited and adapted these ideas, responding to new social conditions and intellectual developments. Together, these periods established many of the critical frameworks and aesthetic principles that continue to influence literary analysis today.

1.2.1 William Wordsworth and the Romantic Conception of Language and Taste

William Wordsworth lived from 1770 to 1850 and became one of the most important figures in English Romantic literature and criticism. He grew up in the beautiful Lake District of England where the natural landscapes deeply shaped his imagination and poetry. Wordsworth experienced major historical events

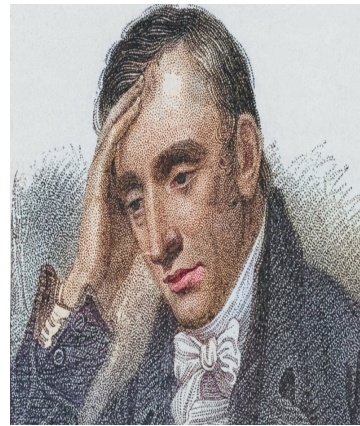


Fig 1.2.1 William Wordsworth

like the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution which influenced his views on nature, emotion, and human life. In 1798 he collaborated with Samuel Taylor Coleridge to publish *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection that revolutionised English poetry by using simple everyday language to describe ordinary people and natural scenes. This broke away from the formal, artificial style of eighteenth-century poetry. When critics objected to this new approach, Wordsworth wrote the famous "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" to the second edition in 1800 to explain and defend his ideas. This preface remains a key document in literary criticism because it outlines the principles of Romantic poetry.

Wordsworth defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" but he made it clear that this overflow happens after calm reflection. He described the process as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" where the poet first feels strong emotions then thinks about them later before writing. This makes poetry thoughtful and meaningful rather than just an immediate outburst. Wordsworth also changed the language of poetry by insisting it should use the real speech of ordinary people instead of fancy poetic words like "hoary sage" for "old man". He wanted poets to take this natural language and refine it carefully while keeping its honest emotional power. In his own words from the "Preface" he aimed for "the real language of men" to make poetry connect directly with readers' hearts and ex-

periences.

Wordsworth believed ordinary subjects and people deserved serious poetry just as much as kings or heroes. His poems in *Lyrical Ballads* told stories of peasants, shepherds, children and poor folk showing their deep genuine emotions. He argued that simple uneducated people often felt emotions more purely than sophisticated city dwellers. Nature played a central role in his vision as a living spiritual presence that speaks to the imagination. In “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” he writes of nature as “The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse / The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul”. Wordsworth also addressed public taste which he saw as corrupted by sensational novels and commercial writing. He believed true poets could educate readers back to appreciating sincere feeling and truth through honest poetry that improves taste and connects people to nature and humanity.

1.2.2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Theory of Imagination

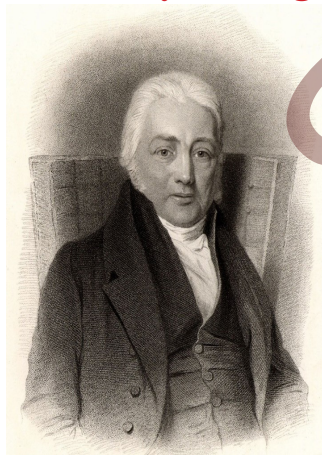


Fig 1.2.2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a brilliant contemporary of Wordsworth and one of the most intellectually gifted figures of the Romantic period. Although he collaborated

with Wordsworth on the revolutionary *Lyrical Ballads*, his approach to poetry and criticism was distinct because he focused more on the philosophical foundations of art. In his major critical work, *Biographia Literaria* (1817),

Coleridge combines autobiography with literary theory to offer profound insights into the nature of creativity. One of his most significant contributions is his careful distinction between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’. He argues that fancy is a lesser faculty that merely rearranges existing memories and images into new patterns without changing their nature. Fancy is playful and mechanical, producing works that may be witty or decorative but lack deep unity and feeling.

Coleridge elevates the concept of imagination far above fancy, dividing it into two levels known as the Primary and Secondary Imagination. The Primary Imagination is the universal power of human perception that allows every person to make sense of the world around them. It is the “living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception” which actively constructs reality rather than passively receiving it. The Secondary Imagination is the specific gift of the poet and artist. It is an echo of the primary power that co-exists with the conscious will to dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate the world in order to recreate it. This creative faculty unifies opposing elements to produce a new organic whole where every part contributes to the meaning of the work. For Coleridge, the true function of poetry is to reveal truth through this imaginative transformation of experience. A work of art created by the Secondary Imagination is not just a collection of parts but a living organism that grows from within according to its own internal laws. This concept of “organic form” was a major departure from the mechanical rules of Neo-classical criticism which Coleridge criticised for being too rigid. He believed that genuine poetry should reconcile opposites, such as the general and the specific or the strange and the familiar, to create a sense of harmony. His theories provided a deep philosophical basis for Romantic literature and helped to revive interest in complex writers like Shakespeare and the Metaphysical poets.



1.2.3 John Keats and Negative Capability



Fig1.2.3 John Keats

John Keats wrote poetry for only about six years, but his achievement in that short time is remarkable. Today he stands among the greatest English poets. His critical ideas do not appear in formal

essays; instead, they are scattered through the many letters he wrote to friends and family. Modern readers and scholars have developed a renewed interest in these letters because they show how sharp, thoughtful, and original his prose could be. Keats, though less systematic a thinker than Coleridge, articulated important ideas about poetry and the poet that have profoundly influenced literary criticism. His letters reveal a mind deeply engaged with questions about artistic creation, the nature of beauty, and the role of the poet in society. Two phrases coined by Keats have now become part of the vocabulary of literary criticism: “Negative Capability” and “Egotistical Sublime.” Of these, *negative capability* remains the most influential.

Negative Capability

Shakespeare shaped Keats’s thinking more deeply than any other writer. Keats admired not only Shakespeare’s artistry but also what he called the “genuineness of being” - a kind of deep inward truthfulness. Through Shakespeare, Keats learned to value a state of mind that does not rush toward certainty but instead remains open to life’s depth and complexity.

Keats first used the phrase “Negative Capability” in a letter written on 21 December 1817

to his brothers George and Tom. He explained that the greatest writers possess a special quality: *the ability to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without impatiently grabbing at facts or logical explanations*. For Keats, Shakespeare embodied this quality more than anyone else. Shakespeare could create noble figures like Hamlet or Julius Caesar and, with equal power, shape dark, destructive minds like Iago or Edmund. He did so without inserting his personal judgement or moral attitude. His imagination entered every character fully, yet without forcing his own ego onto them. This selfless imaginative openness is what Keats admired most.

Keats believed that a true poet lets the sense of beauty dissolve all other considerations. Instead of controlling or shaping an experience according to personal preferences or moral positions, the poet should surrender to it with full sensitivity. This explains why Keats’s idea seems at odds with the Romantic theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who emphasised personal emotion, moral insight, and the shaping presence of the poet’s own mind. Critics like Allan Rodway have pointed out this tension. Keats valued self-forgetting openness, yet he also felt drawn, at times, to philosophical depth and to the moral responsibilities of human experience. His career reflects both impulses.

Some readers argue that complete negative capability is possible only in certain moments, when the poet is open, passive, watchful, and receptive. Wordsworth called this state “wise passiveness.” Even if the poet must later choose, shape, and judge, Keats insisted that the first movement of creation should be one of surrender rather than control. It is in that receptive space that imagination works most freely.

Implications for Critical Theory

Keats's concept of Negative Capability has important implications for literary criticism and interpretation. It suggests that the critic should not approach a work of literature with a predetermined thesis or interpretive framework, seeking to extract a single correct meaning. Rather, the critic should remain open to the multiplicity of meanings and the ambiguities present in the text. A work of literature may contain contradictions and tensions that cannot be resolved but rather should be appreciated for their richness and complexity.

This idea has influenced subsequent critical schools, including New Criticism and post-structuralist criticism, which have emphasised the complexity and ambiguity of literary texts and resisted the reduction of literature to simple moral or political messages. Keats's concept provides a philosophical and aesthetic rationale for appreciating literature's richness and resisting simplistic interpretation.

1.2.4 German Romanticism and the Sublime

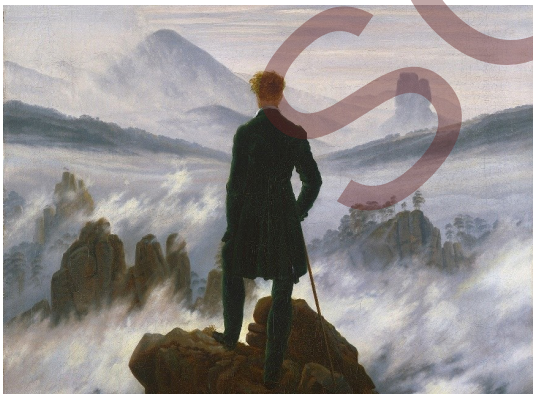


Fig.1.2.4 “Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog” painted by Caspar David Friedrich

German Romanticism emerged in the late eighteenth century as a major cultural movement that spanned literature, philosophy, music, and art. It developed as a reaction against the Enlightenment's focus on reason and log-

ic, emphasising instead emotion, imagination, and the spiritual depths of the human mind. Influenced by German Idealist philosophers like Fichte and Hegel, the movement explored the idea that reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual rather than just material. Central to this aesthetic was the concept of the “Sublime”—a powerful sense of awe and mystery in the presence of something vast that exceeds human comprehension. Unlike the “Beautiful,” which is defined by harmony and order, the Sublime involves excess and a feeling of being overwhelmed. This experience often mixes fear with exaltation, forcing the individual to recognise their own limits while sensing an infinite reality beyond them.

The German Romantics frequently located the Sublime in the grandeur of the natural world. They saw vast landscapes like mountains, oceans, and wilderness as manifestations of a divine or infinite power. This connection is famously captured in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, particularly *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. In this iconic work, a solitary figure stands on a rocky precipice gazing out over a mist-covered landscape. The figure appears small and insignificant against the immense scale of nature, yet his contemplative posture suggests a spiritual communion with the scene. Literature also explored this theme, such as in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, where the protagonist is overwhelmed by the “sublime and infinite” power of nature. These works illustrate the Romantic belief that confronting the vastness of nature allows the human soul to transcend ordinary life and connect with something greater than itself.

A key feature of this movement was its obsession with the “Infinite”, the boundless reality that lies beyond rational understanding. For the Romantics, the finite human mind is constantly striving to touch the infinite, whether

through nature, art, or the depths of the unconscious. This encounter can be unsettling or even terrifying, but it also offers the potential for profound spiritual renewal. These ideas travelled beyond Germany and deeply influenced English Romanticism, particularly through figures like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The concept of the Sublime enriched English poetry, encouraging writers to look at nature not just as scenery, but as a gateway to spiritual truth and a space where the human imagination could meet the divine.

1.2.5 Late Nineteenth-Century Criticism

The late nineteenth century was a period of extraordinary intellectual ferment and cultural change. The Industrial Revolution had transformed society, creating new wealth and new social problems. Urbanisation had accelerated, changing patterns of life and work. Evolutionary theory, particularly Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, challenged traditional religious and philosophical frameworks. Psychology and the study of the human mind emerged as new disciplines. The growth of print culture, including newspapers and popular magazines, expanded the audience for literature and criticism. The development of universities and the establishment of literature as an academic discipline created new institutional contexts for literary study and criticism.

Late nineteenth-century criticism reflected these changes. There was a growing emphasis on historical and contextual approaches to literature, as critics sought to understand literary works in relation to their historical periods and social circumstances. There was also an emerging interest in the psychology of literary creation and the psychological dimensions of literary response. Scientific methods were applied to literary study, as critics sought to analyse literature with something of the rigour

and objectivity associated with scientific investigation.

Yet alongside these developments, there emerged a counter-movement emphasising the autonomous value of art and aesthetic experience. This movement, known as Aestheticism, represented a reaction against utilitarian and moralistic approaches to art. Aestheticism championed art for its own sake, arguing that the value of art lay not in its moral lessons or social utility but in the beauty of form and the aesthetic experience it provided.

1.2.6 Matthew Arnold and the Criticism of Life

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) was the most influential literary critic of the mid-to-late nineteenth century and a towering figure in Victorian intellectual life. Born into an educated, distinguished family, his father Thomas Arnold was a famous headmaster of Rugby School and educational reformer. Matthew Arnold received an excellent education at Oxford University. Beyond his work as a critic, he was also a poet, educational reformer, and cultural commentator whose ideas continue to influence critical thinking today. Arnold's career was diverse: he worked as an inspector of schools, giving him extensive knowledge of English education and society, and served as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, where he delivered influential lectures on literature and criticism. His most famous essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864), defines criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." This definition became one of the most important statements in critical theory. For Arnold, criticism is not primarily about finding fault or making negative judgments but rather about recognising and circulating excellence. The true critic must be free from personal bias, political prejudice,

and commercial interests, with a duty to maintain high standards and resist the complacency and mediocrity that threaten civilisation. His most distinctive contribution to literary theory is the concept of criticism of life. In his essay “The Study of Poetry,” Arnold argues that poetry is fundamentally a “criticism of life”, meaning that poetry is far more than entertainment or the expression of personal feeling. Rather, poetry is a profound commentary on human experience, values, and how we ought to live. The greatest poetry provides the most penetrating and comprehensive “criticism of life,” offering wisdom about human nature and destiny.

Arnold believed that in the modern world, as religious faith declined and traditional authorities weakened, poetry must assume the role that religion once played in society. Poetry can offer moral guidance and spiritual sustenance; it helps individuals understand themselves and their place in society. The great poets - Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton - provided their societies with profound insights into human nature and the human condition. Yet Arnold also recognised a serious problem: the threat of cultural mediocrity and complacency. He criticised what he called “stock notions and habits”, the conventional wisdom and accepted mediocrity that dominate popular culture. Arnold believed critics have a responsibility to challenge this complacency and insist on the pursuit of excellence. He was especially critical of English cultural self-satisfaction, arguing that English people often assumed the superiority of their own culture and ways without subjecting these assumptions to rigorous examination. To maintain

standards and make sound judgments, Arnold advocated the touchstone method of criticism. Rather than defining excellence through abstract principles, the critic should keep in mind exemplary works of undoubted greatness and use them as touchstones, standards of measurement, against which to evaluate other works. By constantly referring to passages from Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, the critic can develop a sensitive perception of quality and judge new works accurately. This practical method, grounded in direct experience of great literature, proved more reliable than theoretical definitions.

Arnold’s criticism cannot be separated from his broader vision of culture and society. In his book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), he argues that culture, understood as the pursuit of perfection and appreciation of the best that has been thought and said, is essential for social and moral development. English society faced fragmentation and conflict, threatening its unity and stability. Against these dangers, Arnold advocated the unifying and elevating power of culture. When disseminated through criticism and education, culture could overcome class divisions, provincial narrow-mindedness, and the shallow materialism of utilitarian thinking that reduced life to mere economic calculation. Culture, for Arnold, was a civilising force capable of transforming individuals and society. This vision of culture and criticism as forces for moral and social improvement remains central to Arnold’s legacy, establishing the critic not merely as a judge of texts but as a guide to living well and a defender of civilisation itself.

1.2.7 Aestheticism and Art for Art's Sake



Fig 1.2.5 Aestheticism and Art for Art's Sake

Aestheticism emerged as a significant cultural movement in the late nineteenth century, particularly in England and France, as a powerful reaction against the moralism and utilitarianism that dominated Victorian society. This movement asserted that art possessed autonomy and should not be judged by moral, political, or social standards, but only by aesthetic criteria. Rather than serving moral purposes or social improvement, art should be valued for its intrinsic beauty and the aesthetic experience it provides. The philosophy underlying Aestheticism rests on the conviction that beauty is a distinct and autonomous form of value, separate from moral truth or practical utility. An artwork might be morally questionable or socially harmful, yet still possess genuine aesthetic value. This radical separation of the aesthetic domain from the moral and practical domains marked a significant departure from earlier critical traditions.

Walter Pater (1839–1894) was one of the most important theorists of Aestheticism. His influential book *The Renaissance: Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), particularly its famous Conclusion, became a manifesto for the Aesthetic movement. Pater began from the philosophical premise that all reality is characterised by perpetual flux and constant

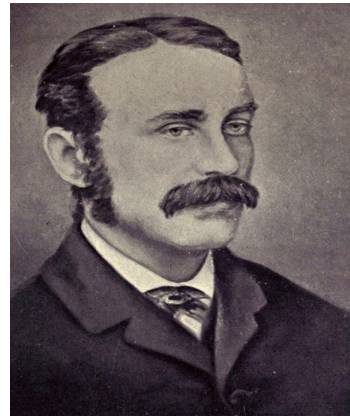


Fig 1.2.6 Walter Pater (1839–1894)

change - nothing is stable, everything transforms continuously. Given this fundamental instability of existence, Pater argued that we should live with the primary aim of intensifying and refining aesthetic experience. He urged readers to burn with a “hard, gem-like flame,” seeking in each moment - whether encountering a work of art, a natural scene, a human relationship, or an ordinary experience - to extract the maximum of beauty and meaning. His own critical practice exemplified this philosophy: his essays employed refined, elegant prose to evoke the aesthetic experience of the works he discussed, avoiding moral judgements and seeking instead to capture the quality and significance of aesthetic feeling.



Fig 1.2.7 Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) became the most famous and flamboyant practitioner of Aestheticism, embodying the Aesthetic ideal through his witty, elegant writing and radical aesthetic ideas. Wilde's most famous and paradoxical assertion was that “all art is quite useless” - meaning that art should never be sub-

ordinated to external purposes or utility. Art should not teach morality, improve society, or achieve any practical goal; rather, it exists purely for itself, for the beauty of form and the aesthetic experience it provides. Any attempt to make art serve morality or social improvement, Wilde argued, degrades and diminishes art itself. In the Preface to his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde sets forth aesthetic principles through a series of provocative aphorisms: “there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all.” He insists that “the artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is the aim of the artist.” These statements encapsulate the Aesthetic philosophy - art should be judged purely by aesthetic standards; art’s purpose is to create beauty and aesthetic experience; the artist’s personality should disappear into the work itself. Wilde further argued, paradoxically, that the critic is an artist. In his essay “The Critic as Artist,” he asserts that criticism is a creative act equal to creation itself. The critic, through interpretation and appreciation, creates meaning and aesthetic experience, functioning as a co-creator who brings the work to life rather than as a subordinate judge of the artist’s creation.

Wilde also celebrated artifice and artificiality as superior to nature and naturalism. He argued that nature is chaotic and incoherent, whilst art imposes deliberate form and meaning through the artist’s will and imagination. Art achieves perfection through elaborate decoration and refined construction, an aesthetic that markedly differed from Romantic emphasis on nature and spontaneity. Aestheticism extended beyond literature and theory into a broader lifestyle and cultural phenomenon. Aesthetes cultivated distinctive living environments characterised by Japanese art, art nouveau design, exotic fabrics, and carefully arranged collections of beautiful objects,

creating total aesthetic environments in which life itself became a work of art. However, Aestheticism provoked considerable opposition and criticism. Moralists and utilitarians condemned the movement as representing a dangerous withdrawal from moral and social responsibility. Critics argued that separating art from morality was potentially corrupting, as it might lead to celebrating immoral behaviour if aesthetically refined. The Aesthetic emphasis on beauty and artifice was denounced as elitist and disconnected from ordinary people’s concerns. Some critics also identified an internal contradiction: if art serves no purpose and has no utility, why should we value it at all? Aesthetic theorists attempted to resolve this paradox by arguing that aesthetic experience itself constitutes genuine human value - that the refinement of perception and feeling achieved through aesthetic appreciation represents a real good, even without external utility.

Despite these criticisms, Aestheticism profoundly influenced literary and aesthetic theory. It established art’s autonomy as a central principle of modern aesthetics, and the idea that art should be judged by aesthetic rather than moral criteria became widely accepted, even among non-Aesthetes. The movement also enriched literary criticism by emphasising close attention to form and language. The late nineteenth century witnessed a fascinating tension between Matthew Arnold’s vision of criticism as a moral and cultural force essential for social development and the Aesthetic movement’s assertion of art’s autonomy. Arnold saw literature as an instrument for moral and social improvement; the Aesthetes saw demands that art serve moral purposes as corrupting art’s true nature. This dialogue between moralism and aestheticism remains profoundly relevant today. Contemporary critics continue to debate whether literature and art should be judged primarily by aesthet-



ic or moral and political criteria, whether art can be autonomous from social context and consequence, and what responsibility artists and critics bear toward broader society. The

positions established in the late nineteenth century continue to shape these enduring debates about art's nature and purpose.

Recap

- ▶ Wordsworth revolutionised poetry through *Lyrical Ballads* using simple, natural everyday language.
- ▶ Wordsworth defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” recollected in tranquillity.
- ▶ Wordsworth championed “the real language of men” over artificial poetic diction.
- ▶ Wordsworth believed ordinary people and subjects deserved serious literary treatment.
- ▶ Coleridge distinguished fancy (mechanical rearrangement) from imagination (creative unification) in *Biographia Literaria*.
- ▶ Coleridge developed the concept of organic form transcending Neoclassical mechanical rules.
- ▶ Primary Imagination is universal human perception; Secondary Imagination is the poet's creative gift.
- ▶ Keats coined “Negative Capability” - remaining in uncertainties without grasping for facts or certainty.
- ▶ Keats admired Shakespeare's selfless imaginative openness and ego-less character creation.
- ▶ German Romanticism emphasised the Sublime as vast, overwhelming, and spiritually transformative nature.
- ▶ Arnold defined criticism as “disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best.”
- ▶ Arnold argued poetry is fundamentally “a criticism of life” offering moral wisdom.
- ▶ Arnold employed the touchstone method comparing works to exemplary masterpieces.
- ▶ Pater urged living intensely, extracting maximum beauty from aesthetic experience.
- ▶ Wilde asserted “all art is quite useless” and the critic is an artist

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Lyrical Ballads* revolutionarily?
2. What is poetry's definition, Wordsworth?
3. Which concept unites emotion reflection?
4. Who wrote *Biographia Literaria* philosophically?
5. What distinguishes fancy from imagination?
6. What principle replaced Neoclassical rules?
7. Who coined negative capability?
8. Whose character creation did Keats admire?
9. What emotion defines the Sublime?
10. Who defined criticism as disinterested?
11. What is poetry fundamentally, Arnold?
12. What method did Arnold advocate?
13. Who wrote *The Renaissance* aesthetically?
14. What should burn brightly, Pater?
15. What statement defines Wilde's aestheticism?

Answers

1. Wordsworth
2. Spontaneous
3. Tranquillity
4. Coleridge
5. Imagination
6. Organic
7. Keats
8. Shakespeare
9. Awe
10. Arnold
11. Commentary
12. Touchstone
13. Pater
14. Flame
15. Useless

Assignments

1. Explain Wordsworth's theory of poetic language and emotion, analysing how "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and "the real language of men" challenged eighteenth-century poetic conventions.
2. Evaluate Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination, and explain how the concept of organic form advanced beyond Neoclassical mechanical principles.
3. Analyse Keats's concept of Negative Capability through Shakespeare, examining how selfless imaginative openness differs from Wordsworth's and Coleridge's emphasis on personal emotion and the poet's shaping mind.
4. Discuss Matthew Arnold's vision of criticism as a moral and cultural force, evaluating his "touchstone method" and the concept of poetry as "criticism of life" in relation to Victorian social anxieties.
5. Compare Arnold's moralistic approach to literature with the Aesthetes' claim that art should exist autonomously "for art's sake," and assess the enduring relevance of this Victorian debate to contemporary literary criticism

Suggested Reading

1. Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads with Preface*. Ed. Michael Mason. Longman, 1992.
2. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. Princeton University Press, 1983.
3. Keats, John. *Selected Letters*. Ed. Robert Gittings. Oxford University Press, 1970.
4. Arnold, Matthew. *Selected Prose*. Ed. P.J. Keating. Penguin Classics, 1987.
5. Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Oxford University Press, 1980 (particularly the Conclusion)

BLOCK - 02

Socio-political and Literary Background II

Unit-1 : Twentieth-Century Criticism

Unit-2 : Indian Poetics

Unit
1

Twentieth-Century Criticism

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ▶ analyse early twentieth-century critical movements effectively.
- ▶ examine Formalism's specific focus on literary form.
- ▶ evaluate Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry.
- ▶ apply New Critical methods to analysis.
- ▶ become aware of Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation clearly.

Prerequisite

Before studying this unit, learners should possess a foundational understanding of the shift from Victorian to Modernist literature. Familiarity with the historical context of the early twentieth century, including the impact of industrialisation and the World Wars on social thought, will enhance comprehension. Additionally, learners should have a basic grasp of Romantic expressive theories to better understand the Modernist reaction against them.

A working knowledge of basic literary terminology such as imagery, metaphor, and narrative structure is essential, as this unit focuses heavily on technical analysis. Learners should also be acquainted with key figures of the late nineteenth century who paved the way for modern criticism. Prior exposure to the general concepts of literary theory, particularly the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to text, will facilitate understanding of the New Critical perspective.

Keywords

Defamiliarisation, Formalism, Paradox, Ambiguity, Impersonality

Discussion

Early twentieth-century English criticism, often associated with the modernist period, emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century as a response to rapid social, cultural, and artistic change. This period witnessed the breakdown of old certainties under the impact of industrialisation, world war, urbanisation, and new scientific and philosophical ideas. In literature, there was a marked rejection of many traditional forms and conventions, together with a strong emphasis on individual consciousness, subjectivity, and technical experimentation.

Critics and theorists in this period began to pay close attention to language, form, and structure. They challenged earlier habits of reading that relied heavily on biography, moral lessons, or historical context alone. Instead, they argued that a literary work needed to be studied closely as an artistic construct. Among the most influential figures were T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, William K. Wimsatt, and Monroe C. Beardsley, who insisted on careful analysis of the text and helped lay the foundations of movements such as formalism and New Criticism. Their ideas have continued to shape literary criticism and theory well into the present.

2.1.1 Formalism in Literature

Formalism in literature is an approach that centres on the technical features of a work, such as structure, language, form, imagery, and narrative technique. A formalist reading treats a poem, novel, or play as a self-contained object. It treats the work as something that can be understood on its own terms without relying primarily on the author's life, political opinions, or the detailed historical context. This does not mean that history or biography are unimportant, but that the first task of criticism is to examine how a work is put

together and how its internal elements function.

A well-known example of a text that rewards a formalist reading is T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In this poem, Eliot employs a range of devices such as repetition, allusion, irony, and fragmentation to convey the psychological anxiety of his speaker. The poem proceeds through a sequence of apparently disjointed images and situations rather than a straightforward narrative. This broken structure mirrors the inner confusion of Prufrock and the fragmented nature of modern urban life. Repeated phrases and images, such as the fog and the indecisive questions about "daring," create a circular pattern that emphasises paralysis, alienation, and self-doubt.

Another important example is James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. This novel is famous for its complex narrative techniques, including stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and shifting perspectives. The events of the novel take place during a single day in Dublin, yet the structure moves freely in and out of the minds of different characters and experiments with many styles of writing. Joyce's language is highly patterned and playful, and his chapters often adopt different rhetorical and stylistic modes. A formalist study of *Ulysses* focuses on how these experimental forms reflect themes of identity, memory, sexuality, and perception. The novel's structure, far from being chaotic, creates its own internal order through recurring motifs, parallels with Homer's *Odyssey*, and intricate networks of cross-reference.

In the mid twentieth century, formalism in the English-speaking world became closely associated with New Criticism. The New Critics, which included figures such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, W. K. Wimsatt, and



Monroe Beardsley, argued that a poem should be examined as an autonomous verbal structure. They insisted on close reading, attending to irony, paradox, ambiguity, and tension in the text. They warned against two common “fallacies”: the intentional fallacy (relying on the author’s supposed intention) and the affective fallacy (judging a work only by the emotional effect on readers). For them, meaning was to be found in the careful analysis of the language, patterns, and structure of the work itself. Formalism thus encouraged a disciplined, text-centred approach that has influenced classroom teaching and critical practice for decades.

2.1.2 Viktor Shklovsky and Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism developed in Russia in the early twentieth century, roughly between 1915



Fig 2.1.1 Viktor Shklovsky

and the later 1920s. It arose in a period of intense social and political upheaval, but its early focus was not political. Instead, the Russian formalists wanted to establish a “scientific” study of literature that would concentrate on its specific qualities as an art of language.

Rather than viewing literature as a simple reflection of society or the author’s biography, they treated it as a special use of language with its own devices, structures, and techniques.

One of the most influential figures of Russian Formalism was Viktor Shklovsky. Shklovsky argued that art does not simply mirror reality. Instead, its task is to make the world appear strange in order to renew our perception. He introduced the famous concept of “defamiliarisation,” which means making the familiar appear unfamiliar so that we notice it again. In everyday life, repeated habits and routines cause perception to become automatic. We pass through the world in a state of half-attention, hardly seeing things. Art, by slowing down perception and presenting objects in unusual ways, can break through this dull routine.

In his important essay “Art as Technique,” Shklovsky explains that literary language is different from ordinary language because it draws attention to itself. The writer uses devices such as metaphor, simile, unusual syntax, repetition, or unexpected points of view to disrupt automatic perception. This effort makes readers work harder, but it is precisely this effort that restores the freshness of experience. For Shklovsky, the essence of art lies not in its subject matter or message, but in its capacity to transform perception through formal devices.

Shklovsky’s reading of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* offers a striking example. He notes that Tolstoy spends many pages describing everyday details such as clothing, gestures, domestic routines, and even how characters eat breakfast. In the hands of a lesser writer, these details might seem trivial. However, Tolstoy presents them in such a way that they become strange. As readers, we are compelled to notice them and to see Anna’s life as a series of disconnected scenes rather than a single harmonious whole. This fragmentation of experience, presented through form rather than

direct commentary, contributes to the tragic effect. The tragedy lies as much in the way the story is told as in the events that occur.

Shklovsky also believed that art could perform a critical and even political function. By defamiliarising daily life, art can expose the hidden assumptions and ideologies that govern our perceptions. In his essay “Monument to a Scientific Error,” he criticised official attempts in the Soviet Union to rewrite history and control public memory. He argued that the artist’s task was to challenge these efforts at control by creating works that unsettled accepted narratives and made people question what they took for granted.

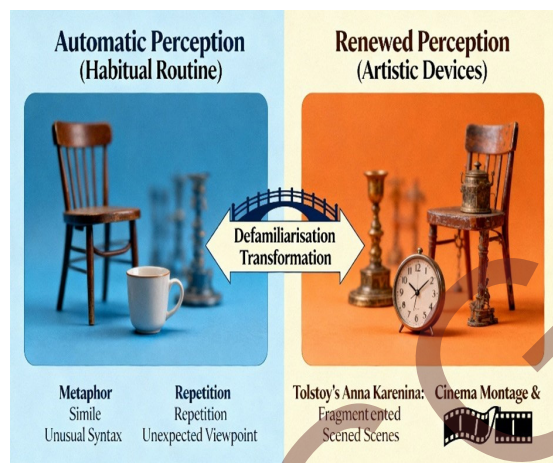


Fig 2.1.2 Defamiliarisation

Shklovsky was also interested in the impact of new technologies such as cinema. In his essay “The Film Novel,” he suggested that film required a new kind of language and that literary techniques of defamiliarisation could be adapted to the cinema through editing and montage. By cutting and rearranging images, filmmakers could create a sense of estrangement and force viewers to see familiar events in a new way. Russian Formalism, through Shklovsky and others such as Roman Jakobson, thus helped to establish many of the concepts that later structuralist and poststructuralist critics would develop further.

Jakobson, another central figure, brought linguistic analysis into literary study. He argued that language consists of discrete units and functions, and that literature concentrates attention on the “poetic function” of language, where the message draws attention to its own form. This emphasis on the formal features of language helped to link literary criticism with linguistics and paved the way for later structuralist approaches.

2.1.3 Features of Modernism

Modernism in literature is the broad name given to the radical innovations in form, style, and subject matter that occurred in the late

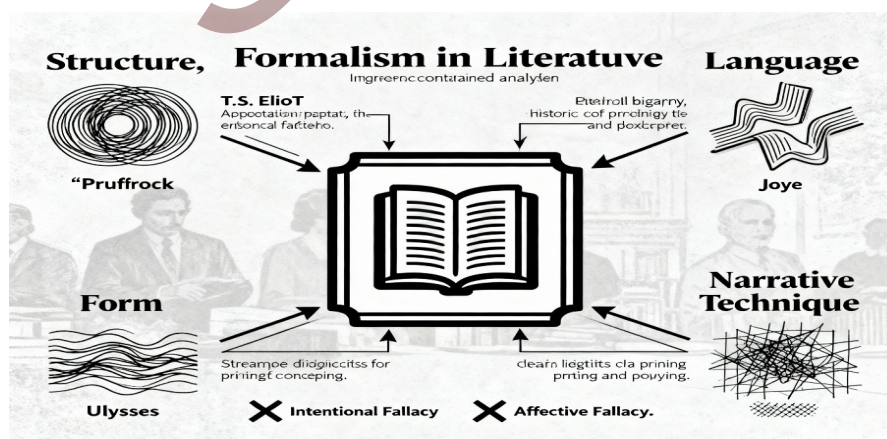


Fig 2.1.3 Features of Modernism

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modernist writers felt that the old Victorian forms could no longer express the complexities of modern urban life, technological change, and the experience of war and social crisis. They experimented with disrupted narratives, fractured perspectives, and new uses of language in order to register this sense of fragmentation and uncertainty.

One widely noted feature of modernist writing is fragmentation. Rather than presenting a single, smooth story, many modernist works break up time, perspective, and narrative voice. This reflects a sense that modern life itself has become fragmented. Writers such as T. S. Eliot or Virginia Woolf frequently move between different speakers, time periods, or locations without clear transitions. The reader must piece together meaning from scattered hints. This broken surface forces active participation and mirrors the fractured nature of modern consciousness.

Another key feature is stream of consciousness. This narrative technique attempts to follow the flow of a character's thoughts, feelings, and associations more directly than traditional narration. It often abandons clear punctuation and logical order to mimic the mind's movement. James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* are famous examples. In such works, external events are often less important than the inner life of the characters. The narrative shifts rapidly from one mental impression to another, blurring the line between present perception and remembered past.

Modernist writers also place great importance on imagery. Rather than explaining ideas directly, they use vivid, concrete images to suggest complex emotions or states of mind. Poets influenced by Imagism tried to "present an image" clearly and sharply without unnec-

essary words or moral comment. The power of a poem lies in the precise arrangement of images and rhythms, which evoke feeling in the reader without lengthy explanation. This emphasis on image connects modernist poetry with formalist concerns about language and structure.

Allusion is another frequent feature. Many modernist texts are filled with references to earlier literature, myth, religion, and history. T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* is a classic example. It weaves together phrases and images drawn from the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, ancient myth, and contemporary popular culture. These allusions create layers of meaning and suggest that modern life is haunted by a broken relationship with a richer cultural past. At the same time, the density of reference demands a well-read audience and invites scholarly interpretation.

Modernist narratives often break with linear time. Works by writers such as William Faulkner move backwards and forwards in time, presenting multiple versions of the same event from different points of view. This non-linear structure suggests that human experience cannot be captured by a simple sequence of events. Memory, trauma, and subjective perception distort our sense of time.

In poetry, many modernists rejected strict rhyme and regular metre in favour of free verse. This did not mean abandonment of craft, but a search for new rhythms suited to modern speech and experience. The aim was to find a form that felt flexible, alive, and responsive rather than bound to eighteenth-century patterns.

Overall, modernist literature is characterised by a deep mistrust of easy answers and stable meanings. It questions inherited beliefs about self, society, and language. Its experimen-

tal forms attempt to reflect a world that feels unstable, often disorienting, yet also charged with new possibilities.

2.1.3.1 Ezra Pound and Modernism

Ezra Pound was a central figure in early modernist poetry and played a crucial role in shaping the movement's direction. Born in Idaho in 1885, Pound moved to Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century. He lived in London, Paris, and later Italy, and was actively involved in supporting and promoting other writers. He helped to publish and revise the work of many important modernists, including T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.



Fig 2.1.4 Ezra Pound

Pound believed that poetry had to be renewed through strict discipline and technical innovation. He criticised vague, sentimental, and decorative verse and called for a return to precision and

clarity. He became a leading voice of Imagism, a movement which insisted on direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective, and the elimination of unnecessary words. Imagist poems should be brief, clear, and built around a sharp visual image presented in simple language.

His very short poem “In a Station of the Metro” exemplifies this approach. The poem contains only two lines but suggests a whole scene and mood:

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.”

The poem presents two images without ex-

plicit connection. The reader is invited to see the faces in the underground station as ghostly appearances and to link them with the image of flower petals against dark, wet wood. The poem works by juxtaposition, not explanation, and shows Pound’s belief that precise images can convey complex feelings more powerfully than abstract statements.

Ezra Pound and Modernism

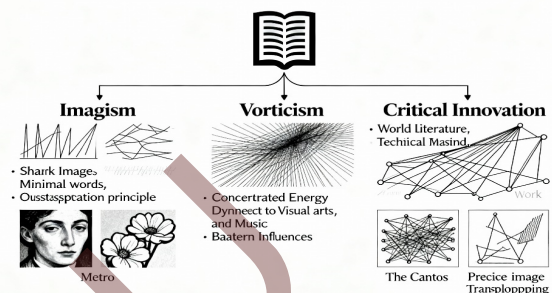


Fig 2.1.5 Pound and Modernism

Pound was also associated with Vorticism, a short-lived movement that sought to capture the energy and movement of modern life. He argued that poetry should be dynamic, concentrated, and in touch with other arts such as painting and music. He admired Chinese and Japanese poetry and tried to adapt their concision and image-based technique to English. His great long poem, *The Cantos*, is complex and controversial but shows his interest in history, economics, politics, and culture woven into a collage-like poetic form.

Pound’s critical writings were equally influential. His essays urged writers to learn from the whole of world literature, not only from the recent English tradition. He recommended that poets study the “masters” for technique and not imitate their surface effects. He encouraged translation and adaptation of foreign works as a way of renewing English poetry.

However, Pound’s political choices were deeply troubling. During the Second World

War he supported Italian fascism, broadcast propaganda, and expressed anti-Semitic views. After the war he was arrested by Allied forces and confined for some years in a mental institution in the United States. These facts complicate his legacy. Modern readers and critics must distinguish between his lasting contributions to poetry and criticism and his unacceptable political beliefs. His technical innovations, promotion of other writers, and theoretical insights remain central to the study of modernism.

2.1.3.2 T. S. Eliot and Modernist Theories

T. S. Eliot was both a major modernist poet and one of the most influential literary critics of the twentieth century. Born in St Louis in 1888, he later settled in England and became a British citizen. His poetry, including “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” *The Waste Land*, “Gerontion,” and “Four Quartets,” is widely regarded as central to modernist literature. At the same time, his essays on poetry and criticism reshaped critical practice.

In his famous essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot challenged the Romantic idea of poetry as the direct expression of personal emotion. He argued that the poet’s mind is not a place where private feelings are poured out, but rather a complex medium in which impressions and experiences are transformed. For Eliot, true poetic creation involves a constant, conscious engagement with the whole of the existing tradition of European literature. A new work of art is judged in relation to the tradition, and at the same time, the tradition itself is subtly altered when a genuinely new work appears.

Eliot insists that “no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.” Every poet must be understood in relation to past poets. Tradition, in this sense, is not blind imitation

of the past, but a historical awareness that shapes the poet’s sensibility. The individual talent must submit to the discipline of tradition even as it seeks originality. Eliot thus encourages poets and critics to view literature as a continuous, interrelated whole rather than as isolated works linked only to authors’ lives.

In the same essay, Eliot introduces a view of poetic emotion that is quite different from Romantic ideas. He suggests that in poetry, emotion and personality are “depersonalised.” The poet uses a “catalyst,” a set of images, situations, or events, to evoke emotion in the reader without directly stating personal feelings. This concept is closely related to another famous idea of his, the “objective correlative,” which he discusses in “Hamlet and His Problems.” According to Eliot, an objective correlative is a combination of external facts, objects, or events that can be used to produce a particular emotion in the audience. Rather than describing emotions directly, the poet presents a carefully chosen sequence of images and actions that will naturally evoke the desired response.

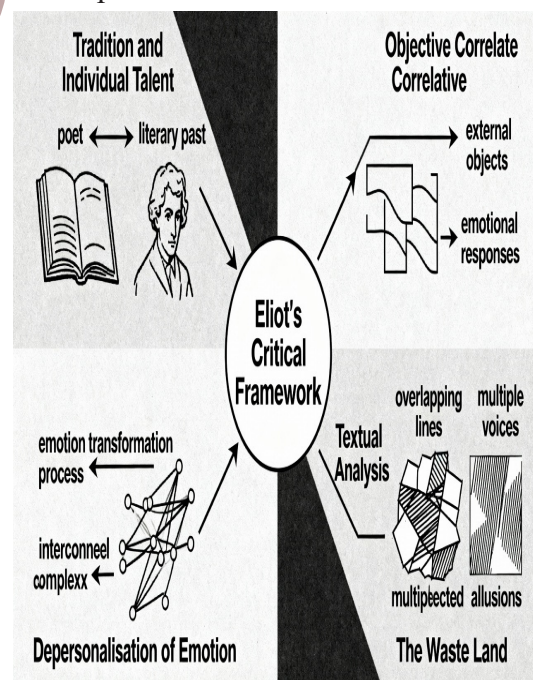


Fig 2.1.6 Eliot and Modernist Theories

Eliot's own poetry illustrates these theories. *The Waste Land* is filled with allusions to earlier texts, myths, and rituals. The poem moves rapidly between voices, languages, and settings, using fragments of earlier literature as part of its own structure. It portrays a spiritual and cultural wasteland after the First World War, but it does so through dense imagery and echoes of past works rather than overt statements. The reader must work to connect these fragments, just as a modern subject must struggle to find meaning in a fragmented world.

Eliot's early criticism also strongly influenced the development of modernist and later formalist criticism. He argued that criticism should be impersonal and should focus on the text. He distrusted purely biographical or impressionistic criticism and called for standards based on the internal coherence and complexity of the work. This approach helped to prepare the ground for New Criticism and later text-centred methods.

At the same time, Eliot's essays on religion, culture, and society, such as those collected in *The Sacred Wood* and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, show his belief that literature is deeply connected with wider cultural and spiritual questions. He was concerned with the decline of a shared religious and cultural framework and saw poetry partly as a means of exploring this loss. Thus, while he insisted on technical and formal rigour, he did not treat literature as a purely isolated game. For Eliot, poetry stands within a long tradition, reflects the conditions of its time, and addresses questions of meaning and value that remain central to human life.

2.1.4 New Criticism in Britain and the United States

At the start of the 20th century, a group of critics in England and the USA aimed to bring

more structure to literary criticism. Society and people's ways of thinking were changing, and literature was also evolving. As A.C. Ward put it: "The old certainties were certainties no longer. Everything was held to be open to question, everything from the nature of the Deity to the construction of verse forms."

Poets of the 20th century rejected rigid authority and fixed ideas. They began questioning long-established beliefs, influenced by critics such as Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Symonds, Sir Walter Raleigh, George Saintsbury, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf. These early critics often took an impressionistic approach, lacking clear methods. Meanwhile, other academic fields, especially the social sciences, were becoming more scientific, leading to calls for a more structured approach in literary criticism as well.

David Robey describes New Criticism as a literary theory that started with I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot in England before the Second World War and continued in the USA with John Crowe Ransom, W.K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, and Allen Tate during the 1940s-1960s. Although separate from Russian Formalism and Prague School Structuralism, these movements shared some similarities. They rejected traditional literary scholarship, focusing instead on literature itself. Both viewed literary texts as independent from their author and historical context, emphasising structure and internal connections.

One of the earliest figures in this movement was T.S. Eliot. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), often considered a modernist manifesto, Eliot argued that poetry should be impersonal. He saw poetry as an escape from personal emotion rather than a direct expression of the poet's personality. He also stressed objectivity in literary criticism. As B.K. Das explains, Eliot believed that a



great poet's mind functions like a chemical catalyst, facilitating new artistic combinations without being influenced itself.

Among the most influential critics was I.A. Richards, whose *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) had a major impact on British literary studies. Richards focused on the reader's response to literature and developed methods of analysing poetry without reference to biography or historical context. In *Practical Criticism*, he conducted experiments at Cambridge, giving students anonymous poems to analyse without any background information. This led him to propose a more rigorous approach to poetry, focusing on language, meaning, and close reading. His student William Empson expanded on this idea in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), which examined how poets use language to create multiple meanings, sometimes appearing contradictory. Empson's work was influenced by Sigmund Freud's ideas on language and symbolism.

In America, a group known as the *Fugitive Poets* led the New Criticism movement. Key figures included John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks. Others, such as R.P. Blackmur, Yvor Winters, and Kenneth Burke, also contributed. Major works included Blackmur's *The Double Agent* (1935), Tate's *Reactionary Essays* (1936), and Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). These critics emphasised close reading and the autonomy of literature. Ransom, for example, argued that poetry should be analysed as a self-contained structure rather than judged based on the poet's biography or historical influences.

Although New Critics shared a belief in analysing texts closely, they sometimes disagreed on key ideas. Ransom, for example, criticised I.A. Richards's focus on emotional response and disagreed with Cleanth Brooks's emphasis on paradox and irony. Ransom and Tate

were also interested in the debate between science and poetry, arguing that poetry reveals deeper truths than scientific facts alone.

By the 1930s, New Criticism was becoming central to academic study in the USA. Many of its leading figures took teaching positions at universities, such as Ransom at Kenyon College and Brooks at Yale. Books like *Understanding Poetry* and *The World's Body* introduced students to the methods of close reading, moving literary studies away from biography, historical analysis, and moral judgment.

Key Ideas of New Criticism

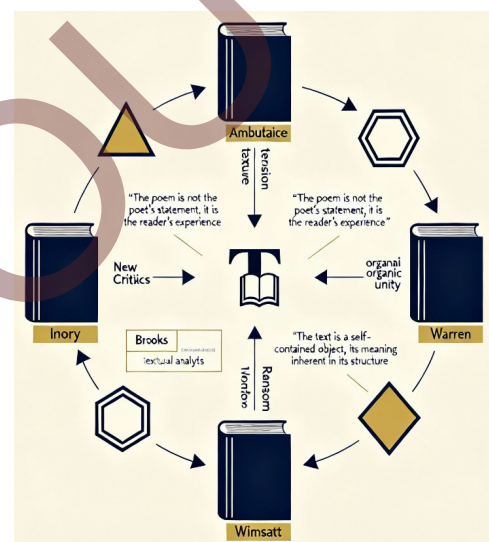


Fig 2.1.7 New Criticism

1. The Poem as an Independent Object

New Critics believed that a poem should be analysed on its own terms, focusing on its form, structure, and language rather than its historical or social background.

2. Close Reading

Critics emphasised the detailed study of a text's linguistic and structural features to uncover its multiple layers of meaning. William Empson's work was particularly influential in this area.

3. Rejection of External Influences

New New Critics argued that a poem's meaning should not depend on the author's biography, historical context, or moral messages. Cleanth Brooks called this the "heresy of paraphrase", arguing that poetry is not merely an expression of experience but an experience in itself.

4. Organic Unity

A poem's meaning and structure are seen as inseparable. The idea that a poem should not simply *mean* but *be* was famously expressed in Archibald MacLeish's poem *Ars Poetica*:

*A poem
Should not mean
But be.*

5. Rejection of Authorial Intention

New Critics believed that analysing an author's intentions was unnecessary. W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley argued in their essay "The Intentional Fallacy" that a poem's success should be judged based on how well it functions as a piece of literature, not on what the poet intended to express.

New Criticism dominated literary studies for much of the early 20th century, especially in poetry analysis. However, by the 1950s, its influence began to decline. Scholars started to explore new critical approaches, including structuralism, reader-response criticism, and cultural studies, which considered broader historical and social contexts.

Despite its limitations, New Criticism had a lasting impact on literary analysis. Its focus on close reading remains central to the way literature is studied today, particularly in academic settings.

2.1.4.1 Close Reading in New Criticism

Close reading represents the foundational methodology of New Criticism. This approach

demands careful attention to the precise language, grammatical structures, and formal patterns embedded within a literary work. Rather than seeking to extract a simple moral or philosophical message, close readers examine the intricate interplay of words, syntax, and literary devices to uncover the tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, and resolutions that give the text its distinctive character. The New Critic treats the poem as an autonomous, self-contained aesthetic object- a carefully constructed whole where every syllable, every comma, and every structural choice contributes purposefully to the overall artistic effect. This method valorizes what New Critics termed "organic unity," the idea that a truly accomplished poem achieves a state of seamless integration wherein form and content are inseparable, and every component serves the unified vision of the work.

Central to New Critical philosophy is the explicit rejection of reductive interpretation, particularly the impulse to translate a poem's meaning into prosaic paraphrase. Cleanth Brooks, one of the movement's most influential theorists, articulated this foundational principle through his concept of the "heresy of paraphrase," arguing that any attempt to distill a poem into straightforward declarative statements fundamentally betrays and diminishes the work's distinctive power. According to this view, a poem *is* not merely what it *means* - rather, it *is* the precise, irreplaceable configuration of language itself. The poem's significance resides in its particular arrangement of words, its tonal modulations, its formal constraints, and the complex play of meaning that emerges from these specific linguistic choices. To paraphrase is to strip away the very elements that constitute the poem's identity and aesthetic achievement, reducing a multi-valent artistic creation to a flattened, univocal statement that cannot adequately represent the richness and complexity of the original text.



2.1.5 John Crowe Ransom and Ontological Criticism

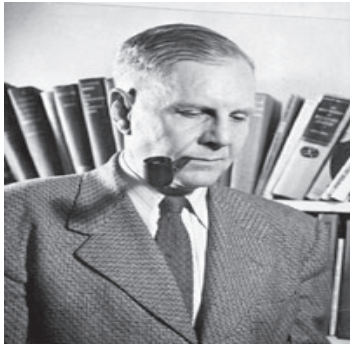


Fig. 2.1.8 John Crowe Ransom (1888-1974)

John Crowe Ransom was an American poet, literary critic, and scholar who played a key role in the development of New Criticism. His 1941 book *The New Criticism* helped define the movement, emphasising that literary analysis should focus on the text itself rather than

external factors like the author's biography or historical context. Ransom introduced the concepts of *structure* and *texture* in poetry, arguing that a poem's *structure* refers to its overall meaning and organisation, while *texture* includes elements like imagery, rhythm, and metaphor. He believed that both elements were essential and should not be separated in literary analysis. His influence extended beyond criticism. He was also a respected poet, with collections such as *Chills and Fever* (1924) and *Two Gentlemen in Bonds* (1927), and he founded *The Kenyon Review* in 1939, which became a leading literary journal.

Ransom was also associated with two other movements: *The Fugitives* and *Agrarianism*. The Fugitives was a group of poets he formed in the 1920s to challenge traditional sentimentalism in Southern literature, publishing their

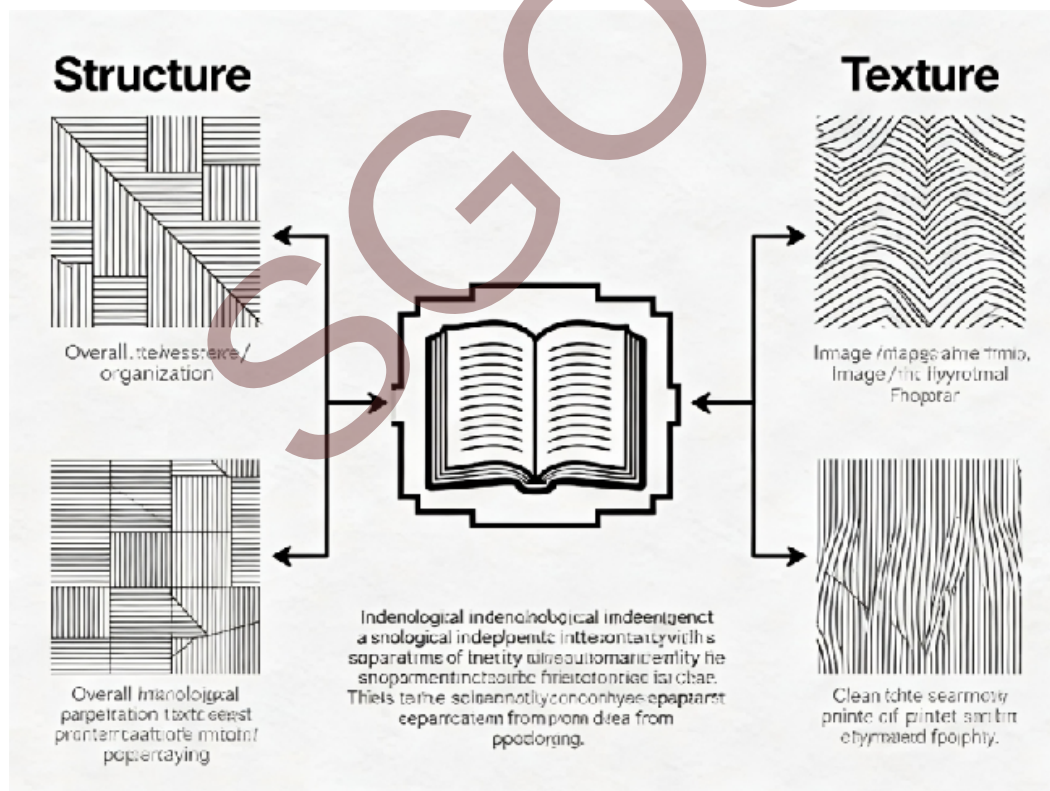


Fig 2.1.9 Structure and Texture

work in *The Fugitive* magazine. Later, he co-authored *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), a manifesto promoting 'Agrarianism', which advocated a return to rural values and criticised industrialisation. In literary criticism, Ransom championed *ontological criticism*, which holds that a text has its own independent existence and should be analysed as a self-contained entity. He insisted that critics should not go beyond the text in their interpretations and that meaning should be found within the work itself. His ideas greatly influenced New Criticism, which dominated literary studies for much of the 20th century. His contributions earned him significant recognition, including the Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1951 and the National Book Award in 1964 for *Selected Poems*.

2.1.6 Wimsatt and Beardsley - Intentional and Affective Fallacy



Fig.2.1.10 Wimsatt and Beardsley

W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley were two important literary critics who helped shape modern ways of analysing literature. They are best known for introducing the ideas of the 'Intentional Fallacy' and the 'Affective Fallacy', which argue that a literary work should be judged on its own, without focusing on the author's intentions or the reader's emotions. These ideas became central to the New

Criticism movement, which encouraged close reading of texts.

The **Intentional Fallacy** is the mistake of using an author's intentions to judge the meaning or quality of a literary work. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that a poem, novel, or play should be understood based on the words and structure within the text itself, rather than what the writer may have meant to say.

The 'Intentional Fallacy', first introduced by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their 1946 essay of the same name, argues that an author's intentions should not be used as a criterion for interpreting or evaluating a literary work. They developed this idea further in *The Verbal Icon* (1954), asserting that meaning is embedded in the text itself rather than in the author's personal motivations or creative process. According to their argument, it is impossible to determine an author's true intentions with certainty, and even when an author states his intended meaning, this does not necessarily reflect the full significance of the work. Furthermore, if an author's stated intention does not align with the text's actual impact, the work should be judged on what it achieves rather than what the author intended. They also emphasised the self-sufficiency of a literary work, arguing that once it is published, it gains an independent existence, shaped by its language, structure, and literary tradition rather than by external explanations. As they famously stated, "If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence." By this logic, they insisted that meaning should be derived through close textual analysis rather than speculation about the author's mindset.

The **Affective Fallacy** is the mistake of judging a literary work based on the emotional reaction of the reader. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that criticism should not be about how a poem makes someone feel, because different readers may have different reactions.

Closely related to this is the ‘Affective Fallacy’, a term they introduced in *The Verbal Icon* (1954), though first developed in 1949. This concept warns against evaluating a literary work based on the emotional response it elicits from readers rather than through objective analysis of its structure and meaning. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that relying on personal reactions makes criticism overly subjective, as different readers will inevitably have different interpretations. They cautioned that when literary criticism focuses too much on emotion, “the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear, so that criticism ends in impressionism and relativism.” Instead, they advocated a structured approach, where literature is assessed based on its intrinsic qualities, such as form, language, and themes. For example, if one person says

Hamlet is inspiring, another finds it depressing, and another thinks it is boring, these opinions are all personal feelings. They do not tell us anything about the structure, themes, or meaning of *Hamlet* itself.

These ideas became central to New Criticism, a movement that promoted close reading and detailed textual analysis. New Critics believed that literature should be treated as an independent work of art, free from historical context, the author’s biography, or personal interpretations. They focused on elements such as imagery, irony, symbolism, and structure to understand how meaning is created within a text. Wimsatt and Beardsley’s theories supported this approach by reinforcing the idea that literary analysis should be objective and be based solely on what is present in the text. Their work continues to influence literary studies today, reminding critics to focus on the text itself rather than external influences.

While later critical movements, such as reader-response criticism and post-structuralism, have challenged aspects of their arguments, the ‘Intentional Fallacy’ and ‘Affective Fallacy’ remain central to discussions on literary interpretation, ensuring that texts are evaluated based on their inherent qualities rather than external, subjective considerations.

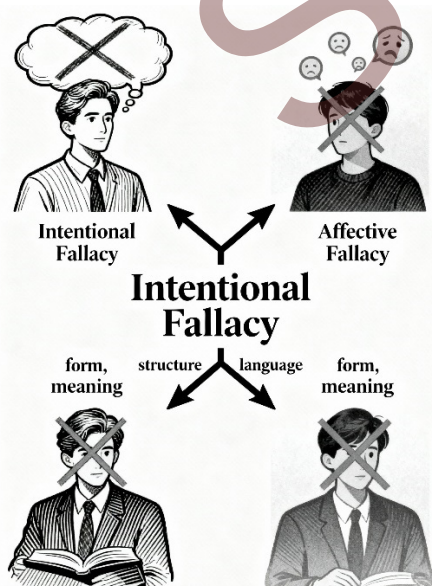


Fig 2.1.11 Intentional Fallacy

2.1.7 William Empson: Ambiguity

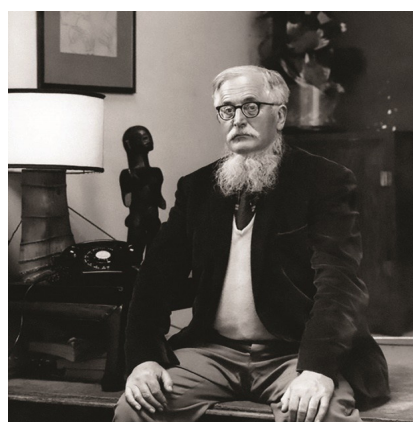


Fig. 2.1.12 Sir William Empson (1906–1984)

Sir William Empson was a highly influential English literary critic and poet, known for his close analysis of language and meaning in poetry. His work significantly contributed to New Criticism, a literary movement that emphasised detailed textual analysis over historical or biographical context. Empson's theories focused on the complexities of language, particularly *ambiguity* and *paradox*, which he saw as central to poetic expression.

As a New critic, William Empson focused on the detailed analysis of literary texts, particularly the structure and meaning of poetry, without relying on historical, biographical, or social context. His approach centred on *close reading*, arguing that a poem should be understood as a self-contained work of art. He saw *ambiguity* and *paradox* as fundamental to

He identified seven forms of ambiguity that reflect the intricate ways in which meaning operates in poetry:

1. **Metaphor** – A comparison between two seemingly unrelated things, offering multiple interpretations.
2. **Antithesis** – The use of contrasting words or ideas that create tension and complexity.
3. **Shifting Meaning** – When a poet develops an idea in real time, causing words or phrases to hold multiple, evolving meanings.
4. **Pun** – A play on words that exploits multiple meanings, often



Fig 2.1.13 Seven Types of Ambiguity

poetry, as they create multiple layers of meaning and deepen the reader's engagement with a text.

Empson's most influential work, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), explored how words and phrases in poetry can hold several meanings at once, making interpretation a complex and dynamic process. He argued that rather than limiting meaning, ambiguity enriches poetry by allowing different ideas to coexist within a single text.

producing irony or deeper significance.

5. **Contradictory Meanings** – When two interpretations seem to oppose each other but together express the poet's complex thoughts or emotions.
6. **Reader Interpretation** – When a statement is unclear, requiring the reader to construct meaning,

sometimes in opposition to the poet's intention.

7. **Opposites in Context** – When two seemingly contradictory words or ideas reveal a deeper, unresolved tension within the poem.

For Empson, ambiguity and paradox were not flaws in poetry but essential tools that poets use to challenge straightforward interpretation. He saw poetry as a space where contradictions could coexist, creating richer and more profound meanings.

His approach aligns closely with *New Criticism*, which prioritises *form, structure, irony, tension, and meaning within the text itself*, rather than external factors such as the author's life or historical background. Empson's ideas encouraged readers to engage deeply with a poem's language and structure, treating every word as significant.

His other major works, *Some Versions of Pastoral* and *Milton's God*, also applied these principles to literature. In *Some Versions of Pastoral*, he argued that the pastoral genre was more than simple depictions of rural life, it contained deeper philosophical and political meanings. In *Milton's God*, he examined *Paradise Lost* and challenged traditional religious interpretations, suggesting that the poem presents moral contradictions rather than resolving them.

Through his emphasis on *ambiguity, paradox, and textual analysis*, Empson played a key role in shaping New Criticism, influencing how poetry and literature are studied today. His work remains a model for modern literary analysis, reinforcing the idea that meaning in poetry is complex, layered, and deeply connected to the language itself.

2.1.8 Cleanth Brooks – Irony and Paradox



Fig.2.1.14 Cleanth Brooks

Cleanth Brooks stands as one of the most influential yet paradoxically resistant figures in New Criticism, despite his explicit discomfort with the label itself. His collaboration with Robert Penn Warren on important textbooks such as *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) fundamentally transformed the teaching of literature in American universities, establishing close reading as the standard pedagogical method. Though Brooks himself resisted the designation of “New Critic,” he acknowledged his central role in the movement with characteristic wit, remarking that he was “often set down as the most thoroughly typical (and therefore the most reprehensible) of the New Critics.” Literary critic Robert B. Heilman recognised that Brooks's influence on both literary criticism and creative literature extended from 1935 onwards, making him an architect of mid-twentieth-century literary studies.

Paradox and Irony as the Foundation of Poetic Language

Brooks's distinctive contribution to New Criticism lies in his assertion that paradox and irony are not merely decorative literary devices but rather the essential foundation

of poetic language itself. Unlike other New Critics who emphasised different aspects of linguistic complexity, John Crowe Ransom's structure and texture, Allen Tate's tension and extension, or William Empson's ambiguity, Brooks positioned paradox as the most fundamental element of poetry. In his influential essay "The Language of Paradox" published in *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), he argues that poetry operates through a fundamentally different mode of meaning-making than ordinary language, capturing depths of human experience that scientific or factual discourse cannot accommodate. For Brooks, poetry is not a mere statement of truth nor a decorative arrangement of sounds. Rather, it provides a unique form of knowledge that embraces apparent contradictions and conflicting perspectives. He proves this principle through careful analysis of canonical works. In Wordsworth's "It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free," the evening is simultaneously described as calm and breathless with adoration, a paradox that creates a richer and more complex understanding than either term could achieve alone. Similarly, in John Donne's "The Canonization," the paradoxical presentation of profane love as divine and the polysemous use of 'die' to signify both physical death and sexual consummation exemplify how poets communicate their deepest insights through irreducible contradictions rather than straightforward statements.

Irony, Structure, and the Inseparability of Form and Meaning

Brooks further developed his critical theory by identifying irony as the organising structural principle that holds poetry together. He distinguished between verbal irony, where words signify something different from their literal meaning, and dramatic irony, wherein the audience possesses knowledge unavailable to a character. For Brooks, irony and paradox function collaboratively to create the aesthetic structure of a poem, making meaning fundamentally inseparable from form. He strongly rejected the notion that poetry could be reduced to paraphrase, arguing instead that poets uniquely shape their own language to create meanings that cannot be extracted or restated without diminishing the work's power. This perspective reflects his belief that poetry expresses complex truths through apparent contradictions that should never be simplified into univocal statements. Brooks demonstrated that paradox, irony, and ambiguity transcend historical boundaries, manifesting consistently across literary periods from Milton and Dryden through the Augustans, Romantics, Victorians, and Modernists. His insistence on the organic unity of poetic language ensures that every linguistic choice contributes to a carefully balanced pattern of resolutions, tensions, and harmonizations.

This approach fundamentally shaped how literature has been studied and interpreted throughout the twentieth century and continues to influence contemporary critical practice today.

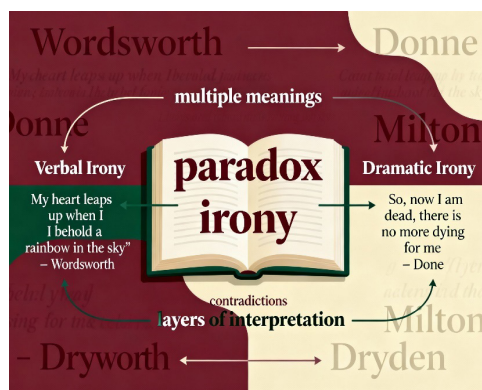


Fig.2.1.15 Paradox and irony

- ▶ **Verbal irony** – when words mean something different from their literal interpretation.
- ▶ **Dramatic irony** – when the audience knows something that a character does not (e.g., Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*).

2.1.9 F. R. Leavis and Moral Seriousness

F. R. Leavis, a British critic associated with Cambridge, shared with the New Critics a belief in close reading and the centrality of the text. However, his focus was somewhat different. Leavis placed strong emphasis on “moral seriousness” and the role of literature in sustaining a “living tradition” of culture. He believed that great literature embodies finely discriminated responses to life and that criticism should help preserve and transmit these values.

Leavis’s journal *Scrutiny* became an important platform for rigorous literary evaluation. He practised close analysis of style and tone, particularly in the novel and in poetry, but he always related this analysis to questions of moral and cultural responsibility. Unlike some American New Critics who wanted criticism to be almost purely formal, Leavis insisted that evaluation—deciding what works belong to the “great tradition”—was central. Nevertheless, his method in the classroom, based on intense, line-by-line reading, aligned closely with New Critical practice.

2.1.10 Northrop Frye and Myth Criticism



Fig 2.1.16 Northrop Frye

ing but argued that criticism needed a broader theoretical framework. Instead of treating each poem or novel as a unique, isolated object, he proposed that literature as a whole is organised by recurring structures of myth and archetype.

Frye’s myth criticism suggests that literary works draw on a limited number of narrative patterns and symbolic structures that recur across periods and cultures. These include myths of death and rebirth, quest narratives, seasonal cycles, and archetypal figures such as the hero, the wise old man, and the scapegoat. According to Frye, critics should identify these underlying patterns to understand how individual texts fit into a larger imaginative universe. In this way, criticism moves beyond the single text to map the “order of words” that unites all literature.



Fig 2.1.17 Myth Criticism

While Frye differed from strict New Critics by giving more importance to large-scale patterns and genres, he shared their respect for the autonomy of literature. He did not treat literature merely as a reflection of history or ideology, but as a system with its own internal logic. His work therefore extends New Critical formalism into a more comprehensive, mythic and structural vision. For students, Frye's approach offers a way to connect detailed textual analysis with larger questions about narrative, symbolism, and the collective imagination.

New Criticism in Britain and the United States reshaped the study of literature in the

twentieth century by insisting on the primacy of the text and the discipline of close reading. Figures such as I. A. Richards, Wimsatt and Beardsley, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, F. R. Leavis, and Northrop Frye each contributed distinctive concepts - practical criticism, intentional and affective fallacy, structure and texture, paradox and irony, ambiguity, moral seriousness, and mythic patterns. Together, they established methods that continue to influence how literature is read, taught, and evaluated, even as newer theoretical approaches have challenged and revised their assumptions.

Recap

- ▶ Early twentieth-century criticism rejected biography in favour of close textual analysis.
- ▶ Formalism treats literature as a unique use of language with specific devices.
- ▶ Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation makes the familiar world appear strange and new.
- ▶ Modernist writers used fragmentation to reflect the broken nature of modern life.
- ▶ T.S. Eliot argued that poetry is an escape from personality, not expression.
- ▶ Tradition involves a historical sense and the simultaneous order of all literature.
- ▶ New Criticism emphasises the text as an autonomous, self-contained verbal structure.
- ▶ I.A. Richards introduced practical criticism to focus attention on the words on the page.
- ▶ William Empson identified seven types of ambiguity that enrich poetic meaning.
- ▶ John Crowe Ransom distinguished between a poem's logical structure and its local texture.
- ▶ Wimsatt and Beardsley rejected the Intentional Fallacy and the Affective Fallacy.
- ▶ Cleanth Brooks argued that the essential language of poetry is the language

of paradox.

- ▶ The Heresy of Paraphrase warns that summarizing a poem destroys its essential meaning.
- ▶ F.R. Leavis emphasised the moral seriousness of literature and the “Great Tradition.”
- ▶ Northrop Frye proposed that literature is organised by recurring myths and archetypes

Objective Questions

1. Which critical movement focuses on the technical features of a work?
2. Who introduced the concept of “defamiliarisation” in literary criticism?
3. Which poet wrote the influential essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”?
4. What term describes the mistake of judging a work by its emotional effect?
5. Who wrote the seminal book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*?
6. What term did Cleanth Brooks use to describe the essential language of poetry?
7. Which critic championed “ontological criticism” and founded *The Kenyon Review*?
8. What journal did F.R. Leavis use to establish his critical standards?
9. Who co-authored the essay “The Intentional Fallacy” with Monroe Beardsley?
10. What type of criticism focuses on recurring narrative patterns and archetypes?
11. Which movement was Ezra Pound a central figure in founding?
12. What term describes the inseparable unity of form and content in a poem?
13. Who wrote *Principles of Literary Criticism* and influenced New Criticism?
14. What literary device does Shklovsky say restores the freshness of perception?
15. Which modernist poem by T.S. Eliot uses fragmentation to depict urban decay?

Answers

1. Formalism
2. Shklovsky
3. Eliot
4. Affective
5. Empson
6. Paradox
7. Ransom
8. Scrutiny
9. Wimsatt
10. Myth
11. Imagism
12. Organic
13. Richards
14. Defamiliarisation
15. Waste Land

Assignments

1. Discuss the shift from Romantic self-expression to the Modernist theory of impersonality in criticism.
2. Explain the concept of defamiliarisation and how Shklovsky uses it to distinguish poetic language from ordinary language.
3. Evaluate the New Critical arguments against the Intentional and Affective Fallacies. Do you agree that a text should be judged in isolation?
4. Analyse Cleanth Brooks's assertion that "the language of poetry is the language of paradox" using examples from the unit.
5. Compare and contrast the critical approaches of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis regarding the function of literature in society.

Suggested Reading

1. Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. Methuen, 1920.
2. Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947.
3. Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Chatto & Windus, 1930.
4. Ransom, John Crowe. *The New Criticism*. New Directions, 1941.
5. Wimsatt, W. K., and Monroe Beardsley. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. University of Kentucky Press, 1954.

SGOU

Unit 2

Indian Poetics

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Bharata's rasa theory foundationally.
- ▶ analyse six schools of Indian poetics.
- ▶ evaluate Anandavardhana's Dhvani suggestion theory.
- ▶ assess Kuntaka's Vakrokti oblique expression.
- ▶ examine Abhinavagupta's spiritualised aesthetic philosophy

Prerequisite

Indian aesthetics developed as a comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding artistic creation and aesthetic experience, with Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* (200 BCE–200 CE) establishing the foundational Rasa theory that all subsequent schools acknowledged. Over fifteen centuries, six principal schools emerged - Rasa, Alamkara, Riti, Dhvani, Vakrokti, and Aucitya - each offering distinctive insights into how literature creates meaning and beauty, representing not competing theories but complementary perspectives on poetry's multifaceted nature.

The learner should be familiar with basic Sanskrit poetic terminology, foundational concepts of Indian philosophy including Vedanta and Shaiva traditions, understanding of the nine rasas (emotional essences), and awareness of how Indian aesthetics differ fundamentally from Western critical approaches by emphasising creative process and spiritual transformation over finished product and rational analysis. Additionally, comprehension of how later theorists like Abhinavagupta (975–1025 CE), Anandavardhana (820–890 CE), Bhattanayaka (7th–8th century), and Kuntaka (950–1050 CE) developed, synthesised, and extended earlier theories will facilitate appreciation of Indian aesthetic thought's philosophical sophistication and continuing relevance to contemporary literary and aesthetic theory.

Keywords

Rasa, Dhvani, Vakrokti, Abhinavagupta, Suggestion



Discussion

When we study aesthetics, we must remember that these principles develop within specific cultural backgrounds. Comparative aesthetics helps us appreciate how different cultures create and value art. To understand Indian aesthetics, it is therefore useful to compare it with Western thought, particularly the rhetorical traditions that developed in Europe.

The European rhetorical science flourished five hundred years before the Christian era. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Horace, Tacitus, Seneca, Demetrius, Longinus and Hermogenes were the pioneering scholars. However, following their contributions, Europe entered a period of intellectual decline that lasted approximately a thousand years.

While Europe experienced this period of relative aesthetic inactivity, India was a centre of intense artistic and scholarly activity. From Bharata Muni (500 BCE) to Appayya Dikshitar (1550 CE), numerous celebrated scholars developed eight important schools of literary criticism. Alamkarasastra (the study of poetic ornaments and devices) was the most significant school, with chief exponents including Bharata Muni, Dandin, Bhamaha, Vamana, Udbhata, Rudratan, Bhoja, Mammata, Vagbhata, Ruyyaka, Appayya Dikshitar, and others.

Since classical times, literary criticism has matured considerably. It now focuses increasingly on the medium of communication, particularly through developments in stylistic analysis. Recent explorations in linguistics have made the interpretation of literary texts more scientific and systematic.

Until the medieval period in India, literary criticism concentrated on two main areas. First, Alamkarasastra addressed rhetoric and the ornamental qualities of language. Second, Vrittasastra examined prosody and metrical

patterns. In the West, classical rhetoricians conducted detailed analysis of rhetorical figures and attempted to define each distinctly. Importantly, Indian scholars such as Bharata, Bhamaha, Vamana, and Vagbhata developed their own independent systems of literary analysis without adopting Western models.

A significant difference existed between the two traditions in their purposes. Western rhetoricians aimed at perfecting the art of public speaking and eloquence. Indian aestheticians, by contrast, focused primarily on understanding the poetic use of decorative language devices and their emotional effects. Yet, despite these differences, the two traditions share considerable common ground in their fundamental principles.

2.2.1 Defining Indian Aesthetics

The term “Aesthetics” originates from the Greek word meaning “sense perception.” In the context of art, aesthetics refers to the science of sensitive cognition, the systematic study of how we perceive and respond to beauty. When applied to Indian art and literature, Indian aesthetics becomes the study of how Indian art forms create and communicate beauty and meaning. Indian aesthetics is a unique philosophical and spiritual perspective on art, architecture, and literature. It is not merely a system of rules but a comprehensive framework for understanding artistic creation and aesthetic experience. In Indian thought, aesthetics addresses the fundamental question: What happens when we encounter a work of art?

2.2.2 The Evolution of Indian Poetics

Throughout history, scholars have attempted to define Kavya (poetry) from their unique perspectives. Some have sought to discover the essential nature of poetry itself. Yet poetry resists simple definition because it is ultimate-

ly an experience, an experience of intellectual and emotional enjoyment. Aristotle, the Western philosopher, approached this question through his *Poetics*. However, his analysis focused on only two emotional dimensions: pity and fear. Indian poetics, while appearing simpler on the surface, is actually far more complex and comprehensive than Western poetics. It addresses not merely the emotional content of art but the entire mechanism of artistic creation and aesthetic reception. A fundamental distinction separates Eastern and Western approaches to poetry. Western criticism often focuses on the finished product, the results of poetry. Indian poetics, by contrast, emphasises the creative process, how poetry comes into being and how it functions to produce aesthetic experience. The Sanskrit word for literature is *Sahitya*. Etymologically, it means coordination, balance, harmony, and unity. Literature is understood not as isolated individual works

but as a systematic body of knowledge about how language creates meaning and beauty. In Indian poetics, literature is represented through the concept of *Kavya*, much as Aristotle approached literary analysis through his *Poetics*. Indian scholars developed distinct schools of thought to explain the principles governing poetry and literary creation. Each school offers a different perspective on what makes literature powerful and meaningful.

The Six Principal Schools of Indian Poetics

Over centuries, Indian scholars recognised that poetry and drama are not simple imitations of reality. Instead, they identified specific principles governing how literary works create aesthetic experience. The following table presents the six major schools, their founders, and the key texts in which they were introduced:

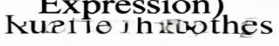
School	Founder	Key Text	Period (approx.)
Rasa (Emotion)	Bharata Muni	Natyasastra	100 BCE-200 CE
Alamkara (Poetic Devices) 	Bhamaha	Kavyalamkara	6th century CE
Riti (Style and Manner)	Vamana	Kavyalamkarasutra	9th century CE
Rhvani (Suggestion)	Vamana	Kavyalamkarasutra	9th century CE
Dhvani (Suggestion)	Anandavardhana	Dhvanyaloka	10th century CE
Vakrockti (Oblique Expression) 	Kuntaka	Vakroktjivita	11th century CE
Aucitya (Propriety/Fitness)	Kshemendra	Ashemendra Aucityavichara Charcha	11th century CE 

Fig 2.2.1 Schools of Indian Aesthetics

These six schools are not competing theories that cancel each other out. Rather, they represent different ways of understanding how literature works. A single poem might be ana-

lysed through the lens of *Rasa* (what emotion does it evoke?), *Alamkara* (what poetic devices does it employ?), and *Dhvani* (what deeper meanings does it suggest?). Each school re-

veals different aspects of the poem's beauty and power.

1. The School of Rasa: Emotion as the Heart of Aesthetic Experience

Bharata Muni was the first to develop a comprehensive theory of aesthetics in Indian thought. According to Rasa theory, language and voice operate differently and independently. It is therefore impossible to settle or resolve all meaning through language alone. Language is permanent and immortal; emotions (bhavas) are temporary and mutable. Yet rasa, refined emotional experience, is the spine or backbone of poetry. Rasa theory is considered superior to all other theories of poetry.

As the scholar T.N. Sreekantaiah observed, "The principle of Rasa is the very central part of Indian poetics. It is the nectar that founders and thinkers have obtained after churning the ocean of poetry." This metaphor, comparing aesthetic discovery to the churning of the cosmic ocean, suggests the precious and universal nature of rasa.

When various bhavas (emotions) blend together, a more refined emotional state emerges. This state is accompanied by a thrill of joy and aesthetic pleasure. This refined state is called Rasa. In the sixth chapter of the *Natyasastra*, Bharata explains that rasa is the soul of poetry and drama. He identified nine principal rasas, each associated with specific colours and deities, as presented in the table above.

It is important to note that rasa emerges only through the interaction of four specific components: Vibhava, Anubhava, Sancharibhava, and Sthayibhava. These four elements work together to produce the aesthetic experience.

The *Natyasastra* remains the foundation of fine arts in India. All subsequent theories of aesthetics, even when they diverge from

Bharata's emphasis on emotion, acknowledge his foundational contributions.

2. The School of Alamkara: The Power of Poetic Devices

Bhamaha was the first scholar to develop Alamkara poetics systematically. *The Kavyalamkara*, his principal work, classifies poetic devices in the second and third chapters, identifying thirty-five distinct figures of speech.

Bhamaha recognised that poetic beauty arises through the skilled use of language devices. He classified these devices into two categories:

Arthalamkara (Semantic Figures - Meaning-based)

Arthalamkaras are devices that operate primarily through meaning. They include:

- ▶ Anupamaya (Simile): Comparison between two distinct objects using words such as "like" or "as." For example, "Her beauty is like the full moon."
- ▶ Rupaka (Metaphor): Direct identification of two different things. For example, "The night is a black blanket."
- ▶ Astisaya (Exaggeration/Hyperbole): Magnification beyond actual limits. For example, "Her beauty makes the heavens jealous."
- ▶ Slesa (Coalescence/Pun): Use of a word with multiple meanings simultaneously.

Shabdalamkara (Phonetic Figures - Sound-based)

Shabdalamkaras are devices that operate primarily through sound and linguistic structure.

They include:

Anuprasa (Alliteration): Repetition of the same sound at the beginning of words. For example, “The sweet, subtle sounds of summer.”

Yamaka (Repetition): Use of the same word with different meanings, or similar-sounding words for effect.

Slesa (Paronomasia): Clever use of words that sound similar but have different meanings.

Citra (Elegant/Ornamental): Arrangement of words for visual or aesthetic effect.

Later Developments: Mammata's Classification

Later scholars expanded these classifications significantly. Mammata, a prominent theorist, enumerated sixty-one figures of speech and organised them into seven principal types:

1. **Upma (Simile):** Explicit comparison between similar objects
2. **Rupaka (Metaphor):** Direct identification without explicit comparison
3. **Aprastuta Prasamsa (Indirect Description):** Praising something through the description of something else
4. **Dipaka (Stringed Figures):** Connected or sequential figures that build upon each other
5. **Vyatireka (Dissimilitude):** Statement of what something is not
6. **Virodha (Contradiction):** Simultaneous assertion and denial
7. **Samuccaya (Concatenation):** Combination of several figures together

The Alamkara school emphasises that poetic beauty and power derive significantly from

the deliberate and skilful use of linguistic devices. A poet must master these devices and know when and how to employ them for maximum effect.

3. The School of Riti: Style, Manner, and Presentation

The word Riti means “manner” or “way” of presentation. This school argues that the style or manner of expression is as important as the content being expressed. A poet's choice of words, sentence structure, rhythm, and overall approach creates the distinctive effect and quality of a poem.

Vamana developed Riti into a systematic theory. He introduced the concept of *Vishista Padrachana* (distinguished or distinctive arrangement of words). Riti, according to Vamana, is not a superficial ornament applied to meaning but an integral part of how meaning is created and communicated.

The Gunas (Qualities) in Riti Theory

Vamana identified essential qualities that characterise poetic excellence. These qualities exist at two levels:

Sabda Gunas (Qualities of Word/Sound):

- **Ojas:** Compactness, force, and power in word structure. Compact words create vigorous, energetic effects.
- **Prasad:** Clarity, elegance, and accessibility. Words and phrases chosen for clarity and smoothness create pleasant, flowing effects.

Artha Gunas (Qualities of Meaning/Content):

- **Ojas:** Maturity and depth of conception. The ideas are sophisticated and developed.
- **Prasad:** Clarity of meaning



achieved through directness and avoidance of unnecessary complexity.

Kanti: Brilliance and prominence. The meaning shines forth clearly and memorably.

The Four Styles

Vamana identified four principal styles of poetic composition, each with its own characteristics:

- ▶ Vaidarbhi Style: Characterised by sweetness, smoothness, and emotional intensity. Associated with the Vidarbha region.
- ▶ Panchali Style: Distinguished by wit, ingenuity, and intellectual display. Associated with Panchala region.
- ▶ Gaudi Style: Marked by grandeur, force, and elaborate ornamentation. Associated with Gauda region.
- ▶ Lati Style: Combining elements of the other three styles with elegance and balanced sophistication.

The Riti school teaches that every poem embodies a particular style or manner, and this manner significantly shapes the reader's experience and the poem's overall effect.

4. The School of Dhvani: Suggestion and Implied Meaning

The term Dhvani means "resonance" or "suggestive quality." The Dhvani school, headed by the ninth-century aesthetician Anandavardhana, represents a significant evolution in Indian aesthetic thought.

Anandavardhana recognised a crucial distinction in how poetry communicates meaning. He observed that poetry does not operate solely through direct, literal, and explicit

meaning. Rather, poetry suggests indirect and emotive meaning through implication, association, and evocation.

In Dhvani theory, a poem's words may describe a simple, concrete scene on the surface, but through suggestion and implication, they evoke complex emotions, philosophical truths, and spiritual insights. The suggestive meaning is not stated directly; rather, it is perceived and constructed by the reader through imagination and sensitivity.

The Mechanism of Dhvani

Anandavardhana identified three levels or types of meaning in language:

1. Abhidha (Direct/Literal Meaning):

This is the primary, obvious meaning of words. For example, in the sentence "The sun rises," abhidha simply denotes the literal occurrence of sunrise.

2. Lakshana (Indicative or Transferred Meaning):

When direct meaning is impossible or inadequate, we use indicative meaning. For example, in "The whole city came to greet the king," lakshana allows us to understand this as "a significant portion of the city's population came," not literally every person. Lakshana operates when we have the primary meaning available but need to extend or modify it.

3. Vyanjana (Suggestive/Implied Meaning):

This is the most subtle and powerful type of meaning. Even when direct and indicative meanings exist and are understandable, vyanjana operates beyond them to suggest deeper, often unstated significance. For example, in a poem describing a lonely woman waiting by a window at dusk, the literal meaning is simply descriptive, but the suggestive meaning evokes longing, separation, unfulfilled hope, and spiritual yearning.

The Significance of Dhvani

Dhvani theory revolutionised Indian poetics by showing that poetry's power lies not merely in what it says but in what it evokes beyond the words. The poet uses language as a vehicle to suggest profound experiences and truths that cannot be fully captured in direct statement.

5. The School of Vakrokti: Oblique and Indirect Expression

Kuntaka is recognised as the originator of Vakrokti theory. The term Vakrokti means "oblique expression" or "crooked speech." Vakrokti theory proposes that poetry is essentially distinguished from ordinary language not by its vocabulary or even its devices alone, but by the oblique or indirect manner of expressing thought.

Kuntaka's principal work, the *Vakroktijivata*, argues that Vakrokti is the defining characteristic of all creative literature. Through Vakrokti, ordinary language is transformed into poetry. What makes an expression vakrokti (oblique) rather than direct is that it expresses meaning in an unexpected, unusual, or ingenious way.

Vakrokti and Poetic Beauty

In Vakrokti theory, beauty emerges through the expression itself - through the clever, unexpected, or innovative way of saying something rather than through the content alone. Consider the difference between these two expressions:

- ▶ Direct: "The woman is beautiful."
- ▶ Vakrokti: "The lotus blossomed when she opened her eyes; even the stars dimmed when she smiled."

The second expression communicates beauty through ingenious, indirect comparison and implication rather than through direct assertion. This indirection and ingenuity constitute vakrokti.

Vakrokti encompasses various types of obliquity:

- ▶ Deviation from expected word order
- ▶ Unexpected comparison or analogy
- ▶ Witty or clever juxtaposition
- ▶ Paradoxical or seemingly contradictory expression
- ▶ Sophisticated play on language

Kuntaka emphasised that vakrokti is not mere decoration applied to pre-existing meaning. Rather, it is the fundamental principle through which ordinary language is elevated to poetry. The ability to express thought in unexpected, ingenious, and beautiful ways, this is the hallmark of the poet.

6. The School of Aucitya: Propriety and Fitness

The final major school of Indian poetics is Aucitya, which means "propriety," "suitability," or "fitness." This school, developed by Kshemendra and others, addresses the principle of appropriateness in literary composition.

Aucitya theory proposes that in every work of literature, every element - words, figures, style, emotion, subject matter - must be appropriate and fitting to the context, purpose, and audience. There are no absolutely good or bad poetic devices; rather, there are devices appropriate and inappropriate to specific situations.



For example, the Vaidarbhi style with its sweetness and emotional intensity is appropriate for love poetry but may be unsuitable for philosophical discourse. Heroic rasa with its energy and courage is appropriate for narratives of battle and noble struggle but inappropriate for intimate domestic scenes.

These six schools represent the cumulative wisdom of Indian literary criticism developed over more than a thousand years. Each school offers insights into different dimensions of how literature works:

- ▶ Rasa addresses the emotional and spiritual experience literature creates
- ▶ Alamkara examines the linguistic devices and ornamental qualities that create beauty
- ▶ Riti considers the importance of style and manner of expression
- ▶ Dhvani reveals how poetry operates through suggestion and implication
- ▶ Vakrokti emphasises the power of oblique and indirect expression
- ▶ Aucitya reminds us that all literary elements must be appropriate to their context

A complete understanding of Indian literary criticism requires engaging with all six schools. They are not contradictory but complementary, each illuminating different aspects of literary creation and aesthetic experience.

2.2.3 The Key Theorists of Indian Aesthetics

1. BHARATA MUNI: The Founder of Indian Aesthetic Theory

Bharata Muni stands as the foundational figure in the entire history of Indian literary theory and aesthetics. He is traditionally credited with the authorship of the *Natyasastra*, one of the most comprehensive and influential texts on the performing arts in world literature. Although exact biographical details remain uncertain, most modern scholars estimate that Bharata lived between 200 BCE and 200 CE, during the Maurya and Gupta dynasties of ancient India. According to historical and legendary accounts, Bharata was both a sage and scholar associated with royal courts of ancient India, possibly connected to the court of King Pushyamitra Shunga. The tradition holds that Bharata compiled the *Natyasastra* after receiving divine inspiration, systematising the comprehensive knowledge of performance arts, drama, music, and poetry that had developed over centuries in Indian culture.

The *Natyasastra* is Bharata's monumental work, comprising approximately six thousand couplets (shlokas) written in Sanskrit and organised into thirty-six chapters. This text systematically addresses three principal art forms: Kavya (poetry), Natya (drama and theatre), and Gana (music), along with detailed analysis of dance movements, gestures, and performance principles. The *Natyasastra* covers everything from the classification of hand gestures (mudras) and bodily movements to the principles of dramatic construction, char-

acterisation, stagecraft, and the relationship between performer and audience. Significantly, it addresses the aesthetic experience created through performance, introducing the revolutionary concept of *rasa*, refined emotional states that transcend ordinary emotion. The text is considered the “Fifth Veda” in Indian tradition, a sacred knowledge system that has influenced all subsequent developments in Indian aesthetics, philosophy, and artistic practice for over two thousand years.

Bharata’s greatest innovation was the articulation of *Rasa* theory, which became the cornerstone of all Indian aesthetics and influenced artistic creation across dance, drama, music, poetry, and visual arts. He established that art, particularly drama and poetry, creates refined emotional experiences in the audience, and that these emotional experiences are not ordinary personal emotions but universalised, contemplative states that elevate consciousness. Bharata identified nine principal *rasas* or emotional essences that all art can evoke: *shrngara* (erotic), *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vira* (heroic), *bhayanaka* (terrible), *bibhatsa* (odious), *adbhuta* (marvellous), and *shanta* (peaceful), each associated with specific colours, deities, and physical manifestations. His influence on Indian culture has been profound and enduring - all subsequent theories of Indian aesthetics acknowledge Bharata as the foundational authority, classical Indian dance forms are based directly on his codification of movements and principles, and Western scholars of aesthetics have recognised him as one of the world’s greatest philosophical thinkers, comparable to Aristotle but offering a distinctly different framework emphasising spiritual elevation over catharsis.

2. ABHINAVAGUPTA: The Synthesiser and Mystical Philosopher

Abhinavagupta (975–1025 CE) stands as one of the greatest polymaths and philosophers in Indian intellectual history, representing the culmination of classical Indian aesthetic thought. He lived in Kashmir during the flourishing period of Kashmiri Shaivism and was recognised as the foremost authority on Shai-va philosophy in his time and thereafter. Unlike Bharata, who lived in ancient India, and Anandavardhana, who preceded him, Abhinavagupta brought together diverse intellectual traditions - philosophy, theology, aesthetics, poetry, yoga, and spirituality - into a unified philosophical vision that integrated aesthetic experience with spiritual enlightenment. He was not merely a theorist of aesthetics but also a spiritual teacher and guide whose philosophical frameworks addressed the deepest questions about the nature of consciousness, reality, and human experience. Abhinavagupta’s intellectual achievement lay in demonstrating that aesthetic theory and spiritual philosophy were not separate domains but complementary paths toward understanding the fundamental nature of existence.

Abhinavagupta’s most significant work is the *Abhinavabharati*, his monumental commentary on Bharata’s *Natyashastra*. However, this was not merely an explanatory commentary but a profound reinterpretation and sophisticated development of Bharata’s theories, extending them into new philosophical territories. The *Abhinavabharati* consists of extensive discussions on the nature of *rasa* and how it is produced, the relationship between performer and audience, the philosophical underpinnings of aesthetic experience, the spiritual dimensions of artistic creation and reception,



and the integration of Kashmiri Shaiva philosophy with aesthetic theory. Abhinavagupta introduced the revolutionary concept of *Sadharanikarana* (universalisation), arguing that *rasa* is not the personal emotion of the character or the individual spectator, but a universalised, transindividual emotional state that transcends personal feelings and mirrors the spiritual experience of a yogi who transcends the ego to attain universal consciousness. Through this concept, he linked aesthetic experience directly to spiritual realisation, proposing that when properly experienced, *rasa* lifts the audience beyond their personal emotional state into a state of universal consciousness and spiritual bliss (*ananda*).

Abhinavagupta revolutionised the understanding of *rasa* by introducing sophisticated philosophical concepts and linking aesthetics fundamentally with spirituality and consciousness studies. He argued that aesthetic experience is not merely entertainment or emotional catharsis but a spiritual experience that serves as a pathway to realisation and enlightenment, similar to meditation or yogic practice. His interpretation of *rasa* theory became the authoritative understanding in Indian aesthetics, and his successors in the Kashmiri Shaiva tradition built upon his foundations, creating schools of thought that continue to influence Indian philosophy and aesthetics. Abhinavagupta's synthesis of aesthetics with Vedantic and Shaiva philosophy represented the most advanced and holistic achievement in the history of classical aesthetic philosophy, anticipating modern interests in psychology, consciousness studies, and the transformative power of art by nearly a thousand years. His work demonstrates that Indian aesthetic theorists were engaged not with superficial questions about literary ornament but with the deepest questions about human consciousness, spiritual experience, and the role of art in human transformation and enlightenment.

3. ANANDAVARDHANA: The Theorist of Suggestion

Anandavardhana (820-890 CE) was a Kashmiri court poet and literary critic of extraordinary refinement and sophistication, honoured with the title of *Rajanak* indicating his position as a royal poet during King Avantivarman's reign. He lived in the ninth century, a period of intense intellectual ferment in Kashmir when philosophy, aesthetics, and poetics were flourishing at the highest levels of sophistication. Anandavardhana was influenced by earlier theorists like Bharata and Bhamaha, whose works he had studied deeply, yet he developed his own distinctive and revolutionary perspective on how poetry functions and creates meaning. Unlike Bharata, who focused on the production of *rasa* through emotional components, and unlike earlier theorists who emphasised poetic devices and ornaments, Anandavardhana shifted critical focus to the role of suggestion, implication, and the reader's imagination in creating poetic meaning. His work represents a decisive moment in the development of Indian aesthetic thought when the emphasis moved from content and devices to the subtle mechanisms through which poetry communicates meaning beyond the literal.

Anandavardhana's masterpiece is the *Dhvanyaloka* (A Light on Suggestion), one of the most influential texts in the history of Indian poetics. The title itself - "A Light on Suggestion" - indicates the work's central theme: the power of indirect and suggestive meaning in poetry and how this suggestive quality is what distinguishes poetry from ordinary language. The *Dhvanyaloka* comprises ten chapters and systematically develops the theory of *Dhvani*, analysing how poetry operates through subtle suggestion rather than direct statement, implied meaning that operates beyond literal language, and the creative imagination of the reader or listener in constructing meaning from poetic texts. Anandavardhana's fundamental

insight was revolutionary: poetry operates on multiple levels of meaning simultaneously. He identified *Abhidha* (literal or direct meaning, the surface meaning of words), *Lakshana* (indicative or transferred meaning when direct meaning is inadequate or extended), and *Vyanjana* (suggestive meaning, the deepest level where meaning is implied rather than explicitly stated). He argued that true poetry operates primarily through *vyanjana*, with the power of a poem lying not in what it explicitly states but in what it suggests and evokes, inviting the reader to complete the meaning through imagination and sensitivity.

Anandavardhana made significant contributions by integrating the *Rasa* theory of Bharata with his own *Dhvani* theory, proposing that poetry's ultimate aim is to evoke *rasa* (emotional and spiritual essence) through suggestion rather than direct expression. Most significantly, he introduced the ninth *rasa*, *Shanta-rasa* (the *rasa* of peace or tranquility), which earlier theorists had omitted or disputed. This *rasa* represents a specifically spiritual feeling: peace arising from weariness with worldly pleasures and aspirations, traditionally associated with the achievement of a contemplative state of peaceful consciousness. Anandavardhana revolutionised aesthetic theory by shifting critical focus to the reader or audience member, emphasising that the meaning of a poem is not solely determined by the poet's intention but emerges through the interaction of the poet's suggestive language with the reader's cultured imagination and sensitivity. This theory anticipated by nearly a thousand years modern theories of literary interpretation that emphasise the active role of the reader in creating meaning, demonstrating that Indian aesthetic theorists were engaged with sophisticated epistemological questions about meaning, interpretation, consciousness, and the nature of human understanding.

4. BHATTANAYAKA: The Theorist of Transcendental Experience

Bhattanayaka (estimated 7th–8th century CE) remains one of the most influential yet historically mysterious figures in Indian aesthetics, whose biographical details are sparse yet whose philosophical contributions are profound and acknowledged by all subsequent theorists as foundational. Unlike many other theorists whose complete works survive, Bhattanayaka's original works are now lost and known only through references, critiques, and discussions in the works of later theorists, particularly Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharaṭi* and subsequent Sanskrit aesthetic texts. Modern scholars like Sheldon Pollock have reconstructed his philosophical system from these secondary sources, revealing a thinker of extraordinary sophistication. Bhattanayaka was deeply influenced by Vedantic philosophy, particularly Advaita Vedanta, and became the first aesthetic theorist to systematically integrate these philosophical frameworks into aesthetic theory, setting a pattern that would be followed by subsequent thinkers like Abhinavagupta. His work represents a critical turning point in Indian aesthetic thought when the fundamental nature of aesthetic experience began to be understood not merely as emotional or intellectual but as essentially a spiritual or transcendental phenomenon.

Bhattanayaka developed what is known as *Bhuktivada* (the Enjoyment Theory), a revolutionary theory addressing a fundamental problem in aesthetic experience: if ordinary emotions like sorrow or fear are produced in the audience, why do we find them pleasurable in art rather than distressing as we do in life? His solution was groundbreaking—he argued that *rasa* is not produced anew but involves a transformation of *bhavas* (emotions) into a state of bliss or enjoyment (*bhukti*) through a process



he called Bhavakatva (objectification or state-ness). When emotions are perceived as objective universal states or conditions rather than as personal subjective feelings, they become objects of contemplation rather than sources of suffering. This objectification and universalisation allows the audience to contemplate emotions from a distance, transforming ordinary emotion into refined rasa, and creating pleasure from what would otherwise be painful. Bhattanayaka developed a sophisticated threefold analysis of how language functions in creating this transformation: Vachya (the stated or explicit function), Lakshya (the indicated or transferred function), and Vyanjya (the suggested function that operates beyond stated or indicated meanings), showing that aesthetic meaning operates on multiple linguistic levels simultaneously.

Bhattanayaka integrated his aesthetic theory with Vedantic philosophy by proposing that the experience of rasa parallels the experience of Brahman (ultimate reality) in Vedantic philosophy- both involve a transcendence of individual ego and personal limitations, both lead to a state of bliss (ananda) and spiritual elevation, and both represent profound transformations of consciousness. Although his original works are lost, his influence on Indian aesthetics is enormous and his ideas became a foundation stone for all subsequent aesthetic theory. Abhinavagupta explicitly acknowledged his debt to Bhattanayaka's insights, and later theorists throughout India built upon his framework rather than rejecting it. His theory of Bhavakatva and Bhuktivada became central to understanding how aesthetic experience differs fundamentally from ordinary emotional experience and how art serves as a pathway to spiritual realisation. Modern scholars recognise Bhattanayaka as a pivotal figure whose ideas shaped the entire subsequent development of Indian aesthetic philosophy, demonstrating that Indian thinkers were addressing

the deepest questions about consciousness, emotion, spirituality, and the transformative power of aesthetic experience.

5. KUNTAKA: The Theorist of Oblique Expression

Kuntaka (approximately 950–1050 CE) is remembered as one of the most innovative and original thinkers in the history of Indian literary theory, occupying a unique and distinctive position in the development of Sanskrit poetics. He lived roughly a century after Anandavardhana and was a contemporary of other major theorists like Abhinavagupta, making him part of an extraordinary period of intellectual ferment in Kashmir and other centres of Sanskrit learning. Kuntaka came from a strong tradition of Sanskrit poetics and built systematically upon the foundations laid by earlier theorists - Bharata's Rasa theory, Bhamaha's analysis of poetic devices, Vamana's theory of style, and Anandavardhana's theory of suggestion - while offering his own distinctly original vision of what constitutes poetry and poetic beauty. His work represents not a rejection of earlier theories but a synthesis and deepening of them, combined with a revolutionary insight about the fundamental nature of poetic expression. Unlike predecessors who had focused on emotions, devices, style, or suggestion as key to poetry, Kuntaka identified the manner or mode of expression itself, its characteristic obliqueness and indirectness, as poetry's defining feature.

Kuntaka's principal and most important work is the Vakroktijivita (The Life of Oblique Expression), a text whose very title suggests that Vakrokti is not merely a decorative feature or optional device but the essential principle animating all poetry. The Vakroktijivita systematically develops the theory of Vakrokti through detailed analysis, illustrative examples, and rigorous philosophical argumentation, progressively building a comprehensive

theory of oblique and indirect expression as the defining characteristic of all creative literature. Kuntaka's fundamental proposition was revolutionary: poetry is distinguished from ordinary language not primarily by its content, vocabulary, emotional content, or even devices alone, but by its manner or mode of expression - specifically, its oblique, unexpected, and creative way of articulating thought. The term Vakrokti consists of Vakra (meaning crooked, bent, twisted, or indirect) and Ukti (meaning speech, expression, or statement), together denoting expression that is characteristically indirect, unexpected, ingenious, and innovative. Kuntaka identified multiple types of vakrokti including deviation from expected word order, unexpected comparison or analogy, witty or clever juxtaposition of ideas and words, paradoxical or seemingly contradictory expression, sophisticated play on language, and innovative metaphorical extension that creates novel meanings.

Kuntaka argued that vakrokti emanates from the creative and imaginative faculty of the poet and that through vakrokti, poetic language acquires strikingness (*vaicitrya*) or distinctive beauty that causes aesthetic delight in the reader or listener. Crucially, he insisted that

vakrokti is not a superficial ornament applied to pre-existing meaning but is constitutive of poetic meaning itself, the oblique manner of expression actually creates new meanings that would not exist in direct statement, making poetry a unique mode of knowledge and expression rather than merely a prettier version of ordinary language. His theory emphasises the role of poetic genius and originality, suggesting that the greatest poets are those who can find fresh and unexpected ways of expression, thereby encouraging poetic experimentation and individuality rather than rigid adherence to convention. Kuntaka's theory shifts the focus of poetic analysis from content, moral lessons, or even emotional effects to the formal properties of language and the uniqueness of its expression, anticipating by nearly a thousand years modern formalist criticism and theories of poetic language that emphasise the independence and power of literary form. His work continues to be studied by scholars of comparative aesthetics and literary theory as a precursor to twentieth-century formalism and as evidence that Indian aesthetic theorists were deeply engaged with questions of linguistic meaning, creative expression, and the distinctive features that separate art from ordinary language.

Recap

- ▶ Bharata Muni established Rasa theory as the foundational principle of Indian aesthetics.
- ▶ Rasa emerges through interaction of four components: Vibhava, Anubhava, Sancharibhava, Sthayibhava.
- ▶ Bharata identified nine principal rasas: shrngara, hasya, karuna, raudra, vira, bhayanaka, bibhatsa, adbhuta, shanta.
- ▶ Rasa is universalised emotional experience transcending ordinary personal emotion and producing spiritual bliss.
- ▶ Alamkara school emphasises poetic beauty arising from skilled use of linguistic devices.



- ▶ Bhamaha classified thirty-five poetic figures into Arthalamkara (meaning-based) and Shabdalamkara (sound-based) devices.
- ▶ Riti theory argues style and manner of expression shape literary effect fundamentally.
- ▶ Vamana identified four principal styles: Vaidarbhi, Panchali, Gaudi, and Lati.
- ▶ Dhvani theory recognises three levels of meaning: Abhidha, Lakshana, and Vyanjana.
- ▶ Anandavardhana argued poetry operates primarily through vyanjana (suggestive implied meaning).
- ▶ Vakrokti means oblique, indirect expression as poetry's defining characteristic.
- ▶ Kuntaka proposed vakrokti constitutes poetic meaning, not mere superficial ornament.
- ▶ Abhinavagupta introduced Sadharanikarana (universalisation) linking rasa with spiritual consciousness transcendence.
- ▶ Bhattanayaka developed Bhuktivada: rasa transforms emotions into universal contemplative bliss.
- ▶ Six schools represent complementary perspectives on literary creation and aesthetic experience.

Objective Questions

1. Who established foundational rasa theory?
2. How many principal rasas exist?
3. Which school emphasises poetic devices?
4. Who systematised Alamkara theory initially?
5. What does Riti mean literally?
6. Who developed Riti systematically?
7. What are four principal styles?
8. What does Dhvani mean literally?
9. Who originated Dhvani theory?
10. What are three meaning levels?
11. What does Vakrokti mean literally?
12. Who developed Vakrokti comprehensively?
13. What period did Abhinavagupta live?
14. What concept did Abhinavagupta introduce?
15. What does Aucitya signify critically?

Answers

1. Bharata
2. Nine
3. Alamkara
4. Bhamaha
5. Manner
6. Vamana
7. Four
8. Resonance
9. Anandavardhana
10. Three
11. Obliqueness
12. Kuntaka
13. 975-1025
14. Sadharanikarana
15. Propriety

Assignments

1. Analyse Bharata's Rasa theory, explaining how the four components (Vibhava, Anubhava, Sancharibhava, Sthayibhava) interact to produce universalised emotional experience distinguishing rasa from ordinary emotion.
2. Compare and contrast Alamkara, Riti, and Dhvani schools, evaluating how each offers distinctive insights into poetic meaning-making and aesthetic beauty.
3. Examine Anandavardhana's three-level meaning structure (Abhidha, Lakshana, Vyanjana), demonstrating how Vyanjana (suggestive meaning) operates beyond literal language to create poetic power.
4. Evaluate Kuntaka's Vakrokti theory as a revolutionary approach to poetry, assessing how oblique expression constitutes rather than merely decorates poetic meaning.
5. Assess Abhinavagupta's synthesis of aesthetics with Shaiva philosophy, showing how Sadharanikarana (universalisation) connects rasa experience with spiritual enlightenment and transcendence

Suggested Reading

1. Bharata Muni. *The Natyasastra*. Trans. A Board of Scholars. Motilal Banarsidass, 1956.
2. Anandavardhana. *The Dhvanyaloka*. Trans. Daniel H.H. Ingalls. Harvard University Press, 1990.
3. Abhinavagupta. *The Locana: Abhinavagupta's Commentary on the Dhvanyaloka*. Trans. Daniel H.H. Ingalls. Harvard University Press, 1990.
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5. Gerow, Edwin. *Indian Poetics*. Mouton, 1977.

SGOU

BLOCK - 03

Greek and Roman Criticism

Unit-1 : “Republic Book II & III” - Plato

Unit-2 : Poetics - Aristotle

Unit-3 : “On The Sublime (Chapter VII to IX)” - Longinus



Republic, Books II & III

- Plato

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Plato's theory of poetic inspiration clearly
- ▶ evaluate the theory of imitation in poetry
- ▶ analyse Plato's charges against poets in society
- ▶ comprehend the structure of the *Republic's* arguments

Prerequisite

Plato (427–348 B.C.) was a major philosopher and writer in ancient Greece. He was the most famous student of Socrates, who taught people to ask questions and think carefully to find the truth. Plato lived at a time when the great age of Greek art and drama was fading, and people were turning more towards philosophy and public debate. He was deeply interested in the value of poetry and art, and in how they affect the minds and morals of citizens.

Around 387 B.C., Plato founded a school in Athens called the Academy, which became one of the most important centres of learning in the ancient world. Aristotle, who later started his own school, the Lyceum, studied with Plato there for many years. Plato's most famous work, the *Republic*, is written as a conversation led by Socrates. It explores what justice is, what an ideal state should look like, how citizens should be educated, and what place poetry and the arts should have in a good society. These ideas form the background for studying Books II and III of the *Republic* and understanding Plato's views on poetry, imitation, and education.

Keywords

Theory of Inspiration, Theory of Imitation, Republic, Guardians, Poetic Censorship

Discussion

3.1.1. Plato's Theory

Plato developed two influential theories concerning poetry: the Theory of Inspiration and the Theory of Imitation. In his Theory of Inspiration, Plato considers the poet either a prophet or a madman, and in some cases both. In *Phaedrus*, Plato declares that the poet is looked upon as a creature who is possessed. He uses a language that is different from ordinary men and converses in a divinely enthused frenzy. The poet therefore cannot be judged by the standards used for normal men. He carries forward his views on the poet in *Ion*, where he claims that the poet is an inspired singer through whom God speaks. The poet is only a passive tool in the hands of God, who practises his art at the behest of God's will. Plato notices that a magnetic chain is developed among God, the poet, a rhapsodist or singer, and the spectators are enamoured by the performance of the artist. In *the Republic*, Plato draws a distinction between the poet and the philosopher. Plato gives preference to the philosopher because the poet, according to him, tells lies. However, in *Phaedrus* and the *Ion* he gives readers the impression that the poet speaks what is true and beautiful, and hence his speech is equal to the words of God. Plato concentrates on the moral responsibilities of the poet, which suggests that his position is much inferior to the philosopher because the poet appeals only to the emotions of the people and not to their intellect. This is dangerous for society. The poet misleads people because he does not express reality in his works but only provides an imitation of it. This idea is developed by Plato in *the Republic* as his second important theory of poetry called the theory of imitation.

Theory of Imitation

Plato remarks that poetry is harmful to people because it is rooted in falsehood. The poet deals with appearance only, or rather the appearance of an appearance. He deals with the ever-changing world, which can be perceived with the senses. The philosopher, on the other hand, turns the attention of people from the world of appearance to reality. While the poet presents the picture of an unreal world, his work is twice removed from truth and reality. The artist or poet imitates appearance and not reality. While the philosopher proceeds from appearance to reality, the poet moves away from appearance because he copies it in his poems. Thus he takes us doubly away from reality by projecting a copy of a copy. The theory of imitation, derived from painting, is enforced by Plato on poetry. He elaborates his theory by stating that at the outset, the carpenter makes a chair, which is an imitation of the ideal chair, also called the real or absolute chair in the mind of the carpenter. The painter who paints the chair offers a copy of that imitation which the carpenter has created. Thus the work of the painter is the copy of a copy and therefore twice removed from the real chair or the ideal one. Just as the painter appeals to the eye, the poet uses words and rhythms that appeal to the ear. The poet as well as the painter recreates only an imitation of the appearance which can be perceived with the senses. The world that the poet observes consists of apparitions and insubstantial images of the reality which lies behind them. Therefore, the painter and poet create a copy of a copy and hence their subjects and methods are considered false.



Charges against the Poet

Plato charges the poet with engaging emotion rather than reason. Therefore, poets provide excitement and strengthen the worthless part of the soul that fascinates those unrestrained sentiments and disordered impulses which in ordinary life a decent person would be ashamed to indulge in. The more fascinating and captivating the works of a poet are, the deadlier they are in luring people to a false view of life and have a detrimental influence on emotions. Building his assessment of poetry on the theory of imitation and Puritanical views, Plato concludes that poets like Homer and Hesiod must be banished from the ideal state. Tragedies and comedies, which deal with falsehood and appeal to the unrestrained emotions of people, must be absolutely avoided. If poetry is permitted, it must be confined to hymns for the Lord and verses in praise of noble men.

3.1.2. The Republic: Structure and Context

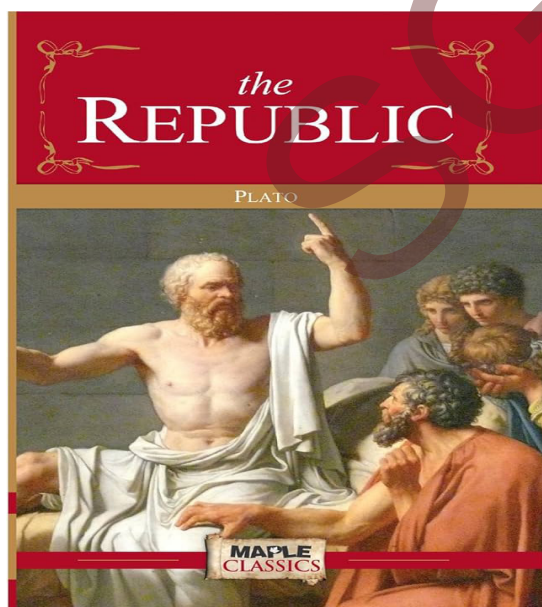


Fig 3.1.1 *The Republic*

The Republic, a book of ten chapters, is structured as extended conversations that lead to

a debate among a group of philosophers led by Socrates. Plato builds the argument for the necessity of an ideal state, the republic, and what it represents. The book is an exposition of Plato's philosophical concept of an ideal state that would function as a model for existing as well as emerging societies during his time and extending to posterity. Any society that intends to amend its functioning could emulate the framework laid down in *the Republic*. The work is considered to have made a lasting impression on the development of political theory and the role of philosophy in society.

The pivotal speaker Socrates recalls the visit to Piraeus, the port of Athens, to take part in festivities in honour of the Thracian goddess Bendis, who is also the Greek mythological goddess Artemis, the goddess of the moon. He meets his acquaintances who are scholars and philosophers, and they urge him to spend time with them in philosophical dialogues. Socrates (the persona for Plato, who appears in all the dialogues), Cephalus, Polemarchus (Cephalus's son), Thrasymachus (a Sophist and teacher of argument), and Glaucon and Adeimantus (the elder brothers of Plato) gather at Cephalus's house on this day of feasting to engage in philosophical deliberations related to diverse aspects of society, citizens, and the state.

The Characters in the Dialogue

Socrates serves as the principal speaker in the series of exchanges who initiates Plato's doctrines. The name Socrates means "master of life". The fictive character Socrates serves as the mouthpiece of Plato, and in doing so Plato tries to immortalise his teacher and his preaching. Cephalus is a friend of Socrates and an old and wealthy businessman who heads a business family. Cephalus commences the dialogues with a casual, friendly, and informal conversation. His discussions prove

his experience in life, but not as a philosopher. Cephalus's deliberations highlight the arguments which would ensue. Polemarchus is the son of Cephalus and disciple of Lysias, a teacher of rhetoric. His name means "war lord" or "general", and he seems quite impatient in his demeanour when he takes charge as host after his father Cephalus quits the conversation. Thrasymachus is a sophist, a teacher of specious rhetoric. His name means "rash fighter". Socrates takes particular interest in engaging with Thrasymachus on philosophical issues in the dialogue, which rages into a pretty quarrel. Adeimantus is a young poet and elder half-brother of Plato. His name means "sooth-singer". Glaucon is a young half-brother of Plato whose name means "owl" or "gleaming eyes".

The Ten Books of the Republic

The ten books of the Republic cover distinct philosophical territories. Book One examines wealth, justice, moderation, and their opposites. Book Two investigates the individual, the state, and education. Book Three focuses on the arts in education. Book Four explores wealth, poverty, and virtue. Book Five discusses matrimony and philosophy. Book Six presents the philosophy of government. Book Seven examines shadows and realities in education. Book Eight analyses four forms of government. Book Nine discusses wrong or right government and the pleasure of each. Book Ten concludes with the recompense of life. Poetry and the arts are discussed primarily in Books Two, Three, and Ten, which form the core of Plato's literary criticism.

3.1.3 Book Two: "The Individual, the State, and Education"

Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus continue their discussion on justice from where Thrasymachus and Polemarchus had left the debate to enjoy the festival in reverence of the god-

dess Bendis. When Socrates proposes that justice is worthy to pursue as both an end and as a means to an end, Glaucon decides to test the validity of the proposition to finally put an end to the debate. Glaucon asserts that justice is a compromise between doing injustice to others and having injustice done unto oneself that is imposed by law. He narrates the parable of the shepherd Gyges, who discovers a magic ring that grants invisibility to the person who wears it. The shepherd misuses his powers, seduces the queen, and overthrows the ruler. Glaucon continues his discussion and suggests an experiment where the two opposed characters, the just and the unjust, are perceived by the public. At this juncture, Adeimantus utters a series of poetic lines from Aeschylus, Hesiod, and Homer that assert the superiority of injustice over justice. He challenges Socrates to prove the other way round, for he cannot find any instances from literature in support. Accepting the challenge humbly, Socrates suggests scrutinising the role of justice in the state first and then the life of the individual, and therefore constructing the Republic with definite rules should be given priority.

Initially, the essential needs of man, namely food, a dwelling place, and clothing, have to be acquired, and then labour or the structures that would help procure these amenities because the state by itself cannot provide these to the citizens. Socrates discusses economics, education, arts, territory, and warfare. Socrates asserts: "One man cannot practice many arts with success." This observation leads to the need for division of labour where each person would have to follow only one profession and not the others. He privileges the guardians, the citizens whose qualities par excellence vouchsafe them positions of civil and military authority. They would be entrusted with maintaining safety and order of the state. A good guardian is one who imbibes the dual goodness of music for the soul and



gymnastics for the body. This way his philosophy and spirit, agility and strength would unify to mark him better than the others in the state. Socrates moves on to discuss the education pattern of the guardians wherein they would not be exposed to narratives of discord, violence, and immorality because traditional tales propagate “lies” that would be harmful for the soul of the guardian. He forbids what he terms “bad fiction”, that is, poetry and literature of unconvincing moral value, from the primary stages of education of the guardians. He advocates expurgation of the Greek literary tradition, especially with regard to the battle scenes of the Gods in Homer. Instead, the youth should be familiarised with “models of virtuous thoughts.” Certain principles pertaining to the Gods are established by Socrates. The first is that “God is not the author of all things, but of good only” and the second is that “he is one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image”. Socrates does not consider God as the creator of the world, but strictly of good. Book Two concludes with Socrates’s further elaboration of the theology of the state and the endorsement of its ethics into edicts.

Analysis of Book Two

Socrates states that it is important to be socially responsible, otherwise power could be misused and injustice would prevail. The entire book raises the most pertinent question related to accountability in matters concerning the state, law, and power. In reply to Adeimantus’s reference to the poetry of Aeschylus, Hesiod, and Homer that does not assure success of the just, Socrates proposes to build a state where justice would be tested against injustice and then the trial of the just individual. He announces that the formation of the ideal state is more important at this stage, and *the Republic* that is formed “out of the needs of mankind” becomes the cornerstone of *the Re-*

public. A single occupation that suits natural inclination is considered the best. The notion of mind and body schism is evident even in traditional Greek philosophy as Socrates suggests that education should be streamed into mousikē (music) and gymnastikē (gymnastics). However, he insists on censoring fiction, debunking “bad fiction” that the guardians of the state could be exposed to and protecting them from false representations of human life. He disapproves of Homer and Hesiod whose literature abounds in undesirable or fallacious stories. Plato’s intention is to disregard fiction forever. The religious and spiritual claims of Socrates perceive God as the source of all that is complete, absolute, perfect, and good. Socrates’s denouncement of Classical Greek mythology and folklore is based on improbable claims and therefore unacceptable.

3.1.4. Book Three: “The Arts in Education”

Socrates discusses poetic narratives and firmly denounces “libellous poetry and fiction” because it would be harmful at the initial stages of education of the guardians of the state. He expresses his willingness to censor Homer’s lines to make them acceptable for education. The essential virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance should be taught to the guardians strictly using poetry and literature that are didactic. Morally undesirable characters as men or Gods should not be discussed. He condemns the depiction of Achilles, the epic hero of *the Iliad*, and Theseus and Pirithous, the sons of Gods, because the tales about these characters are untrue and they promote indiscipline. Socrates discusses the various narrative styles. Narrative style could be single voice (or narrative), mimetic, and a combination of both, state Socrates and Adeimantus. Socrates criticises Homer’s verses that are an uneven blend of narrative, especially the speeches of the characters in the

Iliad that also employ mimesis or imitation. Imitation is hazardous for the guardians of the state who should be concerned with righteousness and morality. Socrates has earlier divided education into two branches: music and gymnastic. He expresses his views on music to the accompaniment of words, melody, and rhythm. The Dorian and Phrygian harmonies embody “the strain of courage, and the strain of temperance” hence they are agreeable and suitable for study. Socrates approves of a musical style that is simple and exhilarating that would incline the guardians toward virtuous behaviour. He widens the scope of the aesthetic standards to be observed by all the diverse art forms prevalent in the state. Rigorous practice is essential for physical fitness. Citizens should maintain their health expecting little medical supervision. The guardians, the elite of the citizens of the state, are reckoned pre-eminent to rule the state because they possess the qualities of steadfast love of the state and a resolute sense of duty. They are magnanimous in their deportment and their sense of responsibility is unsurpassed. Socrates moves on to narrate the Phoenician tale, a myth related to the state with which the book ends. The citizens of the state are the sons of a mother and they are extremely fond of their state. They are brothers who do not share common attributes. The individual qualities of the characters are a mix of metals ranging from gold to brass and iron. Citizens of gold are the

worthiest of the lot and beloved of the state. The others are placed according to a social hierarchy. When Socrates enquires whether this allegory would benefit the citizens, the others disagree, but they mention that succeeding generations would benefit from this tale.

Analysis of Book Three

Socrates feels it is necessary to censor artists and poets to bring out the best poetry that would benefit the citizens, especially the guardians of the state. Beauty, pleasure, and laughter for their own sake are rejected. Corruption cannot be overlooked. By segregating select passages from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* to show their potentially harmful tendencies, Socrates fails to recognise that these epics, read as a whole, could benefit the guardians of the state because they contain instances of moral and social uprightness. These epics dramatise the struggles between good and evil. Socrates opts for simple living, not giving into the excesses of social and cultural factors because the integrity of the state would be at stake. Physical education need not be rigorous but could be imparted in a harmonious manner. Through the Phoenician tale that allegorises the necessity for social stability and hierarchy based on individual character, Socrates privileges the rulers of the state. He makes the point that each man embodies a mixture of metals that determines his value in the state.

Recap

- ▶ Plato viewed poets as prophets or madmen possessed by divine frenzy.
- ▶ Poets are passive tools through whom God speaks, creating a magnetic chain to spectators.
- ▶ Plato favours philosophers over poets because poets appeal to emotions rather than intellect.
- ▶ The Theory of Imitation states poetry deals with appearances, not reality.
- ▶ Poets create copies of copies, placing art twice removed from truth.



- ▶ The carpenter creates a chair from an ideal form, then a painter copies that chair, making art twice removed from truth.
- ▶ Poets engage emotion rather than reason, strengthening the worthless part of the soul.
- ▶ Plato demands banishment of Homer and Hesiod from his ideal state.
- ▶ Only hymns to Gods and verses praising noble men are permitted in the Republic.
- ▶ The Republic comprises ten books of Socratic dialogues set in Piraeus during a festival.
- ▶ Key characters include Socrates, Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Adeimantus and Glaucon.
- ▶ Book Two presents the Ring of Gyges parable and proposes building an ideal state with division of labour.
- ▶ Guardians require education combining music for the soul and gymnastics for the body, with censorship of bad fiction.
- ▶ Book Three discusses censorship of poetry, narrative styles, and criticises Homer's use of mimesis.
- ▶ The Phoenician tale uses metal imagery to explain social hierarchy and identify the worthiest citizens.

Objective Questions

1. What is Plato's view of the poet in his Theory of Inspiration?
2. Which dialogue does Plato use to discuss poetic inspiration?
3. What does the poet imitate according to Plato's Theory of Imitation?
4. How many times removed from reality is poetry in Plato's view?
5. Which epic poet does Plato want to banish from his ideal state?
6. What type of poetry does Plato permit in his *Republic*?
7. How many books constitute Plato's *Republic*?
8. Where does the dialogue of the *Republic* take place?
9. Who is the principal speaker in the *Republic*?
10. What is the name of Cephalus's son?
11. What does the Ring of Gyges parable demonstrate?
12. What two branches of education does Socrates propose for guardians?
13. What does Socrates call poetry that corrupts morals?
14. Which harmonies does Socrates approve for guardian education?
15. What allegory does Socrates use to explain social hierarchy?

Answers

1. Prophet or madman
2. Phaedrus
3. Appearance
4. Twice removed
5. Homer
6. Hymns and praise verses
7. Ten
8. Piraeus
9. Socrates
10. Polemarchus
11. Justice vs injustice
12. Music and gymnastics
13. Bad fiction
14. Dorian and Phrygian
15. Phoenician tale

Assignments

1. Explain Plato's Theory of Imitation and its implications for poetry's value in society.
2. Analyse why Plato considers poets dangerous for the ideal state in *The Republic* Book Two.
3. Discuss Socrates's educational programme for guardians and its literary censorship.
4. Evaluate the significance of the Ring of Gyges parable in Plato's argument about justice.
5. Examine how Plato's concept of mimesis affects his view of narrative styles in Book Three.

Suggested Reading

1. Plato. *The Republic*, Books II and III. Trans. by Desmond Lee, Penguin Classics, 2007.
2. Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford University Press, 1981.
3. Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Harvard University Press, 1963.
4. Ferrari, G. R. F. *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
5. Murdoch, Iris. *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. Oxford University Press, 1977.

SGOU

Unit 2

Poetics

Aristotle

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Aristotle's life and critical background
- ▶ explain mimesis as basis of all arts
- ▶ describe objects and manners of poetic imitation
- ▶ analyse Aristotle's theory of tragedy

Prerequisite

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. at Stagira in Macedonia and later joined Plato's Academy in Athens, where he studied for many years. After Plato's death he left the Academy, and King Philip of Macedon appointed him tutor to the young Alexander, who later became Alexander the Great. Aristotle taught him politics and literature. In 338 B.C. Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his own school, the Lyceum, where he studied politics, literature, history, natural science, and biology with his pupils. He wrote on God, government, education, democracy, and religion, often in a controversial way, but always valued virtue and morals as central to human life.

Among his many works, *Poetics* is a short but very influential treatise in which he discusses the nature of poetry, including drama. It contains twenty six chapters and covers imitation, the origins of poetry, the difference between epic, tragedy, and comedy, the structure of plot, the nature of character, catharsis, diction, and the comparison between epic poetry and tragedy. The learner is expected to have a basic idea of Greek tragedy, the epics of Homer, and key critical terms such as mimesis, catharsis, and hamartia in order to follow Aristotle's arguments with ease.

Keywords

Poetics, Mimesis, Catharsis, Hamartia, Epic, Tragedy



Discussion

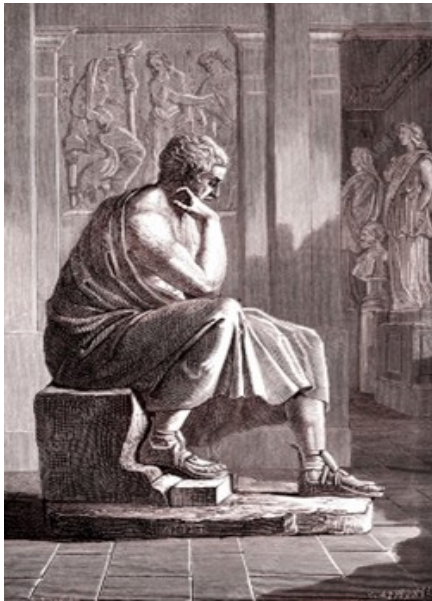


Fig 3.2.1 Aristotle

Aristotle was born in 384 BCE at a place called Stagirus in Macedonia. He was a member of Plato's Academy and trained himself there under Plato's guidance. After Plato's death, Aristotle was nominated by King Philip as tutor to Alexander the Great, who was just fourteen years old at that time. Aristotle taught politics and literature to Alexander. In 338 BCE, Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum, and trained his disciples there. He made extensive studies of politics, literature, history, natural science, and biology. Aristotle married Pythias, and his conjugal life had its own difficulties, as Aristotle had a mistress named Herpyllis. He held strong views on God, government, education, democracy, and religion. Some of his views were highly controversial. For example, he believed that God is indifferent to the sufferings of mankind, which led to his dissatisfaction with conventional religious thought. However, Aristotle held virtue and morals as supreme ideals in the life of an individual.

Aristotle wrote numerous important works. His *Dialogues*, *On Monarchy*, *Rhetoric*, and

Metaphysics are among his popular works, in addition to *Poetics*. However, many of his works have disappeared over time and have not been retrieved to the present day. *Poetics* is a literary treatise comprising twenty-six chapters. In it, Aristotle discusses the art of writing poetry, which includes drama. This work remains one of the most influential texts in literary criticism and has shaped critical thinking for over two thousand years.

Poetics is one of the earliest systematic works of literary criticism in Western thought. Aristotle is interested in poetry as a serious art that imitates life and gives pleasure and understanding to the audience. He looks at poetry in general, but his main focus is on tragedy, because he believes it shows the artistic possibilities of poetry in their highest form. Throughout *Poetics* he asks what makes a good poem or play, and why some works move us more deeply than others.

3.2.1 *Poetics* – Chapter wise

Summary

Chapter 1 – Imitation as the Basic Virtue of All Arts

Aristotle begins by stating that all fine arts are forms of imitation, which he calls mimesis. Poetry, comedy, tragedy, music, dance, painting, and sculpture are all imitations. This does not mean that they copy nature in a simple way. Instead, imitation is a creative process through which the artist reshapes reality and expresses human emotions and ideas. Music, for example, imitates the emotions and passions of the human soul rather than physical objects.

Arts differ from one another in three respects: medium, objects, and manner of imitation. Medium is the material used to imitate. A painter uses colour and form, a musician uses sound, and the poet uses language along with rhythm and harmony. Poetry and music share

rhythm and harmony, but poetry also uses words. Aristotle notes that the general term “literature” did not exist in his time, so he refers to poetry, drama, and prose collectively as an “art without a name”. He also observes that poetry can be written without metre, and that prose can sometimes be poetic.

Chapter 2 – The Objects of Imitation

In Chapter 2 Aristotle turns to the objects imitated in poetry and drama. The poet imitates human beings and their actions, which can be morally good or bad. Tragedy presents people as better and nobler than they are in real life, while comedy presents people as worse than they are, by exposing their weaknesses and follies. This difference in moral level helps to distinguish tragedy from comedy. Even when gods or heroes are shown, what is important is how their actions reveal human character and conduct.

Chapter 3 – The Manner of Imitation

Chapter 3 deals with the manner in which different arts imitate. Aristotle identifies three main manners. First, in the narrative manner, the poet tells the story in his own voice, describing events and actions. Second, in the dramatic manner, the story is presented through characters who speak and act on stage. Third, there is a mixed manner, in which the poet both narrates and allows characters to speak.

The mixed manner is especially important in epic poetry, where the poet narrates general events but also gives long speeches to individual characters. Homer is Aristotle’s chief example. In this way the manner of imitation helps us to distinguish between epic and drama. In drama, especially tragedy, the stress falls on direct presentation of action rather than on narrative description.

Chapter 4 – The Genesis of Poetry

In Chapter 4 Aristotle explains how poetry began and developed. He believes that poetry comes from four natural human tendencies. Human beings have a strong desire to imitate, which can be seen in children. They take pleasure in imitation for its own sake, even of things that may be unpleasant in reality. People also enjoy learning, and they learn many things through imitation. Finally, human beings take delight in harmony and rhythm, which form a part of poetry.

From these basic impulses poetry slowly divided into two main branches. One branch dealt with noble actions and noble people. This produced hymns in honour of gods and later led to heroic or epic poetry, as in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. From epic there grew the serious dramatic form called tragedy. The other branch dealt with the actions of ordinary or trivial people and led to comedy, which mocks and corrects human folly. Aristotle mentions Homer’s *Margites* as an example of an early comic work.

Chapter 5 – Comedy, Epic Poetry, and Tragedy

In Chapter 5 Aristotle compares comedy, epic poetry, and tragedy. Comedy presents characters who are lower than the average person, but not utterly wicked. They are “ridiculous” in the sense that their defects cause laughter without giving serious pain to others. Epic and tragedy, by contrast, deal with serious matters and serious characters who are better than the ordinary run of people, and they use a grand style.

Aristotle then notes some differences between epic and tragedy. Epic poetry is always in narrative form. Its action is not bound to a short



period of time, but may extend over many years. The metre used in epic is the heroic metre, while tragedy uses different metres in different parts of the play. He observes that all the elements of epic can be found in tragedy, but not all elements of tragedy are present in epic, which prepares the way for his later judgement that tragedy is the higher form.

Chapter 6 – Definition and Elements of Tragedy

Chapter 6 contains Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy. "Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language which has rhythm and melody, with different kinds of embellishment in different parts, performed by actors and not by narration, and it achieves through pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions." This definition shows that tragedy must deal with important and complete actions, must be suitable in length, must be performed rather than told, and must have a definite emotional effect.

Aristotle states that every tragedy has six elements: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. Plot is the arrangement of incidents and is the life and soul of tragedy. Character refers to the moral and personal qualities of the people in the drama. Thought is the ideas and reasoning expressed in their speeches. Diction is the choice of words and style of language. Melody belongs to song and music, especially in the choral odes. Spectacle refers to the visual aspect of the performance, including scenery and stage effects.

Chapter 7 – Construction of the Plot

In Chapter 7 Aristotle explains how a tragic plot should be constructed. The plot must be complete and whole. This means that it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning does not come after anything else within the play, but naturally gives rise

to other incidents. The middle follows from the beginning and leads towards the end. The end follows from what has gone before, and brings the action to a natural close.

The plot must have a suitable length. It should be long enough to allow a clear change in the hero's fortune, but not so long that the audience forgets the start before reaching the conclusion. The incidents should be arranged in a probable and necessary order. If any incident is removed or displaced, the whole will be disturbed. This careful ordering of events creates the sense of unity that is essential for a good tragedy.

Chapter 8 – Unity of the Tragic Plot

Chapter 8 continues the discussion of unity. Aristotle warns that unity is not gained simply by writing about the life of one person, because a single life may contain many unrelated events. True unity arises when all the incidents in a play are connected through cause and effect and belong to one complete action.

A well constructed plot should not look like a series of loose episodes. The audience should feel that each event follows from what has gone before and prepares for what follows after. When this happens, no incident can be removed without harming the whole. Aristotle calls this "absolute unity" of plot.

Chapter 9 – The Difference Between Poetry and History

In Chapter 9 Aristotle compares poetry and history. History tells us what actually happened in the past, while poetry deals with what could happen according to probability or necessity. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and serious than history, because it presents general truths about life rather than particular facts.

The poet is a maker of plots. He may borrow the material for his stories from history or tra-

dition, but by his imagination he reshapes it until events follow a probable pattern. Poetry imitates the idea of life and appeals to the emotions by showing why things happen, not merely that they happened. The poet therefore has greater freedom than the historian, but also a greater responsibility to create convincing patterns.

Chapter 10 – Simple and Complex Plots

In Chapter 10 Aristotle distinguishes between simple and complex plots. A simple plot is one in which the change of fortune takes place without sudden reversal or recognition. The story moves forward in a straight line to its conclusion.

A complex plot includes peripety and anagnorisis. In such a plot the action changes direction because of a reversal of situation or a discovery. The protagonist's fortunes rise and fall in unexpected ways, yet the events still appear necessary or highly probable. Aristotle prefers the complex plot for tragedy, since it produces a stronger effect of pity and fear.

Chapter 11 – Peripety, Anagnorisis, and Suffering

Chapter 11 explains peripety, anagnorisis, and suffering more fully. Peripety is a sudden reversal of fortune, when the action turns into its opposite. A character who seemed to be moving towards success suddenly faces disaster. Anagnorisis is discovery or recognition, when a character realises an important truth, such as the identity of another character or the real nature of his own situation.

Suffering is the third element. It includes painful or destructive actions such as wounds, deaths, and bodily agonies. These three elements, when handled skilfully, make the plot more intense and moving. Aristotle considers

the best tragedies to be those in which peripety and anagnorisis arise naturally from the structure of the plot.

Chapter 12 – Components of Tragedy and the Chorus

In Chapter 12 Aristotle describes the formal parts of a Greek tragedy. The prologue is the part of the play that comes before the entrance of the chorus. The parodos is the entrance song of the chorus.

Episodes are the scenes of action and dialogue that occur between choral songs. The stasimon is a choral ode sung while the chorus stands in its place. The kommos is a lament sung together by the chorus and the actors. The final section after the last choral song brings the action to its conclusion. Aristotle stresses that the chorus is an important actor in the drama and should take part in the action rather than stand outside it.

Chapter 13 – The Perfect Plot and the Ideal Tragic Hero

Chapter 13 discusses what kind of plot and hero are most suitable for tragedy. Aristotle says that a perfectly good man should not be shown falling from happiness into misery, because this will shock us but not evoke proper pity and fear. A completely bad man should not be shown rising from misery into happiness, because this offends our sense of justice. Nor should we show a very bad man falling from happiness into misery. That may satisfy our wish to see him punished, but it does not move us to pity.

The best tragic hero is a person of middling character. He is neither very virtuous nor very wicked, but has some weakness. His fall into misfortune is caused not by vice but by an error of judgement or mistake of understanding. Aristotle calls this hamartia. The plot should



centre on this single line of misfortune. Tragedies with double endings, where good people are rewarded and bad people punished, are more suited to comedy than to true tragedy.

Chapter 14 – Spectacle and Tragic Emotions

Chapter 14 turns to spectacle, the visual side of tragedy. Aristotle agrees that shocking scenes, such as the blinding of Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, can powerfully arouse pity and fear. Yet he insists that true tragic pleasure does not depend on such scenes. The arrangement of incidents in the plot should be enough to move us, even if the play is simply read.

He also points out that tragic emotions are stronger when the deed is done within close family ties. A son killing his father, a mother killing her child, or a brother killing a brother, all create deeper pity and fear. Tragic effect is heightened when such acts are done in ignorance and discovered later, since the audience sees both the innocence of intention and the horror of the result.

Chapter 15 – Characterisation

In Chapter 15 Aristotle sets out four requirements for good characterisation. Characters must be good in the sense that their words and actions reveal a sound moral purpose. They must be appropriate, which means their behaviour must suit their type and status. For example, a woman should act in a way that fits her role, and a slave should not behave like a noble.

Characters must also be true to life. They should resemble real human beings, with a mixture of virtues and vices, joys and sorrows, so that the audience recognises them

as people like themselves. Finally, characters must be consistent. Once a character's nature is established, he or she should act in keeping with that nature. Even a changeable character must be consistent in being changeable. Aristotle adds that the denouement of the play should arise naturally from the characters' actions and the previous incidents, without sudden mechanical devices.

Chapters 16–18 – Discovery, Plot Construction, Complication, and Denouement

In Chapter 16 Aristotle returns to discovery and lists six kinds of anagnorisis. Some recognitions come through physical signs or tokens such as scars or necklaces, but these are less artistic unless they arise naturally from the story. Other recognitions are forced by the poet, brought in suddenly to end the play, and these are also inartistic. Better recognitions arise through memory, reasoning, or through false clues that lead to a confession. The best discovery grows only out of the incidents themselves and seems entirely natural, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Chapters 17 and 18 give advice on constructing plots. Aristotle says that the poet should imagine every scene vividly, as if present, and even act out the gestures, in order to feel the emotions of the characters and choose suitable language. He should first reduce the story to a simple outline, then expand it into episodes while preserving logical links. Every tragedy has two main parts, complication and denouement. Complication includes all that leads up to the turning point of the action, often beginning before the play opens. Denouement is the part of the play from the turning point to the end, where the action is resolved.

Chapters 19–22 – Thought and Diction

Chapters 19 to 22 discuss thought and diction. Thought is what characters express in their speeches when they argue, advise, appeal to emotions, or judge events. It reveals their inner life and supports the movement of the plot.

Diction is the choice and arrangement of words. Aristotle lists different kinds of words: ordinary words, foreign words, metaphors, ornamental expressions, new coinages, and slightly altered forms such as “spake” for “spoke”. He suggests that heroic or epic poetry may use all these freely, while drama must use them more carefully so that language remains clear, fitting, and suitably elevated.

Chapters 23–24 – Epic Poetry and Comparison with Tragedy

In Chapters 23 and 24 Aristotle turns again to epic poetry. An epic poem, like a tragedy, should have unity of action. It should narrate a single story with a beginning, middle, and end, even though it may cover events from many years and involve many people.

Epic poetry is narrative, while tragedy is dramatic. The epic poet may describe simultaneous events in different places, and he uses the heroic metre with rich and elaborate diction. Tragedy must fit its action into the limits of stage performance and does not have the same freedom. Aristotle praises Homer as the ideal epic poet. Homer uses the marvellous and the improbable, but he makes these things seem probable and convincing. Aristotle remarks that a likely impossibility is better than an unconvincing possibility.

Chapters 25–26 – Faults in Poetry and the Superiority of Tragedy

In Chapter 25 Aristotle answers critics who point to faults in poetry. They complain of impossibility, irrationality, immorality, con-

tradiction, and lack of technical correctness. Aristotle replies that impossibilities should generally be avoided but may be allowed when they add beauty or wonder, especially in epic narrative. Irrational details may sometimes be accepted if they reflect older customs or poetic convention. Acts that seem immoral must be judged in context and may be justified in war or in pursuit of greater good. Contradictions should be examined carefully before they are blamed, and technical faults in language should be corrected where possible, though some poetic licence is allowed.

In Chapter 26 Aristotle compares epic with tragedy and finally declares tragedy superior. Tragedy contains all the elements of epic, yet it adds music and spectacle. It is shorter and more unified, so it produces a more concentrated effect. Tragedy arouses pity and fear more directly and powerfully than epic does. For these reasons Aristotle concludes that tragedy offers the highest and most complete form of poetic art.

3.2.2 Critical Analysis

Aristotle’s Concept of Tragedy

Aristotle’s *Poetics* is a landmark work in literary criticism. He was one of the earliest critics to discuss the principles of tragedy systematically. Tragedy had developed in the Greek language even before Aristotle’s time. The Greek concept of tragedy differed significantly from modern understandings of the term. The word “tragedy” originally meant “a goat song.” In ancient Greece, drama contests were held, and the writers of the best dramas received goats as prizes. Hence tragedies were called “goat songs.” In modern times, a tragedy is typically a story with a sad ending. However, Greek tragedies were serious in tone, and some of them actually had happy endings. The Greek language was highly developed before Homer’s time, and poets wrote poetry glorifying the greatness of Greek gods and goddesses.



Over time, Heroic or Epic poetry emerged from this tradition. Homer was the first to write epic poems in Greek. As time passed and writers' attitudes changed, Tragedy was born from Epic poetry. Epic poetry was meant for recital and performance, whereas Tragedy was intended for enactment on the stage before an audience.

Aristotle's Definition of Tragedy

Aristotle defines tragedy in the following way: "Tragedy is the imitation of action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude. It employs language that is beautified in different parts with different kinds of embellishment. It presents action through performance rather than narration. Through scenes of pity and fear, it brings about the catharsis of such emotions." This definition identifies three essential factors. First, tragedy is the imitation of serious action and therefore cannot be a story with a happy ending. Second, it differs from epic poetry because the imitation of human life is made through action and not through narration. Third, it must evoke pity and fear in the audience and bring about catharsis. Catharsis means purgation or purification of feelings. It is the artistic impact made on the audience by a tragedy when it is performed on the stage. When spectators watch a tragedy, they experience and release intense emotions, resulting in a sense of purification and relief.

The Plot: Structure and Importance

The most important factor in a tragedy is its plot. In a tragic plot, action should always be complete and whole. A plot must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is something that nothing precedes, although something else follows it. A tragic story need not commence from the very beginning of the hero's or central character's life. It can begin even in the later part of his life. The beginning should be convincing to the reader with no doubts about why and how the action commences. The middle is consequent upon the

beginning and logically leads the action towards the end. This structure is what Aristotle calls "a whole" in a tragic plot. A tragic story must be long enough to accommodate all incidents. The incidents must be arranged in a proper sequence. However, the plot cannot be too long, or the reader will forget the beginning before reaching the climax. A tragic plot should present the fall of the hero from a lofty position to misery or death in a believable manner that evokes strong emotional responses.

Characterisation: The Tragic Hero

Aristotle states that neither a villain nor a pre-eminently perfect and just person can be made the hero of a tragedy. A tragic hero is neither a bad villain nor a perfect being. Rather, he is of a mediocre type, similar to ordinary people with weaknesses and some bad traits. Members of the audience will develop pity and fear for such a person because they feel he is one of them. A tragic hero suffers owing to misfortunes wrought by his own deeds. However, a tragic hero does not have a moral weakness. Instead, he suffers due to an error of judgement or miscalculation. Aristotle calls this "hamartia" in a tragic hero. A tragic hero comes from the elite class in society, and the fall of such a person arouses a great amount of pity and fear that cannot normally be aroused by the fall of an ordinary person from the lower segment of society. This high social status makes the hero's downfall more significant and emotionally powerful for the audience.

Catharsis: Emotional Purification

Catharsis means purgation of feelings or purification of emotions wrought by a tragedy in the minds of the audience. The incidents and events in a tragedy arouse pity and fear in spectators. Pity, fear, and such other emotions create in the audience a sense of pleasure leading to relief. This happens because the audience identifies their own feelings with those of the tragic characters. This identification of

feelings produces catharsis, a purification of emotions that causes artistic pleasure in the audience. As a result, members of the audience experience relief when they understand that suffering is universal and common to all mankind. The experience of watching tragedy allows people to safely experience and release intense emotions, resulting in psychological and emotional cleansing.

The Three Unities: Essential Structural Principles

For the success of a tragedy, a dramatist must follow the three unities as stipulated by Aristotle. The three unities impart to a tragedy an air of credibility. The three unities are the unities of time, place, and action. Of the three, the unity of action is the most important according to Aristotle. A tragedy may have any number of incidents, but they must be rightly linked with each other and should develop the action to the resolution at the end. The plot should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. If the development of conflict is consistent, the tragedy has unity of action. The unity of time implies that action in a tragedy should take place in one day, usually from sunrise to sunset. If this time limit is exceeded, the artistic effect will be spoiled and there will not be any element of credibility in the story. Action taking place over many years may be reported by the chorus if necessary. The unity of place signifies that action should take place in one location only and cannot be shifted to another place, lest it spoil the artistic effect. Some critics claim that Aristotle stipulates only the unity of action and that the remaining two unities are appendages attributed to him by critics who appeared after the Renaissance.

Aristotle's concept of tragedy is unique and his contribution to literary criticism, especially to the criticism of drama, is unprecedented. In Aristotle's time, poetry and drama were not separated as they are in modern times. There-

fore, whilst reading *Poetics*, readers may develop some ambiguity, unable to see a clear difference between what Aristotle says about tragedy and what he says about poetry generally. There is not much difference between the two. In a tragedy, plot and characters are the most important elements. In addition to them, catharsis and the three unities are two major factors contributing to the success of a tragedy. Aristotle's systematic analysis of tragedy established principles that have governed dramatic criticism and practice for over two thousand years.

3.2.3 Epic Poetry and Tragedy

In the structure of *Poetics*, Aristotle's discussion of epic poetry appears towards the close of the critical treatise and is relatively slender in comparison with his treatment of tragedy. Aristotle analyses epic poetry in relation to tragedy for good reason. In Aristotle's time and before him, epic poetry was meant for recital only on festive occasions, whereas tragedy was intended for enactment on the stage. Naturally, a tragic play was the most sought after form of art, and tragedy therefore gained more importance than epic poetry. In view of this, Aristotle devoted more space to discussing tragedy and established that tragedy is superior to epic poetry. Understanding the relationship between these two forms clarifies Aristotle's overall critical philosophy and his judgement about what constitutes the highest form of literary art.

The Nature of Epic Poetry

A tragedy presents a story through imitation of human action on the stage, whereas an epic poem narrates a story in versified language. An epic poem does not imitate human action like a tragedy. However, in many respects, an epic poem and a tragedy resemble each other. As in a tragedy, in an epic poem, the poet should maintain unity of the story. This is the prime criterion for epic poetry. The story



should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself. It should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. An epic poem will deal with events belonging to several periods of time. It deals with the lives of many persons, and the career of one person alone will not be sufficient for its story and action. This broader scope distinguishes epic from tragedy in important ways.

A Comparison Between Epic Poetry and Tragedy

Aristotle focuses on comparing epic poetry and tragedy systematically. An epic poem is as varied as a tragedy in its structure. It may be simple or complex. The story may be based on a single character or on the sufferings of someone else. A tragedy depends on spectacle and visual incidents, but an epic poem does not require such visual presentation. Similarly, the chorus is indispensable in a tragedy, but in an epic poem, the chorus is absent. Barring spectacle and the chorus, all other characteristics are alike in both forms. An epic poem is longer than a tragedy. Incidents and events may be presented in an epic poem as occurring at different places simultaneously, but this is not possible in a tragedy while being enacted on the stage. This method of simultaneous presentation of action enriches the reader's poetic experience and gives variety of taste and interest. An epic poet can introduce miracles, marvels, and wonders in his poem, but the same cannot be shown effectively on the stage. The essential difference between an epic poem and a tragedy is the use of metre. Metre enriches the reader's experience significantly, but a tragedy is largely devoid of it. Metre other than the heroic will not be suitable for an epic poem. The iambic and trochaic metres are metres of movement. The first one represents the movement of life and action, while the other stands for the movement of dance. Nature itself has given the heroic as the most appropriate metre to epic poetry.

Homer as the Ideal Epic Poet

Aristotle projects Homer as an ideal epic poet. As an epic poet, Homer has perfectly performed his role in his two great epic poems. An epic poet should not interfere in the course of narrative. He should not speak in his own voice, and if he wants to speak at all, he should do so very minimally. Other poets may speak in other forms of poetry. The marvellous and the improbable are more required in a tragedy than in an epic poem. Homer uses the improbable, but he makes it look probable and meaningful. As a result, the reader is convinced of it. Aristotle states that a likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility. The success of an epic poem depends on the illusion presented convincingly. There may be a fallacy, but it should be presented logically. Acceptance of illusion as reality is the basis for the success of an epic poem. The use of the improbable and the irrational should be avoided in an epic poem. If there is a need for it, it should be minimised. An epic poet must use elaborate and ornate diction to achieve the elevated tone and grand scope appropriate to the form.

The Superiority of Tragedy Over Epic Poetry

A tragedy, in every sense, is superior to an epic poem. It possesses all the elements one could find in an epic poem. Besides, there is music and spectacle. In terms of length, a tragedy is shorter than an epic poem, and therefore there is better scope for concentration on every artistic aspect. The emotional and artistic effects a tragedy makes on the audience are always strong and immediate. Since a tragedy is shorter in length, it has greater unity and coherence. Pity and fear can best be aroused in human persons only by a tragedy. Therefore, a tragedy is always superior to an epic poem in its power to move and transform the audience. The concentrated intensity of tragic drama

exceeds what epic poetry, despite its greater scope and length, can achieve.

In the past, epic poetry was written for recital on important social and religious occasions, while tragedy was enacted on the stage for entertainment and artistic experience. Since a tragic play is action-oriented and performs before a live audience, it gained more popularity than the epic in ancient times. The length of a tragedy, being shorter than an epic, combined

with its music, metre, treatment of unified emotion, and powerful emotional impact on the audience, are the elements which make tragedy more appealing to human beings than epic poetry. Aristotle's conclusion about tragedy's superiority reflects not merely his personal preference but his recognition that dramatic performance creates a more immediate and powerful aesthetic experience than narrative recitation.

Recap

- ▶ *Poetics* is Aristotle's systematic study of poetry, with special focus on tragedy.
- ▶ All fine arts, including poetry and drama, are forms of creative imitation called mimesis.
- ▶ Arts differ by medium, object, and manner of imitation, with poetry using language, rhythm, and harmony.
- ▶ The objects of imitation are human beings and their actions, shown as better in tragedy and worse in comedy.
- ▶ Poetry grows from natural human desires to imitate, to enjoy imitation, to learn through it, and to delight in rhythm and harmony.
- ▶ From early verse developed epic and tragedy dealing with noble actions, and comedy dealing with trivial or laughable actions.
- ▶ Aristotle defines tragedy as a serious imitation in action that uses embellished language, is performed not narrated, and brings about catharsis through pity and fear.
- ▶ The six elements of tragedy are plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle, with plot as the life and soul.
- ▶ A good tragic plot is complete, has beginning, middle, and end, and shows a change of fortune arranged with unity and probability.
- ▶ Complex plots include peripety, anagnorisis, and suffering, which together sharpen the tragic effect.
- ▶ The ideal tragic hero is a person of middling character who falls into misfortune through hamartia, an error of judgement rather than wickedness.
- ▶ Catharsis is the purification of pity and fear in the audience, giving emotional relief and insight into universal human suffering.

- ▶ Character in tragedy must be good, appropriate, true to life, and consistent, with actions following naturally from disposition.
- ▶ Epic poetry and tragedy share unity of action, but epic is narrative and wide in scope while tragedy is performed and more concentrated.
- ▶ Aristotle finally judges tragedy superior to epic because it is more unified, intense, and effective in arousing pity and fear.

Objective Questions

1. What term does Aristotle use for artistic imitation?
2. Which word names the emotional purification produced by tragedy?
3. What is the Greek word for the tragic hero's error of judgement?
4. Who is Aristotle's chief model of the epic poet?
5. What is the central structural element of tragedy according to Aristotle?
6. Which element of tragedy refers to choice of words?
7. Which element of tragedy refers to visual presentation on stage?
8. What kind of poetry narrates a long heroic story?
9. Which branch of poetry presents people as worse than they are?
10. Which unity does Aristotle regard as the most important for tragedy?
11. What is the sudden reversal of fortune in a tragic plot called?
12. What is the term for discovery or recognition in tragedy?
13. Which dramatic form does Aristotle finally consider superior to epic?
14. Which Greek dramatist wrote *Oedipus Tyrannus*?
15. What single word names Aristotle's general principle that poetry imitates life?

Answers

1. Mimesis
2. Catharsis
3. Hamartia
4. Homer
5. Plot
6. Diction
7. Spectacle
8. Epic
9. Comedy

10. Action
11. Peripety
12. Anagnorisis
13. Tragedy
14. Sophocles
15. Imitation

Assignments

1. Explain Aristotle's concept of mimesis and show how medium, object, and manner of imitation differ across the arts.
2. Discuss Aristotle's definition of tragedy in Chapter 6 and analyse how each part of the definition relates to the purpose of tragedy.
3. Examine Aristotle's account of the tragic plot, with detailed reference to peripety, anagnorisis, and suffering.
4. Analyse Aristotle's idea of the tragic hero and hamartia. How does this conception shape our response of pity and fear?
5. Compare epic poetry and tragedy as presented in *Poetics* and evaluate Aristotle's claim that tragedy is superior to epic.

Suggested Reading

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On the Sublime (Chapters 7–9) -Longinus

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Longinus's concept of sublimity or hypsos
- ▶ distinguish true sublime from false sublime in writing
- ▶ analyse the five sources that produce sublimity
- ▶ evaluate Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as sublime models

Prerequisite

On the Sublime is a critical treatise written around the first century CE, attributed to Longinus, though the author's identity remains uncertain. The work is addressed to Postumius Terentianus, a friend who shared Longinus's interest in the art of writing. Longinus wrote the treatise as a reaction to an earlier work by Caecilius of Calacte, which he found deficient in defining what makes writing truly great. The treatise is epistolary in form and covers forty four chapters, though the manuscript is fragmentary and chapters are not clearly marked.

Longinus lived during the Roman Empire, a period when rhetoric and literary taste were widely debated. He believed that great writing does not merely persuade but transports the reader, creating an overwhelming emotional and intellectual experience. His ideas have influenced later writers, especially during the Romantic period, who saw in his concept of the sublime a model for inspired and elevated creativity. The learner should be familiar with the basic features of Greek and Roman rhetoric, and have some knowledge of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which Longinus often uses as examples.

Keywords

Hypsos, Sublimity, Grandeur, False Sublime, Pragmatic Tests

Discussion

Longinus's *On the Sublime* is a landmark treatise on literary style, second only in importance to Aristotle's *Poetics*. The author, often called Dionysius Longinus or Cassius Longinus, writes in the form of a letter to his friend Postumius Terentianus, inviting frank criticism of his argument. The treatise is fragmentary but coherent, spread over forty four chapters that explore the nature of sublimity or *hypsos* in writing. Longinus defines the sublime as "the echo of greatness of spirit" and "the image of greatness of mind". He insists that truly great writing overwhelms the reader like a thunderbolt, carrying all before it and revealing the writer's full power in a flash. This distinguishes his view from the rhetorical tradition that focuses on persuasion and arrangement.

The work is written in the form of a letter and is fragmentary in structure, yet it maintains strong coherence of thought throughout its forty four chapters. The surviving manuscript does not indicate chapter breaks, but the ideas flow in a clear and deliberate manner. Longinus addresses his friend, referred to as "my dear Postumius Terentianus" or "my dear friend." He explains that both of them once read Caecilius of Calacte's work on great writing, but they were disappointed by the author's failure to define his subject clearly or guide his readers helpfully.

For Longinus, any treatise should do two things. It should explain its subject with clarity, and it should show the reader how to acquire the skill under discussion. Longinus intends to fulfil both aims, and he invites his friend to correct him wherever necessary. His tone is friendly, thoughtful, and serious. He presents his reflections on the nature of sublimity as a shared intellectual effort rather than a one sided lecture. Throughout the text he uses rhetorical address, speaking both

to his friend and to the wider audience. This framing device holds the arguments together, even though many parts of the work seem like self contained discussions.

3.3.1 General Summary

Longinus divides his argument into five broad stages. In the first stage, set out in chapter one, he proposes that great writing possesses a rare distinction of thought and expression which lifts great authors above others and gives them lasting fame. True greatness in literature does not rely merely on persuasion or neat arrangement of words. It has the power to move the reader in a sudden and overwhelming way. As Longinus describes it, great writing strikes like a flash of lightning and reveals the full force of the writer's mind in an instant. This idea differs strongly from the usual rhetorical emphasis on invention, structure, and decorum.

The second stage, which appears in chapters two to six, considers whether greatness in writing can be analysed as an art and studied critically. Longinus argues that natural talent is essential, yet even the most gifted writer benefits from method and discipline. He refers to errors that appear in writing, such as empty grandeur, childishness, false emotion, and coldness. A writer must therefore develop clear judgement to separate what is truly great from what is merely showy.

The third stage, in chapters seven and eight, identifies the practical tests of greatness and the main sources of expressive power. Longinus lists three tests by which greatness can be recognised. These involve social value, psychological impact, and the lasting approval of readers over time. He then sets out the five sources which provide the most reliable foundation for great writing. These include grandeur of thought, inspired passion, skilful use of figures of thought and figures of speech,



dignified expression, and an elevated and well structured composition.

The fourth stage, covering a long section from chapter nine to chapter forty three, contains detailed discussions on mental conception, the use of figures, the choice of diction, and the arrangement of rhythm and sound. Longinus also explains why great writing, even if imperfect, is superior to polished but modest writing.

The fifth and final stage, found in chapter forty four, reflects on the decline of rhetoric. Some Romans believed that eloquence had faded because freedom and democracy no longer existed. Longinus proposes another view. He argues that inner conflict and uncontrolled desire have weakened the human spirit. He believes that the experience of the sublime can restore the soul by lifting it above narrow self interest and showing it a larger vision of life.

Highlights from the Earlier Chapters

The treatise is written as a letter to Postumius Terentianus. Longinus criticises Caecilius for failing to define sublimity or explain its essential elements. Responding to his friend's request, he sets out to define sublimity and describe the methods by which it can be achieved. In the opening chapter he explains that he writes because Caecilius has not made the subject clear.

Longinus describes sublimity as the echo of a great spirit. It reflects the moral and imaginative strength of the writer. For him, the sublime is “a certain loftiness and excellence of language” and an image of greatness of mind. It is the quality that helps authors win enduring fame. Sublimity moves every reader, sometimes even against his will. A well timed sublime passage, like a flash of lightning, illuminates the whole subject. In chapter two he states that genius alone is not enough, for without guidance even the most gifted writer

will fail to receive proper appreciation.

In chapter three Longinus opposes artificial diction and unnecessary ornament. He identifies three barriers to true sublimity. These are tasteless grand speech, childish display of learning, and coldness of expression. Grandiloquence is the excessive use of decorated language which distracts from genuine expression. Puerility appears when a writer shows off learning in an immature or narrow way. Frigidity is the loss of intensity or feeling, sometimes seen even in the works of Plato and Xenophon. Longinus quotes the historian Timaeus as an example of cold exaggeration.

In chapter five he warns that the pursuit of novelty can be both helpful and harmful. Writers must therefore learn how to avoid faults that accompany attempts at sublimity. Chapter six explains that the surest way to reach true sublimity is to acquire a refined sense of judgment, something that only long experience can produce. Longinus distinguishes between the true sublime and the false sublime. Displays of showy splendour belong to the false sublime, which is shallow and unreliable.

3.3.2 Chapter 7: Markers of True and False Sublime

In Chapter 7 Longinus provides ways to tell the true sublime from the false. The true sublime uplifts the soul, fills the mind with joy, and stands the test of time; it is equally enjoyed by all, regardless of profession, age, or language. False sublime, by contrast, relies on excessive ornamentation and artificial diction; it may seem grand at first but loses its effect with each reading and is eventually discarded as verbose. Longinus stresses that genuine sublimity cannot be resisted; it carries universal appeal and becomes memorable because it reflects moral and imaginative greatness rather than mere verbal display.

Three Pragmatic Tests for Greatness

Longinus proposes three pragmatic tests to identify greatness in writing. The first is the social value test: “nothing is noble which it is noble to despise”. Wealth, social status, and political power do not constitute greatness because truly great souls can possess them but choose to disdain them. The second is the psychological impact test: whatever creates an enduring impression on the mind of the reader or hearer qualifies as great writing. The third is the test of time: greatness in writing satisfies all people at all times, and the agreed verdict of generations gives it an authority beyond dispute. These tests have social and moral implications because they connect literary excellence to human values that transcend personal ambition.

3.3.3 Chapter 8: Five Sources of Sublimity

Chapter 8 outlines the five principal sources of sublimity. The first is grandeur of thought, which depends on the writer’s ability to form noble impressions and ideas. The second is vigorous and spirited treatment of the passions, which adds emotional force. Both these sources are innate, involving vigour of mental conception and strong, inspired emotion.

The remaining three sources are products of art. The third is artifice in the use of figures, which are of two kinds: figures of thought and figures of speech. When used naturally, these figures invigorate style and elevate expression. The fourth source is dignified expression, subdivided into proper choice of words and use of metaphors and other ornaments of diction. The fifth source is majesty and elevation of structure, which depends on the harmonious arrangement of words and rhythm. Longinus warns that extreme conciseness can cripple

thought, while true brevity is economical and direct. Sublimity results from a harmonious blending of all these elements.

3.3.4 Chapter 9: Grandeur of Thought and Great Souls

Chapter 9 elaborates on the first source, grandeur of thought. Longinus affirms that “sublimity is the echo of a great soul”. Men with despicable or subservient dispositions cannot produce anything truly elevating. To achieve distinction of style, a writer must feed his soul on the works of great masters such as Homer, whose sublimity is so overpowering that it guides the mind towards higher ideals. Grandeur of conception must be enforced to give the subject proper treatment, and amplification, the collection of relevant details, helps to strengthen poetic creativity. Powerful and captivating images enable the reader to comprehend the writer’s vision more effectively.

Homer as the Model of Sublimity

Longinus quotes extensively from Homer’s *Iliad* to illustrate the force and vigour of sublime writing. He cites the description of Poseidon striding across the sea, causing the waves to part and sea beasts to leap in recognition of their king. The lines capture the divine nature in its pure, great, and undefiled form. He also quotes Ajax’s desperate prayer to Zeus during battle: “Zeus, Father, yet save thou Achaia’s sons from beneath the gloom, and make clear day, and vouchsafe unto us with our eyes to see! So it be but in light, destroy us!” Ajax does not plead for life, which would demean his heroic stature; instead he asks for a worthy death, even if it means fighting Zeus. Longinus praises Homer for sharing the full inspiration of combat, making the poet himself seem prophetic and frenzied with creative energy.



***Iliad* versus *Odyssey* – Rise and Decline of Genius**

Longinus contrasts the *Iliad* with the *Odyssey*, arguing that the former shows Homer at the height of his inspiration, full of action and conflict, while the latter reveals a decline. He describes the *Odyssey* as “the work of Homer’s old age”, characterised by narrative rather than dramatic action, and a love of marvellous tales rather than passionate intensity. The *Iliad*’s sublimities are sustained and packed with real life images, whereas the *Odyssey* lacks the same profusion of accumulated passions and the supple oratorical style. Longinus suggests that as great poets age, their creative passion declines and they turn to characterisation, producing what he calls “a comedy of manners”. This observation shows that even the greatest genius has limitations, and that sublimity is not a permanent gift but must be nurtured by continued engagement with life and passion.

3.3.5 Elaboration of the Other Sources of Sublimity

After discussing the first source, Longinus moves to the remaining four. The second source, spirited passion, contributes more to loftiness than the expression of ordinary emotion. This explains why he values the passionate courage of the *Iliad* more than the narrative calm of the *Odyssey*. He also prefers the forceful oratory of Demosthenes to the more polished style of Cicero. Passion must be used truthfully and at the right moment. Aristotle’s defence of emotion in tragedy is mainly moral, since he sees it as a way of purifying

the audience. Longinus values emotion for its beauty and artistic strength, which eventually leads to moral refinement.

Longinus then discusses the third source, the deliberate use of figures. He explains that figures must be used naturally and must arise from genuine feeling. When used well they raise the style. Figures such as the omission of conjunctions, inversion, repetition, direct address, and periphrasis heighten emotional effect and rhythm. But careless use of figures weakens the expression and makes the writing heavy or artificial.

The fourth source is dignified expression through the proper choice of words and the use of metaphors and other forms of decorated language. Ordinary words and striking words must be combined thoughtfully to preserve beauty and power. Words should illuminate the thought and give life to the imagery. It is unwise to use magnificent language for trivial matters because the result is always disappointing.

The final source is majesty and elevation of structure. This refers to the arrangement of words and the rhythm of the composition. A well balanced structure gives rise to an elevated style which moves the reader. Longinus warns that extreme conciseness limits thought and reduces its effect, whereas well judged brevity strengthens expression. Sublimity comes from a harmonious blending of all the essential elements: grand thought, sincere emotion, meaningful figures, dignified language, and elevated structure.

Recap

- ▶ *On the Sublime* is a first century CE treatise on literary greatness, addressed to Postumius Terentianus.
- ▶ Longinus defines sublimity (hypsos) as the echo of a great soul and the image of greatness of mind.
- ▶ True sublime overwhelms the reader like a thunderbolt, while false sublime relies on ornamentation and soon loses effect.
- ▶ The three pragmatic tests for greatness are social value, psychological impact, and the test of time.
- ▶ Social value means despising wealth and power; psychological impact means creating lasting impression; the test of time means universal acclaim across ages.
- ▶ The five sources of sublimity are grandeur of thought, vigorous treatment of passions, artifice in figures, dignified expression, and majesty of structure.
- ▶ Grandeur of thought and passionate emotion are innate; figures, diction, and structure are products of art.
- ▶ Grandeur of thought requires feeding the soul on great masters such as Homer.
- ▶ Homer's *Iliad* exemplifies sublimity at its height, full of action and inspired passion.
- ▶ The description of Poseidon and Ajax's prayer show Homeric power, force, and vigour.
- ▶ The *Odyssey* reflects Homer's decline, with more narrative and less dramatic intensity.
- ▶ Longinus calls the *Odyssey* a "comedy of manners" because character replaces passion in old age.
- ▶ Sublimity is not permanent; even great genius must sustain passion through engagement with life.
- ▶ Figures of speech such as asyndeton, hyperbation, and metaphor must serve genuine emotion, not mechanical display.
- ▶ Dignified expression and harmonious structure create rhythm and elevate the soul, but excessive conciseness cripples thought

Objective Questions

1. What Greek word does Longinus use for sublimity?
2. Who is the recipient of Longinus's treatise?
3. Which earlier critic's work does Longinus find deficient?
4. What metaphor does Longinus use for the effect of true sublimity?
5. What are the three pragmatic tests for greatness in writing?
6. What is the first source of sublimity according to Longinus?
7. Which two qualities are innate sources of sublimity?
8. Which three qualities are products of art among the sources?
9. Which epic poet does Longinus use as the prime model of sublimity?
10. Which Homeric epic does Longinus praise for sustained passion?
11. Which Homeric epic does Longinus see as a product of declining genius?
12. What term does Longinus use for the *Odyssey's* focus on character over passion?
13. What figure of speech involves omission of conjunctions?
14. What is the danger of using excessive ornamentation in writing?
15. What does Longinus warn about extreme conciseness in style?

Answers

1. Hypsos
2. Postumius Terentianus
3. Caecilius
4. Thunderbolt
5. Social value, psychological impact, test of time
6. Grandeur of thought
7. Grandeur of thought, vigorous treatment of passions
8. Figures, dignified expression, majesty of structure
9. Homer
10. Iliad
11. Odyssey
12. Comedy of manners
13. Asyndeton
14. It creates false sublime
15. It cripples thought

Assignments

1. Explain Longinus's definition of true sublimity and show how it differs from false sublimity.
2. Discuss the three pragmatic tests Longinus proposes for recognising greatness in literature.
3. Analyse the five sources of sublimity and evaluate which sources are innate and which are products of art.
4. Examine Longinus's treatment of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as examples of the rise and decline of poetic genius.
5. Evaluate Longinus's view that sublimity is the echo of a great soul and its moral and social implications for writers and readers.

Suggested Reading

1. Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Trans. by W. H. Fyfe, Harvard University Press, 1995.
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BLOCK - 04

Renaissance and Romantic Tradition

Unit-1 : “An Apology for Poetry” - Philip Sidney

Unit-2 : “Preface to Lyrical Ballads”- William Wordsworth



“An Apology for Poetry”

Philip Sidney

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Sidney’s defence of poetry against Puritan attacks
- ▶ explain the definition and functions of poetry as imitation
- ▶ analyse poetry’s superiority over history and philosophy
- ▶ evaluate Sidney’s classification of poetic forms
- ▶ assess his views on English drama and diction

Prerequisite

Philip Sidney (1554–1586) was a prominent Elizabethan poet, courtier and literary critic whose work profoundly shaped the development of English literary criticism. He emerged during a formative period in English cultural history when the Renaissance had begun to transform intellectual and artistic thought across Europe. Sidney’s education encompassed classical learning in both Greek and Latin, acquired at Shrewsbury School and Christ Church College, Oxford, and refined through extensive continental travel. His position at Queen Elizabeth’s court afforded him access to the most sophisticated intellectual circles of his age. Sidney was not merely a creative writer; he was a theorist of considerable sophistication whose defence of poetry stands as the earliest significant work of formal literary criticism in the English language.

The late sixteenth century witnessed heated debates about the moral and social value of literature. Puritan critics, most notably Stephen Gosson, launched vigorous attacks on poets and poetry, arguing that they corrupted public morals, wasted time, and fostered vice. Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* (written 1585, published 1595) emerged as the principal intellectual response to these attacks. Rather than offering a defensive retreat, Sidney constructed an elaborate and philosophically sophisticated argument for poetry’s essential role in human development and social cohesion. Drawing on classical learning from Plato and Aristotle, Sidney articulated a vision of poetry as a divine art form capable of moving humanity towards virtue whilst simultaneously delighting the intellect. His critical method combined rigorous classical argumentation with passionate advocacy, establishing a framework for literary criticism that would influence English studies for centuries to come.



In this unit, you will explore Sidney's life and historical context, the intellectual circumstances surrounding the composition of *An Apology for Poetry*, and the critical principles he articulated in defence of the poetic art. You will examine his definitions of poetry, his arguments against specific charges of corruption and falsehood, his analysis of poetic genres, and his vision of poetry's superior status among all branches of human knowledge.

Keywords

Apology, Imitation, Mimesis, Vates, Renaissance Criticism

Discussion



Fig 4.1.1 Sir Philip Sidney

Sir Philip Sidney is remembered not only as a poet and courtier but also as one of the earliest and most important literary critics of the English Renaissance. Educated in the classical tradition, with a strong grounding in Greek and Latin, Sidney absorbed the ideas of ancient writers such as Plato and Aristotle, which deeply shaped his critical thinking. His exposure to European humanist culture during his travels further broadened his intellectual outlook. These experiences equipped him to respond thoughtfully to contemporary attacks on poetry. In *An Apology for Poetry*, written during a period of withdrawal from court life, Sidney defends poetry against moral and educational criticism and presents it as a noble and necessary art that combines delight with instruction.

As a critic, Sidney argues that poetry is superior to both philosophy and history because it teaches virtue more effectively through imaginative example. He defines the poet as a “maker” who creates ideal images of life, guiding readers toward moral truth without forcing doctrine upon them. Drawing on classical au-

thority while addressing the concerns of his own age, Sidney justifies poetry as a powerful influence on the reader's mind and emotions. His *Apology for Poetry* stands as the first major work of literary criticism in English and marks a crucial moment in the development of Renaissance critical thought, establishing poetry as an art of ethical, imaginative, and cultural value.

4.1.1 Literary Criticism During Sidney's Period

The European Renaissance and Its Impact on English Letters

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 triggered one of the most significant intellectual migrations in European history. Greek scholars, fleeing the Ottoman advance, dispersed throughout European nations, bringing with them the philosophical and literary heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. This migration proved immensely beneficial to Western Europe, as these scholars introduced Europeans to classical texts and ideas that had been largely inaccessible during the medieval period. European countries gained direct access to Greek art, literature and philosophy, which catalysed an intellectual, cultural and literary awakening throughout the continent, a phenomenon known as the European Renaissance.

Prior to this transformative period, Christian fundamentalism and superstitious beliefs had dominated European intellectual life. World literature and art had been largely neglected or actively suppressed. Theology, combined with religious superstition, had shaped intellectual outlook and cultural priorities. Spiritual authority held considerably greater power than temporal authority, and standards of judgement were predominantly theocratic rather than secular, literary, cultural or aesthetic. The emergence of the Renaissance fundamentally altered this worldview, introducing humanistic values that emphasised human potential, artistic achievement and the study of classical antiquity.

Greek writings profoundly influenced European thought and stimulated widespread interest in art and literature. Greek and Roman classics were translated into English and other European languages, making them accessible to an increasingly educated reading public. The invention of the printing press by William Caxton further democratised access to these classical texts, allowing for the rapid dissemination of ideas. Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, together with works by Plato and other Greek writers, "helped to bring on a Renaissance of theoretical activity, an era of criticism, which remains one of the most conspicuous in literary history."

The Development of English Critical Theory

The European Renaissance originated in Italy and exerted influence across Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. English literary theory of this period was substantially shaped by Italian poetics and rhetorical scholarship. Early English figures who embraced this Continental influence included three Cambridge scholars: Sir John Cheke, Roger Ascham and Thomas Wilson, collectively known as the "Cambridge School."

These figures held dual commitments: they revered Greek and Roman classics as supreme models for their own writing, whilst simultaneously championing the enrichment and development of the English language and English literature. Cheke advocated for English to be "written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled." Ascham argued passionately for "English matter in the English tongue for Englishmen," emphasising the importance of native-language literary development. Wilson authored *The Art of Rhetoric* (1553), modelled on Cicero and Quintilian, which has been termed "the first book or system of criticism in our language."

This period witnessed considerable scholarly engagement with the classification of poetic forms and metrical studies. Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesy* and Webb's *Discourse of English Poetry* represented the first sustained attempts to introduce classical metres into English poetry and to develop a systematic poetics for the English language. During this era, a notable literary circle called the "Aeropagus" was established in 1579, comprising a group of poet-scholars devoted to the reformation of English verse. Sidney held membership in this circle, whose principal objective was to reform English versification by substituting the Greek and Latin system of prosody for the accentual English system. The name "Aeropagus" itself recalled the famous hill in ancient Athens that housed the highest court of the state. Besides Sidney, the circle's membership included Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser and Edward Dyer. The members endeavoured to popularise the quantitative classical system of prosody in preference to the English accentual system of versification, actively advocating for unrhymed classical metres, particularly the hexameter. Although these efforts influenced scholars and creative writers of the age, driving them to Greek and Roman classics for literary enrichment, it was Harvey



alone who consistently advocated for the classical system of versification. The other circle members, including Sidney, ultimately continued to write in traditional English forms, recognising the incompatibility of classical prosody with English linguistic structures.

4.1.2 The Poetry Controversy of 1579 and the Puritan Attack

Concurrently with these scholarly debates, literary opinion became sharply divided. Two distinct factions emerged: one supporting the classical tradition and another upholding the native tradition. Thomas Campion championed the classical tradition in his *Art of English Poesy*, whilst Samuel Daniel, author of the celebrated sonnet sequence *Delia*, eloquently defended the cause of the native tradition, arguing for the validity of English forms and metres.

In 1579, another significant controversy erupted in England, focused directly on poetry and its social effects. This dispute arose from the transformative impact of the Renaissance, which had familiarised people with ancient Greek and Roman learning during an era of peace and prosperity under Queen Elizabeth's reign. This period witnessed unprecedented literary activity, particularly in poetry, drama and criticism. The increasing output of poems and plays came under vigorous attack from Puritan critics, who contended that such works corrupted public morals, wasted time better spent on religious devotion, and fostered vice and licentiousness. Stephen Gosson led one particularly virulent assault through his treatise *The Schoole of Abuse*, which he dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney without securing permission for the dedication. Gosson's stated aim was to denounce poets and poetry, describing his work as "a pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters and such like caterpillars of a Commonwealth." He characterised

poets as "fathers of lies," and condemned the theatre for fostering wantonness, pride, deceit and similar vices. Gosson did not deny that some poems and plays possessed merit; rather, he advanced a rigidly moralistic definition of "good" literature, insisting that all literary works must be explicitly morally edifying. His censure of poetry and drama targeted their alleged abuse and misuse, leading him to brand poets as "enemies to virtue." He condemned music as debilitating, drama as inciting "popular debauchery," and tragedies as replete with violence and cruelty.

Sidney's Response: An Apology for Poetry

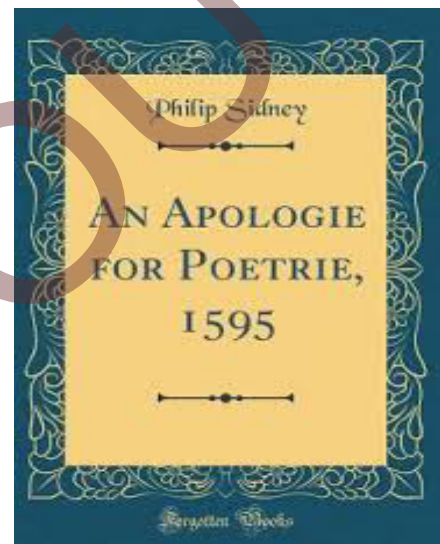


Fig 4.1.2 *An Apology for Poetry*

The Schoole of Abuse provoked replies from numerous writers committed to defending literature and the poetic art. Foremost among these defenders was Sir Philip Sidney, whose *An Apology for Poetry* (also titled *The Defence of Poetry*) serves as the most sophisticated and comprehensive rejoinder to Gosson's attacks. Although Sidney composed this defence in 1585, the work was not published until 1595, nearly a decade after its composition and nine years after Sidney's death in battle.

An Apology for Poetry marks the formal beginning of literary theorising in England. It presents a rigorously reasoned defence of poetry, drawing upon Sidney's extensive classical learning. Whilst Gosson had grounded his attack in Platonic philosophy, Sidney based his defence on Aristotelian principles, demonstrating his mastery of classical critical traditions. In this work, Sidney articulates compelling reasons for valuing poetry highly and for dismissing the various objections levelled against it. He expounds his views on the nature of poetry, on style, diction and poetic form, and on the social and moral functions of literature. Sidney's arguments are logically structured, philosophically sophisticated and passionately expressed, offering a treatise on critical principles that would establish the foundations of English literary criticism.

According to Sidney, poetry represents the oldest and most noble of all branches of knowledge, a claim he supports through extensive reference to classical antiquity. *An Apology for Poetry* constitutes a meticulously organised and carefully reasoned work of critical theory. Sidney's arguments emphasise poetry's universality, its consistently high esteem across the ages, and its essential role in human development. He directs attention to the poetic content preserved for us by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, as well as canonical poets such as Homer, Boccaccio and Petrarch. Sidney celebrates poetry's glorious past whilst lamenting its contemporary condemnation by Puritan critics. He affirms that poetry is a divine gift and proceeds to articulate his foundational definition, one that would shape critical discourse for generations to come.

4.1.3 *An Apology for Poetry*: Overview and Structure

Sidney's Definition of Poetry

Sidney defines poetry with precision and philosophical rigour: "Poetry is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with the main aim of teaching and delighting the readers."

This definition represents Sidney's synthesis of Aristotelian poetics with his own philosophical understanding. The term *Mimesis* (imitation) carries profound significance in Sidney's critical framework. It does not mean mere mechanical copying of nature; rather, it refers to the imaginative representation of life through language. Sidney's formulation diverges slightly from Aristotle's original conception. Whereas Aristotle regards poetry as an art of imitation valued primarily for the natural pleasure it affords, Sidney identifies an additional and crucial purpose: poetry aims simultaneously at teaching and delighting the reader. For Sidney, poetry functions as an activity consciously directed towards moving humanity towards virtuous action and moral improvement. This elevated conception of poetic purpose, as an instrument for moral instruction combined with aesthetic pleasure, distinguishes his position from purely aesthetic theories of poetry.

Sidney categorises poetry into three types: Religious, Philosophical and Creative. This classification derives from Renaissance critic Julius Caesar Scaliger and reflects Sidney's attempt to map the entire range of poetic expression. Religious poetry, exemplified by the

Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, serves the purpose of prayer, praise of God and seeking solace during affliction. Philosophical or moral poems convey knowledge and offer comfort and consolation through the articulation of ethical principles. Right poetry, however, represents the genuine and true form of poetry. It delights and instructs the reader simultaneously, achieving the perfect union of aesthetic pleasure and moral edification. Sidney emphasises that a significant difference exists between genuine poetry and abstract, mythical philosophy, a distinction comparable to that between genuine painters or artists and their inferior counterparts. Genuine artists demonstrate inventiveness and originality, whereas minor artists merely imitate existing models without creative transformation.

Sidney maintains that poetry achieves the aim of purifying our understanding, enriching our memory, and ennobling and refining our judgement and actions. The knowledge derived from poetry elevates us to noble heights of perfection in our earthly existence. Whilst disciplines such as Astronomy, Mathematics, Music and Philosophy furnish us with knowledge concerning heavenly bodies and illuminate us spiritually and metaphysically, poetry alone ennobles and enlightens us in a holistic manner, integrating intellectual understanding with moral development and emotional refinement.

The Poet as Maker and Creator

Sidney draws upon the Greek term for poet - *poiētes*, meaning “maker” - to establish a crucial distinction between the poet and other knowledge-workers. All sciences concern themselves with and rest upon Nature, Sidney argues. The astronomer observes the stars and records his findings. The geometrician and arithmetician similarly observe and study the movements and forms of objects in Nature.

The musician likewise draws harmony from Nature. The natural philosopher and the moral philosopher similarly derive their lessons from Nature. The lawyer, grammarian, rhetorician, logician and metaphysician depend upon Nature as the basis for their sciences and conclusions.

However, the poet does not wholly depend upon Nature. The poet creates an alternative Nature. He functions as an inventor, producing things either superior to Nature or things that never existed in Nature - such as demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras and similar fantastical beings. Sidney emphasises that poets have rendered the earth more glorious and magnificent than Nature itself. The poet's rivers surpass the beauty of actual rivers; his trees prove more fruitful than real ones; his flowers display greater fragrance than those found in nature. The poet's world glimmers with gold whilst Nature remains merely brazen. Nature has never created characters such as Theagenes, Pylade, Orlando or Cyrus, yet the poet brings such figures into being through imaginative creation.

Sidney does not, however, deny Nature's greatness. What he suggests is that the poet, through artistry, transcends Nature. The poet is not merely a builder of airy castles or creator of fantasies detached from reality. The world the poet creates emerges from his imagination, fashioned in imitation of Nature yet surpassing it. In creating a Cyrus or other exemplary figure, the poet excels and furnishes the world with a model for it to emulate. Thus poets stand as divinely inspired sages and prophets, creators second only to the divine creator. Sidney maintains that God did not intend Nature to be superior to man, whom He created through “divine breath” in His own likeness. In comparison to Nature, man operates as a maker and was intended to be so by God, the ultimate Maker.

4.1.4 Arguments in *An Apology for Poetry*

Poetry's Antiquity and Universal Respect

Sidney argues that poetry has commanded respect since time immemorial among peoples both barbarous and civilised throughout the world. In Turkey, poets occupied a status second only to prophets and priests. In Ireland, they enjoyed devoted reverence. The indigenous peoples of the Americas possessed their Areylos, songs celebrating the deeds of their ancestors and honouring the gods. In Wales, bards were held in such high regard that their memory persists to the present day.

The Romans designated a poet as *vates*, meaning prophet, diviner or foreseer. The Romans even believed that poets furnished righteous guidance. The poet Virgil was venerated as an oracle, and lines from his poetry, selected at random, were consulted for guidance about the future. Ancient oracles such as the Sibyl and those of Delphi pronounced their prophecies in verse when consulted. According to Sidney, the Romans possessed good justification for calling a poet *vates*; for prophets have consistently been poets. He offers the example of David, whose Psalms constitute a supreme achievement. In these psalms, David personifies God and permits us to perceive Him in all His magnificent glory. Thus, Sidney demonstrates that poetry's connection to prophecy and divine inspiration extends from ancient times into the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Poetry's Superiority to History and Philosophy

Sidney proceeds to compare poetry, history and philosophy, arguing systematically for poetry's superiority over both. The historian records events that were genuinely accomplished or occurred in the past. The poet, by contrast, does not reproduce the past; rather,

he imagines things that never existed. However, the poet concerns himself with universal understanding. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, distinguishes poetry as dealing with universal considerations, unlike history which addresses particulars. The historian documents facts as they occurred; the poet presents facts as they ought to be. The historian's account of events represents factual truth, whereas the poet's representations constitute truth coloured by imaginative vision. This contrast illuminates the poet's superiority over the historian. The historian remains bound to particular events and their chronological sequence, whereas the poet transcends particularity to articulate universal truths applicable across ages and cultures.

Sidney's comparison of poetry and philosophy reveals similar advantages for poetry. One might concede that the philosopher teaches more perfectly than the poet, yet fails to move us as powerfully as the poet does. Philosophy does not move us as profoundly as poetry achieves. The poet accomplishes the function of moving us, the crucial function of transforming intellectual understanding into action, with particular effectiveness. The philosopher shows us the way and informs us of particular details, but this assistance benefits only those readers who approach the philosopher's work "with attentive studious painfulness." The poet, by contrast, comes to us bearing "words set in delightful proposition," which inspire enchanting music and emotional engagement. He invokes tales such as those of Hercules and Achilles to convey to us "the right description of wisdom, valour and justice" in narratively compelling form.

Sidney discerns that philosophers such as Plato and Boethius frequently "borrow the masking raiment of poetry" to present the concept of virtue, implicitly acknowledging poetry's superior power to move and persuade. He



cites the example of Menenius Agrippa, an orator and philosophical thinker of ancient Rome. When the entire populace of Rome had fragmented into factions, Agrippa united them through a tale about all the parts of the body mounting a revolt against the Senate. Sidney offers another example: Nathan the prophet. When David erred by denying God through adultery followed by murder, Nathan visited him and related to him a tale of a man whose beloved lamb was ungratefully taken from him. Through this narrative, Nathan moved David to repentance more effectively than direct philosophical rebuke could have achieved. Thus, Sidney demonstrates that poetry's capacity to delight whilst instructing renders it superior to both history and philosophy in achieving moral improvement.

Defence Against Specific Charges

Sidney methodically addresses the four principal charges brought against poetry by Puritan critics:

First Charge: Poetry is a Waste of Time

Sidney repudiates the contention that reading and writing poetry constitutes a waste of time. According to him, poetry instructs and moves us towards virtue more fruitfully than any other branch of knowledge. If one must choose between studying poetry and studying other disciplines, the choice should favour poetry because of its unique capacity to engage both intellect and emotion in the pursuit of moral development.

Second Charge: Poetry is the Mother of Lies

Sidney offers a flat denial of this charge. He asserts that of all writers, the poet proves the least prone to falsehood. It remains impossible for the poet to lie, even were he to harbour the desire to do so. Astronomers, physicians and

geometricians may affirm things as true that later prove false. Historians too cannot escape falsehood, for they do not cite authorities or produce solid proof for all their affirmations. The poet, by contrast, does not labour to tell us what is; rather, he presents what should or should not be. "Though the poet recounts things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not." The poet furnishes not affirmations of truth; he writes things allegorically and figuratively rather than affirmatively. The characters he creates bear fictitious names. These inventions render his characters and pictures more vivid and compelling. One does not call a lawyer a liar for employing fictitious names in legal arguments. Thus, the notion that poets, by virtue of their engagement with fiction, must be liars represents an ancient misconception.

Third Charge: Poetry Abuses Human Intellect and Corrupts Morality

Sidney's contention holds that the abuse of poetry does not constitute an argument against its proper use. He concedes that poetry addresses love, lust and vanity. However, we cannot attribute fault to poetry itself. It is human intellect that abuses poetry; when abused, poetry can harm. Yet when properly employed, poetry serves more beneficially than any other branch of learning. Sidney emphasises that every art and science admits to abuse. Poetry in itself remains neither corrupt nor sinful. Medicine, Law, and even Scripture itself may be subjected to abuse. One must avoid this abuse or misuse of poetry. Poetry itself stands as a source of enlightenment and delight.

Fourth Charge: Poetry Renders Men Passive and Effeminate

Sidney cannot conceive of any period in human history without poetry. The English have

never existed without poetry. Memory preserves no era earlier than that of poetry. Poetry has consistently played a vital role in human history and in the formation of national character. Poetry inspired Turks and Tartars in times of war. Alexander the Great, having left his teacher Aristotle behind, carried the epics of Homer with him into battle. The example of Achilles inspired him to bravery and military excellence. Thus poetry, far from rendering men effeminate, has historically served as inspiration for martial valour and heroic action.

Sidney's Assessment of Contemporary English Poetry and Drama

Sidney directs his attention towards the drama, poetry and critical conditions of his own era. He observes that English tragedies and comedies do not consistently observe the classical rules of dramatic composition. In *Gorboduc*, though correctly composed in the Senecan style, Sidney discerns primarily stately speeches and resonant phrases. Whilst the play achieves the purpose of poetry through teaching and delighting the audience, it does not present itself as an exemplary model for subsequent tragedies because it violates the classical Unities of Time and Place. Sidney advocates for tragedy to remain bound to the laws of poetry derived from classical dramatic practice. He emphasises the value of the three Unities: Unity of Time (action occurring within a single day), Unity of Place (action occurring in a single location) and Unity of Action (a single coherent plot). The observance of these three Unities must constitute standard practice in serious drama.

Sidney opposes what he calls tragicomedy, a hybrid form combining tragedies and comedies. He criticises the mingling of these traditionally distinct forms, arguing that such combination weakens dramatic works. Tragicomedies generate loud laughter but not the genuine delight which constitutes comedy's

true aim. Sidney distinguishes carefully between laughter and delight. Delight contains permanent joy within it, arising from things that accord with human nature. Laughter, by contrast, represents merely the result of scornful tickling, arising from what appears disproportionate or contradictory to human nature. Delight constitutes the fruit of permanent joy, whilst laughter represents only momentary scornful reaction. The goal of drama must be to achieve delight, not merely to provoke laughter.

Sidney remarks that the lyrics and sonnets of his time exhibit artificial and uninspired qualities. The mode and manner of writing lyrical poems cause "poesy's honesty to be called in question." Contemporary English poets demonstrate poor judgement in their use of words, exhibiting excessive fondness for puns, conceits and wordplay of various sorts. They do not represent true imitators of classical masters such as Tully (Cicero) and Demosthenes. Their use of art aims to display art rather than to conceal it, violating the classical principle that art should be invisible, that technique should serve expression rather than calling attention to itself.

4.1.5 Sidney as a Critic

Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* has long been regarded as one of the most outstanding works in the history of English literary criticism. It is true that he depends largely on classical and Italian critics and borrows many of their theories and principles. He had studied the classical writers thoroughly, yet his critical opinions are both original and thought-provoking. He applies classical rules wherever he finds them useful. Atkins's evaluation of Sidney as a critic throws light on his originality and critical method.

"*Apology for Poetry* has been described as an epitome of Renaissance theory; but this



description can be misleading if it is taken to mean nothing more than a summary reproduction of classical and Italian doctrines. What gives the work its undoubted value is its originality, the skill with which Sidney draws on earlier teaching, selecting, adapting, and fusing together ideas gathered from many sources in order to set forth his own independently formed conception of poetry. Apart from the Italians, he makes use of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, and Plutarch; but like Horace, he subscribes to the authority of no one school of thought. His treatment throughout is elective; his conclusions arise from personal reflection as well as wide reading, and they bear the stamp of a lofty personality. At the same time, there is no doubt that Platonic influence played a considerable, perhaps dominant, role in shaping his views, owing to a natural affinity of spirit. To him, poetry was a natural human activity, enabling men to sing of beauty and truth and to satisfy their longing for a transformed world, thus nurturing what is good and noble in them. Far from being merely a tool for moral teaching, poetry was a concrete and inspiring revelation of human ideals, and in this sense, a criticism of life. This element of permanent truth formed the substance of Sidney's message to an age often perplexed and even hostile. By boldly facing traditional objections, claiming a place for poetry in intellectual and social life, and attempting a serious treatment of the poetic art, he offered a vindication of poetry, restoring something of its ancient prestige and meaning and providing enlightenment and reassurance to his generation."

Apology for Poetry is the earliest practical attempt in English to deal systematically with poetic art. Sidney's judgments on contemporary poetry and drama display mature wisdom and sound scholarship. In style and presentation, the work shows a freshness and vigour

characteristic of Sidney alone. "Writing for courtly circles from a vein far removed from the fantastic or pedestrian style of contemporary pamphlets and disputations, he achieved a form of expression unsurpassed even in an age of daring experiments in prose. Nowhere else do we find such a happy mingling of the ideal and the practical, such a blend of dignity and humour, sincerity and irony, controlled enthusiasm and lively colloquialism, or that unstudied simplicity and grace which pervade the whole work."

Sidney's critical approach moves away from the strict Aristotelian conception of imitation, even though he uses the term frequently. He develops instead a theory of *ideal imitation*. According to him, the poet's world is of value because it is better than the real world and presented in such a way that the reader is inspired to imitate it in life. Thus, the Aristotelian notion of imitation is transferred from poet to reader: the poet does not merely imitate but creates; it is the reader who imitates what the poet creates.

Sidney upholds the views of the Roman poet Horace that poetry must both delight and instruct. He points out that "verse is but an ornament and no cause to poetry" and asserts, "It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate."

Spingarn, an American critic, remarks: "The introduction of Aristotelianism into England was the direct result of Italian critical influence, and the agent who brought this new influence into English letters was Sir Philip Sidney. His *Defence of Poesy* is a veritable epitome of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance, so thoroughly imbued with its spirit that no other work - Italian, French, or English - gives so complete or so noble a conception of the temper and principles of Re-

naissance criticism.”

Sidney’s *Apology* is constructive and contributes greatly to a clearer understanding of literary values. He refers to works such as “Chevy Chase”, *Gorboduc*, and “The Shepherd’s Calendar” with an open and generous mind. The presentation, method, and freshness are distinctly his own. His *Apology* is undoubtedly a landmark in English literary criticism. He is, in many ways, the real father of English criticism, not Dryden, as Dr Samuel Johnson later suggested.

Dramatic criticism in England begins with Sidney. He was the first to formulate clear principles of dramatic art in English. His ideas were original and creative, his approach judicious, and his work continues to be admired. As critics have said, “As a fitting legacy of one of England’s noblest and gentlest souls, the work will continue to charm modern readers with its idealism, its sanity, its humour, and its grace.”

4.1.6 Critical Analysis

Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* represents far more than a defensive response to Puritan attacks. It constitutes the first systematic and comprehensive work of literary criticism in English, establishing critical principles and methodologies that would influence English literary studies for centuries. Sidney’s approach combines several distinctive features that merit careful examination.

Sidney’s critical method is grounded in extensive classical learning. His engagement with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Plato’s *Republic*, and works by Roman critics such as Horace demonstrates his mastery of the critical tradition extending from antiquity. However, Sidney does not merely reproduce classical authorities. Rather, he engages in creative synthesis, adapting classical principles to specifically English circumstances and concerns.

His definition of poetry as *Mimesis* with the dual purpose of teaching and delighting represents his distinctive contribution to critical theory, a formulation that transcends mere slavish adherence to classical sources.

While Sidney engages in abstract philosophical argument, he consistently grounds his theory in concrete examples and practical observations. His references to specific poets, specific plays, and specific social situations prevent his criticism from becoming merely theoretical abstraction. When arguing for poetry’s power to move, he cites the specific examples of Menenius Agrippa and Nathan the prophet, making his arguments vivid and persuasive through illustration.

Central to Sidney’s critical approach is his conviction that literature possesses profound moral significance. Unlike critics who view literature as mere entertainment or aesthetic pleasure, Sidney insists on literature’s connection to human development and moral improvement. This ethical dimension of his criticism would influence subsequent critics, particularly those of the twentieth century such as F.R. Leavis, who similarly emphasised literature’s moral and cultural functions.

Sidney argues not merely that poetry is valuable, but that it is essential. His contention that poetry has commanded respect across all cultures and throughout history positions poetry as fundamental to human society. Poetry is not a luxury or entertainment for the idle; it is a vital force in civilization itself. This vision of poetry as socially and culturally necessary represents a significant claim that extends beyond aesthetic appreciation to encompass cultural and ethical claims.

The Significance of Sidney’s Arguments

Sidney’s demonstration that poetry has existed and been respected across all cultures and



throughout history establishes poetry as a fundamental human activity rather than a cultural contingency or passing fashion. This universality argument proves particularly effective in the context of Puritan attacks, suggesting that those who condemn poetry stand against the entire weight of human civilization and wisdom.

Sidney's careful distinction between poetry and falsehood proves crucial to his defence. By arguing that poets do not claim truth-value for their fictional creations but rather present them allegorically and figuratively, Sidney separates poetry from lying. This distinction remains philosophically important and continues to influence contemporary critical discussions of fiction and truth-telling.

Sidney's emphasis on poetry's distinctive power to move human beings towards virtue, a power superior to that of philosophy or history, establishes emotional and aesthetic engagement as legitimate and important. Poetry does not merely convey information; it transforms understanding into action by engaging the reader's emotions and imagination.

Sidney's advocacy for the classical Unities of Time, Place and Action represents his attempt to establish rational principles for dramatic composition. Whilst later critics would challenge the absolute necessity of these unities, Sidney's insistence on coherence, probability and unified action continues to influence dramatic criticism.

Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* established foundational principles for English literary criticism that continue to resonate in contemporary critical practice. His insistence on close reading, moral seriousness, and literature's cultural function influenced subsequent critics throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Romantic critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge engaged with Sidneian principles whilst adapting them to new aesthetic contexts. Victorian critics continued to grapple with Sidney's definitions and arguments.

In the twentieth century, critics such as F.R. Leavis explicitly acknowledged Sidney's influence in their own critical projects. Leavis's emphasis on close reading, moral seriousness, and literature's role in shaping human sensibility echoes Sidneian principles established nearly four centuries earlier. Contemporary criticism, even when departing from Sidney's specific arguments, continues to work within the intellectual space he established.

Sidney's defence of poetry against charges of immorality and corruption resonates in contemporary debates about literature, film, video games and other media forms. His argument that the abuse of an art form does not invalidate the art itself remains pertinent to ongoing cultural debates. His vision of literature as a moral and intellectual force rather than mere entertainment continues to inform serious critical engagement with texts.

Recap

- ▶ Philip Sidney (1554–1586) was an Elizabethan poet, courtier and literary critic whose work shaped the development of English literary criticism
- ▶ Sidney received classical education in Greek and Latin, acquired at prestigious institutions and refined through extensive continental travel
- ▶ *An Apology for Poetry* (written 1585, published 1595) represents the earliest significant work of systematic literary criticism in English

- ▶ The work emerged as a response to Puritan attacks on poetry, particularly Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse*
- ▶ Sidney defines poetry as *Mimesis*, an art of imitation whose purpose is to teach and delight the reader
- ▶ The poet functions as a “maker” or creator, producing imaginative works that transcend mere imitation of nature
- ▶ Sidney categorises poetry into three types: Religious, Philosophical and Creative, with Creative poetry representing the highest form
- ▶ Sidney argues that poetry possesses greater antiquity and has commanded more universal respect than history or philosophy
- ▶ Poetry proves superior to history because it deals with universal truths rather than particular facts
- ▶ Poetry proves superior to philosophy because it possesses the unique power to move human beings towards virtue
- ▶ Sidney defends poetry against four principal charges: that it wastes time, that it is the mother of lies, that it corrupts morality, and that it renders men effeminate
- ▶ Sidney argues that poets cannot lie because they do not claim truth-value for their fictional creations
- ▶ The abuse of poetry does not invalidate poetry itself; rather, abuse represents a misuse rather than a condemnation of the art form
- ▶ Sidney's assessment of English drama critiques violations of the classical Unities of Time, Place and Action
- ▶ Sidney opposes tragicomedy as a hybrid form that weakens dramatic effect by mingling comic and tragic elements
- ▶ Sidney distinguishes between laughter and delight, arguing that genuine comedy aims at delight rather than mere laughter
- ▶ Sidney criticises contemporary English poetry for its artificial style, excessive wordplay and display of technique rather than concealment of art
- ▶ Sidney's critical method combines classical learning with English circumstances, integrating theory with practical illustration
- ▶ The moral seriousness of literature constitutes a central principle in Sidney's critical approach
- ▶ Sidney positions poetry as essential to human civilization and cultural development
- ▶ Sidney's influence extends throughout subsequent centuries, shaping critical practice from the Renaissance through the contemporary period

- Contemporary critics continue to engage with Sidneian principles concerning literature's moral function and cultural significance

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *The School of Abuse* attacking poetry?
2. What Greek term does Sidney use for imitation?
3. What three kinds of poetry does Sidney identify?
4. Which two writers does Sidney compare the poet to, finding the poet superior?
5. What are the three unities Sidney insists upon in drama?
6. What does Sidney call the mingling of tragedy and comedy?
7. What distinction does Sidney make between delight and laughter?
8. Which ancient poet does Sidney cite as an example of divine inspiration?
9. What does Sidney say is the poet's main aim?
10. Which Roman term for poet means prophet or diviner?
11. Which of Sidney's works was inspired by his disappointment in love?
12. What does Sidney say poetry creates: another what?
13. Which classical metre does Sidney discuss regarding ancient versification?
14. What three things guide poetic genius according to Sidney's conclusion?

Answers

1. Stephen Gosson
2. Mimesis
3. Religious, philosophical, creative
4. Historian and philosopher
5. Time, place, action
6. Bad
7. Delight is permanent joy; laughter is momentary scornful tickling
8. David
9. To teach and delight
10. Vates
11. Astrophel and Stella
12. Nature
13. Hexameter
14. Art, imitation, exercise

Assignments

1. Explain Sidney's definition of poetry as imitation and show how it differs from Aristotle's conception.
2. Discuss Sidney's argument that poetry is superior to both history and philosophy.
3. Analyse Sidney's classification of poetic forms and his evaluation of each form's function.
4. Examine Sidney's defence against the charge that poetry is the mother of lies.
5. Evaluate Sidney's views on English drama, particularly his insistence on the three unities and his criticism of tragic comedy.

Suggested Reading

1. Sidney, Sir Philip. *An Apology for Poetry*. Edited by Geoffrey Shepherd, Manchester University Press, 1973.
2. Duncan-Jones, Katherine. *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*. Yale University Press, 1991.
3. Myrick, Kenneth Orne. *Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman*. University of Nebraska Press, 1965.
4. Maslen, R. W. *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counter-espionage and the Duplicity of Fiction in Early Elizabethan Prose Narratives*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
5. Helgerson, Richard. *The Elizabethan Prodigals*. University of California Press, 1976.



Preface to Lyrical Ballads

-William Wordsworth

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Wordsworth's poetic theory and principles clearly
- ▶ explain the choice of rustic subject matter and language
- ▶ analyse the relationship between prose and poetic language
- ▶ evaluate the poet's functions and poetry's superiority
- ▶ assess the role of metre and the four creative phases

Prerequisite

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, intending to give a new kind of poetry to English readers. Wordsworth's aim was to choose ordinary subjects and present them extraordinarily, while Coleridge reversed this process. The first volume lacked an introduction, but friends advised Wordsworth to add a preface for the second edition in 1800, with an appendix in 1802. Wordsworth's poetry broke from his predecessors and contemporaries, and the Preface explains his concept of poetry, language, metre, and other factors. It serves as an introduction to his poems and a defence of his theory, not an attack on other poets.

The Preface is divided into three parts: subject matter, theme, language, and style; functions of the poet, poetry's superiority, pleasure and truth; and further discussion of language, metre, creative process, and defence against critics. Wordsworth argues that essential human feelings are best seen in humble rustic life, and that purified rustic language is most appropriate for poetry. He claims no essential difference exists between the language of prose and poetry, except for metre. The learner should understand Wordsworth's context, his break from neoclassical conventions, and his emphasis on feeling over action.

Keywords

Lyrical Ballads, Rustic Language, Metre, Spontaneous Overflow, Poetic Diction

Discussion

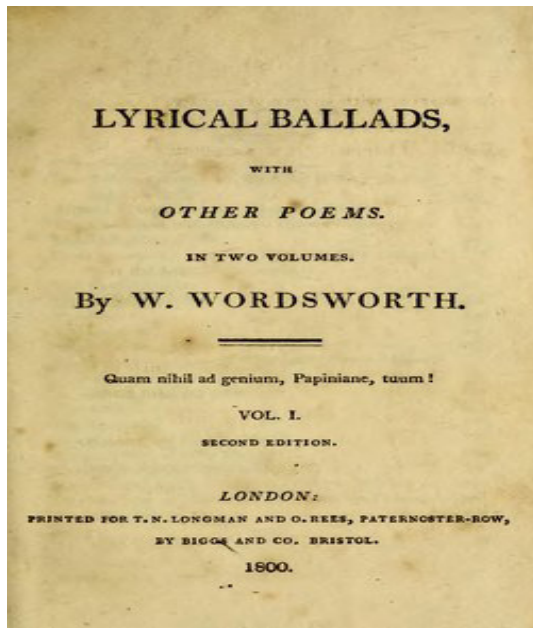


Fig 4.2.1 *Lyrical Ballads*

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) published an anthology of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. The aim of the poets was to give a new kind of poetry to the reading public in England. They wrote two different types of poems in the volume. Wordsworth's aim was to choose ordinary subject matter for his poetry and present it in an extraordinary manner. Coleridge reversed the process: his subject matter was extraordinary and it was presented in an ordinary manner. The first volume of *Lyrical Ballads* did not have any introduction. Friends of Wordsworth advised him to include one in the next edition. Wordsworth's poetry was different from that of contemporary poets and his predecessors. Readers who were attuned to the poetry of Wordsworth's predecessors and contemporaries might not understand the new poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Therefore, on the advice of well-wishers, Wordsworth added a preface to the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1800, and an appendix was added in 1802.



In the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”, Wordsworth explains his concept of poetry, the language to be used in poetry, metre, and other factors. The “Preface” should be taken as an introduction to Wordsworth's poems and a defence of his theory of poetry rather than an attack on any other poet or his concept of poetry.

The “Preface” may be divided into three parts dealing with different aspects of poetry and the functions of a poet. The first part throws light on the subject matter, theme, language, and style of writing in poetry. The second part deals with the functions of a poet, the superiority of poetry over other branches of knowledge, and pleasure and truth in poetry. The third part focuses on further discussion of the language of poetry, metre, the different stages in the creative process of poetry, and Wordsworth's reply to critics in defence of his poems. The three parts are examined one by one for detailed analysis.

4.2.1 Summary of “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”

Simple and Rustic Subject Matter for Poetry

Wordsworth states that his principal object is to choose incidents and situations from common life, presented in language really used by men, thrown over with a colouring of imagination. He is concerned with making themes interesting by reproducing the primary laws of human nature. The essential feelings of the human heart can best be seen in people living in humble and rustic surroundings, who express such feelings truly. Elementary human feelings coexist in simplicity and are forcefully expressed in simple settings, whereas urban sophistication and vanity prevent city-dwellers from plain frank expression. Pristine human disposition is found only in rustics living in villages, always in communion with nature, which motivates noble feelings. Therefore,

Wordsworth chooses his themes from rustic life.

Simple and Rustic Language for Poetry

Wordsworth says that simple and rustic language must be used in poetry, but it should be purified by removing hackneyed expressions, slang, faulty structures, and colloquialisms. He has adopted such language in *Lyrical Ballads* for three reasons: rustics are in communion with nature from which the best part of language is derived; rustics lack social vanity and express feelings simply and unelaborated; and rustic language arises from repeated experience and regular feelings, giving it simplicity and clarity, free from artificial poetic diction. This language establishes immediate rapport with readers.

Thoughts and Feelings in Poetry

A good poem has definiteness of purpose and should enlighten readers with new ideas while purifying their feelings. Though a poet cannot write every poem with definiteness of purpose, when he writes poetry in general with this notion, his habitually elevated thoughts and feelings automatically produce good poetry. Wordsworth says, “All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. A poet possesses more than usual organic sensibility, thinks long and deeply over his subject, and writes good poetry. Thoughts and feelings are powerful factors in the creative process, with thoughts modifying feelings. Serious contemplation helps a poet choose right and important thoughts and arrange them in order. In his poems, feelings are more important than action and situation, for feelings kindled within a reader make him think, whereas action and situation are only momentary.

Inferior Emotional Excitement

The human mind sometimes craves inferior and pseudo-excitement, developing a taste for

extraordinary and uncommon events, but this cannot cause inferior excitement in readers. In Wordsworth’s time, big cities grew with crowds everywhere, and monotonous city life caused boredom. People craved something unusual, and journals, magazines, newspapers, theatres, and cheap literature attracted them, lowering their taste and misleading them. They lost power of judgment, could not appreciate Shakespeare and Milton, and enjoyed inferior works. Wordsworth aims to refine readers’ taste and sensibility so they can read good works of art. Instead of treating subjects causing cheap excitement, he presents noble and dignified subjects in *Lyrical Ballads* to create genuine interest.

Style of Language in Lyrical Ballads

Having dealt with subject matter, Wordsworth discusses his style of language in the poems. He has adopted “the very language of men”, greatly avoiding personifications of abstract ideas, which are not natural or regular traits of English language. Men use personifications only when emotionally motivated, and Wordsworth has used them in such situations. He avoids what is usually called poetic diction—inappropriate use of symbols, metaphors, images, similes, and the inane phraseology of neoclassical writers. The new poetry gives pleasure akin to poetry only. At times he uses elevated language because the subject matter is elevated. He differs from contemporary poets in employment of literary devices, using appropriate poetic diction and avoiding unnecessary figures.

The Essential Difference between Prose and Poetry

Wordsworth asserts, “There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”. Critics hold that rhyme and metre differentiate poetry from prose, but Wordsworth maintains that a poet can use language really used by

men after purging it of impurities like slang, vulgarity, and archaism. What remains is the finest part of language and can be used in poetry. Poetry can exist even without metre; metre is only an adjunct. Poetry sheds natural and human tears, not celestial ichor; the same human blood circulates through both prose and poetry. The source of creation and appeal to readers is the same for both forms.

The Evolution of Language in Poetry

The appropriate use of language in poetry concerns the poet, who must avoid artificial language. Characters must speak in language natural to their disposition. Self-conscious use of elevated language unsuitable to character or situation creates only artificiality. When feelings are rightly expressed, they take care of language evolution in a poem. The passions and feelings of characters make a poet choose appropriate language with suitable devices like symbols, images, metaphors, and similes. What matters in poetry is expression of feelings, not poetic language itself. Wordsworth says poets should be judged by how they exploit language and express passions appropriately, helping readers reappraise works of greatest poets and understand them better.

The Functions of a Poet

The second section of the Preface deals with the poet's functions, poetic pleasure, and poetry's superiority over other knowledge. A poet is a man speaking to men, endowed with more lively sensibility, enthusiasm, and tenderness, reacting to external objects more intensely than others. His expression of feelings is greater, and he possesses a more comprehensive soul with intense imagination, imagining absent things as present. He can identify with others and express their feelings besides his own. The joys of nature, life, and others he feels and expresses. His power of communication is sharpened, presenting thoughts, ideas, and emotions precisely. He expresses

emotions appropriate to characters or situations and uses appropriate language. Poetry's function is to give pleasure; when a poet uses appropriate language, poetry imparts pleasure spontaneously. This is higher pleasure, not mere amusement.

Pleasure and Truth in Poetry

Poetry is the image of man and nature, presenting truth akin to nature and reproducing reality. Poets explain universal truths through particular characters and situations. Poetry's first aim is to give pleasure along with truth. Pleasure is the chief principle of all beings. Different feelings give pleasure - sympathy with the afflicted, acquisition of knowledge by scientists, and imitation. A poet presents man, objects, and their reactions, causing birth of new ideas, sensations, convictions, and intuition, giving pleasure to readers. So pleasure is the first principle, followed by truth.

Poetry: Superior to All Branches of Knowledge

Wordsworth argues that poetry is superior to all branches of knowledge. A poet is like a translator who adds beauty to expression, but Wordsworth rejects this analogy. The pleasure imparted in poetry is higher pleasure, and the truth presented is higher truth. According to Aristotle, poetic truth is higher than truth of history or philosophy. Poetry is more philosophical than philosophy itself. History deals with particular facts; philosophy deals with abstract truths. Poetry supplies both particular and general truths, making it superior to both. Scientific truth is particular and cannot be shared by all, whereas poetic truth is universal and common to all. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression in the countenance of all Science. Scientists dissect appearances, but poets look deep into inner reality, presenting truth coloured by feelings, passions, and emotions. Despite differences of soil, climate, language,



and customs, poets bind all people by passion and knowledge, conveying love and unity. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge, as immortal as the heart of man.

Language of Poetry

In this section Wordsworth elaborates on poetic language, metre, creative process stages, and defence against criticism. He argues that language cannot be merely ornamental; the poet's message must not be hampered by stylistic devices. A poet appeals through message, vision, subject matter, and treatment, not ornamental diction. Poets must use language appropriate to characters, and even when speaking in their own person, elevated language is unsuitable because poets speak the same language as common men. No poet writes for his own gratification; poetry is meant for all readers. Therefore poets should use the language of common men, purged of impurities.

The Irrelevance of Ornamental Language in Poetry

Wordsworth insists that language cannot be merely ornamental. The poet's message must not be hampered by stylistic devices. Appeal comes through message, vision, subject matter, and treatment, not ornamental diction. A poet must use language appropriate to characters; even when speaking in his own person, elevated language is unsuitable because poets speak the same language as common men. No poet writes for his own gratification; poetry is meant for all readers, so poets should use language of common men purged of impurities.

Metre and Poetic Diction

Wordsworth defends metre and rejects artificial poetic diction. Metre has regular uniform pattern and adds beauty to poetry, whereas poetic diction has no standard rules, varies from poet to poet, and creates confusion. Tradition

proves metre's value, as many past poets employed it. Some critics argue metre gives minimum pleasure and poetic diction is needed to heighten pleasure, but Wordsworth contends they underrate metre's power. Metre alone can give pleasure, as proved by past poets whose works still delight readers. He favours metre and rejects poetic diction outright because it creates confusion.

Metre and Its Controlling Purpose

Poetry's end is to produce excitement, but excitement may exceed proper bounds. In a state of excitement, a poet may not present ideas and feelings uniformly and cogently. Emotional excitement may cause loss of uniform expression, requiring a controlling factor, metre. Metre helps control excessive flow of emotional expression. When presenting pathos, metre is required because it checks excessive expression of painful feelings. Metre creates a dream-like atmosphere and a sense of "remoteness", making pathos more reasonable, bearable, and endurable. This significant use of metre appears in Shakespeare's plays. The human mind derives pleasure from perception of "similitude in dissimilitude" and "dissimilitude in similitude" - pleasure from contrast. Metre provides contrast and causes pleasure. Wordsworth restricts discussion due to space but notes this principle.

The Four Phases of Poetic Creation

Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity". Though he calls poetry spontaneous, it is not written on the spur of the moment. Poetry writing involves four stages: (1) observation, (2) recollection, (3) recrudescence, and (4) actual writing. A poet observes objects, persons, places, etc., and some register in his mind. At the second stage, he recollects from his subconscious what has been registered, which occurs only in tranquillity. The third stage is

recrudescence, a fresh outbreak of emotions already registered. He broods over observed things, causing excitement that purifies emotions and rearranges thoughts, feelings, and emotions for execution. At the fourth stage, the poet actually writes poetry. Metre adds more pleasure to the final work.

Wordsworth's Defence of His Poems against Dubious Criticism

Wordsworth replies to critics who may find faults in his poetry. Critics may say his subjects are unworthy of poetry, but he defends that a subject's worth depends on right and effective treatment, not its nature. Critics may object to particular words and phrases, but Wordsworth rejects this view, saying feelings are primary, language secondary. A poet chooses appropriate words as a creator; this cannot be dictated by others. To substantiate that feelings are more important than language, Wordsworth compares lines from Dr Johnson's "The Hat" with the popular ballad "Babes in the Wood". Both have similar word choice and order, but the ballad expresses noble feelings while Johnson's poem lacks them. Wordsworth appeals to readers to judge his poems by feelings expressed, not be misled by dubious critics. He says poetry reading is an art requiring "accurate taste", developed by constantly reading the best works. Poetry imparts pure pleasure and lasting moral truth. Contemporary readers should avoid ineffective writers like Pope and Dryden. If poets follow his line and readers develop accurate taste, good poetry will be produced. He asks readers to read his poems attentively to see if he has implemented what he said and whether it is worth implementing. Their answer will determine the success of his new poetic endeavours.

Appendix to Preface to Lyrical Ballads

Wordsworth added an appendix in 1802 discussing the nature and origin of poetic diction. Early poets, excited in composition, used figurative and metaphorical language. Subsequent poets tried to imitate this elevated language but failed, producing only artificial language. Past readers appreciated artificial language, thinking poets deserved veneration. This spread elsewhere. Wordsworth presents excerpts from Gray, Pope, Johnson, and Cowper to show their language is artificial and ineffective. He maintains there is no difference between prose and poetry language; difference lies only in treatment of ideas and expression of feelings. Metre is only an adjunct and optional. Poetry remains appealing and interesting even without metre.

4.2.2 Critical Analysis

Preface: A Critical Document

Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is a critical document of great significance and a landmark in the history of literary criticism. At the outset, Wordsworth explains that the Preface is not intended as a full account of his poetic theory or a systematic defence of his views. Rather, because the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* represent a new kind of poetry, he feels an introduction is needed so that readers may understand and appreciate his aims. His purpose is to mark a sharp break with the older poetic tradition and to prepare readers for a different kind of poetic practice.

The dominant theme of the Preface is Wordsworth's argument about poetic diction. Many critics have observed that his immediate target is the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" of

contemporary poets. More broadly, he challenges what F. W. Bateson later called “a positive theory of poetic diction” - the long-standing eighteenth-century belief that certain kinds of diction were unsuitable for poetry, while other specialised modes were deemed essential.

Wordsworth’s central objection to what he elsewhere calls “a vague, glossy, and unfeeling language” is that separating poetic language from ordinary speech would inevitably separate poetry from human life. The value of poetry, he insists, lies in its ability to share experience and communicate truth. As he famously puts it, “Poetry sheds no tears ‘such as angels weep,’ but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial fluid that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of both.” The 1798 Preface clearly states his views on the nature and function of poetry and on the process of poetic creation. For Wordsworth, the honour of poetry lies in the fact that its material may be found in any subject capable of interesting the human mind—an idea he further expands in later Prefaces.

Wordsworth believes the object of poetry is to give pleasure, but not in the shallow sense of entertainment. For him, poetic pleasure is profound and ennobling. He holds that poetry is superior to history, philosophy, or science. It is “the most philosophical of all writing,” the passionate expression of truths that science discovers. Science appeals mainly to the intellect; poetry deepens these truths by adding feeling and making them vivid and humanly significant.

In the extended 1802 Preface, Wordsworth defines the poet’s nature and role. “A poet is a man speaking to men.” He differs from others not in kind but in degree. He possesses greater imagination and greater communicative power. He can grasp truths that others overlook,

perceive the essence of things, and convey his insight to readers.

The Preface also outlines Wordsworth’s view of poetic creation, scattered across several passages. He asserts that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” a phrase he repeats for emphasis. The process begins in tranquillity with the recollection of past emotional experiences. These emotions are then modified by thought and connected with dormant memories and feelings in the subconscious mind. Thought and emotion interact until the “spontaneous overflow” begins and shapes itself into a poem. As one critic notes, “Spontaneous seems to imply both that the shaping process cannot be begun at will and that once begun, it is to some extent self-directing.”

The Preface covers many themes and raises numerous questions. As Margaret Drabble observes, “It is quite impossible to give a full account of the questions raised by the Preface,” for Wordsworth moves freely across topics such as the relation of poetry and science, the use of metre, the place of pleasure in art, questions of taste, Aristotle, and the history of poetry. She adds that the document “raises every knotty aesthetic problem one can think of,” handled with “amazing confidence and energy.” The Preface reveals a mind that has thought long and deeply. Though it is a defence of his position, it is neither dry nor dogmatic. The reader is left with the impression of a rare combination of creative and critical power, of passion and thought. “It cannot be read too often,” Drabble concludes, “for every time it seems to contain something new and unexpected. It marks the beginning of a new age.”

Despite its merits, the Preface has been criticised. Coleridge observed that parts of it are obscure and that Wordsworth often violated his own principles in practice. He noted an

excessive elaboration in the diction of the latter half. Garrod criticises it as “a propaganda pamphlet,” driven at times by exaggeration and over-emphasis. Derek Roper similarly finds it tactless as an introduction to a collection of poems, accusing Wordsworth of doctrines that are sometimes pedantic, sometimes arrogant, and sometimes defensively absurd. Yet Roper concedes that the Preface remains “a great irritant to thought,” provoking questions and stimulating discussion.

4.2.3 Critiques of Wordsworth's Principles of Diction

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction was strongly criticised by Coleridge and T. S. Eliot.

Coleridge's Criticism

Coleridge was the first major critic to challenge Wordsworth's theory of poetic language. He argues that a purified or selectively chosen form of everyday speech, as Wordsworth recommends, would not actually differ much from the language already used by any intelligent speaker. More importantly, Wordsworth's acceptance of metre undercuts his own claim that poetry should employ “the real language of men.” Metre inevitably alters the shape and movement of sentences, giving poetry a distinct verbal character that prose does not share, including in Wordsworth's own poems. If a poet is free to use metre, which is an artificial device, Coleridge sees no valid reason to ban what Wordsworth calls “poetic diction,” since both devices can heighten pleasure and meaning for the reader. He also dislikes the vague term “real language of men,” preferring “ordinary language,” or *lingua communis*, because speech always carries individual, social, and universal elements. No single group's language can claim to be more “real” than another's.

Coleridge further argues that the finest parts of language come from thought, reflection, and the growth of the human mind rather than from raw natural experience. As societies develop, they form abstract ideas, ideas that simply cannot be expressed through the plain and limited vocabulary of rural life. If a poet relies entirely on rustic speech, he would also have to adopt the rustic's limited mental world, which Coleridge considers a step backward for art. For poetry to rise to its full potential, it must draw on the full range of human expression, not restrict itself to the narrow boundaries of countryside language.

T. S. Eliot's Criticism

Eliot exposes contradictions in Wordsworth's theory. In the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* introduction, Wordsworth claims to use “the language of conversation in the middle or lower classes of life.” Eliot asks whether he examined the language of the upper classes, which would be just as appropriate if the characters belonged to that class. From 1800 onward, Wordsworth refers to “a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation,” and later to bringing his language “nearer” to such speech. Eliot notes the shift from imitation to approximation, revealing inconsistencies across the Prefaces. The phrase “real language of men” remains vague and hard to apply.

Critics have also pointed out that Wordsworth rarely followed his own theory. His poems often contain inverted constructions and vocabulary beyond the speech of Cumberland rustics, whom he describes as “real men.”

Though Wordsworth's theory of poetic language contains flaws and contradictions, its significance cannot be denied. O. Elton summarises its achievement well: Wordsworth rejected the artificial diction of his age and sought a poetic medium grounded in the life



and speech of ordinary people. Even though he did not always adhere to his own principles or define them clearly, he demonstrated in practice the dignity and expressive strength

of plain language. Many of his finest poems use a diction that, though simple, is unmistakably poetic. His theory remains influential and continues to provoke thought.

Recap

- ▶ Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 to introduce new poetry.
- ▶ Wordsworth added a Preface in 1800 and an appendix in 1802 to explain his theory.
- ▶ He chose simple rustic subject matter because essential human feelings are best expressed there.
- ▶ Rustics live in communion with nature and express noble feelings simply and truly.
- ▶ Rustic language must be purified by removing slang, colloquialisms, and hackneyed expressions.
- ▶ Good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity.
- ▶ Thoughts and feelings are powerful factors; thoughts modify feelings in the creative process.
- ▶ City life creates craving for inferior excitement, lowering taste and judgment.
- ▶ Wordsworth avoids personification of abstract ideas as it is not natural to English language.
- ▶ He rejects poetic diction - inappropriate symbols, metaphors, and neoclassical phraseology.
- ▶ No essential difference exists between prose and poetry language; metre is the only adjunct.
- ▶ Poetry is the image of man and nature, presenting truth akin to nature.
- ▶ Poetry is superior to history, philosophy, and science because it gives universal truth and pleasure.
- ▶ Metre controls excessive emotional expression and creates remoteness, making pathos bearable.
- ▶ Poetry writing involves four stages: observation, recollection, recrudescence, and actual writing.

Objective Questions

1. What year did Wordsworth first publish *Lyrical Ballads*?
2. What two types of subjects did Wordsworth and Coleridge choose?
3. What does Wordsworth call the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings?
4. Where are essential human feelings best expressed, according to Wordsworth?
5. What three things must be removed from rustic language?
6. What is the first aim of poetry?
7. Which branch of knowledge does Wordsworth claim is superior to poetry?
8. What device controls excessive emotional expression in poetry?
9. How many stages does Wordsworth identify in poetic creation?
10. What does Wordsworth call the employment of same language in prose and poetry?
11. Which poet does Wordsworth cite as supporting critics' views?
12. What does Wordsworth say metre adds to poetry?
13. What does Wordsworth compare poetry's pleasure to?
14. What three qualities should guide poetic genius?

Answers

1. 1798
2. Ordinary and extraordinary
3. Poetry
4. Rustic surroundings
5. Slang, colloquialism, hackneyed expressions
6. Pleasure
7. None (poetry is superior)
8. Metre
9. Four
10. Prosaism
11. Thomas Gray
12. Beauty
13. Spontaneous overflow
14. Art, imitation, exercise

Assignments

1. Explain Wordsworth's reasons for choosing simple rustic subject matter and language for his poetry.
2. Discuss Wordsworth's view that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and poetry.
3. Analyse the four phases of poetic creation according to Wordsworth and their significance.
4. Evaluate Wordsworth's claim that poetry is superior to all other branches of knowledge.
5. Examine Wordsworth's defence of his poems against critics who find fault with his subject matter and language.

Suggested Reading

1. Wordsworth, William. *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, Routledge, 1991.
2. Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 1953.
3. Bateson, F. W. *Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation*. Longmans, Green, 1954.
4. Prickett, Stephen. *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Lyrical Ballads*. Edward Arnold, 1975.
5. Gill, Stephen. *William Wordsworth: A Life*. Oxford University Press, 1989

BLOCK - 05

From the Victorians to the Modernists

- Unit-1** : “Function of Criticism in the Present Time”-
Matthew Arnold
- Unit-2** : “The Language of Paradox”
Cleanth Brooks
- Unit-3** : “Tradition and Individual Talent”
T.S. Eliot
- Unit-4** : “The Great Tradition”
F.R. Leavis



“Function of Criticism in the Present Time”

Matthew Arnold

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ▶ distinguish between creative and critical faculties effectively.
- ▶ explain how criticism creates conditions for artistic creation.
- ▶ analyse Arnold’s concept of disinterestedness in critical practice.
- ▶ evaluate the role of intellectual atmosphere in literary production.
- ▶ apply Arnold’s critical principles to contemporary literary analysis

Prerequisite

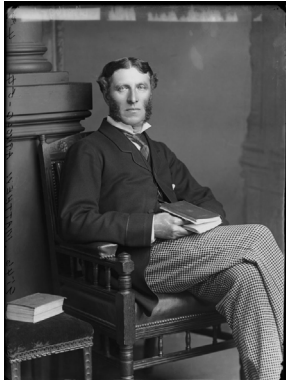
Before studying this unit, learners should possess a foundational understanding of nineteenth-century English literature, particularly the works of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley. Familiarity with the historical context of the Victorian era, including the aftermath of the French Revolution and its impact on English thought, will enhance comprehension of Arnold’s arguments. Additionally, learners should understand basic critical terminology and have read representative works by major European writers, particularly Goethe and Shakespeare, as these are central to Arnold’s illustrations.

A grasp of classical literary principles and Greek philosophy will prove beneficial, as Arnold frequently references classical ideas such as “grand style” and “excellence.” Learners should also be acquainted with the general aims and methods of literary criticism, including the concepts of textual analysis and interpretative practice. Prior exposure to the concept of intellectual movements and their cultural effects will facilitate understanding of Arnold’s discussion about epochs of concentration and expansion.

Keywords

Disinterestedness, Critical Effort, Creative Faculty, Cosmopolitan Criticism, Free Play of Mind,

Discussion



Figf 5.1.1 Matthew Arnold
(1822–1888)

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) was the most influential literary critic of the Victorian era. David Daiches, a major twentieth-century critic, called him “the great modern critic,” recognising his lasting significance. Arnold began his career as a poet but gradu-

ally turned towards criticism, especially after being elected to the Chair of Poetry at Oxford in 1857. His critical works include his Preface to the 1853 Poems, three lectures on translating Homer (1861), lectures on Celtic literature (1867), and most importantly, his *Essays in Criticism* (first series 1865, second series 1888).

The essay “The Function of Criticism in the Present Time” first appeared in the *National Review* in November 1864. Arnold later placed it as the opening essay in his *Essays in Criticism*, making it the gateway to his critical philosophy. The essay emerged from Arnold’s deep concern about the state of English culture. He saw what he called “cultural anarchy” everywhere in Victorian England, and he wrote with the conviction that criticism had a vital role to play in cultural regeneration. His essay is significant because it establishes the critic not merely as a literary judge but as someone carrying larger cultural and moral responsibilities. Arnold believed that the critic could shape the intellectual atmosphere of an age and thereby create the conditions necessary for great creative work to flourish.

We note that the title of the essay is “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”. This essay held special significance as it

aimed at civilising society and putting an end to the cultural anarchy which Arnold found in Victorian Britain. Therefore, it becomes necessary to read the essay and assess its arguments within the social context of the time in which it was written. Understanding the historical background enhances our appreciation of Arnold’s critical concerns and his urgent call for intellectual reform.

5.1.1 Summary of “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”.

The Creative Faculty Versus the Critical Faculty

Arnold begins the essay by recalling remarks he had made in another context regarding the great need for and importance of criticism in English literature. Many people had suggested that he ascribed too much importance to criticism and asserted that the creative effort of the human spirit was much superior to the critical effort. Wordsworth, for whom Arnold held the greatest respect, spoke disparagingly of criticism and argued that the critic could not possess a sensitivity fine enough to appreciate the finer influences of genuine poetry. According to Wordsworth, the time spent on writing a critique would be better spent on original compositions. A false and malicious critique would cause much harm, whereas an original composition, however mediocre it might be, would not cause harm.

Arnold finds this argument untenable. He argues that if a man feels he can produce some effect in the field of criticism, he would not readily spend time in the field of creative effort for which he has no aptitude. While critical activity may be lower than creative activity, he does not agree that it is better to devote time to inferior creative work rather than to criticism. Arnold points out that he cannot accept that Dr Johnson, instead of writing his *Lives of the Poets*, should have continued pro-

ducing plays like *Irene*. Nor can he agree that Wordsworth, instead of writing his admirable *Preface*, should have continued to produce inferior works such as his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. He expresses his satisfaction that Goethe, one of the greatest poets, wrote a great deal of criticism.

Arnold acknowledges that critical effort is lower in rank than creative power. However, he insists that man may use his creative faculty in producing great critical works, not only in the creation of great works of literature and art. This distinction allows for a more expansive understanding of creativity itself.

A Creative Writer Needs New and Fresh Ideas

The exercise of creative faculty in the production of great works of art and literature is not possible in all epochs and at all times. Arnold elaborates on this crucial point by explaining that the creative artist works with certain elements and materials. In the case of literature, this material exists in the form of ideas. If this material is lacking in a certain age, creative work is not possible. There may be periods when there is a lack of this current of fresh and new ideas. A creative genius does not discover new ideas, for that is the business of a philosopher. A literary artist's work is one of synthesis and exposition. Arnold writes, "the grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery." The artist is inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere and by a certain order of ideas. He deals with these divinely and presents them in the most effective and attractive combinations. He creates beautiful works with these ideas.

Arnold argues that two powers must combine for the creation of great literature: the power of the individual and the power of the historical moment. The individual alone is not

enough without the opportunities provided by the times. This observation underscores the interdependence of individual talent and historical circumstances in producing great art.

Criticism Makes Creation Possible: It Prepares the Ground

Creative activity is possible only when there is a fresh current of ideas and a suitable intellectual environment. It is the function of criticism to create such an atmosphere and such a current of ideas. Criticism can create conditions suitable for the production of creative works of great merit. The critic in all branches of knowledge, whether theology, philosophy, history, art or science, should see the object as it is in itself, or as it really is. A critic, by acquiring wide knowledge not merely of literature but also of other subjects, can create an intellectual environment in which a creative artist can do his work. Criticism can establish a current of ideas which, if not absolutely true, is yet true in comparison with the older order of ideas. The new ideas reach society and there is stir and growth, and out of this stir come the creative epochs. In Arnold's opinion, criticism can prepare the ground for the effort of creativity to be successful. This preparatory function of criticism is essential for cultural flourishing.

Poets Need Critical Effort

A poet must know the world and understand all aspects of human life before they address them in their poetry. This knowledge of the world, which is absolutely necessary if a poet's work is to have any significance, involves a great deal of critical effort. The modern age is a complex one, and without critical effort, creative effort in the modern age would remain poor and barren. It is possible for poets to acquire their knowledge from books, but it is best to acquire it from a current of the best ideas as they exist in the intellectual atmosphere. There was such a burst of activi-

ty in the England of Shakespeare and in the Greece of Pindar. In those ages, society was saturated with fresh and new ideas, and this made society alive and intelligent. Even if such an all-pervasive and diffuse intellectual atmosphere could not exist for all times, there should be a large body of men who are cultured and free in their thinking. It was because of the existence of such a body of individuals that Goethe could produce his creative works. That is why Goethe's poetry has enduring qualities while Byron's does not, even though both poets had immense productive power. Goethe's productive power was nourished by a great deal of critical effort. This contrast illustrates how intellectual cultivation strengthens artistic achievement.

Creative Activity of the Nineteenth Century Was Premature Because of the Lack of Critical Effort

In England, the burst of creative activity in literature during the first quarter of the nineteenth century was somewhat premature, as it proceeded without enough data or material to work with. There was no national glow of thought and life, no national growth and stir of intellect, nor was there the culture and force of learning and criticism as there had been in Germany in the time of Goethe. In early nineteenth century England, there was a dearth of fresh ideas required for successful creative effort and, as a result, English poetry from this period had plenty of energy and creative force, but did not have adequate knowledge to reinforce it. In other words, it lacked the critical effort and the current of best ideas which are the material of poetry. Arnold observes that this makes "Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth, even profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety." These poets lacked the material to work with. Wordsworth would have been a greater poet if he had read more books.

Reading need not be the only method of gaining the necessary knowledge for becoming a poet. Pindar and Shakespeare were not excessive readers. However, Arnold explains, these writers lived in periods of history which were characterised by a current of ideas that animated and nourished the creative faculty to the highest degree. Such conditions did not exist in the first quarter of the nineteenth century in England, and so there is a lack of a thorough interpretation of life in the poetry from that period. This demonstrates how external circumstances shape artistic production.

The French Revolution: Why Creative Activity is Lacking After It

Some may point out that there was plenty of intellectual stir and activity in the early nineteenth century, brought about by the French Revolution. However, Arnold highlights the difference: the French Revolution became political and practical, rather than remaining a purely intellectual movement. In contrast, the Renaissance and the Reformation were intellectual and spiritual movements which produced a current of great ideas that benefited the literature of those periods. No such benefit could come out of the French Revolution for it was a movement of a political and practical nature. The Revolution in France led to an era of concentration in England, which withdrew into itself, away from foreign ideas and thought, fearing a similar revolution might occur. Burke typifies this epoch of concentration when he speaks eloquently against the Revolution. This defensive posture prevented England from benefiting from the intellectual ferment that might have nourished her creative writers.

Criticism Should Be Disinterested

Arnold asserts that criticism must follow the path of disinterestedness to be truly useful. Criticism should be a free play of the mind



upon all subjects it touches, rejecting any ulterior, political or practical influences. It should value knowledge and ideas for their own sake, not for their practical applications. True criticism is the free play of the mind on all subjects, aiming to know the best that is known and thought in the world, without any political motives. Criticism should uncover what is best in thought and knowledge and share it with others, creating a current of new and fresh ideas in the process, with inflexible honesty and ability.

Arnold notes that in contemporary criticism, there is a lack of disinterested search for knowledge and the creation of new currents of ideas. Practical considerations have often guided criticism. He remarks, “our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve...the play of mind is second.” Journals in Britain were mainly the organs of political parties and did not pursue ideas for their own sake. The state of English criticism was poor, but Arnold was optimistic. He finds it reassuring that an era of penance following the bloody revolution had made England more receptive to ideas from outside. The epoch of concentration was giving way to an epoch of expansion. Additionally, increased leisure time resulting from advances in science and technology would allow for more intellectual exploration rather than merely practical considerations.

Criticism Would Cure Self-Satisfaction and Complacency

According to Arnold, criticism in England failed to remain purely intellectual because self-satisfaction and complacency were holding the nation back. Real criticism would help move people away from complacency towards perfection by encouraging the mind to focus on what is excellent, beautiful and fitting. In England, criticism failed in this respect because it was not separate from prac-

tical considerations. Arnold highlights examples of self-satisfaction from Parliament speeches by Adderley and Roebuck, arguing they made hollow claims of superiority. Contrasting these claims were reports of extreme poverty and tragic incidents in newspapers - a critic's role is to show such stark contrasts to wake people out of complacency. Only then can the human spirit advance towards perfection. Criticism has an important function: to expand people's horizons, both mentally and spiritually.

Equipment and Duties of a Critic

A critic must be detached from practical considerations

Arnold sets a high standard for critics. Their duty is to bring the best knowledge and ideas into circulation, which requires wide learning and absolute detachment from practical concerns. Their work should remain in the mental sphere—the realm of ideas. Arnold acknowledges that this view may make criticism slow and obscure, but if it is to do its duty, it must be patient and resolute.

A critic must pursue their course with utmost sincerity, especially in the face of misunderstandings. They must make fine distinctions between the perfect and imperfect and help others recognise this difference. Such distinctions form the basis of high culture. While critics may be tempted to join the practical majority, true critics must keep their independence.

Duties of a critic

The critic must learn to see objects as they truly are and cultivate disinterestedness - remaining independent from practical considerations. Even well-meant practical motives can be limiting in the realm of ideals.

A critic should always strive for fine distinctions and discriminate judgements. The critic

should be constantly dissatisfied with things as they stand, recognising that they tend to fall short of the ideal. They must resist all indiscriminate estimates, as these can mislead and dull sensibility. The duty of the critic is to highlight what is truly the best, so even practical-minded individuals recognise the value of nobility and beauty.

Arnold acknowledges the difficulties critics face but insists they must persevere through slow, demanding work. Critics should carefully study and praise elements needed for spiritual satisfaction, even if those things are sometimes considered harmful or unfashionable. They should be impartial, seeing both strengths and weaknesses, and be prepared to praise as well as condemn where appropriate. For example, when considering Catholic and Protestant faiths, the critic should appreciate the contributions of both, while also highlighting faults impartially. Critics must rise above practical, political or religious motives, allowing their ideas to mature before expressing them so those ideas can contribute to meaningful change.

Subject matter and judgement in criticism

Criticism must be ruled by the aim to discover and spread the best that is thought and known in the world. This shapes the subject matter a critic should focus on. The critic must seek and share the best ideas, helping to create a current of true and fresh concepts.

Arnold encourages critics to understand foreign literature, especially since British literature was, at that time, not at its height. He favours engagement with French and German thought, urging critics to know at least one other literature well besides their own. For Arnold, criticism must regard Europe as a federation working towards a shared intellectual purpose, equipped with knowledge of

Greek, Roman and Eastern antiquity, as well as an understanding of contemporary thought across Europe. In *“Tradition and Individual Talent,”* T. S. Eliot echoes this European perspective.

Judgement, according to Arnold, should accompany fresh knowledge naturally. Though critics are sometimes seen as chiefly judges, Arnold argues that judgement is best formed unconsciously in a fair and informed mind, developing alongside new knowledge. The critic’s main concern should always be with knowledge; sharing this knowledge is primary, while judgement is secondary.

At times, criticism will address familiar topics, such as an author’s place in literature. Then, judgement alone may be needed—a detailed application of principles. Critics must beware of becoming abstract and always strive for an intimate, living sense of the truth in what they write.

Creative character of criticism

Creative work brings joy to the artist. Yet criticism can also be a creative force. A critic well equipped for their role can find similar happiness in their work as a creative artist does in theirs. Criticism should be sincere, simple, flexible and enthusiastic, always seeking broader knowledge. At such times, criticism provides a sense of creative joy - a joy one might prefer to the limited pleasure of creating something incomplete or poorly conceived. There are periods in history when criticism is the only creative path open, then its importance is at its greatest.

5.1.2 Critical Analysis

Matthew Arnold’s essay “Function of Criticism at the Present Time” is an important work that discusses the role and significance of criticism in the world of literature. He begins by admitting that the critical faculty is considered



lower than the creative one, yet he asserts that creative achievement depends on the presence of a vibrant current of best and noble ideas. When such an intellectual climate is lacking, as in so-called uncongenial times, creative literary output inevitably suffers. For example, Arnold points to Thomas Gray, whose poetry is minimal because his era did not provide a fertile ground for creative inspiration.

Drawing upon Taine's formulation, Arnold argues that successful creation depends on both the "power of the man" and the "power of the moment." The latter, a surge and emergence of noble ideas, is made possible by criticism. Criticism, therefore, is much more than mere judgement; it is a noble endeavour that shapes and nourishes the intellectual environment required for artistic creation.

Arnold redefines criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." He objects to the prevailing notion that the critical power is subordinate to the creative. In literature, the creative poet or writer does not invent new ideas but rather synthesises existing ones. Creation is a process of synthesis and exposition, whereas criticism is analytical and investigative. True creativity flourishes only in epochs marked by a stimulating intellectual climate, such as ancient Greece or Shakespearean England, where poets lived within a current of ideas and inspiration.

Arnold observes that even during non-creative epochs, learning and critical engagement with literature can bring about a semblance of such intellectually rich periods. Criticism thus plays a significant role in generating a continuous current of high ideas, which, in turn, sustains creative endeavour.

Reflecting on history, Arnold analyses the French Revolution, noting that although the

Romantics lived through it, the movement was primarily political, not intellectual or spiritual. This, he claims, was its grand failing, as it did not produce enduring intellectual fruits. He describes such periods as "epochs of concentration," where minds are focused on practical affairs. Eventually, these must give way to "epochs of expansion" where intellectual enquiry flourishes, as during the Renaissance. Arnold predicts a transition from the materialistic age he inhabits to a new intellectual age, where literary criticism will be essential in guiding inquiry into the ideas that shape society.

Arnold's first principle of criticism is disinterestedness. Genuine criticism must avoid the distortion of "practical views," which are often marred by political, social, or religious biases. He strongly condemns the self-satisfaction of the English middle class, whom he calls Philistines, and encourages critics to practise the "Indian virtue of detachment." Criticism must steer clear of involvement in practical affairs and focus on its profound function: to see objects as they truly are. This requires freedom from personal prejudices and the cultivation of an objective mindset.

Another fundamental function of criticism is to produce and sustain a current of true and fresh ideas, approached with inflexible honesty and ability. Criticism must refrain from getting entangled in questions of practical consequences and applications. In this way, criticism serves as the foundation for social reform, acting as an agent of intellectual renewal.

Arnold's principle of "disinterestedness" should not, however, be mistaken for abstract or purely theoretical criticism. His "touchstone method," discussed in *The Study of Poetry*, shows his commitment to concrete examples and the practical application of critical principles.

Arnold's critical method is both cosmopolitan and classicist. He aims to elevate criticism above the barriers of time, place, and national prejudice. He opposes both the "practical view of things" and narrow provincialism in literature. Ideas such as "excellent human actions," "architectonic," "grand style," and "disinterestedness" are all classical principles which he brings into modern literary practice. Arnold strives to instil restraint, symmetry, and proportion in the intellectual excesses of the Romantic period. For him, criticism is fundamentally the dissemination of the best ideas, knowledge and thought in the world.

In defining the role of the critic, Arnold envisages a figure who serves society as a benefactor, offering a stream of true and fresh ideas to challenge stock notions and habits. The creative artist, however talented, relies on the critic to pave the way for their work. The critic's defining virtue is "disinterestedness" - freedom from political, social, or personal biases, self-centredness, or self-will. Only through an unbiased approach, equipped with knowledge of the finest intellectual traditions across cultures, can a critic truly achieve his purpose. Arnold further advocates openness to foreign literature and ideas, lamenting English provinciality and championing cosmopolitanism and urbanity in European writing.

Arnold reimagines criticism as an essential force that precedes and enables literary creation. By transmitting the best that is known and thought, criticism generates currents of noble ideas. It must be disinterested, intellectually honest, and cosmopolitan, constantly nourishing the atmosphere that allows creative genius to thrive. In so doing, criticism becomes the intellectual vanguard, shaping not only literature but the wider culture.

Critical Remarks

"Function of Criticism in the Present Time" is a significant critical document. Arnold's essay offers many wise insights and powerful phrases, embodying his talent for compelling expression. Arnold's conception of criticism is ambitious and demanding, though he accords it a lower position than that of pure creative activity. He insists, however, that critical effort is necessary for creativity and enables the circulation of fresh ideas.

Arnold emerges as a strong critic of his era, outspoken against self-satisfaction, materialism and lack of culture. He argues that complacency hinders cultural and intellectual progress, and sees criticism as a remedy. He was the first major English critic to define and champion criticism as essential to creativity. His assertion that Goethe was a greater poet than Byron mainly due to the critical effort behind his poetry is echoed by T. S. Eliot, who suggests poets owe their greatness as much to their critical faculties as to their imagination. Arnold insists that criticism should adopt an international perspective, seeing literature in a broader European and world context.

Throughout the essay, Arnold introduces memorable slogans and thoughtful analogies, many adapted from French and German critics, such as Sainte-Beuve, who inspired the idea of criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world". The essay also shows Arnold's ironic and lively style, making his arguments both engaging and memorable for his readers.



Recap

- ▶ Criticism ranks below creation but helps make creative work possible.
- ▶ Creative writers reshape existing ideas rather than discovering entirely new ones.
- ▶ Great literature needs talent combined with supportive historical intellectual conditions.
- ▶ Criticism builds an atmosphere of ideas that fuels creativity continually.
- ▶ Critics need broad knowledge to prepare conditions for creative activity.
- ▶ Arnold rejects criticism controlled by politics instead of pure intellect.
- ▶ The French Revolution failed intellectually by becoming political and practical.
- ▶ Great artistic ages thrive when ideas strongly energise creative work.
- ▶ Early nineteenth-century English poetry lacked depth due to weak criticism.
- ▶ Goethe's lasting power comes from criticism; Byron lacked sustained critical grounding.
- ▶ Disinterestedness requires critics to avoid political, religious, social biases.
- ▶ Criticism should seek and spread the world's best knowledge impartially.
- ▶ Critics need international outlook, studying Greek, Roman, German, French thought.
- ▶ Criticism guides society from complacency toward higher intellectual and spiritual aims.
- ▶ Criticism can itself be creative, offering joy when creation is limited.

Objective Questions

1. According to Arnold, what faculty is subordinate to the creative faculty in rank?
2. What term does Arnold use to describe the condition when fresh ideas are absent?
3. Name the French critic who influenced Arnold's definition of criticism.
4. What movement does Arnold criticise for becoming political rather than intellectual?
5. Which German poet does Arnold cite as an example of great critical engagement?

6. What virtue must a critic practise according to Arnold?
7. What term does Arnold use for periods dominated by practical and political concerns?
8. What social class does Arnold criticise for self-satisfaction?
9. What type of method does Arnold advocate in *The Study of Poetry*?
10. Which period does Arnold identify as having the greatest current of ideas?
11. What must critics ultimately create through their work?
12. According to Arnold, what should criticism value above practical applications?
13. What does Arnold believe will eventually replace the epoch of concentration?
14. What Indian virtue does Arnold recommend critics practise?
15. What does Arnold consider the primary concern of a critic?

Answers

1. Criticism
2. Uncongenial
3. Sainte-Beuve
4. Revolution
5. Goethe
6. Disinterestedness
7. Concentration
8. Philistines
9. Touchstone
10. Shakespearean
11. Ideas
12. Knowledge
13. Expansion
14. Detachment
15. Current of Ideas

Assignments

1. Compare Arnold's support for criticism with Wordsworth's complete dismissal.
2. Examine Arnold's argument that criticism is essential for creating the conditions necessary for great creative work. Do you find this argument convincing? Support your answer with examples from the essay.
3. Evaluate whether modern criticism achieves Arnold's principle of disinterestedness.
4. Analyse Arnold's concept of disinterestedness. What does he mean by it, and what obstacles prevent English critics from achieving it?
5. Assess Arnold's cosmopolitan criticism against English provinciality and its limitations

Suggested Reading

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2. Arnold, Matthew. *The Study of Poetry and Other Essays*. Dover Publications, 2005.
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“The Language of Paradox”

– Cleanth Brooks

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Brooks’s concept of paradox in poetry clearly
- ▶ recognise how paradox unites opposites in literary works
- ▶ analyse paradox as natural language of poetic expression
- ▶ evaluate paradox’s role in revealing higher truths

Prerequisite

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994) was an influential American literary critic and a central figure in the New Criticism movement, which emphasised close reading and textual analysis. He taught at Louisiana State University and Yale University, mentoring many future critics. Brooks believed literary works should be studied as independent entities, focusing on intrinsic qualities rather than external factors or authorial intentions. His key works include *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), co-authored with Robert Penn Warren.

New Criticism gained prominence through textbooks like *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943), edited by Brooks and Warren. The movement advocated analysing the complex interplay of irony, paradox, ambiguity, and tension, which harmonise a work and enhance human experience. Brooks argued that poetry’s language is inherently paradoxical, forcing readers to confront and reconcile opposing ideas for deeper understanding. The learner should be familiar with Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, metaphysical poets like Donne, and neoclassical writers like Pope to appreciate Brooks’s examples fully

Keywords

Paradox, Irony, Wonder, Metaphor, Close Reading



Discussion



Fig 5.2.1 Cleanth Brooks

Cleanth Brooks (1906–1994) was an influential American literary critic and one of the prominent figures associated with the New Criticism

movement. He made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism through his innovative ideas and rigorous approach to textual analysis. Brooks believed that literary works should be studied in their own right, focusing on the intrinsic qualities of the text rather than relying on external factors or authorial intentions. This approach, known as close reading, became a central tenet of New Criticism.

One of Brooks's key works is *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947). In this book, he examines the intricate relationship between form and content in poetry. Brooks argues that the unity and coherence of a poem arise from its carefully crafted structure, and he emphasises the importance of analysing how a poem's various elements - such as imagery, metaphor, and rhythm- contribute to its overall meaning. Another influential work by Brooks is *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), co-authored with Robert Penn Warren. This book challenges the prevailing notion that modern poetry has severed ties with tradition. Brooks and Warren argue that contemporary poets are engaged in a meaningful dialogue with the literary tradition, drawing upon and reinterpreting the works of their predecessors.

Brooks also explored the concept of paradox

in literature, as evident in his essay "The Language of Paradox" (1956). He believed that paradoxes, with their inherent contradictions, encapsulate the complexities of human experience. According to Brooks, paradoxical language forces readers to confront and reconcile opposing ideas, enabling a deeper understanding of the text's meaning. As a teacher, Brooks played a vital role in shaping the field of literary studies. He taught at Louisiana State University and later at Yale University, where he mentored numerous students who went on to become influential critics in their own right. His impact on the academic community can be seen in the continued relevance and influence of New Criticism, which emphasised close reading and textual analysis.

Cleanth Brooks's contributions to literary criticism continue to resonate today. His emphasis on close reading and the study of form, as well as his exploration of paradox, have enriched the understanding and appreciation of literature. Through his influential works and teachings, Brooks has left a lasting legacy in the field of literary criticism.

5.2.1 New Criticism

The principles of New Criticism gained prominence when Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren published their textbooks *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943). Other influential books that contributed to the development of the New Critical approach include *The World's Body* (1938), Allen Tate's *Reasons in Madness: Critical Essays* (1941), Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), and William K. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954). In 1939, John Crowe Ransom edited and released the journal *Kenyon Review*, which criticised the prevailing system of literary historical studies in American universities. In 1941, Ransom used

the term 'New Criticism' in a book of the same name, introducing this new method of critical practice. Prominent critics in the period between 1930 and 1950 proposed a fresh approach to teaching literature in American colleges and high schools. Other notable New Critics include Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, and William K. Wimsatt. In England, F.R. Leavis published similar criticism, and a group of critics known as the 'Anglo-American New Critics' emerged.

New Criticism advocated for a close analytical reading of a work to uncover its connotative meaning, as the meaning of a text did not necessarily align with the writer's intentions, and the ultimate meaning of a work of art surpassed any original intention. A poem was considered an independent entity unaffected by the writer and not reliant on the reader. It was viewed as a unified object that conveyed meaning through the selection, arrangement, and balance of its individual parts. Consequently, a reader could discern a poem's meaning by examining its intrinsic aspects alone.

While American New Critics asserted that a poem's theme is complex, their British counterparts posited that poetry revealed truth in a more intricate manner than other forms of discourse, as it was rooted in experience rather than scientific abstractions. Irony, paradox, ambiguity, and tension were devices that endowed a work with multiple meanings and rendered it complex. These devices harmonised a work to enhance human experience. The metaphor was regarded as a tool that opened up connotations or new possibilities of meaning, given its inherently ironic and paradoxical nature. Complexity, irony, ambiguity, tension, and paradox were values favoured by the New Critics.

Cleanth Brooks (1906–1994), a prominent New Critic, gained popularity through his col-

lection of critical essays, *Modern Poetry and Tradition* (1939), and *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947). Brooks influenced critics by advocating for suggestiveness in poetry. He co-authored *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) with William K. Wimsatt (1907–1975). His influential essay 'Irony as a Principle of Structure' emphasised the importance of metaphor. He believed in 'a principle of indirection' and argued that statements and images in a poem maintained an organic relationship, with each part qualifying and adding meaning to the other. Other essays by Brooks include 'The Language of Paradox', 'The Formalist Critic', and 'The Heresy of Paraphrase'. His book *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963) is considered one of his best works, written much later.

5.2.2 Summary of "The Language of Paradox"

'The Language of Paradox', a critical essay by Cleanth Brooks, one of the foremost literary critics of today, was first published in 1942 in *The Language of Poetry*, a journal published by Princeton University Press. It is now included in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* and is the first essay in this collection of some of the most penetrating critical essays of recent times. The learned critic examines the place of irony and paradox in poetry and illustrates his viewpoint by analysing poems by such poets as Wordsworth and Donne, who have very little in common with each other.

Paradox and Irony: Defined and Explained

A paradox is a self-contradictory statement or a statement that brings together opposite ideas which, however, convey some essential truth. Such a statement is often used by writers to startle and surprise and thus to capture atten-



tion at once. It is highly intellectual in tone. A paradox may also be defined as a statement contrary to accepted opinion. Hence it may be apparently absurd and fantastic, but a little reflection shows that it is essentially true. Sophisticated writers make extensive use of paradox to make their readers think and to drive home the truths they want to convey. Irony, on the other hand, is the use of language opposite in meaning to that really intended by the writer. Thus when a man says 'you are very wise', he may in reality mean that the person spoken to is very foolish. Irony is thus the instrument of sarcasm and satire. Paradox may simply arouse wonder, or it may be ironical. Irony and wonder are the twin attributes of paradox. Both irony and paradox are indirect or oblique ways of expression and can be used only by the intellectual and the witty. Poetry, on the other hand, is an expression of emotion and imagination, and hence one naturally thinks that paradox and irony have nothing to do with poetry. However, in the present essay, the author establishes the paradox that 'paradox is the natural language of poetry'. A poet cannot help being paradoxical.

Development of Thought

Cleanth Brooks begins the essay by pointing out that "the language of paradox is the language of poetry", though most people are not prepared to accept this truth. Poetry is the language of the soul, an expression of imagination and emotion, while paradox is an expression of the intellect. It is hard and witty, the saying of brilliant things that appeal to the intellect, to the mind and not to the heart. We associate paradox and irony with a writer like Chesterton, and with satire and epigram in general. However, the general view is that it has nothing to do with poetry proper. As the writer puts it, "our prejudices force us to regard paradox as intellectual rather than emotional, clever rather than profound, rational rather than divinely irrational." In other

words, it is wrong to think that paradox is wholly rational and intellectual; in fact it can also be emotional, irrational and profound.

Wordsworth: His Use of Paradox

The truth is that it is the language of science which is entirely free from any trace of paradox, while paradox is the natural and appropriate language of poetry. Many of the truths which the poet utters can be expressed only through paradox. Even such a simple and direct poet as Wordsworth cannot avoid using the language of paradox. Wordsworth is extremely simple and he avoids every kind of artificiality, and yet a typical Wordsworthian poem is based on a paradoxical situation. For example, in one of his better-known poems the poet is out in nature with a simple and innocent girl. It is a calm and quiet evening:

*It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration.*

The poet is filled with worship and adoration, but the girl by his side is not:

*If thou appear'st untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine;
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.*

She does not worship, but the paradox is that she is still divine, and God is still with her, though unknown to us. Thus the lyric is based upon a paradox and the paradox states an essential truth. She is divine and God's chosen because she is in sympathy with all nature, not merely with its more noble and solemn aspects. Her unconscious sympathy is her unconscious worship. She is in communion with nature "all the year", and her devotion is con-

tinal, whereas that of the poet is sporadic and momentary.

There is one further paradox even in this simple lyric. The evening is compared to a nun, and obviously 'quiet', 'calm', 'free' are the outward signs and symbols of the evening as a nun. The 'holiness' of the evening, with the outward trappings of a nun, stands in sharp contrast with the inner holiness and innocence of the girl who, however, does not have these external trappings, nor does she worship in any formal way, as a nun does. Her carefree innocence is in itself a kind of continuous worship.

Wordsworth is a simple poet who believes in direct statement, but another of his lyrics, as simple as "Upon Westminster Bridge", has a tinge of irony and paradox, and it is this use of paradox which accounts for its mysterious charm, though most readers are not conscious of this fact. There is neither much noble sentiment nor are there any brilliant images worth mentioning. There are also no graphic details. The details are brought together in lines like the following:

*Silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and
temples lie
Open unto the fields...*

From such lines we get a blurred impression - points of roofs and pinnacles along the skyline, all twinkling in the morning light. More than that, the sonnet as a whole contains some very flat writing and some well-worn comparisons.

The charm of the lyric arises from the fact that it grows out of a paradoxical situation. The poet had always been disgusted with 'urban mark and roar', and now he is surprised that that horrible city could be so sweet and charming, and look so beautiful in the light of

the morning. Grim, feverish London was not expected by the poet to have this charm, and hence his surprised exclamation:

*Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or
hill...*

The 'smokeless air' reveals a city which the poet did not know existed. Man-made London is a part of nature too, is lighted by the sun of nature, and lighted to a beautiful effect:

*The river glideth at his own sweet
will...*

A river is the most 'natural' thing that one can imagine; it has the elasticity and curved line of nature itself. The poet had never been able to regard this river as a real river, as a part of nature. Now, uncluttered by barges, the river reveals itself as a natural thing, not at all disciplined into a rigid and mechanical pattern. It is like the daffodils or the mountain brooks, artless and whimsical, 'natural' as they. The poem closes as follows:

*Dear God the very houses seem
asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still.*

The city, in the poet's insight of the morning, has earned its right to be considered organic, not merely mechanical. That is why the stale metaphor of the sleeping houses is strangely renewed. The most exciting thing that the poet can say about the houses is that they are asleep. He has been in the habit of counting them as dead, as just mechanical and inanimate; to say they are 'asleep' is to say that they are alive, that they participate in the life of nature. In the same way, the trite old metaphor which sees a great city as a pulsating heart of an empire becomes revived. It is only when the poet sees the city under the semblance of death that he can see it as actually alive - quick with the only life which he can accept, the organic life of 'nature'.



The Romantic Programme: Its Paradoxical Nature

The programme of the Romantic movement, as worked out by Wordsworth and Coleridge, was itself paradoxical. Their purpose was to make the common look uncommon, to make the familiar look unfamiliar. As Coleridge has beautifully summarised the whole thing: “Mr Wordsworth... was to propose to himself as his object, 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. Wordsworth, in short, was consciously attempting to show his audience that the common was really uncommon, the prosaic was really poetic.” This is nothing but the use of paradox. The Romantics were concerned with surprise, with wonder, with revelation, by showing the familiar world in a new light so that readers are both startled and delighted.

The Neo-Classics: Their Use of Paradox

Thus paradox may be said to be the very basis of Romanticism. However, the Neo-Classics too made ample use of it. But there is a difference in the Romantic use of paradox and the Neo-Classical use of it. The Romantics used it to arouse wonder, to awaken the mind and to make it conscious of a new light and beauty in things ignored as commonplace and trivial. However, the Neo-Classical use of paradox is ironical. Opposites are brought together to make readers alive to the irony of the situation. We find such irony throughout Pope’s poetry. There is irony in the following lines from his “Essay on Man”:

*In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to
err;*

*Alike in ignorance, his Reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too
much...
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great Lord of all things, yet a Prey to
all;
Sole Judge of Truth, in endless Error
hurl’d:
The Glory, Jest and Riddle of the
world.*

Man reasons, but the irony is that he reasons only to err; he may be the lord of all created beings, but the irony is that he is also a prey to all; he claims to be the sole judge of truth, but the irony is that he is always in error. The paradoxes here are ironical, but it may also be claimed that there is wonder also, for Pope has made us see man in a new light.

Some Other Poets: Their Use of Paradox, Irony and Wonder

However, paradoxes which arouse both wonder and irony are more clearly mixed in the poetry of poets like Blake. They merge in Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner” and in Grey’s “Elegy”. The situation in the elegy is typically Wordsworthian. The peasants are contemplated in the light of their betters. The comparison startles, illuminates and shows the peasants in a new light. The contrast between their real glory and factual obscurity is startling. However, the paradox is ironical too, and in the following the scales are heavily tilted in the favour of irony; the paradox is ironical rather than a startling one:

*Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting
breath?
Can Honour’s voice provoke the silent
dust?
Or Flatt’ry sooth the dull cold ear of
Death?*

Poetry and Science

The above discussion clearly shows that “the language of poetry is the language of paradox”, and that the paradox may be both startling and ironical. The language of poetry is not fixed and rigid as that of science. In science, the meaning of words is fixed, but the poet makes his own language as he writes. He uses words in new combinations, and such new arrangements continually modify the meaning of words, violate the dictionary meanings, and thus enrich the language and increase its expressive power. Such modification is perpetual; it cannot be kept out of the poem; it can only be controlled and guided. T.S. Eliot has commented upon “that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations”, which occurs in poetry. Such modification takes place even in such a simple poem as Wordsworth's evening sonnet quoted above. The adjective ‘breathless’ suggests tremendous excitement, and yet the evening is not lively but calm. There is no final contradiction, to be sure: it is that kind of calm and that kind of excitement, and the two states may well occur together. However, the poet has no single term. He must work by contradiction and qualification.

The Nature of Metaphor

The poet must use analogy and metaphor, and as I.A. Richards has pointed out, there are subtle and complex states of emotion which cannot be communicated without the use of metaphor. The use of metaphor forces the poet to resort to the use of paradox, for figures of speech in their very nature imply the figuring of one thing or concept through another, even its opposite. There are necessarily constant adjustments, contradictions and modifications. As Shakespeare has said, in poetry we “By indirections find directions out”. Even the simplest poets are forced to use paradox. Such

is the nature of poetry. However, there are others who use paradox and irony consciously to gain a compression and precision which is not otherwise possible.

Donne: His “Canonisation”

John Donne is one such poet. His poems are based on paradox and steeped in irony. For example, take “Canonisation” which is based on a paradox, and the paradox is reflected in the title itself. Profane love is treated as divine love, and the canonisation is not of holy saints who have renounced the pleasures of the flesh, but of lovers who have renounced the world for each other. The body of each is a hermitage for the other, and so they can also be called saints, saints of love. The paradox is cleverly argued out and established. However, as Cleanth Brooks himself points out, “the poem then is a parody of Christian sainthood; but it is an intensely serious parody of a sort that modern man, habituated as he is to an easy yes or no, can hardly understand. He refuses to accept the paradox as a serious rhetorical device, and since he is able to accept it only as a cheap trick, he is forced into this dilemma: either Donne does not take love seriously; here he is merely sharpening his wit as a sort of mechanical exercise. Or Donne does not take sainthood seriously; here he is merely indulging in a cynical and bawdy parody.”

However, both such attitudes are wrong, for a careful reading of the poem shows that Donne takes both love and religion seriously, and he could have used no other instrument for his purpose except paradox. Through a detailed analysis of the poem, the learned author shows that the vein of irony is maintained throughout. There are ironic contrasts and ironic statements. By the last stanza it is shown that in rejecting life and through their total absorption in each other, the lovers actually achieve a more intense life. This paradox has been hinted at earlier in the phoenix met-



aphor. Here it receives a powerful dramatisation. The lovers in becoming hermits find that they have not lost the world, but have gained the world in each other - now a more intense, more meaningful world. Donne is not content to treat the lovers' discovery as something which comes to them passively, but rather as something which they actively achieve. They are those:

*Who did the whole world's soule contract,
and drove,
Into the glasses of your eyes...*

The image is that of a violent squeezing, as of a powerful hand. And what do the lovers 'drive' into each other's eyes? The 'Countries, Townes,' and 'Courtes', which they renounced in the first stanza of the poem. The unworldly lovers thus become the most 'worldly' of all. This is the paradox and irony of it all.

Paradox and Irony: Their Advantages

The poem gains intensely in precision, compression, and effectiveness by the use of irony and paradox. Donne could have used the method of direct statement as other later poets have done. He might have been as forthright as a later lyricist who wrote, "We'll build a little nest, somewhere out in the West and let the rest of the world go by". He might even have imitated that more metaphysical lyric which maintains, "You're the cream in my coffee." "Canonisation" touches on all these observations, but it goes beyond them, not merely in dignity, but in precision. And this could have been achieved only by the use of paradox. More direct methods may be tempting, but they distort the meaning and weaken the effect.

Spiritual Insights

Indeed, valuable insights can be conveyed only through the use of paradox with its two aspects: irony and wonder. Religion makes

frequent use of paradox to convey its insights: "He who would save his life, must lose it." "The last shall be first." Indeed, almost any insight important enough to warrant a great poem apparently has to be stated in such terms. Deprived of the character of paradox with its twin concomitants of irony and wonder, the matter of Donne's poem unravels into 'facts', biological, sociological, and economic. Considered scientifically, the lovers become Aldous Huxley's 'animals' quietly sweating, palm to palm. Not Donne's lovers alone, but even Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet would be reduced to this very level without the use of such oblique language as that of Juliet when she says:

*For saints have hands that pilgrims'
hands do touch
And palm to palm is holy palmers'
kiss.*

Creative Imagination: Bringing Together of Opposites

A paradox is a fusion or union of the opposite and the discordant. This fusion is brought about by the imagination of the poet. This poetic imagination is creative, and it creates by bringing into ever-new combinations the discordant and the irreconcilable. S.T. Coleridge has well expressed the shaping power of poetic imagination in the following words: "It reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities; of sameness with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order..." It is a great and illuminating statement, but it is a series of paradoxes. Apparently, Coleridge could describe the effect of the imagination in no other way.

Shakespeare's View of It

Shakespeare, in one of his poems, has giv-

en a description that oddly parallels that of Coleridge:

*Reason in itself confounded,
Saw Divisions grow together;
To themselves yet either neither;
Simples were, so well compounded.*

Reason and intellect separate and divide, whilst imagination brings together and unites. A poet cannot do without paradox, for in its very nature a paradox is a bringing together of opposites, and so is a metaphor and so is poetry. In his “The Phoenix and the Turtle”, Shakespeare has dwelt at length on the magic power of poetic imagination which unites, and has contrasted it with Reason which divides and separates:

*Hearts remote, yet not asunder:
Distance and no space was seen,
‘Twixt this Turtle and his Queene;
But in them it were a wonder...
Property was thus appalled,
That the self was not the same;
Single Natures, double name.
Neither two nor one was called.*

Precisely! The nature is single, one, unified. However, the name is double, and today with

our multiplication of sciences, it is multiple. If the poet is to be true to his poetry, he must call it neither two nor one; the paradox is his only solution. The difficulty has intensified since Shakespeare's day. The timid poet, when confronted with the problem of “Single Natures double name”, has too often avoided it.

In Shakespeare's poem, Reason is ‘in itself confounded’ at the union of the Phoenix and the Turtle; however, it recovers to admit its own bankruptcy:

*Love hath Reasons, Reason none,
If what parts, can so remain.*

And it is Reason which goes on to say:

*Beauty, Truth, and Rarity,
Grace in all simplicity,
Here enclosed, in cinders lie.*

Conclusion

It is poetry and poetry alone which brings about a union of ‘Beauty, Truth and Rarity’, and the poet can bring about this rare fusion because he is gifted with creative imagination which expresses itself through paradox and metaphor. Metaphor may, therefore, justly be called the natural language of poetry.

Recap

- ▶ Cleanth Brooks's “The Language of Paradox” examines paradox and irony in poetry.
- ▶ Paradox is a self-contradictory statement conveying essential truth by uniting opposites.
- ▶ Irony uses language opposite to intended meaning, serving sarcasm and satire.
- ▶ Our prejudices wrongly view paradox as purely intellectual, rational, not emotional or profound.
- ▶ Even simple poets like Wordsworth cannot avoid paradox; his poems contain paradoxical situations.
- ▶ In “It is a beauteous evening”, the girl's unconscious sympathy is continuous worship, a paradox.



- ▶ “Upon Westminster Bridge” paradoxically shows London as alive, organic, part of nature.
- ▶ The Romantic programme was paradoxical: making common look uncommon, familiar unfamiliar.
- ▶ Neoclassical writers used paradox ironically, as in Pope’s *Essay on Man*, showing human contradictions.
- ▶ Blake, Coleridge, and Gray mix wonder and irony in their paradoxes.
- ▶ Poetry’s language is not fixed like science; poets modify meanings through new combinations.
- ▶ Metaphor forces poets to paradox, figuring one thing through its opposite, requiring constant adjustment.
- ▶ Donne’s “Canonisation” treats profane love as divine, using paradox seriously, not as cheap trick.
- ▶ Shakespeare’s “Phoenix and Turtle” shows imagination uniting opposites while Reason divides.
- ▶ Paradox is the natural language of poetry, enabling communication of complex truths direct statement cannot achieve.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote the essay “The Language of Paradox”?
2. What movement was Cleanth Brooks associated with?
3. What is a paradox according to Brooks?
4. What is irony as defined by Brooks?
5. Which poet does Brooks analyse as a simple poet using paradox?
6. Which Wordsworth poem does Brooks discuss as paradoxical?
7. What was the Romantic programme’s paradoxical aim?
8. Which neoclassical poet does Brooks cite for ironical paradox?
9. What does Brooks say about poetry’s language compared to science’s?
10. Which metaphysical poet’s work does Brooks analyse extensively?
11. What is the title of Donne’s poem discussed by Brooks?
12. What religious paradox does Brooks cite as example?
13. What does Coleridge’s description of imagination consist of?
14. What is the natural language of poetry according to Brooks?

Answers

1. Cleanth Brooks
2. New Criticism
3. Self-contradictory statement uniting opposites to convey truth
4. Language opposite to intended meaning
5. Wordsworth
6. "It is a beauteous evening"
7. Making common look uncommon
8. Pope
9. Poetry's language is not fixed; poets modify meanings
10. Donne
11. "Canonisation"
12. He who would save his life must lose it
13. Balance of opposite qualities
14. Paradox

Assignments

1. Explain Brooks's concept of paradox and show why he calls it the natural language of poetry.
2. Discuss how Wordsworth's poetry, despite its simplicity, contains paradoxical situations.
3. Analyse the difference between Romantic and Neoclassical use of paradox according to Brooks.
4. Examine Donne's "Canonisation" as an example of serious paradox, not cheap trickery.
5. Evaluate Brooks's argument that poetry's language must be paradoxical to communicate complex truths.

Suggested Reading

1. Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. Harcourt, Brace, 1947.
2. Brooks, Cleanth. *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press, 1939.
3. Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Poetry*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1938.
4. Wimsatt, William K. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. University of Kentucky Press, 1954.
5. Ransom, John Crowe. *The New Criticism*. New Directions, 1941.

SGOU



“Tradition and Individual Talent” – T.S. Eliot

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Eliot’s concept of tradition in literary creation
- ▶ explain the impersonality theory of poetic composition
- ▶ analyse the poet’s mind as a catalyst in creation
- ▶ distinguish between personal emotion and artistic emotion
- ▶ evaluate poetry as organisation rather than inspiration

Prerequisite

The essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” was first published in 1919 in *The Times Literary Supplement* as a critical article. It may be regarded as an unofficial manifesto of Eliot’s critical creed, for it contains all those critical principles from which his criticism has been derived ever since. The seeds which have been sown here come to fruition in his subsequent essays. It is a declaration of Eliot’s critical creed and these principles are the basis of all his subsequent criticism.

The essay is divided into three parts. The first part gives us Eliot’s concept of tradition, and the second part develops his theory of the impersonality of poetry. The short third part is in the nature of a conclusion, or summing up of the whole discussion. Eliot’s ideas challenged Romantic subjectivism and emphasised the poet’s relationship with literary tradition, the depersonalisation of emotion, and poetry as an organic process. The learner should be familiar with Romantic theories of poetry (especially Wordsworth’s “emotion recollected in tranquillity”), classical notions of imitation, and the context of early twentieth-century modernism to appreciate Eliot’s arguments fully

Keywords

Tradition, Impersonality, Historical Sense, Catalyst, Depersonalisation



Discussion

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5.3.1 Summary of “Tradition and Individual Talent”

The Significance of Tradition

Eliot begins by pointing out that the word tradition is generally regarded as a term of censure. It sounds disagreeable to English ears. When the English praise a poet, they praise him for those aspects of his work which are ‘individual and original’. It is supposed that his chief merits lie in such parts. This undue stress on individuality shows that the English have an uncritical turn of mind. They praise the poet for the wrong thing. If they examine the matter critically with an unprejudiced mind, they will realise that the best and the most individual part of a poet’s work is that which shows the maximum influence of the writers of the past. To quote his own words: “Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice, we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.”

Tradition: Ways in which It Can Be Acquired

This brings Eliot to a consideration of the value and significance of tradition. Tradition does not mean a blind adherence to the ways of the previous generation or generations. This would be mere slavish imitation, a mere repetition of what has already been achieved, and “novelty is better than repetition”. Tradition in the sense of passive repetition is to be discouraged. For Eliot, tradition is a matter of much wider significance. Tradition in the true sense of the term cannot be inherited; it can only be obtained by hard labour. This labour is the labour of knowing the past writers. It is the critical labour of sifting the good from the bad, and of knowing what is good and useful. Tradition can be obtained only by those who have the historical sense. The historical sense involves a perception “not only of the pastness of the past, but also of its presence”. One who has the historical sense feels that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day, including the literature of his own century, forms one continuous literary tradition. He realises that the past exists in the present, and that the past and the present form one simultaneous order. This historical sense is the sense of the timeless and the temporal, as well as of the timeless and the temporal together. It is this historical sense which makes a writer traditional. A writer with the sense of tradition is fully conscious of his own generation, of his place in the present, but he is also acutely conscious of his relationship with the writers of the past. In brief, sense of tradition implies (a) a recognition of the continuity of literature, (b) a critical judgment as to which of the writers of the past continue to be significant in the present, and (c) a knowledge of these significant writers obtained through painstaking effort. Tradition represents the accumulated wisdom and experience of ages, and so its knowledge is essential for really great and noble achievements.

Dynamic Conception of Tradition

Emphasising further the value of tradition, Eliot points out that no writer has his value and significance in isolation. To judge the work of a poet or an artist, we must compare and contrast his work with the work of poets and artists in the past. Such comparison and contrast is essential for forming an idea of the real worth and significance of a new writer and his work. Eliot's conception of tradition is a dynamic one. According to his view, tradition is not anything fixed and static; it is constantly changing, growing and becoming different from what it is. A writer in the present must seek guidance from the past; he must conform to the literary tradition. But just as the past directs and guides the present, so the present alters and modifies the past. When a new work of art is created, if it is really new and original, the whole literary tradition is modified, though ever so slightly. The relationship between the past and the present is not one-sided; it is a reciprocal relationship. The past directs the present, and is itself modified and altered by the present. To quote the words of Eliot himself: "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered." Every great poet like Virgil, Dante, or Shakespeare adds something to the literary tradition out of which future poetry will be written.

Its Function

The work of a poet in the present is to be compared and contrasted with works of the past, and judged by the standards of the past. But this judgment does not mean determining good or bad. It does not mean deciding whether the present work is better or worse

than works of the past. An author in the present is certainly not to be judged by the principles and standards of the past. The comparison is to be made for knowing the facts, all the facts, about the new work of art. The comparison is made for the purposes of analysis, and for forming a better understanding of the new. Moreover, this comparison is reciprocal. The past helps us to understand the present, and it throws light on the past. It is in this way alone that we can form an idea of what is really individual and new. It is by comparison alone that we can sift the traditional from individual elements in a given work of art.

Sense of Tradition

Eliot now explains further what he means by a sense of tradition. The sense of tradition does not mean that the poet should try to know the past as a whole, take it to be a lump or mass without any discrimination. Such a course is impossible as well as undesirable. The past must be examined critically and only the significant parts should be acquired. The sense of tradition does not also mean that the poet should know only a few poets whom he admires. This is a sign of immaturity and inexperience. Neither should a poet be content merely to know some particular age or period which he likes. This may be pleasant and delightful, but it will not constitute a sense of tradition. A sense of tradition in the real sense means consciousness of "the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations". In other words, to know the tradition, the poet must judge critically what are the main trends and what are not. He must confine himself to the main trends to the exclusion of all that is incidental or topical. The poet must possess the critical gift in ample measure. He must also realise that the main literary trends are not determined by the great poets alone. Smaller poets also are significant. They are not to be ignored.



The poet must also realise that art never improves, though its material is never the same. The mind of Europe may change, but this change does not mean that great writers like Shakespeare and Homer have grown outdated and lost their significance. The great works of art never lose their significance, for there is no qualitative improvement in art. There may be refinement, there may be development, but from the point of view of the artist there is no improvement. (For example, it will not be correct to say that the art of Shakespeare is better and higher than that of Eliot. Their works are of different kinds, for the material on which they worked was different.)

The Poet's Knowledge and Erudition

Eliot is conscious of the criticism that will be made of his theory of tradition. His view of tradition requires, it will be said, a ridiculous amount of erudition. It will be pointed out that there have been great poets who were not learned, and further that too much learning kills sensibility. However, knowledge does not merely mean bookish knowledge, and the capacity for acquiring knowledge differs from person to person. Some can absorb knowledge easily, while others must sweat for it. Shakespeare, for example, could know more of Roman history from Plutarch than most men can from the British Museum. It is the duty of every poet to acquire, to the best of his ability, this knowledge of the past, and he must continue to acquire this consciousness throughout his career. Such awareness of tradition sharpens poetic sensibility and is indispensable for poetic creation.

Impersonality of Poetry

The artist must continually surrender himself to something which is more valuable than himself, i.e., the literary tradition. He must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past. He must continue to acquire the sense of tradition throughout

his career. In the beginning, his self, his individuality, may assert itself, but as his powers mature there must be greater and greater extinction of personality. He must acquire greater and greater objectivity. His emotions and passions must be depersonalised; he must be as impersonal and objective as a scientist. The personality of the artist is not important; the important thing is his sense of tradition. A good poem is a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. He must forget his personal joys and sorrows, and be absorbed in acquiring a sense of tradition and expressing it in his poetry. Thus the poet's personality is merely a medium, having the same significance as a catalytic agent, or a receptacle in which chemical reactions take place. That is why the poet holds that "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."

The Poetic Process

In the second part of the essay, Eliot develops further his theory of the impersonality of poetry. He compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of poetic creation to the process of a chemical reaction. Just as chemical reactions take place in the presence of a catalyst alone, so also the poet's mind is the catalytic agent for combining different emotions into something new. Suppose there is a jar containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide. These two gases combine to form sulphurous acid when a fine filament of platinum is introduced into the jar. The combination takes place only in the presence of the piece of platinum, but the metal itself does not undergo any change. It remains inert, neutral and unaffected. The mind of the poet is like the catalytic agent. It is necessary for combinations of emotions and experiences to take place, but itself does not undergo any change during the process of combination. The mind of the poet is constantly forming emotions and experiences into new wholes, but the new combina-

tion does not contain even a trace of the poet's mind, just as the newly formed sulphurous acid does not contain any trace of platinum. In the case of a young and immature poet, his mind, his personal emotions and experiences may find some expression in his composition, but, says Eliot, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates". The test of the maturity of an artist is the completeness with which his mind digests and transmutes the passions which form the substance of his poetry. The man suffers, i.e., has experiences, but it is his mind which transforms his experiences into something new and different. The personality of the poet does not find expression in his poetry; it acts like a catalytic agent in the process of poetic composition.

Poetry as Organisation

Eliot next compares the poet's mind to a jar or receptacle in which are stored numberless feelings, emotions, etc., which remain there in an organised and chaotic form till "all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together". Thus poetry is organisation rather than inspiration. And the greatness of a poem does not depend upon the greatness or even the intensity of the emotions, which are the components of the poem, but upon the intensity of the process of poetic composition. Just as a chemical reaction takes place under pressure, so also intensity is needed for the fusion of emotions. The more intense the poetic process, the greater the poem. There is always a difference between the artistic emotion and the personal emotions of the poet. For example, the famous *Ode to a Nightingale* of Keats contains a number of emotions which have nothing to do with the nightingale. "The difference between art and

the event is always absolute." The poet has no personality to express; he is merely a medium in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may find no place in his poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may have no significance for the man. Eliot thus rejects romantic subjectivism.

Emotion and Feeling in Poetry

The experiences which enter the poetic process, says Eliot, may be of two kinds. They are emotions and feelings. Poetry may be composed out of emotions or out of feelings only, or out of both. T.S. Eliot here distinguishes between emotions and feelings, but he does not state what this difference is. "Nowhere else in his writings", says A.G. George, "is this distinction maintained; neither does he adequately distinguish between the meaning of the two words". The distinction should, therefore, be ignored, more so as it has no bearing on his impersonal theory of poetry.

Poetry as Escape from Personality

Eliot concludes: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality". Thus Eliot does not deny personality or emotion to the poet. Only, he must depersonalise his emotions. There should be an extinction of his personality. This impersonality can be achieved only when the poet surrenders himself completely to the work that is to be done. And the poet can know what is to be done only if he acquires a sense of tradition, the historic sense, which makes him conscious, not only of the present, but also of the present moment of the past, not only of what is dead, but of what is already living.

Recap

- ▶ “Tradition and Individual Talent” was first published in 1919 in *The Times Literary Supplement* and serves as Eliot’s critical manifesto.
- ▶ The essay is divided into three parts: concept of tradition, theory of impersonality, and conclusion.
- ▶ Eliot argues that tradition is generally regarded as a term of censure in England, where undue stress is placed on individuality.
- ▶ True tradition is not passive repetition; it can only be obtained by hard labour and critical judgment.
- ▶ The historical sense involves perception of the pastness of the past and its presence, forming one simultaneous order.
- ▶ Tradition is dynamic, not static; the present alters and modifies the past, creating a reciprocal relationship.
- ▶ A sense of tradition means recognising continuity of literature, judging which past writers remain significant, and acquiring knowledge of them through painstaking effort.
- ▶ Art never improves qualitatively; great works like Shakespeare and Homer never lose their significance.
- ▶ The poet’s mind acts as a catalyst, combining emotions into new wholes without itself undergoing change.
- ▶ The poet must surrender personality to tradition, achieving greater objectivity and depersonalisation of emotions.
- ▶ Poetry is organisation rather than inspiration; greatness depends on intensity of the poetic process, not intensity of emotions.
- ▶ There is a difference between artistic emotion and personal emotions; the poet transforms experiences into something new.
- ▶ The poet is a medium, like a catalytic agent, and does not express personality but escapes from it.
- ▶ Poetry is not emotion recollected in tranquillity but concentration of experiences forming new combinations.
- ▶ The test of maturity is the completeness with which the poet’s mind digests and transmutes passions into impersonal art.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was Eliot's essay first published?
2. What does Eliot call his essay in relation to his critical beliefs?
3. How many parts is the essay divided into?
4. What does Eliot say the English generally regard tradition as?
5. What does the historical sense involve perception of?
6. What does Eliot compare the poet's mind to in the creative process?
7. What does the poet surrender himself to, according to Eliot?
8. What is poetry: organisation or inspiration?
9. What is the difference between artistic emotion and personal emotions?
10. What does Eliot say art never does?
11. What metaphor does Eliot use for the poet's mind in poetic composition?
12. What does Eliot reject as the origin of poetry?
13. What does Eliot say the poet must escape from?
14. What makes a writer traditional?
15. What does Eliot say about Shakespeare's art compared to his own?

Answers

1. 1919
2. Manifesto
3. Three
4. Term of censure
5. Pastness of the past and its presence
6. Catalyst
7. Tradition
8. Organisation
9. Artistic emotion is transformed, personal are crude
10. Improves qualitatively
11. Catalytic agent
12. Emotions recollected in tranquillity
13. Personality
14. Historical sense
15. It is not better or higher, just different

Assignments

1. Explain Eliot's concept of tradition and why he believes it is misunderstood by the English.
2. Discuss Eliot's theory of the impersonality of poetry and his use of the catalyst metaphor.
3. Analyse the difference between personal emotions and artistic emotion in Eliot's theory.
4. Evaluate Eliot's rejection of Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and his alternative view.
5. Examine why Eliot believes that art never improves and how this affects the evaluation of poetry.

Suggested Reading

1. Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. Methuen, 1920.
2. Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*. Faber and Faber, 1932.
3. Unger, Leonard. *T.S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns*. University of Minnesota Press, 1966.
4. Kenner, Hugh. *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot*. Methuen, 1965.
5. Kermode, Frank. *The Romantic Image*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957



“The Great Tradition”

– F.R. Leavis

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand F.R. Leavis’ critical approach
- ▶ evaluate Leavis’ concept of the literary canon.
- ▶ critically engage with Leavis’ critique of mass culture
- ▶ apply Leavis’ principles of close reading
- ▶ analyse the role of human sensibility

Prerequisite

Frank Raymond Leavis (1895–1978) was a major figure in 20th-century literary criticism, known for his rigorous and morally engaged approach to literature. He believed literature was not merely an aesthetic pursuit but a vital force in shaping human thought and countering the negative effects of modernity. His journal, *Scrutiny* (1932–1953), promoted close reading, focusing on deep textual analysis rather than abstract theories. Leavis argued that literature should engage with the complexities of life, offering insights into human nature, society, and morality. He rejected the idea of literature as mere entertainment, instead underscoring for its role in intellectual and moral development. In *The Great Tradition* (1948), he identified Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence as central to the English literary canon, valuing their artistic integrity, moral seriousness, and technical skill.

His approach combined detailed textual study with intuitive judgement, focusing on the text itself rather than external influences. Though influenced by T.S. Eliot, he placed greater emphasis on the moral and social responsibilities of literature. He also criticised mass culture, arguing that popular media and commercialised literature weakened intellectual and cultural standards. Despite his selective canon and controversial exclusions - such as his initial dismissal of Charles Dickens- Leavis’s ideas continue to shape literary studies. His focus on close reading, moral seriousness, and literature’s cultural role remains influential.

In this unit, you will explore Leavis’ critical methods, his views on the English novel, and his lasting impact on literary thought.



Keywords

Great Tradition, Moral Seriousness, Literary Canon Formation, Cultural Critique, Artistic Integrity

Discussion

5.4.1. Introduction to F.R. Leavis

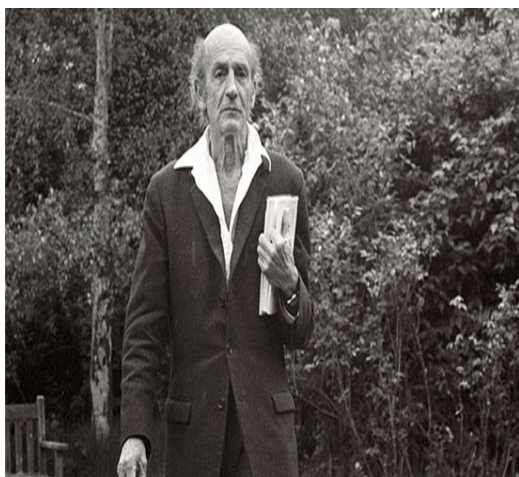


Fig. 5.4.1 F.R. Leavis (1895-1978)

Frank Raymond Leavis was a distinguished literary critic whose approach emphasised close reading and the rigorous evaluation of texts. He advocated that literary criticism should focus on the text itself, prioritising an empirical engagement that enables a deeper understanding of literature. For Leavis, literature held a crucial role in preserving cultural values, providing a counterbalance to the potentially dehumanising effects of technological progress. His teachings, lectures, and ideas were disseminated through *Scrutiny*, the literary quarterly he co-founded in 1932, which remained an influential publication until its closure in 1953.

Leavis' critical method was largely empirical rather than theoretical, and his approach can be described as an intuitive and socially committed form of moral criticism. His work was deeply influenced by T.S. Eliot, particularly in his early assessments of the English poetic tradition. However, his contributions to En-

glish fiction analysis remain among his most impactful works. He emphasised the necessity of literature to present characters that respond sensitively to the social and moral issues of their time. His criticism was founded upon an ethical commitment to literature's role in shaping human sensibility, but he firmly resisted abstract theorisation.

Raman Selden categorised Leavis as a moral critic rather than a New Critic, distinguishing his method from the American New Critical approach, which emphasised an objective, text-based analysis. While the New Critics focused on textual autonomy and formalist scrutiny, Leavis emphasised sensibility and the human experiences embedded in literary works. His approach acknowledged that values in literature were intuitive and deeply felt rather than subject to abstract theorisation.

Major Works and Contributions

Leavis's influential works covered both literature and popular culture, some of which include:

- ▶ *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930)
- ▶ *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932)
- ▶ *Revaluation* (1936)
- ▶ *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948)
- ▶ *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955)
- ▶ *Dickens the Novelist* (1970, co-authored with Q.D. Leavis)
- ▶ *The Living Principle: "English" as a Discipline of Thought* (1975)

► *Nor Shall My Sword* (1970)

His essay on *Hard Times*, originally published in *Scrutiny* (Spring 1947) as “The Novel as Dramatic Poem,” reflects Leavis’ effort to re-evaluate Dickens as a serious artist. Ian Gregor highlights Leavis’ observation of Dickens’ stylistic dexterity, symbolic depth, and narrative precision. Though Dickens was initially dismissed by Leavis as primarily an entertainer rather than a serious novelist, his later reassessment in *Dickens the Novelist* (1970) acknowledged Dickens’ artistic merit.

The Great Tradition and Its Chapters

Leavis’s *The Great Tradition* (1948) remains his most renowned work, establishing a lineage of novelists whom he considered central to the English literary canon. The book consists of the following chapters:

- The Great Tradition
- George Eliot
- Henry James
- Joseph Conrad
- *Hard Times*: An Analytic Note
- Appendix

5.4.2. Summary of Chapter 1 - The Great Tradition

Leavis notes at the beginning that, among English novelists, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad are widely recognised as “the great English novelists.” He acknowledges that some critics consider his perspective too limited, but he insists that he can justify his position. The study of fiction is particularly challenging because it allows for multiple interpretations, which can sometimes lead to confusion when forming judgments and shaping critical thought. Writers such as Jane Austen, Thackeray, George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell, Scott, the Brontë sisters, and Trollope, among others, are generally re-

garded as classical novelists. It is worth highlighting that these authors not only contribute significantly to literature but also bring about distinct changes in the artistic possibilities of the novel. Through their works, they explore and expand human understanding by engaging with the complexities and “possibilities of life,” offering insights into human nature, society, and moral choices.

Leavis proposes a tradition within the English novel, where novelists form a continuous lineage in relation to the idea of tradition. As a result, the established views of English fiction’s past would require significant revision. He particularly admires Henry Fielding for his role in introducing Jane Austen to this tradition. Leavis also praises Fielding for the broad scope and variety of episodes in his novel *Tom Jones*. However, he observes that Fielding’s focus on human nature, though straightforward, has a limitation, it results in a certain monotony. According to Leavis, while Fielding’s work is notable, it does not offer enough diversity in terms of themes and depth of exploration.

Jane Austen is “one of the truly great writers, and herself a major fact in the background of other great writers.” She provides a faithful, and enlightening portrayal of ingenuity and artistically portrays the connection between individual talent and tradition. Her relation to tradition is creative in that she not only considers tradition a lineage but also the effort to look back into her intentions as far as her relationship with the past is concerned.

Leavis quotes Cecil Day Lewis, who observes that George Eliot is “the first modern novelist who not only excels entertainment but also explores “serious problems and preoccupations of mature life”. She breaks with the primary tradition of form and matter characteristic of the novel of her times. Lewis compares George Eliot with Jane Austen because their



plots are not only deliberate and well-calculated but they also offer an insight into the realities of life

Leavis comments that Jane Austen is interested in composition; however, she maintains an aesthetics that is disparate from moral significance. The dual principles of organisation and development, in her works offer an intense moral interest that shows her preoccupation with her personal life. She is serious and dedicated enough to impersonalise her moral tensions and makes efforts to learn what to do with them. Her success is her preoccupation with morals

The great novelists in the tradition identified by Leavis are preoccupied with form for they are technically original and use their genius to frame uniquely appropriate methods and procedures in their art. The various novels of D.H. Lawrence, George Moore, Jane Austen and George Eliot show the composition that is orderly and frames an authentic picture of life.

Lewis however imparts to Jane Austen a superiority over George Eliot due to the freedom from moral preoccupations, which Austen enjoys. An example would be Emma that is appreciated only in terms of Austen's moral preoccupation that brings out the novelist's peculiar interest in life. Emma is a great novel because it is perfect in form with aesthetic matter preserved in the beauty of composition and "represents truth to life."

Henry James, who admires Jane Austen is infused with a peculiar ethical sensibility. His ethical sensibility is discerning, his wit is real and natural, his poetry is intelligent and rich; moreover, it is devoid of anything that is false, vulgar or cheap with regard to his principles. He is a novelist who studies and analyses his fellow-craftsmen. James' works are easy due to the use of well-grounded technical sophistication and bears a view of the world

that is quite different from his contemporaries. Though he is unmistakably an American from the English point of view, he is also very much a European in temperament

George Eliot could create only from her personal experiences that is closely related to the middle and lower class of the rural England of the 19th century Midlands, observes Leavis. Though she is labelled a Puritan, this is quite misleading because there is no evidence of anything restrictive or timid about her ethical habits and what she expresses through her Evangelical background other than her serious attitude to life and an interest in human nature that makes her a great psychologist. Her psychological and moral insights are significant because her characters exhibit the best in society. Her moral seriousness has not been taken seriously by many writers, especially Henry James. Leavis considers James' treatment of George Eliot too narrow and lauds the efforts of Eliot.

Henry James is a genius who creates an ideal civilised sensibility and possesses the capacity to communicate by the finest means of implication. Joseph Conrad is also an innovator in form and method who takes serious interest in life. Like James, Conrad views fiction as a serious art where the peculiar way of the ingenuity and uniqueness of the artist could be explicitly drawn. Charles Dickens possesses the vitality and vision of art as Conrad does. However, Dickens cannot be included "*in the line of great novelists*"

Leavis mentions that despite the creativity and the permanent place that Dickens holds among the classics, his "genius was that of a great entertainer and he had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests". Dickens novels are not serious in subject matter and they serve as the source of recreation only. His

failure as a serious novelist shows his immaturity in projecting the intensity of life. For these reasons, Dickens fails to be in line with the “great English novelists” and this justifies the exclusion of the elaboration of Dickens’ art and creativity in *The Great Tradition*.

Leavis quotes Santayana, who mentions, in Soliloquies in England that Dickens is famous only among parents and children all over the world, probably in the evenings. Leavis discerns that he is immature and his creative genius is controlled throughout “to a unifying and organising significance.” *Hard Times* is denied due recognition for the great product it is. The novel is quite perfect, but quite uncharacteristic of Dickens. The work maintains complete seriousness and is free of “repetitive overdoing and lose inclusiveness;” moreover, the themes in the novel are rich, well-knit and exceedingly commanding.

In this connection, Leavis mentions, “The fable is perfect; the symbolic and representative values are inevitable and, sufficiently plain at once, yields fresh subtleties as the action develops naturally in its convincing historical way.” The prominent feature of the Victorian civilisation is drawn by Dickens with an awe-inspiring force that is manifested concretely. The connections and significances among the characters as well as the setting are appropriately realised

Dickens, in *Hard Times* brings out crucial aspects related to Victorian Utilitarianism through the characters, Gradgrind and Bounderby. Gradgrind, though respected possesses “the grossest and crassest, the most utterly unspiritual egotism, and the most blatant thrusting and bullying to which a period of ‘rugged individualism’ gave scope.” He is practical and marries his daughter to Bounderby who is as individualistic as Gradgrind. The greatness of *Hard Times* has passed unnoticed, and

Dickens’ artistic felicity cannot be underestimated.

Leavis concludes by discussing the contributions of D.H. Lawrence, whose novels are characterised by their vitality, radical experimentation, and engagement with fundamental human experiences. He critiques James Joyce’s *Ulysses* for lacking a unifying organic principle, despite its technical ingenuity. While Joyce is admired for his formal innovations, Leavis argues that the novel’s fragmented structure ultimately detracts from its artistic coherence.

In conclusion, Leavis affirms that Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence collectively define the great tradition of the English novel. These writers exemplify a continuous evolution of form, intellectual depth, and artistic integrity, shaping the trajectory of English fiction in profound and enduring ways.

5.4.3. Critical Analysis

The Great Tradition and Leavis’s Critical Approach

Leavis’s *The Great Tradition* (1948) is one of his most influential works. In it, he argues for a lineage of great English novelists who represent the highest artistic and moral standards. He identifies Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad as the central figures in this tradition, later including D.H. Lawrence. Leavis defines “tradition” not as a mere continuity of literary forms but as an evolving, self-renewing process in which each great novelist builds upon and transforms the achievements of predecessors.

His selection of novelists was controversial because he excluded some of the most celebrated authors of the time, such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Leavis dismissed



Dickens, for example, as primarily an entertainer rather than a serious artist, arguing that his novels lacked the depth and complexity necessary for inclusion in *The Great Tradition*. However, he later revised his view, acknowledging *Hard Times* as a serious work of fiction.

Leavis emphasised “close reading” and believed that literary criticism should be an act of precise discrimination. He rejected abstract theorizing and instead focused on the nuances of language, style, and moral seriousness in literary works. His approach was influenced by T.S. Eliot in his early years, particularly in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), where he championed poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. However, Leavis later diverged from Eliot, particularly in rejecting the concept of poetic impersonality.

Key Novelists in The Great Tradition

Jane Austen

Leavis considered Austen “one of the truly great writers” whose works exhibit artistic ingenuity and moral seriousness. She maintains a delicate balance between form and ethical concerns, offering insightful explorations of human nature and society. Her contribution to the novel lies in her ability to unify artistic excellence with profound moral and psychological depth. *Emma* is particularly significant because of its intricate form and precise character development, which, according to Leavis, “represents truth to life.”

George Eliot

Mary Ann Evans, known by her pen name George Eliot, was an English novelist, poet, journalist and translator of the Victorian era. Leavis regarded Eliot as “the first modern novelist,” who, beyond providing entertain-

ment, engaged with serious intellectual and moral questions. Her works, such as *Middlemarch*, break with earlier traditions by integrating complex philosophical and psychological dimensions. Eliot’s profound moral seriousness and deep engagement with human relationships make her a key figure in *The Great Tradition*. However, Leavis noted that her fiction was deeply tied to her personal experiences and her Evangelical background, which informed her ethical outlook.

Henry James

Leavis viewed James as a writer of remarkable ethical sensibility and technical sophistication. His novels are distinguished by their psychological depth and precise narrative control. James’s work, such as *The Portrait of a Lady*, reflects a refined ethical perception and an intricate understanding of human relationships. Leavis appreciated James’s dedication to fiction as a serious art form and his influence on the evolution of the modern novel.

Joseph Conrad

Conrad, according to Leavis, is a master of narrative form and psychological complexity. His novels, including *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*, embody a serious moral vision and a deep concern with human nature. Like James, Conrad viewed fiction as a means of profound inquiry into the human condition. His stylistic innovations and thematic depth secured his place in *The Great Tradition*.

D.H. Lawrence

Lawrence represents, for Leavis, a radical departure from traditional forms of fiction. His novels, such as *Women in Love* and *Sons and Lovers*, are marked by their intense exploration of human emotions, relationships, and sexuality. Leavis considered Lawrence’s fiction as possessing a unique vitality and immediacy, making him a vital force in modern

literature. Unlike James, whose ethical sensibility was finely tuned but restrained, Lawrence embraced a passionate, unfiltered engagement with life and its contradictions.

► Leavis's Exclusion of Other Novelists

Leavis's exclusion of Dickens from *The Great Tradition* was particularly controversial. He believed that Dickens, despite his creative genius, lacked the serious artistic purpose that characterized Austen, Eliot, James, and Conrad. However, he acknowledged that *Hard Times* was an exception, a novel that displayed the depth and structural integrity he valued.

Similarly, Leavis was critical of James Joyce and *Ulysses*, despite the novel's technical brilliance. He felt that Joyce's work lacked an organic unity and a moral core that would place it within the tradition of great English fiction. Unlike Lawrence, whose fiction reflected a dynamic engagement with life, Joyce's work appeared to Leavis as overly experimental and detached from deeper human concerns.

► Conclusion: Leavis's Significance in Literary Criticism

F.R. Leavis remains one of the most influential literary critics of the 20th century. His emphasis on close reading, moral seriousness, and the importance of tradition in literature shaped modern English studies. *The Great Tradition* continues to provoke debate about the criteria for literary greatness and the role of criticism in shaping the literary canon.

Leavis's approach to literature was passionate and uncompromising. His insistence on the importance of literature as a means of preserving human values and resisting the dehumanization of modern life underscores his enduring relevance. While his exclusions and strong opinions have been challenged, his contributions to literary criticism, particularly

his insistence on literature as a serious, life-affecting endeavour, ensure his lasting impact on the field.

5.4.4. F.R. Leavis: Concept of Literature and Criticism

F.R. Leavis remains one of the most influential literary critics of the twentieth century, shaping modern approaches to literary criticism through his emphasis on moral responsibility, tradition, and close reading. His critical philosophy was deeply rooted in the belief that literature plays a vital role in shaping cultural and ethical consciousness. Unlike critics who saw literature as merely an aesthetic pursuit, Leavis insisted on its profound connection to life, morality, and intellectual development. His work sought to establish a rigorous approach to literary analysis, one that rejected superficiality and upheld a selective literary canon of works that demonstrated both artistic excellence and moral depth.

► Literature as a Moral and Social Force

Leavis viewed literature as essential to the moral and cultural development of society. He believed that great literature was not only an artistic achievement but also a medium through which moral and ethical values were explored and reinforced. For Leavis, literature was integral to the human experience, offering insights into the complexities of life, character, and personal responsibility. He championed works that engaged deeply with moral issues and criticised those that he believed encouraged intellectual passivity. His critical method sought to distinguish between literature that cultivated serious thought and that which merely entertained or pandered to popular taste. This perspective led him to critique much of Victorian and Romantic literature, which he often dismissed as overly sentimental or lacking intellectual rigour.



► The Importance of Tradition and the Literary Canon

A central aspect of Leavis's criticism was his emphasis on literary tradition. He argued that literature should be studied in terms of a carefully curated canon of great works, primarily from the English tradition. Leavis's idea of the literary canon was selective, valuing works that he believed demonstrated supreme artistic and intellectual achievement. He held particular admiration for Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Austen, Eliot, and Conrad, while he was critical of certain Victorian and Romantic writers whom he saw as indulgent or emotionally excessive. His selective approach to literary tradition shaped debates about the nature of literary value and the criteria by which works should be judged.

► Close Reading and the Scrutiny Method

Leavis' approach to literary criticism was heavily influenced by the New Criticism movement, which advocated close reading and detailed textual analysis. He believed that literature should be examined for its intrinsic qualities rather than through the lens of historical or biographical context. This method was advanced through *Scrutiny*, a journal he founded in 1932, which became a platform for promoting his critical ideals. Through *Scrutiny*, Leavis encouraged a meticulous and disciplined approach to literary analysis, one that sought to uncover the nuances of language, structure, and meaning within a text. This insistence on close reading shaped the academic study of literature, placing emphasis on precise textual interpretation over broad theoretical speculation.

► Critique of Mass Culture and Popular Literature

One of the most controversial aspects of Leavis's criticism was his strong opposition

to mass culture and popular fiction. He was deeply sceptical of the influence of commercialisation on literature and saw the rise of mass media as a threat to serious intellectual engagement. He argued that popular literature, film, and advertising encouraged superficiality, weakening the ability of individuals to think critically. In contrast, he saw serious literature as demanding intellectual effort and providing deeper insights into human experience. His views on mass culture reflected a broader cultural critique, warning against the dangers of passivity and the decline of rigorous intellectual standards in modern society.

► Reevaluation of English Literary Tradition

Leavis sought to redefine and refine the English literary tradition, often challenging the conventional appreciation of certain authors. He was particularly critical of the Romantics and certain Victorian writers, whom he regarded as lacking the intellectual discipline necessary for great literature. Instead, he championed the works of the metaphysical poets, as well as modernist writers like T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, whom he saw as embodying the complexity and depth that great literature required. His analysis of Lawrence, in particular, emphasised the psychological and moral dimensions of literature, arguing that literature should engage with fundamental questions of human existence. By promoting this reevaluation, Leavis contributed to shifting critical focus towards more intellectually demanding and morally engaging works.

► Impact on Literary Criticism

Leavis' influence on literary criticism was profound and long-lasting. His insistence on a selective literary canon, the rigorous application of close reading, and the moral function of literature helped shape English literary studies throughout the twentieth century. His work reinforced the idea that literature should

be judged based on its intellectual and moral value, rather than on its popularity or historical significance alone. However, his approach has also been criticised for its elitism and exclusivity, with some arguing that his rigid criteria for literary value overlooked important works that did not fit into his narrow definition of great literature. Despite such critiques, Leavis' impact on literary criticism remains undeniable, and his ideas continue to influence contemporary discussions on the role of literature in society.

Conclusion

F.R. Leavis's concept of literature and criticism was founded on the belief that literature is a moral and intellectual pursuit, essential to the development of culture and individual thought. His advocacy for a selective literary canon, his emphasis on close reading, and his critique of mass culture have left a lasting imprint on literary studies. Although his views remain debated, his insistence on rigorous critical standards and the intellectual responsibility of literature continue to shape how literature is studied and understood today.

Recap

- ▶ Leavis focused on detailed analysis of language, structure, and meaning.
- ▶ He judged literature based on its ethical and moral significance.
- ▶ *The Great Tradition* defined important English novelists in literary history.
- ▶ *Scrutiny* promoted rigorous literary criticism and in-depth textual analysis.
- ▶ Literature preserves cultural values and shapes ethical human consciousness.
- ▶ He criticised mass media for encouraging superficiality and intellectual laziness.
- ▶ His criticism relied on textual evidence rather than theoretical speculation.
- ▶ Literature should explore emotions, relationships, and deep moral dilemmas.
- ▶ He supported a selective literary canon based on artistic excellence.
- ▶ Initially, Dickens was dismissed but *Hard Times* gained his approval.
- ▶ Influenced by Eliot, he emphasised the literature of moral and social relevance.
- ▶ He admired Lawrence for experimental writing and deep human insights.
- ▶ He criticised *Ulysses* for lacking coherence despite technical achievements.
- ▶ His methods shaped English literature studies through strict critical analysis.
- ▶ Leavis's legacy highlights literature's role in moral and intellectual life.

Objective Questions

1. What was the name of the literary journal founded by F.R. Leavis?
2. Which work by Leavis identifies Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad as central figures in the English literary canon?
3. What critical method did Leavis emphasise, focusing on detailed textual analysis?
4. Which novelist did Leavis initially dismiss as an entertainer but later acknowledge for *Hard Times*?
5. What term describes Leavis's belief in literature as a force for shaping cultural and ethical consciousness?
6. Which literary movement influenced Leavis's early criticism, particularly his focus on textual autonomy?
7. Which novelist did Leavis include in *The Great Tradition* for his radical experimentation and engagement with human experiences?
8. What did Leavis criticise James Joyce's *Ulysses* for lacking?
9. Which Victorian ideology is critiqued through characters like Gradgrind and Bounderby in *Hard Times*?
10. What did Leavis view as a threat to intellectual rigour and cultural values in modern society?
11. Which poet's work did Leavis champion in *New Bearings in English Poetry*?
12. What did Leavis consider the primary role of literature in society?
13. Which novelist did Leavis describe as "the first modern novelist" for engaging with serious intellectual and moral questions?
14. What did Leavis believe was essential for a work to be included in the literary canon?
15. Which literary figure's concept of poetic impersonality did Leavis later reject?

Answers

1. Scrutiny
2. The Great Tradition
3. Close Reading
4. Charles Dickens
5. Moral Criticism
6. New Criticism
7. D.H. Lawrence
8. Organic Unity

9. Utilitarianism
10. Mass Culture
11. T.S. Eliot
12. Moral Development
13. George Eliot
14. Artistic Integrity
15. T.S. Eliot

Assignments

1. Why did Leavis include specific novelists in *The Great Tradition*?
2. How does Leavis's moral criticism differ from other critical approaches?
3. What are Leavis's concerns about mass culture and popular literature?
4. How does Leavis's close reading method enhance literary text analysis?
5. What is F.R. Leavis's lasting impact on literary criticism today?

Suggested Reading

1. Leavis, F. R. *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*. Chatto & Windus, 1948.
2. Leavis, F. R. *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*. Minority Press, 1930.
3. Leavis, F. R. *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*. Chatto & Windus, 1932.
4. Leavis, F. R. *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*. Chatto & Windus, 1955.
5. Mulhern, Francis. *The Moment of Scrutiny*. Verso, 1979.

BLOCK - 06

Indian Aesthetics

- Unit-1** : “The Theory of Rasa”
S. N Dasgupta
- Unit-2** : “Theory of Dhvani”
Kunjunni Raja
- Unit-3** : “Kuntaka: Theory of Poetry: Vakrokti”
S. K. De



“The Theory of Rasa”

-S. N Dasgupta

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ identify key psychological bases of Rasa.
- ▶ distinguish bhava, vibhava, anubhava, vyabhicharibhava clearly.
- ▶ explain Abhinavagupta’s theory of universalised emotion.
- ▶ analyse Bhatta Nayaka’s bhavakatva, bhojakatva functions.
- ▶ evaluate Dasgupta’s interpretation of aesthetic experience

Prerequisite

Surendranath Dasgupta (1887–1952) was an eminent Indian philosopher best known for his five-volume *A History of Indian Philosophy*, a monumental work that traced Indian thought from its ancient beginnings to the 16th century. He sought to demonstrate the rigour and sophistication of Indian philosophy, correcting Western misconceptions that dismissed it as mystical or irrational. His scholarship helped revive many neglected traditions and placed Indian philosophy in conversation with Western thought.

“The Theory of Rasa”, included in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (1947), surveys the historical development of Rasa theory, explaining core concepts such as bhava, vasana, vibhava, anubhava, vyabhicharibhava, camatkara, and sahrdaya. It also reviews debates among major theorists like Bharata, Abhinavagupta, Bhatta Lollata, Bhatta Nayaka, Bhatta Tauta, and others on imitation, poetic truth, universalisation, and the psychology of aesthetic experience. The learner should already be familiar with basic Sanskrit aesthetic terms and the nine rasas as codified in Bharata’s *Natyashastra*.

Keywords

Rasa, Sthayibhava, Vibhava, Camatkara, Sahrdaya



Discussion

Surendranath Dasgupta was an eminent Indian philosopher and scholar renowned for his work on Indian philosophy, particularly Advaita Vedanta. Born in 1887, Dasgupta dedicated his life to the study and interpretation of ancient Indian philosophical traditions. Dasgupta's magnum opus is his five-volume masterpiece, *A History of Indian Philosophy*. This monumental work provides an insightful account of Indian philosophy from its ancient origins to the 16th century. Dasgupta's meticulous research and analysis helped revive and illuminate many forgotten or overlooked philosophical traditions.

Through his writings, Dasgupta aimed to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. He emphasised the profound intellectual depth and sophistication of Indian philosophical thought, challenging the notion that Indian philosophy was mere mysticism or irrationality. His scholarly contributions have had a lasting impact on the field of philosophy, not only in India but glob-

ally. His works continue to be widely studied and referenced by scholars and students interested in Indian philosophy and its relevance to contemporary thought. Surendranath Dasgupta's legacy lies in his profound exploration of Indian philosophy, his dedication to rigorous scholarship, and his efforts to promote cross-cultural understanding in the world of philosophy.

The essay "The Theory of Rasa", written by S.N. Dasgupta and published in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* in 1947, provides a historical overview of the development of the rasa theory and engages with the contributions of various scholars to the arena. It details the concepts central to an understanding of the theory of rasa, such as bhava, vasana, chamatkara, vibhava, anubhava, vyabhicharibhava etc., are discussed in detail. Dasgupta also elaborates upon the perception of imitation and poetic truth by various theorists in the context of Indian aesthetics. The essay is a commentary on the rasa theory and its historical development through the works of Indian aestheticians



Figure 6.1.1 Bharata's Rasa Formula (Vibhava-Anubhava-Vyabhichari Bhava)

6.1.1 Summary of “The Theory of Rasa”

Definition of Rasa

Rasa is defined as aesthetic emotion. We describe it as aesthetic emotion because the imitation of life in art does not produce the same emotion or feeling that we experience in real life when actual events happen to us. Bharatamuni propounded this theory in ancient Sanskrit dramatic theory. In *Natyasastra*, the formula for the production of Rasa is stated as follows:

Vibhavanubhavavyabhicarisamyogad rasani-spattih

This formula indicates that Rasa emerges from the combination of Vibhava, Anubhava, and Vyabhichari Bhava.

6.1.1.1 Technical Terms Associated with the Discussion of Rasa

Understanding Rasa requires knowledge of several technical terms:

Vibhava refers to the objective condition producing an emotion. This is divided into two kinds:

- ▶ **Alambana Vibhava:** The person or persons with reference to whom the emotion is produced. For example, a young man and a woman who meet and fall in love.
- ▶ **Uddipana Vibhava:** The circumstances that foster the emotion, such as the romantic atmosphere of a garden, moonlight, and the youthfulness and beauty of the woman.

Anubhava refers to bodily expression by which emotions are expressed. Examples include the arch glances of the lady or her invit-

ing manner in the above case.

Vyabhichari Bhava refers to a series of diverse emotions that feed the dominant emotion. For example, a woman in love anxiously waiting at the rendezvous for her lover, feeling disappointed when he fails to arrive, and feeling jealous at the thought that he may have been courted by another woman.

6.1.1.2 Abhinava Gupta and His Contribution

Bharatamuni propounded the formula for Rasa. Abhinavagupta started the discussion on Rasa and focused on two terms connected to it: ‘Samyoga’ and ‘Rasa nispatti’. His contribution was significant in developing a more sophisticated understanding of how Rasa functions in aesthetic experience.

6.1.1.3 Rasa and Psychology

According to S.N. Dasgupta, Rasa is based upon a postulate of psychology. He proposes that our personality is constituted, both towards its motivation and understanding, of a few primary emotions that are embedded in the subconscious and the unconscious. These primary emotions and their aesthetic equivalents are as follows:

- ▶ The amorous (Sringaram)
- ▶ The heroic (Veeram)
- ▶ The pathetic (Karunam)
- ▶ The ludicrous (Hasyam)
- ▶ The wondrous (Aibhutham)
- ▶ The fearful (Bhayanakam)
- ▶ The nauseating (Beebhatsam)
- ▶ The angry (Roudram)
- ▶ The peaceful or intellectual (Santham)

Other aesthetic psychologists have added three more emotions:



- ▶ The devotional (Bhakti)
- ▶ The filial (Chand)
- ▶ The passionate or heroic (Heroic)

These emotions run permanently in a manner in all human nature. They may be likened to the ragas in music. They form the basic note of a performance, which is called the Sthayibhava or the permanent emotion. In a work of art, these emotions do not appear monotonously, remaining at the same pitch or intensity. Instead, they appear with variant degrees of intensity, mixing and mingling with other emotions in varying degrees. However, the Sthayibhava, like the basic note within which a musician performs, is always maintained. This Bhava remains the groundwork for the particular piece. For example, in a tragedy, we distinguish pathos or Karuna Rasa as the basic note. However, no emotion can be called Rasa unless it is aesthetically excited. It is the artistic circumstances or situation that rouses it.

6.1.1.4 How Is Rasa Aroused?

Bhatta Lollata's argument is that Rasa is related to the Vibhavas in the relation of the produced and the producer. In other words, Rasa is a product of the Vibhavas. Mamata repudiates this view. He proposes that the Vibhavas are only nimitta karanas, or the efficient cause. However, Dasgupta points out that there cannot be any Rasa unless there is also the Vibhava and Anubhava. Vibhavas cannot be considered as communicative agents because an agent presupposes the thing to be communicated. Rasa does not exist before the work of art. The basic human emotions are not Rasa themselves.

Samkuka's Illustration

Samkuka illustrates this with the analogy of a painting. A painted horse is a horse but not a horse. It is a creation of the artist, or in other

words, an imitation. Similarly, Rasa in art is created through artistic means but is distinct from ordinary emotion.

6.1.1.5 Bhatta Nayaka's Definition

Bhatta Nayaka declares that Rasa is neither produced nor suggested nor created by anything external. He held that a proper aesthetic creation has the peculiar function of generating in us a new spiritual creation. We have in us a special function by which we can enjoy it. These two functions are called Bhavakatva and Bhojakatva. Without knowledge of these two, we cannot define aesthetic experience.

6.1.1.6 Abhinavagupta's Objection and Theory

Abhinavagupta repudiates the above argument and proposes another idea, which is more plausible. He says that after having grasped the full significance of the words and their meanings, there is a mental intuition. As a result, the actual temporal and spatial character of the situation is withdrawn from the mind. The emotion suggested therein loses its individual character and dissociates itself from such conditions as might have led us to any motivation. The pathological conditions of real life emotions are not there. Hence, emotion is universalised and detached from these conditions. This produces the joy that is the experience of art. In the intuition of Rasa, we live through the experience of a pure sentiment bereft of all its local characters. That is why we "enjoy" a tragedy which presents human sorrow and suffering.

6.1.1.7 The Reason for Kinship and Identity Among Art Lovers

The term Sahrudaya is used to denote the love of art. Rasika is also used in languages such as Tamil. When art presents before us the universal emotions of various kinds in representation, they become affiliated to the real life

emotions lying deep in the mind. There takes place a process of recognition of identity, which transforms into Rasa.

Bhatta Tauta, the author of *Kavya Kautuka* and the teacher of Abhinavagupta, analysed the process of the making of Rasa in his book. He first points out that the performance of a play is not an actual physical occurrence. The audience do not consider the actual perceptual experience of the actor playing the role of Rama (or any such character). They also do not believe that he is the real Rama. The actor is poised somewhere midway between the ideal of the character impersonated and the real human being who is the actor. This, together with the other elements such as music and setting, produces a kind of exhilaration. This present experience interacts with the audience's emotional complexes buried deep in the mind and creates a new dimension of emotional experience detached from the actual. This becomes artistic enjoyment or Rasaswadana, also known as Camatkara. This is something shared by everyone. Hence, it is the enlightenment of the universal emotion. It is a new creation involving the personality of the individual and the objective dramatic content as constituents. It is a new appearance, a revelation different from all other experience and all external objects. Dasgupta argues that if the above is true, then "dramatic experience and art can no longer be regarded as imitative."

6.1.1.8 Two Kinds of Universalisation of the Poetic

First Kind: The aesthetic composition, by nature of its special suggestive force, presents before our minds an aesthetic situation and an emotion that is devoid of all its local character.

Second Kind: The expression of this artistic enlightenment has a universal character in its manifestation in different minds.

The presented whole is commingled with the complex emotions and feelings in the subconscious. This varies from individual to individual. This is the reason why a work of art is experienced and interpreted differently by different people. The same presentation can mean differently to different individuals. The experience, being free of real life emotions, is called Alaukika. Its other name is Camatkara.

6.1.1.9 Three Senses in Which Camatkara Is Used

First Sense: Camatkara is sometimes used to denote the special aesthetic attitude of the mind produced by the commingling of the universal artistic situation and the stirred-up emotion-motive complexes.

Second Sense: Camatkara denotes the aesthetic pleasure arising out of this commingling.

Third Sense: Camatkara denotes the bodily manifestation of such enjoyment.

Camatkara is also used to denote that special mental function by which the whole aesthetic process is comprehended and experienced. This term encompasses both the internal emotional response and the external manifestation of aesthetic appreciation.

6.1.2 Critical Analysis

S. N. Dasgupta's essay "The Theory of Rasa" represents an important moment in the modern interpretation of Indian aesthetic theory. Its critical importance does not lie in the formulation of an original doctrine, but in its attempt to systematise, philosophically interpret, and intellectually defend the classical rasa theory for a modern academic readership. He functions less as a theorist and more as a critical mediator who translates Sanskrit aesthetic discourse into a conceptual framework accessible to contemporary philosophy and literary criticism.



One of the most significant strengths of Dasgupta's analysis is his insistence on distinguishing *rasa* from ordinary emotion. By foregrounding this distinction, he addresses a problem that has long troubled aesthetic theory: how art produces pleasure through emotions that are painful in real life. His argument that aesthetic emotion is detached from practical motivation and personal consequence provides a coherent explanation for the enjoyment of tragic and fearful experiences in art. This conceptual clarity strengthens *rasa* theory and positions it as a serious alternative to Western explanations such as catharsis or emotional purgation.

Dasgupta's interpretation of Bharata's *rasa* sutra further demonstrates his analytical depth. Rather than treating the formula of *vibhava*, *anubhava*, and *vyabhichari bhava* as a mechanical prescription, he interprets it as a psychological process unfolding within the spectator's consciousness. This move allows him to bridge classical aesthetic theory and modern psychology. His emphasis on *sthayibhava* as a deep rooted emotional disposition embedded in the subconscious is particularly valuable, as it explains both the stability and variability of aesthetic response. However, while this psychological reading enhances the explanatory power of *rasa* theory, He does not sufficiently clarify how subconscious emotional structures are universally shared across cultures and historical periods.

Dasgupta's critical engagement with earlier aestheticians reflects his commitment to philosophical rigor. His rejection of Bhatta Lollata's causal theory of *rasa* exposes the inadequacy of treating aesthetic experience as a mere product of objective conditions. Similarly, his treatment of Samkuka's imitation theory reveals its limitations in explaining aesthetic pleasure. These critiques demonstrate His ability to evaluate earlier positions with-

out dismissing their historical importance. At the same time, his discussion remains heavily conceptual and would have benefited from sustained literary examples to ground theoretical claims in actual artistic practice.

The most persuasive section of his analysis is the evaluation of Abhinavagupta's theory of universalisation. By endorsing this view, Dasgupta provides a philosophically robust explanation for the *alaukika* nature of aesthetic experience. The withdrawal of personal, temporal, and spatial limitations, as described by Abhinavagupta, convincingly accounts for the transformation of ordinary emotion into aesthetic delight. His preference for this theory reflects his broader intellectual orientation toward idealist philosophy, which privileges universal consciousness over individual psychological difference. While this strengthens the metaphysical coherence of *rasa* theory, it also limits its engagement with social, historical, and ideological factors influencing aesthetic response.

Dasgupta's discussion of tragedy further illustrates both the strengths and limitations of his approach. His claim that tragic emotion is transformed rather than purged challenges dominant Western models and highlights the originality of Indian aesthetics. The conception of sorrow as *karuna rasa*, experienced with contemplative pleasure, offers a nuanced account of tragic enjoyment. However, He does not sufficiently address whether all audiences, regardless of cultural conditioning or personal experience, are equally capable of such transformation. The theory assumes a degree of emotional refinement that may not be universally present.

Another important contribution of Dasgupta's essay is his emphasis on the role of the *sahridaya*. By stressing the necessity of aesthetic cultivation, he recognises that literary appreciation is not a passive process but requires

intellectual and emotional preparedness. This insight aligns Indian aesthetics with modern reader response theories. Yet, he stops short of exploring the social processes through which such aesthetic sensibility is formed, thereby leaving the concept of the *sahridaya* largely idealised and abstract.

Dasgupta's treatment of *camatkara* effectively captures the experiential dimension of *rasa*. His description of aesthetic wonder as a heightened, integrated state of awareness anticipates holistic theories of aesthetic response that reject mind body dualism. Nevertheless, his explanation remains largely descriptive, offering limited analytical tools for distinguishing *camatkara* from other forms of emotional absorption or imaginative engagement.

A notable limitation of Dasgupta's essay is its predominantly philosophical orientation. While this lends the work intellectual authority, it also distances it from concrete literary analysis. The absence of detailed textual illustrations makes the theory appear abstract, particularly for students engaging with *rasa* theory for the first time. Furthermore, his

engagement with Western aesthetics, though implicit, is not systematically developed. A more explicit comparative framework could have strengthened his claim that *rasa* theory addresses universal aesthetic concerns.

Despite these limitations, "The Theory of *Rasa*" remains a foundational critical text in modern Indian aesthetics. Its greatest achievement lies in presenting *rasa* theory as a coherent, psychologically plausible, and philosophically sophisticated system rather than as a collection of isolated concepts. By foregrounding universalisation, detachment, and aesthetic joy, he reaffirms the relevance of classical Indian aesthetic thought to contemporary literary criticism.

In short, Dasgupta's essay succeeds not by offering definitive answers, but by reframing *rasa* theory as a serious philosophical response to enduring aesthetic problems. His work continues to shape academic engagement with Indian aesthetics and serves as an essential bridge between classical Sanskrit poetics and modern critical discourse.

Recap

- ▶ Dasgupta defines *Rasa* as aesthetic emotion, distinct from ordinary real-life emotion.
- ▶ Bharata's *sutra* states *Rasa* arises from the conjunction of *vibhava*, *anubhava*, and *vyabhicharibhava*.
- ▶ *Vibhava* is the objective condition of emotion, divided into *alambana* (person) and *uddipana* (stimulating circumstances).
- ▶ *Anubhava* is the bodily or outward expression of inner emotion, such as gesture, glance, or posture.
- ▶ *Vyabhicharibhavas* are transitory supporting emotions that nourish and sustain a dominant emotion.
- ▶ *Sthayibhavas* are permanent dominant emotions in the psyche, like love, heroism, fear, disgust, and wonder.



- ▶ Later thinkers added peace, devotion, and filial affection as further fundamental emotional bases.
- ▶ Dasgupta stresses that these basic emotions become Rasa only when aesthetically excited in art, not in raw life.
- ▶ Bhatta Lollata treated Rasa as literally produced by vibhavas, a view Mamata modified by calling them efficient causes only.
- ▶ Samkuka's painted-horse analogy shows that aesthetic emotion is like imitation: similar to but not identical with real emotion.
- ▶ Bhatta Nayaka argued Rasa is neither produced nor merely suggested, but realised through bhavakatva and bhojakatva as a new spiritual experience.
- ▶ Abhinavagupta proposed that through universalisation real-life spatio-temporal and personal conditions are removed, yielding pure, generalised sentiment.
- ▶ The spectator's buried emotional complexes recognise a kinship with represented universal emotions, resulting in Rasa-svadana or relish.
- ▶ Camatkara names both the special aesthetic attitude and the delight and bodily manifestation that accompany Rasa-experience.
- ▶ Dasgupta concludes that dramatic and poetic experience cannot be seen as mere imitation but as a new, alaukika mode of consciousness.

Objective Questions

1. Who authored "The Theory of Rasa"?
2. In which text does Bharata codify Rasa?
3. What term denotes the permanent emotion?
4. What is the objective cause of emotion called?
5. What term denotes bodily expression of emotion?
6. What are transitory supporting emotions called?
7. Which aesthetician elaborated universalisation (sadharanikarana)?
8. Who introduced bhavakatva and bhojakatva?
9. What term denotes the aesthetic relish of Rasa?
10. What is the connoisseur of art called?
11. What Sanskrit term denotes aesthetic wonder-delight?
12. Which rasa corresponds to pathos or pity?
13. Which rasa denotes peace or tranquillity?
14. What is the collective name for the nine sentiments?
15. Which Sanskrit drama treatise first formulates Rasa theory?

Answers

1. Dasgupta
2. Natyashastra
3. Sthayibhava
4. Vibhava
5. Anubhava
6. Vyabhicharibhava
7. Abhinavagupta
8. BhattaNayaka
9. Camatkara
10. Sahrdaya
11. Adbhuta
12. Karuna
13. Shanta
14. Navarasa
15. Natyashastra

Assignments

1. Explain Dasgupta's distinction between ordinary emotion and Rasa with suitable examples.
2. Discuss the roles of vibhava, anubhava, and vyabhicharibhava in the emergence of Rasa.
3. Examine Bhatta Nayaka's concepts of bhavakatva and bhojakatva and their importance for Rasa experience.
4. Analyse Abhinavagupta's account of universalisation and show how it explains the enjoyment of tragic art.
5. Evaluate Dasgupta's claim that dramatic experience is not simple imitation but a new, alaukika mode of consciousness.

Suggested Reading

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SGOU



“Theory of Dhvani”

-Kunjunni Raja

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Anandavardhana’s definition of Dhvani
- ▶ analyse Abhinavagupta’s three stages clearly
- ▶ evaluate criticisms from Nyaya philosophers
- ▶ classify Dhvani into primary categories
- ▶ assess Visvanatha’s critique on poetry

Prerequisite

Anandavardhana stands as one of the foremost authorities in classical Indian poetics, and his celebrated work *Dhvanyaloka* (A Light on Suggestion) is among the most widely discussed texts in literary criticism, ranking alongside Bharata Muni’s *Natyashastra*. His fundamental contribution was arguing that suggested content possesses greater significance than surface or literal meanings, revolutionising understanding of how literature communicates meaning and creates aesthetic experience.

Kunjunni Raja’s essay provides a comprehensive examination of Anandavardhana’s Dhvani theory, tracing its historical development, philosophical underpinnings, and debates with rival schools of thought including Nyaya logicians, Mimamsa philosophers, and other Alamkarikas. The learner should be familiar with basic Sanskrit poetic terminology such as Rasa, Bhava, Vibhava, Anubhava, Vyabhicharibhava, Sphota, Lakshana, Abhidha, and the foundational concepts of Indian aesthetics to appreciate the nuanced philosophical arguments surrounding suggestion’s nature and function.

Keywords

Dhvani, Suggestion, Vyanjana, Sphota, Sahrdaya



Discussion

Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja was a distinguished Indian philosopher and scholar known for his deep engagement with Indian philosophical and aesthetic traditions. Born in Kerala in 1928, he was trained in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy at the University of Madras, where he earned his Master's degree and doctorate. His academic formation in Advaita Vedanta and classical Indian thought shaped his approach as a critic and interpreter of philosophical texts. Raja combined traditional learning with modern scholarly methods, enabling him to present complex Indian theories in a clear and systematic manner for contemporary readers.

During his long academic career, Dr. Kunjunni Raja served as Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Kerala and held several important positions, including Chairman of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research. His scholarship extended across Indian philosophy, epistemology, and aesthetics, with a particular focus on meaning and interpreta-

tion. Through works such as *Indian Theories of Meaning* and *Indian Theories of Knowledge*, he examined how Indian thinkers understood language, suggestion, and aesthetic experience. His contributions earned wide recognition, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, and established him as a leading authority on Indian philosophical criticism.

In the essay "Theory of Dhvani," published in *Indian Theories of Meaning* (1969), Kunjunni Raja critically examines the concept of *dhvani*, or suggested meaning, which lies at the heart of Indian poetics. He explains the centrality of *rasa-dhvani* and discusses the objections raised by rival schools such as *lakshana*, *anumana*, and *arthapatti*, carefully presenting Anandavardhana's responses to these critiques. By analysing different kinds of *dhvani* and the role of suggestion and intonation in poetry, Raja clarifies and defends the *dhvani* theory. The essay serves as both an exposition and a reasoned justification of one of the most influential ideas in Indian aesthetics, making it an important introduction to the study of *dhvani*.



Fig 6.2.1 "Theory of Dhvani" - Relationship between Dhvani and Rasa in aesthetic experience.

6.2.1 Summary of “Theory of Dhvani”

What is Dhvani?

Dhvani literally means suggestion, that which is not directly stated but is clearly implied. It encompasses inferences we draw from contextual and non-lexical elements in a literary work, conveyed through skilful rhetorical devices. As R. Mukerjee explains, Anandavardhana employs the term dhvani to signify not merely the sense of symbolic content but equally the suggested meaning, suggestive expression, the function of suggestion, and the total specimen of poetry containing all these elements working together.

Understanding Dhvani through Literary Example

Consider Act III, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, when Macbeth tells his wife: “Duncan is in his grave. After life’s fitful fever, he sleeps well.” A literal paraphrase would simply state: Duncan is dead and buried; his life was turbulent, and death brings him peace. However, the dramatic context enriches meaning immeasurably. Macbeth himself passes a sleepless night, his conscience burdened with guilt. He has murdered Duncan and lost his peace of mind. His words reverberate with irony: he envies the man he murdered, for Duncan has achieved the peace that eludes Macbeth. The suggestion reveals an inner torment, the speaker’s own spiritual crisis, far exceeding the surface meaning.

Similarly, in the midnight scene announcing Duncan’s death, the setting, imagery, and language combine to suggest meaning beyond the literal. When Lady Macbeth appears asking, “What is this hideous trumpet that calls to parley the sleepers of the house?” the image of a hideous trumpet combined with other imagery of death and resurrection recalls biblical accounts of the Last Judgement. This suggestive

richness illuminates the play’s central theme: sin and divine judgment. The comic relief scene preceding this, where a drunken porter fantasises about guarding hell’s gate, intensifies the suggestion through ironic juxtaposition. Such layered suggestiveness exemplifies how a gifted dramatist employs dhvani

6.2.1.1 The Linguistic Foundation: Sphota Theory

Anandavardhana adapted his concept from Sanskrit grammarians. Just as the sounds of utterances dhvani in the grammarian’s sense reveal the integral linguistic sign sphota, the unified meaning, bearing entity, a great poem employs sound, literal sense, and rhetorical devices to evoke a charming, suggested sense possessing significant aesthetic value. The term dhvani is applied to suggestive poetry when suggested meaning predominates over literal meaning. Anandavardhana considered dhvani the very soul of poetry.

He distinguished between two kinds of poetic beauty: literal (*vacya*) and implied (*pratiya-mana*). The implied sense resembles the charm of a beautiful woman, distinct from the attractiveness of individual features. It is something more than literal meaning, depending on the unified whole rather than separate parts. The expressed sense always remains either an idea or a figure of speech; however, the suggested sense may take three forms: an idea, a figure of speech, or an emotion.

6.2.1.2 The Aesthete’s Sensibility

Only those possessing refined poetic sensibility (*sahrdaya*) can comprehend suggested meaning. Grammatical training alone proves insufficient; true appreciation requires cultivated aesthetic taste. All genuinely great poetry contains this element of suggestion. While some argue that dhvani theory merely extends *rasa* theory, this misrepresents their relationship. There exists no conflict between them:



dhvani emphasises the method of treatment, while rasa addresses the ultimate effect. Together, they form the soul of poetry.

Originally limited to drama, Anandavardhana extended dhvani theory to poetry, thereby universalising its application.

6.2.2 Abhinavagupta's Philosophical Development

Abhinavagupta advanced understanding by arguing that rasa is realised through dhvani (suggestion). The emotional potentials bha-vas lie dormant in the spectator's consciousness, stimulated into manifestation by objective conditions vibhavas. Rasa is suggested through the power of suggestion vyanjana. He describes rasa as not merely indescribable but reachable through distinct psychological stages.

The Three Stages of Rasa-Realisation

First Stage Intellectual Cognition: The reader or spectator comprehends the formal and intellectual elements of the poem or drama, which serves as means to subsequent stages.

Second Stage, Imaginative Idealisation: The mind idealises the presented subjects through the faculty of imagination, transcending literal particularity.

Third Stage, Emotional Climax: The reader or spectator arrives at the inexpressible affective (emotional) culmination, the supreme moment when form and feeling merge into unified aesthetic experience.

6.2.3 Criticisms Against Dhvani Theory

A. Dhvani and Anumana (Inference)

The Nyaya school (logicians) and certain Mimamsa philosophers rejected dhvani theory. Mahimabhatta, in his *Vyaktiviveka*, propounded the most systematic critique: he argued

that dhvani can be subsumed under anumana (inference). The implied sense in literature is conveyed by expressed sense through inference itself; therefore, no new linguistic power requires recognition.

Anandavardhana's Rebuttal: Inference depends upon vyapti (invariable concomitance between logical terms). However, in literature, no such relationship exists between primary and suggested senses; therefore, the latter cannot be validly inferred from the former. The fallacy of undistributed middle *anaikantakatva* invalidates the inference.

An analogy clarifies this: the relationship between expressed and implied senses resembles that between light and the pot it illuminates. The light (expressed sense) reveals the pot (implied sense), yet no inherent relationship exists between them. Inference requires mediacy, the minor term becomes the major through relation to the middle term. Suggestion operates without such logical mediation.

B. Jayantabhatta's Logical Critique

In his *Nyayamanjari*, Jayantabhatta dismisses dhvani as unworthy of serious consideration. Other Nyaya philosophers argue that suggested sense derives from primary and secondary meanings, remaining inseparable from them - a view grounded in logical principles of accuracy and precision. Logic appeals to reason and accepts meaning only insofar as it can be inferred from expressed sense.

However, this criticism misses language's deeper dimensions. Beyond lexical meanings lies a prelinguistic realm of human experience. Great poetry appeals to this transcendent level. As Henry Bergson observed, "Language is incapable of apprehending and expressing reality." Yet language may be employed "not to present, but to bring the hearer to a point where he himself may transcend language and

pass to communicable insight.” Poetry, Bergson suggests, functions as a dialectical ladder which, once ascended, may be kicked away. T.S. Eliot’s aphorism captures this: “To describe is to destroy; to suggest is to create.” Logical precision cannot account for suggestion’s power.

C. Dhvani and Arthapatti (Presumption)

Some theorists attempted to include dhvani under arthapatti, a form of immediate inference based on universal relations. Otto Jespersen’s linguistic theory illuminates this debate. He distinguishes three elements in speech: expression (what the speaker gives), suppression (what he could but does not give), and impression (what the listener receives). Suggestion is impression created by suppression. Unspoken meanings accompany oral and verbal communication; individual words carry separate meanings, but their contextual patterning produces meanings transcending the sum of parts. This mutual relationship *samsargam-aryada* constitutes suggestion.

Yet arthapatti implies accurate and definite sense, valid knowledge with precise reference. Poetic suggestion transcends such definiteness, operating in realms of ambiguity and multiplicity.

D. Dhvani and Lakshana (Secondary Meaning)

Alamkarikas such as Mukulabhatta attempted to subsume *vyanjana* (suggestion) under *lakshana* (secondary or metaphorical meaning). They acknowledge that sentences sometimes convey ideas differing from literal sense; all such instances, they claim, fall under *lakshana*. Mukulabhatta cites Bhartrihari, arguing that literal sense leads to other ideas through *abhidheyya sambandha* (conventional relationship). Instances of arthapatti similarly fall

under *lakshana* - hence, dhvani exists within *lakshana*.

Anandavardhana’s Counter-argument: *Lakshana* and *dhvani* differ fundamentally in nature and subject matter. *Lakshana* operates where primary sense contains inconsistency; it indicates secondary sense after cancelling the primary. In suggestion, the primary sense remains included. *Lakshana* is the tail of primary sense; *dhvani* can occur entirely without expressed sense, as in music or dance, where emotion is suggested without words.

The emotive element cannot be explained through *lakshana*, as emotion depends on contextual factors - intonation, facial expression, gestures - absent from *lakshana*’s operation. Additionally, *lakshana* conveys only ideas, whilst *dhvani* encompasses ideas, figures of speech, and emotions.

Illustration: In the sentence “Gangayan ghose” (the village is on the Ganges), *lakshana* operates when the impossible primary sense (the village literally on the river) is replaced by secondary sense (the village on the river’s banks). Yet the deeper resonance, the holiness of the Ganges, escapes *lakshana*’s explanation and emerges through suggestion via contextual and emotional factors. Such suggestion operates even without *lakshana*’s presence.

E. Dhvani and Abhidha (Primary Meaning)

Prabhakara Mimamsa philosophers subordinate *dhvani* to *abhidha*, the primary signifying power. They argue that a word’s meaning is what it conveys, unconfined in scope and extendable indefinitely. A word in a sentence contains not merely its isolated meaning but also its relationships to other words - mutual relationship *samsarga* included.

Anandavardhana’s Objections: Suggested



sense cannot be conveyed by abhidha, which furnishes only definite conventional meaning directly related to the word. Once abhidha fulfils this function, its power is exhausted. The primary sense relates directly to the word; suggested sense is known only indirectly through expressed sense. Suggestion need not depend entirely on words - it varies with context and is grasped by the aesthetically refined, not through linguistic training alone.

F. Dhvani and Tatparyavrtti (Relational Function)

Dhanika and Dhananjaya proposed that dhvani falls under tatparyavrtti, a sentential function explaining comprehension from verbal utterance. Whilst a word's direct relation is to its isolated lexical meaning, contextual relationships are not conveyed directly but suggested through tatparyavrtti.

Distinguishing Poetic Suggestion: According to Abhinavagupta, tatparyavrtti explains literal sentence-meaning; vyanjana operates at a different level. Tatparyavrtti exhausts itself upon establishing logical connections, whilst vyanjana derives from non-expressive factors -- music, gesture, tone. Both senses cannot be attributed to the same power; tatparyavrtti directly emerges from words and concerns expressed sense, whilst dhvani originates elsewhere.

G. Dhvani and Vakrokti (Oblique Expression)

Some theoreticians, notably Kuntaka (exponent of vakrokti in *Vakroktijivita*), incorporated dhvani within vakrokti -- a striking, innovative mode of speech superficially resembling suggestion but fundamentally distinct in focus and methodology.

6.2.4 Classification of Dhvani ***Two Primary Categories***

Dhvani divides into two fundamental types:

1. Avivaksitavacya (Lakshana-based suggestion)
2. Vivaksitanyaya-paravacya (Abhidha-based suggestion)

Avivaksitavacya (Lakshana-mula Dhvani)

Here the literal meaning is unintended or rejected. The emotive element in all intentional metaphors belongs to this category. This subdivides into two varieties:

Atyanta-tiraskrita-vacya: The literal sense is completely set aside. Example: the statement "Dirty clothes are not clothes" (from ancient Mimamsa) negates the usual sense. Similarly, Shelley's "Bird thou never wert" in "To a Skylark" employs such negation. This pregnant use of words either brings all feeling-tones associated with a term along with logical sense or entirely strips them away. Such enhancement or diminishment of normal sense produces suggestion of praise or blame.

Arthantara-samkramita-vacya: The literal meaning shifts through enhancement or diminishment. William Empson's concept of "pregnant use of words" captures this phenomenon. To say "A is A" exemplifies this type, where normal meaning undergoes transformation.

Vivaksitanyaya-paravacya (Abhidha-mula Dhvani)

The literal sense is intended but subordinate to implied sense. This comprises two sub-varieties:

Samlaksyakrama-vyangya: Stages of realising suggested sense are perceivable. Two subdivisions exist:

- Vastu-dhvani: A fact is suggested
- Alamkara-dhvani: An alamkara

(figure of speech) is suggested

Further classification divides suggestion into: (1) Shabdashakti-mula (word-based), where actual words are vital and synonyms cannot substitute, and (2) Arthashakti-mula (meaning-based), where contextual and socio-cultural factors serve suggestion. A third type, Ubhayashakti-mula, combines both.

Asamlakshyakrama-vyangya: The stages of realisation are imperceptible. This type - most significant for poetry - concerns emotional suggestion. Latent emotional potentials in the reader (sthayibhavas) are aroused alongside vibhavas, anubhavas, and vyabhicharibhavas, yet intermediate transformation stages remain imperceptible. When suggested emotion subordinates to expressed sense, it is termed gunibhuta-vyangya.

6.2.5 Visvanatha's Critique and the Question of Poetry's Soul

Visvanatha criticised Anandavardhana for including suggested facts or figures of speech within poetry, arguing that suggestion of poetic emotion alone constitutes poetry's soul. Absent emotional elements, mere verse lacks true poetic status. However, Anandavardhana viewed facts and figures as precipitating rasa-realisation. Abhinavagupta clarifies through the concept rasatilitanti - the suggestion of ideas and figures ultimately culminates in rasa development.

Feeling-Tones and Semantic Multiplicity

Feeling-tones of words shabdashakti-mula resist precise determination, varying according to social factors and frequency of emotional usage. According to Mammata and Visvanatha, homonymous words or expressions containing multiple primary senses, though contextually restricted, suggest additional

meanings.

Jaganatha Pandita notes that in yogarudha words (such as pankaja - lotus, literally "mud-born"), popular usage restricts etymological meaning. Yet poetry may revivify etymological significance as suggestion. Kalidasa demonstrates mastery of such subtle suggestion, where multiple, sometimes evasive meanings emerge -- especially characteristic of Eastern poetry. In homonymous expressions (slesa), if both meanings apply contextually, abhidha conveys both, but contextual restriction determines which operates. In arthashakti-mula, suggested sense need not be idea or figure but fleeting emotion and feeling emerging from contextual factors.

6.2.6 The Importance of Intonation (Kaku)

Suprasegmental Features and Meaning

Utterances in specific contexts carry meanings and emotions transcending lexical significance -- a distinction starkly evident when comparing spoken and written language. In drama, dialogue interpretation transforms through actual stage utterance; tonal variations carry immense importance. These variations, numerous and difficult to classify, were well understood by ancient critics. Bharata Muni, in *Natyashastra*, discusses tonal variations, tempo, and pitch employed by actors to create specified effects. This reaches into phonetics and linguistics; Sanskrit possesses detailed treatises on such matters.

The meaning of any statement remains incomplete without considering suprasegmental features. Kaku denotes intonation. Bharata identifies two types:

- Akanksa-kaku (expectant intonation)



- Nirakanksa-kaku (non-expectant intonation)

Rajasekhara, in *Kavya-mimamsa*, elaborates [translate:akanksa-kaku] into three sub-varieties:

- Akshepagarbha: suggesting disapproval
- Prasnagarbha: suggesting question
- Vitarkagarbha: suggesting doubt or uncertainty

These tonal variations powerfully convey suggestion in theatre and, to a considerable extent, in poetry -- remembering that poetry, in its original form, was the spoken word, recited rather than silently read.

Conclusion: The Meaning of “Meaning”

Sanskrit theoreticians have historically subsumed under [artha] (meaning) far more than mere paraphrase or lexical sense. [Dhvani] theory, operating predominantly through larger structural unities rather than isolated words, recognises that language achieves its fullest expression when suggestion complements, enriches, and ultimately transcends literal meaning. The theory remains foundational to understanding how great literature communicates at levels beneath and beyond the articulate word -- in silence, gesture, tone, and the spaces between utterances -- thereby touching dimensions of human consciousness where the inexpressible finds voice.

6.2.8 Critical Analysis

Kunjunni Raja’s exposition of the Theory of Dhvani occupies an important position in modern interpretations of classical Indian poetics. Drawing primarily on Anandavardhana’s *Dhvanyaloka* and Abhinavagupta’s philosophical elaborations, Raja presents dhvani

not merely as a technical linguistic concept but as the central principle governing poetic meaning and aesthetic experience. His analysis succeeds in demonstrating that Indian literary theory recognised, long before modern criticism, the limitations of literal meaning and the necessity of suggestion in articulating profound emotional and spiritual experiences.

One of the greatest strengths of Kunjunni Raja’s treatment lies in his clear articulation of dhvani as “suggested meaning”, a dimension of meaning that transcends both direct denotation (*abhidha*) and secondary or metaphorical meaning (*lakshana*). Raja emphasises that dhvani operates in a realm where meaning is neither explicitly stated nor logically inferred, but intuitively grasped by the sensitive reader or spectator. This insistence on suggestion as the soul of poetry challenges reductive approaches to literary interpretation that confine meaning to paraphrase or propositional content.

Raja’s discussion is particularly effective in demonstrating how dhvani functions in actual literary contexts. By invoking examples from Western literature, such as *Macbeth*, he bridges Indian poetics and English literary criticism, showing that dhvani is not a culture-bound concept but a universal mode of literary communication. The analysis of Macbeth’s words about Duncan’s sleep reveals how irony, guilt, and inner conflict emerge through suggestion rather than explicit statement. This example reinforces Anandavardhana’s claim that suggested meaning possesses greater aesthetic power than surface meaning and validates Raja’s attempt to make dhvani intelligible to modern students of English literature.

Another significant contribution of Raja’s analysis is his explanation of the linguistic foundation of dhvani in the *sphota* theory of Sanskrit grammarians. By linking poetic suggestion to linguistic theory, Raja shows that

dhvani is not an arbitrary critical invention but emerges from a deep philosophical understanding of language itself. Just as sphota represents the indivisible unity of meaning revealed through sound, dhvani represents the total poetic meaning arising from the interaction of sound, sense, context, and emotional resonance. This holistic approach anticipates modern theories that emphasise textual totality over atomistic word-by-word analysis.

Kunjunni Raja also clarifies an important misconception regarding the relationship between dhvani and rasa. He firmly rejects the view that dhvani is merely an extension or subsidiary aspect of rasa theory. Instead, he argues that dhvani concerns the *method* of poetic expression, while rasa concerns the *effect* of that expression on the reader or spectator. This distinction is crucial, as it allows both theories to coexist without rivalry. Dhvani explains how meaning is conveyed, while rasa explains how that meaning is emotionally realised. His balanced treatment underscores the complementary nature of these two foundational doctrines in Indian aesthetics.

His account of Abhinavagupta's philosophical development further deepens the analysis. Raja explains that Abhinavagupta transformed dhvani from a literary principle into a comprehensive aesthetic philosophy by linking it to the process of rasa-realisation. The three stages of aesthetic experience - intellectual comprehension, imaginative idealisation, and emotional culmination - provide a psychologically plausible model for understanding how literature moves from form to feeling. His exposition here is particularly valuable for students, as it renders a complex philosophical process intelligible without oversimplification.

The strength of Raja's analysis becomes especially evident in his discussion of the numer-

ous criticisms levelled against dhvani theory by Nyaya and Mimamsa philosophers. Rather than dismissing these objections, he presents them systematically and evaluates Anandavardhana's rebuttals with clarity. The debate over whether dhvani can be reduced to inference (*anumana*), presumption (*arthapatti*), or secondary meaning (*lakshana*) highlights the philosophical rigour of Indian poetics. He convincingly shows that logical inference, which depends on fixed relationships and definite conclusions, cannot account for the fluidity, ambiguity, and emotional multiplicity characteristic of poetic suggestion.

In responding to these criticisms, Raja's analysis reveals one of the most original insights of dhvani theory: that poetic meaning operates beyond the confines of strict logic. The analogy of light revealing an object without having an inherent logical relationship to it illustrates how suggestion functions without mediation or inference. This conception of meaning challenges positivist and rationalist models of interpretation and aligns dhvani theory with modern thinkers such as Bergson and T. S. Eliot, whom he invokes to reinforce the idea that suggestion creates, while description merely explains.

Raja's treatment of *lakshana* and *abhidha* is equally persuasive. He clearly distinguishes dhvani from secondary meaning by pointing out that *lakshana* operates only when the primary meaning is cancelled or rejected, whereas dhvani allows the primary meaning to remain intact while transcending it. This distinction is crucial in understanding why emotional suggestion cannot be explained through semantic substitution alone. His observation that dhvani can operate even without words, as in music or dance, decisively establishes its independence from purely linguistic mechanisms.



One of the more insightful sections of Raja's analysis concerns suprasegmental features such as intonation (*kaku*). By emphasising tone, pitch, and rhythm, Raja shows that meaning in poetry and drama is inseparable from performance and sound. This anticipates modern discourse analysis and performance studies, which stress that meaning is produced through voice and context as much as through words. His reference to Bharata's detailed treatment of tonal variations reinforces the sophistication of ancient Indian criticism in recognising non-verbal dimensions of meaning.

Despite its many strengths, Raja's analysis has certain limitations. His exposition is dense and conceptually demanding, which may pose difficulties for beginners. The extensive engagement with philosophical debates can sometimes overshadow literary illustration, making the theory appear abstract. While he does use examples, a greater number of sustained textual analyses might have helped readers see dhvani in continuous literary practice rather than in isolated instances.

Another limitation lies in the largely idealist framework within which Raja operates. His emphasis on universal emotional structures and aesthetic sensibility may underplay the role of historical, social, and ideological factors in shaping literary meaning. Contemporary criticism, influenced by cultural studies and post-structuralism, would question the assumption of a universally shared aesthetic consciousness. However, this limitation reflects the philosophical orientation of classical poetics rather than a flaw unique to his interpretation.

Kunjunni Raja's "Theory of Dhvani" stands as one of the most authoritative modern accounts of Indian poetic suggestion. His work demonstrates that dhvani is not a marginal or decorative feature of poetry but its organising principle and animating soul. By defending dhvani against logical reductionism and linguistic simplification, Raja affirms the depth and complexity of literary meaning.

Recap

- ▶ Dhvani literally means suggestion, that which is not directly stated but clearly implied.
- ▶ Anandavardhana considered Dhvani the very soul of poetry and extended it from drama to all literature.
- ▶ Sphota theory from Sanskrit grammar underlies Dhvani: sounds reveal unified meaning just as poems evoke suggested sense.
- ▶ Anandavardhana distinguished literal (*vacya*) and implied (*pratiyamana*) beauty, with suggested sense taking idea, figure, or emotion.
- ▶ Only those with refined poetic sensibility (*Sahridaya*) can comprehend suggested meaning; grammatical training alone proves insufficient.
- ▶ Dhvani and Rasa differ: Dhvani emphasises method of treatment while Rasa addresses ultimate aesthetic effect.
- ▶ Abhinavagupta advanced theory by arguing Rasa is realised through Dhvani and *Vyanjana* (suggestive power).

- ▶ The three stages of Rasa-realisation are: Intellectual Cognition, Imaginative Idealisation, and Emotional Climax.
- ▶ Mahimabhatta argued Dhvani falls under Anumana (inference), but Anandavardhana showed no Vyapti exists between primary and suggested senses.
- ▶ Jayantabhatta dismissed Dhvani as unworthy, but Bergson and Eliot support suggestion's transcendent power beyond logic.
- ▶ Some theorists tried subsuming Dhvani under Arthapatti, but poetic suggestion transcends definiteness and operates in ambiguity.
- ▶ Mukulabhatta attempted to subsume Vyanjana under Lakshana, but Anandavardhana showed they differ fundamentally in nature and operation.
- ▶ Prabhakara Mimamsa subordinated Dhvani to Abhidha, but suggested sense is known only indirectly and varies with context.
- ▶ Dhanika and Dhananjaya proposed Tatparyavrtti explains Dhvani, but Abhinavagupta distinguished literal from suggestive operations at different levels.
- ▶ Kuntaka's Vakrokti incorporates Dhvani but remains distinct in focus, representing a striking innovative mode superficially resembling suggestion.

Objective Questions

1. Who authored *Dhvanyaloka*?
2. What does Dhvani literally mean?
3. Which theory underlies Anandavardhana's Dhvani?
4. What is refined poetic sensibility called?
5. Which critic criticised Dhvani as inference?
6. What does Vyapti mean in logic?
7. Who advanced Dhvani through three stages?
8. What are Bhava dormant in spectators?
9. Which meaning is literal (vacya)?
10. Which meaning is implied (pratiyamana)?
11. What does Kaku denote in aesthetics?
12. Who first rejected Dhvani theory?
13. What is direct word-meaning power called?
14. What is secondary meaning-function called?
15. What is oblique innovative expression called?

Answers

1. Anandavardhana
2. Suggestion
3. Sphota
4. Sahrdaya
5. Mahimabhatta
6. Concomitance
7. Abhinavagupta
8. Potentials
9. Surface
10. Implied
11. Intonation
12. Nyaya
13. Abhidha
14. Lakshana
15. Vakrokti

Assignments

1. Explain Anandavardhana's concept of Dhvani with reference to the Macbeth example and the Sphota theory.
2. Analyse Abhinavagupta's three stages of Rasa-realisation and show how they differentiate from intellectual and logical processes.
3. Examine Mahimabhatta's critique that Dhvani falls under Anumana and evaluate Anandavardhana's refutation using the light-and-pot analogy.
4. Discuss the classification of Dhvani into Avivaksitavacya and Vivaksitanyay-
aparavacya with appropriate literary examples.
5. Assess Visvanatha's criticism regarding suggested emotion as poetry's soul and Abhinavagupta's concept of Rasatelitanti in response.

Suggested Reading

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SGOU





“Kuntaka: Theory of Poetry: Vakrokti”

-S. K. De

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand Kuntaka’s theory of Vakrokti in poetry clearly
- ▶ analyse six levels of Vakrokti’s operation in detail
- ▶ distinguish Sukumara-marga and Vicitra-marga styles
- ▶ evaluate Kuntaka’s treatment of Rasa and Dhvani
- ▶ assess Kuntaka’s contribution to Indian poetics

Prerequisite

S. K. De was Professor Emeritus of Sanskrit at the University of Calcutta and a great Indian scholar who wrote extensively in the field of aesthetics. His acquaintance and understanding of Indian society were immense, and he contributed freely to the perception of Indian aesthetics as an independent entity with its own unique flavor, distinctly different from Western aesthetics. His contribution in the area of comparative aesthetics was enormous, and almost all works on Sanskrit poetics invariably provide reference to De’s two volumes of *The History of Sanskrit Poetics*.

Kuntaka belonged to the 7th Century and based his theory on Bhamaha’s conception of Vakrokti. According to K. Krishnamoorthy, Kuntaka’s aesthetic theory bears very close affinity to the Crocean aesthetics that all art is expression and that it is creative intuition which culminates in poetry. The learner should be familiar with basic concepts of Sanskrit poetics such as Alamkara, Rasa, Dhvani, and the works of earlier critics like Bhamaha, Dandin, and Vamana to appreciate Kuntaka’s innovations fully.

Keywords

Vakrokti, Vaicitrya, Alamkara, Rasa, Dhvani, Sukumara-marga, Vicitra-marga, Sahrdaya

Discussion

6.3.1 Kuntaka's Notion of Vakrokti

Prof. De explains that Kuntaka wrote this theory based on the central premise that the charisma of poetry is grounded on Vaicitra or a

strikingness of expression. So, De maintains, Vakrokti avoids expression of ideas by using conventional mode of speech. Instead, it demands the use of striking words. This is unlike sciences and the scriptures which require one to use established words or ways.

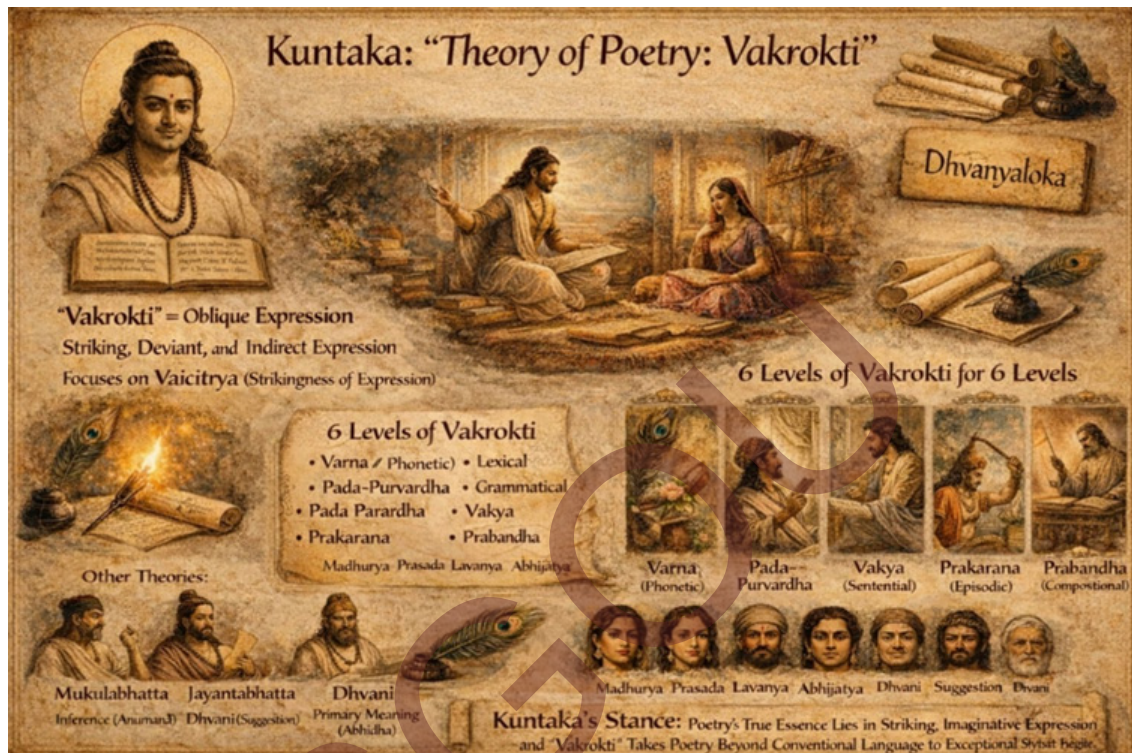


Fig 6.3.1- "Kuntaka: Theory of Poetry: Vakrokti"

Generally, every word in a poem has a meaning but Kuntaka, as De reminds, says that every word in poetry must be used in a unique way so that its meaning stands out conspicuously. According to Kuntaka, the poet must be skilled enough (Kavi-kausala) to use his imagination (kavivya para) in innovative ways. This usage of the unusual in new ways in poetry (Kavi-vyapara-vakrata) is the ultimate source of poetry. Thus Vakrokti is a Bhaniti-prakara which requires the use of new and non-conservative phrases. Ruyyaka refers to this as Utkarsa-Vaicitra or an extraordinary expression which depends on poetic talent.

While Dandin and some other critics give a lot of importance to Svabhavokti or a natural description of an object, both Bhamaha and Kuntaka do not accept their version. They argue that decorations are meant to beautify the nature of an object, but if the nature or Svabhava is already decorative, further decoration becomes pointless. Kuntaka includes decorating of the nature of an object under Vakya-vakrata in which the nature of an object in both Sahaja and Aharya forms becomes the correct premise for heightened expression. Kuntaka includes Svabhavokti as an element of Sukumara-marga. Similarly, both Bhamaha and Kuntaka feel that Atisaya (striking qual-

ity) or Prakarsa-kastha-adhiroha (climax of excellence) is necessary for a striking style or Vicitra-marga and leads to Vakrokti-vaicitrya. The highest point of enjoyment, beyond what is achieved through use of the best words, ideas or decoration, is called Tadvid-ahla-da-karitva, and it is what Vaicitrya in poetry, which diverges from the usual trends, seeks to achieve. The Tad-vid or Sahrdaya, the man of taste who possesses a certain degree of culture and aesthetic instinct, appreciates Vaicitrya in poetry by identifying with the feelings and moods of the poet. Abhinava Gupta defines the Sahrdaya as persons with responsive hearts whose sensibilities are rendered transparent by a regular contemplation of poetry and who are capable of identification with the described object.

Kuntaka believes that Vakrokti alone can decorate the poetry or become its Alamkara. While actually it is the word and its meaning or Alamkarya which is in need of embellishment or decoration or Alamkara, Kuntaka does not give importance to the difference between Alamkarya and Alamkara and includes them under Vakya-vakrta. He, like Dandin, uses the term Vakrokti as co-extensive with the generic term Alamkara. Vakrokti, he argues, is the only embellishment possible to a word and its meaning, and so-called poetic figures are different aspects of Vakrokti.

6.3.2 Levels of Operation of Vakrokti

De observes that, according to Kuntaka, Vakrokti is the oblique use of language and it operates at six levels:

1. Varna: Shabdalanakaras or phonetic obliquity
2. Pada-purvardha: suggestive use of linguistic elements & Gunas or lexical obliquity.
3. Pada-parardha: suggestive use

of affixes etc. or grammatical obliquity

4. Vakya: figures of sense or sentential obliquity
5. Prakarana: episode in plot with unity and originality or episodic obliquity
6. Prabandha: compositional obliquity or obliquity in the entire composition

The first level is Varna-vinyasa-vakrta (phonetic obliquity or obliquity in the arrangement of phonemes or consonants or syllables). It works at three levels of phonemes: when similar or identical phonemes or consonants are repeated at varying intervals; when phonemes or consonants are arranged without any interval; when new phonemes or consonants are employed; and when stops are combined with their homorganic nasals.

The second type of Vakrta is Pada-purvardha-vakrta (lexical obliquity). It is found in the base forms of substantives. Its sub-varieties are based on obliquity in Rudhi (usage), Paryaya (synonym), Upacara (transference or fancied identification founded on resemblance), Visesana (adjective), Samvrti (concealment or covert expression), Vrtti (indeclinable), Bhava (roots of words), Linga (gender) and Kriya (verb).

The third type of Vakrta is Pada-parardha-vakrta (grammatical obliquity or obliquity in the inflectional forms of substantives), i.e., tense, case, number, person, voice, affix and particle, and accordingly they deal with peculiar uses of Kala (tense), Karaka (case), Samkhya (number), Purusa (person), Upagraha (voice), Upasarga (affix) and Nipata (particles).

The fourth type of Vakrta is Vakya-vakrta (sentential obliquity) which has obliquity in a whole sentence admitting of a thousand vari-

eties, including a whole lot of figures. It can be Sahaja (natural) or Aharya (imposed).

The fifth type of Vakrata is Prakarana-vakrata (episodic obliquity or obliquity in parts or episodes or incidents). It involves obliquity of emotional state, modified source story, episodic relationship, particular event and episode, dominant rasa, secondary episode, device of play within play, and juncture.

The last type of Vakrata is Prabandha-vakrata (compositional obliquity or obliquity in the entire composition). It involves obliquity of changing the rasa, winding up the story, intended end, contingent objectives, title, etc.

Kuntaka feels that Vakratva may be of infinite types as it solely depends on the individual creative talent of poets.

6.3.3 Kuntaka's Ideas on Riti or Marga

Kuntaka was influenced by the Riti-school of thought and had more elaborate views on Riti and Gunas than his master, Bhamaha. Like Dandin and Vamana, he uses the word Marga as equivalent to Riti but he found faults with their system of nomenclature and classification of Ritis. His first objection to Riti classification is the practice of naming Ritis after places. While criticising Vamana and Dandin, Kuntaka says that it is wrong to associate po-

Vicitra-marga	Sukumara-marga
1. Svabhava of things important.	1. Striking quality of figure important.
2. Natural powers of poet emphasised and poetic talent is not artificial.	2. Poetic effort subordinated to object and art is chiefly decorative.
3. Exhibits Dhvani suggestiveness.	3. Exhibits Dhvani or suggestiveness.
4. Rasa is according to Svabhava.	4. Ornamentation is according to Rasa.
5. Demands skill and maturity of treatment and so more difficult.	5. Not as difficult.
6. It is characterised by Madhurya or sweetness due to compact structure and no laxity.	6. It is characterised by Madhurya or sweetness due to usage of fewer compound words.
7. It is characterised by Prasada or lucidity due to use of expressive words and easy syntax.	7. It is characterised by Prasada or lucidity due to articulateness or perspicuity.
8. It is characterised by Lavanya or beauty due to the arrangement of short and long syllables.	8. It is characterised by Lavanya or beauty due to proper arrangement of letters and words.
9. It exhibits Abhijatya in the form of elevatedness, neither too soft nor too hard.	9. It exhibits Abhijatya in the form of smoothness.
10. Characterised by Aucitya or usage of befitting words & ideas & Saubhagya or excellence due to realisation of all the resources of the composition.	10. Characterised by Aucitya or usage of befitting words & ideas & Saubhagya or excellence due to realisation of all the resources of the composition.

etic styles with particular countries or places or regions. Instead, due importance must be given to the personality of the poet and to his abilities or power and to the reflection of his

culture and extent of practice. As these are not determined by location, such practices cannot be considered healthy.



Secondly, he also objects to the gradation of Ritis on the basis of their quality. He argues that classifying Ritis as Uttama (good), Adhama (bad) and Madhyama (indifferent) is inadequate as only the good Ritis appeal to readers who are uninterested in the details about the other two. Thus the other two, Adhama and Madhyama, should not find any place in the classification.

Kuntaka puts forth two styles: Sukumara-marga and Vicitra-marga and distinguishes between them clearly as follows:

6.3.4 Kuntaka's Treatment of Rasa and Bhava

According to De, Kuntaka also negotiated the place of Rasa in the Alamkara theory. Writers like Bhamaha and Dandin had said that when the rasa is subordinate to the ordinary meaning, it is a rasavat alamkara. Kuntaka did not deny rasa as emotion but he regarded it only as a mode of Vakratva in a composition. According to Kuntaka, Rasa is involved in the poetic figures of different Margas which give life to the poet's words and add to the charm of episode and plot-structure. According to Kuntaka, art is not different from arthalankara (figure of sense). It transforms the subject-matter and describes it in various ways. In other words, the writer describes the subject-matter in many ways based on the kinds of this obliquity produced by arthalankara. Kuntaka admits a thousand varieties of it and includes the whole lot of Alamkara in it. But he considers them useful only for producing grandeur and beauty. This is why he holds that the writer should not employ them arbitrarily to describe the subject-matter. By introducing an element of strangeness into what one speaks or hears every day, the Alamkaras satisfy a basic demand of human nature, a pleasant surprise.

According to Bhamaha and Dandin, Rasa was considered as a decoration for the poetic

content. But consequent to Dhvani-kara and Anandavardhana's insistence on Rasa as an essential part of poetry, Kuntaka theorised that Rasa (sentiments) and bhavas (emotions) can be considered to be a part of poetic content. He contended that sentient objects can be characterized through proper development of sentiments like love. Like Anandavardhana, he believed that Rasas cannot be described by their name and poetry becomes appealing when it consists of Rasas and bhavas. Kuntaka cites how love in separation in Vikramorvasiya and pathetic sentiments from Tapasa-vatsaraja make the poetry conducive to beauty by virtue of the charming words.

Kuntaka does not accept Rasavat as an Alamkara. According to him, Rasa is invariably pradhana and can never take a subservient position to anything else. At the same time, it is not possible for Rasa to function as both Alamkara and Alamkaryya. For Kuntaka, it is the poet who uses Rasa to create Vakrokti so that the fascinating element of the poetry is enhanced. Nothing else - no story, no plot - can evoke the magic in poetry. Sheer words that are selected carefully and used in fascinating ways by the poet with the right delineation of Rasa enable a piece of writing to be raised to the stature of a poem. Thus, for Kuntaka, it is Vakrokti which allows one to experience Rasa. He says that whenever there is Rasa that alone is predominant. Rasa is taken to be the Artha of Kavya.

De reminds the readers that Kuntaka thus allotted an important place to Rasa in both styles, the Sukumara and the Vicitra, and in both modes of composition: a complete composition or one in parts or episodes. In the episodic composition, the function of the plot whether ingenious or traditional is to allow the development of the Rasa. Kuntaka provides a number of instances of such use of Rasa. He says, it is possible to take the dominant Rasa

to new heights as in Vikramorvasiya, Act IV, or to develop and sustain a single Rasa in new and brilliant ways in spite of constant repetition of the theme, or to have the dominant Rasa of the original story replaced by some other Rasa.paste.txt

6.3.5 Kuntaka's Treatment of Dhvani

De also comments on Kuntaka's views on Dhvani. Kuntaka treated Dhvani in the same vein as he treated other principles of literary criticism. He comprehends Dhvani in some aspects of Vakrata. Dr. De uses Ruyyaka's explanation of this phenomenon to clarify Kuntaka's stand. He suggests that perhaps Kuntaka acknowledges Dhvani in the form of Upacara-vakrata, for here the differences between objects are covered up by highlighting their similarities. For instance, in the phrase 'particle of abuse', 'particle' in the sense of littleness has a pleasing effect when applied to the object 'abuse'. It may also be considered as Lakshana or transference of indication by writers of Dhvani school of thought.

Like Bhamaha, Dandin, Udbhata and Vamana, Kuntaka believes that Dhvani or suggestion is not the essence or soul of poetry but is only a secondary element. However, he appreciates its importance and does not just attribute it to Upacara-vakrata. He accepts the importance of Dhvani in Sukumara-marga, but lauds it in Vicitra-marga. He admits most of the broad divisions of Dhvani propagated by the Dhvani school like Dhvani based on transference and Dhvani based on power of word. He also indicates that suggestive expressions are as effective as expressed words. Thus he is open to possibilities of suggestion of the object and seems to acknowledge the use of Alamkara-dhvani. For Kuntaka, Dhvani was therefore an important feature for the expression of the poet's Pratibha or genius. Though later writers

did not accord a high place to Kuntaka, yet it appears clear that an all-round estimate of literature with emotion and beauty as its root, as conceived by Kuntaka, seems to beat even the authors of the Dhvani school, who were more or less obsessed by the Dhvani and the Rasa perspectives.

Kuntaka's efforts to reappraise the traditional categories of Indian poetics were refreshing and genuine. He truly wanted to accept and present the best ideas of poetics, and he attempted to resolve contentious ideas in order to bring clarity in the scenario of Indian poetics. His was an effort to unite amidst diversities. His literary sensibility and aesthetic philosophy are indeed worthy of admiration. He explains and explores the confusing aspects of poetics and displays a unique ability for literary criticism. His poetic theory shuns controversies and is based on fundamentals that were acceptable to his predecessors, and therefore it is widely read and appreciated even today. De's examination of Kuntaka's Vakrokti theory brings Indian Aesthetics on par with Western poetics. He also provides English equivalents to many Sanskrit terms used in Indian poetics.

6.3.6 Critical Analysis

Kuntaka's theory of Vakrokti represents one of the most original and independent contributions to classical Indian poetics. Unlike theorists who sought the essence of poetry in rasa, dhvani, or riti alone, Kuntaka located the distinctive quality of poetry in the oblique and striking use of language. His approach foregrounds the creative agency of the poet and the transformative power of expression. Through Vakrokti, Kuntaka presents poetry as an art that deliberately deviates from ordinary modes of speech in order to generate aesthetic delight.

At the heart of Kuntaka's theory lies the concept of vaicitrya, or strikingness. He argues



that poetry differs fundamentally from scientific, philosophical, or scriptural discourse because it does not rely on conventional or standardised language. Where other disciplines value clarity and established terminology, poetry demands novelty, surprise, and imaginative deviation. Vakrokti, understood as oblique or indirect expression, becomes the defining feature of poetic language. This emphasis allows Kuntaka to shift critical attention from what is said to how it is said, thereby privileging style, imagination, and verbal ingenuity.

One of the major strengths of Kuntaka's theory is his insistence on the poet's skill and imagination, referred to as *kavi kausala* and *kavi vyapara*. Poetry, according to him, is not a spontaneous overflow of emotion but the result of conscious artistic effort. The poet reshapes language through creative manipulation, producing meanings that appear fresh even when dealing with familiar themes. This focus on poetic craftsmanship counters theories that reduce poetry to emotional content alone. Kuntaka thus anticipates modern stylistic criticism by treating language as an active and formative force rather than a transparent medium.

Kuntaka's refusal to separate *alamkara* from *alamkarya* is another distinctive feature of his theory. Traditional critics often distinguished between poetic content and poetic ornament, treating figures of speech as external embellishments. Kuntaka rejects this distinction and argues that Vakrokti itself is the sole ornament of poetry. All figures of speech, according to him, are merely different manifestations of oblique expression. This view simplifies poetic theory while also deepening it, as it suggests that beauty in poetry arises organically from expression rather than being artificially added.

His classification of Vakrokti into six levels demonstrates both analytical rigour and imaginative breadth. By showing how obliquity operates from the smallest phonetic units to the structure of an entire composition, Kuntaka presents poetry as a unified aesthetic system. Sound, word choice, grammatical variation, sentence structure, episode, and overall composition all contribute to poetic charm. This multi level approach is one of the most comprehensive stylistic models in Indian poetics and reveals Kuntaka's sensitivity to the totality of literary creation.

The phonetic and lexical levels of Vakrokti show Kuntaka's acute awareness of sound and verbal texture. His attention to repetition, novelty of phonemes, and arrangement of syllables reflects an understanding that poetry appeals to the ear as much as to the intellect. At the grammatical and sentential levels, his analysis demonstrates how subtle deviations in tense, case, or syntax can produce heightened meaning. These insights align closely with modern linguistic stylistics, even though Kuntaka worked within a classical Sanskrit framework.

Kuntaka's treatment of *prakarana* and *prabandha vakrata* is particularly noteworthy. By extending Vakrokti to plot structure and overall composition, he moves beyond ornamental criticism and addresses narrative design. Episodes are not merely links in a story but opportunities for imaginative reshaping. Even inherited plots gain originality through the poet's treatment. This position allows Kuntaka to reconcile tradition and innovation, showing how creativity can flourish even within established narrative frameworks.

His views on *riti* or *marga* further highlight his independence as a critic. By rejecting the practice of naming styles after geographical regions, Kuntaka challenges a mechanical and

external approach to literary classification. He rightly argues that poetic style arises from the poet's personality, cultural refinement, and artistic maturity rather than from regional identity. His rejection of inferior and mediocre styles also reflects a normative critical stance, as he believes criticism should focus on what truly appeals to the sensitive reader.

The distinction between *sukumara marga* and *vicitra marga* reveals Kuntaka's balanced aesthetic vision. He does not privilege complexity over simplicity or ornament over naturalness. Instead, he recognises different modes of poetic excellence, each with its own demands and pleasures. This flexibility prevents his theory from becoming rigid or dogmatic. At the same time, his emphasis on *vicitra marga* underscores his belief that poetry reaches its highest form when expression achieves striking originality.

Kuntaka's treatment of *rasa* marks a significant departure from earlier *alamkara* theorists. While Bhamaha and Dandin treated *rasa* as a decorative element, Kuntaka accords it a central role without allowing it to dominate theory entirely. He argues that *rasa* is always predominant and can never be subordinate, yet it becomes aesthetically effective only through *Vakrokti*. This position enables him to integrate emotion and expression without subordinating one to the other. Poetry, in his view, emerges from the harmonious interaction between imaginative language and emotional experience.

His rejection of *rasavat* as an *alamkara* further strengthens his argument. *Rasa* cannot function as both ornament and ornamented object. It is the ultimate meaning of poetry, while *Vakrokti* is the means through which it is realised. This approach subtly redefines poetic meaning as experiential rather than conceptual. Words, when used with imaginative obliquity, awaken *rasa* in the reader, transforming

language into aesthetic experience.

Kuntaka's engagement with *dhvani* is cautious but open minded. Unlike Anandavardhana, he does not consider suggestion to be the soul of poetry. However, he does not dismiss it either. By subsuming *dhvani* under *Vakrokti*, he acknowledges the importance of suggestion while maintaining the primacy of expression. This stance reflects his broader aim of synthesising rather than polarising critical doctrines. While later critics may have undervalued his contribution due to the dominance of *dhvani* theory, Kuntaka's integrative vision remains compelling.

A limitation of Kuntaka's theory lies in its relative neglect of reader response as an independent factor. Although he recognises the role of the *sahrdaya*, his emphasis remains firmly on the poet's genius. Modern criticism, with its focus on interpretation and reception, may find this approach somewhat author centred. Additionally, the sheer complexity of *Vakrokti* classification can appear overwhelming, especially for beginners. The theory demands considerable linguistic and literary sensitivity, which may not be easily accessible to all readers.

Despite these limitations, Kuntaka's theory of *Vakrokti* remains a landmark in Indian poetics. It offers a comprehensive stylistic framework that foregrounds creativity, imagination, and verbal artistry. His refusal to reduce poetry to emotion, suggestion, or ornament alone results in a richly textured aesthetic philosophy. By emphasising the power of oblique expression, Kuntaka affirms poetry as an art that transforms ordinary language into a source of wonder and delight. His contribution continues to hold relevance for comparative literary criticism and modern stylistic studies, making *Vakrokti* not merely a classical concept but a timeless principle of poetic creation.



Recap

- ▶ Kuntaka attached special importance to Vakrokti, which means obliquity or unique expression in poetry.
- ▶ Vakrokti operates at six levels: Varna (phonetic), Pada-purvardha (lexical), Pada-parardha (grammatical), Vakya (sentential), Prakarana (episodic), and Prabandha (compositional).
- ▶ Varna-vinyasa-vakrta involves phonetic obliquity through arrangement of phonemes, consonants, and syllables.
- ▶ Pada-purvardha-vakrta is lexical obliquity found in base forms of substantives, with sub-varieties based on Rudhi, Paryaya, Upacara, Visesana, Samvrti, Vrtti, Bhava, Linga, and Kriya.
- ▶ Pada-parardha-vakrta is grammatical obliquity in inflectional forms dealing with tense, case, number, person, voice, affix, and particle.
- ▶ Vakya-vakrta is sentential obliquity admitting a thousand varieties, including figures of sense, and can be Sahaja or Aharya.
- ▶ Prakarana-vakrta is episodic obliquity involving emotional state, modified source story, episodic relationships, events, dominant rasa, secondary episodes, play-within-play devices, and junctures.
- ▶ Prabandha-vakrta is compositional obliquity concerning the entire composition, including changing rasa, winding up stories, intended ends, contingent objectives, and titles.
- ▶ Kuntaka proposed two styles: Sukumara-marga (path of tenderness) emphasizing Svabhava of things, and Vicitra-marga (path of strikingness) emphasizing Vaicitrya.
- ▶ Sukumara-marga exhibits Dhvani, demands skill and maturity, and is characterized by Madhurya, Prasada, Lavanya, and Abhijatya.
- ▶ Vicitra-marga exhibits striking quality, where poetic effort is subordinated to object and art is chiefly decorative.
- ▶ Kuntaka treated Rasa as a mode of Vakratva, not as Alamkara, and believed Rasa is invariably pradhana in poetry.
- ▶ Kuntaka considered Dhvani as a secondary but important element, comprehending it in aspects of Vakrta like Upacara-vakrta.
- ▶ Kuntaka's theory unifies Indian aesthetics with Western poetics by emphasizing creative intuition and expression.
- ▶ Despite later writers not according him high place, Kuntaka's all-round estimate of literature with emotion and beauty as its root remains worthy of admiration.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote the essay on Kuntaka's Vakrokti theory?
2. What does Vakrokti literally mean?
3. How many levels does Vakrokti operate at?
4. What is the first level of Vakrokti called?
5. What type of obliquity is Varna-vakrta?
6. What type of obliquity is Pada-purvardha-vakrta?
7. What type of obliquity is Pada-parardha-vakrta?
8. What type of obliquity is Vakya-vakrta?
9. What type of obliquity is Prakarana-vakrta?
10. What type of obliquity is Prabandha-vakrta?
11. What are the two styles Kuntaka proposed?
12. What does Sukumara-marga emphasize?
13. What does Vicitra-marga emphasize?
14. How did Kuntaka view Rasa in poetry?
15. How did Kuntaka view Dhvani?

Answers

1. S.K. De
2. Obliquity
3. Six
4. Varna
5. Phonetic
6. Lexical
7. Grammatical
8. Sentential
9. Episodic
10. Compositional
11. Sukumara-marga, Vicitra-marga
12. Svabhava
13. Vaicitrya
14. As Vakratva
15. As secondary but important

Assignments

1. Explain Kuntaka's theory of Vakrokti and its significance in evaluating poetry.
2. Discuss the six levels at which Vakrokti operates with appropriate examples.
3. Analyse Kuntaka's classification of poetic styles into Sukumara-marga and Vicitra-marga.
4. Evaluate Kuntaka's treatment of Rasa and Dhvani in his poetic theory.
5. Assess Kuntaka's contribution to Indian poetics and his relationship with Western aesthetic theories.

Suggested Reading

1. De, S.K. *The History of Sanskrit Poetics*, 2 volumes. Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960.
2. De, S.K. *Some Problems of Sanskrit Poetics*. University of Calcutta, 1959.
3. Krishnamoorthy, K. *A History of Indian Literary Criticism*. Poona University Press, 1965.
4. Kuntaka. *Vakroktijivita*. Edited by Raghavan, V., Adyar Library, 1943.
5. Raghavan, V. *Bhoja's Sringara Prakasa*. Adyar Library, 1963.



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

FYUG BA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION – FOURTH SEMESTER
MAJOR CORE COURSE - SGB24EG204MC
English Critical Tradition from Aristotle to F.R. Leavis
2024 - 25 Admission Onwards (SET - 1)

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any *eight* of the following questions in one word or sentence (8 × 1 = 8)

1. Which books of The Republic deal with poetry?
2. Who defined tragedy as an imitation of action?
3. Who formulated the idea of the Sublime?
4. What does Eliot mean by “tradition”?
5. Who supported the doctrine of “Art for Art’s Sake” in England?
6. Name the Indian critic associated with Vakrokti theory.
7. Who introduced the concept of disinterestedness in criticism?
8. Name any one novelist included by Leavis in the Great Tradition.
9. What literary device does Brooks consider central to poetry?
10. What is “Sahridaya” in Indian literary criticism?

SECTION B

Answer any *six* of the following questions in one or two sentences (6 × 2 = 12)

11. Why does Plato ban poets from his ideal state?
12. What is the importance of catharsis in Aristotle’s theory of tragedy?
13. How does Wordsworth define poetry in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads?
14. Explain Coleridge’s distinction between Fancy and Imagination.



15. What is meant by “Art for Art’s Sake”?
16. What is Rasa according to Indian aesthetics?
17. What does Leavis mean by “moral seriousness”?
18. What is Intentional fallacy?
19. How does Matthew Arnold define the relationship between criticism and creation?
20. What is the central concept of Anandavardhana’s “Dhvani”?
21. Explain the concept of “Rasa” in classical Indian aesthetics.
22. What does Cleanth Brooks mean by “the heresy of paraphrase”?

SECTION C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph

(6 × 5 = 30)

19. Examine Plato’s concept of imitation in art.
20. Discuss Aristotle’s views on the function of tragedy.
21. Write a note on Longinus’s treatment of emotion in *On the Sublime*.
22. Discuss Wordsworth’s reaction against Neoclassical poetry.
23. Explain Matthew Arnold’s idea of disinterested criticism.
24. Discuss Oscar Wilde’s contribution to Aesthetic criticism.
25. Explain the concept of Rasa with suitable examples.
26. Write a short note on German Romanticism.

SECTION D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words each

(2 × 10 = 20)

27. Discuss Aristotle’s concept of tragedy and its elements in *Poetics*.
28. Discuss the major principles of Indian literary aesthetics.
29. Examine Matthew Arnold’s views on criticism as presented in *The Function of Criticism in the Present Time*.
30. Discuss how New Criticism focuses on the text itself, rejecting biographical and historical explanations of meaning.



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English Critical Tradition from Aristotle to F.R. Leavis
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Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any *eight* of the following questions in one word or sentence (8 × 1 = 8)

1. Who is regarded as the first systematic literary critic?
2. What is the Greek term for imitation used by Aristotle?
3. Name one Greek comic dramatist.
4. Who introduced the theory of Dhvani?
5. What is meant by “Close Reading”?
6. Who introduced the concept of “Negative Capability”?
7. To which school of criticism does Cleanth Brooks belong?
8. Name one theorist of Russian Formalism.
9. Who explained Rasa theory in modern criticism?
10. What does “Vakrokti” literally mean?

SECTION B

Answer any *six* of the following questions in one or two sentences (6 × 2 = 12)

11. How does Plato connect art with morality?
12. What is the role of plot in Aristotle’s theory of tragedy?
13. What is Sidney’s concept of the poet?
14. Explain the term “Negative Capability.”
15. Why does Arnold emphasise objectivity in criticism?
16. What is the Affective Fallacy?



17. What is irony according to Cleanth Brooks?
18. What is the function of suggestion in Dhvani theory?

SECTION C

Answer any *six* of the following questions in one paragraph

(6 × 5 = 30)

19. Discuss the role of philosophy in Greek literary criticism.
20. Explain Aristotle's classification of poetry.
21. Write a note on Pope's contribution to Neoclassical criticism.
22. Discuss T. S. Eliot's views on tradition and impersonality.
23. Explain the basic principles of New Criticism.
24. Discuss the theory of Dhvani as explained by Anandavardhana.
25. Write a note on Kuntaka's theory of Vakrokti.
26. Discuss the role of ambiguity in enriching poetic meaning according to Empson.

SECTION D

Answer any *two* of the following questions in 300 words each

(2 × 10 = 20)

27. Trace the shift from Plato's rejection of poetry to Aristotle's defence, highlighting their key philosophical differences.
28. Analyse "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" as a Romantic manifesto redefining poetry, the poet's role, and reader response.
29. Discuss Cleanth Brooks's views in "The Language of Paradox" and explain its significance in New Criticism.
30. Explain T. S. Eliot's concept of tradition with reference to "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
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ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
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BE TOO LATE**

**SAY
NO
TO
DRUGS**

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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