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SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

M.A. ENGLISH

2023

SEMESTER : III **UNIT : I-VI**

COURSE NO. : ENG-311 **LESSON : 1-27**

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M.A. ENGLISH

COURSE CODE : ENG-311

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Distance Learners

Welcome to PG Semester III !

Course No. ENG-311 Literary Theory introduces you to the works of well known English critics/theorists. You must read the texts in detail and make ample use of the library resources. Though this course is difficult but a comprehensive reading will thoroughly acquaint you with the emergence of various critical approaches of the 20th century in the background of 19th century criticism.

Wish you good luck and success!

Dr. Jasleen Kaur
Teacher Incharge PG English

SEMESTER-III

Course Code : ENG-311 | **Duration of Examination : 3 hrs.**
Title of the Course : Literary Theory-I | **Total Marks : 100**
Credits : 6 | **(a) Semester Examination : 80**
(b) Sessional Assessment : 20

Objective : The aim of the course is to acquaint the students with the emergence of various critical approaches of the 20th Century in the background of 19th Century criticism.

Unit-I

S.T. Coleridge — *Biographia Literaria*
(Chapters : 13, 14, 17, 18 and 19)

Unit-II

Keats — Letters :

(i) To John Taylor Feb 27, 1818
(ii) To George and Thomas Keats Dec 22, 1817 and Jan 5, 1818
(iii) To Shelley
(iv) To Leigh Hunt

Shelley — *Defence of Poetry*

Unit-III

Mathew Arnold
(i) "The Function of Criticism in the Present Time"
(ii) "The Study of Poetry"

Unit-IV

T.S. Eliot	(i) "Tradition and Individual Talent" (ii) "The Function of Criticism"

Unit-V

I.A. Richards	From *Principles of Literary Criticism :* (i) Practical Criticism "*Four kinds of Meaning*" (ii) Science and Poetry, Extract on "Pseudo Statements"

Unit-VI

John Crowe Ransom	From *The Criticism :* (i) Criticism Inc. (ii) Poetry : A Note on Ontology
Cleanth Brooks	From *The Well-Wrought Urn : Studies in the Structure of Peotry* (i) "Irony as Principle of Structure" (ii) "Keats Sylvan Historian : History without Footnotes"

MODE OF EXAMINATION

The paper will be divided into sections A, B and C. M.M. = 80

Section A **Multiple Choice Questions**

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

Section B **Short Answer Questions**

Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks. (5×2=10)

Section C **Long Answer Questions**

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

Suggested Reading

T.S. Eliot	(a) *The Sacred Wood* (b) *Selected Essays (1932, 1965)*
Mathew Arnold	*Culture and Anarchy* *Essays in Criticism*
F.R. Leavis	*New Bearings in English Poetry, Revaluation.* *Education and the University : The Common Pursuit*
Goerge Watson	*The English Critics*
Rene Wellek	*History of Modern Criticism Vols. III to IV.*
S. Ramaaswamy and V.S. Sethurarnam ed.	*The English Critical Tradition* *Vol. I and II.*
David Lodge	*20th Century Literary Criticism*
William J. Hardy	*20th Century Criticism : Major Statements*
J.P. Schiller	*I.A. Richards Theory of Literature*
Christopher Butler	*I.A. Richards and the Fortunes of Critical Theory*

M.A. ENGLISH SEMESTER - III
COURSE CODE : ENG - 311
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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. : III **LESSON : 1**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : I**

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE:
BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

STRUCTURE

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE:
BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

1.1 BIOGRAPHY

1772 : Coleridge was born on 21st October 1772 at Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire.

1778 : Coleridge's schooling started at his father's school.

1781 : His father died of heart attack.

1782 : Admitted to the Christ's Hospital at Hertford.

1791 : Entered Jesus College, Cambridge.

1793 : December: left the University and was enlisted in the 15th King's Light Dragoons as Silas Tomkyn Camberbache (the initial of his name S.T.C. still retained). His brother took him out of this army.

1794 : April : he returned to Cambridge.

1795 : He published *Conciones and Populam,* a collection of political works.

1796 : 18th March : inaugurated *The Watchman,* a periodical. 13th May : the last issue came out. 31st December : due to financial problems moved into a new house provided by Tom Poole, in Nether-Stowey.

1797-98: He wrote most of his poetry.

1798 : September : publication of *Lyrical Ballads*.

September : tour to Germany.

1799 : November : touring the Lake district with Wordsworth.

1800 : He moved to Keawick.

1804 : He left for Malta.

1807 : June : he started a periodical *The Friend,* only seven issues.

1816 : Published poetry.

1817 : *Biographia Literaria* came out.

1818 : He republished *The Friend* in volume form.

1824 : He received an annual grant from the Royal Society of Literature.

1834 : July : Coleridge died at Highgate.

COLERIDGE'S LITERARY WORKS

1796 : Poems on various subjects.

Started a magazine, *The Watchman*, devoted to politics and literature, only 10 in number. Play: *The Fall of Robespierre*, based on pantisocratic principle.

1798 : The *Lyrical Ballads* in collaboration with Wordsworth.

JUNE 1797- SEPTEMBER 1798 :

The Ancient Mariners, *The Nightingale*, *Christabel* (first part, Love, The Dark Ladie, Ode to France, Fears in Solitude, Frost at Midnight, Kubla Khan).

1800 : *Christabel* (2nd Part)

1802 : Ode on Dejection.

Translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*.

Other Works: *Lay Sermons*, *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, *Notes on Shakespeare*.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO ST COLERIDGE'S WORKS

Coleridge's literary career may be roughly divided into four periods:

1.2.0 The first period lasts upto his meeting with Wordsworth in 1797. It may be called the period of experimental poetry. The best works of this period are:

i. The Fall of Robespierre

ii. To a Friend

iii. Ode on the Departing Year, and

iv. France: an Ode

1.2.1 The second period opens with the summer of 1797 and ends in 1802. It is the flowering season of his poetic genius. The best creations of the poet belong to this period, and include such pieces as:

i. The Ancient Mariner

ii. Christabel I & II

iii. Love, Remorse

iv. Dejection: An Ode, and

v. Frost at Midnight

1.2.2 The third period lasting from 1803 - 1817 is a confused and indistinct period. Ill-health, slavery to opium, and domestic unhappiness combine to cast a shadow across his life and there is a marked decline in his powers. He produced the periodicals, *The Friend*. He delivered a series of lectures on Shakespeare, published *The Statesman's Manual*. The most important work in criticism, *Biographia Literaria* was produced in this period. In Theology, *Aids of Reflection* was written by him.

1.2.3 The fourth period covers the last 17 years of his life.

Here his literary powers partially recovered under the sympathetic care of Dr. Gillman. The noteworthy products of this period are :

i Lay Sermons

ii The Constitution

iii Confessions

iv Notes on English Divines

Effective remarks on literature and literary theory are scattered all over his prose works as :

i The Friend

ii Aids to Reflection

iii Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit

iv Anima Poetae

v Sibylline Leaves

vi Areopagitica

vii Lectures on Shakespeare and other poets

viii Biographia Literaria

BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

1.3 COLERIDGE'S NOTE ON AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL METHOD ADOPTED IN THIS BOOK

In the opening paragraph, Coleridge says that he has adopted the autobiographical method in this book to express his opinion, and to give a continuity to the work, and not for the sake of telling his readers about himself and his life. Through this method he has been able to express his views on politics, religion, and philosophy, clearly and fully. This method has also helped him to apply the rules deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism.

One of the aims of Coleridge in writing this book has been to try to effect a settlement of the long disputed nature of poetic diction. At the same time he wanted to define the real poetic character of Wordsworth, whose writing led to controversy on poetic diction.

1.4 THE MISCONCEPTIONS

In this chapter Coleridge tries to clear away the misconception of the critics which are as follows:

1. Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth have started a school of poetry. This criticism is entirely baseless. In the case of Wordsworth the censure of reviewers has been caused by some hundred lines or so, which are written in a homely, colloquial diction. The critics have objected to the use of colloquial phrases by Wordsworth and have charged him with having bad literary taste.

2. The real cause of controversy is "The Preface" pre-fixed to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and the poems written in colloquial style and dealing with humble life and rustic characters.

   The author, critics agreed, possessed both genius and intellectual strength, but they were not certain about the correctness of the poets' taste.

3. The critics themselves differ in their choice of the poems which they think worthy of censure. A set of critics censured one group of poems, but they are enthusiastically praised by others.

4. Wordsworth's poetry has been condemned as "simpleness, under the affectation of simplicity".

5. His diction has been called prosaic : "prosaic words in feeble metre" .

1.5 *DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES*

Coleridge became acquainted with Wordsworth's publication, entitled *Descriptive Sketches* (1797). He at once discovered in it an original poetic genius struggling to manifest itself through the artificialities of style and diction.

1.6 MEETING WORDSWORTH

When he was twenty four, he met Wordsworth, who entertained him with the recital of "The Female Vagrant", a poem which appeared in the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*.

1.7 WORDSWORTH, THE GENIUS

Coleridge recognized that the poet had freed himself from the original obscurity of language, opaqueness of thought and turbulence

of imagery. He found a union of two opposite virtues, that of deep feeling and profound thought, truth and accuracy in observing the objects and the capacity colouring and modifying those objects with the alchemy of the imagination. Above all, there was the power to spread a tone and atmosphere of the ideal world above and around ordinary commonplace objects, so as to invest them with beauty, wonder and dignity.

1.8 COLERIDGE'S DIFFERENTIATION OF FANCY AND IMAGINATION

The union of opposites gave Coleridge the first inclination of the fact that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties. They were neither two names with one meaning, nor the lower and the higher degrees of one and the same power. This belief has since been confirmed by his repeated reflection upon, and close analysis of, the various faculties of mind. Fancy derived from the Greek word *"Phantasia"* and imagination from the Latin "Imaginato" should not be confused with each other. Milton was highly imaginative as compared to Cowley, who was very fanciful.

1.9 WORDSWORTH Vs COLERIDGE

In the *Preface* (1815) Wordsworth also tried to make a distinction between Fancy and Imagination. He was concerned with the manifestation of these faculties in poetry from meditation on which he proceeded to deduce their diversity. He is concerned chiefly with the manifestation of these faculties in poetry, and from a study of their effects in poetry, he concluded that they are different in kind. On the other hand, Coleridge being a philosopher, applied a philosophical approach to the problem. He made his investigations a part of his analysis of the constitution of human mind itself. He was also interested in psychology and metaphysics. Coleridge is the first critic to differentiate between imagination and fancy, the first literary critic to distinguish between primary and secondary imagination. Through his theory of imagination he revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation. His theory of Fancy and Imagination is a fundamental aspect of his poetic creed.

1.10 MISUNDERSTANDING AGAINST THE AUTHOR

Coleridge analyses the complex feeling with which readers in general take part against the author. This attitude is in favour of the critic, and they are easily led to believe that poets of genius are ill-tempered and irritable by nature. But Coleridge does not agree with this view. He says that men of genius are not ill-tempered by nature. In reality, only those are ill-tempered and irritable who are not men of real genius, but who want to have the reputation of being men of genius.

1.10.0 PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Coleridge analyses the above quoted problem psychologically. He says, persons of weak imaginative power, who have necessity to rely on their immediate sense impressions, grow superstitious and fanatical. Such people are deficient in enthusiasm which comes out of real understanding and imaginative appreciation of things. Since they suffer from a deficiency of enthusiasm, these people try to possess it by imitating the fanatic frenzy of the crowd. Since they do not possess the enthusiasm singly, they want to share the excitement of the crowd. They hide their want of insight and judgment by anger and irritability.

Passion and insight are contradictory; they are opposite to each other. A man of clear understanding and penetrating judgement will be temperamentally calm and quiet. He will not be subject to passions, or roused to anger and fury so easily. It is not genius and clarity of understanding and judgement, but is :

1. Lack of understanding
2. Lack of clarity
3. Lack of insight
4. Lack of confidence

In his own powers which leads to irritability in man. The absence of a solid intellectual foundation creates in them a sense of fear from which nature rescues them only by means of anger. It is known from experience that the first defence of weak minds is to make counter charges and indulge in mutual accusations.

1.10.1 MAN OF GENIUS

Coleridge says that these men in whose minds the ideas are vivid and there exists a perfect union of thought and feeling, take interest in events and things only because they are objects of thought, or because they stimulate thoughts.

A man of vivid, strong, and original ideas may be wanting the quickness for action. He may not do anything to realize or fulfil his ideas. The power of realising his ideas is the strongest in the man who possess more than mere talent, yet still wants something of the creative, and self-sufficing power of absolute Genius, Coleridge calls such men as men of commanding genius. Difference between Man of commanding genius and of absolute genius: Men of absolute genius choose an imaginative and ideal medium of expression in the world of artistic forms. Men of commanding genius choose real things and human lives. And it is by choosing an irrelevant and inadequate medium that men of commanding genius become, in disturbed times, the shaping spirits of destruction. They use their mental powers for destructive purposes. They came out to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day, and to change kings and kingdoms, just as the wind shifts shape the clouds in the sky.

1.10.2 GENIUS ARE CALM AND TRANQUIL IN TEMPER

The records of biography confirm that the men of greatest genius have been of calm and tranquil temper in all those matters that are related to themselves. They seem to be either indifferent or resigned to immediate reputation. For example:

CHAUCER

In the works of Chaucer, there pervades a spirit of cheerfulness and a manly hilarity which makes it very clear that he himself was a man of similar cheerfulness and gaiety of temperament.

SHAKESPEARE

He was very reputed in his own age for the evenness and sweetness of his temper. He was fully conscious of his superior artistic excellence.

SPENSER

Spenser's mind was constitutionally tender and delicate and almost effeminate. It was additionally saddened by the severe calamities which he suffered in his later years. These have diffused over all his compositions "a melancholy grace". But there is least trace of irritability and still less of quarrelsome or contempt of those who found fault with his work.

MILTON

Milton did not show any anger in his poetry. He reserved his anger for the enemies of religion, freedom, and his country. He was a parliamentarian and fought against the Royalists. But neither party could understand him and his high ideals. Even in his later years, poor and lonely, he remained cheerful and hopeful and listened to the music of his own thoughts. He derived consolation from his own faith, and did not question heaven's will or argue against it.

1.10.3 EFFECT OF GENIUS

Genius exercises a humanizing influence on man. It controls his temper and makes it sweet and pleasing. In men of genius irritability does not proceed from genius but from some physical pain, or some defect in the body which disable him to experience the pleasurable sensations. What is charged to the author, belongs to the man, who would

probably have been still more impatient, but for the humanizing influences of the genius, which yet bears the blame of his irritability.

1.10.4 CAUSE OF IRRITABILITY

The real cause of irritability in the people is the desire to possess those things which are wholly out of their powers. The absence of real powers of genius and the desire to possess them makes a man prone to suspicion and jealous irritability. In a country with literature spread widely, many people take intense desire for reputation of poetic genius as the original tendencies of a genius.

1.11 ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

English literature in the past age, i.e. of Chaucer and Gower was the product of real genius. It was not easy for a poet of mediocre ability to write poetry in the past. Then the language and literary traditions were both undeveloped and the poet had to create both poetry and the medium of poetic creation. Poets had great difficulty in moulding the language and make it express their ideas and emotions in musical terms. The modern poets do not face such a difficulty.

Language and literary traditions are now highly developed, and therefore talent of a high order is not needed to compose conventional type of poems. The modern poets have all the resources of the language available to them. The language is now fully developed and mechanised. There are set rules of composition. In his attempt to write poetry, the modern poet is greatly helped by the ancient poets who, by their great genius and untiring labours, have developed the language and literary traditions to great heights.

1.11.0 THE MINOR POETS OF MODERN (COLERIDGE'S) AGE

The writers of minor ability, in the modern age, can get temporary fame and popularity. Their compositions might be mediocre and lacking in real poetic warmth and quality, yet they can please a large number of people who are ignorant of real poetic qualities. But when some

intelligent, learned, and discriminating critic exposes the hollowness of their poetic compositions, they get greatly annoyed. They try to defend themselves by counter-attacking the critic with all their venom and irritability. These minor poets grow in great number. The irritability shown by them on various occasions makes readers believe that bitterness of temper is an inevitable outcome of genius.

1.11.1 POETS OF NEO-CLASSICAL AGE

Poets of the neo-classical age are not men of real genius and are not elevated by genuine poetic inspiration. They follow certain fixed rules of composition and write conventional type of poetry. They express their ideas in an epigrammatic way. But their sentences are unconnected and the ideas of one couplet is not carried on into the other. Coleridge disapproves their way of writing. He says that the compositions of these poets are not very appealing, and they do not stick for long in the reader's memory. They succeed only in making an appeal to the basic instincts of humanity by writing in a satirical manner.

1.11.2 SENSIBILITY OF THE GENIUS

Sensibility both quick and deep is a characteristic feature as well as a component part of genius. But it is not so powerfully excited by personal interests as by other factors.

A man of genius lives mostly in the ideal world, in which the present is constituted by the future and the past. He takes a keen interest in his images and ideas, and thereby he loses all consciousness of self-interest and self-benefit. And yet if he ever tries to refute some false charge or rectify some erroneous censure, people mistake it to be his irritation.

1.11.3 COLERIDGE'S REACTION TO PUBLIC OPINION

Speaking about himself, Coleridge says that the original sin of his character consists in a careless indifference to the public opinion. He does not pay much attention to praise and admiration, and even to

the sale and profit of his works, though monetary considerations were important to him in that situation. His indifference to public opinion is due to his constitutional indolence and ill-health, not because he considers himself genius.

Coleridge says that it is a writer's duty to feel and express a resentment in proportion to the hostility of the criticism and the quality of the poem. The profession of a poet requires an early and constant attention.

1.11.4 DUTY OF MANKIND

It is the duty of mankind to protect and preserve the poetic compositions of a poet who has devoted all his life to the writing of poetry, which by admission of all civilised nations in all ages is honourable as a pursuit, and glorious as an attainment.

Speaking about himself, Coleridge says that he has written a great number of poems, many of which have been forgotten by the people. Still some of his poems have maintained their existence, and they will continue to inspire people in future also. They possess some genuine poetic inspiration and appeal. They will stand against even bitter criticism.

1.12 GENERAL VIEW OF COLERIDGE

Coleridge frankly confesses his indebtedness to critics and satirists for making him a poet. He says that when the name of a man appears frequently in books and journals the readers become familiar with that name. From this point of view, even adverse criticism is better than no criticism at all. The common readers, who read the popular periodicals and journal, are not very intelligent or attentive, and therefore soon forget whatever they have read. If the name of an author frequently occurs in journals, the people remember the name only, and forget whether that author was praised or blamed by the critics. Coleridge says that his poetry has

been condemned by critics of the periodicals and journals continuously for the last seventeen years, mostly for faults which it did not possess. Why is it so ?

1.12.0 PERSONAL VIEW

Whatever may have been the case with others, Coleridge does not attribute the adverse criticism of his works to personal dislike, or to envy, or to feeling of vindictive animosity.

1. The hostile criticism of his works cannot be attributed to personal dislike because with the exception of a very few of his intimate friends, his acquaintance with literary figures is limited only to a few persons.

2. Neither by letter, nor in conversation he has ever had dispute with anybody beyond the common social interchange of opinions.

3. He always took care not to express his dissent until he could establish some points of complete sympathy, some grounds common to both sides, from which to commence its explanation.

4. He can neither attribute the hostile criticism of his works to envy. The reason is that the few literary works that he has produced were published long ago, and his books had a very poor sale in the market. Therefore one has no reason to be envious of him, and even then if any one feels envy towards him, he must be envy-mad.

5. Lastly, he cannot attribute the adverse criticism of his works to vindictive animosity. He has already said that his acquaintance with literary men has been limited, and he has never involved himself in any dispute or controversy. From his early life, he has, with, few and short interferes, lived either abroad or in retirement. His work is very small, and his whole writings consist of some essays on subject of national interest, and his courses of lectures on the principles of criticism as applied to Shakespeare and Milton. And in all his works he

has never attacked any of his literary contemporaries.

1.12.1 INTIMACY : THE REAL CAUSE

In the preceding paragraphs Coleridge has explained why the adverse criticism of his works should not be due to personal dislike, envy, vindictive animosity. If it is none of these, what is its real cause? According to Coleridge, it is his intimate friendship with Wordsworth and Southey. Whenever Wordsworth and Southey are censured by critics, Coleridge is also sure to receive some part of the hostility of the critics against these two authors. But why Wordsworth and Southey are so severely and vehemently condemned by the critics?

1.12.2 SOUTHEY AND WORDSWORTH

First he takes up the case of Southey. The faults which the critics noticed in the earlier works of Southey were (1) Careless lines (2) inequality in the merit of the different poems, and (3) a predilection for the strange and whimsical. These are the faults which might be found in any young and rapid writer, but they were unduly emphasized in the case of Southey. The critics of his age, following the traditions of Dr. Johnson, wanted the contemporary poets to adhere to the rules of the ancients in writing their own poems. If a young poet with a free spirit tried to break away from the rules, the critics with neo-classical bent condemned his poetry. Both Wordsworth and Southey were against the artificial and turned more and more towards naturalness and simplicity of the language of poetry. Therefore Wordsworth and Southey were condemned by the critics of that age.

No critic of his age pointed out the chief quality of Southey's poetry-that in art and diction it differed greatly from the poetry of the eighteenth century in his taste and estimation of writers, Southey agreed far more with Warton than with Johnson. Besides, like Sir Philip Sidney, Southey preferred an excellent ballad in the humblest style of poetry to twenty indifferent poems that were written in an artificial

and elaborate style, and lacked the smoothness of movement. The later poems of Southey are characterized by a deeper pathos, profound reflections, and a more sustained dignity of language and of metre. But the critics of the day failed to perceive these beauties in Southey's poetry. The critics are encouraged to calumniate because these are readers who are delighted with calumny.

1.13 CHANGING FUNCTION OF BOOKS

There is a change and retrograde movement in the aims and objectives of literature itself. In old times, books were religious oracles, and a sanctity was attached to them. As literature advanced, the books next became venerable instructors; then they descended to the rank of instructive friends; and as their numbers increased, they sunk still lower to that of entertaining friends. And in the modern age they come forward as the supporters and propagators of the views of self-elected, arrogant, and ill-qualified critics who write from humour or interest, from enmity or arrogance.

1.13.1 AUTHOR, READER AND CRITIC

The same gradual retrograde movement may be traced in the relation which the authors themselves have assumed towards their readers. The authors themselves have come down from a higher level to a lower level. In the past like Bacon, they spoke as sages and saints, and gave wise counsels to the readers who were supposed to be less learned than the authors. As the time advanced, the poets and philosophers increased in number. Their increased number made them diffident. They started addressing themselves first to the learned readers and they tried to win over the sympathies of the candid readers. Gradually the critics sit as a despot on the throne of criticism. But though the critics have now exalted their position and sit as a despot, they are most ill-suited and least qualified to perform their duties judiciously and rendered the critics dogmatic and arrogant. They are totally devoid of learning and the

critical faculty to judge the merits of a poem.

According to Coleridge, critics may be compared to the eunuchs who were employed by oriental despots to look after their harems. Since such critics lack understanding and the power of judgement, they are qualified to act as guardians of litters in the same manner as the eunuchs had been to act as the guardians of the harems of oriental despots. The moaning of Coleridge is that the reviewers of his own age were all intellectual bankrupts, and could not be given the title of being the critics in the right connotation of the word.

Southey's poems like the Thalaba the Madoc, Cid, the Kehama, and the Don Roderick bear the marks of art and careful revision. They are written with fine workmanship. But the unfortunate part is that Southey had also written a few playful poems which can be enjoyed or passed over according to the taste and humour of the reader. The critics of the day took over these playful poems to show the characteristic faults of the poetry of Southey, and ignored his better compositions. This is not fit. Coleridge deplores one particular tendency of the critics of his age. They judged the poet by his worst composition. But it is not the correct or just way of judgement. A poet or artist should be judged from the best that he has written and not from his second-rate compositions.

Literary criticism is in a bad condition these days. The standards of criticism are very poor, and the critics are also altogether unqualified for their job. There can be an improvement in literary criticism if it is conducted on far other principles, and with far other motives. In place of arbitrary judgments and petulant sneers, the reviewers should support their decisions by references to fixed cannons of criticism previously established and deduced from the nature of man. Every author writes some great literature and some light literature, which is not to be taken too seriously. The correct approach of criticism will be to judge his merits by his greater and more important compositions.

Then again, the lighter literature has a value of its own. In hours languor, when a man is not in a mood for serious study, he derives some innocent amusement by reading the lighter works of a great writer. The lighter compositions, therefore, do not diminish the greatness of an author; rather, they enhance his greatness by showing the versatility of his genius. The same is true of Southey. Even his lighter compositions are marked by his moral predilections, and show the purity of his mind.

No just critic can find fault with Southey the man and the writer. He was man of sound moral principles and never strayed from the path of virtue. He stands second to none either as a historian or as a bibliographer. He is great as an essayist. No one has combined so much wisdom with so much wit, so much truth and knowledge with so much liveliness and imagination. His prose is always intelligible and always entertaining.

Without knowing Southey properly, people have abused and slandered him severely. As an intimate friend of Southey, Coleridge considers it his duty to give a correct and impartial account of Southey as a man and as writer. In his opinion Southey possesses the best gifts of talent and genius, free from all their characteristic defects.

1.14 WORDSWORTH AS A POET

Coleridge says that the assumption that he or Southey or Wordsworth has established a new school of poetry is baseless. A careful examination of Wordsworth's poems published in the *Lyrical Ballads* will reveal the fact that the omission of less than a hundred lines from them would have precluded nine-tenth of the criticism on this works. There are some one hundred lines in Wordsworth's poems, which are weak and carelessly written, and if they are removed, the poems become good and appealing. But the critics have unduly stressed these blemishes. It is unjust. In the eyes of an impartial reader they would have appeared as mere irregularities, and attributed to inattention, not to perversity of judgment. The critics have objected to the use of colloquial phrases by Wordsworth in his poetry, and have charged him with

having bad literary taste. But Coleridge says that the criticism has been blind to the fact that such blemishes pertain only to one-third of poems, dealing with humble life in a colloquial style, and the two-third of the poems are good and admirable. But the critics have denounced the whole works only on the ground that it contains some weak or bad lines.

1.15 WORDSWORTH AND HIS CRITICS

The real cause, according to Coleridge, of the hostile criticism of Wordsworth's poetry is that in his *Preface* Wordsworth has set forth his new critical principles. The critics were against Wordsworth's critical principles and therefore cited the weakest verses to confirm their censures. They could not deny that Wordsworth possessed both genius and a powerful intellect. But they were not quite certain whether he was in the right and they themselves in the wrong. In "The Preface" Wordsworth has tried to show what is true literary taste. "The Preface" was against the critical principles of the eighteenth century poetry. Wordsworth wanted to prove that what the critics were praising was actually bad poetry and what they were condemning was actually good poetry. Coleridge says in literary judgement:

> *It is early proved by the fact that the same poems have been condemned by one critic and praised by another.*

It is true that some poems of Wordsworth have trivial themes and weak expressions, and as such they are far below criticism. But, Coleridge says, that it is a matter of wonder that these very weak poems have engrossed criticism for nearly twenty years. The best thing for the critics would have been to take no notice of these poems and pay attention to Wordsworth's nobler and loftier compositions.

1.15.0 WORDSWORTH'S GENIUS

It was in 1794, the year of his residence at Cambridge, that Coleridge became acquainted with Wordsworth's first publication entitled *Descriptive Sketches*. He at once discovered in it an original genius struggling to manifest itself. It is true that there are certain defects of style in these poems, yet it contains an

unmistakable stamp of Wordsworth's poetic genius. The genius of a poet develops generally, and the faults and errors of this earlier productions are no more found in his later poetry. The same is the case with Wordsworth. His later poems are free from the faults of his earlier poetic attempts.

1.15.1 UNION OF FANCY AND IMAGINATION

In "The Female Vagrant," Coleridge was delighted to see how soon Wordsworth had freed himself from the original obscurity of language, vagueness of thought, and turbulence of imagery. The occasional obscurities which had risen from an imperfect control over the resources of his native language had almost wholly disappeared. There were no arbitrary and illogical phrases, at once hackneyed and fantastic in it. But the ground of his wonder and admiration lay deeper than the surface refinement of style. He found in this poem a union of two opposite virtues of deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of tough observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed, and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations. Wordsworth possessed the skill to spread a tone and atmosphere of the ideal world around ordinary objects so as to reinvest them with beauty, glory, and wonder.

This union of the opposite elements in Wordsworth's poetry gave him the first, two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power. This belief has since been confirmed by repeated meditation and closer analysis of the various faculties of the human mind. Milton had a highly imaginative, Cowley a very fanciful mind. The distinction between Fancy and Imagination is the same as that between delirium and mania.

Coleridge says that "metaphysics and psychology have long been my hobby-horse". He says that he may quite legitimately claim credit

for being the first among his countrymen to distinguish Fancy from Imagination. W. Taylor has also pointed out the distinction between Fancy and Imagination in his book *British Synonymes Discriminated*. Coleridge says that he has not seen this book, but Taylor's specification of Fancy and Imagination has been clearly shown to be both insufficient and erroneous by Wordsworth in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, where the poems are categorised as those of Fancy and Imagination. But Wordsworth was concerned with the manifestation of these faculties in poetry, and from the different effects he proceeded to deduce their diversity in kind.

On the other hand Coleridge, being a philosopher, felt interested in a philosophical approach to the problem. He wanted to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. Coleridge's theory of Fancy and Imagination is a fundamental aspect of his poetic creed, and his investigation is a part of his analysis of the constitution of human mind itself.

1.16 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Why Coleridge adopted autobiographical method in his book *Biographia Literaria*.

b) Briefly discuss Coleridge's concept of Fancy and Imagination.

1.17 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary purpose of Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria"?

A) To provide a detailed autobiography

B) To analyze the works of other poets

C) To explore his thoughts on literary criticism and poetry

D) To discuss his political views

2. In “Biographia Literaria,” what does Coleridge mean by the “willing suspension of disbelief”?

   A) Readers should believe every word in a poem.

   B) Readers should never believe anything in a poem.

   C) Readers should temporarily accept the unreal elements in a poem.

   D) Readers should criticize all aspects of a poem.

3. According to Coleridge, what is the primary function of the secondary imagination?

   A) To create entirely new ideas

   B) To organize and transform existing ideas into poetic forms

   C) To mimic the primary imagination

   D) To interpret the meaning of a poem

4. What term does Coleridge use to describe poetry that relies solely on the external senses without engaging the mind?

   A) Sensational poetry

   B) Organic poetry

   C) Fancy

   D) Imagination

5. Which of the following is NOT a topic discussed by Coleridge in “Biographia Literaria”?

   A) The role of the poet as a seer

   B) The influence of his childhood experiences on his poetry

C) The principles of chemistry

D) The relationship between philosophy and poetry

Answers: 1c, 2c,3b,4c, 5c

1.18 SUGGESTED READING

Cane, Hall. *Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003. Print.

Holmes, Richard. *Coleridge: Early Visions*, 1772-1804. New York: Pan theon Books, 1999. Print.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. : III **LESSON : 2**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : I**

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE:
BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

CHAPTER - XIII

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2.3 Primary Imagination

2.3.0 Coleridge's View on Mind and Senses

2.3.1 The Universe and the Inner Mental Universe

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2.5.0 Properties of Fancy

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2.7 Composition of *Lyrical Ballads*

2.8 The Plan of *Lyrical Ballads*

2.9 Coleridge's View on a Poem

2.9.0 Object

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2.10.1 The Poet

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CHAPTER - XV

2.11 Talent Versus True Poetic Talent

2.11.0 Perfect Music and Verse

2.11.1 Choice of Subject

2.11.2 Use of Imagination

2.11.3 Depth of Thought

2.12 Multiple Choice Questions

2.13 Examination Oriented Questions

2.14 Suggested Reading

CHAPTER - XIII

This is a significant chapter. It can be divided into three parts:

1. In the beginning there is a philosophical discussion which may be regarded as a sequel to the discussion in Chapter XII.

2. Then Coleridge introduces letter, supposed to have been written by a friend, a man of judgement and knowledge. He advises the author that the chapter when completed would occupy no fewer than a few hundred pages and will hence be out of place in the literary biography. The letter was actually written by Coleridge himself who at that point had thought of abandoning the idea of completing his survey of Fancy and Imagination.

3. In the end he gives his new classical definitions of Imagination; primary and secondary and also of Fancy.

2.1 VIEWS OF DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHERS

The famous French philosopher, Descartes said, "Give me matter and motion and I will construct you the universe." Similarly the transcendental philosopher says, "Grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you." Every other science presupposes intelligence as already existing and complete: the philosopher contemplates it in its growth, and as it were, it also represents its history to the mind from its birth to its maturity. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, is of opinion that opposites are of two kinds, either logical, i.e. such as are absolutely incompatible, or real without being contradictory. A body in motion is something; but a body at one and the same time in motion and not in motion is nothing, or at most air articulated into nonsense. On the other hand a motory force of a body in one direction, and an equal force of the same body in an opposite direction, is not incompatible, and the result, namely rest, is real and representable. Also two equal forces acting in opposite direction, both being finite, reduce each other to inaction. This is a philosophy, no less than a poetic genius, which is differentiated from the highest perfection of talent not by degree but by kind.

2.2 COLERIDGE RECEIVES A LETTER

Coleridge received a letter from a friend, while he was developing his thesis. The friend informed him that his opinions and methods of argument were entirely new. He then advised him to withdraw from the book the chapter on Imagination because:

1. It would be too long for this book.

2. The common reader would not be able to understand so abstruse a subject. Thus Coleridge abandoned his plan, and concluded the chapter by giving in brief the definitions of:

a. Primary Imagination

b. Secondary Imagination

c. Fancy

d. Difference between Fancy and Imagination

2.3 PRIMARY IMAGINATION:

Coleridge defines the Primary Imagination as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception".

It is the idealistic - organistic conception of imagination. In his definition he uses the words "the infinite I am" refer to the universe, which is a proliferation of God. 'Perception' is the process of knowing the external universe through the senses, chiefly the eye and the ear, which nourishes the mind with sensations received from the world outside. By some thinkers the primary is given to the senses while mind is regarded as more or less passive, which depends on the senses for its information and functioning.

2.3.0 COLERIDGE'S VIEW ON MIND AND SENSES

Coleridge, however, does not accept the notion that the human mind is merely passive depending on the senses. He asserts that in all acts of perception the mind plays an active role. The mind is something living and vital. The senses through which it receives sensations from the external world are its agents. These senses share mind's vitality and so become *half-creator* and *half-perceiver.* Every human mind repeats the process of creation which is at work in the external and wider universe. In this way, through the 'interchange of action from within as well as without', the way is paved for the growth of consciousness.

2.3.1 THE UNIVERSE AND THE INNER MENTAL UNIVERSE

Coleridge's world "the infinite I am" refers to the universe. This universe is something vast and limitless through which the majesty

of the creator is proclaimed. Universe came into existence with the words of God: 'God said there should be light and there was light'. Similarly, the inner mental universe is built through the operation of the living agent, the primary imagination, upon the fixed objects of the external world.

2.4 SECONDARY IMAGINATION

Secondary Imagination is the creative power peculiar to poets and creative artists. Coleridge calls it an 'echo' of the primary imagination. According to him, the primary imagination occurs first and is followed by the secondary imagination.

The secondary imagination extends the scope of the primary imagination, though it depends for its strength and energy upon the vitality of the primary one. That is to say, the secondary imagination receives its raw material to work upon from the primary imagination, and, as long as, it gets the fresh raw material, it will function actively.

Then, the primary imagination functions involuntarily, while the secondary imagination works voluntarily and deliberately. Thus, the difference between the two is :

1. Only of degree and not of kind, and
2. Their modes of operation are different,
3. The Primary imagination is assimilative, while the secondary is a synthetical power,
4. The former colours without distortion, while the latter (dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate) dissolves, destroys, breaks and melts things in order to recreate new forms. The secondary imagination also strives to reconcile the opposites, create unity in diversity, and spread an ideal tone and atmosphere over and around the objects real and familiar. It is a living power. And it works wonders with the objects in nature, which are dead, fixed, inactive and definite.

2.5 FANCY

Fancy, according to Coleridge "has no other counters to play with but to fixities and definites". He adds that it is a mode of memory liberated from the limitations of time and place.

2.5.0 PROPERTIES OF FANCY

(1) Fancy is light and playful.

(2) It plays upon the definite and static images and does not modify them.

(3) It is swift-footed and ranges freely among the images supplied by memory unfettered by the limits of time and place. Fancy picks and chooses images needed by it, irrespective of time and place.

(4) Fancy, "must receive all its material ready-made from the law of association", i.e. it is like the ordinary memory and it is the same power as was discussed by the Associationist philosophers of the day. (Law of Association: images are brought together to form clusters or trains, and simple sensations are combined together to form complex wholes). According to Coleridge, the images assembled by Fancy to form clusters are governed by association based on superficial resemblance.

2.6 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FANCY AND IMAGINATION

From Coleridge's definitions, the difference between Fancy and Imagination can be stated as follows:

1. Fancy is light and playful power. Imagination is a serious and grave power.

2. Fancy does not try to achieve much. It simply plays with the objects of perception. Imagination, on the other hand, aims at recreation of some new form different from its resource.

3. Fancy plays with definite and static images and does not modify them while imagination dissolves, dissipates in order to recreate.

4. Fancy is light-footed and ranges freely among the images of memory unhampered by the limits and order of time and place. It selects images by "Choice", and so there is only an accumulation of images. The perfect union of images is effected by living power of the imagination.

5. Fancy, like memory, receives all its material ready-made from the law of association. Imagination creates unity in diversity, spreading the tone and atmosphere of the ideal world over and around the real world.

CHAPTER - XIV

2.7 COMPOSITION OF *LYRICAL BALLADS*

This chapter opens with an account of the occasion which led to the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. During the first year Coleridge and Wordsworth were neighbours, they frequently talked about two cardinal points of poetry; namely

a) The power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and

b) The power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination.

It was, therefore, decided by them to work out two kinds of poems;

1. In the one the incidents and agents were to be supernatural. They would be rendered credible and interesting by giving them the emotions and behaviours peculiar to real human beings. It was Coleridge's responsibility to compose such kind of poems.

2. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life. The characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village by an alert mind and sympathetic heart. Wordsworth got the responsibility to compose such poems. And the excellence aimed at was to transform the familiar objects into something novel, fresh

and strange, by colouring of imagination.

2.8 THE PLAN OF *LYRICAL BALLADS*

In this way originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The work of composing poems was distributed on the principle that Coleridge would try to make the unfamiliar credible, and Wordsworth the familiar charming.

Coleridge wrote *The Ancient Mariner*, *The Dark Lady* and *Christabel,* where the supernatural was to be treated with greater subtlety and effectiveness. He dealt with humble and rustic life and characters. He also wrote two or three poems in his own character, marked by dignity of thought and stateliness of manner which are peculiar to his genius. In this form the first edition of the *Lyrical* was published, with a brief 'Advertisement' pointing out that the poems were the product of an experiment to see how poems representing ordinary incidents and characters in a simple, unadorned and colloquial language can impart that pleasure to the readers which poetry is generally expected to provide. Two years later, in 1800, the second edition was brought out, with a lengthy Preface, in which Wordsworth said that the language actually spoken by peasants and rustics was the only suitable language for all kinds of poetry. And it gave rise to a heated and prolonged controversy.

Critics found "meanness of language and inanity of thought" in Wordsworth's poems. But Coleridge opposed all charges, for inspite of all the charges levelled against them these poems have not only survived, but also have steadily grown in popularity. In 1800, a second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* was issued with a "Preface" written by Wordsworth. Here he tries to extend the language of rustics to all kinds of poetry. As Coleridge's name is frequently mentioned by the critics along with that of Wordsworth, he deems it proper and necessary to declare where he does agree with the theory and where he does not agree. But in order to facilitate an understanding of his views, he thinks it essential to explain his views first, of a *Poem,* and secondly, of *Poetry* in general.

2.9 COLERIDGE'S VIEW ON A POEM

According to Coleridge, a poem contains the same elements as a prose composition. The difference between them being either in (1) different combination of those elements, or (2) a different object which the poet has in mind.

The object of the poet may be simply to aid the memory of certain facts or observations by artificial arrangements. Then the composition will be a poem merely because it is distinguished from prose by :

a) metre

b) rhyme, or

c) both jointly

It is a superficial distinction of form between prose and poetry, and the source of pleasure will consist in the anticipation of the recurrence of sounds.

2.9.0 OBJECT

What is the difference in the objects of poem and the work of science? Coleridge answers:

The immediate object of a poem is pleasure, and the immediate object of a work of science is truth. But a work of science may also give pleasure and a poem may contain a profound truth. They may be their ultimate objects.

2.9.1 METRE

As the immediate object of a poem is pleasure and not truth, and metre, under certain conditions, adds to poetry; poetry prefers it to the language of prose. According to Coleridge, if metre is superadded to a poem, the other parts of it also must harmonise with it. The recurrence of accent and sound, which is the essence of metre, directs attention to each part of the composition separately. And in order to deserve the name of a poem each part must be so arranged as to justify that attention.

"A Poem", defines Coleridge, "is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object, i.e. pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part".

"A poem therefore, may be defined as a class of composition," which is opposed to works of science in proposing for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth. It means the poem is an organic whole in which the various parts work in harmony to provide the pleasure which is peculiar to poetry. Philosophers deny the name of a poem to such compositions where:

(a) If lines of a poem are so striking that they can be detached from the whole and enjoyed separately.

(b) If the parts are so undistinguished that the reader can rapidly glance through the whole and understand its general purpose, without paying attention to and enjoying the beauty of each separate parts in itself.

2.10 POETRY AS DISTINGUISHED FROM A POEM

2.10.0 POETRY

At its best, poetry may be found in works which employ no metrical language, like the works of Plato and Jeremy Taylor, and also the prophetic books of the Bible. But to define poetry means to define the poet, the creator.

2.10.1 THE POET

The poet, at his best, calls forth all the powers of the soul into activity, a synthetic and magical power, the poet harmonizes and blends together the various points to produce the tone and spirit of unity over the whole.

The creative power is first put into action by will and understanding and operates under their gentle and unnoticed control. It manifests itself most clearly in the balance or reconciliation of opposite qualities:

1. Sameness with difference,

2. The general with the concrete,

3. The idea with the image,

4. The individual with the representative,

5. Novelty and freshness with old, familiar objects,

6. Unusual emotional excitement with strict order and discipline,

7. Strong and vehement passion with vigilant judgement and unflagging self-possession.

2.10.2 POETRY ALSO BLENDS

a) The natural and the artificial with due subordination of art to nature;

b) The manner to matter, and

c) Our admiration of the poet to our sympathy for the poem.

Coleridge concludes rather abruptly that good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its eternal dress; motion its living principle, and imagination the soul which is diffused through the whole, which animates each part and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

CHAPTER XV

2.11 TALENT VERSUS TRUE POETIC TALENT

Coleridge tries to differentiate between talent and true poetic talent. For this he examines the early poems of Shakespeare; *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* :

(a) *Venus and Adonis* deals with the passionate love story of Venus, the goddess of love, for Adonis, a Greek youth of great charm and beauty. This youth was fascinated by hunting and other outdoor sports. But he was very cold and indifferent towards the amorous pleadings and

protestations by Venus.

(b) *The Rape of Lucrece* deals with a tragic theme, in which Lucreece, a matron of Rome was raped by King Tarquin, who came to her house to pass the night in her house as a guest. But he raped her in her bed-chamber.

Both these poems are early and immature poems and show imperfection of the artist. They are literally exercises following the mode fashionable in those days. Yet they promise of great future. There is an intellectual ingenuity and profusion of conceits and ornaments.

According to Coleridge these are four worth noting qualities which may be regarded as the marks of true poetic genius.

2.11.0 Perfect Music And Verse

In *Venus and Adonis,* there is the perfect music of its verses; the artistic adaptation of the music of the subject, remarkable variation of rhythm. The music is rich and excessive and original. And this ability is a highly favourable promise in a young poet. Imagery is drawn from nature and books, incidents are moving, thoughts are just, feelings and emotions are interesting. And there is an excellent poetic combination of all the above qualities. Yet the sense of musical delight and the power of producing it is the only gift of imagination and that of genius.

2.11.1 Choice of Subject

According to Coleridge, the second mark of excellence is the choice of subjects remote and away from the personal interest and the domestic problems of the poet himself. When the poet gives personal accounts, the excellence of a particular poem is a fallacious show of genuine poetic power.

In *Venus and Adonis*, the impersonality of the dramatist, a superior spirit, more conscious than the characters themselves, is at work. While in play the vividness of effect is achieved by the speeches, actions, gestures,

and passions of the actors. The result of all this is a curious illusion that the characters are a part of whole not independent. Shakespeare has presented the animal desires in circumstances best calculated to divert the attention of the audience from it with the help of visual images, variegated events and episodes, witty conceits, etc. There is no time to think of the moral aspect of the story, or to brood over the erotic implication involved in the poem.

2.11.2 Use of Imagination

Shakespeare's excellence is again marked in his poems through his profound imagination. The images, beautiful and copied from nature, vividly presented in words are powerful and precise and proofs of the original poetic genius.

These images may be modified by :

1. A predominant passion; or
2. By thought and images awakened by that passion; or
3. When they create the effect of reducing multitude to unity or
4. when they are a succession to an instant; or lastly
5. When the poet is able to transfer from his own spirit a human and intellectual life among the objects of nature which are basically inert, inactive, cold and inanimate.

It is here that Shakespeare excels all other poets, and is able to impart dignity to the objects he presents. Imagery is still more characteristic:

1. It can mould and colour itself to the circumstances, passion or character present in the mind of the poet. *King Lear* and *Othello* and his sonnets are packed with such numerous instances.
2. Semblance of simultaneousness: With the help of a series of

vivid and faithful images, Shakespeare precepts before us a succession of pictures which give the semblance of simultaneousness.

2.11.3. Depth of Thought

Depth of thought is the most essential quality without which other qualities cannot remain complete. Poetry imbibes human thoughts, passions, emotions and human language. All these constituents of poetry are skillfully handled by a poet, being a great thinker and philosopher.

Shakespeare's creative power and the intellectual energy is in conflict to excel each other in poetry. But the conflict is resolved in his dramas. However, *Venus and Adonis* did not allow for the display of the deeper passions. But in the tragic and pathetic story of *Lucrece* the passions demand their inmost working.

The Rape of Lucrece is a web of all the artifices of the early poems:

(i) Wealth of imagery.

(ii) Vivid and colourful descriptions.

(iii) Ingenuity and subtlety of argument, reflected in the witty and clever style.

(iv) Abounding in allusions and conceits.

(v) Frequent interventions of the reflective utterance, reflecting wider knowledge and energy of thought.

Shakespeare's early poems discover their author as a young man of keen eye and alert mind. He studied with labour and patience. His knowledge was fully assimilated with his habitual feeling and thinking, and in turn it gave birth to that stupendous power which seated him on the summit along with Milton. They were geniuses of contrasted temperaments, yet the two have added eternal glory to English literature.

2.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What does Coleridge mean by the term "esemplastic" in "Biographia Literaria"?

A) The ability of the primary imagination to create new ideas

B) The role of the poet as a critic

C) The power of the secondary imagination to unify diverse elements into a whole

D) The suspension of disbelief in poetry

2. According to Coleridge, what is the ultimate aim of poetry?

A) To entertain and amuse readers

B) To convey moral lessons

C) To communicate the poet's personal experiences

D) To awaken the reader's imagination and engage their intellect

3. In "Biographia Literaria," Coleridge criticizes which contemporary poet for lacking imagination and creativity?

A) William Wordsworth

B) John Keats

C) Lord Byron

D) William Blake

4. What is the significance of Coleridge's distinction between "fancy" and "imagination" in his critical theory?

A) It highlights the importance of visual imagery in poetry.

B) It underscores the role of nature in his poetry.

C) It emphasizes the need for rhyme and meter in poems.

D) It differentiates between mere surface-level creativity and deeper, transformative poetic power.

5. What literary concept does Coleridge consider central to the understanding of poetry and criticism in "Biographia Literaria"?

A) The role of irony

B) The sublime

C) The heroic couplet

D) The epistolary novel

Answers: 1c, 2d,3c,4d,5b

2.13 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Briefly discuss Coleridge's view on primary and secondary imagination.

b) Discuss Coleridge's view on a poem.

2.14 SUGGESTED READING

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Gutenberg.org. Gutenberg, July 2004. Web. 10 Aug. 2016.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. J. Shawcross. London: Clarendon Press, 1907. Print.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. III **LESSON : 3**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : I**

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE:
BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

STRUCTURE

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3.3 Disagreement between Him and Wordsworth

3.3.0 Poetic Diction

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3.7 Concluding remarks on Language of Poetry

3.7.0 Language of Prose and Metrical Composition

3.7.1 Wordsworth's Contention

3.7.2 Coleridge's Reply

CHAPTER XVI

3.1. POETS OF 15TH - 16TH CENTURY AND THE PRESENT AGE

Coleridge enumerates the striking points of difference between the poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and that of his own age. According to him, all Christiandom, from its very beginning, has functioned as a single body. Likewise artists and poets in one particular period in the various countries exhibit peculiarities of style and composition. The peculiarities speak of their fundamental unity and about their difference from characteristics of other periods. The narrative poems of Shakespeare exhibit a conformity of manner to contemporary Italian poets. The art of painting also follows the same route. Coleridge says that in the contemporary times:

(i) Poets set great store by new and striking images in poetry.

(ii) They prefer the specific and the individual personality in

their character and descriptions.

(iii) They exhibit greater freedom and slackness in diction and metre.

(iv) They do not follow any definite principles in their metrical arrangements.

(v) For convenience and expediency, they even sacrifice logic.

(vi) In case of use of language, it has remained poetical simply because it would be intolerable in conversational and prose form. Yet even the poets who have tried to maintain the purity of the language cannot say that they have been able to guard this purity with the same enthusiasm with which the great Italian poets of the 13th century did. The great poet Dante declares in his Illustrious Vernacular that to guard the purity of the language is the first duty of the poet, as it once contains the trophies of the past, and the weapons of its future conquest. Similarly in modern painting the entire interest has been shifted to the background. The middle and foreground are left comparatively flat and unattractive. To compare it with, in the works of great Italian and Flemish masters, the front and middle objects of the landscape are the most obvious and determinate. Here the interest gradually declines in the background. The charm and peculiar worth of the picture consists to lesser degree in the specific objects displayed in visual language. Then the aim of the artist and the poet was not originality and novelty of the subject, but in the superior excellence in the treatment of even the common subjects and themes.

The poetry of the distinguished poets of the 15th and 16th centuries imbibed:

(i) Imagery in general: Sun, moon, flowers, breeze, murmuring streams, delicious shades, damsels, nymphs, goddesses, etc. The thoughts are generally conventional. The distinction is

achieved with an attractive treatment of the emotion and the vividness of description.

(ii) Poetry was an art and the poet sought the refinement of diction with simple and lucid expression. The poet used the language and idioms of the cultivated society.

(iii) The poet did not strive for the novelty of metre and measure. The experienced poets of England and Italy produced more charming varieties by modifications and subtle balances of sound. In the end Coleridge sums up by saying that a lasting and undisputed fame can be achieved by the modern man of genius. He only needs a successful hand in uniting the appropriateness, felicity, polish, delicate grace and balance, a quality carried by the ancient lyric poets, together with the finish and harmony of their compositions to the real emotions, fresh and varied imagery.

CHAPTER XVII

3.2 COMMENT ON WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF POETIC DICTION

Coleridge begins with a lengthy and irrelevant discussion of Wordsworth's critics. He is more particular about Wordsworth's services in condemning the poetic diction of the eighteenth century as is revealed in the following points:

(i) He was against the use of stock cliches and devices as substitutes for natural expressions.

(ii) He tried to reform the poetic diction through his compositions.

(iii) Wordsworth rightly pointed out that in the original poets simile and metaphor were the natural products of genuine and strong passion, but in the hands of the later poets they merely became artificial decorations without any outlet of the genuine emotions and feelings. The later poets only tried to copy their figures of speech.

(iv) He strived for truth and presence of nature in poetry.

The verses both of his professed admirers and hostile critics clearly show that they have been influenced by this theory and practice.

3.3. DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN HIM AND WORDSWORTH

Coleridge points out his differences with the views of Wordsworth, as follows:

3.3.0. Poetic Diction

Wordsworth contented that "the proper diction of poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken. . . from the mouths of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conversation of man under the influence of natural feelings".

Coleridge's objection is three-fold:

(a) That in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry.

(b) That even to these classes it is not applicable, except in such a sense as has never been denied or doubted by anyone; and

(c) That, as a rule, it is useless, if not injurious, and therefore either need not or ought not to be practised.

3.3.1 Subjects or Themes

Wordsworth chose low and rustic life "because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint and speak a plain and more emphatic language. . . . ." In such a life the elementary feeling exists in a simple form and is forcibly communicated in a simple language.

Coleridge's argument is based on two important considerations: The perusal of the relevant poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*, shows

(i) that the characters employed in the best poems like 'Brothers' 'Michael', 'Ruth', etc. are by no means taken from rustic or low

life. Their excellence cannot be attributed to their rusticity. They are small landed-proprietors under no necessity of working for others but able to get a simple livelihood by strenuous labour. Their education further, is the outcome of their knowledge of the Bible and the hymn book.

Coleridge is of the opinion that for the human soul to prosper in rustic life, a certain vantage ground is essential. Education or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant. If they are not sufficient, the mind contrasts and hardens by want of stimulants. In other words, in the absence of independence and education the rustics, instead of experiencing nature's salutary influence, become selfish, sensual, gross and hard-hearted. And thereby, the universe of Nature, "the mighty world of eye and ear" becomes as useless as beautiful pictures to the blind and music to the deaf.

Coleridge points out that a small group of rustics cannot represent the whole lot. He accepts with full faith the principle of Aristotle:

(a) That poetry is essentially ideal,

(b) That it avoids and excludes all accidental,

(c) That its apparent individualities of rank, character or occupation must be clothed with generic attributes, with the common attributes of the class; not with such as one gifted individual might possibly possess, but such as from his situation it is most probably beforehand that he would possess. Wordsworth's poem about rustic and humble characters succeed only in the degree in which it conforms to this Aristotalian principle. The moment he departs from this principle, he fails. The Idiot Boy and Harry Gill are unimpressive rustics, and they succeed only because they are located "in the vicinity of interesting images". Coleridge agrees with the two charges levelled against the poem "The Idiot Boy" that:

(i) the representation of the boy's idiocy is disagreeably realistic;

(ii) there is little to choose between the mother's silly indiscretion and the boy's idiocy.

Next is the defect of long-endedness or circumlocutory way of retelling facts, in a narrative poem. But this defect is present in his own poem 'The Thorn'. In 'The Thorn' Wordsworth intends to present a narrative by a retired seaman, one with leisure to go gossiping round the countryside. Coleridge finds this part of the theory of Wordsworth unconvincing and defective.

3.4 LANGUAGE OF THE RUSTICS

Coleridge does not agree with Wordsworth's view that the language of poetry must be the language of the rustics purified "from all provincialism and grossness" i.e. dialectical ugliness and bad grammar. Coleridge traces the following points against this theory :

1. He avers that a rustic's language purified from all provincialism and grossness, and so far re-constructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar will not differ from the language of any other man of common sense, however learned or refined he may be. Also the notions to be conveyed by the rustics are fewer and more indiscriminate.

2. The rustic aims solely to convey insulated facts, from the more imperfect development of his faculties and from the lower state of his cultivation. But an educated man chiefly seeks to discover and express those facts, from which some more or less general law can be deduced.

3. The rustic's vocabulary is a small collection of terms pertaining to his basic needs; very similar to that of birds and animals. Occasionally they may use words of educated speech that they may have come into contact with in the church or some learned sources. Coleridge denies that the words and combinations of words derived from the objects with which the rustic is familiar can be justly said to form the best part of language. The best part of

language is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself and apparently rustics are incapable of it. It is from the mouth of the civilized and educated society, that the rustics pick up some words and phrases. The words are thus diffused from the higher to the lower classes of society. The major role is played by the religious instructors in this diffusion.

3.5 REAL LANGUAGE

Coleridge objects to Wordsworth's use of the phrase "real language". He regards the word 'real' as equivocal. Every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties and the depth and quickness of his feelings.

Every man's language has:

1. Its individuality
2. The common properties of the class to which he belongs
3. Words and phrases of universal use

The language of Wordsworth's most homely composition differs from that of a common peasant. There, the term 'real' must be substituted by 'ordinary' or lingua communis. The language which is so highly extolled by Wordsworth varies in every country, rather in every village, according to the accidental character of the clergyman, the existence or absence of schools, or due to some other common reasons.

Coleridge attempts to arrive at the meaning of the term 'real'. He affirms that there are three concentric areas of language. The innermost is the circle of one's personal and unique use of a language. The outermost is the poorest, and this is the only area that Wordsworth's real language can refer to.

3.6 USE OF THE PHRASE "IN A STATE OF EXCITEMENT"

Wordsworth later added the phrase "in a state of excitement". Coleridge argues the use of this phrase, as the property of passion is not to create, but to

set in an increased activity. The mind excited by even strongest passions cannot create fresh words: If there is a paucity of ideas, there will be only meaningless repetitions, and it is difficult to conjecture what assistance to the poet, or ornament to the poem, these can supply.

A common uncultivated mind, overpowered by a strong passion, can only utter broken words, or repeat certain set terms and phrases, and a literary artist needs to take great care in turning these meaningless repetitions of uncultivated minds into felicities of style.

Coleridge asserts that excitement cannot invent; it can only cause a ferment in what already exists. Hence, the qualification, which Wordsworth tries to add is without any significance.

CHAPTER XVIII

3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS ON LANGUAGE OF POETRY

Coleridge gives a concluding remark on Wordsworth's phrase " a selection of language really used by men". In the beginning he explains what do we mean by adopting the language of a class. His view is that the poet does not adopt the language of a class merely by using the words understood and used by that class, but also following the order in which the words of such men succeed each other as for the conversation of uncultivated rustic (1) it is fragmentary and disconnected. (2) He does not possess the under perspective and sufficient knowledge to view things in their proper relations. (3) The rustic mind cannot foresee the whole which it wishes to convey. (4) He cannot arrange an idea into an organised whole.

But such is not the case with educated and cultivated people. They can view things in their proper relations and can express the whole idea as a complete unit.

3.7.0 Language of Prose and Metrical Composition

Coleridge proceeds to examine Wordsworth's statement that

"there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." He disagrees with Wordsworth on the point. According to Coleridge there exists a great difference between the styles of prose and poetry, even though the words used in both are the same. He lays emphasis on **style** and not **on the use of metre and phrases.** The style of poetry is essentially different from that of prose. Then, Coleridge goes on to examine Wordsworth's statement that, "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." According to Coleridge, Wordsworth's claim must mean that there cannot be a different organization of language of prose and poetry, where as Coleridge contends that there must be a difference because of the special conditions under which poetry is composed.

3.7.1 Wordsworth's Contention

a) Language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must not differ from that of good prose.

b) likewise some of the most interesting parts of the best poems may be having the language of prose when prose is well-written.

3.7.2 Coleridge's Reply

Coleridge replied with the statement that "things identical must be convertible". Therefore it is not enough for Wordsworth to say that certain passages in great poetry are equally good as prose. Wordsworth has to prove that all poetry would be equally good as prose and that all prose is convertible into poetry.

The main factor responsible for the difference is the presence of metre in poetic composition and its absence in even good and serious prose.

3.8 THE ORIGIN AND EFFECT OF METRE

3.8.0 The Origin

Coleridge traces the origin of metre to 'balance in the mind affected'

by that spontaneous effort which stirs to hold in check the workings of passion on the impulse to allow the free overflow of feelings is balanced by a conscious exercise of the will and judgement, for the foreseen purpose of pleasure. Their balance of the opposites is effected in a poem by metre.

From this two necessary conditions of metrical composition emerge:

1. Since the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement.

2. These elements are formed into metre by a voluntary act. It is an artificial creation. The purpose is to blend delight with emotion. Thus the exercise of will (volition) should be proportionately discernible throughout the metrical composition.

That is to say that in a poem there must be perfect union or reconciliation of these two conditions. There must be an interpenetration of passion, of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose. When these two elements-the one of nature and other of art, are so united, the metaphors and figures which are the natural and spontaneous language of passion become part and parcel of poetry. Art co-exists and blends with nature to produce an effect through design. That would require art and deliberate efforts on the part of the poet and their union can be best manifested in a language which is picturesque and vivifying.

3.8.1 The Effect of Metre

Coleridge believes that since metre is an organic part of poetry, it is vitally connected with its effect also. This effect may be described as an increased likeliness and susceptibility, of the general feelings of the reader and his attention. The effect of metre is produced by the continual excitement of surprise. It has the power to load the language and render it pleasurable.

3.8.2 Pleasure of Metre is Conditional

Pleasure of metre itself is conditional. It depends on the appropriateness of thought and expression, to which the metrical form is superseded. Coleridge argues that metre is only an accessory in itself. Therefore metrical composition must be accompanied by a rich thought content and poetic diction. Metre assumes a great importance when it is combined with other elements in the poem.

3.8.3 Metre: Stimulant of Attention

Before the invention of printing, rather before the introduction of writing, metre possessed an independent value as an aid to memory. It helped in preservation of series of truths and incidents; their metre is simply a stimulant of attention.

Coleridge does not agree with Wordsworth's statement that metrical excitement produces pleasure. He says that pleasure depends on the appropriateness of thoughts and expressions to which metre has been added. A poet, to him, writes in metre to create a piece different from prose. But where the language is not up to the mark, metre itself often becomes feeble.

3.8.4 Coleridge's Conclusion

Coleridge concludes that metre is an integral part of poetry. Poetry is imperfect and defective without metre. In a poem the sense may be good and weighty, the language correct and dignified, and the subject interesting and treated with feeling. Yet the style may be blamed as prosaic, because the words and the order of words despite finding their appropriate place, would not be suitable to metrical composition.

Coleridge refers to the practice of the best poets of all countries and of all ages, in support of his argument and arrives at the final conclusion that "in every import of the word essential. There may be, is, and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition."

The best and surest guide in poetic composition is the poet's own

intuition. It helps him to choose his own language, figures and style. If a rule is imposed from without, poetry would cease to be poetry and become a mechanical work of art. Poetry must grow and evolve according to its own inherent laws under the inference of the shaping powers of imagination.

CHAPTER XIX

3.9 COMMENT ON WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF STYLE.

Sometimes it appears from certain passages in the *Preface* that Wordsworth wanted to introduce a new theme in English poetry: The new theme of treatment of low and rustic life and the necessity of a close accordance with actual language of men. But from the drift of the argument that follows, it is quite clear that he wanted to apply it to all kinds of poetry.

According to Coleridge this theory is so groundless and absurd that it is hard to believe that a great poet like Wordsworth himself seriously entertained it. Coleridge surmises, Wordsworth being disgusted with the artificial poetic diction of the eighteenth century formulated his own theory of poetry. In this theory he carried his love for the language of nature and good sense to the opposite extreme. Instead of the gaudy and artificial poetic diction, which was remote from the language of the rustics he preferred the later which was simple and natural and close to real life.

The real object which Wordsworth had in mind can be best put in the words of Grave, "The talent which is required to make excellent verse lies in seeking only the apt expressions of thoughts, and yet to find at the same time with it the rhyme and the metre to write verses in which everything was expressed just as one would wish to talk, and yet all dignified, attractive and interesting at the same time, perfectly correct as to the measure to the syllables and the rhyme."

This plain but prevalent style is not something new in English poetry. Spenser clearly manifests it in his *Faerie Queen*. Several poems of Cotton and Waller's song are admirable specimens of this style. This style marks

the poems of Chaucer, the father of English Poetry. His poem *Troilus and Cressida* is a fine example of the simple, natural and unstudied style. George Herbert, a seventeenth century religious poet, illustrating the characteristic fault of the elder poets is just the opposite of the more recent poets. He conveys the most fantastic thoughts in the most correct and natural language, while the recent poets convey the most trivial ideas in the most fantastic language. Herbert's poetry is an enigma of thoughts. That of the recent (contemporary of Coleridge) poets is a riddle of words to convey the most trivial thoughts.

CHAPTER XX

3.10 CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE THEORY OF POETIC DICTION

Coleridge says that it is surprising that a theory of poetic diction which recommends the common language as the best medium of poetic expression, should have come from a poet whose style, next to Shakespeare and Milton, is the most individualized. It uniforms adherence to genuine. Logical English is undoubtedly Wordsworth's quality for which he is distinguished among his contemporaries. A man of taste who has read three or four principle plays of Shakespeare will have little difficulty in recognising even a small quotation from any of his plays. Similar is the case with Wordsworth. His style is so highly individualized that it is easily recognizable even when he speaks through his characters in his poems.

However it would be difficult to select from Wordsworth's more elevated compositions instances of a diction peculiarly his own. Coleridge selects examples from the '*Boy of Winander- Mere*' the noble imitation of Drayton in the Joanna, and the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*. *The Excursio*n, demands a more dignified and pompous style to maintain the dignity of the theme, for the language of the most part is sufficiently common. But his diction is very different from the language actually spoken by people.

For instance, Wordsworth describes a bird singing loudly as, "the thrush is busy in the wood", or the boys with a string of club-moss round their rusty hats as, "the boys with their green coronate", or of the beauty of May-day as,

"Both earth and Sky keep Jubilee", or the reflection of the sky in water as, "that uncertain heaven received into the bosom of the steady lake."

A detailed analysis of the theory brings Coleridge to conclude on a very positive note that if all that literal adherence to the theory of his *Preface* is excluded from Wordsworth's poetic composition, at least two-third of the marked beauties of his poetry would be erased. He says that quite a few intelligent readers of Wordsworth's poetry have frankly confessed to him that many passages in his works have awakened a meditative mood in them at different times as compared to any other modern work.

3.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Why did Coleridge disagree with Wordsworth's view that the language of poetry must be the language of rustic.

b) Discuss Coleridge's origin and effect of metre.

3.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary difference between Coleridge and Wordsworth's views on imagination in poetry?

   A) Coleridge emphasizes primary imagination, while Wordsworth focuses on secondary imagination.

   B) Coleridge dismisses the role of imagination, while Wordsworth believes it is central.

   C) Both share the same view on imagination in poetry.

   D) Coleridge and Wordsworth do not discuss imagination in their theories.

2. How do Coleridge and Wordsworth differ in their approach to the use of language in poetry?

   A) Coleridge advocates for the use of everyday language, while Wordsworth prefers archaic and complex language.

   B) Coleridge and Wordsworth both favor highly ornate and flowery language.

   C) Both Coleridge and Wordsworth argue for the use of formal poetic diction.

D) Wordsworth promotes the use of simple and natural language, while Coleridge values precision and richness of language.

3. Which poet believes that poetry should arise from "emotion recollected in tranquility"?

   A) Coleridge

   B) Wordsworth

   C) Both

   D) Neither

4. In contrast to Wordsworth, how does Coleridge view the role of the poet's personal experiences in poetry?

   A) Coleridge believes personal experiences should be the sole focus of poetry.

   B) Wordsworth and Coleridge share the same view on this matter.

   C) Coleridge emphasizes the importance of universal and imaginative experiences over personal ones.

   D) Coleridge dismisses the idea of personal experiences influencing poetry.

5. Which poet famously emphasized the concept of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" in poetry?

   A) Coleridge

   B) Wordsworth

   C) Both

   D) Neither

6. How do Coleridge and Wordsworth differ in their views on nature's role in poetry?

   A) Coleridge believes that nature is irrelevant in poetry, while Wordsworth sees it as the central theme.

B) Both poets share the same perspective on nature's role in poetry.

C) Coleridge values nature only as a source of picturesque imagery, while Wordsworth believes it reflects spiritual truths.

D) Wordsworth disregards nature in his poetry, while Coleridge finds inspiration in urban settings.

7. What does Coleridge argue about the relationship between poetry and philosophy?

A) Poetry and philosophy should always be separate.

B) Poetry and philosophy can be integrated to explore profound truths.

C) Wordsworth strongly disagrees with Coleridge on this matter.

D) Coleridge believes philosophy should never be a part of poetry.

8. Which poet is more concerned with the supernatural and the mysterious in their poetry and criticism?

A) Coleridge

B) Wordsworth

C) Both

D) Neither

9. What does Wordsworth argue about the ideal poetic process in contrast to Coleridge?

A) Wordsworth believes in meticulous planning and revision, while Coleridge supports spontaneous inspiration.

B) Both Wordsworth and Coleridge advocate for spontaneous inspiration.

C) Wordsworth and Coleridge have the same view on the ideal poetic process.

D) Wordsworth doesn't provide a clear stance on the poetic process.

10. Which poet's theory of poetry places a stronger emphasis on the "inward eye" and the imagination's creative power?

A) Coleridge

B) Wordsworth

C) Both

D) Neither

Answer:1a, 2d, 3b,4c,5b,6c,7b,8a,9a,10a

3.13 SUGGESTED READING

Burwick, Frederick. *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria*: T*ext and Meaning*. USA: Ohio State University Press, 1989. Print.

Fogle, Richard Harter. *The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962. Print.

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JOHN KEATS: LETTER TO JOHN TAYLOR (FEB 27, 1818)

STRUCTURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

John Keats was an apprentice to an apothecary-surgeon at the age of fifteen. It is very impressive that at such a young age Keats was able to understand medical terminology and assist in medical procedures. Keats left

the medical field to become a writer. Keats' leaving the medical field demonstrates how much he loved poetry and writing.

In one of his letters Keats testifies that he cannot write about a subject because he has not had the proper number of years to study it. This shows Keats' commitment to present information as thoroughly and accurately as possible. Keats goes on to say that he is certain of nothing but the truth in imagination. This proclamation may be controversial because it seems as though he is suggesting that imagination and love register more truth than the dictates of religion.

In the letter Keats describes imagination as truth proclaiming that he has yet to find truth in logic: "The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream-he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning-and yet it must be-Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections-However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!"The letters of John Keats begin in 1816 and end with his death in 1821. They are very much a personal record, so much so that their publication in the nineteenth century occasioned notable critical hostility. The Victorians were shocked by these letters. Men like Matthew Arnold and even Algernon Swinburne stated that they were too emotional, and should not be presented to public view. Modern criticism has taken a completely different viewpoint; the love letters are acknowledged to be among the greatest of their kind and the passages on criticism are now thought to be major documents of Romantic aesthetics.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

This lesson examines the significance of the letters of Keats with a special discussion on his letter to John Taylor written on 27 February 1821.

4.3 KEATS' LETTERS (1817-1820)

Keats' letters, which were first published in installments in 1848

and 1878, were initially thought of as distractions from his poetry. In the twentieth century, however, these documents became much more highly regarded. Modernist poet and critic T.S. Eliot wrote, "There is hardly one statement of Keats about poetry which...will not be found to be true, and what is more, true for greater and more mature poetry than anything Keats ever wrote." Keats used letter-writing as a way of synthesizing his thoughts and philosophy, especially in the abundant letters he wrote to his brother George and his sister-in-law Georgiana, who had moved to the United States. Some of his most noted philosophical concepts-the chameleon poet, *negative capability*, and the Mansion of Many Apartments- took form in his letters. The letters also appear to have influenced Keats' poetry; for example, in an 1817 letter to Benjamin Bailey, he wrote, "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination–What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth," thus presaging one of his most famous lines in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". He also composed perhaps his most well-regarded poem, "To Autumn", after noting the beauty of the season in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds.

Here is a list of some famous, oft-quoted comments and views expressed in his letters:

- I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination-what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not.

  Letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1817).

- The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream - he awoke and found it truth.

  Letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1817).

- O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!
  Letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1817).

- I scarcely remember counting upon happiness - I look not for it if it be not in the present hour - nothing startles me beyond the moment. The

setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.

Letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1817).

- At once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean *negative capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

  Letter to George and Thomas Keats (December 22, 1817).

- They will explain themselves- as all poems should do without any comment.

  Letter to George Keats (1818).

- Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers.

  Letter to his brother (January 23, 1818).

- Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (Februrary 3, 1818).

- We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us-and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself, but with its subject.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (February 3, 1818).

- Many have original minds who do not think it — they are led away by custom — Now it appears to me that almost any man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own citadel.

Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (February 19, 1818).

- In Poetry I have a few axioms, and you will see how far I am from their centre. I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity — it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance — Its touches of Beauty should never be halfway thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural to him — shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the luxury of twilight — but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it — and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.

  Letter to John Taylor (February 27, 1818).

- Scenery is fine — but human nature is finer.

  Letter to Benjamin Bailey (March 13, 1818).

- Every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer.

  Letter to Benjamin Bailey (March 13, 1818).

- Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: we read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (May 3, 1818).

- I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (May 3, 1818).

- I am certain I have not a right feeling towards women - at this moment I am striving to be just to them, but I cannot. Is it because they fall so far beneath my boyish imagination? When I was a schoolboy I thought

a fair woman a pure Goddess; my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not.

Letter to Benjamin Bailey (July 18, 1818).

- There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of immortality.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (September 22, 1818).

- I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works.

  Letter to James Hessey (October 9, 1818).

- I have written independently *without Judgment*. I may write independently, and *with Judgment*, hereafter. **The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself** - That which is creative must create itself- In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a, silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. **I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.**

  Letter to James Hessey (October 9, 1818).

- I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death.

  Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (October 14, 1818).

- **The poetical character**... is not itself - it has no self- it is every thing and nothing-It has no character- it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it fair or foul, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. — It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philospher, delights the chameleon poet.

Letter to Richard Woodhouse (October 27, 1818).

- **A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity** — he is continually informing — and filling some other body.

  Letter to Richard Woodhouse (October 27, 1818).

- **A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory — and very few eyes can see the mystery of life** — a life like the Scriptures, figurative. Lord Byron cuts a figure, but he is not figurative. **Shakespeare** led a life of allegory: his works are the comments on it.

  Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (February 14 - May 3, 1819).

- **Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced** — Even a proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it.

  Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (February 14-May 3, 1819).

- I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of — I am, however young, writing at random — straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness — without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin?

  Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (March 19, 1819).

- Call the world if you please "The vale of soul-making."

  Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (April 21, 1819).

- I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute.

  To Fanny Brawne (July 25, 1819)

- I have nothing to speak of but my self-and what can I say but what I feel.

  Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (August 24, 1819).

- "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory — but **I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered.**"

  To Fanny Brawne (c. February 1820).

- You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefullest.

  Letter to Fanny Brawne (March 1820).

- You might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore.

  Letter to Percy Bysshe Shelley (August 1820).

- I can scarcely bid you good-bye, even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow. God bless you!

  Letter to Charles Armitage Brown (November 30, 1820).

Throughout the letters there are many references to the great men who created the literature of England. Keats, although not formally educated in literary studies, was conscious of his heritage as a writer. One of the great themes of these letters is therefore English literature itself, and Keats' relationship to it. He mentions the names of Shakespeare and Milton often, and he continually tries to orient his own attitudes and work toward the great works of the past. In writing to his brother he goes through a whole catalogue of poets and essayists, in the process showing his strong sense of belonging to a community of the literate. He reveals that he reads matter outside what might be thought of as the range of poetry: the works of Voltaire, Gibbon, and Rabelais. In addition to these he reveals that he is interested in and indeed familiar with the work of Swift among the older writers, and with the whole spectrum of literature in his century:

Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Hunt, Scott, and Hazlitt. Keats mentions these men and others often, and generally he reveals the operation of a strong critical sense. He tries not only to understand what these writers represent, but in what ways he himself can come to terms with them as a writer.

4.4 JOHN TAYLOR

John Taylor (1781–1864) was a publisher, essayist and writer. He is noted as the publisher of the poets, John Keats and John Clare. He was born in East Retford, Nottinghamshire, the son of James Taylor and Sarah Drury; his father was a printer and bookseller. He attended school first at Lincoln Grammar School and then he went to the Local Grammar School in Retford. He was originally apprenticed to his father, but eventually he moved to London and worked for James Lacking Ton in 1803. Taylor left after a short while because of low pay.

Taylor formed a partnership with James Augustus Hessey (1785–1870), as Taylor & Hessey, at 93 Fleet Street, London. In 1819, through his cousin Edward Drury, a bookseller in Stamford, he was introduced to John Clare of Helpston in Northamptonshire. He polished Clare's grammar and spelling for publication. He was also Keats' publisher, and published works by Lamb, Coleridge and Hazlitt.

In 1821 John Taylor became involved in publishing *Blackwood's Magazine*. In later years he became Bookseller and Publisher to the then new University of London and, in formal partnership with James Walton, moved to Upper Gower Street. As such he developed a line in what was then the new and developing field of standard academic text books. After Taylor's death, many of his manuscripts were put up for sale at Sotheby's, but the poets of the Regency era were out of fashion, and the total only fetched about £250. In contrast, when sold in 1897, the manuscripts of *Endymion* and *Lamia* fetched £695 and £305 respectively.

4.5 THE LETTER TO JOHN TAYLOR

Hampstead, February 27th, 1818

Hampstead, 27 February

My dear Taylor -

Your alteration strikes me as being a great Improvement - And now I will attend to the punctuations you speak of - The comma should be at soberly, and in the other passage, the Comma should follow quiet. I am extremely indebted to you for this attention, and also for your after admonitions. It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome prejudices in reading my verses - that affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular passage - In Endymion, I have most likely but moved into the go-cart from the leading-strings - In poetry I have a few axioms, and you will see how far I am from their centre.

1st. I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; It should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

2d. Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, seem natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what poetry should be, than to write it - And this leads me to another axiom - That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. - However, it may be with me, I cannot help looking into new countries with 'O for a Muse of Fire to ascend!' If Endymion serves me as a pioneer, perhaps I ought to be content - I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read, and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths; and I have I am sure many friends, who, if

I fail, will attribute any change in my life and temper to humbleness rather than pride - to a cowering under the wings of great poets, rather than to a bitterness that I am not appreciated. I am anxious to get Endymion printed that I may forget it and proceed. I have copied the 3rd Book and begun the 4th.

Your sincere and obliged friend,

John Keats

4.6 CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE LETTER

Keats wrote this letter while revising *Endymion* and, in it, lays out his axioms for poetry. The letter was written by Keats to his publisher John Taylor who belonged to the firm of Taylor and Hessey, publishers of Keats' *Endymion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, etc.

Keats was very particular about the documentation of the poetical scripts. He was careful about the punctuation part of them too. While going through the proof of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, he was struck with an alteration in the seventh stanza made by the publisher;

"...her maiden eyes incline

Still on the floor, while many a sleeping train

Pass by..."

Keats retained what he had written originally:

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:

The music, yearning like a God in pain,

Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train

Pass by- she heeded not all: in vain

Came many a tiptoe, amourous Cavalier,

And back retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain,

But she saw not: her heart was otherwhere;

She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

Keats' lines show more aesthetic mellowness than those of the proofreader's. Keats' phrase 'her maiden eyes divine' shows typically Keatsian coiling and spiraling of epithets. He is distinguished by his remarkable epithets. It will be worthwhile to introduce the learner with Keats' epithets in some phrases from his odes:

i. …a silent deep disguised plot

ii. Ripe was the drowsy hour

iii. ..watchful with fatigued eye

iv. …evening's steep'd in honied silence

v. …sleep…embroider'd with dim dreams

vi. …beaded bubbles winking at the brim

vii. …leaden eyed despair

viii. …verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways

ix. …embalmed darkness

x. …rich to die

xi. …leaf-fringed legend

xii. …charm'd magic casements

xiii. …cool-rooted flowers fragrant eyed

xiv. …amorous glowworm of the sky

xv. …chain- swung censer teeming

xvi. Pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming

xvii. …fond believing lyre

xviii. Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness

xix. Close bosom friend of the maturing sun

The key to Keats' poetic excellence lies largely in the manipulation of the adjective. Keats was conscious of the use of every comma too.

Keats talks of three axioms in his poetry. These axioms are central to his poems and his words may be on the periphery. The very first axiom that he points out is that Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity-it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear-almost a Remembrance. Thus, poetry should be overwhelming with sublime thoughts. It should appear as if the poet were rephrasing or giving expression to his thoughts. A poem should appear as a kind of recollection or memoir. Keats comes very close to Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and 'emotions recollected in tranquility.'

The second axiom about Poetry as described by Keats is that "its touches of Beauty should never be half way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should the sun come natural to him- shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight- but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it." This is a wonderful statement about the aesthetics of poetry and its beauty of imagery. The images should not be far-fetched, complex and alienated to make the reader perplexed and irritated. Poetry must be a source of contentment and satisfaction in its mellowness and serenity. Poetic imagery must be like natural sunshine: it should not be unnecessarily scholastic and artificial. It should be spontaneous and sprawling over the composition like the warming sun in winter. It must enlighten the reader with its luxurious magnificence. The poet is aware of the fact that it is more easily said than done. To postulate and formulate the aesthetic theories is one thing and to write a poem is another. It is not every poet's cup of tea to incorporate finer technicalities of imagery and composition in a poem. A poem is an entity in itself: it must exist *sui generis*- as a class by itself.

The third axiom as stated by Keats is that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." The poet's conviction is that a poem should grow organically from within. Buds, flowers and leaves cannot be forcibly pulled out like teeth from one's mouth. Thematically and imagistically, things must not look artificially imposed or pasted like stickers with glue. Keats, thus, emphasizes spontaneity in poetic creation.

Keats does not recognize a forced composition as a poem. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* does not conform to the axioms and yardsticks as pointed out by Keats. According to him the incorporation of the Rosicrucian doctrine and classification of women as nymphs, sylphs, gnomes and salamanders would be outright absurd. Pope transcends the limits of naturalness in his *The Rape of the Lock*. The way he described Belinda's toilet was nonsensical and absurd according to the norms set by Keats. He distinguishes between the poets and the hosts of poetasters and rhymesters.

Keats writes in the letter, "I cannot help looking into new countries with 'O for Muse of fire to ascend!'- if *Endymion* serves me as a pioneer perhaps ought to be content. Keats was inquisitive to discover and explore new realms in poetry. He had already declared in his sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer":

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold

And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;

Round many western islands have I been,

Which bards in featly to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told

That deep- browed Homer rules as his demesne;

Yet did I never breathe its pure serene

Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then I felt I like some watcher of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken;

...

When Keats discovered Homer through Chapman's translations, he experienced as if a new planet swam into his range of perception. In his *Endymion*, Keats explored and surveyed the entire perspective of Greek mythology. It was surely a pioneering effort on his part. *Endymion* appeared in four books and was published in 1818. It narrates the story of Endymion- 'the brain- sick shepherd-prince' of Mt. Lantos, with whom the moon-goddess (Cynthia/Phoebe) falls in love. With this story are mingled the legends of Venus and Adonis, of Glaucus and Scylla, and of Arethusa. *Endymion* includes in Book one 'Hymn to Pan'. In his preface to *Endymion*, Keats described the work as 'a feverish attempt rather a deed accomplished." It is a product of sensation rather than thought. The allegory, which is somewhat obscure, represents the poet pursuing the ideal of perfection but he is distracted from his quest by human beauty. The poem was vehemently criticized in *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Quarterly*. In *Endymion*, Keats tries to be another Homer as Virgil does in the *Aeneid*. He explores Greek mythology exclusively and intensively.

4.7 KEATS' POETIC AMBITION

Keats' "Letter to John Taylor" clearly reveals his views on poetry. It shows that he had matured and observed sensitive opinions on poetry and poets. His statement, "That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" has become a usual critical description. The likening of poems to leaves to a tree is quite remarkable. Although Keats wrote that "if poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all", poetry did not come easily to him; his work was the fruit of a deliberate and prolonged classical self-education. He may have possessed an innate poetic sensibility, but his early works were clearly those of a young man learning his craft. His first attempts at verse were often

vague, languorously narcotic and lacking a clear eye. His poetic sense was based on the conventional tastes of his friend Charles Cowden Clarke, who first introduced him to the classics, and also came from the predilections of Hunt's *Examiner*, which Keats read as a boy. Hunt scorned the Augustan or 'French' school, dominated by Pope, and attacked the earlier Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, now in their forties, as unsophisticated, obscure and crude writers. Indeed, during Keats' few years as a published poet, the reputation of the older Romantic school was at its lowest ebb. Keats came to echo these sentiments in his work, identifying himself with a 'new school' for a time, somewhat alienating him from Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron and providing the basis from the scathing attacks from *Blackwoods* and *The Quarterly*.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

Keats' letters, although often poignant, reveal the sense of enjoyment with which he wrote, and reflect the active searching of a youthful and ever-developing mind. They are filled with vigor, quality, and individuality, making them essential reading for a deeper understanding of Keats' poetry and poetic thought. Keats claims to have grasped "Shakespeare to his depths" and he cowers down under the weight of his wings of Poesy. He is extremely grateful to Shakespeare. Keats' letters abound with references to Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. Middleton Murray wrote *Keats and Shakespeare* to appreciate Keats and Shakespeare. Keats shows his extraordinary interest in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets by quoting copiously from them. Keats appreciated the exquisite feeling of love as expressed in his sonnets. According to Matthew Arnold, Keats ranks with Shakespeare. This judgment cannot be summarily dismissed. The letter discussed above speaks volumes of Keats' aesthetic sensibility and critical talent.

4.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. According to Keats, The Imagination may be compared to:

   (a) Adam's dream

(b) Apollo's light

(c) Sylvan historian

(d) Muse's lamp

2. Who wrote *Keats and Shakespeare*?

(a) Algernon Swinburne

(b) Cleanth Brooks

(c) Middleton Murray

(d) Matthew Arnold

3. Complete this statement by Keats: Scenery is fine but ----- is finer.

(a) Beauty

(b) Truth

(c) Sensuousness

(d) Human nature

4. Keats wrote the letter to John Taylor on February 27th, 1818 while revising:

(a) *Lamia*

(b) *The Eve of St Agnes*

(c) *Endymion*

(d) *Hyperion*

5. According to Keats, Poetic imagery must not be:

(a) spontaneous and sprawling

(b) scholastic and artificial

(c) far-fetched, complex and alienated

(d) Both B and C

6. Which of the following is the moon-goddess?

   (a) Venus

   (b) Phoebe

   (c) Adonis

   (d) Scylla

7. Who first introduced Keats to the classics?

   (a) Cowden Clarke

   (b) John Taylor

   (c) Chapman

   (d) Shelley

8. Who attacked the earlier Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge as unsophisticated, obscure and crude writers?

   (a) Cowden Clarke

   (b) Hunt

   (c) John Taylor

   (d) None of these

9. Who said, "Keats ranks with Shakespeare" ?

   (a) Middleton Murray

   (b) Shelley

   (c) Matthew Arnold

   (d) John Taylor

10. Who was the editor of *John Keats*: *A Reassessment* published by Liverpool in 1958?

(a) Briggs, Harold F

(b) Dickstein, Morris

(c) Gettings, Robert

(d) Kenneth, Muir

Answers: 1. (a); 2. (c); 3. (d); 4. (c); 5. (d); 6. (b); 7. (a); 8. (b); 9. (c); 10. (d).

4.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Keats' use of epithets in his poetry.

2. What are the three axioms formulated by Keats as applicable to poetry?

3. Write a short note on Keats' *Endymion*.

4.11 SUGGESTED READING

(ed.) Weekes, A.R.: *John Keats*: *The Odes*. London: University Tutorial Press.

Briggs, Harold F. *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose by John Keats*. New York: Modern Library, 1951.

Dickstein, Morris: "Keats and Politics." *Studies in Romanticism* 25, Summer 1986.

Gettings, Robert (ed.): *Letters of John Keats*: *A Selection*. OUP. 1970

Graves, Robert: *Greek Myths*. Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1955

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KEATS' LETTERS TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS (DECEMBER 21, 1817 & FEBRUARY 14, 1818)

STRUCTURE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Keats was a West countryman by his descent but a Londoner by birth. His father Thomas Keats was employed as an ostler in livery stables in

Finsbury. He married his master's daughter Frances Jennings. He was a man of 'remarkably fine common sense and native respectability.' His wife was a smart woman. From this marriage sprang John Keats, George, Tom; Edward, who died in infancy; and one daughter, Francis Mary (Fanny). Obviously, Keats did not belong to aristocratic family. He was not brought up with a silver spoon in his mouth. This fact must always be borne in mind in the context of the 'Cockney School of Poetry' and his Radicalism.

Keats acquainted himself with English literature at a private school, Enfield, managed by Rev. John Clarke. His teacher was Charles Cowden Clarke. Keats also had a penchant for fighting. He would fight anyone, his brothers Tom and George among the rest. It does not mean that he did not have an intensely tender affection for his brothers. In course of time, he became a voracious reader. He occupied himself with the writing of the prose translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. He studied Leigh Hunt's Whig paper- *The Examiner*. He also formed intimate friendships with Severn, John Hamilton Reynolds, Hazlitt, Coleridge, Haydon, Shelley, Leigh Hunt etc. Keats and his brother George fought 'the losing battle of liberalism.' Keats suffered a severe blow of separation as George Keats and his wife migrated to America. "My love for my brothers,'' wrote Keats, "from the early loss of our parents, and even from earlier misfortunes, has grown an affection passing the love of woman." He wrote several letters to his brothers with deep affection. Later in 1818, he suffered a more severe and heavier blow of grief as his brother Tom died of consumption. Keats had nursed him till his death.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall study Keats' letters to his brothers George and Thomas Keats written on December 21, 1817 and on February 14, 1818. We shall also make a critical study of his famous concept of Negative Capability.

5.3 KEATS' LETTER TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS (DECEMBER 21, 1817)

Hampstead, December 21, 1817.

My dear Brothers

I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this…. I saw Kean return to the public in Richard III., and finely he did it, and, at the request of Reynolds, I went to criticise his Duke in Richd.—the critique is in to-day's Champion, which I send you with the Examiner, in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsoletion of Christmas Gambols and pastimes: but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost. Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing, and as Englishmen very encouraging: his Not Guilty is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning—Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin—Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service. I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke yesterday and today, and am at this moment just come from him, and feel in the humour to go on with this, begun in the morning, and from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells and went next morning to see Death on the Pale horse. It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality. The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth—Examine King Lear, and you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness—The picture is larger than Christ rejected.

I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, and had a very pleasant day, I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith and met his two Brothers with Hill and Kingston and one Du Bois, they only served to convince me how superior humour is to wit, in respect to enjoyment—These men say things which make one start, without making one feel, they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have all a mannerism in their very eating and drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company—would I were with that

company instead of yours said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me and yet I am going to Reynolds, on Wednesday. Brown and Dilke walked with me and back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute, but a disquisition, with Dilke upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakspeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

Shelley's poem is out and there are words about its being objected to, as much as Queen Mab was. Poor Shelley I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la! Write soon to your most sincere friend and affectionate Brother John.

5.4 ANNOTATIONS AND REFERENCES I

1. ***21 Dec. 1817*** — When you see a date in brackets in a re-printed letter, that means the editors have determined the date by means of some internal or external evidence, but the letter itself is undated.

2. ***brothers*** — John Keats had two surviving younger brothers, George (1797-1841) and Thomas (1799-1818). He also had a brother who died in infancy (Edward, 1801-1802) and a sister Frances (1803-1889), whom — as was the custom with that name — everyone called Fanny.

3. ***Kean***: Edmund Kean (1787 –1833) was a celebrated Shakespearean stage actor born in England, who performed in London, Belfast, New York, Quebec, and Paris among other places. He was well known for his short stature, tumultuous personal life, and controversial divorce.

His appearances in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* demonstrated his mastery of the range of tragic emotion. He made his name and became known as the great but erratic actor described by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge as revealing Shakespeare by 'flashes of lightning'.

In the next few sentences Keats mentions writing a review and a trial of a publisher that was in the news at the time. William Hone had been charged with blasphemy and sedition for publishing *The Reformists' Register*, a newspaper that promoted radical political opinions, and four satirical pamphlets that used Church of England liturgy as the basis for attacks on the current government. Hone successfully defended himself by reading other, similar parodies (including one by a member of the current cabinet) aloud, often with the result that the audience in the courtroom broke out in raucous laughter. It was a major victory for freedom of the press, made even more definitive by being unexpected because the judge (Lord Ellenborough, whom Keats mentions) was known for being conservative and thus favoring the power of the state over the freedom of the individual.

4. ***'Richard III'*** — Shakespeare's play about the scheming, villainous hunchback whose famous first and last lines, are "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this son of York" and "A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"

5. ***Reynolds***: John Hamilton Reynolds (1794–1852) was an English poet, satirist, critic, and playwright. He was a close friend and correspondent of poet John Keats whose letters to Reynolds constitute a significant body of Keats' poetic thought.

6. ***The Champion***:Keats worked briefly as a theatrical critic for *The Champion,* edited by John Scott.

7. ***Dilke*** — Charles Wentworth Dilke, a well-to-do friend of the Keats brothers who had liberal political views. The family remained important

in English politics for another two generations. No two men could well be more unlike in mind than Dilke and Keats. Nevertheless the two took to each other and became fast friends.

8. ***Death on the Pale Horse*** — Actually, the title is *Death on a Pale Horse*; it is a painting by the American-born painter Benjamin West (1738-1820).

9. ***Christ Rejected*** — *Christ Rejected by the Jews*, another painting by West.

10. ***Haydon*** — Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), a British painter and writer, and a friend of Keats.

11. ***Horace Smith*** — a friend of Shelley and occasional poet.

12. ***low company*** — disreputable friends; clearly the Smith brothers and the other guests that night, who did not approve of the social circles in which Edmund Kean traveled.

13. ***Brown***— Charles Armitage Brown, Keats' closest friend at this point in his life. Brown later wrote one of the early recollections of Keats, whom he described as "a superior being." The work is far too subjective to be called a biography, and it continues the rather silly assertion made by Shelley in *Adonais* that the young poet had been slain by the vicious reviews his first book had drawn. Still, the text makes clear that Brown looked on Keats with something like worship, and it is a touching document. Brown also sketched what most consider being the most accurate portrait of Keats we have.

14. ***Verisimilitude*** — something that is the image of truth

15. **Penetralium** — the most secret part

16. ***from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge*** — Here, Keats is likely referring to one or more of Coleridge's poems. The prior year (1816), Coleridge had published *Kubla Khan; or A Vision in Dream*, now generally considered one of his greatest works. However,

he prefaced it with what was, in effect, an apology, saying that he had begun the poem many years earlier but had never been able to finish it. In that introduction, he explains that while ill, he had been prescribed medicine by a doctor (it was opium, and Coleridge tragically became addicted to it) and fell asleep reading a book called *Purchas's Pilgrimage*, which led to a dream during which he had effortlessly composed "not less than two to three hundred lines." When he awoke, he began writing those lines down, but he was interrupted by "a person on business from Porlock," and when he returned, he could no longer remember the rest of the poem. Only after the great poet Lord Byron heard Coleridge recite it and insisted Coleridge publish it did he do so, and he even refused to name Byron as the poet for fear of embarrassing him, saying that he was publishing it "at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity, and as far as the author's own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merits."

At the same time as Coleridge published *Kubla Khan*, he also at Byron's urging published *Christabel*, a poem about a young noble woman who goes out in the woods and encounters a supernatural creature, a kind of lesbian vampire named Geraldine. Coleridge had completed the first part of the poem in 1797 and the second part in 1800, but he supposedly had plans for three more parts that he never wrote. At the point the poem ends, Geraldine appears triumphant, and though Coleridge assured readers that all would be well in the end, imagining how he would have brought about that conclusion (given the situation at the end of Part II) is practically impossible. Keats could thus have had this poem in mind instead, or both poems equally, as examples of a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery that Coleridge is willing to let go by (meaning abandon).

17. ***Shelley's poem*** — *Laon and Cythna; or The Revolution of the Golden City* is Shelley's longest poem and expresses his radical views on all

manner of issues. It had been published in November 1817 but was quickly withdrawn (perhaps because in the original version the two titular lovers are also siblings, continuing the theme of incest that often crops up in Romantic literature from Wordsworth and Byron to Poe). Shelley revised it and re-published it under the new title *The Revolt of Islam* in January, 1818.

18. ***Queen Mab*** — Shelley's first major work, subtitled *A philosophical Poem*, completed and published in 1813. The work was so politically radical that Shelley did not try to have it distributed commercially. Instead, he gave or sent about seventy copies to friends and people he considered political allies, and even then he cut his name from the pages. The poem did not therefore receive much notice until 1817, when it was introduced into evidence in court when Shelley tried to obtain custody of his children Ianthe, Charles, and William (by his wife Harriet, who had committed suicide); Shelley lost the battle for custody. Later, the poem was often cited by various radical factions in British politics, from the Chartists (who favored universal male suffrage, vote by secret ballot, equal-sized electoral districts, the right for any male of voting age to run for a seat in Parliament, and pay for Members of Parliament so that not only the independently wealthy could afford to serve) to the Marxists.

19. ***in sooth la*** — really, truly

5.5 ON NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

In the letter to George and Thomas Keats (Sunday, 21 December 1817), Keats happened to toss a remarkable phrase "Negative Capability.' It is actually a term of aesthetic criticism. It has been applied in the context of dramatic criticism of Shakespeare. Dr. Samuel Johnson in his *Preface to Shakespeare* had used the phrase 'the suspension of disbelief' to mean that the Elizabethan audience believed the words of the co-coordinator- *Sutradhar*- when he informed them that it was King Lear running to and fro in the storm of oak-cleaving

winds or that Cleopatra sat splendidly in the floating barge over the Nile or Aliena and Ganymede walked in the forest of Arden or that the ghost of Banquo occupied Macbeth's chair in royal feast.

According to Samuel Johnson, it was essential for the Elizabethan audience to enjoy fully the spectacular and theatrical beauty of Shakespeare's drama which was *Drishya Kavya* (Spectacular Poetry) at its best: the spectators, for the time being, assumed the illusion to be reality. Keats was intelligent and perceptive enough to rephrase the Johnsonian phrase 'willing suspension of disbelief' into 'Negative Capability.' Keats wrote to his brothers, *"...that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.... that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."* Keats extends the meaning of negative capability to psychology. One can interpret the difficult remarks by Keats. Our life is filled with change, uncertainties and mysteries; we can grasp and understand the elusive flux of life by being imaginatively open-minded, sympathetic and receptive- by extending every possible feeling that we may have potentially in us. We can achieve this active awareness only by negating our own egos. We must not only rise above our own vanity and prejudices but resist the temptation to make up our minds on everything. If we discard a momentary insight, because we cannot fit it into a systematic framework, we are selfishly asserting our own identity or ego. A great poet is less concerned with himself and has eyes on what is without. With him, the sense of Beauty- the capacity to relish concrete reality in its full meaning overcomes every other consideration of deliberating, analyzing and piecing together experience in a logical structure. Human imagination enjoys light and shade, foul and fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago or an Imogen. Keats specially points out in his letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October 1818) that it does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one because they end in speculation.

Keats had an excellent grasp of aesthetics at the conceptual level. What Keats is advocating is a removal of the intellectual self while writing (or reading) poetry – after all:

> *Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all Ye know on earth and all ye need know*
>
> (Ode on a Grecian Urn, lines 49-50)

Throughout his poetry and letters Keats proposes the theory that beauty is valuable in itself and that it does not need to declare anything for us to know that it is important. That is, beauty does not have to refer to anything beyond itself:

> *I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination - What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.*
>
> - Keats in letter to Benjamin Bailey (Saturday, 22 November, 1817)

It is this ability to hold onto a beautiful truth despite the fact that it does not fit into an intellectual system that Keats praises in Shakespeare. He criticizes Coleridge for letting go 'by a thin isolated verisimilitude... from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge' where he should realise that 'beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration' (Keats in a letter to his brothers [Sunday, 21 December, 1817]).

Keats' poems are full of contradictions in meaning ('a drowsy numbness pains') and emotion ('both together, sane and mad') and he accepts a double nature as a creative insight. In an *Ode to a Nightingale* it is the apparent (or real) contradictions that allow Keats to create the sensual and hedonistic feeling of numbness that allows the reader to experience the half-swooning emotion Keats is trying to capture. Keats would have us experience the emotion of the language and pass over the half-truths in silence, to live a life 'of sensations

rather than of Thoughts!' (Letter to Benjamin Bailey [Saturday, 22 November 1817]). Keats here can be seen to be extending Kant's principle that much thought is sublingual by making the meaning of words less important than their 'feel'. Since you can very often not find the exact word that you need (showing that much of your thinking occurs without language), Keats often deals in the sensations created by words rather than meaning. Even if the precise definition of words causes contradiction they can still be used together to create the right ambience. Negative Capability asks us to allow the atmosphere of Keats' poems to surround us without picking out individual meanings and inconsistencies. Whatever the complicated relations between Truth and Beauty and their respective definitions, what matters to Keats are moments of intense feeling that combine 'thought' and 'emotion' in appreciating beauty. This explains why much of Keats' poetry is devoted to catching and holding moments of beauty. Keats addresses this desire directly in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (lines 15 – 20) where he writes,

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave

Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;

She cannot fade, tho thou hast not thy bliss,

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

Throughout this poem, and many others, Keats captures moments, like that of the 'fair youth' stooping to kiss his lover, and holds them to prevent change and decay, reveling in that moment of perfection. In many of Keats' poems this need to hold a perfect instant leads to an excited tone, an almost excessive use of superlatives and an atmosphere of crushing, voluptuous intensity as Keats demonstrates the depth of his appreciation for the beautiful and in the act of appreciation creates poems as exquisite as that which he is admiring. Keats' Negative Capability is the ability to bask in the beautiful without questioning either it or his methods of description. In other words, take beauty simply as it is.

5.6 KEATS' LETTER TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS (FEBRUARY 14, 1818)

Featherstone Buildings, Monday [January 5, 1818].

My dear Brothers—I ought to have written before, and you should have had a long letter last week, but I undertook the Champion for Reynolds, who is at Exeter. I wrote two articles, one on the Drury Lane Pantomime, the other on the Covent Garden new Tragedy, which they have not put in; the one they have inserted is so badly punctuated that you perceive I am determined never to write more, without some care in that particular. Wells tells me that you are licking your chops, Tom, in expectation of my book coming out. I am sorry to say I have not begun my corrections yet: tomorrow I set out. I called on Sawrey this morning. He did not seem to be at all put out at anything I said and the inquiries I made with regard to your spitting of blood, and moreover desired me to ask you to send him a correct account of all your sensations and symptoms concerning the palpitation and the spitting and the cough if you have any. Your last letter gave me a great pleasure, for I think the invalid is in a better spirit there along the Edge; and as for George, I must immediately, now I think of it, correct a little misconception of a part of my last letter. The Misses Reynolds have never said one word against me about you, or by any means endeavoured to lessen you in my estimation. That is not what I referred to; but the manner and thoughts which I knew they internally had towards you, time will show. Wells and Severn dined with me yesterday. We had a very pleasant day. I pitched upon another bottle of claret, we enjoyed ourselves very much; were all very witty and full of Rhymes. We played a concert from 4 o'clock till 10—drank your healths, the Hunts', and (N.B.) seven Peter Pindars. I said on that day the only good thing I was ever guilty of. We were talking about Stephens and the 1st Gallery. I said I wondered that careful folks would go there, for although it was but a shilling, still you had to pay through the Nose. I saw the Peachey family in a box at Drury one night. I have got such a curious ... or rather I had such, now I am in my own hand.

I have had a great deal of pleasant time with Rice lately, and am getting initiated into a little band. They call drinking deep dyin' scarlet. They call good wine a pretty tipple, and call getting a child knocking out an apple; stopping at a tavern they call hanging out. Where do you sup? is where do you hang out?

Thursday I promised to dine with Wordsworth, and the weather is so bad that I am undecided, for he lives at Mortimer Street. I had an invitation to meet him at Kingston's, but not liking that place I sent my excuse. What I think of doing today is to dine in Mortimer Street (Wordsth), and sup here in the Feaths buildings, as Mr. Wells has invited me. On Saturday, I called on Wordsworth before he went to Kingston's, and was surprised to find him with a stiff collar. I saw his spouse, and I think his daughter. I forget whether I had written my last before my Sunday evening at Haydon's—no, I did not, or I should have told you, Tom, of a young man you met at Paris, at Scott's, ... Ritchie. I think he is going to Fezan, in Africa; then to proceed if possible like Mungo Park. He was very polite to me, and inquired very particularly after you. Then there was Wordsworth, Lamb, Monkhouse, Landseer, Kingston, and your humble servant. Lamb got tipsy and blew up Kingston—proceeding so far as to take the candle across the room, hold it to his face, and show us what a soft fellow he was. I astonished Kingston at supper with a pertinacity in favour of drinking, keeping my two glasses at work in a knowing way.

I have seen Fanny twice lately—she inquired particularly after you and wants a co-partnership letter from you. She has been unwell, but is improving. I think she will be quick. Mrs. Abbey was saying that the Keatses were ever indolent, that they would ever be so, and that it is born in them. Well, whispered Fanny to me, if it is born with us, how can we help it? She seems very anxious for a letter. As I asked her what I should get for her, she said a "Medal of the Princess." I called on Haslam—we dined very snugly together. He sent me a Hare last week, which I sent to Mrs. Dilke. Brown is not come back. I and Dilke are getting capital friends. He is

going to take the Champion. He has sent his farce to Covent Garden. I met Bob Harris on the steps at Covent Garden; we had a good deal of curious chat. He came out with his old humble opinion. The Covent Garden pantomime is a very nice one, but they have a middling Harlequin, a bad Pantaloon, a worse Clown, and a shocking Columbine, who is one of the Miss Dennets. I suppose you will see my critique on the new tragedy in the next week's Champion. It is a shocking bad one. I have not seen Hunt; he was out when I called. Mrs. Hunt looks as well as ever I saw her after her confinement. There is an article in the se'nnight Examiner on Godwin's Mandeville, signed E. K.—I think it Miss Kent's—I will send it. There are fine subscriptions going on for Hone.

You ask me what degrees there are between Scott's novels and those of Smollett. They appear to me to be quite distinct in every particular, more especially in their aims. Scott endeavours to throw so interesting and romantic a colouring into common and low characters as to give them a touch of the sublime. Smollett on the contrary pulls down and levels what with other men would continue romance. The grand parts of Scott are within the reach of more minds than the finest humours in Humphrey Clinker. I forget whether that fine thing of the Serjeant is Fielding or Smollett, but it gives me more pleasure than the whole novel of the Antiquary. You must remember what I mean. Some one says to the Serjeant: "That's a non-sequitur!"—"If you come to that," replies the Serjeant, "you're another!"—

I see by Wells's letter Mr. Abbey does not overstock you with money. You must write. I have not seen ... yet, but expect it on Wednesday. I am afraid it is gone. Severn tells me he has an order for some drawings for the Emperor of Russia.

You must get well Tom, and then I shall feel whole and genial as the winter air. Give me as many letters as you like, and write to Sawrey soon. I received a short letter from Bailey about Cripps, and one from Haydon,

ditto. Haydon thinks he improved very much. Mrs. Wells desires particularly ... to Tom and her respects to George, and I desire no better than to be ever your most affectionate Brother

John.

***P.S.**—I had not opened the Champion before I found both my articles in it.*

I was at a dance at Redhall's, and passed a pleasant time enough—drank deep, and won 10.6 at cutting for half guineas.... Bailey was there and seemed to enjoy the evening. Rice said he cared less about the hour than any one, and the proof is his dancing—he cares not for time, dancing as if he was deaf. Old Redhall not being used to give parties, had no idea of the quantity of wine that would be drank, and he actually put in readiness on the kitchen stairs eight dozen.

Every one inquires after you, and desires their remembrances to you.

Your Brother

John.

5.7 ANNOTATIONS AND REFERENCES II

1. ***Drury Lane Pantomime:*** The first English pantomime was *Tavern Bilkers* performed at Drury Lane in 1702. This started a popular tradition in which the annual Christmas pantomime at Drury Lane was the foremost entertainment of this kind. The thirty seven pantomimes in the years 1852 to 1888 were all written by E.L. Blanchard.

2. ***Covent Garden new Tragedy**: The Covent-Garden Tragedy* is a play by Henry Fielding that first appeared on 1 June, 1732 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane alongside *The Old Debauchees*. It is about a love triangle in a brothel involving two prostitutes. While they are portrayed satirically, they are imbued with sympathy as their relationship develops.

The play is a mockery of tragedy in general, but the characters contain realistic qualities separating them from other characters within Fielding's plays. This realism conflicts with the comedic nature. The play was a failure and ended its run after its first night, in part because it was set in a brothel. Contemporary critics noted the complete failure of the play and one implied that Fielding was acquainted with brothels. However, modern critics pointed out that the play was very good if not for its setting.

3. ***Stephens***: Henry Stephens, (1796 –1864) was a doctor, surgeon, chemist, writer, poet, inventor and entrepreneur. At medical school in London he was a friend of, and shared rooms with John Keats.

4. ***Godwin's Mandeville****: Mandeville,* a tale of the seventeenth century (1817) is a three volume novel written by William Godwin, an English journalist, political philosopher and novelist. His daughter, Mary Godwin married the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

5. ***Humphrey Clinker****: The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* was the last of the picaresque novels of Tobias Smollett published in London on 17 June 1771 (just three months before Smollett's death), and is considered by many to be his best and funniest work. It is an epistolary novel, presented in the form of letters written by six characters.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

Keats had strong family ties with his brothers and sister. He was always concerned about the poor health of his brothers. He used to interact with them frequently through letters deliberating upon literary happenings around him and also sharing with them his personal outings with his friends and acquaintances. It is remarkable that one of his critical terms 'Negative Capability' was tossed by him in one of his letters to his brothers.

5.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on 'Negative Capability.'
2. What did Keats think about *Drury Lane Pantomine*?

3. How was *Covent Garden Tragedy* received by the public and critics of those times?

4. How does Keats compare and contrast Scott's and Smollett's novels?

5.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Which of the following was Keats' teacher at a private school?

   (a) Rev. John Clarke

   (b) Charles Cowden Clarke

   (c) Leigh Hunt

   (d) John Hamilton Reynolds

2. Keats' brother, Tom, died of:

   (a) Cancer

   (b) AIDS

   (c) Consumption

   (d) Cardiac arrest

3. Edmund Kean was:

   (a) a Shakespearean stage actor.

   (b) Keats' friend

   (c) Keats' critic

   (d) Keats' publisher

4. "A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" In which of Shakespeare's play does this line occurs?

   (a) *King Lear*

   (b) *Othello*

(c) *Henry V*

(d) *Richard III*

5. Keats worked briefly as a theatrical critic for *The Champion*, edited by:

(a) John Scott.

(b) John Hamilton Reynolds

(c) Charles Wentworth Dilke

(d) Edmund Kean

6. 'Death on a Pale Horse' is:

(a) An allegory

(b) A Ballad

(c) A painting

(d) A lyric

7. Who had insisted Coleridge to publish *Kubla Khan*?

(a) Wordsworth

(b) Shelley

(c) Keats

(d) Byron

8. Which of the following is Shelley's longest poem?

(a) *Adonais*

(b) *Laon and Cythna*; *or The Revolution of the Golden City*

(c) *Ode to the West Wind*

(d) *Prometheus Unbound*

9. "Negative Capability' is actually a term of:

(a) Aesthetic criticism

(b) Psychoanalysis

(c) Historical criticism

(d) New criticism

10. 'Negative Capability' was actually rephrasing of:

(a) Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings

(b) Ideas recollected in tranquility

(c) Willing suspension of disbelief

(d) Verisimilitude

11. The thirty seven pantomimes in the years 1852 to 1888 were all written by:

(a) William Godwin

(b) Henry Stephens

(c) Henry Fielding

(d) E.L. Blanchard

12. The *Covent-Garden Tragedy* is a play by:

(a) William Godwin

(b) Henry Stephens

(c) Henry Fielding

(d) E.L. Blanchard

13. The play *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* was a failure because:

    (a) It was set in a brothel.

    (b) It was against Christianity.

    (c) It lacked willing suspension of disbelief.

    (d) The presentation was poor.

14. *Mandeville* is a novel by:

    (a) Mary Godwin

    (b) William Godwin

    (c) Percy Bysshe Shelley

    (d) Lord Byron

15. *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* by Tobias Smollett was:

    (a) A historical novel

    (b) A memoir

    (c) A travelogue

    (d) An epistolary novel

Answers: 1. (b); 2. (c); 3. (a); 4. (d); 5. (a); 6. (c); 7. (d); 8. (b); 9. (a); 10. (c); 11. (d); 12. (c); 13. (a); 14. (b) 15. (d)

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KEATS' LETTER TO P. B. SHELLEY (AUGUST 16, 1820)

STRUCTURE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Keats may be thought to reveal himself in the letter more distinctly than in any other. What is revealed there can help to approach his figure as both the poet and the man. In this sense, his letter to Shelley must be always taken up as one of the most important letters and with renewed interest. Keats' letters, in a sense, help more than his poems towards giving a clue to the secret of his art.

6.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, we shall study Keats' letter to Shelley written on 16

August 1820 and see how the two great Romantic poet- friends shared their feelings with each other.

6.3 THE CONTEXT

Before pursuing the letter, we must take account of the conditions under which the letter was addressed (more exactly, answered) to P. B. Shelley. On July 27, 1820, Shelley sent a letter to Keats from Pisa. Let us divide the letter into four passages:

My dear Keats

I, hear with great pain the dangerous accident that you have undergone, and Mr. Gisborne who gives me the account of it, adds, that you continue to wear a consumptive appearance. This consumption is a disease particularly fond of people who write such good verse as you have done, and with the assistance of an English winter it can often indulge its selection; I do not think that young and amiable poets are at all bound to gratify its taste; they have entered into no bond with the Muses to that effect.

These first sentences indicate the physical conditions in which Keats was placed. 'The dangerous accident' must point to the 'fresh attack of blood-spitting' which has happened to him on June 22. (His fatal illness had begun on February 3) And from the time of the event onwards his very poor physical conditions ' a consumptive appearance' are to continue to the last and to weaken both his body and his creative imagination. It is a remarkable fact that from about that time, his poetic activities come to decline and even his genius seems to have disappeared. Let it be remembered now that from start to finish Shelley adopted a leading, though friendly, attitude towards Keats. But, on the contrary, Keats did not hold Shelley as the artist in high estimation, and this feeling is to be echoed in the letter to Shelley which is the object of this essay. Once he refused to visit Shelley that he might have his 'own unfettered scope', and this episode is often mentioned as showing his poetic independence. As Edmund Blunden says, Keats was 'ever a fighter'. In the next place, we must call special attention to the phrase 'such good verse as you have done'.

It is a very perplexing thing to understand in what sense these words are written. Did Shelley write them in a laudatory or in a depreciatory sense? And must we be aware of his sincerity or 'his arrogance'? The best way of grasping the meaning must be to be eclectic, though the way may appear to be a little too convenient. Accordingly, we may summarize rightly by saying that we must be sensible of both sincerity and arrogance. As for the remaining passage, little need to be said except that a humorous strain pervades, but we are vividly aware that the condescending way of saying shows itself again in the last two sentences.

So much for the first part, and we will go to the second:

But seriously (for I am joking on what I am very anxious about) I think you would: do well to pass the winter after so tremendous an accident in Italy, and (if you think it as necessary as I do) so long as you could find Pisa or its neighbourhood agreeable to you, Mrs. Shelley unites with myself in urging the request, that you would take up your residence with us.- You might come by sea to Leghorn, (France is not worth seeing, and the sea air is particularly good for weak lungs) which is within a few miles of us.- You ought at all events to see Italy, and your health which I suggest as a motive, might be an excuse to you.- I spare declamation about statues and paintings and the ruins- and what is a greater piece of forbearance- about the mountains the stream, and the fields, the colours of the sky, and the sky itself-

These parts are written in a sincere way, which betokens the generosity of Shelley. It is common knowledge that of the later Romantics, Shelley is said to be most generous and to be always ready to hold out a supporting hand to any poetic friends, if need be. In the passage above quoted, the genuine friendly feeling is perceptible and his disagreeable side disappears. A disinterested literary mind appeals to us with much intensity, suppressing his self-conceited inclination. It may be a superfluous thing, but only the fact is to be added that at that time, Italy was the very climate where consumptives can take care of themselves. And in the words "You ought at all events to see Italy,' we must remind ourselves that we can perceive the worship of Italy which reigned in the

literary circle of Europe. And again, it may be not going too far to say in addition that the last sentence tells the strong sense of beauty, artistic as well as natural, which the two most romantic poets have in common.

The following passage must be dealt with as much caution:

I have lately read your Endymion again and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will.

In May 1818, *Endymion*, which has been called a sheer failure by critics, was published. It need not be added that almost all of criticisms of the poem were inclined towards blame, which Keats himself an acute self-critic, had expected to incur. But the expectation could not make him indifferent to criticisms, some of which were given not from a literary point of view but from a political. In this passage we see Shelley as an eminent critic of poems. His judgment on *Endymion* holds true without any revision up to this day. He thought that in the poem, Keats' imagination could not be said to fire to a creative glow, which could produce the masterpieces to come and his critical attitude was not partial. In this passage he gave frank criticism without taking into consideration any feelings of Keats. Shelley must have been acutely sensible of Keats' paganism in the new shape, which was created by a poet richly gifted in eye and ear. On May 14, 1820, thinking again of *Endymion*, he summarizes his opinion about the genius of the younger poet by writing that, "Keats, I hope, is going to show himself of a great poet: like the sun, to burst through the clouds, which, though dyed in the finest colours of the air, obscured his rising." This summary opinion accords with the last sentence: "I feel persuaded that you are capable of greatest things, so you but will." As Shelley says, Keats at that period was full of poetic possibility, though he did not get his feet on the ground yet.

Now we come to the last part:

I always tell Ollier to send you Copies of my books-"Prometheus Unbound". I imagine you will receive nearly at the same time with this letter. The Cenci I hope you have already received- it was studiously composed in a different style "below the good how far! But far above the great." In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism: I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan-

Whether you remain in England, or journey to Italy,- believe that you carry with you my anxious wishes for your health happiness and success, wherever you are or whatever you undertake- and that I am

Yours sincerely,

P.B. Shelley

Shelley confesses that in "The Cenci", he has attempted a poetic experiment 'in a different style.' He explains about the meaning of the experiment in his own terms in the following line:

In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism: I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan.

Shelley has attempted to make a poem in a different way from a traditional one- to avoid system and mannerism. Truly, how to avoid system and mannerism is most essential and hard to put into practice. Indeed, Keats was one of the poets who had been most aware of the difficulty.

The next sentence is full of significance. We have to grasp the real intention of Shelley. The question is whether we should read the sentence into his arrogant attitude or into a modest one. Indeed, Shelley wrote the words, 'those who excel me in genius', counting Keats among them. But did Shelley regard Keats as one of those who excel in genius in the fullest sense? We have noticed that when Shelley touches upon poetry, he is confident enough to get beyond the limits of arrogance. The remaining parts of the letter strike us as an example of genuine friendship.

This was the background against which Keats replied to Shelley's letter. Keats wrote back about twenty days after he received Shelley's letter. The letter was written in an outspoken manner.

6.4 THE LETTER WITH CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS

Keats' letter to Shelley from Hampstead, written on 16 August 1820, is a response to Shelley's advice and gracious offer of his home in Italy for Keats' early convalescence.

It will be convenient to divide the letter into several parts to give it a close examination.

Hampstead

August 16th

My dear Shelley,

I am very much gratified that you, in a foreign country, and with a mind almost over occupied, should write to me in the strain of the Letter beside me. If I do not take advantage of your invitation it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy – There is no doubt that an english winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering hateful manner, therefore I must either voyage or journey to Italy as a soldier marches up to a battery. My nerves at present are the worst part of me, yet they feel soothed when I think that come what extreme may, I shall not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bed-posts.

Though Keats expresses his gratitude, yet we feel that Keats' words do not sound very hearty. It is very painful to read the sentence: '*If I do not take advantage of your invitation it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy'* but we must keep in mind his poor state of health that time. In his letter to John Taylor written on August 14,1820, he wrote that, "Chest is in so nervous a State, that anything extra such as speaking to an

unaccustomed Person or writing a Note half suffocates me." He seemed to be very aware of the death which was approaching stealthily- *a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy.* On account of the obvious fact that the English winter will put an end to him in a lingering hateful manner, he reluctantly makes up his mind to travel across the Straits of Dover for Italy. In the Italian journey which haunts him horribly, he can only find the least consolation that he will not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bed-posts.

The passage that follows offers a most important clue for the understanding of Keats' art. We must examine the passage in all its varieties and from various points of view:

I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor Poem; – which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as I have done about Reputation. I received a copy of the Cenci, as from yourself from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of; the Poetry, and dramatic effect, which by many spirits nowadays is considered the mammon. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God – an artist must serve Mammon – he must have "self concentration" selfishness perhaps.

In the passage, 'my poor Poem' must mean *Endymion*. Keats did not use the epithet 'poor' in a modest manner. Hence the passage may be interpreted as both a frank confession of failure and a result of self-criticism. Keats must have felt glad at a sympathetic praise of Shelley's, but the joy is to be suppressed soon after- by the self-criticisms given upon himself in the Preface to the poem and in a letter of his, written five months after it was published and criticized by critics having neither authority nor responsibility. At that time, literary criticism was in the habit of being put under the control of politics. Today we know it is sheer nonsense but it was a great pity for the poet of genius that his poem, though it might be a failure from a literary viewpoint, was trampled down under the feet of critics from without.

Keats wrote a letter to J.A Hessey on October 9, 1818. The letter including his own criticisms upon himself was written five months after *Endymion* saw the light. The letter has often been quoted as showing his self criticism:

...I cannot but feel indebted to those Gentlemen who have taken my part-As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the Quarterly could possibly inflict, and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary reperception and ratification of what is fine.

It must be noticed here that as five months passed since the time of publishing, Keats came to have a stability of mind which enabled him to look upon his own work with fair objectivity and this composure began to suggest even a kind of confidence in his own poetic stature. Besides, this confidence shows that he is well on the way to forming his own aesthetics, based on 'love of beauty in the abstract' and his 'own solitary reperception and ratification of what is fine'. Keats proceeds to criticize his own work:

I will write independently- I have written independently without Judgment- I may write independently, and with Judgment hereafter... in Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pie, and took tea and comfortable advice.

He who collided with 'the rocks' determines on adhering fast to his own 'unfettered scope' without giving ear to any 'comfortable advice.' When we read the concluding remarks: 'I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest,' we feel relieved that a valuable genius was not nipped in the bud. The joy, thus suppressed, seemed to have remained a bitter experience until he wrote the letter to Shelley about two years later, when he says about the failure of the past:

I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible

The joy which changed into a bitter experience may have been felt with increased intensity. That may be the reflective Keats speaking, but in the following, suddenly he changes into a severe critic upon art, refusing to follow the lead of a contemporary poet of his. When we become aware of the sudden refusal, we find ourselves confronted with one of the most important questions. The acute remarks which he makes upon a copy of "The Cenci" are worth considering with serious attention:

There is only one part of it I am judge of; the Poetry, and dramatic effect, which by many spirits nowadays is considered the mammon.

In this passage we cannot separate 'the Poetry' from 'dramatic effect', and it is proper to take 'the Poetry' as having an immediate connection with 'dramatic effect'. Another question which is not to be avoided is the word 'mammon'. In general, we think of it in a biblical sense, but in the short passage, Keats seems to use it in a more literary one. In an another letter written to John Taylor on November 17, 1819, he says what is nearly equivalent to the passage:

"The little dramatic skill I may as yet have however badly it might show in a Drama would I think be sufficient for a Poem."

There is no doubt Keats was thinking of the dramatic skill or the dramatic effect in close connection with a poem. The dramatic effect takes a concrete shape with most success in his group of perfect odes which always rank as masterpieces.

In this sense, it can be said with certainty that he lived up to his aesthetic principles. The passage which follows is concerned with a more important and central question:

A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God – an artist must serve Mammon – he must have "self concentration" selfishness perhaps.

Here, judging from the definite article added to 'God' and the capital letter of the word, it may be said without any reservations that 'the God' means 'Mammon', which soon appears in the following sentence. For 'a modern work', we may think of *Paradise Lost* as identical to the work which Keats considers to be modern. We may assume that Keats thought about a modern work having a purpose with Milton's masterpiece in mind as it is an undeniable fact that Milton, the poet of *Paradise Lost*, continued to haunt Keats all his life.

What the word 'an artist' in the sentence which follows stands is nearly equivalent to the French word 'artiste' or 'artisan'. The poet being an artist must try hard to produce a modern work in the fullest sense of the term. Summarizing the foregoing two sentences, Keats says:

> *he must have "self concentration" selfishness perhaps.*

As the truest expression in verse of the whole personality of a poet is worth a poem in the full sense of the word, the concentration of the poet's self, which can be 'selfishness', put in another way, is one of the requirements for the production of a poem. In other words, the 'self concentration' signifies the concentration of the poet's self. Considered in close connection with Keats' own notion that, first of all, a poet should be an artist, we can say that the poet's self must be concentrated on the effect of the single line and phrase. And this artistic attitude will be soon concerned with the main subject in the later passage:

> *You I am sure will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and 'load every rift' of your subject with ore.*

Here we must understand the full implication of the word 'ore'. E.C. Pettet in his *On the Poetry of Keats* explains about the words 'to load every rift with ore' that they must be taken as 'making every phrase a concrete image'. Considered along the line, the explanatory comments which follow emerge as a natural result: Keats was undoubtedly thinking chiefly of sensuous imagery in

poetry. When the 'ore' is interpreted mainly as signifying 'image' or 'imagery', Keats begins to incline towards being a kind of imagist. T.E. Hulme accepts Keats as one of his allies, i.e. imagist. Bernice Stole in her *Keats and the Dramatic Principle* says that the 'ore' means 'poetry, dramatic effect', which has been just used by the poet himself in the preceding lines. However, Bernard Blackstone in his *The Consecrated Urn* allows the 'ore' to admit of a variety of interpretations: the 'ore' can be taken as 'full poetry' or 'organic texture', and, to use more explanatory terms, as 'richness, complexity and depth' or 'a matter of life's texture'. Thus what Keats wants to attain by this artistic method of his own making is the 'intensity' in art. It is on this ground that Keats' poetry is criticized as 'dense'. This advice of Keats which is full of much confidence shows the poet who has assumed a stature worthy of the artist and is sharply conscious of the artistic sincerity.

Now let us move to the remaining part of the letter. It involves a few points of relative importance:

The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl'd for six Months together. And is not this extraordina[r]y talk for the writer of Endymion? whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards – I am pick'd up and sorted to a pip. My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk – you must explain my metap [for metaphysics] to yourself.

Keats continues to write in a confident tone without changing his attitude. 'The thought of discipline' is asserted to be essential to the poet as an artist. Undoubtedly, these words indicate that Keats has recognized fully the lack of discipline on the part of Shelley and has sensed the danger that the lack will not fail to make Shelley long survive his genius. Then, with all his confidence, again, the Keats of *Endymion* begins to reflect on himself:

My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk – you must explain my metap [for metaphysics] to yourself.

These words ring with something like a revolutionary tone, for the conviction that the poet must devote himself to nothing but imagination leads to a new attitude representative of the Romantic Revival. Keats seems to maintain that the artist who gives up himself to unremitting discipline, regarding imagination as the only weapon to rely upon, is worthy of being called a poet in the real sense of the word.

Now here is the concluding passage:

I am in expectation of Prometheus every day. Could I have my own wish for its interest effected you would have it still in manuscript – or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath – I am returning advice upon your hands. Most of the Poems in the volume I send you have been written above two years, and would never have been publish'd but from a hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now. I must exp[r]ess once more my deep sense of your kindness, adding my sincere thanks and respects for Mrs Shelley. In the hope of soon seeing you (I) remain

most sincerely yours,
John Keats

6.5 LET US SUM UP

Keats never reached the Shelleys in Pisa. He died in Rome on 23 February 1821, aged twenty-five. Keats' letters, although often poignant, reveal the sense of enjoyment with which he wrote, and reflect the active searching of a youthful and ever-developing mind. They are filled with vigour, quality, and individuality, making them essential reading for a deeper understanding of Keats' poetry and poetic thought.

6.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Keats' letters help more than his poems towards giving a clue to the secret of his art. Discuss with reference to his letter to P B Shelley.

2. How can you say that Shelley adopted a leading, though friendly, attitude towards Keats?

3. Write a note on the criticism of *Endymion* by the critics of Keats' times. Why does Keats call it 'my poor Poem'?

4. What part of the letter strikes us as an example of genuine friendship? How?

5. How can you say that Keats lived up to his aesthetic principles?

6. Explain 'an artist must serve Mammon.'

7. How can you say that Keats recognized the lack of discipline on the part of Shelley?

6.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. What was Shelley's attitude towards Keats from start to finish?

   (a) Leading and friendly

   (b) Hostile and unfriendly

   (c) Critical and fault finding

   (d) Indifferent and disinterested

2. Which of the following statements is true?

   (a) Keats held Shelley as the artist in high estimation.

   (b) Keats did not hold Shelley as the artist in high estimation.

   (c) Keats regarded Shelley as a great lyric poet.

   (d) Keats regarded Shelley as a great myth-maker.

3. Who said Keats was 'ever a fighter'?

   (a) Shelley

   (b) John Taylor

(c) Thomas Keats

(d) Edmund Blunden

4. Why did Shelley recommend Keats to visit Italy?

(a) He wanted to teach him personally the art of writing poetry.

(b) Italy was the very climate where consumptives could take care of themselves.

(c) Italy reigned in the literary circle of Europe.

(d) Both B and C.

5. What did Shelley think about Keats' *Endymion*?

(a) It was his masterpiece.

(b) It was unjustly criticized by critics.

(c) It needed minor improvements.

(d) In the poem, Keats' imagination could not be said to fire to a creative glow.

6. What is Keats referring to in the phrase, *a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy*?

(a) His critical evaluation by bitter critics

(b) The negative response of Fanny Browne.

(c) His approaching death.

(d) The approaching death of his brother, Tom.

7. What does Keats mean by the term 'ore' in the clause '*load every rift of your subject with ore'*, according to Bernard Blackstone?

(a) 'full poetry' or 'organic texture'

(b) 'richness, complexity and depth'

(c) 'a matter of life's texture'

(d) All of these.

8. According to E.C. Pettet, '*load every rift of your subject with ore'* means:

(a) Adding strangeness to beauty.

(b) Making every phrase a concrete image.

(c) Describing every concrete image in abstract terms.

(d) Loading poetry with myths.

9. According to Bernice Stole, the term 'ore' in '*load every rift of your subject with ore'*, means:

(a) Poetry, dramatic effect

(b) Myths

(c) Sensuous imagery

(d) Figures of speech

10. Keats sensed that Shelley will not long survive his genius because he:

(a) was only good at writing lyrics

(b) lacked discipline.

(c) was too sensitive of criticism

(d) wrote irregular odes

11. Who said, “Praise” or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works?

(a) Shelley about Keats

(b) Keats about Shelley

(c) Keats about himself

(d) J.A Hessey about Keats

12. When Keats calls his *Endymion* 'my poor Poem':

(a) He is being modest.

(b) It is a pessimistic comment.

(c) It is a frank confession of failure and a result of self-criticism.

(d) He wanted to elicit Shelley's response.

Answers: 1. (A); 2. (B); 3. (D); 4. (D); 5. (D); 6. (C); 7. (D); 8. (B); 9. (A); 10. (B); 11. (C); 12. (C).

6.8 SUGGESTED READING

M. B. Forman (ed.): *The Letters of John Keats* (Oxford, 1952)

Kikuchi, Wataru: *Notes on Keats Attitude towards Milton*.The Annals of the Hitotsubhashi Academy, Vol. IX, No.1.

Kikuchi, Wataru: *On Reading Keats' Letters* (Hitotsubhashi Journal of Arts and Sciences, Vol.1, No.1)

E.C. Pettet: *On the Poetry of Keats* (Cambridge, 1957)

Bernice Slote: *Keats and the Dramatic Principle* (University of Nebraska Pr., 1958)

Bernard Blackstone: *The Consecrated Urn* (Longmans, 1959)

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KEATS' LETTER TO LEIGH HUNT

STRUCTURE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) was at the center of the literary and publishing world during the Romantic and Victorian early 19th century: he was the fundamental piece of the literary network in London. His extensive correspondence reflects his intimate knowledge of literary, artistic, political and religious spheres in these key periods of British cultural history.

Leigh Hunt was a devoted friend and supporter of Keats. Hunt used to lend him books, give him advice from time to time, engage him in composition contests and print and praise Keats' poetry. Hunt also introduced Keats to Haydon, Shelley, and others. Hunt's radical politics, however, earned him the enmity of influential critics. And since Keats was regarded as Hunt's protégé, he suffered the same fate. He understandably wished to distance his poetry from Hunt's influence, but they remained friends. Hunt later traveled to Italy where he began an ill-fated literary journal with Shelley and Byron. In 1828, he wrote a biographical sketch of Keats.

7.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall go through Keats' Letter to Leigh Hunt, who was staying with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley at the time. Towards the end of the letter, Keats refers to a story about Shelley dramatically quoting Shakespeare on the death of kings. By joking about deaths of poets, he foreshadows his and Shelley's premature deaths in 1821 and 1822.

7.3 KEATS AND LEIGH HUNT

The history of the friendship between John Keats and Leigh Hunt is the story of Keats'development as a poet. Between the years 1816 and 1821, Keats became a mature poet, moving from the uneven workmanship of his youth to the mastery evidenced in his odes, in *La Belle Dame sans Merci,* in *Lamia,* in *The Fall of Hyperion,* and so on. These were the years also of his friendship with Leigh Hunt. Their relationship centered on poetry from the start, and poetry was responsible for many of the sufferings which it involved. It is the reason also for the special importance of that friendship.

7.4 THE LETTER

Margate May 10th –

My dear Hunt,

The little Gentleman that sometimes lurks in a gossips bowl ought to have come in very likeness of a coasted crab and choaked me outright for not

having answered your Letter ere this – however you must not suppose that I was in Town to receive it; no, it followed me to the isle of Wight and I got it just as I was going to pack up for Margate, for reasons which you anon shall hear. On arriving at this treeless affair I wrote to my Brother George to request C. C. C. to do the thing you wot of respecting Rimini; and George tells me he has undertaken it with great Pleasure; so I hope there has been an understanding between you for many Proofs – – C. C. C. is well acquainted with Bensley. Now why did you not send the Key of your Cupboard which I know was full of Papers? We would have lock'd them all in a trunk together with those you told me to destroy; which indeed I did not do for fear of demolishing Receipts. There not being a more unpleasant thing in the world (saving a thousand and one others) than to pay a Bill twice. Mind you – old Wood's a very Varmant-sharded in Covetousness – And now I am upon a horrid subject – what a horrid one you were upon last sunday and well you handled it. The last Examiner was [a] Battering Ram against Christianity – Blasphemy – Tertullian – Erasmus – Sr. Philip Sidney. And then the dreadful Petzelians and their expiation by Blood – and do Christians shudder at the same thing in a Newspaper which the attribute to their God in its most aggravated form? What is to be the end of this? I must mention Hazlitt's Southey – O that he had left out the grey hairs! Or that they had been in any other Paper not concluding with such a Thunderclap – that sentence about making a Page of the feelings of a whole life appears to me like a Whale's back in the Sea of Prose. I ought to have said a word on Shakspeare's Christianity – there are two, which I have not looked over with you, touching the thing: the one for, the other against. That in favor is in Measure for Measure Act 2. S. 2 Isab. Alas! alas!

Why all the Souls that were, were forfeit once

And he that might the vantage best have took,

Found out the Remedy –

That against is in Twelfth Night. Act 3. S. 2. Maria – for there is no Christian, that means to be saved by believing rightly, can ever believe such

impossible Passages of grossness! Before I come to the Nymphs I must get through all disagreeables – I went to the Isle of Wight – thought so much about Poetry so long together that I could not get to sleep at night – and moreover, I know not how it was, I could not get wholesome food – By this means in a Week or so I became not over capable in my upper Stories, and set off pell mell for Margate, at least 150 Miles – because forsooth I fancied that I should like my old Lodging here, and could contrive to do without Trees. Another thing I was too much in Solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only resource.

However Tom is with me at present and we are very comfortable. We intend though to get among some Trees. How have you got on among them? How are the Nymphs? I suppose they have led you a fine dance-Where are you now. In Judea, Cappadocia, or the Parts of Lybia about Cyrene, Strangers from "Heaven, Hues and Prototypes. I wager you have given several new turns to the old saying "Now the Maid was fair and pleasant to look on" as well as mad[e] a little variation in "once upon a time" perhaps too you have rather varied "thus endeth the first Lesson" I hope you have made a Horseshoe business of – "unsuperfluous lift" "faint Bowers" and fibrous roots. I vow that I have been down in the Mouth lately at this Work. These last two day[s] however I have felt more confident – I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than other Men, – seeing how great a thing it is, – how great things are to be gained by it – What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame – that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming Power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton – yet 'tis a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt, and at this moment I drive the thought from me. I began my Poem about a Fortnight since and have done some every day except travelling ones – Perhaps I may have done a good deal for the time but it appears such a Pin's Point to me that I will not coppy any out. When I consider that so many of these Pin points go to form a Bodkin point (God send I end not my Life with a bare Bodkin, in its modern sense) and that it requires a thousand bodkins to make a Spear bright enough to throw any light to posterity – I see that nothing but continual uphill

Journeying! Now is there any thing more unpleasant (it may come among the thousand and one) than to be so journeying and miss the Goal at last. But I intend to whistle all these cogitations into the Sea where I hope they will breed Storms violent enough to block up all exit from Russia. Does Shelley go on telling strange Stories of the Death of Kings? Tell him there are strange Stories of the death of Poets – some have died before they were conceived "how do you make that out Master Vellum". Does Mrs. S. cut Bread and Butter as neatly as ever? Tell her to procure some fatal Scissors and cut the thread of Life of all to be disappointed Poets. Does Mrs Hunt tear linen in half as straight as ever? Tell her to tear from the book of Life all blank Leaves. Remember me to them all – to Miss Kent and the little ones all.

Your sincere friend

John Keats alias Junkets –

7.5 ANNOTATIONS AND REFERENCES

1. ***a coasted crab***: Keats, of course, means 'roasted' crab and not 'coasted'.

2. ***C. C. C.***: Charles Cowden Clarke (1787 –1877), English author and Shakespearean scholar. Clarke's father, Jason Bourne, was a schoolmaster in Clarke's Academy in Enfield Town, among whose pupils was John Keats. Charles Clarke taught Keats his letters and encouraged his love of poetry. He knew Charles and Mary Lamb, and afterwards became acquainted with Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Coleridge, Hazlitt, William Macready, Charles Dickens, Douglas Jerrold, and William Godwin.

Once Charles Clarke called upon Mr. Leigh Hunt. He took with him two or three of the poems he had received from Keats. He could anticipate that Hunt would speak encouragingly, and indeed approvingly, of the compositions — written, too, by a youth under age; but his partial spirit was not prepared for the unhesitating and prompt admiration which broke forth before Hunt had read twenty lines of the first poem. Horace Smith happened to be there on the occasion, and he was not less demonstrative in his appreciation of their merits. The piece which he

read out was the sonnet, "How many Bards gild the Lapses of Time!" marking with particular emphasis and approval in the last six lines. Smith exclaimed, "What a well-condensed expression for a youth so young!" After making numerous and eager inquiries about him personally, and with reference to any peculiarities of mind and manner, the visit ended in my being requested to bring him over to the Vale of Health. Charles Clarke observed that that was a "red-letter day" in the young poet's life, and one which will never fade with him while memory lasts.

3. ***Rimini***: *The Story of Rimini* was a poem composed by Leigh Hunt published in 1816. The work was based on his reading about Paolo and Francesca in hell. Hunt's version gives a sympathetic portrayal of how the two lovers came together after Francesca was married off to Paolo's brother. The work promotes compassion for all of humanity and the style served to contrast against the traditional 18th century poetic conventions. The work received mixed reviews, with most critics praising the language.

A review in the *Edinburgh Review* by William Hazlitt praised the poem as a "gem of great grace and spirit, and in many passages and in many particulars, of infinite beauty and delicacy". In a letter to Hunt, Hazlitt stated, "I have read the story of Rimini with extreme satisfaction. It has many beautiful & affecting passages. You have, I think, perfectly succeeded. I like the description of the death of Francesca better than any. *This will do*." A review in the *Quarterly Review* attacked the poem, which Byron attributed to Hunt's poetic diction. Thomas Moore told Byron: "though it is, I own, full of beauties, and though I like him sincerely, I really could not undertake to praise it seriously. There is so much of the quizzible in all he writes, that I never can put on the proper pathetic face in reading him."

4. ***Hazlitt's Southey***: William Hazlitt (1778 –1830) was an English writer, drama and literary critic, painter, social commentator, and philosopher. He met John Hunt, publisher of *The Examiner*, and his younger

brother Leigh Hunt, the poet and essayist, who edited the weekly paper. Hazlitt admired both as champions of liberty, and befriended especially the younger Hunt, who found work for him. He began to contribute miscellaneous essays to *The Examiner* in 1813.

Robert Southey was an English poet of the Romantic school, one of the so-called "Lake Poets", and Poet Laureate for 30 years from 1813 to his death in 1843. Southey was criticized by Lord Byron and William Hazlitt who accused him of betraying his political principles for money.

5. ***Shakespeare's Christianity***: Keats refers to Isabella's dialogue in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (Act.2 Sc 2):

> "*Why, all the souls that were forfeit once;*
> *And He that might the vantage best have took*
> *Found out the remedy. How would you be,*
> *If He, which is the top of judgment, should*
> *But judge you as you are? O, think on that;*
> *And mercy then will breathe within your lips,*
> *Like man new made*."

The basis of her appeal is that we have all received unconditional forgiveness, grace, and mercy from the only One who could truly judge us all—"He that might the vantage best have took." We are all "forfeit souls," but instead of severity we have received mercy. That one thought, above all, should be enough to inspire mercy to breathe new life within us. But it's not always the case, unfortunately. Too often we are like the "Unforgiving Steward" in Jesus' parable—all too happy to take the grace we have been freely given, and all too willing to deal out judgment to those around us.

Jesus was the very incarnation of mercy. In everything he did, he demonstrated concretely the nature of God's mercy by accepting and befriending and loving and caring for sinners and tax collectors,

outcasts and outsiders. He forgave sins and restored lives freely, joyfully, and without any kind of conditions—whoever, whatever, whenever, wherever. That kind of open-ended generosity seems to me to be completely opposite from what I see reflected in our world.

Then he contrasts it with the speech of Maria in *The Twelfth Night* (Act3 Sc. 2)- She says, "That gullible idiot Malvolio must have renounced Christianity, since no Christian could do such outrageous things as he's doing. He's wearing yellow stockings."

6. ***Isle of Wight***: John Keats resided on the Isle of Wight during 1817–1819.

7. ***The Nymphs***: *The Nymphs* was composed by Leigh Hunt and published in *Foliage*, his 1818 collection of poems. The work describes the spirits of a rural landscape that are connected to Greek mythology. The images serve to discuss aspects of British life along with promoting the freedom of conscience for the British people. The collection as a whole received many attacks by contemporary critics, but later commentators viewed the poem favourably.

7.6 A HORSESHOE BUSINESS

The phrase, 'a horse shoe business', is used in the middle of Keats' letter to Hunt. Of all his letters this one requires the fullest annotation. Both men had left London in April 1817. Hunt, staying in Marlow with the Shelleys, was completing his two-part poem *The Nymphs*. Keats had gone off on his own to start his Poetic Romance, *Endymion*. Both poems celebrate the cult of Pan and the natural religion of Greek mythology, implicitly setting their fictive worlds against the restrictions of contemporary sexual mores. Keats is replying to a letter from Hunt which reached him belatedly because it had to be forwarded from his London address. The extract begins with an account of how he comes to be in Margate, and ends by asking about Hunt's progress with *The Nymphs*.

The first paragraph is an apology explaining why it has taken Keats so long to reply to Hunt. This is not at all convincing since he has already admitted that Hunt's letter reached him two weeks earlier on the Isle of Wight. The

interesting thing though is Keats's self-representation. The tone is partly comic: 'I became not over capable in my upper Stories'. It is at moments archly (and archaically) ironic—'because forsooth I fancied'. It is hectic: 'pell mell' describes not just Keats' journey but his syntax, his thoughts tumbling out, and organized through dashes. Yet set against this narrative tone is another one, in which thinking about 'Poetry' kept him awake all night, while 'Solitude' led to a 'continual burning of thought'. The younger poet writing to the older man is self-mocking but simultaneously dramatizes himself as a striving solitary artist. The comedy masks Keats' self-identification as a true poet. His rhetorical strategy appeals to Hunt as a fellow writer and seeks his understanding. But what does Keats mean in the first sentence by 'all disagreeables'? Most obviously they are his physical travels, yet the force of feeling behind the words points to a further instability. What this actually describes is a severe crisis of confidence alone on the Isle of Wight, one which had only been resolved by calling on his brother to join him in Margate at extremely short notice. At this point the letter turns to Hunt's *The Nymphs*. Keats had characterized Margate as 'treeless' in comparison to the Isle of Wight, setting up an opposition between urban reality and the pastoral world. Hunt's poem, like Keats' *Endymion*, belongs to the latter. So Keats' humorous statement, 'We intend though to get among some Trees', enables him to ask Hunt 'How have you got on among [the trees in your pastoral]?' And he then goes off into a playful riff in which he imagines Hunt summoning up the spirits of the classical nymphs-Dryads, Oreads, etc. The 'fine dance' blasphemously parodies the Bible, Acts [Chapter] ii, where a multitude of believers from 'Judea' to 'Cyrene' are inspired by the Holy Ghost to speak in tongues, just as the Greek deities are imagined to speak anew through Hunt's poem. Hunt's Nymphs are 'Strangers from Heaven', and the 'Maid fair and Pleasant to look on' is another Biblical allusion. Keats assumes that Hunt shares his familiarity with the Bible. A play on other kinds of story-telling follows (making 'a little variation in "once upon a time" ' or on Biblical readings in church-'Here endeth the first Lesson'). And the whole letter is packed with references to literary texts, including four Shakespeare plays and an article by Hunt in the most recent issue of the *Examiner* (described approvingly by Keats as a 'Battering Ram against Christianity'). Keats continues, 'I hope you have

made a Horse shoe business of [the following phrases in your poem]—"unsuperfluous lift" "faint Bowers" and "fibrous roots". The obscurity of this sentence is resolved by Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang*. *Horse shoe* has the slang meaning, 'The female pudenda', and 'business' means 'sexual intercourse'. Keats had seen a draft of Hunt's poem, and is urging him to make explicit the eroticism of the scene in which a 'young poet' is unwittingly 'enticed' by Keats' 'Forebodings' a 'bevy' of naked water nymphs (Naiads) to join them swimming. Keats picks out innocent phrases which, when quoted out of context, carry sexual innuendo. Thus 'Bowers' is slang for a woman, and 'roots' (changed by Keats from Hunt's word 'mould') is slang for penis. In this context 'unsuperfluous lift', Hunt's description of a swan's wings, becomes another possible sexual pun. The younger man has switched from the persona of one poet writing to another. He is now addressing Hunt, man to man, as someone equally free of religious and sexual cant. It is an invitation to share in recognizing, and mocking, the displaced eroticism of pastoral romance. Keats is fully conscious that if Hunt's poem might be laughed at for this reason, the same is true of his own poem—hence he says, 'I vow that I have been down in the Mouth lately at this Work [on *Endymion*]'. Keats' letter presents himself as he wished to appear to Hunt. He papers over the crisis of confidence which caused his 'pell mell' flight to Margate, but his joking play on the 'Horse shoe' potential in Hunt's poem is a momentary revelation of the doubleness of his attitude to sexuality. It discloses Keats' repressed anxieties and uncertainties about his story of a mortal's love for the moon goddess. His pitting of the artificiality of classical mythology against the slang reality of Regency London reflects a conflict evident throughout his work, one which if allowed the opportunity would subvert the whole *Endymion* project.

Keats' switching between romance and anti-romance, between 'abstract adoration of the deity' and 'goatish winnyish lustful love', between desire and disgust, appears in the presentation of female sexuality in his poems, in his annotations, and in his letters. But immediately after the 'Horse shoe' passage, Keats appears to recover balance—'These last two day [s] however I have felt more confident—I have asked myself so often why I should be a

Poet more than other Men,—seeing how great a thing it is . . . What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame'. Yet, read as a whole, Keats' letter to Hunt strains for effect. It tries too hard to be literary and witty. This is partly because, encouraged by Haydon, Keats had come to think of Hunt as 'self-deluded' and so is putting up a front. The following day, referring to his brief and opaque comments on *The Nymphs* and *Endymion*, he told Haydon, 'I wrote to Hunt yesterday—scar [c]ely know what I said in it—I could not talk about Poetry in the way I should have liked for I was not in humor with either his or mine'. Far from feeling 'confident' when writing to Hunt, Keats' joking about 'Horse shoe business' reflected his doubts about the validity of either his or Hunt's 'Poetic Romances' in the modern world. Keats' letter to Hunt was written during the day on Saturday, 10 May.

7.7 LET US SUM UP

Keats, when writing to those he most trusted, used his letters to test out his ideas and to risk describing what he hoped he might achieve.

7.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How was Keats' friendship with Leigh Hunt both a curse and a boon?
2. Keats quotes two extracts from Shakespeare to comment on his notions of Christianity. Discuss.
3. Explain the phrase 'a horse shoe business' as used by Keats in his letter.
4. Why does Keats use the term 'treeless' in the letter to Hunt?

7.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Who praised *The Story of Rimini* composed by Leigh Hunt in a review?

   (a) Hazlitt

   (b) Thomas Moore

   (c) Byron

   (d) Keats

2. What did Lord Byron and William Hazlitt accuse Robert Southey of?

   (a) Criticizing unduly the poetry of Keats.

   (b) Betraying his political principles for money.

   (c) Being a political adversary of Leigh Hunt.

   (d) Both A and C

3. In the letter Keats asks Hunt, *"How are the Nymphs*?" What is he referring to here?

   (a) Hunt's girl friends

   (b) Hunt's daughters

   (c) Hunt's imagination

   (d) Hunt's collection of poems.

4. What kept Keats awake all night at Margate?

   (a) His illness

   (b) Fear of critics

   (c) thinking about 'Poetry'

   (d) loneliness

5. What does Keats call a 'Battering Ram against Christianity'?

   (a) Hunt's summoning up the spirits of the classical nymphs

   (b) an article by Hunt in the most recent issue of The *Examiner*

   (c) a review published in *The Quarterly*

   (d) a play that he saw at Margate

6. What earned Hunt the enmity of influential critics?

   (a) His close friendship with Keats.

(b) His radical politics.

(c) His anti- religious views.

(d) His reviews in *The Examiner*.

7. Hunt wrote a biographical sketch of Keats in:

(a) 1828

(b) 1812

(c) 1859

(d) 1838

8. Where was Tom when Keats wrote the letter to Hunt?

(a) He had migrated to France.

(b) He was dead.

(c) He was with him.

(d) Keats does not mention about him.

9. Does Shelley go on telling strange *Stories of the Death of Kings*? Whom was Shelley dramatically quoting here?

(a) Shakespeare

(b) Marlowe

(c) Ben Jonson

(d) Dryden

10. Keats refers to two of the Bard's plays when he talks of Shakespeare's Christianity. Which are those two plays?

(a) *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*

(b) *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

(c) *Richard III* and *Henry V*

(d) *Measure for Measure* and *The Twelfth Night*

Answers: 1. (A); 2. (B); 3. (D); 4. (C); 5. (B); 6. (B); 7. (A); 8. (C); 9. (A); 10. (D)

7.10 SUGGESTED READING

Edmund Blunden, *Leigh Hunt's "Examiner" Examined* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1931).

Barnette Miller, *Leigh Hunt's Relations with Byron, Shelley and Keats* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910).

Sidney Colvin, *Keats* (New York: Martin's Press, 1968).

John Keats, *The Poetical and Other Writings of John Keats*, edited by H. Buxton Forman, vol. 5. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons., 1938-39).

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SHELLEY "A DEFENCE OF POETRY"

STRUCTURE

8.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with P.B. Shelley's essay "A Defence of Poetry" which was written in 1819 and finally published posthumously in 1840.

CHAPTER - V : "A Defence of Poetry"

"A Defence of Poetry" was an essay written in reply to an attack made on contemporary verse by Shelley's friend Thomas Peacock. "A Defence of Poetry" hurriedly composed, remains a fragment but it is the most mature expression of Shelley's view for it was written shortly before his death. It appears to owe very little either to Wordsworth's *Preface* or to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, but there are a few reminiscenes of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* which Shelley had read just before he wrote his own Defence and it shows like much of his mature poetry and how deeply he was influenced by the more imaginative dialogues of Plato.

“A Defence of Poetry” was written in 1819 and finally published posthumously in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (1840). It contains Shelley's famous claim that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Shelley's “Defence” is a response to Thomas Love Peacock's essay "Four Ages of Poetry" in which Peacock satirically devalued the importance of poetry in the age of science and technology. Shelley believed that poetry and by extension art in general - revealed the beauty and order of things in the universe and that without the artists’ imagination, mankind would fail to appreciate the small things in life.

The essay asserts the power of poetry to affect change within the world, claiming that poetry is “indeed something divine”. Shelley indicates that the characteristic ability of the divine to both create and be reflected in all it creates applies unconditionally to poetry: “Juxtaposing poetry to other knowledge Shelley cites it as the generative force of all systems of thought - poetry reveals, transforms and influences human thought, allowing for the recreation of a universe that has been dulled by lack of wonder”. Although he admits that actual poetic inspiration can never be recorded, Shelley suggested that the dissipation of inspiration allows for self-conscious understanding of the creative faculty. Because self-consciousness can reflect on itself infinitely, transitory inspiration paradoxically attains an immortal and solidified manifestation. Poetry, the material record on inspiration, creates anew the universe.

“A Defence” begins with Shelley's exposition of two classes of mental action - called reason and imagination. Reason is like a mind ratiocinating about the relations borne by one thought to another and imagination as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light. Reason according to him is the enumeration of quantities already known; Imagination is the perception of the values of those quantities both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences and imagination, the similitudes of things. "There are points on which reasoning is insufficient to convince the mind" he wrote to Hogg. Reason itself is only an assemblage of our better feelings, passion considered under a peculiar mode of its operation."

What the head and heard are unanimous in approving we need never doubt.

Professor Melvin T.Solve in *Shelley* : *This Theory of Poetry* aptly remarks:

> Shelley's was the type of mind which inclines instinctively toward the ideal, and hence, while he recognized that the senses supplied the materials of beauty he came to believe more and more that the power of mind, the imagination, was the important factor in art. In the he distinguishes between reason and imagination. Both work with the materials supplied by sense, but only imagination has the power of making new combinations, or discovering new truth. Imagination is the poetic faculty. By its power the artist creates what is new, yet also relative to the age new, yet related to the world of sense. As Shelley was more and more driven in upon himself - the things of this world being nothing but disappointments - he found refuge in the transcendental philosophy, and solace in a perfect world of ideas governed by love and beauty. Sometimes this world was thought of as almost wholly within the mind, as in Prometheus Unbound; sometimes it existed apart from both mind and the world of things, as in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, and cast its shadow here.

Shelley distinguishes imagination from reason by declaring the former to be synthetic in its nature, while reason is analytic. Imagination is an original creative principal within man which harmonizes all materials of sense in accord with the individual in question, and also with the eternal, the infinite and the one, in so far as the person is a poet.

Shelley has given reason small place in “A Defence”. It is a mere mechanical process which must wait upon imagination. Reason has to do with the relations which one thought bears to another and is the enumeration of quantities already known. A reaction against the psychology of Locke appears in the comparisons between man and the lyre. The impressions driven over the mind both from without and from within produce ever changing melody as the wind does on the strings of the lyre, but there is a synthetic power within the mind which the lyre does not have a power of accommodation among those impressions, and a power of adjustment to their external source. The result is not

melody merely but harmony also. Shelley goes on to elaborate how "a child at play by itself will delight by its (lyre) voice and motions and prolong the consciousness of that effect even when the sound has died away. "After the cause has died away the child will seek to prolong its pleasure by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect." This desire to make the effect permanent was, so Shelley thought, the probable origin of language and of the various arts.

Shelley explores in greater detail the difference between the reason and the imagination, which are both "classes of mental action" or faculties or functions of the mind, found in each human being. He defines reason as the "mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced". The reason is, in other words, concerned with the logical processes of critical reasoning and argumentation to arrive at the truth of things. It is, to this end, preoccupied with "analysis" or understanding worldly phenomena by dissecting them, splitting them into their constitutive elements. By contrast, the imagination is "mind acting upon those thoughts [produced by the reason] so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts". In other words, the imagination is responsible for a higher level of thought than the reason and "has for its objects those forms which are common to Universal nature and existence itself". That is, the imagination sees beyond the physical world to the essences or ideal forms of which physical phenomena in the Platonist scheme of things, are merely imperfect replicas. The Imagination is, as such, concerned with "synthesis" or conceptualizing the unification of phenomena where reason perceives only distinctions: where reason "respects the differences", the Imagination perceives the "similitude of things"; it accordingly "marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure; eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things". All in all, the imagination is superior to reason, making use of and building upon but also exceeding it: "reason is to the imagination, as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance".

While poetry and the other arts are mimetic, their aim is to produce an effect rather than to reproduce a thing, though this effect does not necessarily pre-suppose an audience. The lyre when the wind passes over its strings produces an effect

according to the laws of its own nature. Man, when subjected to external stimuli, responds to the irritation with an expression of pleasure or pain which bears a definite relation to that which produced it, but which is different in kind. A child at play will express its delight by its voice and movement, and each gesture will, in a way, be an image of that which produce it, yet different. After the cause has died away the child will seek to prolong its pleasure by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect. This desire to make the effect permanent was, so Shelley thought, the probable origin of language and of the various arts.

The language of poets is "vitally metaphorical," that is, it marks relationships before unperceived and perpetuates that apprehension in words which become in time signs of portions or classes of thought, instead of pictures of integral thoughts. When this stage is succeeded by one of the stereotyped forms of speech, some new poet must arise to revitalize the language or it will become dead. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself, being fresh and full of associations, is poetry. At such times language is poetry because it is imaginative, because the associations between existence and perception on the one hand, and between perception and expression on the other, are clearly marked. Grammarians and lexicographers follow the poets, classifying and cataloguing the creations of poetry. The grammatical forms as to moods of time and difference of person are of no value in the highest poetry.

Color, form, religious and civil habits of action, as well as language, are all instruments and materials of poetry. In the *Revolt of Islam* Shelley speaks of "Paintings, the poesy of mightiest thought", and in "The Witch of Atlas", we are told, embroiders "pictured poesy" in her fountain-lighted cavern. But in a more restricted sense poetry expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by "that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man." The fact that poetry is particularly well expressed in language is due to the nature of language itself, which is "a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations than color, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For

language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression." Language is as a mirror which reflects the light of imagination; the other media, because of their inherent qualities (what Aristotle called entelechies), are as clouds that enfeeble the light which they should communicate. It is because of the superiority of language as a medium of expression that poets have excelled in fame over all other artists. Only founders of laws and of religions have rivaled poets in fame, and if one subtracts from the fame of the former a portion for gross flattery by the vulgar, and what belongs to them in their higher character of poets, little excess will remain.

The poet, moreover, is the person to whom one should look for new words and new combination of words. He possesses imagination, the creative faculty, in a more generous degree than does anyone else. Language, as we have seen, was thought by Shelley to be the arbitrary creation of imagination.

Why then, should the poet confine himself to the words used by those who live close to nature? In so far as they have, the poet must excess them in power, or he is no poet. Shelley is more in accord with Coleridge than with Wordsworth in the matter of language.

"For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression. The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeeble, the light of which both are mediums of communication. Hence the fame of sculptors, painters, and musicians, although the intrinsic powers of the great masters of these arts may yield in no degree to that of those who have employed language as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts, has never equaled that of poets in the restricted sense of the term; as two performers of equal skill will produce unequal effects from a guitar and a harp."

As rhythm or order is fundamental in distinguishing beauty, it is logical that rhythm should be of primary importance in poetry, and that distinction should be made between measured and unmeasured language. Meter was produced, Shelley thought, by the observation of the regular mode of occurrence of harmony in the language of poetic minds, with the result that traditional forms of harmony were established. But it is not necessary that a poet accommodate his language to a traditional form, if the spirit of poetry, which is harmony, be preserved. The practice of writing in meter is to be preferred, though a poet must inevitably make innovations upon the forms used by his predecessors.

Shelley follows Sidney in declaring that the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. Like Sidney too, he declares that certain philosophers and other prose writers were poets. Plato was essentially a poet, he says in the Defence; "the truth and splendor of his imagining, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forbore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the varied pauses of his style." Bacon was a poet too, and his language has "a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect." Although Plato is master of a rare and subtle logic, it is the "Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendor and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions," which makes him a poet; his intuitions into all that can be the subject of human mind, rather than his reason. The poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah had a great effect upon Jesus, whose own words are "instinct with the most vivid poetry." All the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets, as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth; but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music : “Poetry reveals through concrete and rhythmical language hitherto unperceived relationships between the world of experience and that of truth. Imagination invents or discovers and synthesizes its elements into a harmony which is in

accord with the eternal music."

Poetry and the other arts are imitative, but the imitation is the result of desiring to prolong or make permanent an effect which something in nature, or in the relations between men, had made upon the observer. This desire for prolongation of pleasure may coincide with the desire for communication, or merely for expression. The basis of art is, in either case, emotional and not intellectual. Facts as such, while they may be of importance in history or philosophy, would be of no importance in art unless they had a definite emotional value. The marshaling of facts is the work of reason; the selection and combination of materials of sense so as to produce a unified and harmonious result is the work of the poetic faculty, imagination. This power inherent in the mind is able to make out of the materials which it has, forms approaching to ideal perfection, and hence is genuinely creative. Poetry and the other arts in their approximations to the perfect and enduring are thus concerned with the highest truth. When the veiled maid appeared to Shelley in Alastor, singing in tones "like the voice of his own soul,"

Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,

And lofty hopes of divine liberty.

But the imaginative truths of poetry always have to be referred to the emotions in order to determine their validity. Consciously or not it is the satisfaction of an emotional craving which the artist is trying to achieve in a work of art, and when he has found it he recognizes it instantly by the pleasure which attends the representation.

Man with all his passions becomes the object of the passions of man and as more and more emotions are added, the repertoire of expression increases and "language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony." Since man creates social sympathies the moment two people interact, he observes a certain kind of harmony in words and actions quite distinct from that of the mundane objects and the impressions represented by them.

Shelley believed that the spark of divinity, the whiter adiance of eternity which was in everyone, and which could not be entirely obscured by the dome

of many colored glass, made all people aspire toward a more perfect world. Everyone has some imagination, some ability to find truth and beauty, and hence happiness, but poets have this faculty most highly developed. Men in a society find the passions and pleasures of life greatly enriched, and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, and mutual dependence, which are the principles determining their wills to action, also are the principles which "constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind." Love of truth and beauty, hatred of falsehood and error are the underlying principles of society and of art alike. Poetry is the expression of the imagination; the imagination enables us to put ourselves in the place of others, to find what is good in them and to love it. Poetry develops the imagination as exercise develops a limb, and hence is the best socializing agent. Poets, as those having most imagination, are the discoverers of all knowledge, the pioneers in all fields of learning. As they are most sensitive to harmony and best able to produce it, they are the originators of laws, the lawgivers to the world. The arts, then, are in the very closest relationship to life, to morality, to knowledge, and can never become obsolete or useless, as Peacock contended they had already become. They bridge the gap between the temporal and the infinite.

The stress which Shelley lays upon the emotional basis of art may not seem to be in accord with the conception of poetry as an art which discovers and expresses the highest truth, for emotion is commonly thought to interfere with the discovery of truth. But, as the mystics and transcendentalists have always done, Shelley relied (as we have already seen) very much upon his emotions and inner promptings. Instead of accepting the world's judgment, he had long been accustomed to trust to his feelings. And it is interesting to note that this statement and others of the same tenor were made even during the period when he was not most engrossed with the cult of reason preached by Godwin and the Encyclopaedists. "Reason", he wrote to Hogg in February, 1813, "is only an assemblage of our better feelings - passion considered under a peculiar mode of its operation....." He believed that all new truth came, a little at a time no doubt, though intuitive flashes, in sudden illuminations;

and the mode of mind which apprehended these new relationships he called the imagination, the poetic faculty. The experience always brought a glow of intense pleasure, even though the background of fact had been tinged with melancholy.

It is the fundamental factor of rhythm which makes translation of poetry impossible. In every poetical composition there is a close relationship between the rhythms of sound and those of thought. They are, indeed, inseparable, and the meaning and effect of the poem depend upon both. Facts, no doubt, can be translated into any language but Facts are not what we want to know in poetry, in history, in the lives of individual men, in satire, in panegyric. They are the mere divisions, the arbitrary points on which we hang, and to which we refer those delicate and evanescent hues of mind, which language delights and instructs us in precise proportion as it expresses. What is a translation of Homer into English? A person who is ignorant of Greek need only look at *Paradise Lost* or the tragedy of Lear translated into French to obtain an analogical conception of its worthless and miserable inadequacy.

The language of poets has always affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it would not be poetry, and this sound rhythm is almost as necessary to the communication of its influence as are the words themselves. When an attempt is made to translate from one language to another, it is obvious that while fairly exact equivalents can be found for the words, the sound element of each word is changed, and the sound rhythm which resulted from the juxtaposition of the words in the verse must be utterly destroyed. "Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of the poet. The plan must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower…..". Translation, then, is impossible, first, because the interrelated rhythms of sound and sense cannot be reproduced in another language, and second, because the world of art must spring from an intuition, as the plant from the seed.

According to Shelley, "In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the

true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression."

Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets : a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time.

One may ask why the poets have not been more systematic thinkers; why the poet's sense of form, proportion, and harmonious relationships does not extend itself into systems of thought. Shelley would, of course, have denied that the poets have borrowed their philosophical ideas from the systematic philosophers. On the contrary, he maintained that the philosophers, in so far as they have contributed new ideas or made new associations between ideas, have made their discoveries by means of the imagination, and hence are poets. Thus Plato and Bacon were poets; essentially there is no difference between a poet and a philosopher, and Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton were "philosopher of the very loftiest power." Perhaps if Shelley had been pressed he would have added that those whom we commonly called philosophers have, in addition to imagination, its colder and more prosy counterpart, reason, developed to a high degree.

Having defined the poet, Shelley turns his attention to comprehending the nature of poetry. In a famous definition which signals a definitive shift towards the author-oriented or expressive model of literature which comes to predominate from about 1900, Shelley argues that poetry is the "expression of the imagination" of the poet. He admits that reason evidently plays a part too: "[l] language, color, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry". In other words, at least at one level, poetry makes use of media like words and is an imitation of human actions and behaviour. Poetry is in short, to some degree at least, a mirror held up to the physical world, as Wordsworth argues. These are all functions within the province of the reason.

However, poetry does more than this: poets, using their Imagination, "imagine and express" an "indestructible order". This is because the poet "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one". Poetry is, from this point of view, the main "portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit . . . into the universe of things" and, as such, the "echo of the eternal music". For this reason, poetry is the "very image of life expressed in its eternal truth": it "strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms". Its "words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth". This is why Shelley speaks of poets as "communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature" and functioning thereby to "measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit".

Shelley accordingly ranks literature in general and poetry in particular above all other art forms such as the visual arts, the plastic arts (sculpture), or dance. This is because poetry "expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man" which he calls the Imagination. Poetry, in other words, is the medium by which the Imagination, that sovereign faculty within man which links him to beyond the physical world, expresses itself. This fact "springs from the nature itself of language" which is a "more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations" and is "more plastic and obedient of the faculty of which it is the creation" than other media of representation found in other art forms such as "color, form, or motion".

Shelley also elevates poetry above prose fiction, even though the latter also utilizes words. He spends some time distinguishing between prose fiction and poetry, or as he puts it, "measured and unmeasured language". The difference lies not merely in the fact that one is written in verse while the other is not. Where a "story" (prose fiction) is merely a "catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect", poetry is by contrast the "creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the

mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds". Where prose fiction is "partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur", poetry is "universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature". Where prose fiction is nothing more than a "story of particular facts" and, as such, a "mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful", poetry is a mirror which "makes beautiful that which is distorted". Poetry, Shelley famously asserts, is the "record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds". It "makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind". It "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" because it "turns all things to loveliness".

Arguing that knowledge is subjective, that all things "exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient", the mind being able to "make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven", Shelley contends that poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. “And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It . . purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. . . . It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.”

This is why he argues that the creative faculty is the "basis of all knowledge". Arguing that we have more "moral, political and historical wisdom" and more "scientific and economical knowledge" than we know what to do with and that the "poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes", Shelley asserts that what we lack is the "creative faculty to imagine that which we know; . . . the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life". He contends that the cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the

empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.

The function of the poetic faculty is two-fold, he stresses: it "creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure" and it "engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange" these materials "according to a certain rhythm and order which might be called the beautiful and the good".

Because the Imagination is the most important mental faculty, in Shelley's view, responsible for composing a poem, the creative process is not one that can be consciously controlled. Creativity is "not like the reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will". One cannot say that "I will compose poetry". As a result, he argues that the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like Richard L. W. Clarke notes "an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure."

Poetry is the product of inspiration, emanating from within and over which the conscious portion of our mind (or reason) has little control. Poets are "compelled to serve" that regal "power which is seated on the throne of their own soul". He concludes that it is, therefore, an error to assert that the "finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study". Rather, he writes, we are conscious only of "evanescent visitations of thought and feeling, sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden but elevating and delightful beyond all expression". It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the morning calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it.

Such "conditions of being", he avers, are experienced mostly by "those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination".

For Shelley, because of their power to envision an alternative world, poets are more than mere writers: they are "institutors of laws, . . . founders of civil society, . . . inventors of the arts of life, . . . teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world" which we normally call religion. Shelley terms them "legislators" and "prophets" because the poet "not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present and his thoughts are the germ of the flower and the fruit of the latest time".

The harmonious expression of one's apperception of life, which has the possibility of communication, which gives pleasure, and which has been vitalized by its author's contact with his fellow-men, is, according to Shelley, poetry in its widest sense. "A poem differs from a story in that the story is a catalogue of facts related in time, place, circumstances, cause, and effect. The poem is the "creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds." The story is of a given time and place, a combination of events which can never recur; the poem is universal and bears in itself "the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature." A story of particular facts obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful. By its copying of the details of external nature or of man's life it fails to discover the fundamental relationships or rhythms which have universal validity. The poem, on the other hand, is "a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted." The poet perceives the basic proportions and relationships under the chaotic appearances of life, and out of them makes a harmony which is in accord with the unchangeable forms of human nature and with the mind of the Creator.

Parts of a composition may be poetry, without the work as a whole being a poem. We may even regard a single sentence as poetry, though it occurs in the midst of others which are unassimilated - out of harmony with each other and with themselves. This small part of a composition may be the spontaneous work of imagination, while those surrounding it may be only the laborious result of

unimpassioned effort. Even a single word may be "a spark of inextinguishable thought." For this reason all of the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, and Livy, were poets. Their method of work, demanding as it did too close an observance of particulars, prevented their developing the poetic faculty in its highest degree, but "by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images," they made ample amends for their subjection.

For Shelley- “A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sound; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not when and why Shelley praised Homer's epic of war and intrigues most highly among the poems of the ancient.”

8.2 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Give Shelley’s view on the two classes of mental action - Reason and Imagination.
2. How, in Shelley's view is Imagination more important than Reason?
3. Elucidate through the example of the harp the effect of pleasure.
4. What are the materials of Poetry according to Shelley?
5. The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error in Shelley's opinion. Elaborate.
6. Why were poets, in earlier epochs, called the prophets and legislators of the world?
7. How, in Shelley’s view in ‘A Defence of Poetry’ translation from one language to another, impossible?
8. Elucidate Shelley's nature of poetry.
9. What are the two-fold functions of poetry?
10. Does Shelley favour a didactic note in poetry?

8.3 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the main argument of Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry"?

   A) Poetry should primarily entertain readers.

   B) Poetry is a waste of time and resources.

   C) Poetry is the highest form of human expression and has a vital role in society.

   D) Poetry should be confined to traditional forms and styles.

2. According to Shelley, what is the source of poetry's power and influence?

   A) Political authority

   B) Religious institutions

   C) The imagination

   D) Logical reasoning

3. In Shelley's view, what is the relationship between poetry and ethics?

   A) Poetry has no ethical or moral significance.

   B) Poetry can corrupt moral values.

   C) Poetry has the power to inspire and elevate moral and ethical awareness.

   D) Poetry should avoid addressing ethical issues.

4. What does Shelley mean by the term "unacknowledged legislator of the world" in reference to poets?

   A) Poets have political power.

   B) Poets have no influence on society.

   C) Poets shape cultural norms and values through their work.

   D) Poets should remain silent on social issues.

5. According to Shelley, why is poetry a superior form of communication compared to prose?

A) Poetry is easier to understand.

B) Poetry is more entertaining.

C) Poetry appeals to the emotions and imagination, conveying deeper truths.

D) Poetry is more concise.

Answers 1c,2c,3c,4c,5c

8.4 SUGGESTED READING

The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Medwin (London, 1847).

Gilmour, Ian (2002). *Byron and Shelley: The Making of the Poets*. New York: Carol & Graf Publishers.

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P.B. SHELLEY – "A DEFENCE OF POETRY"

STRUCTURE

9.1 OBJECTIVES

The Objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with P.B. Shelley's essay "A Defence of Poetry".

9.2 CHAPTER - VI- "A DEFENCE OF POETRY"

Homer embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character; nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition becoming like Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses: the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism, and persevering devotion to an object. The poet through his composition may garb the vices of revenge or self- deceit temporarily but will not conceal the eternal purpose of poetry's beauty.

The manner in which poetry achieves its effect is impossible to apprehend. Since it is concerned with the permanent and universal, it must inevitably be

conductive of virtue; but the mature Shelley (although we find it in his poetry) says he had no faith in moral precepts. Moral precepts are the result of reason; they are particular and local, of a time and place. A poet would do all to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong in his poetry, for they could not have universal validity. A didactic purpose, he says, is injurious to poetry, and poets such as Euripides, Lucan, Tasso, and Spenser, who have frequently affected a moral aim, diminished the effect of their poetry in exact proportion to the degree "in which they compel us to advert to this moral purpose". "Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it." Since genuine poetry is inevitably conducive to virtue, there need be no attempt made to avoid the representation of evil, for it is not the presence of the evil, or of the transient, which determines that a work is not poetry, but the absence of the universal, permanent, and harmonious. Poetry has the power to transform all things to loveliness, to subdue to union all irreconcilable things.

> Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union, under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its sweet *alchemy* turns to *potable* gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its form.

The deliberate or inadvertent utilization of pain to produce pleasure is met with frequently in Shelley. This is the work of a power which he attempts to describe in the second paragraph of the 'Defence'. "But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in a lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them". There is a transcendental power inherent in the mind which is able to harmonize the incongruous

materials of sense into works of art. By the aid of this divine gift the poet is able to make out of his own sufferings and the dross and error of the world something which bears the stamp of beauty; through this faculty, which indeed the poet is not master of, he participates in "the eternal, the infinite, and the one". Hence, in so far as he is a poet, as he is the author of the highest wisdom and pleasure, the poet ought to be the happiest and best of men.

The transmutation of error, pain, and evil by the poet's imaginative faculty is alluded to more than once. Indeed, he held that suffering is an important source of art, for he says that :

"Most wretched men

Are called into poetry by wrong :

They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

And the force and sweetness of their singing may be in direct proportion to the severity of the pain :

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

This magic which enables the poet to turn poison to potable gold and sadness to sweet song is the harmonizing, the regulating and unifying power of poetry. Shelley has in mind here the charming and stabilizing power of rhythm, both of sound and of thought.

This harmonizing element Shelley also calls love, which to him was the law of the universe, and beauty, the creative and supporting power of the world. Love is, of course, attracted to the perfect, but love also has a sublimating and harmonizing power and can reproduce its image in that which it contemplates. The power of love to produce happiness was early recognized by Shelley, and so was its constant attendant pain. The poetical faculty, he says, has one of its functions the engendering of a desire to reproduce and to arrange the materials presented to it "according to a certain rhythm or order which may be called the beautiful and the good." This process of making rhythmical has the effect of absorbing the evil, at least of making it innocuous. The recognition of this underlying principle in the ancient poet aroused

Shelley's enthusiasm for them, and caused him to defend them as moral.

It is the imagination which apprehends the relationships of things and ideas, and which perceives the before unknown harmonies and beauties of the world. Shelley uses the word intellectual to indicate that beauty to him is of the mind, is idea, and not sensuous; to distinguish what is universal and eternal from that which is temporal, transient, and local.

Shelley contends that Homer and the cyclic poets were followed by the dramatic and lyrical poets of Athens and architecture, music, dance, sculpture, philosophy, all flourished as kindred expressions of the poetical faculty yet it was poetry which gave permanence to this epoch.

Shelley than goes on to elucidate as to how drama flourished in Athens. For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill, and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity, one towards the other.

The growth of a free aesthetic attitude toward the subject matter of art, which has several times been alluded to, is further noticeable in the poet's attitude toward the comic, and in statements such as those in the 'Defence' where he says that imperfection in poetry does not consist so much in the presence of things connected with the external and the temporal as in the absence of those elements which belong to the inner faculties of our nature; that the incomparable perfection of the ancients consisted in the harmony of all elements.

Shelley's early condemnation of comedy was due not merely to a defective sense of humour, but to an excess of sensibility. The comic characters of the day gave him no pleasant sense of superiority; he felt, on the one hand, pity for what seemed to him to be society's unfortunates and, on the other, responsibility and guilt for their deplorable ignorance and utter lack of dignity. The comic became, through excess of sympathy, pathetic. He thought that neither the authors nor the theater going audience had any sympathy for the objects of their mirth, and hence humor was superseded by wit. This, as he says in the *Defence*, was ever the

situation in periods when morals were in a low state. Comic poetry in such periods sinks to the merely superficial, or the obscene. "If we laugh at all it is from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm, and contempt, succeed to sympathetic merriment." The comic of this nature he would condemn because there is in it none of the universal, and because the evil, the temporal, is not reconciled to the good and the eternal; the element of harmony is absent.

Shelley recognizes the blending of comedy with tragedy in modern times an extension of the dramatic circle but the comedy should be as in *King Lear*, universal, ideal and sublime. But it is in poetry with its most perfect form, good and evil in conduct or habit is related although tragedy mirrors the circumstances of age.

The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of their elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.

A decay in social life leads to a decay in drama and tragedy becomes a cold imitation of great masterpieces. Dramas effect sentiment and passion but without imagination they degenerate into 'caprice and appetite'. The grossest degradation of drama took place in the reign of Charles II where poetry was a vehicle to glorify the king. Only Milton's poetry shone brilliantly in this age.

Shelley argues that the connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. In a degraded society life could be exalted if dramatic principles were enclosed. Wars and subordination suspended the creative faculty of Greece and the 'bucolic' writers patronized by the dictatorial rulers came out with poetry which was intensely melodious but like the odour of the tuberose, it overcomes and sickens the spirit with excess of sweetness; whilst the poetry of the preceding age was a meadow-gale of June, which mingles the fragrance of all the flowers of the field, and adds a quickening and harmonizing spirit of its own which endows the sense with a power of sustaining its extreme delight.

Shelley has the Plotinian notion of creation as a falling-away from the perfection of the ideal. This he holds to be true of the artist's work as well as of the mundane world, for he tells us in the 'Defence' that "the mind in creation is as a fading coal"; that "when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet". "This world, as Plato taught, is but a poor shadow of reality"; and for the weak organs of mortals perhaps it is necessary to veil the radiancy of the eternal, "to temper this planetary music". This admixture of dross or error in all things of this life, even in art, may, he thinks, be necessary, or at least expedient.

Everyone, while having definite gifts and tendencies of his own, must be a product of the age in which he lives, must reflect the age, and must bear a definite relation to his contemporaries. All the writers of any particular age must bear a resemblance to each other, for they "cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live; though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded." The mind of everyone, as he said in *Mont Blanc*, both renders and receives fast influencings,

Holding an unremitting interchange

With the clear universe of things around;

and, as he says in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, "A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain his powers; he is not one but both."

The part which the clear universe of things plays in the poet's work is undoubtedly great, for not only does the material of poetry come from the world of sense experience, but the stimulus to create comes from the external world also. A significant part of the external world is the public, whose contribution toward a work of art Shelley also believed to be very important. "It is impossible

to compose," he wrote very shortly before his death, "except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write…."

The spirit of the age in which they live affects all poets, said Shelley, and the study of the foremost writers of his age is quite apt to influence a poet's style. Every writer is subject both to the modes of thought and feeling which the events of his age have brought to view, and to the forms in which these ideas and emotions have been expressed. These factors will tend to produce a similarity in all the writers of a given period, but it can not be said because of that similarity that Byron imitates Wordsworth any more than that Wordsworth imitates Byron. "The spirit of one's genius is less affected than is the form in which they live," but the spirit is "the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind."

There is a direct correspondence, Shelley thought, between the moral tone of an age and the quality of the poetry produced in that period. In periods of moral decadence the public mind occupied itself with trivialities and not with universal truths, and poetry in such times was lacking in elevation and in sympathy. Humor became wit, and comedy, instead of being of a universal nature, became corrupt and obscene. Yet even in an age when imagination was at a low ebb and when indulgence was substituted for intellectual pleasure, poetry was the source of all the true happiness which men were capable of feeling.

Social corruption destroys all sensibility to all pleasure beginning with the imagination and the intellect and slowly permeating into the very vetalo with its poisonous effect. At such times poetry shines both as 'light of life; the source of whatever of beautiful or generous or true can have place in an evil time (571-572 Lines) The sacred links of great poetry can never be disjoined because it "contains within itself the seeds at once of its oven and social renovation."

In time social life was not so influenced by the poetical element still Lucreties and Virgil wrote exalted poetry. Although it imitated Greece yet just as the shadow is less vivid than the substance the institution of Rome was less poetical than those of Greece. The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions;

for whatever of beautiful, true and majestic, they contained, could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist.

Shelley then goes on to argue how the poetry of Moses, Job David and Solomon had made an impact on the mind of Jesus and has disciples. Here it is to be confessed and Light seems to thicken,

And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood;

Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,

While night's black agents to their preys do rouse,

But Plato's creed of the division of the faculties of mind was exalted to the position of reverence. But from this anarchy he choose, poetry resurrected itself in the doctrine of Christ and the mythology and institutions of the Celtic conjurers of Rome. Argues Shelley that the Christians' doctrines were not responsible for the ignorance of the Dark ages. Despotism and superstition flourished because men had become 'insensible and selfish, lust, fear, avarice, cruelty, and fraud, characterized a race amongst whom no one was to be found capable of creating in form, language, or institution'.

It was only in 11th century that the poetry of the Christian and chivalric system began to make itself heard. Plato following the doctrine of Timaeus and Pythagoras had already taught the principle of equality in his *Republic* as well as moral and intellectual system of doctrine comprehending at once the past, the present and the future condition of the men. Christ became a vehicle to reveal these sacred and eternal truths to mankind.

The abolition of personal and domestic slavery and the freedom of women from the humiliating restraints of the ancient time produce the poetry of sexual love, "Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present." It was as if the statues of Apollo and the Muses had been endowed with life and motion, and had walked forth among their worshippers; so that earth became peopled by the inhabitants of a diviner world. The familiar appearances and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly, and a paradise was created

as out of the wrecks of Eden. And as this creation itself is poetry, so its creators were poets; and language was the instrument of their art: 'Galetto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse'.

Dante and Petrarch elevated the mind through the sacred emotion of love and Dante's *vita nuova* became an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language. Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, has been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world and the music has penetrated the caverns of society, and its echoes still drown the dissonance of arms and superstition. At successive intervals, Ariosto, Tasso, Shakespeare, Spenser, Calderon, Rousseau, and the great writers of our own age, have celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory, over sensuality and force.

Dante's poetry, Shelley asserts, also served to bridge the gap between the ancient and the modern world. Milton's Satan expresses energy and magnificence and Satan does not personify evil. Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture. Milton does not endow God with any superior virtue over the Devil and therein lies the supremacy of his genuine. He mingled as it were the elements of human nature as colours upon a single pallet, and arranged them in the composition of his great picture according to the laws of epic truth, that is according to the laws of that principle by which a series of action of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind.

Shelley opines that Dante and Milton had both imbibed deeply the ancient religions of the civilized world and this spirit was mirrored in their works. Dante was the first reformer and awakener of Europe preceding the Reformation.

"His very words are instinct with spirit; cache is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high

poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for every overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight."

After Dante, Petrarch and Boccacio poets were almost over thrown by 'reasonists' and mechanists who argued that although the exercise of the imagination was most delightful, it was reason which was more useful.

There are two kinds of pleasure : one which banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, giving men security of life, dispersing the grosser delusions of superstition, and inducing such forbearance among men as may be consistent with personal advantage. But this sort of utility is transitory and particular; the durable and universal pleasure comes from whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense. The first sort of utility is the result of the calculating faculty, and while men pursue it the rich grow richer and the poor, poorer, while the vessel of state is driven between the Scylla of anarchy and the Charybdis of despotism. There is no lack of the wisdom which the calculating faculty is able to produce; we know principles which are much better than those which we practice. "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life; we have eaten more than we can digest." The mechanical arts have been *assiduously* cultivated while the imaginative arts have been allowed to *languish,* and as a result the inventions for *abridging labor* have only increased the curse of Adam. Poetry is the God, Shelley insisted, and self, or its visible incarnation, money, is the Mammon of the world. He believed that the world could yet be saved by the god Poetry. It is in periods when the materials of external life have been accumulated in excess of our power to assimilate them to the laws of our internal nature that the cultivation of poetry is most needed. These externals are the body of which imagination or poetry

is the soul, and in certain periods the body is permitted to become too unwieldy for the soul to manage.

Besides the illuminating and expanding effect of poetry, it can be known by the feeling of pleasure with which it is always attended. "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure; all spirits upon which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight." Social corruption destroys sensibility to pleasure, but even in corrupt periods, poetry communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving. It is still the light of life and the source of whatever there can be of the beautiful, generous, or true in a time of evil. By pleasure Shelley means the good which all sensitive and intelligent men seek and which they recognize.

The poetical faculty thus has a double function: it cannot only create new materials of knowledge, power, and pleasure, but it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange those materials according to a certain rhythm or order which may be called the beautiful and the good. This reproduction and arrangement, as stated earlier in the chapter, is the mimetic process of art; but it is more than imitative, because of the power residing in the mind which enables it to combine its materials into forms of such harmony and perfection that the objects of external nature are mocked, rather than mimicked. Poetry has the power to bring externals into tune with the universal harmony, for the poet is the first link in the chain which binds the world of men to that of the gods.

The original element in poetry, Shelley thought is to be very large. In any class of mimetic representation there is that fundamental factor of order or rhythm which in the representation bears a relation to, but yet differs from the order or rhythm of the action or thing which is represented. While we may suppose that the rhythmic factor in things of nature is of importance, yet when those things are imaginatively representation springs from the poet, and not from the external object or action. Even in primitive works of art, Shelley says, men “observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject

to the laws of that from which it proceeds. Even the lyre responds to the wind or other stimulus according to the laws of its own nature, although it has not the power of adjustment and of synthesis that would enable it to make harmony as well as melody".

The highest type of poetry, according to Shelley, is divine and not mortal. Not even the greatest poet can visibly influence to brighten his imagination. No amount of labor and study can do more than fill the gaps between the moments of inspiration. The visitations arise unforeseen and depart unbidden, but they delight beyond expression while they last. "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds." Poets, as subject to divine inspiration, color with the hues of the ethereal world all that they touch and thus reanimate in others the sleeping or cold images of a diviner world. Poetry thus immortalizes all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the "vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life," and veiling them in language or in other form, sends them to communicate joy to persons with whom kindred spirits of beauty abide, kindred spirits which do not manifest themselves, because there is no "portal of expression" by means of which to escape from the caverns of the spirit into the universe of things. "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man."

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portion of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.

Poetry according to Shelley is spontaneous. This spontaneous poetry - this "overflowing of the soul" - has a reality and truth not derived from imitation of mundane objects or actions. The things of this world are even mocked, put to scorn by the divine creations of art. A slavish imitation of the external

forms of nature indeed would not be art. It would hardly be worth attempting, for as a copy of a copy, or the shadow of a shadow, to use the platonic phraseology, it could have little value. But Shelley's idealism here led him to a higher and truer opinion of art than that expressed by his master in the tenth book of the *Republic*. For to the mature Shelley, art was not copying mundane forms but imitation of the infinite and archetypal forms, so far as imagination was able to apprehend them.

His opinion of toilsome revision, and of the comparative value of the mundane and the ideal, is well, though flippantly, stated in the following stanza :

Wordsworth informs us he was nineteen years

Considering and retouching Peter Bell;

Watering his laurels with the killing tears

Of slow, dull care, so that their roots to Hell

Might pierce and their wide branches blot the spheres

Of Heaven, with dewy leaves and flowers; this well

The over busy gardener's blundering toil.

"I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day," he says in the 'Defence', "whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labor and study. The toil and the delay recommended by the critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself." Milton, he says, conceived *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions, and we have Milton's own statement that the muse "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song." Let this be an answer to those who say there are fifty six various readings to the first line of *Orlando Furioso*. Poetry so produced would be as mosaic is to painting. The instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in

the plastic and pictorial arts; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation, is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Shelley's true attitude is that stated in the Preface to the *Revolt of Islam* and again in a “Defence of Poetry”. The spontaneous song issuing from the inmost depths of the poet's mind is of incomparably greater worth than anything produced by careful toil, although the latter was necessary to connect the brief moments of inspiration.

Poetry has the power of awakening and enlarging the mind "by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar"; it reproduces in the mind of the reader that which it represents, and "the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thence forward in the minds of those who have contemplated them as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists." The creations of art, bathed in the light of beauty, impress themselves upon the mind as embodiments of truth and harmony, and this feeling of harmony or love extends itself to include all with which it comes in contact. This spirit of harmony or love is the secret of morals as it is of art.

Poetry, Shelley continues turn all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms.

The poet imbued as he is with the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory "is the wisest, the happiest, and the best, in as much as he is a poet". The greatest of poets are men of impeccable virtue, unparalleled wisdom and the most fortunate of men. All their faults would be dust compared to the sublimity of their creations.

Poetry, says Shelley diffuse from logic in that it is not subject to the control of the active power of the mind.

The mystical and irrational in poetry and poets impressed Shelley so much that in 1821 he wrote : "The poet and the man are two different natures; though they exist together, they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding on each other's powers and efforts by any reflex act." Byron held a similar view, saying that poetry is a distinct faculty of the soul, having no more to do with the everyday individual than the inspiration of the Pythianess when removed from her tripod.

At least a partial explanation of this sense of dual personality has been furnished by the psychologists. The poet, they would say, represents the side of consciousness which functions in associative, undirected thought; in dreams, either waking or in sleep. The man represents the practical side of mind: directed, purposive thought. Since the associative thinking is not bound by the social conventions, or even by time and space, it seems discrete from the purposive processes, and hence is not looked upon as rational; is even regarded as a kind of madness. Since it comes without effort and unbidden, the poet easily believes himself inspired or divinely possessed.

The effect of poetry upon the mind is mystical. As Shelley says of Bacon's majestic rhythm, "It is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy." This sudden widening of the reader's mental horizon, we should note, corresponds exactly to the simplest mystical experience as it is described by William James. The suddenly deepened meaning of a word or phrase, which at once opens new vistas to us and makes us exclaim, "I have heard that all my life, but never realized its full significance till now," is, according to James, a mystical

experience. Other attributes of the mystical state, as such as the feeling of elation or elevation, of moral exaltation and intellectual enlightenment, the sense of familiarity, all are recognizable in Shelley's words. The passivity of mind, and at least an approach to what Professor Bucke termed "cosmic consciousness," are also apparent. The evanescent visitations of thought and feeling which come to the poet, Shelley says, are like "the interpenetration of a diviner nature than our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. This and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship is essentially linked with such emotions; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe." The ineffability of the higher mystical state is, however, lacking.

9.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How does Shelley see love as the most harmonizing element?
2. Why did Shelley criticize the comedy of his time?
3. How does the spirit of an age and moral tone affect the quality of poetry?
4. Describe Shelley's views on Dante and Milton.
5. What are Shelley's view on reasonists and mechanists? How does he contrast them with poets?
6. "The highest type of poetry", according to Shelley, is divine and not moral". Elucidate.
7. How, in Shelley's view does poetry turn all things into loveliness?
8. Explain the mystical effect of poetry on the mind.

9.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. How does Shelley describe the role of the poet in relation to the natural world?

A) Poets should avoid nature as a subject in their work.

B) Poets are passive observers of nature.

C) Poets have the power to interpret and idealize nature, revealing its spiritual significance.

D) Poets should only write about human experiences.

2. What does Shelley mean by the term "Lyrical Poetry" in his essay?

A) Poetry written for public performance

B) Poetry that rhymes

C) Poetry that expresses personal emotions and thoughts

D) Poetry that uses formal language

3. According to Shelley, what role does the "imagination" play in the creation of poetry?

A) It is irrelevant to the process of creating poetry.

B) It is the primary source of poetic inspiration and creativity.

C) It should be avoided in poetry.

D) It is a minor factor in poetry.

4. What does Shelley argue regarding the permanence of poetry compared to other forms of human creation?

A) Poetry is less enduring than other forms of art.

B) Poetry is equally enduring as other forms of human creation.

C) Poetry is more enduring because it captures the essence of human emotions and ideas.

D) Poetry is irrelevant in discussions of permanence.

5. What does Shelley say about the relationship between poets and society's progress?

A) Poets have no role in society's progress.

B) Poets impede social progress.

C) Poets are essential contributors to the progress of society.

D) Poets should stay neutral and uninvolved in societal matters.

Answers 1c, 2c,3b,4c,5c

9.4 SUGGESTED READING

James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*: *A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008)

Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Includes Adonais, Daemon of the World, Peter Bell the Third, The Witch of Atlas, A Defence of Poetry, and 3 Complete Volumes of Works. Google Ebooks volume 2.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM.: III **LESSON : 10**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : III**

MATTHEW ARNOLD

STRUCTURE

10.1 BIOGRAPHY

24, Dec. 1822 - Born in a little village of Lalehan on the Thames, London.

- eldest son.
- Father: 'Doctor' Arnold of Rugby. Author of *Tom Brown's School Days*.
- Mother: Mary Penrose

1841 : Arnold admitted to Ballid College, Oxford, won Newdigate Poetry Prize for "Cromwell".

1844 : Graduated with a second class degree.

1845 : elected to a Fellowship in Oriel College.

1846 : He made a Trip to France, met George Sand, a French novelist.

1847 : He became Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Minister of Education under Lord John Russell's ministry.

1848 : Visited Switzerland, fell in love with a French girl, the "Marguerite" of the cycle of poems *Switzerland* and *Faded Leaves*.

1850 : Charlotte Bronte met him. Appointed Inspector of School, held the post for 35 years.

1851 : Married Frances Lucy Wightman. Settled Life Started, love home and children.

1883 : Got civil pension of $ 250.

1857 : Elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford (for 10 years). 15 April, 1888 : Death at Liverpool.

10.2 PRINCIPAL WORKS

10.2.0 Poems

The Strayed Reveller and other Poems, 1849. *Empedocles on Etna*, 1852. *Mycerinus Poem*s, 1853 *Poems*, Second Series, 1855 *Merope* : *A Tragedy*, 1858 *New Poems* 1867 *Sohrab and Rustum*. Thyrsis, 1866. *Rugby Chapel*, 1967 *Scholar Gipsy*, 1853. *Dover Beach*, 1867. *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens*, 1852. *Shakespeare*.

10.2.1 Essays & Studies

On Translating Homer, 1861 *Essays in Criticism*, 1865. *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 1867. *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869. *Literature and Dogma*,1873. *Last Essays on Church and Religion*, 1877. *Discoveries in America*, 1885. *Civilization in the United States*, 1888. *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*, 1888.

10.2.2 Introduction to Important Works of Arnold

The Preface to Works of Arn the Poems of 1853

This work may be regarded as a critical manifesto of Arnold. It contains the germ of all the critical canons which he elaborated in later essays. There is insistence on the importance of the subject or action of a poem and on the study of the ancient classics. He suggested the use of 'grand style' if the subject was suitable.

10.2.3 *On Translating Homer* (1861)

Arnold makes a study of existing translation of Homer with a view to giving advice for future translations. Homer's poetry, says Arnold

had four chief qualities. It had fluid rapidity of movement, its style was simple, there was plainness of thought, and a nobility in it.

10.2.4 *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867)

Here Arnold says that the Englishman is a combination of the Norman, Germanic and Celtic strains. He says that the English man free themselves from 'philistinism' by emphasising on the Celtic strain of their character, namely Celtic ardour and sensibility. English poetry was its 'natural magic' to the Celtic Source. He finds the dominant characteristics of Celtic literature; 'melancholy', 'natural magic', and 'vagueness' which he tries to trace in the works of Shakespeare and Keats.

10.2.5 (a) *Essays in Criticism*

The first series was published in 1865. It contained essays: "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time", "The Literary Influence of the Academies".

"Maurice de Guerin"

"Eugenie de Guerin"

"Henrich Heine"

"Pagan & Medieval Religious Sentiments"

"Joubert"

"Spinoza and the Bible"

"Marcus Aurelius"

10.2.5 (b) The Second Series of *Essays in Criticism*

It was published in 1888. It contains:

"The Study of Poetry"

"Milton"

"Thomas Gray"

"John Keats"

"Wordsworth"

"Byron"

"Shelley"

"Count Leo Tolstoy"

"Arnie"

Arnold puts forth his theory of poetry as criticism of life and as an application of ideas of life under the conditions fixed by the poetic truth and poetic beauty.

10.2.6 *Mycerinus*

This dramatic monologue brings out the story of the king Mycerinus of Egypt, who was informed by the Oracle that he would meet his end in six year's time. The poem ends, not in protest, but in resignation to fate.

10.2.7 *Empedocles on Etna*

It recounts the life of Empedocles, a learned and eloquent philosopher of Sicily about 444 B.C. and his suicide by plunging into the crater of the volcano.

10.2.8 *Sohrab and Rustum*

It is an oriental tale recounting in good narrative verse the pathetic end of Sohrab at the hands of his own father Rustum.

10.2.9 *Thyrsis* (1866)

It is a pastoral elegy written on the death of Arthur Clough. The theme of the elegy is really, Arnold himself, his doubts and problems and introspective melancholy, developed indirectly in an elegiac contest.

10.2.10 *Rugby Chapel* (1867)

It is written in the memory of his father Dr. Thomas Arnold. He quotes many virtues of head and heart.

10.2.11 *Scholar-Gipsy* (1853)

It recounts the adventures of an Oxford Scholar, who tired of seeking preferment, round the gypsies to learn their lore, roamed in the world with them, and still haunts the Oxford countryside.

10.2.12 *Dover Beach* (1867)

It is a representative poem of Arnold and is typical of his outlook on life. Here he gives a pointed expression and the problem of less faith in the Victorian Age. It is marked with an elegiac note, though it has lyric touch about it.

10.3 THE BACKGROUND TO MATTHEW ARNOLD'S LITERARY CRITICISM

The Victorian Age spans a long period of time, in fact from the time Queen Victoria came to the throne until the end of her reign, ie., from 1837 till 1901. In any age, the social trends and atmosphere inevitably influence the literary output. The Victorian Age was no different. Since it was spread over a large period of time, there is also a certain difference between the literary criticism existing at the beginning of the era and that which came into being at the end of the period. But the most significant factor which influenced Literature and Criticism of Literature was the quick changes that were brought about in the social scene of the day.

10.3.0 An Age of Change and Contrast

There were far reaching changes in different fields at the very beginning of this period. There was breakthrough brought in scientific and economic fields and these naturally brought about rapid changes in the social outlook and literary criticism. Science and scientific inquiry had advanced to a great extent, and it had been proved conclusively that

man had descended from the ape rather than from the Garden of Eden. These biological and evolutionary theories which were the essence of the growth of rationalism, shattered age old religious concepts and theories. It also unsettled the common man's religious faith for it came as a rather sudden and terrible shock. Old ideals and values underwent a rapid disruption. Pessimism grown at faith in the Old Orders was inevitable rendering it foolish and unrealistic. The old order was surely and steadily giving place to a new individual consciousness. There was a helpless breakdown of faith.

At the same time technological progress had resulted in the Industrial Revolution. This brought rapid material advancement with better and greater production. Thus, in the economics their prosperity was not an unmixed boon. There was a growth of materialistic concept of life and an erosion of values; a worship of money at the expense of basic human qualities. Moral and social problems were arising out of the over crowding cities. Extremes of poverty and wealth existed together and bred class rivalries. There was a certain erosion of sensibility to beauty. There was no sustenance to be found in religion as there had been a sudden breakdown in religious faith, due to the advances made in biological science. There was a sense of despair even though there was unlimited material progress. There existed a spiritual vacuum, a crisis of culture.

10.3.1 Role of Literary Criticism

The role of literary criticism was to seek some way to re-establish cultural values and make the materialism give way to an ennobling influence, so that life would become better in a humanistic sense. The great critics of the Victorian era sought to give a religious or moral bias to literary criticism, so that it would help to counter the disintegration and degradation of ideals and values in the society of the day.

10.3.2 Respect for Order, Discipline and Restraint

The age was one of contrasts. With the breakdown of faith in the religious sphere, there was a special attempt to prevent the age from

degenerating into chaos. Though there was a spiritual discontent, it was not allowed to degenerate into confusion and lawlessness. The French Revolution had taught the English to avoid a bloody revolution in their own country. They desired progress in the material way but they did not want chaos. It should be an ordered, steady improvement and for this, discipline was necessary. The public was inculcated with a deep respect for authority, law and order, rules and regulation.

Respect for order and self-control found its way into the field of literary criticism too. There was a decline of Romanticism, as the great Romantic writers were either dead or had stopped writing. Those who followed these romantic ideals were not capable of accomplishing much and, in their hands, both creative and critical writing degenerated into sheer erratic, unbalanced and capricious writing. They did not possess the natural critical acumen which made the works of Coleridge, Lamb and Haziltt, great and splendid. In the name of subjectivity these critics of lower degree of the romantic school produced whimsical critical work. The natural reaction to this was an insistence on more balance, discipline and order.

10.3.3 The Golden Mean : The Victorian Compromise

Victorian age was an age of contrasts in which authority co existed with freedom, wealth with want, faith with doubt. It was a compromise which saw the reconciliation of all these opposites. The age with all its 'Divided Aims' was yet of one mind in the end, namely that England's good lay in the golden mean in all spheres, politic, religion, industry or literature.

10.3.4 Influence of French Critics

The influence which is most obvious on the greatest of the Victorian literary Critics, Matthew Arnold, is that of two French Critics. These were Taine and Sainte-Beuve.

Biographical-Critical Method

Taine regarded literature as the product of social forces and these he classified as race, milieu and moment. These have to be studied carefully

before assessing the value of a poet's work. These would help in truly appreciating and understanding the work. Sainte Beuve's approach is similar. The writer's personality, once assessed, would help one to get a better judgement of his work. But the critic has to ignore all other likes and dislikes in the interest of a healthy curiosity, that of seeing an author as he really is.

This Biographical-Critical method appealed to Arnold and to others. It had a promise of accuracy as well as disinterestedness. In this method there was no reference to rules made by a third party as there was in the neo-classical mode. There was not the looseness of romantic criticism which was judgement made on the spot, instantaneously. The writer would be judged with reference to the opportunities present to him and his limitations.

This method was a compromise between neo-classicism with its rigidly and strict rules on one hand, and romanticism which had degenerated with the later and lesser and lesser writers into sheer lawlessness and waywardness on the other.

10.3.5 Arnold: A Representative of Victorian Compromise

Arnold as a critic brought the compromise between faith and doubt to bear in the field of literary criticism. According to him, criticism was the search and propogation of the best that was known and thought in the world. And the critic was to do this in a disinterested manner, i.e., disinterested about practical or political considerations.

Arnold was a poet of compromise between authority of fixed rules and complete autonomy. In other words he was a poet of balance. He had a moral concern as well as a concern for the beautiful and the pleasing. Arnold takes the realism of the rationalistic thinkers like Macaulay, Mill and Spenser and the moral or idealistic concern of Carlyle, and Ruskin. His idea of criticism is to make the best ideas prevail in society and the best poetry to that which is a criticism of life, a moral

application of ideas expressed in beautiful, poetic language and style. He sought 'The Golden' mean in art too. Art should not be separate from life but it should also be beautiful.

Pure literary criticism was lacking

The political situation saw the rise of democracy. With this, there came a spread of education. Much of the reading public did not have the time or inclination to read a complete book. As casual readers, their needs were satisfied by the numerous Reviews which enjoyed a large circulation. Most well known of these Reviews were the *Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly*, etc.

Pure literary criticism was altogether non-existent. The reviewers further lacked any sense of responsibility as their articles were published anonymously. All fields of knowledge such as politics, economics, history or science, intruded into criticism that purported to be literary. It was this tendency to mix politics and the practical side of life with literary criticism that led Arnold to speak passionately for the quality of disinterestedness.

Development of literary criticism in the Victorian era

The period between 1835 and 1860 did not show a significant advance in the field of literary criticism. This was a period in which there was a decay and decline of Literary Criticism. This period saw critics as Carlyle, Macaulay and Mill. But they were more concerned with social, historical or philosophical interests.

1860-1880 saw the emergence of Ruskin and Arnold, two names which stand high in the field of literary criticism. Ruskin is, however, more of an art critic than a literary critic. But he tries to achieve a synthesis between art and morality and literature. The function of criticism according to Arnold, was the propagation of the best that was thought and written in the world.

Art for Art's sake

The last phase of the Victorian period saw the emergence of the theory of Art for Art's sake. There was no longer the synthesis between life and art. The most well known exponents of this theory were Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. In this there can be seen the influence of the thinkers on the continent such as Gautier and Baudelaire of France. Saintsbury and Leslie Stephen also belong to this period. They produced pure literary criticism, not highly original but factual, scientific and orderly.

10.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss Matthew Arnold as a representative of Victorian Compromise.

b) Give an outline of the important works of Matthew Arnold.

10.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Matthew Arnold is often associated with which literary movement during the Victorian Age?

   A) Romanticism

   B) Realism

   C) Aestheticism

   D) Victorianism

2. What was Matthew Arnold's significant contribution to Victorian literature and criticism?

   A) Pioneering the use of science fiction in literature

   B) Advocating for the revival of medieval poetry

   C) Promoting the idea of "culture" as a means of moral and intellectual improvement

   D) Writing epic poetry about ancient Greek mythology

3. Which of the following terms is often used to describe Matthew Arnold's critical approach to literature?

A) Formalism

B) Structuralism

C) New Criticism

D) Humanism

4. In his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Matthew Arnold argues that criticism should primarily serve what purpose?

A) To entertain readers with witty and humorous reviews

B) To preserve traditional literary values

C) To provide objective judgment and moral guidance

D) To challenge the authority of established authors

5. What key social and cultural changes characterized the Victorian Age, which had a significant impact on Matthew Arnold's literary and critical work?

A) Industrialization, urbanization, and the growth of the British Empire

B) A return to pastoral simplicity and rural life

C) A rejection of traditional British values and customs

D) A focus on the supernatural and the gothic in literature

Answers: 1d, 2c,3a,4c,5a

10.6 SUGGESTED READING

'Letters of Matthew Arnold' (1848-1888) and (1895-1896) edited by George W.E. Russell.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. : III **LESSON : 11**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : III**

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM

STRUCTURE

TEXT: *ESSAYS IN CRITICISM*: SERIES I
"THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM"

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The title of the essay is "The function of Criticism at the Present Time". It appeared in his 'Essays in Criticism" in 1865. 'Essays in Criticism' are the best known of Arnold's critical works. Most of the ideals of Arnold in the literary sphere are to be found in these essays. It was the first time in England that any such work had been published. Its style was remarkable, its subject had a wide range, and the opinions were expressed confidently. The first two essays: "The Function of Criticism" and "The Literary Influence of the Academics" were almost revolutionary. They express views of a non-conformist as far as existing views are concerned. They attacked provinciality and self-sufficiency. This shows the influence of France and its critics in his own work.

11.2 THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME

This essay expressed Arnold's thesis that the business of criticism is

a. To know the best that is known and thought in the world.

b. And to make this prevail

c. And to create a current of fresh and true ideas.

There should be a disinterested exercise of curiosity in criticism. He says that the critic should possess vast knowledge along with that of foreign literature. Arnold was the first English critic to talk in terms of a European confederation. The essay had a special significance as it aimed at 'civilising'

the society and putting an end to the cultural anarchy which Arnold found in the society of Britain. Thus it becomes necessary to read the essay and assess its points in a social context, the context in which it was written.

11.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY

Arnold defines Criticism as "A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas."

11.3.0 The Creative Faculty Versus the Critical Faculty

Arnold begins the essay by recalling what he had said in another context, namely that there was great importance as well as need for criticism in English Literature. Many people had said that he ascribed too much importance to criticism. He asserted that the creative effort of the human spirit was much superior to the critical effort. Wordsworth for whom Arnold had the greatest respect, spoke disparagingly of criticism and said that the critic could not have a sensitivity fine enough to appreciate the finer influences of genuine poetry. According to Wordsworth, the time spent on writing a critique was better spent on original compositions. A false and malicious critique would do much harm while an original composition, however, stupid it might be, would not do harm.

Arnold finds this argument untenable. He says, that

(1) if a man feels that he can produce some effect in the field of criticism, he would not be ready to spend time in the fields of creative effect for which he has no aptitude.

(2) Critical activity may be a lower one than the creative activity.

(3) Malicious criticism is harmful. But he does not agree that it is better to give time to inferior creative work rather than to criticism. He cannot agree that Dr. Johnson instead of writing his "Lives of the Poets" should have continued producing plays like *Irene*. Nor can he

agree that Wordsworth instead of writing his *Preface* should have continued to produce inferior poetry such as his "Ecclesiastical Sonnets". He expressed his satisfaction that Goethe, one of the greatest poets, wrote a great deal of Criticism. Arnold says that the Critical effort is lower in rank than the creative power. But man may use his creative faculty in the production of great critical works alongside creation of great works of literature and art.

A great Indian Art Critic Ananda K Coomaraswami seems to hold somewhat similar views. According to him "a true critic must also produce a fundamental work of criticism" that is as good as being a poet for a true poet and true critic operate at the same level.

11.3.1 A Creative Execution Needs New and Fresh Ideas

Execution of creative faculty for the production of great works of art and literature is not possible in all epochs and all times.

Arnold says that a creative artist needs some basic raw material to begin with. In case of literature - ideas are the raw material. If ideas are lacking, creative work is not possible.

It is possible that the whole age may suffer from lack of fresh and new ideas, and therefore it may produce no creative work. Moreover, it is no work of the creative genius to discover new ideas for that is the business of a philosopher.

11.3.2 Work of a Literary Artist

A literary artist works for the synthesis and exposition of new and fresh ideas. "The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery." He is inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere by a certain order of ideas. He deals with these divinely inspired things and presents them in the most effective and attractive combinations. He makes beautiful works with these ideas of man and moment.

MAN AND MOMENT

Then Arnold makes an important point that for the creation of a great piece of literature there has to be two factors. Two powers must combine; the power of the man and the power of the moment. The man is not enough without the moment. It is the moment that is the catalyst which leads to creation of fresh ideas.

11.3.3 Criticism Prepares the Ground for Creation

Creative activity is possible only when there is a fresh current of ideas and there is suitable intellectual environment. It is the function of criticism to create such an atmosphere, such a current of new ideas. The criticism can create a condition suitable for the production of creative works of great merit.

The critic, in all branches of knowledge; theology, philosophy, history, art, science

1. Should see the object as it is in itself, or as it really is;

2. Should acquire a wide knowledge, not merely of literature, but also of other subjects to create an intellectual environment in which a creative artist can do this work.

Criticism can establish a current of ideas which if not absolutely true, is yet true in comparison with the older order of ideas. When the new ideas reach society, there is a stir and growth and out of this stir comes the creative epochs. According to Arnold, criticism can prepare the ground for the effort of creativity to be successful.

11.3.4 A Poet Requires Critical Approach

A poet has to be a worldly man, knowing all about human life before he deals with it in his poetry. This knowledge of the world is absolutely necessary if the poet's work is to be of any significance. It involves a great deal of critical effort. The modern age is a complex one.

Without critical effort creative effort would remain poor and barren. It is possible to acquire this knowledge from books. But it is best to get it from a current of the best ideas as they exist in the intellectual atmosphere.

At the time of Shakespeare in England and Pindar in Greece, the society burst in action. The society was saturated with fresh and new ideas; this made the society alive and intelligent.

Even if the intellectual atmosphere, all pervasive and diffused, could not exist for all times equally, there should be a large body of men who are cultured and free of thought. It was because of existence of such a body of men that Goethe could produce his creative works. It is for the same reason that his poetry has enduring qualities. Byron's work on the other hand does not enjoy such fame, though both had immerse productive power. Goethe's productive power was nourished by a great critical effort while that of Byron was not.

11.3.5 Nineteenth Century's Creative Activity Lacks Mature Critical Effort

In England, the burst of creative activity in literature during the first quarter of the nineteenth century was somewhat premature. The reasons for this may be:

- The creative activity had proceeded without proper material or ideas to work with.
- There was no national growth of thought and of life.
- There was no national growth and stir of intellect.
- Nor was there the culture and force of learning and criticism as there had been in Germany during Goethe's time.
- There was a dearth of current of fresh ideas necessary for a successful creative effort but it did not have enough knowledge to reinforce the creative force and energy in the

direction of great poetry.

England lacked critical effort. There was no current of the best ideas, the raw material of poetry. As Arnold puts it, this makes

- Byron so empty of matter
- Shelley so incoherent
- Wordsworth, even profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety.

They lacked the very material to work with. Had Wordsworth read more books, he would have been a greater poet than any other.

Reading need not be the only method of gaining the necessary knowledge for being a poet. Pindar and Shakespeare were not excessive readers. But the authors lived in the periods of history. And this history was characterised by a current of ideas and this animated and nourished the creative faculty to the highest degree. Such conditions did not prevail in the early years of the nineteenth century in England. Thus there is a lack of thorough interpretation of life in the poetry of this period.

11.3.6 The French Revolution and Creative Activity

Some people may point out that the French Revolution brought about a plenty of stir and activity in the sphere of intellect in the early nineteenth century. But the French Revolution did not remain a purely intellectual movement. It took on a political and practical character. On the contrary, the Renaissance and the Reformation were purely intellectual and spiritual movements. They were productive of the current of great ideas which could benefit the literature created in that period.

The result of the French Revolution was to create an epoch of concentration in England. England withdrew into herself, away from any foreign ideas and thought as she feared that a similar revolution might come about in England. Burke typifies this epoch of concentration

when he speaks eloquently against the Revolution.

11.3.7 Criticism Should be Disinterested

According to Arnold, criticism should follow the path of disinterestedness. Criticism should follow the criteria as given below to become useful:

1) it should firmly reject any ulterior or political or practical considerations which may try to enter.

2) it must be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches.

3) it should value knowledge, ideas for themselves and not attach any importance to them on practical considerations.

4) Criticism should know what is best in thought and knowledge in the world and make it known to others and in this way, create a current of new and fresh ideas.

5) and it should do this with inflexible honesty and ability.

6) it should do no more; it should leave alone all aspects of practical considerations.

11.3.8 Contemporary English Criticism is lacking in the disinterestedness

Arnold found that the contemporary English Criticism is lacking in the disinterested search for knowledge and bringing about a current of ideas. Practical considerations weighed heavily and guided the criticism.

The journals of Britain have been first and foremost the organs of political parties and do not disinterestedly persue ideas. Even at such a critical condition of criticism, Arnold does not give up hope. He finds it reassuring that an era of penance following the bloody revolution had made England more receptive to ideas. The epoch of concentration was giving way to an epoch of expansion. Further, there was an increased amount of leisure for the English man resulting from

technology. This would give more time for the free play of the mind on all subjects. The attitude would be : 'look at all subjects as they are in reality and not for practical considerations'.

11.3.9 Real Criticism leads to Perfection

As Arnold observes, criticism in England had kept itself away from purely intellectual fields, so its self-satisfaction and complacency is retarding and vulgarizing. Real criticism is always capable of leading man to perfection and away from self-satisfaction. Real criticism makes the mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself and what is absolute beauty and fitness of things.

If, in England, criticism failed to accomplish its duty, it was due to its attachment with practical consideration. It did not detach itself from practical consideration. It got involved in self-satisfaction, which would prove very harmful to the nation and people. Arnold quotes in the speeches of two members of Parliament, Adderley and Roebuck , complacency. Arnold disapproves strongly of such complacency.

Adderley and Roebuck lost touch of the consideration and made hollow and baseless claims of superiority instead of something towards perfection. Against the claims of these members, there were reports of child-murders in the newspapers. Their murders were caused because of extreme poverty and for which the hopeless mothers were hanged. The critics made it a business to bring together such contrasts so as to shock people out of complacency. Only then can the human spirit take a step towards perfection.

Criticism thus has a great function - to bring the best ideas and knowledge of the world to everybody, and take man towards perfection. For this the critics have to make man realize the absolute beauty and perfection and thus make him conscious of his own imperfections. Criticism has to enlarge the horizon of man both mental and spiritual.

11.3.10 Subject Matter and Judgement in Criticism

Arnold is the first great English critic to insist on an international approach to criticism. He insists that literature should be seen in the context of the literature of whole confederation of nations. The critic should learn to see his own literature in the context of a great tradition of world literature.

Arnold holds that a critic should be governed by the supreme condition that governs criticism: that the function of criticism is to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. This governs the subject matter of his criticism. What he talks about in his criticism has to be such that he can learn and propagate the best, and thus establish a current of fresh and true ideas.

The critic must get to know literature of the other countries as the literature of England was not at its height. The critic must dwell on foreign thought. Arnold shows a special favour to French and German thought. It is the duty of a critic to know as many literatures as possible but he must know at least another well besides his own. For Arnold, the need of the day was a "criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have, for their proper outfit, a knowledge of Greek, Roman and Eastern antiquity and of one another." It is Arnold's insistence that a critic should have a thorough classical knowledge as well as good knowledge of contemporary thoughts, not merely in England, but in the whole of Europe. Eliot, in his *Tradition and Individual Talent* echoes the thought of a European confederation.

What is the role of judgement in a critic's function? Arnold says that judgement should accompany fresh knowledge instinctively. Judging is often spoken of as the critic's one business. But the judgement is valuable if it is formed 'almost insensibly' in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge. Knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge,

must be the critic's great concern for himself. His role lies in communicating this fresh knowledge and in the process passing his judgement (which, however, is a secondary role) along with it.

Sometimes criticism may have to deal with a subject matter which is too familiar to allow for fresh knowledge. In that case, such as establishing an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard, criticism would involve only judgement- a detailed application of principles. But here the critic should be cautious not to become abstract but to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying.

11.3.11 Creative Character of Criticism

Creative activity ensures happiness for its practitioner. But it is not denied to criticism to be creative. A critic, who has equipped himself well for the task, will get the happiness that a creative artist gets out of his work. Criticism should be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent and ever widening in its knowledge. It may then have a joyful sense of creative activity; a sense which a man of insight and conscience will prefer to the joy which he will get from the creation of something inadequate and fragmentary and starved. There are periods when no other creation is possible.

11.3.12 Conclusion

The essay is a significant critical document. It has a number of shrewd and wise remarks and also shows Arnold's talent for powerful phrasing. Arnold's conception of criticism is apparently very high though he accords to it a lower position than that of pure creative activity. Critical activity is necessary for creative activity and ensures a current of fresh and new ideas.

Arnold emerges as a strong critic of his age, its self-satisfaction and materialism and lack of culture. Complacency comes in the way of the people's advancement in cultural or intellectual sphere. He says that to check this complacency criticism was necessary. He became the

first English critic to define criticism, or at least attempt to define it. He makes cogent remarks regarding the necessity of criticism for creativity. His remark that Goethe was a better poet than Byron mainly because of the critical effort behind his poetry is a valid one. This is what Eliot says when he remarks that poets may be great not merely because of greater imagination but because they made better use of critical faculties. Goethe, says Arnold, is great because he brought his critical faculty to bear upon his creative work.

In the course of the essay Arnold provides slogans which lend a striking quality to his arguments. Many of these are catch phrases that are borrowed or adapted from other writers, especially from French and German writers. The French critic Sainte-Beuve has given him the phrase- "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." The essay also reveals his power of irony and sarcasm, which makes his style lively and interesting.

11.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Give a critical analysis of Matthew Arnold's essay "The Function of Criticism".

b) How according to Matthew Arnold real criticism leads to perfection ?

11.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

In "The Function of Criticism," Matthew Arnold argues that criticism should primarily serve:

A) To entertain readers with witty reviews

B) To promote the author's work

C) To provide objective judgment and moral guidance

D) To create new literary works

Answer: C) To provide objective judgment and moral guidance

According to Arnold, what term does he use to describe the highest function of criticism?

A) Literary analysis

B) Literary creation

C) Literary appreciation

D) Literary interpretation

Answer: D) Literary interpretation

What does Matthew Arnold believe is the central problem facing contemporary society in "The Function of Criticism"?

A) Lack of access to literature

B) The decline of literary creativity

C) The absence of moral and intellectual criteria in criticism

D) Excessive reliance on technology

Answer: C) The absence of moral and intellectual criteria in criticism

According to Arnold, how does criticism contribute to culture and society?

A) By suppressing individual voices

B) By challenging the authority of established authors

C) By providing a touchstone for understanding literature and society

D) By advocating for censorship of literature

Answer: C) By providing a touchstone for understanding literature and society

What does Arnold mean by "disinterestedness" in the context of criticism?

A) A lack of interest in literature

B) An unbiased and objective approach to evaluating literature

C) A focus on personal gain and promotion

D) A disregard for the moral aspects of literature

Answer: B) An unbiased and objective approach to evaluating literature

According to Matthew Arnold, what should critics primarily emphasize when evaluating a work of literature?

A) The author's biography and personal life

B) The political and social context of the work

C) The moral and intellectual qualities of the work

D) The popularity and commercial success of the work

Answer: C) The moral and intellectual qualities of the work

What term does Arnold use to describe literature that possesses timeless value and significance?

A) Classic

B) Popular

C) Romantic

D) Radical

Answer: A) Classic

Arnold argues that criticism should strive to:

A) Preserve the status quo in literature

B) Challenge the traditional values of society

C) Improve the moral and intellectual standards of society

D) Promote experimental and unconventional literature

Answer: C) Improve the moral and intellectual standards of society

According to Arnold, what is the relationship between culture and anarchy?

A) Culture leads to anarchy.

B) Culture is the antidote to anarchy.

C) Culture has no impact on societal order.

D) Anarchy is necessary for cultural progress.

Answer: B) Culture is the antidote to anarchy.

What does Matthew Arnold consider as the ultimate goal of criticism in relation to literature?

A) To create new works of literature

B) To challenge the authority of established authors

C) To provide objective judgment and moral guidance

D) To entertain and amuse readers with witty reviews

Answer: C) To provide objective judgment and moral guidance

11.6 SUGGESTED READING

The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough edited by Howard Foster Lowry (1932).

The Voices of Matthew Arnold : *An Essay in Criticism* (1961) by Wendell Stacy Johnson.

Imaginative Reason : *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (1966) by A. Dwight Culler.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. III **LESSON : 12**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : III**

THE STUDY OF POETRY

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY

TEXT : SECOND SERIES OF "ESSAYS IN CRITICISM"

12.1 THE IMMENSE FUTURE OF POETRY: HIGHER THAN RELIGION OR PHILOSOPHY

Arnold begins the essay by saying that poetry had a great future. It would replace religion and philosophy as the resort for the spirit of man. Man will find a resting place for his spirit in poetry and not in religion and philosophy. Religion based its evidence in 'supposed' facts which were not standing up to a close inquiry and examination. Creeds were crumbling and philosophy was too abstract. Poetry dealt with ideas which were closely related to human nature and as such would attract more and more of mankind. Even science would be incomplete without poetry and Wordsworth has quoted : poetry is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge". Religion and philosophy are mere shadows of knowledge. Poetry alone is the very essence of all knowledge.

Arnold's very high concept of poetry is evident in this opening paragraph of the essay. In an age of crumbling creeds and beliefs when cold scientific inquiry was breaking down long accepted beliefs man faced a spiritual confusion. Arnold took up and, offered to others poetry as a stay of the human soul. Garrod remarks that Arnold's "religion was poetry", and the function that Arnold allots to poetry seems to be in keeping with this impression.

12.2 POETRY: A CRITICISM OF LIFE

Only poetry of a high order of excellence can serve the high destinies of poetry, that of sustaining mankind. High standards, therefore, must be used in the judgement of poetry. Charlatanism, by which Arnold means a confusion of distinctions between the excellent and the inferior, sound and unsound, true

and untrue or only half true, should not enter into the sphere of judging poetry. It is only poetry of the best kind that can and will fulfill the important role of forming, sustaining and delighting mankind. Then he puts forward one of the most famous pronouncements in the field of literary criticism, that, "poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty". The more powerful the criticism of life, the greater would be the consolations and spiritual strength it would offer to mankind.

This statement of Arnold has invited the greatest amount of comment and criticism. The term "criticism of life" has provoked various reactions and interpretations. Many have assailed the description of poetry as a criticism of life. Professor Garrod interprets the term that poetry, so far as it possesses organic unity, is a criticism of the chaos of life. Trilling says that Arnold is not giving a definition of poetry but is telling us the function of poetry. Criticism is not what poetry is but what it does. J.D. Jump points out that by 'criticism' Arnold means something wider than what is normally meant by the term. He means a detached attempt to see things as they are. It implies the ideal attitude of the poet towards his experience of life. In the process, value judgements are naturally and unconsciously evolved. According to Oliver Elton, 'criticism of life' means that poetry clarifies while it delights. It illumines, inspires, and helps mankind to 'live'. Poetry gives an insight into life and its problems and implied in this insight are certain valuable judgements which equip man to face life better. Thus we have to understand the term 'criticism' in a wider sense that is usually meant by it. It is almost the 'interpretation' of life.

12.3 HIGH STANDARDS

Only the best poetry can fulfill the high destinies allotted to poetry. Critics have of course attacked Arnold for this rather vague remark that we need the best poetry. Arnold goes on to say that while reading poetry we must have the highest standards of excellence in mind. Poetry should be judged according to these high standards. By having these high standards we can distinguish the excellent from the inferior. We should form a 'real estimate'. For this, one should avoid the historical estimate and personal estimate.

12.4 PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL ESTIMATES

The personal estimate means giving importance to a poet because of personal affinities and likings. Arnold says that the personal estimate should be eschewed, because it will lead to wrong judgement. It is correct on the part of Arnold to warn against the personal prejudices creeping in and he is also right in remarking that this personal estimate happens in the case of poets who are his contemporaries. But one cannot wholly leave out the personal or subjective factors. Arnold himself admits that it is difficult.

The historical estimate, or judging a poet from the point of view of his importance in the course of literary history, is also not a true judgement of a poet. Its historical importance may make us rate the work as higher than it really deserves. Arnold gives a concrete example of the fallacies of the historical approach. Caedmon's position is important in the historical sense but it would be wrong to hold him at the same level as that of Milton poetically because of this historical position. The French romance *La Chanson De Roland* has vigour, and freshness, and has its moments of pathos. It has a historic value, coming as it did at an early stage in the history of French poetry. It has very high historical and linguistic value. But it cannot be ranked as a great and grand epic on the scale of Homer. Concern with the historical importance has made M. Vitet heap undeserved praise on the romance.

12.5 REAL ESTIMATE: MENTAL ALERTNESS REQUIRED

The reader should try to form a real estimate of a work. One should distinguish a real classic from a dubious classic and from a false classic. A dubious classic should be sifted; a false classic should be completely exposed. But a real classic should be enjoyed as deeply as possible. A classic, says Arnold, is that work which belongs to the class of the very best. To enjoy this type of real classic means that a great benefit can be derived out of it. We must have a clear idea of what is excellent. There is not much use in expecting abstractions to help us form correct judgements of the real worth of a poet. Arnold, one may remark, always disliked abstractions and preferred to have concrete examples. Here, too, he offers the touchstone method as a concrete method to reach the real estimate of a poet's work.

12.6 THE TOUCHSTONE METHOD

Arnold suggests that the reader should have always in his mind lines and expressions of the great masters of poetry and that these lines should be applied as touchstones to estimate other poetry. The other poetry need not resemble these lines and expressions; the other poetry may be very different. But with tact, these lines can be applied to other poetry to form a correct judgement. Tact will help us to use these lines as an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of 'high excellence' and also determine the degree to which this quality is present. Arnold illustrates his point by giving short passages and even single lines from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and from Milton. These specimens, he says, "are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgements about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate" .

The touchstone method is a comparative method and as such there is nothing wrong in it. Comparison can be a useful mode of arriving at a sound judgement of various works. The ancient Greek critic, Longinus also laid down similar tests by which the greatness of literature could be judged.

Critics have objected to the particular passages that Arnold chooses as touchstone passages. They remark that in this choice he has let the personal estimate overcome the real estimate. The passages, say some critics, do not represent the full range and variety of poetic excellence. They are predominantly of one type. It has also been said that this type of comparison is not enough in judging the true merits of a work. Comparison may be used, but its use should extend to the work as a whole and not to its particular parts. The whole impression of a work would have to be compared to the whole impression left on our minds by a great work.

12.7 THE FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF POETRY

Arnold is of the opinion that critics take great pains to state the qualities of poetry in the abstract and this is not of any great use. According to Arnold, it is better to keep certain concrete examples of the highest quality of poetry

and to say that the highest qualities of poetry are to be found in them. However, if these qualities had to be stated in the abstract, Arnold would ask us to find them in (a) the matter or substance of the poetry, and (b) in its manner or style. Arnold makes it quite clear that the greatness of poetry lies in both the matter and the manner. Both aspects are important in judging poetry.

12.8 MATTER AND MANNER : THE IMPORTANCE OF 'HIGH SERIOUSNESS'

As regards matter Arnold agrees with Aristotle that the superiority of poetry over history lies in the fact that former has matter of higher truth and a higher seriousness. The greatest poetry has this truth and seriousness to an eminent degree. The best poetry is also characterised by a superiority of diction and style. Matter and manner are closely connected. The superiority of truth and seriousness is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement in manner and style. Arnold puts forward the view that if the subject of a poem is great the diction and style would also be great. The subject thus becomes all important for if the subject or matter of the poem be trivial or not too great, the poetry would not be of the greatest order; elevated subject matter gives rise to the grand style.

12.8.0 Chaucer's poetry is far superior to the French romances of the time

Chaucer's poetry is far superior to the French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But Chaucer's greatness does not lie in the historical estimate alone. He is a great poet even according to the real estimate. His poetry has an enduring fascination and is also permanent source of joy and strength. His poetry has a genuine excellence.

12.8.1 Truth of Matter and Beauty of Style in Chaucer

The great superiority of Chaucer's poetry lies in the matter and manner of his poetry. The superiority of matter comes from the fact that Chaucer looks upon the world from a central position, which is also a truly human point of view. Chaucer takes a "large, free, simple, clear

yet kindly view of human life." Arnold says that Dryden was correct to remark in the *Prologue to Canterbury Tales* that, "here is God's plenty". Chaucer was "a perpetual fountain of good sense." It is by a "large, free, sound representation of things" that poetry becomes a high criticism of life; because it then has truth of substance. Chaucer's poetry has truth of matter and is a high criticism of life.

As regards style and manner, Chaucer's diction has a "divine liquidness". There is a "divine fluidity of movement". His diction may be justifiably described as "gold dew-drops of speech". Chaucer is the father of English poetry "our well of English undefined". With his charming diction and charm of movement, he makes an epoch and finds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction and movement of Chaucer. To show the characteristic charm of Chaucer's diction, Arnold quotes the line, "0 Martyr sounded in virginity." Arnold says that no other poetry except that of the direct followers of Chaucer showed such liquidity of diction and fluidity of movement. It has been said that this liquidity and fluidity arose from the licentious use of language made by Chaucer. But as Arnold rightly remarks, "this is not so". It is Chaucer's natural talent that led to this charm of diction and style.

12.8.2 Chaucer Lacks 'High Seriousness' and thus is not a Classic

After showering so much praise on Chaucer (with which it is difficult to find fault) we observe that Arnold comes to the rather surprising conclusion that Chaucer is not a classic because his poetry lacks 'high seriousness'. He has not the accent of the classics, says Arnold. This is what is lacking in Chaucer and is present in a classic like Dante. Chaucer's view of things and his criticism of life, the substance of his poetry, had a largeness, a freedom, shrewdness, kindliness; but it had not the high seriousness which is the true mark of the greatest poetry. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. Even Villon has moments of this high seriousness though he does not sustain it. In the greatest poets, this quality is sustained. Chaucer's poetry

has a truth of substance and a corresponding exquisite virtue of style. Though he lacks the high seriousness, it is with him that English poetry is born. That Chaucer is not a classic is of course a debatable point and Arnold has been criticised adversely for this view.

12.9 THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

Arnold passes over this period saying that the age has been recognised for its poetic excellence. Shakespeare and Milton are accepted poetical classics. A significant omission is Donne whom Arnold fails to even mention. The failure to take into account this famous poet has been regarded as a limitation in Arnold as a critic. He now passes on to the age of Pope and Dryden, an age which he classifies as an age of prose and reason.

12.9.0 Dryden and Pope: Classics of Prose and not of Poetry

The age of Dryden and the period that followed, namely the eighteenth century sincerely, believed that it had produced great poetical classics. It was understood that, "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers".

Dryden, Pope, Addison and Johnson were considered the great poetical classics of the age. The historical estimate makes them out to be the great poetical classics. Wordsworth and Coleridge tried to deny these poets the status of classical poets but their views were disregarded.

Arnold, however, does not consider, Dryden and Pope, classics of poetry. Dryden was the founder, the powerful and glorious founder, and Pope the high priest, of the age of prose and reason, of the excellent and indispensable eighteenth century, by comparing the prose of Dryden and that of Milton, Arnold establishes Dryden's superiority in this field. Dryden is the father of English prose. He used for the first time this kind of prose that could be put to everyday use. Arnold says that after the Restoration, there was an urgent need for such a prose and this prose was developed. But this had a chilling effect on the power of the imagination, the imaginative life of the soul. The qualities of good

prose were regularity, uniformity, precision, and balance and these are to be found in the prose of this period but attention to these qualities deadened poetic sensibility. Even the poetry of Dryden and Pope has these qualities and as such, does not have the 'soul' of poetry. Their criticism of life, says Arnold, is not a 'poetic criticism'. Their application of ideas to life may be powerful, but it is not poetical. Thus, Arnold implies that there is a 'poetical' application of ideas to life. The poetry of this age does not have the accent of the true criticism of life that is there in the lines:

"Absent thee from felicity awhile"

Or

"And what is else not to be overcome"

Or

"0 martyr souded in virginitee"

Dryden and Pope write in verse 'they may be masters of the art of versification' but they are not "classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose". This contention of Arnold's too has not gone without criticism and argument. There are critics in the twentieth century who challenge this conclusion of Arnold's and try to prove that Dryden and Pope were as much classics in poetry as in prose.

12.9.1 Gray : A Poetical Classic

In the eighteenth century, Gray was the one who had a true poetic point of view. But he is the scantiest and frailest of classics. Arnold considers his qualities as a man. Gray possessed great qualities of mind and soul. He was a learned man and a great antiquarian, being a professor of history at Oxford.

Gray had studied criticism, metaphysics, politics and morals and had a good taste in painting, prints, architecture, and gardening.

He was the first to glorify the beauties of Nature in English poetry. His qualities of soul were high. He had a low opinion of men who lacked weight and depth of character. He was a man of humour, knowledge, seriousness and sentiment.

Gray was born a poet in an age of prose - an age whose task was to develop a man's understanding, wit and cleverness rather than the profound qualities of the soul. Even the poetry of this age took the argumentative, intellectual, and ingenious colouring of prose. Gray had the qualities of a genuine poet; he was blessed with profundity, fresh and new ideas; still he was isolated in his age.

Gray's work shows the excellence of style he aimed at. He is, indeed, an accomplished craftsman, and he was the pioneer of romanticism in England - though Arnold's dislike of the "historical estimate" would prevent him from acknowledging the latter.

Gray was a poetical classic because he studied the ancient works of Greece and Rome and he caught the poetic point of view of those great writers. The poetic manner and matter is not his own, and hence, the scantiness of his works. The tragedy of Gray was that he was born at a wrong time which was not congenial to his talents.

12.9.2 Real Burns to be found in his Scotch Poems

Coming to Burns, Arnold says that the real Burns is to be found in the Scotch poems. He had no command over English and could not express himself freely and well in it. He himself admitted that his ideas were more barren in English than in Scotch. We must therefore look for the real Burns in his Scotch poems. But much of this world is ugly, full of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, Scotch manners. This world is often sordid and repulsive whereas we expect a poet to deal with a beautiful world. Even the world of a poem like "Cottar's Saturday Night" is not beautiful.

There is the danger in the case of Burns to judge him by the personal

estimate. Some readers consider the real Burns in convivial and delightful pieces as the following:

Leeze me on drink! it gies us mair

Than either school or college ,

It kindles wit it wakens lair,

It angs usfou 0' knowledge.

Be't whisky gill or penny wheep

Or any stronger potion,

It never fails, on drinking deep,

To kittle up our nation.

There is a great deal of this sort of thing in Burns, but it is unsatisfactory, not because it is bacchanalian poetry, but because it has not that accent of sincerity which true bacchanalian poetry does often have. There is something in it of bravado, which makes it poetically unsound. Some admirers of Burns find the true Burns in the poetry where he asserts independence, equality and dignity of human beings as in the poem. Some praise him for moralising against illicit love, or admires and recommends felicity of domestic life and married love. But Arnold feels that in none of these poems does Burns become a truly great poet. There is criticism of life in his poetry for sure. There is a powerful application of ideas made by a man of vigorous understanding and a master of language. But, Arnold says, for great poetry the application of ideas to life should be made "under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." These laws fix as an essential condition, a high seriousness and this comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness is there in the poetry of Dante and other classics but it is not there in Burns.

12.9.3 Burns: not a Classic because he Lacks Seriousness

Burns' poetry, like that of Chaucer's, falls short of being a classic

because it lacks this high seriousness. Truth of matter and style is there but there is no high seriousness. At times there is a depth of poetical quality in his poems but this is not the sustained note we find in the great classics. To make a real estimate of Burns would be to say that there is truth of matter and truth of manner in his poetry as there is in the great master's poetry, but he has not there high seriousness. His genuine criticism of life, when he is most himself, is ironic as in "Whistle O're The Lave O't". He, like Chaucer, is free, large, shrewd, kind in his view of life, and his manner of rendering this view is equally poetic.

The freedom of Chaucer is heightened in Burns by a fiery energy. The benignity of Chaucer is deepened in Burns into an overwhelming sense of the pathos of things - the pathos of human nature and also the pathos of non-human nature. If Chaucer has a fluidity of movement there is, in Burns, a bounding swiftness; Burns is by far the greater force though he has not the charm of Chaucer. The world of Chaucer is fairer, richer, more significant than that of Burns. But when Burns' largeness and freedom of vision gets into full swing as it does in the poems "Tam 0' Shanter." The Jolly Beggars, his poetic genius triumphs over the sordidness of the world represented. In the world of 'The Jolly Beggars' there is more than hideousness and squalor; there is bestiality; yet the production is truly poetic. Its breadth, truth and power are matched only by Shakespeare and Aristophanes. Burns is also great in poems in which he combines shrewdness with archness, benignity with infinite pathos. In such poems we find flawless matter and manner. The genuine Burns is to be found in poems like "Duncan Gray," "Tam Glen", "Whistle and I'll come to you my Lad", and "Auld Lang Syne". The real estimate of this Burns must be very high indeed. Arnold comes to the conclusion that Burns is not a classic but a poet with truth of substance and a corresponding truth of style, producing a poetry which is sound to the core.

12.10 CONCLUSION

Arnold concludes the essay by saying that one is on dangerous ground when one approaches the poetry of poets who were so near to one in time, for the personal estimate is bound to enter into one's clear judgement. But it was possible to steer clear of the danger by using the touchstone method. The real estimate would benefit the reader by helping him to feel clearly and enjoy deeply the best and the truly classic in poetry.

12.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss Mathew Arnold's "Touch Stone Method".

b) Discuss 'The Study of Poetry' as an original document of 19th century criticism.

c) How does study of poetry falls under school of objective criticism.

12.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

What is the primary purpose of Matthew Arnold's "Touchstone Method"?

A) To evaluate the physical condition of books

B) To determine the popularity of literary works

C) To assess the moral and intellectual qualities of literature

D) To identify the literary devices used in a text

Answer: C) To assess the moral and intellectual qualities of literature

In Arnold's "Touchstone Method," what is the "touchstone"?

A) A type of writing instrument

B) A specific type of literature

C) A critical tool for analysis

D) A standard or criterion for judgment

Answer: D) A standard or criterion for judgment

According to Arnold, what should be the primary focus when using the "touchstone" to assess a work of literature?

A) The author's biography and personal life

B) The popularity and commercial success of the work

C) The moral and intellectual qualities of the work

D) The historical context in which the work was written

Answer: C) The moral and intellectual qualities of the work

How does Arnold suggest readers should approach the use of the "touchstone"?

A) With a subjective and personal perspective

B) With a focus on the author's intentions

C) With an unbiased and objective mindset

D) With a preference for the literary genre

Answer: C) With an unbiased and objective mindset

What does Arnold consider as the central problem facing literature in his time, which the "touchstone" method seeks to address?

A) Lack of literary creativity

B) The decline of popular literature

C) The absence of moral and intellectual criteria in literary judgment

D) The impact of technology on literature

Answer: C) The absence of moral and intellectual criteria in literary judgment

How does the "touchstone" method relate to the broader field of literary criticism?

A) It promotes superficial literary analysis.

B) It is unrelated to the field of literary criticism.

C) It provides a practical framework for critical evaluation.

D) It encourages subjective and biased interpretations.

Answer: C) It provides a practical framework for critical evaluation.

According to Arnold, what is the primary role of literature in society?

A) To entertain readers with imaginative stories

B) To challenge societal norms and values

C) To provide moral and intellectual guidance

D) To promote political ideologies

Answer: C) To provide moral and intellectual guidance

What does Arnold believe should be the outcome of using the "touchstone" method on a work of literature?

A) The work should be dismissed as irrelevant.

B) The work should be praised for its popularity.

C) The work should be judged based on objective standards of excellence.

D) The work should be analyzed solely based on its aesthetic qualities.

Answer: C) The work should be judged based on objective standards of excellence.

Which of the following is NOT a key element of Arnold's "touchstone" method?

A) Aesthetic appeal

B) Intellectual and moral content

C) Universality

D) Genre-specific criteria

Answer: D) Genre-specific criteria

In the context of Arnold's "touchstone" method, what does the term "touchstone" symbolize?

A) A critical analysis tool

B) A piece of literature

C) The author's personal background

D) A literary genre

Answer: A) A critical analysis tool

12.13 SUGGESTED READING

‘Matthew Arnold: The Poet as Humanist’ (1967) by G. Robert Stange.

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MATTHEW ARNOLD'S VIEWS

13.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ESSAY

We see in this essay that Arnold held poetry in an exalted position, almost on the level of religion. Indeed one critic says that Arnold considers poetry to be his religion. The essay brings out the main points of Arnold's creed of criticism. It is his view that poetry is a criticism of life, and that there is an application of ideas to life in poetry. There is also the insistence upon the 'high seriousness' as an essential part of all great poetry. He also presents his views on the historical

and personal estimates of poets and their works. He gives his own method to correct such fallacies, namely, the touchstone method, and also uses this method to judge a number of English poets. It is true, of course, that this method or rather the choice of the lines has evoked plenty of criticism. It is not wholly possible or desirable to ignore the historical estimate. Many works have to be studied in their respective contexts.

When Arnold says that poetry is a criticism of life under conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, he is not being very clear. He does not elaborate what these 'laws' are. It does not help much to say that criticism of life means the application of ideas to life under poetic laws. Critics have also charged him with misquoting lines. He himself brings in personal estimate in the choice of lines and offers no standard way of choosing except by saying in rather vague terms that it just required 'tact'. As has been said before, the comparative method may be useful but only if one takes into consideration the impression of a work as a whole. Lines and passages cannot really do justice.

But there is one aspect which is significant in the essay. For the first time, in the history of literary criticism one might say, someone has fully brought out the distinction between style and matter. Perhaps for the first time a critic has asserted that the subject is more important than the style in the sense that if the subject of the poetry is great, the manner would automatically be great. Arnold's demand is for a subject which is distinguished and of great magnitude corresponding to which there would be a sustained intensity of attitude. It is the 'high seriousness' which makes poetical work a classic. He was not in favour of the 'poetic moment' which means a passionate and intense interpretation of any image or idea, sensation or feeling.

13.2 "YET CHAUCER IS NOT ONE OF THE GREAT CLASSICS" : MATTHEW ARNOLD

In his essay, *The Study of Poetry*, Arnold defines a 'classic' as that work which belongs to the best class. And the best class of poetry has truth of matter and beauty of style and 'high seriousness' of matter. His assessment of Chaucer

in the essay as not being one of the great classics, has of course aroused much criticism.

13.2.0 Arnold's Assessment

Arnold begins by praising Chaucer's poetry. It is, he says, far superior to the French romance poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Further, Chaucer's poetry does not need the historical estimate to place it on high level. It has great worth even if we look at it from the point of view of real estimate. His poetry has enduring value and offers enduring joy. He achieved poetic truth as far as matter, poetic beauty, and manner is concerned. The immense superiority of substance lay in the fact that Chaucer surveys the world from a detached view point which is all the while a human, and sympathetic outlook. He looks at life from a central and human point of view. His view is large, free, simple, clear, yet kindly. Arnold agrees with Dryden's praise of the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* that 'here is God's plenty". Chaucer is a "perpetual source of good sense". There is a sound and free representation of things in his poetry which is in keeping with poetry being a criticism of life.

In style and manner of writing too, Chaucer achieves a 'divine liquidness' of diction and a 'divine fluidity' of movement. He is the "well of English undefined". His diction and style justify, in their charm and beauty, the lavish praise of critics who speak of his "gold dew-drops of speech". The liquid charm of his diction and the fluidity of his movement can be followed in later poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Keats. Arnold quotes the line, "0 martyr souded in virginitee" to illustrate this characteristic virtue of Chaucer's diction. Arnold also says that this charm and fluidity of movement and diction is not due merely to the fact that Chaucer's use of the language was more free and licentious. It came out of his true talent. It is a high praise indeed. Chaucer, then achieves the 'poetic truth and the poetic beauty' he has truth of matter and truth of style. Yet Arnold says Chaucer is not a classic.

13.2.1 Not A Great Classic

It comes as a surprise when Arnold makes this statement. After saying that Chaucer's poetry is far superior to French romances, better than contemporary English poetry and superior to English poetry that followed it right upto the Elizabethan age, he says that Chaucer is still not a classic. He has not, says Arnold, the accent of the great classics. He uses the touchstone method here. He compares Chaucer to Dante and says that what Chaucer lacked and what Dante possessed in a great degree was 'high seriousness' which according to Aristotle, is one of the great virtues of poetry. Chaucer's substance and his view of life and the criticism of life has a largeness, is free and benign as well as shrewd, but it has not this 'high and excellent seriousness'. Dante has it and Shakespeare has it; all the great poets have it in a sustained manner. But Chaucer does not show it .'Truth of substance is there' and corresponding to this truth of substance, there is the exquisite charm of style and manner. But he has not 'high seriousness' because he has poetic truth, in both matter and manner. He is the father of English poetry.

13.2.2 Surprising Conclusion

Arnold's conclusion that Chaucer is not a classic has, naturally enough, provoked much criticism. Arnold's conclusion might have been arrived at because he regarded poetry in the light of something religious, as Tillotson remarks: "True poetry for him could not but be as solemn as Church". The insistence on 'high seriousness' as an indispensable part of all classics shows a certain lack of breadth of vision on Arnold's part. Further, this notion of 'high seriousness' is somewhat confusing if it were to exclude a comic point of view of life such as Moliere's and ultimately Chaucer's too. Comedy does not mean non-seriousness; it is merely a different point of view. Seven laughter can possess high seriousness; it is not merely the "serious, grim or melacholy" which has high seriousness. As Trilling remarks: "If Chaucer is not serious, then Mozart is not serious and Moliere is not serious". We may note what Eliot observes in this context. Chaucer was not "altogether deficient in

high seriousness. First he (Arnold) contrasts Chaucer with Dante: we admit the inferiority, and we are almost convinced that Chaucer is not serious enough. But is Chaucer, in the end, less serious than Wordsworth, with whom Arnold does not compare him? And when Arnold puts Chaucer below Francis Villion, although he is in a way right, one does not feel that the theory of high seriousness is in operation."

In the end it is obvious, that to Arnold, Chaucer was not a classic because he is also a great humorist. Chaucer's breadth of vision is informed by a most human and tolerant laughter and comic point of view. His lucid imagination, his fluent expression, all are coloured by a gay and vital laughter, a humour which is rich, profound and sane, born out of kindliness and a keen perception of human life and nature. And we must disagree with Arnold if he excluded Chaucer from the great classics because there is laughter in his works. Laughter is after all no bar to seriousness. As Chesterton points out, Chaucer is a humorist in the "grand style". Even if we disregard his humour, there is in Chaucer's poetry much that is solemn and austere and worthy of the grandest tragedy. Classics do not necessarily wish to be sad or grim and painful. And to deny the place of a classic to Chaucer would be to restrict the scope of the term and show a certain lack of catholicity in one's judgement.

13.3 "POPE AND DRYDEN ARE NOT CLASSICS OF OUR POETRY, THEY ARE CLASSICS OF OUR PROSE"

Making a survey of English poetry from Chaucer onwards, Arnold makes the statement that the eighteenth century was excellent and indispensable and that Dryden and Pope are the classics of prose in this age. According to Arnold, Dryden and Pope are not classics of poetry. Pope and Dryden were great men of letters but their chief merit lies in the advance they made in the field of prose. Dryden was the first to make significant contribution towards development of prose which could be put to diverse uses and which was immensely superior to the prose of Milton.

13.3.0 Fit Prose: The Need of the Period

Arnold makes a shrewd statement when he says that coming to the Restoration period the time was fit for prose. Reason and scientific inquiry were gaining interest and communication had to be couched in easy, simple and cogent prose which could be understood by the public in general. The qualities of a good prose, says Arnold, are regularity, uniformity, balance and precision. This prose was achieved in this age which he calls the excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. But it is also a deadening of the 'soul' and the imaginative impulse which was so necessary for poetry. Dryden and Pope paid attention to the achievement of these qualities which are essential for a good prose. Arnold concludes: "Dryden is the puissant and glorious founder; Pope is the splendid high priest of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century". Arnold's gift of phrasing is evident in this statement. Terms such as "excellent and indispensable eighteenth century" and "age of prose and reason" have become catchwords now.

13.3.1 Excellent and Indispensable Eighteenth century

It is unarguable that the eighteenth century is indeed excellent and indispensable as far as literary history of English is concerned. It is also unarguable that the age was remarkable as the age of prose and reason. The growth of scientific inquiry and rationalism was the main contribution to the development of prose. And the development of prose in its turn gave rise to the many genres of writing that were attempted successfully for the first time in this period. It gave rise to the novel; it gave rise to a biographer like Boswell, a critic like Johnson, and essayists like Steele and Addison. It also gave rise to philosopher like Locke, and a letter writer like, Lord Chesterfield.

13.3.2 Arnold's View of Dryden and Pope

There is no denying the fact that Dryden is a classic of prose. He is a classic indeed. He did much to develop prose and we have only to

compare him with earlier writers like Milton and Browne to realise his strength and ability as a prose writer. He does indeed show all the characteristics of a good prose. But then we enter controversial ground when we have to deal with the question of whether he is a classic poet. F.R. Leavis is firmly of the opinion that he is. Satire is a form of poetry and it can be a great poetry. And Dryden is an eminent satirist and as such he is also a great poet. One cannot deny the greatness of Dryden as a satirist. He has also used the heroic couplet with telling effect. The satirical portraits that he draws are admirable. Eliot says that Dryden is one of the tests of a catholic appreciation of poetry. Dryden's satire is often great and admirable. But Arnold is of the opinion that these men of letters do not have the accent of great poets.

The accent of lines such as

"Absent three from felicity a while"

is missing in the lines of Pope and Dryden.

13.3.3 Lack of "Poetic Criticism"

Arnold feels that the essential quality of the poetry of Pope and Dryden is 'prosaic'; their verses do not proceed from men who possessed a 'poetic' vision. They lacked in poetic criticism of life; their poetry did not have the accent of high seriousness which is very essential according to Arnold's concept of poetry. Neither the matter nor the manner of Dryden's and Pope's poetry had the sincere application of ideas to life, nor did they have the largeness, freedom, insight and benignity, which was to be found in the poetry of Chaucer. Their poetry had all the qualities of an age of prose and reason. They are the master craftsmen, not the poets.

13.3.4 Two Kinds of Poetry

Arnold is of the opinion that the poetry of Dryden and Pope is not 'genuine'; being as it is, conceived and composed in their wits. Genuine poetry, according to Arnold, is conceived and composed in the

'soul'. To Arnold the difference between these two kinds of poetry is immense. The poetry of eighteenth century England proceeds from ratiocination, antithesis, and other intellectual devices. It is clever craftsmanship, especially in hands of Pope, but it is not true poetry, as it does not take us deep below the surface. It is not a profound application of ideas to life. Genuine poetry proceeds from the poet's soul; it is essentially simpler than the poetry composed in the wit. This 'genuine' poetry affords greater satisfaction, says Arnold.

13.3.5 Inability to Appreciate Satiric Writing or Humour in Poetry: Arnold's Limitations

We are brought to a glaring drawback in Arnold's concept of poetry. There is too much insistence on 'high seriousness' so much so that it reaches the level of 'solemnity'. There is an inability to appreciate irony, wit and humour in poetry. Arnold seems to think that great poetry has nothing to do with wit ; wit and irony and humour are essential qualities of prose. We see in his idea of poetry a romantic prejudice in favour of the lyric. Thus he is not even ready to consider the possibility of Dryden's satires as great poetry. Satiric writing, according to Arnold, was not of the highest form of poetry. Yet modern critics such as F.R. Leavis have contended that satire can be and should be considered as one of the high forms of poetry. We cannot ignore Dryden's satires. Satires are motivated by some occasion, and hence subject-wise they tend to be what is called 'dated'. But we still appreciate Dryden's *The Medal*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, and *Mac Flecknoe*. We admire the wit, humour and irony, and the admirable use of the heroic couplet. T.S. Eliot says that Dryden was more than a satirist, and that the depreciation of Dryden is not due to the fact that his work is not poetry, but to a prejudice that the material, the feelings, out of which he builts, is not poetic. To dismiss Dryden as a poet means that one does have certain pre-conceived notions regarding poetry. Actually the trouble arises from being too sure "as to what genuine poetry is". Eliot considers

that there are not merely two kinds of poetry, but that there are many kinds.

13.3.6 Defence of Pope as Poet

Modern critics have pointed out that Pope has not made any significant contribution towards English prose and it would be wrong to call him a classic of prose. But here it may be argued that Arnold did not mean that Pope actually wrote in prose, but that the qualities of prose are to be found in his poetry. Once more it becomes apparent that Arnold's concept of poetry was narrow; it did not allow the inclusion of satiric poetry. Tillotson has argued that the very line chosen by Arnold to illustrate the lack of poetical qualities, in fact has a flicker of tenderness in the expression "these chicks my own." There are many such 'emotive' phrases to be found in Pope's poetry. It has also been argued that Pope's poems are designed perfectly. His use of language and versification is admirable. His mastery over the heroic couplet is well-known.

One cannot deny that Pope is precise and clear in his expression. Pope was furthermore the poet of artificial life. But does this deny him the status of being a good poet? It would, if we are to narrow down the scope of "genuine" poetry to the kind that is conceived and composed in the 'soul'. But we cannot help feeling that there are different kinds of poetry and one cannot really say that one is more genuine than the other. We cannot deny that Pope is a great poet of his own sort, so far as his poetry's ability to give pleasure is concerned.

Measured by the standards of the imagination, perhaps, Pope falls short of being a great poet, but if the test be of wit, Pope's position is assured. It is true that there is missing in Pope's poetry, the warmth and passion of emotion and imagination. Yet, even here, one remembers the delicate and imaginative treatment of the sylphs in *The Rape of the Lock*. Largely, however, Pope is a poet of the intellect. *The Rape of the Lock* is a master-piece of its own kind. It is an admirable poem in the mock-

heroic genre. If we say that the deficiencies of Pope as a poet lie in his lack of imaginative poetry, we are, after all, making a judgement in favour of the 'romantic' concept of poetry i.e. in favour of the subjective lyric.

13.3.7 Conclusion

Arnold's statement that the eighteenth century is excellent and indispensable shows his shrewdness as a critic. One cannot argue with his comment. Nor can one argue with his contention that the age was one of prose and reason. It is when we come to the statement that Dryden and Pope are not classics of poetry, that we enter controversial ground. There cannot, in truth, be a categorical resolution of this argument. There will always be supporters of Arnold's contention, as there will be avid critics of it. What is genuine poetry is a difficult question to answer. Poetry, after all can be of different kinds, and how can one say which is better, and, which is best. Pope and Dryden are poets in their own right, within their own sphere. That is all one can expect from a poet.

13.4 "OUR EXCELLENT AND INDISPENSABLE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY": MATTHEW ARNOLD

13.4.0 Introduction

When we talk about the eighteenth century, we are including (nationally) in this period the later part of the seventeenth century also. It was in the later part of the seventeenth century that there were set in motion some of the changes and developments, which continued into the eighteenth century to give it the special character it has. These changes and developments were, mainly, a reaction to the Elizabethan romanticism which had become somewhat extravagant and excessive in the hands of lesser writers. The developments of this period left a lasting mark on the history of English literature, so much so that it is not an exaggeration to call it excellent and indispensable, as Matthew Arnold called it. He also called it an age of prose and reason. Reason and rationalism were indeed the hallmark of this period.

13.4.1 Reason Versus Emotion and Enthusiasm

The reaction against the Elizabethan romanticism started with Denham, Dryden and Waller in the later part of the seventeenth century. Reason became an important aspect of all writing and thoughts. Reason manifested itself in good sense, rationalism, intellect, and wit, but it was totally against any kind of extravagance, eccentricity, escapism and lack of realism. All the important writers of this age glorified reason both in their literary and critical work. With the insistence on reason came the insistence on control and the necessity of adhering to rules and regulations. There is also a stress laid on the imitation of the "ancients", that is, the Greek and Latin writers of antiquity. We find this rational approach to all kinds of literature. We find that this insistence on reason had its beneficial aspect and in that it led to the development of the modern prose in English.

13.4.2 English Prose: Insistence on Clarity, Simplicity and Lucidity

Prose is essentially a language of reason and rationality. The greatest service done by the eighteenth century to the development of English literature is its contribution towards evolving a prose, suitable for expressing different modes of thought, and a wide range of subjects like it became possible for the setting up of the Royal Society for scientific inquiry and experiment as it was the most suitable medium. Science is essentially based on reason. Scientific discoveries and hypothesis also required a suitable vehicle for its communication. This could only be provided by a simple and clear prose style devoid of poetic flourishes and extravagant imagery. Thus there was an insistence on clarity and lucidity in expression so that all could understand easily. The need of the day was a regular, simple, lucid, clear prose style. And the writers naturally obliged. It is also to be noted that it was in the eighteenth century that political parties gained great importance. Each party desired its ideas to influence the people. For this they employed writers. The writers had to express these ideas in simple

form to be understood by the common reader. The development of prose led to the development of several genres of literature.

13.4.3 The Periodical Essay

The periodical essay which found its complete and consummate expression in the hands of Addison and Steele, was a genre peculiar to the eighteenth century. Addison and Steele were instrumental in the development of prose which was free of the elaborate flourishes of the earlier prose of Browne and Burton. It was simple, lucid and clear. The prose satirists of the day such as Swift, to name only the greatest of them all, did their best to improve the prose style. It is also to be remembered that in the periodical essays of Addison and Steele was the germ of the novel which was soon to develop in England for the first time.

13.4.4 Satiric Poetry

Arnold disregards the importance of the age as far as poetry is concerned. But modern critics have pointed out the merits of the greatest satires written in this age, such as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* which is a superb example of poetry of the "artificial life". We cannot underestimate the contribution made by this age, if we regard satire to be a genre of poetry. The wit, the irony and the brilliance of expression of these satiric poems cannot be ignored so easily. It is to be remarked that this period saw the perfection of the "heroic couplet" .

13.4.5 Philosophical Writings

The development of prose and reason led to the beginning of an important period in English philosophic thought. We have Hobbes and Locke, two English philosophers of this period, expressing their thoughts and ideas on empirical philosophy. These thinkers had an inevitable influence on the writers of the age.

13.4.6 Development of a New Genre: The Novel

The most important development of this period was the beginning of the novel. As the name suggests, it was a new genre. Its development was possible because of the development of prose. It was this period which saw the easy prose in what can be called a precursor of the novel, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The rise of the middle classes saw the rise of a new reading public. It was inevitable that this period would see the beginning of the English novel. We see the essays of the *Spectator*. Then came the first masters of the genre in Richardson and Fielding whom Smollett and Sterne followed.

13.4.7 Criticism, Biographers, Historians and Political Thinkers

The period also saw the development of writers in other fields. In the field of criticism there was the great Dr. Johnson whose writings may not be agreed upon by modern readers but whose importance can never be overestimated. It is in this period that we see the development of a great biographer like Boswell and Edward Gibbon's monumental and important work of history, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" that appeared in this period. The period also saw the rise of great political thinkers and orators such as Edmund Burke.

13.4.8 Conclusion

We see that the eighteenth century is indeed excellent and indispensable. It produced so much in many fields of literature and thought. It saw several new developments and brought about many beneficial changes, the most notable of these being the simplicity its writers brought to English prose so that it became what one critic calls "the maid of all work", i.e., suitable vehicle of communication for a wide range of subjects. It accomplished much and much of what it accomplished, was excellent in quality.

13.5 ARNOLD'S ASSESSMENT OF BURNS

It is in the essay, *The Study of Poetry*, that Arnold makes an assessment of Burns' poetry, in the course of a brief assessment of English poets. The assessment of Burns, as those of other poets, reveals both Arnold's critical acumen and the limitations of his ideas.

13.5.0 The Real Burns in his Scotch Poems

Arnold rightly remarks that it is in the Scotch poems that the real Burns is to be appreciated. His English poems, as Burns himself said, were rather barren in ideas. Much of the world, which is presented in these poems, is also not beautiful. It is a world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, Scotch manners - all of which is quite harsh, sordid and repulsive. But, says Arnold, Burns' genius lay in the fact that he could and often did triumph over this ugly world.

Incidentally, Arnold's categorical statement in this connection, that "it is advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world", can be questioned. Is it always of an advantage? The essential advantage of a poet is the ability to see beneath both beauty and ugliness and "to see the boredom and the horror, and the glory" (T.S.Eliot).

13.5.1 How and Where does Burns Triumph over the Ugly World.

Burns is not at his best in lines such as

"Leeze me on drink! it gives us mair

Than either school or college.."

though some of his admirers find them convivial, genuine, and delightful, Arnold feels that this kind of poetry is not even true Bacchanalian poetry - it lacks that accent of sincerity. It is poetically unsound because it has a note of bravado. Other admirers of Burns find him great in the poems in which he speaks for liberty, and equality of human beings. Some praise him for direct moralising as when he says

that illicit love hardens the heart and petrifies the feeling. Arnold agrees that in the poetry of Burns there is an application of ideas, made by a man of vigorous understanding and a master of language.

13.5.2 Not A Classic : Lacks High Seriousness

Arnold comes to the same conclusion about Burns as he does about Chaucer. The application of ideas of life has to be under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. And these laws fix as an essential condition a 'high seriousness'. This arises from absolute sincerity. This assent of high seriousness is possessed by Dante and other classics but it is lacking in the poetry of Burns. But, in some verses as in the following: " We twa hae padil't the burn From morning' Sun till dine; But seas between us braid hae roar'd Sin auld land syne". There is profound and passionate melancholy. There is, in these lines, a depth of poetic quality, according to Arnold. But he cannot sustain this quality for the whole poem. His genuine criticism of life is ironic.

And we wonder if there is not something wrong about Arnold's concept of 'high seriousness'. It does seem as if it is not really seriousness that Arnold speaks of, but solemnity. He shows an inability to appreciate the "ironic" - he cannot admit the "comic" as great. He seems unaware of the fact that there can be 'high seriousness' in irony and comedy too. Arnold admits that Burns' view of life, like that of Chaucer, is large, free, shrewd, kindly, and therefore, truly poetic. He has a matching truth of style. And yet, like Chaucer, he is denied the position of a classic, though Arnold says that the real estimate of Burns is high.

13.5.3 Greatness of Burns

Burns' freedom of vision is heightened by a fiery, reckless energy. The benignity of Chaucer deepens in Burns into an overpowering sense of the pathos of things - of both human and non-human nature. The manner of Burns has spring and bounding swiftness. There is force in Burns, though the charm is less than it is in Chaucer. When the largeness

and freedom of Burns gets full sweep, as in "Tam 0' Shanter" and "The Jolly Beggars" his poetic genius triumphs over its world. The world of "The Jolly Beggars" is hideous and squalid, there is bestiality; yet the work is a poetic success. It has breadth, truth and power - it is only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophanes.

After heaping so much praise on the poetic genius of Burns, Arnold is not ready to rank him among the classics. He admits that in a number of poems such as "Duncan Gray", "Tam Glen", "Whistle and I'll come to you my lad", and "Auld Lang Syne", there is flawless manner and the result is a poetic whole. There is a combination of shrewdness with infinite archness of kindliness with infinite pathos. There are touches of piercing pathos in lines such as :

"We twa hae padil't the bum

From momin' sun till dine

But seas between us braid hae roar'd

Sin auld Lang Syne".

In such pieces Burns is lovely and sound. Perhaps Burns is poetically most wholesome by the perfection of soundness of his lighter and archer masterpieces.

13.5.4 Cautious Assessment

Arnold's critical insight shows itself when he says that Burns is best in his Scotch poems, and that the real estimate of Burns is high. But Arnold's caution and judicious approach prevents him from praising certain aspects of Burns' poetry. He has silent ability to describe his own emotions in a simple and vivid manner. In such poems Burns would not qualify for Arnold's criterion for poetry - that poetry is an application of ideas to life. It shows the limitation of Arnold's view of poetry. One cannot help but agree with Eliot that Arnold's attitude towards Burns is somewhat patronising.

13.5.5 Conclusion

Both Chaucer and Burns are treated alike by Arnold. Both are good poets but not classics. What is lacking in them is 'high seriousness'. Arnold seems to be applying his standard of good poetry a bit too exactingly. The assessment of Burns shows Arnold's critical acumen. At the same time it shows up the limitations of his ideas on poetry.

13.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Briefly discuss Arnold's assessment of Chaucer in the essay "The Study of Poetry".

b) According to Arnold "Pope and Dryden are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our Prose". Illustrate the statement.

c) Discuss Arnold's assessment of Burns.

13.7 SUGGESTED READING

'The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold' (1959) written by William Robbins.

'Matthew Arnold and the Three Classes' (1964) by Patrick McCarthy

'Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition' (1965) by Warren D. Anderson.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. III **LESSON : 14**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : III**

MATTHEW ARNOLD: *THE STUDY OF POETRY*

STRUCTURE

14.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will help the learner to explain the life of Matthew Arnold and his work, *The Study of Poetry*. It is equally important to know Arnold's principles of Criticism, different aspects of poetry, his views about poetry of famous poets and his legacy. The unit also focuses on his 'Touch stone Method' of evaluating the poetry.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Essays in Criticism (Second Series) were first published in 1888 and a Prefatory Note to it was contributed by Lord Coleridge.The first essay, 'The Study of Poetry' with which the volume opens, was written for Humphry Ward's *Selections from the English Poets*. It is a well-documented essay recording his mature judgements upon poetry. Truth and seriousness are the two elements to which he draws the reader's attention. If they make what good poetry should be, he holds that there is a perfect correspondence between matter or content and form or style. To begin with, this is a sound approach to poetry; it is recognition of organic connections between thought and style. The essay has fairly wide range. He proceeds to develop the idea that poetry is a criticism of life under conditions fixed for it by poetic truth and poetic beauty. The historic estimate or the personal estimate cannot establish good poetry. He points out how either of them leads us away from a correct assessment of the true qualities of poetry. The poetical way of arriving at the real estimate is to study great poetry, fix in the mind the memorable lines and passages and apply them as a test.

Briefly, but discursively, Arnold reviews the course and development of poetry. What he means by a real estimate he applies to Burns. In coming to speak of Chaucer he traces the development of early French poetry – the poetry of the Troubadours (Southern France) and the poetry of Trouveres (Northern France) – and shows Chaucer's superiority in substance and style of poetry, which determines the future of English poetry – a fact pointed out by Arnold. The age of Dryden and Pope is an age of prose which meant a consequent fall-off in poetry, and it is shown how the age hampered Gray. In spite of anti-romantic proclivities, he does justice to Burns, even when pointing out his limitations.

14.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

Matthew Arnold was born in December 1822, at the Thames-side village of Laleham, near Staines. He was the eldest son among the nine children of Thomas Arnold, the famous Headmaster of Rugby, who founded the modern Public School system in England.

Arnold started his career as a fifth-form master at Rugby. But only an year after (in 1847) he became Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, President of the Council in Lord Russell's government. He liked this employment very much. In 1851, however, he was appointed an Inspector of Schools, a post which he held with great distinction for 35 years.

Matthew Arnold began his career as a poet in 1849. But, through the volume published in 1867, at the request of Robert Browning established himself as a poet. The notable poems in this volume were *Tristram and Iseult*, *A Summer Night,* and *The Obermann Stanzas*. In 1853 appeared a new collection, *Poems by Matthew Arnold*, containing the best of his old work and much that was new. The most striking new pieces in this volume were *Sohrab and Rustam* and *The Scholar Gypsy*. The volume of 1853 had another remarkable feature. To it Matthew Arnold appended a preface in which he propounded his theory of poetry. This was recognized even in his own day as the most important contribution to the literary criticism since Wordsworth's

famous treatise *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. This placed Matthew Arnold at the height of his literary reputation. He was recognized not merely as a poet but a poet with a new theory of poetry of abiding importance. In recognition of his distinction as a poet and critic Arnold was offered the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford in 1857. He held this distinguished chair for ten years. His last volume of poems, *New Poems*, appeared in 1869. This volume was Arnold's crowning achievement as a poet. It contained such unforgettable pieces as *Thyrsis, Rugby Chapel, Heine's Grave, A Southern Night, Dover Beach* and *Obermann Once More*.

Arnold also wrote a series of essays and lectures. His chief works on theological and social subjects were *Culture and Anarchy: An essay in Political and Social Criticism* (1869); *Saint Paul Protestantism* (1870); *Friendship's Garland* (1871); and *Literature and Dogma*: *An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (1873). Arnold also gave a series of excellent lectures *On the Translating of Homer*. But he gained popularity outside the academic world with the publication of the first series of *Essays in Criticism* in 1865. In 1867 he published the famous essay *On the Study of Celtic Literature*.

In 1886 Arnold retired from the department he had served so faithfully for 35 years. Two years later he died very suddenly of heart failure.

14.3 ARNOLD'S PRINCIPLES OF CRITICISM

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

introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as the two primary tools of criticism.

14.3.0 Arnold as a Critic

Matthew Arnold echoes the thoughts of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's views of poetry when he declares that the ultimate function of humankind lies in exercising its creative power. Arnold therefore is able to link criticism with creative power in his essay, ultimately asserting that writing criticism actually produces in its practitioner a sense of ecstatic creative joy very similar to that enjoyed by the person who engages in creative writing. Arnold's evaluations of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism, and as a poet-critic he occupies an eminent position in the rich galaxy of poet-critics of English literature. Arnold writes, "It is because criticism has so little in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial that it has so ill-accomplished, in this country, its best spiritual work; which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him towards perfection by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself and the absolute beauty and fitness of things." He takes evidently the business of a critic very conscientiously, and states the function as well as the aim of criticism. Criticism should be kept on the intellectual plane, and made free of any extraneous considerations. Detachment or disinterestedness is the quality to be cultivated by a critic. And so he can dwell upon what is excellent in itself and reveal to us the beauty and fitness of things, and cure us of self-satisfaction. All this presumes exquisite perception and sensibility, a balanced judgement and a literary conscience on the part of a critic.

14.3.1 His Principles of Criticism

Matthew Arnold while talking about the function of a critic, says that criticism is "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." How can a critic fulfil this task? First, the critic must "see things as they really are." Secondly he should pass on his ideas to others – his aim being to "make the best ideas prevail." Thirdly, he prepares an atmosphere favourable to the creative genius of the future – and thus he releases "a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power." The function of a critic then is to promote 'culture'. In *Culture and Anarchy* he analyses the duty of a critic pre-eminently as a man of culture, concerned with all aspects of living. Culture, according to him, is a study of perfection, which manifests itself in "the moral and social passion for doing good." The man of culture is, therefore, concerned not only with seeing and knowing truth, but with making it prevail.

It is necessary to understand fully what Arnold means by the term 'disinterestedness'. It is true that a critic should cultivate an unbiased, independent and objective outlook; he should have no axe to grind, as one might say. But Arnold had something more in his mind. We have to recall here his classification of the British people - the Barbarians, i.e. the aristocrat who is accomplished in 'spirit and politeness', but inaccessible to 'ideas and light'; the bawling, hustling, smashing and Beer-drinking populace; the Philistines – the middle classes with whom the world is too much, and who lay waste their powers, getting and spending. He wishes that the critic should not let himself be swayed by their ideas and prejudices. Philistinism is the antithesis of culture. In his essays, O.H. Heine states the position clearly: "the enthusiast for idea, the reason, values reason, the idea in and for themselves; he values them, irrespectively of the practical convenience which their triumph may obtain for him; and the man who

regards the possession of these practical conveniences as something sufficient in itself, something which compensates for the absence or surrender of the idea, of reason, is, in his eyes a Philistine. It is the ideal of intellectual and spiritual excellence which he consistently upholds, and it is in accord with the best that has been known and thought in the world".

Now the point is that while he emancipates the critic from some degrading prepossessions – from interests that are intellectually unacceptable, he binds him down to "moral and social passion for doing good". It is not the kind of disinterestedness that we deemed of an artist and a critic. Behind Arnold's idea of perfection is some moral prepossession; the disinterestedness which he recommends as the essential quality of a critic is of a limited kind. R. A. Scott James points out what this disinterestedness should be: "When I say that the activity of the artist is disinterested, I do not mean that he may not be concerned with any conceivable theme under the sun, but that his business is to provide us with an experience, and that any end he may have beyond making that experience vivid and complete is an alien end, destroying his singleness of purpose wholly disruptive of his art and destructive of its energy." Arnold makes art and criticism subservient to "the moral and social passion for doing well."

Arnold seems to assign a high responsibility on the shoulders of a critic. He thinks that the potential poet is waiting, sterile till the professional critic prepares the ground for him. In a sense, the critic is a John the Baptist. Arnold enjoins upon the critic a social responsibility: "The elements with which creative power works are: ideas; the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time." And it is the business of the critic to make these ideas available to the creative artist; the creative artist's work is one of "synthesis and exposition". A great artist, say, one like Shakespeare, does not owe so much to a critic as Arnold makes him to.

Arnold tells that critic has to discover the best ideas and spread them. This is a practical method. In *The Study of Poetry* he writes, "Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes characteristics of a quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have resource to concrete examples – to take specimens of poetry of the high, very highest quality, and to say: 'The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed there.' He recommends a 'real estimate', which he discourages. By such a means we shall learn to enjoy the best work. He points out that the high qualities lie both in the matter and substance of poetry and in the manner and style. To discover the best, we must then study and fix in our mind the lives and expressions of the great master and apply them 'as a touchstone to the other poetry'.

This is indeed a very practical method. Longinus suggested a similar practical test. There are passages, he says, in which we may recognize 'the beauty and truth to the sublime' because they 'always please and please all (fastidious) readers... and take so strong a hold on the memory that they cannot be forgotten'.

14.4 *THE STUDY OF POETRY*

The Study of Poetry is a major critical text of the Post-Victorian era. It was published nearly twenty five years after Arnold's famous Preface to his poems. Perhaps the finest method of writing about the essay is to begin with beginning of his famous essay: "The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find and even surer. There is not a creed which is not shaken nor an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, nor a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact, it has attached its emotions to the fact, and now the fact is as it is. But for poetry, the idea is everything the rest is a world of illusion, of diving illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea, the idea is fact."

In his seminal essay *The Study of Poetry* (1888) he says that poetry alone can be our sustenance and stay in an era where religious beliefs are fast losing their hold. He claims that poetry is superior to philosophy, science, and religion in his theory that in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose.

In the essay Matthew Arnold attempts to answer two fundamental questions – What is poetry and what is its function in human society? Commencing with the later enquiry, he develops the theme which is the critical work, namely, the paramount importance and high destiny of poetry. Everything else is changing, ephemeral; religious rise and fall, the truths embodied in Poetry are alone eternal. It is the 'breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'.

Hence when other helps fail, the spirit of our race will find here alone its consolation and stay. To the second question, no direct reply is possible. Arnold contents himself by illustration, by means of typical quotations from the great poets of all time, Homer and Dante and Milton and Shakespeare, what true Poetry is. He concludes by warning the student against two common fallacies in criticism, the historical and the personal estimates. Turning to English poetry, he shows that it begins with Chaucer: but Chaucer, admirable though he is, has not the 'high-seriousness' which marks the classic poet. The eighteenth century was par excellence the Age of Prose: the only authentic voices in it were those of Gray and Burns.

14.4.0 The Value of Poetry

"The future of poetry," says Arnold, "is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay." He says that poetry is more lasting than any other human institution or accomplishment. Even religion will, at one time or the other, fail. But poetry is man's immortal possession, or perennial source of joy, comfort and

inspiration. Man will forever turn to poetry to interpret life for him, to console him, to sustain him. Wordsworth describes poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge."

Poetry is superior to history, philosophy, science, even religion. "Without poetry", says Arnold, "our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry". Poetry possesses the 'supreme power of sustaining, edifying and elevating man to the highest possible degree'. This, as Sydney also says, is the end of poetry: "This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement and enlarging of conceit, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection, as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodging, can be capable of".

14.4.1 Need of Excellent Poetry

Therefore mankind needs for its existence refinement, excellent poetry more than anything else: "The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can". If, then, we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry and expect to fulfil the highest mission of which it is capable, we must set our standard for poetry high.

The poetry that is capable of fulfilling such high destinies must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgement. We must learn to distinguish between high and low standards of poetry. Arnold says that it is not an easy task to accomplish. He says, "In poetry, the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay.

But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true".

14.4.2 Two Fallacies in the Judgment of Poetry

Arnold believed that we must guard against two popular fallacies in our judgment of poetry. These two fallacies generally lead us to over-estimate the real order of excellence in a poet or a work. These two fallacies are: (1) The historic estimate. (2) The personal estimate. We are frequently tempted to adopt the historic estimate, or the personal estimate, and to forget the real estimate. The historic estimate generally affects our judgement when we are dealing with ancient poets and the personal estimate when we are dealing with modern or contemporary poets.

A. The Historic Estimate

The historic estimate affects our judgment of the ancient poets or ancient works. We usually attach historic importance to an ancient poet or a poem: "The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it, in short, to over-rate it." Our real judgement is affected by the conventional halo that is ascribed to an ancient poet. Our critical eye fails to discern the real accomplishment of an ancient poet through the halo of glory that usually surrounds him.

A French critic rightly says that "the cloud of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history. It substitutes a halo for a physiognomy, it puts a statue where there was once a man, and, hiding from us all trace of the

labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures, it claims not study but veneration ; it does not show us how the thing is done, it imposes upon us a model. It blinds criticism by conventional admiration. It gives us a human personage no longer, but a God seated immovable amidst. His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus; and hardly will it be possible for the young student to believe that it did not issue ready made from that divine head."

Matthew Arnold cautions us against this fallacious historic estimate of an ancient poet or a work. We must not let our judicious estimate be affected by the glow of antiquity. There are, however, some ancient poets who possess real class, character. Our discerning eye should be able to distinguish between the real gold and dross. Arnold says, "Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best, then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can." We must read our classics with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstition.

B. The Personal Estimate

Equally fallacious, though not so popular and dangerous, is the personal estimate of a poet or a work. A poet or a work may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affirmities, likings and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Matthew Arnold cautions the enthusiastic critic against this fallacious personal estimate also.

14.4.3 The Touchstone Method

Now the question arises how to judge and decide the order of excellence of a modern poet or a work. Arnold suggests his "touchstone

method" to accomplish this difficult task. He recommends that the modern poets or modern works should be judged by the touchstone of ancient classics. In other words, he recommends the comparative method of criticism. He suggests that modern poets should be compared with the celebrated ancient classics and their degree of excellence be indexed in proportion as they bear comparison to them. Explaining his touchstone method, Arnold says that "there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of truly excellent than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. They are an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently".

We should take recourse to concrete examples. Homer, Virgil, Dante, Sophocles among the ancient Greek and Roman poets and Shakespeare and Milton among the English poets, may be taken as models for judging the order of excellence in a modern poet or a work: "If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there".

14.4.4 High Seriousness

High seriousness, according to Aristotle, is the hallmark of great poetry. The best poetry possesses high truth and high seriousness to a pre-eminent degree. Arnold ascribes high-seriousness to the Grand Style. The Grand Style is constituted of two elements – excellent matter and excellent expression. Matter and manner, according to Matthew Arnold, are interdependent on each other : "The superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance of the best poetry is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related and are in

the steadfast proportion of one to the other. So far as high poetic truth is wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement may be wanting to his style and manner.

In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter". High-seriousness therefore arises from the harmonious blending of matter and manner of the substance and expression. Whenever, in the words of Matthew Arnold, a noble nature poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious object, there arises the Grand Style. The Grand Style, for Arnold, is synonymous with Aristotle's 'high-seriousness' and Longinus' 'sublime'. This is the touchstone to judge the order of excellence accomplished by a poet.

14.4.5 The English Classics

Chaucer is the earliest follower of the French and Italian classics in the English language. He is the father of the splendid English poetry. He is great in himself. He does not need the assistance of the historic estimate. He is great both in the substance and style of his poetry. He takes a large, free and synthetic view of human life. In Chaucer's poetry there is God's plenty : "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense". His readers are enamoured of his divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement and his gold dew-drops of speech. He is the "Well of English undefined". He is the maker of an epoch and founder of a tradition. And yet Arnold does not count him among the great classics. Chaucer's poetry in Arnold's view, does not have that high and excellent seriousness which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of great poetry. "The substance of Chaucer's poetry", says Arnold, "is view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high-seriousness."

14.4.6 Shakespeare and Milton

Arnold says that there cannot be two opinions that Shakespeare and Milton are the two greatest English classics. Shakespeare is the king of the realm of thought as well as of poetic rhythm and style. Arnold fully concurs with Henry Cochin's view that Shakespeare produced "the most harmonious verse which has ever sounded upon the human ear since the verse of the Greeks". And as for Milton, there is no need for any plea to assert that "in the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction, he is as admirable as Virgil or Dante". This, Arnold takes as requiring no discussion, this he takes as certain.

14.4.7 Dryden and Pope

Next Arnold takes up a controversial issue whether Dryden and Pope are poetical classics. Dr. Johnson puts them very high in the hierarchy of poetical classics. Wordsworth and Coleridge deny this honour to them. We have to dispel the halo of the historic estimate in order to ascertain their real position in the history of English poetry. Arnold believes that Dryden and Pope are "the splendid high priests of our age of prose and reason". Their Poetry is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. They are the masters of the art of versification. Their poetry has force, vigour and admirable splendour and accuracy. Yet their poetry does not have that indispensible stamp of high-seriousness. It does not offer an adequate poetic criticism of life. It does not offer a powerful poetic application of ideas to life. Their poetry is essentially the product of their discerning intellect, which is primarily the prerogative of prose, rather than of poetry. Therefore Arnold's verdict on Dryden and Pope is that "they are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose".

14.4.8 Gray and Burns

The position of Gray is very singular. He had the makings of a poetical classic. He was deeply and widely read in Greek poetry.

Intellectually and emotionally he constantly lived in the company of the Greeks and caught much of their poetic sensibility and style. But his poetical output is very scanty. Had he written a little more, he would have been among the great poetical classics in English. Nevertheless he is a classic, though "the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry".

And finally Arnold considers the claim of Burns as a poetical classic. Indeed much of his poetry deals with scotch life. In this respect he can be put down as a provincial poet. Yet there is in his poetry something above and beyond mere provincialism. There is at times a free, catholic and truly shrewd criticism of life. At moments he displays the high-seriousness of the great classics. His poetry is at times the effusion of absolute sincerity. He stands a very favourable comparison with Chaucer. Therefore Arnold awards the judgement on him: "Not a classic nor with the excellent high-seriousness of the great classics, nor with the verse rising to a criticism of life and a virtue like theirs; but a poet with thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core".

14.5 ARNOLD'S LEGACY

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

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

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

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

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

Although Arnold disapproved of the Romantics' approach to poetry, their propensity for allusiveness and symbolism, he also shows his appreciation for the Romantics in his *Essays in Criticism*. He praises Wordsworth thus: 'Nature herself took the pen out of his hand and wrote with a bare, sheer penetrating power'. Arnold also valued poetry for its strong ideas, which he found to be the chief merit of Wordsworth's poetry. About Shelley he says that Shelley is 'A beautiful but ineffectual angel beating in a void his luminous wings in vain'.

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

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

14.6 CONCLUSION

"For poetry the idea is everything; The rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; The idea is fact" this is said by Matthew Arnold. According to him idea is supreme and in poetry it is the idea that matters, that is attached by poetry through emotions. According to him the function of poetry is to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. He says if science is appearance then the poetry is expression and there is no appearance without expression. Then Arnold talks about setting our standard for poetry high. We must accustom ourselves to high standard and strict judgement and there is no place for charlatanism in poetry. Charlatanism is for confusing the difference between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half sound, true and untrue or only half true. Judging with little differences has a paramount importance, so there is no place for charlatanism in poetry. Then Arnold tells about three small kinds of estimates and these estimates are related to poetry and its reading. These estimates are: let us read them in brief:

Historic estimate

Personal estimate

Real estimate

Historic estimate: it is fallacious estimate that deals with the poets of past. When we are affected by a poet's historical background, we may easily consider his poetry of more importance than in reality it is. We must overrate it. So, this type of fallacy is caused in judgment by historic estimate.

Personal estimate: it is also fallacious estimate that deals with the contemporary (modern) poets. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate. Due to our personal likings we give more importance to that poetry which does not deserve that much importance. So, second fallacy in our poetic judgement is caused by personal estimate.

Real estimate: real estimate is the only true estimate which is not effected by any kind of estimate. A sense for the best, the real excellence, strength and joy can be drawn from it. It is present in our minds and governs

our estimate of what we read. We are sure of frequent temptation to adopt the historic estimate and personal estimate which are fallacious but forget the real estimate.

The benefit of real estimate is high and it is the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the real excellence, the true classic in poetry. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him, if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best, then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as we can. We must read our classic with open eyes and not with eyes blinded with superstition. We must perceive when his work comes short and when it drops out of the class of very best. This type of negative criticism enables us to have clearer sense and deeper enjoyment of what is real excellence. But the question arises here is:

How can one recognize or identify that "truly excellent" or "really excellent" or "real classic"? Arnold gives a method to identify the real classic and he gives the name “touchstone method” to this method. It is a method to judge the quality of poetry. A goldsmith hits the gold against stone to know the quality or purity of gold, he uses this method to know about the purities and impurities of gold. In the same way, Arnold uses this method to know about the qualities of poetry. It is a comparative method of criticism. According to this method, in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic should compare it to the passages taken from the works of great masters of poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation can serve the purpose. If the other work moves us in the same way as these lines and expressions do only then it is a real classic otherwise not.

To apply his method on various poets and ages, Arnold takes passages from the works of the great classics like Homer and Dante. The passages that Arnold takes, have these qualities in common: the possession of the very highest poetical quality,Characterisation of high quality and to have both substance and matter on one hand, style and manner on other hand, have a

mark, accent of high beauty, worth and power. High truth and high seriousness was also a parameter. By keeping these qualities in center, Arnold applies touchstone method on Chaucer first. According to Arnold, Chaucer is genuine source of joy and strength. There is an excellence of style and subject in his poetry. He has divine fluidity of movement and diction. But he cannot be called a classic because his poetry lacks high seriousness which according to Arnold is very important. After Chaucer, he applies the method on Elizabethan age. Arnold says that all of us recognize it as great poetry. He says this because according to him Shakespeare from Elizabethan and Milton from Puritan Age are Classic Poets. They have all the qualities including high truth and high seriousness. Then he applies the method on the poet in the age of Dryden. This age is regarded as superior to that of the others for 'sweetness of poetry'. Dryden and Pope are the famous poets of this age. But he viewed that this age was full of rules and regulations. The restrictions that were imposed on the poets were uniformity, regularity, precision and balance. This age is famous as age of prose and Arnold also says that Pope and Dryden are not poet classics but 'Prose classics'. Then Arnold applies the method on Gray. He is our classic poet according to Arnold. He lived with the Great poets, with the Greeks, studying and enjoying them and caught their poetic point of view and poetic manner. He is scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry but he is a classic.Then Arnold applies the method on Burns. He says that Burns' poems deal with Scottish dress, Scottish manner and Scottish religion. The Scottish World is the main theme of Burns. Burns moralizes in some of his poems and disregarded morality in actual life. So it seems insincere. His pathos is intolerable. Like Chaucer, he lacks high poetic seriousness. So he is not a Classic. In this way Arnold applies Touchstone method on various poets and finds out that poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Gray are classic poets while Chaucer, Dryden, Pope and Burns are not classics.

Through this essay, Arnold wants to convey that we should not be effected by historical and personal estimate rather we should enjoy the real classic that belongs to the class of very best. We can clearly feel and deeply enjoy the best by affecting ourselves only by real estimate. The best way to

identify the real classic is to apply Touchstone method by which we can clearly identify the wide difference between the real classics and the others as Arnold identifies the difference between classics (Shakespeare, Milton, Gray) and others (Chaucer, Dryden, Pope and Burns).

14.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (SAQs)

1. Who according to Arnold, is the first and the greatest rule of criticism?

Ans. Disinterestedness

2. According to Arnold, Chaucer's superiority lies in?

Ans. His large and tolerant view of life.

3. In his essay "The Study of Poetry" Arnold compares an old English poet Caedmon with?

Ans. Milton

4. Arnold believes that Pope was not a great poet but he was a great poet in his age because?

Ans. He perfected Heroic couplet

5. Arnold opines that Chaucer was nourished on early ……..

Ans. French Poetry

6. As compared with Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, Chaucer lacks ……..

Ans. High Seriousness

7. Arnold regards Gray as?

Ans. Poetical classic

8. With whom does Arnold compares Burns with?

Ans. Chaucer

9. What according to Arnold is man's immortal possession or perennial source of joy, comfort and inspiration?

Ans. Drama

14.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Arnold's position as a critic.

Ans. Introduction: Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the Victorian poet and critic, was 'the first modern critic' and could be called 'the critic's critic', being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself. The purpose of literary criticism, in his view, was 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas', and he has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism, and through his touchstone method introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as the two primary tools of criticism. Arnold's evaluation of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism, and as a poet-critic he occupies an eminent position in the rich galaxy of poet-critics of English literature. T. S. Eliot praised Arnold's objective approach to critical evaluation, particularly his tools of comparison and analysis, and Allen Tate in his essay *Tension in Poetry* imitates Arnold's touchstone method to discover 'tension', or the proper balance between connotation and denotation, in poetry. These new critics have come a long way from the Romantic approach to poetry, and this change in attitude could be attributed to Arnold, who comes midway between the two schools.Arnold remains, then, so valuable to us because he puts us in touch with so much of what is always elusive and yet compelling in the life of poetry, in the life of criticism, and in the life of both his age and ours.

2. Discuss Arnold's Touchstone method.

Ans. Arnold's touchstone method is a comparative method of criticism. According to this method, in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic

should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose. If the other work moves us in the same way as these lines and expressions do, then it is really a great work, otherwise not. This method was recommended by Arnold to overcome the shortcomings of the personal and historical estimates of a poem. Both historical and personal estimates go in vain. In personal estimates, we cannot wholly leave out the personal and subjective factors. In historical estimate, historical importance often makes us rate a work as higher than it really deserves. In order to form a real estimate, one should have the ability to distinguish a real classic. At this point, Arnold offers his theory of Touchstone Method. A real classic, says Arnold, is a work, which belongs to the class of the very best. It can be recognized by placing it beside the known classics of the world. Those known classics can serve as the touchstone by which the merit of contemporary poetic work can be tested. This is the central idea of Arnold's Touchstone Method.

3. What are Arnold's limitations as a critic?

Ans. Arnold's limitations

1. Arnold makes clear his disapproval of the vagaries of some of the Romantic poets. Perhaps he would have agreed with Goethe, who saw Romanticism as disease and Classicism as health. But Arnold occasionally looked at things with jaundiced eyes.

2. Arnold's inordinate love of classicism made him blind to the beauty of lyricism.

3. An excessive fondness for Greek and Latin classics produces a literary diet without variety, while modern poetry and drama have branched out in innumerable directions.

4. Arnold's lack of historic sense was another major failing. As we have seen, later critics praise Arnold, but it is only a qualified praise. Oliver Elton calls him a 'bad great critic'. T. S. Eliot said that Arnold is a 'Propagandist and not a creator of ideas'. According to Walter Raleigh,

Arnold's method is like that of a man who took a brick to the market to give the buyers an impression of the building.

5. In an age when cheap literature caters to the taste of the common man, one might fear that the classics will fade into insignificance.

6. This theory has set limited criteria for work to be great where as great works do not require any criteria. All great work cannot be of same type and cannot be squeezed or fixed in the same frame of classical great works.

7. As all great work cannot be just classic or to be classic in frame doesn't stand synonym to the great judgement.

Arnold's best criticism of poetry is found in his *Essays in Criticism* (second series). This is Arnold's final document both in theoretical and applied criticism of poetry. In *The Study of Poetry*, he propounds his theory of poetry and criticism in the light of his theory. He judges most of the important poets from Chaucer to his own day. He pitches upon a certain standard of excellence and sets out to ascertain what English poets belong to the class of real classics. He evolves a formula to judge the standard of excellence achieved by a poet. He says, in the first place, that poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic theory. So that great poetry must owe its allegiance to life. The greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life. This means that a great poet must have Aristotle's seriousness or Longinus' sublimity.

In the second place, this criticism of life must be made in conformity with the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. This excellence of diction and style in proportion to the excellence of thought is achieved through the grand style. And finally, Arnold recommends his Touchstone method to judge to what degree excellence has been achieved by a modern poet.

Thus Arnold calls on infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them with these principals ready at hand, Arnold proceeds to judge poetry.

4 With whom does Arnold compares Burns with?

5. What according to Arnold is man's immortal possession or perennial source of joy, comfort and inspiration?

14.9 SUGGESTED READING

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T.S. ELIOT AS A CRITIC

STRUCTURE

15.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to familiarize the learner with T.S. Eliot as a critic with particular emphasis on his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent." The

aim is to explicate the different terms and concepts postulated by the critic in this essay which is considered as a landmark in the critical canon of British literature.

15.2 T.S. ELIOT

Thomas Stearns (TS) Eliot was born in Saint Louis, Missouri on September 26, 1888. Eliot's poetry and critical works helped shape modern literature, and in 1948 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Eliot received his education at Smith Academy (closed in 1917) in Saint Louis, at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, and at Harvard University, where he obtained a B.A. and M.A. in philosophy. After studying at the Sorbonne in Paris and at Oxford University, he settled in London in 1914.

Eliot worked first as a teacher, then as a clerk for Lloyd's Bank, while writing poetry in his spare time. In 1917, with the encouragement of his friend and mentor, American poet Ezra Pound, he published his first major poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. "Prufrock" revealed Eliot's early style, mixing humor and pessimism. “The Waste Land”(1922) expressed his horror at the spiritual turmoil of modern Europe. Eliot's “Ash-Wednesday”, (1930) is more traditional, and with its religious emphasis, more hopeful than his previous work. Eliot also wrote several plays including *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). In 1922 Eliot founded, and for seventeen years, edited the literary journal, *The Criterion*. He also served as director of London publisher, Faber & Faber, from 1925 until his death in 1965.

Eliot also made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism, strongly influencing the school of New Criticism. Eliot is considered by some to be one of the greatest literary critics of the 20th century. The critic William Empson once said, "I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He is a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind."

In his critical essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that art must be understood not in a vacuum, but in the context of previous pieces of art: "In a peculiar sense [an artist or poet] ... must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past." This essay was one of the most important works of the school of New Criticism. Specifically, it introduced the idea that the value of one work of art must be viewed in the context of all previous works, a "simultaneous order" of works. Also important to New Criticism was the idea-as articulated in Eliot's essay "Hamlet and His Problems"-of an "objective correlative," which posits a connection among the words of the text and events, states of mind, and experiences.

More generally, New Critics took a cue from Eliot in regard to his 'classical' ideals and his religious thought; his attention to the poetry and drama of the early seventeenth century; his deprecation of the Romantics, especially Shelley; his proposition that good poems constitute 'not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion'; and his insistence that 'poets…at present must be difficult.'"

Eliot's essays were a major factor in the revival of interest in the metaphysical poets. Eliot particularly praised the metaphysical poets' ability to show experience as both psychological and sensual, while at the same time infusing this portrayal with-in Eliot's view-wit and uniqueness. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," along with giving new significance and attention to metaphysical poetry, introduced his now well-known definition of "unified sensibility," which is considered by some to mean the same thing as the term "metaphysical."

15.2.0 Eliot as a Critic

Going by his first and most talked-about collection of essays, “The Sacred Wood” (1920), Eliot’s achievement as a critic seems to have been highly successful. He remarkably succeeded in replacing the Romantic norms of criticism by the norms that established themselves under the name of “modernism.” This first collection still remains central to Eliot’s achievement as a critic, although it does not offer very clear hints concerning his system of values. It also offers very few certainties beyond an intuition of

his personal goal in using criticism as "a by-product of my private poetry-workshop" in judging and rejecting the work of the past by the standards of his own immediate needs as a poet. Certainties did follow a little later, in the next decade (1929-39), but these certainties also raised an alarm for his followers as they led to the darkening of his reputation in an age even more starkly controversial than the 1890's. It is easy now to see that the young generation of the twenties, the "lost generation," for whom a volume of Eliot's poems, and even "The Sacred Wood", had enchanting attraction, had failed to notice the illiberal echoes in Eliot's early works. These echoes may be faint, but they are there: the contrast posed between a heroic past and a decadent present, the distaste for argument, the contempt for cosmopolitanism, the references easily interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as anti-Semitic. Looking back, we can see as inevitable a schism between master and disciples with a sense of angry betrayal, and the master with some sense of relief. Eliot, quite like Arnold, preferred to walk by himself; lone eminence was dearer to both than popular acclaim.

Eliot's second phase in his career as critic opens with a delight fully disarming prelude, the monograph *Dante* (1929). The piece is frankly amateurish, an enthusiastic introduction to Dante for readers who know very little Latin. It is a kind of book which perhaps no one could dislike. Eliot's love for Dante, infectiously suggested, sounds literary rather than scholastic, a poet's rather than a convert's enthusiasm. An ensuing pamphlet, "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931), collected, like Dante, in the "Selected Essays" of 1932, makes a sensible and moderate content on the Anglican conference of 1930, but sets its face finally against humanism in its conclusion:

> "The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us ..."

We know that Eliot's "world" is no more than Europe, as also that his reference to "The Experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality" is in particular to the Eastern Europe which at that time had come under the heavy influence of communism. His confidence that the experiment will fail, and that "we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse," now with hindsight, sounds rather prophetic. The experiment did fail, and the collapse inevitably followed, however it is doubtful that the collapse took place because the experiment was "non-Christian."

We can also hear here the echoes of Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" (1930) which are over-powering. We can also see here even the ultimate direction of "The Waste Land" (1922), which got clearly unfolded by Eliot's later development. Eliot's Harvard lectures of 1932-33, reluctantly published as *The Use of Poetry* and *The Use of Criticism* (1933), dubbed by him as "another unnecessary book," constitute a sketchy volume. It occasionally tends to make a suggestive survey of poets as critics from Philip Sidney to I.A. Richards, but the shades are falling. To use Eliot's own metaphor, stretching it a little, this was the later period of his career. He was already half bored with poetry, almost equally bored with criticism, and more so with his role as a poet-critic. "The sad ghost of Coleridge beckons to me from shadows," he concludes glibly, after repeating the vulgar fallacy that "poets only talk when they cannot sing." And there seemed worse to come.

In 1933, Eliot delivered three lectures at the University of Virginia, which appeared as a collection under the title *After Strange Gods* (1934), just a few months after Hitler took over the reigns of power in Germany. It was perhaps the oddest volume Eliot had produced, and certainly the most difficult to justify. Maybe it was the fulfillment of a promise Eliot had made in a footnote in *The Use of Poetry*, where, after quoting Tvlaritain on the "unconcealed and palpable influence of the devil" on many writers of the time, he had added solemnly: "With the influence of the devil on contemporary literature I shall be concerned

in more details in another book." The austere subtitle to *After Strange Gods* "A Primer of Modern Heresy" - strikes a certain inquisitorial chill, and refusals to discuss grow explicit and insistent. "I refuse to be drawn into any discussion . . ." is a phrase from *The Use of Poetry* often echoed by Eliot in the decade of the 1930' s and after. "In our time," Eliot proclaimed in the Preface to *After Strange Gods* :

> controversy seems to me, on really fundamental matters, to be futile. It can only usefully be practiced where there is common understanding. It requires common assumptions. . . . The acrimony which accompanies much debate is a symptom of differences so large that there is nothing to argue about in a society like ours, worm eaten with Liberalism, the only thing possible for a person with strong convictions is to state a point of view and leave it at that.

The lectures that follow begin with a quotation from his fifteen-year old essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," making us understand the neo-conservative seduction of a word which, in the early essay, seems strikingly and deliberately incongruous. As we have already discussed, Eliot's poetic tradition had nothing to do with a historical sequence: his political "tradition" does have. There is praise for the tradition of the Old South and for the resurrectionist group of neoagrarians such as John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, for old New England, for "stability," "unity of religious background" ("reasons of race and religion combine"), "orthodoxy." The two lectures that follow are a diatribe against free enquiry and the sinister effects of the modern movement whereby "morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy," and against the novels of George Eliot, Hardy, Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence who suffered a "deplorable religious upbringing" which gave him "his lust for intellectual independence" and left his vision "spiritually sick."

One painfully recalls here Eliot's earlier advice, "good criticism is directed, not towards the poet, but towards the poetry." Now he chooses to

explain all that he finds "bad" in Lawrence from the kind of life the novelist had lived; it is nothing but personal and biographical, the worst of its kind. With *After Strange Gods*, offered not as literary criticism but as an attack upon views currently fashionable, Eliot's tragic break with the dominant impulses of his age is total and permanent. Arnold, too, stood alone in certain ways in the Victorian age, but he never sounded plagued with prejudices and irrationalities; the worst one could accuse him of was "idealism." Here, in the case of Eliot, one feels embarrassed to come upon his rapid conservation, his deep-rooted prejudice against the Jews, his irrational hatred of liberalism, etc. Although many of these faults get reflected in his other books as well, here in the present book they surface in the worst possible form.

The third phase of Eliot as a critic, since the Second World War, proved to be rather anti-climatic. There seems no attempt on his part to renew the anti-liberal controversies of the 1930's, and his return to literary issues remains unconvincing. *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) only palely reflects a pre-war concern for intellectual values in a stable society. *Poetry and Drama* (1951) and *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1953) suggest a spark of enthusiasm for a poetic drama which has its roots deep in the Elizabethan essays of *The Sacred Wood* ; but the despairingly high ideal of achieving a "musical order" in language "without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms (as in Shakespeare's last plays, is, on his own telling unattainable), and his plays are called by some "distinguished flops." The dominant tone of his last essays and lectures is sarcastic and irritable, and the target is usually the very criticism his own example created.Consequently, like a startled Frankenstein, Eliot recoiled from the monster he had made, wearily disclaiming responsibility: "I fail to see any critical movement which can be said to derive from myself," as he told a Midwestern audience in 1956.

Interestingly, there is hardly any twentieth century criticism which

does not stand condemned by its chief creator (T.S. Eliot) in this late effusion of despair, for all the polite evasions ("I do not mean that they are bad books".) The list of those condemned includes the scholarly tradition of "explanation by origins," as in J.L. Lowes' study of Coleridge, *The Road to Xanadu* (1927); excesses of subtility provoked by Joyce's *Finnegens Wake* (1939) and Eliot's own works; biographical criticism; non-biographical criticism practiced by I.A. Richards and William Empson as verbal analysis, or "the lemon-squeezer school of criticism" (with which the Indian critic B. Rajan was associated). Finally, the circle gets completed reaching the very position that Eliot, in the suppressed, anti-Edwardian essays of *The Sacred Wood*, had enthusiastically condemned: an elderly, dilettante, "appreciative" criticism whereby the critic may "help his readers to understand and enjoy." Anyone old enough to have observed the march of English criticism continuously for fifty years might be justified in murmuring: "This is where we came in."

These, then, we can sum up, are the three voices of T.S. Eliot the critic: first, the youthful, exploratory enthusiasm of the twenties, where an almost ideal balance between poetic and critical activity is realized; second, an abortive career of social and religious advocacy in frankly obscurantist causes; and third, a bold but exhausted attempt to recover the creative urge, followed at once by denial and desperation. The imposing sense of a vast critical intelligence that emerges, especially in the twenties, is not of a sort that can be defined and codified, and the question with which this chapter began must remain unanswered. Eliot made English criticism look different, but in no simple sense. He offered it a new range of possibilities, confirmed it in its increasing contempt for historical process, and yet reshaped its motion of period by a handful of brilliant institutions. It is not to be expected that so expert and professional an observer of poetry should allow his achievement to be more neatly classified than this.

15.3 OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

Besides his emphasis on "Tradition," "Historical Sense," and the idea of "Impersonality," Eliot advanced the theory of "Objective Correlative," with all the four formulated from his "modernist" reaction against the Romantic poetry and criticism, and all the four forming a spectrum of interconnected concepts. Eliot's thoughts about an impersonal art arrived at their most celebrated formulation in his well-known essay entitled "Hamlet and his Problems" (1919). The concept is as under:

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

The phrase "objective correlative," we know, gained currency probably far beyond anything that the author could have expected or intended. With the advantage of hind sight, it is now easy to know why; the concept of an objective correlative firmly lays emphasis upon the work itself as a structure. Since the poet is not to transfer his emotions or his idea from his own mind directly to his readers, there has to be some kind of mediation - "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events." It is through these that the transaction between author and reader has to take place. This is where "what the author has to say" is objectified, and it is with the shape and character of this object that the critic must also be concerned. For this object is the primary source of, and warrant for, the reader's response, whatever inferences we may draw about what it is that the "author wanted to say."

Eliot's doctrine of the "objective correlative" is a sort of summation of what he, along with Hulme and Pound, derived from the theory and practice of the French symbolists. These French poets had argued that poetry cannot express emotion directly, that an emotion can only be evoked. Their studies had canvassed the various means by which this can be done. Baudelaire, one of the early French symbolists, maintained that every colour, sound, odour,

conceptualized emotion, and every visual image has its correspondence in each of the other fields. Mallarme, another of the major French symbolists, insisted that poetry was made, not of ideas, but of words, and he devoted himself to exploring the potentialities of words conceived as gesture or as modes of emotive suggestion, and treated the interplay of words, as a kind of ballet or a kind of "musical" organization. To name an object was to destroy three-quarters of the delight proper to a poetic evocation of it. Pound in making acknowledgement of "the great gifts of symbolism," mentions specifically "the doctrine that one should 'suggest,' not 'present'."

The concept of the "objective correlative" places a thoroughly anti Romantic accent upon craftsmanship. However, Eliot, in the way in which he argues it, manages to involve himself in the language of expressionism. This expressionism and the "language of the emotions" later came for a vigorous overhauling by the philosopher Eliseo Vivas. Eliot seems to imply that Shakespeare knew in advance the particular emotion for which Hamlet was to be the "correlative," making a further implication that the reader (or auditor) ought to feel this particular emotion too, if the play is to be considered successful. But Eliseo Vivas, the philosopher, contends that in fact the poet only discovers his emotion through trying to formulate it in words. What the poet really felt could only be expressed precisely in and through the poem, which is to say that he had to discover it through the act of composition. It is impossible that the reader should ever feel the same emotion as the poet did, and there is no reason why he should. A poem expresses less than the emotion with which the poet began, but it also expresses much more. It expresses "all that which the poet presents objectively in it for apprehension." Among the elements making up the poem-object,

> there are some that we find easier to denote... through the terms which we use to denote emotion. But I see no reason to assume that all else in the poem is put there merely to arouse an emotion in us or to bring about its objective denotation. Surface, formal, and ideational elements are all in their own right of intrinsic interest. And while the emotion expressed is also of interest, it is not, and it should not be, of chief or exclusive interest to the

reader.

Eliseo Vivas, the philosopher, is confident that such objections have devastating consequences for Eliot's "critical approach"; and with special regard to the theory about Hamlet, that judgment may well be correct. As regards Eliot's general position, however, the philosopher's criticism is a pruning operation that lops off excrescences but can hardly affect the main branches of the theory set forth in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion... it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."

At times, Eliot is inconsistent, but he seems never to subscribe seriously to the notion that the poet's main job is to hand over to the reader some determinate content, whether an emotion or an idea, or that the poet's effectiveness is to be measured by the success of this transaction. On the contrary, the weight of Eliot's prestige has been thrown behind quite an antithetical conception: an anti-Romantic, "impersonal" art, in which the claims of the art-objects, with all their complexity and indeterminacy, have first consideration. A less vulnerable statement of the objective correlative might be found in another of Eliot's essays, that "On the Metaphysical Poets": "[The Metaphysical poets] were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling." The phrase "states of mind and feeling" has the merit of minimizing the notion of some pure emotion, personal to the poet, with which the reader is to be directly infected.

Eliot's theory gets exposed when he reaches a dead end in his exploration of the "overwhelming" emotion which troubled Shakespeare, and which he could not objectify, leaving the play an "artistic failure." Having reached the dead end in this rather Romantic pursuit, Eliot winds up the pursuit saying that to know what that emotion was we shall have to know more about Shakespeare's life than is available to us at present. One wonders on several counts here: Firstly, if we do not know what that emotion is for which Shakespeare failed to find an "objective correlative," then how do we know that the dramatist has been unsuccessful in

giving an objective expression to that emotion?; secondly, if "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry," why do we wish to "know more" about Shakespeare's biography. A lesson that one learns from Eliot's difficulties here is that it is perhaps neither possible nor desirable to reduce the process of creating an art work into a theory. Every individual artist has his or her own distinct way of composing a work, and no two of them can really be put under one umbrella, however large we may make it.

15.4 ELIOT'S CLASSICISM

In his strong reaction against Romanticism of the nineteenth century, Eliot, by name, is given credit for the revolution of "modernism" that came about in English literature around the end of WorId War I, just as Wordsworth is given credit for the revolution of Romanticism that came about a little over a century before. Eliot found, at the turn of the century, just as Wordsworth had found a century ago, that the poetry in English had gone dead, with the decadent repetition of the once vibrant Romantic Movement. Like Wordsworth, he thought of revitalizing English poetry by introducing the element of living speech to replace the "poetic diction," just as Wordsworth had done in his own time. As Wordsworth had replaced neoclassical poetics by the poetics of romanticism, Eliot replaced the romantic poetics by the poetics of new or neoclassicism. We have already discussed his emphasis on tradition rather than individual talent, on impersonality rather than personality, on objective correlative rather than "emotion recollected in tranquility." These new emphasis brought about the revolution of modernism, including the new poetic style of classical restraint, dramatic representation, ironic tone and vision, etc. Thus, Eliot became the leading light of "new classicism," which became known by the name of "Modernism".

Eliot's new classicism did not, however, remain unchallenged; scathing attacks on his new theory followed from the American critics, notably Yvor Winters and John Crowe Ransom, whose differences with Eliot rested upon more fundamental principles. In his well-known book *The New Criticism*, Ransom found Eliot's criticism too psychologistic, too much concerned with

affective experience and too little cognitive. To Ransom, in short, Eliot's classicism was not classical enough. This was in part Winters' criticism as well. The only difference is that Winters' classical reaction, which harks back to that of Irving Babbit, has in it a strong ethical ingredient. Winters castigates romanticism, as most critics of his age did, not merely for its murky indefiniteness but also for its moral delinquency. In his famous book *In Defence of Reason* Winters, indeed, regards one as an aspect of the other (indefiniteness and moral delinquency). In the first place, Eliot's acknowledgement that the poem has in some sense a life of its own seems to Winters a concession that goes far towards making the poet merely an automaton. As Ransom also puts it, "This is very nearly a doctrine of poetic automatism."

Yvor Winters makes an elaborate comment on Eliot's concept of poetic automatism, making the mind a mere gas chamber which facilitates the mixing and merging of different gases into new compounds (poems), itself remaining only a facilitator, making available its meeting place. Winters comes rather heavily on Eliot's evasion of critical intelligence and moral responsibility that every poet must possess and put to use. Note, for instance, the following:

> The artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience, by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other. The poet tries to understand his experience in rational terms, to state his understanding, and simultaneously to state, by means of the feelings which we attach to words, the kind and degree of emotion that should properly be motivated by this understanding.

According to Winters, since the poet makes an evaluation, he must remain fully in control of his poem; there must not be any French-symbolist non-rational images and symbols, letting the reins lie loose upon the horse's neck, allowing him to find his own way. Eliot trusts Pegasus too far when he writes: "I do not deny that art may be affirmed to serve ends beyond itself; but art is not required to be aware of these ends." For Winters, however, Eliot's contention to keep the poet unaware of the end of art is not at all acceptable; for him the poet

must be aware of where he is going; it is not enough for him merely to try to "find the verbal equivalent of states of mind and feeling." Those states of mind and feeling must be judged and evaluated.

Winters' charge against Eliot is that he was too often content merely to reflect the disaster and incoherence of the age. Instead of mastering his experience and judging it, he simply mirrors it. To do this is to fall into what Winters prefers to call the "fallacy of expressive, or imitative form; the procedure in which the form succumbs to the raw material of the poem." The modern poet would justify the formlessness of his poem by saying that he is writing about a chaotic and disordered age. But on the basis of such reasoning as this one could agree that the proper way to write a poem about madness is to make the poem itself insanely irrational, and the proper way to write about dullness is for the poet to make his Dunciad as dull and sleep-provoking as possible. Winters has urged his indictment of the Modernist writers relentlessly. Fortunately, we do not have to endorse his applications of his principle in order to endorse the principle itself. He is clearly correct in pointing out that confusion cannot be expressed by confusion; the negative, by the presentation of a slice of negation. This insight has allowed him to put with special cogency several questions having to do with the structure of poetry: What is the minimum coherence required of a poem and by what structural methods is that coherence to be attained?

Eliot's concern for the poem as an objective thing is the special highlight of his new or neo-classicism. As mentioned earlier, Eliot insists upon the poem's possession of a life of its own, as also on the poet's need to extinguish his personality in the poem. Though such remarks as these can be interpreted as an abdication of the poet's proper responsibility, they need not be. In fact, Eliot's metaphor about the poem's "life" and his suggestion that the poet's primary task is to foster and mature that life are not incorrigibly irrational, as Winters and his like might accuse Eliot of. It is possible to argue that the poem, like a growing plant, naturally grows towards the light and unless interfered with tends to grow straight. This notion that the developing poem furnishes the poet with certain norms for its own nurturing (along with the further implication

that poetry gives us a special kind of knowledge) has been more clearly explained by Allen Tate than by Eliot. Rejecting Winters' conception of a poem as a Statement about something, Tate would define it as an action rendered in its totality. This action is not prescriptive of means (as science is) nor of ends (as religion is). The reader is left to draw his own conclusions: ("... the vision of the whole," as Tate says, "is not susceptible of logical demonstration."). There can be no external verification: the reader grasps it by an act of the imagination or not at all. (The didactic poet, the rhetorician in the service of a cause, the advertising man - all do appeal to some "truth" - some authority, scientific or unscientific - as proof of the case being made).

Winters' objection to Eliot's neo-classicism is that it is not classical enough, because it is not rational enough. In Winters' view, by seeking light from the French symbolists Eliot drifted away from the path of rationalism. According to Winters, the poem must have a rational structure, for it is the rational structure that controls the emotion. The rational statement made by the poem is the "motive" for the emotion. Winters, for sure, does not demand that the poem has an explicitly logical organization: it is enough that it be "implicitly rational." The test is whether the poem "can be paraphrased in general terms." The New Critics, and, of course, Eliot strongly reacted to this demand by Winters. Their counter-attack pronounced the "fallacy of the paraphrase." In their view, no poem could be paraphrased in a prose statement, and if it could be, then it is not poetry. The rational statement that the poem makes - however necessary in Winters' scheme - is not the essence of the poem. Winters himself cites a poem in which the rational content as such says quite the reverse of what the poem taken as a whole "says." The "moral attitude" that Winters insists the poem shall present is defined not by the "logical content alone" but by the feeling as well, and "the feeling is quite specific and unparaphrasable." Yet however indirect the influence of rational structure, it has its final importance, and Winter's censure of Eliot boils down to the charge that he gives "primacy to the emotions."

Certain structural methods yield poems that cannot be paraphrased.

Many of the modern poets, laying aside such time-honoured methods for organizing a poem as Repetition, Logical method, and Narrative, used what Winters called "Pseudo-reference" and "Qualitative Progression." Pseudo-reference pretends to rational coherence (by retaining the "syntactic forms and much of the vocabulary of rational coherence") but it is not really coherent. Qualitative progression goes further and abandons even the pretence of rational progression. It is an attempt to build poetry out of the "connotative" (i.e., the suggestive) aspects of language alone, and it actually results in merely a blur of "reverie." In Qualitative Progression, the transition from image to image is governed by mood: the principle of coherence is that of feeling. Qualitative Progression occurs in traditional poetry, for sure, but only as an ancillary to the basic method of progression, not as the basic method itself. For example, in Shakespeare

> The qualitative progression... is peripheral, the central movement of each play being dependent upon... the psychology of the hero, or narrative logic, and so firmly dependent that occasional excursions into the rationally irrelevant can be managed with no loss of face, whereas in [Eliot's] *The Waste Land* the qualitative progression is central: it is as if we should have a dislocated series of scenes from Hamlet without the prince himself, or with too slight an account of his history for his presence to be helpful. The difference between Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound is this: that in *The Waste Land*, the prince is briefly introduced in the footnotes, whereas it is to be doubted that Mr. Pound could manage such an introduction were he so inclined.

Here, beneath the polemics of Winters against the Eliotic form of the poem lurks an important distinction that deserves a clear restatement: emotions may be presented in one of the two basic ways. The poet can give the reasons for his hero's emotion, "motivating" the emotion by giving us the events which produced it or the poet can define the emotion through a symbol or a series of analogies. One method, of course, does not exclude the other. Shakespeare can give us the series of dramatic events that prompt Hamlet's puzzled disgust with himself, but he can also, and does, allow Hamlet to find an analogy for his feelings: "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" Winters censures Eliot and his colleagues for relying too

exclusively upon the second method: these poets move in an aimless and random reverie from image to image with only a kind of stream-of-consciousness connection between the images. The result is vagueness and obscurity. "The great discovery of the French symbolists," remarked the author of an early book on Pound, "was the irrelevance, and hence the possibility of abolition, of paraphrasable plot." It is just this abolition in Eliot, Pound, and other Modernists that Winters censures.

But though Winters seems distrustful of "dramatic" presentation, because of its dependence on implication and the consequent relinquishment of the poet's control over his "statement", his choice of the term motive (rational statement... is... motive to emotion") actually points towards the mode of drama. For if the emotions are "motivated," the emotion can only be inferred from the context of situation and action. It cannot be expressed directly, and the paraphrasable matter that "motivates" it is not so much a "statement" as a dramatic situation - a narrative, or a plot. It is indeed impossible to interpret Winters' criticism as a powerful reiteration of the primacy of plot. One might even compare it to Matthew Arnold's "classical" protest against romantic "confused multitudinousness" and "exuberance of expression." However, Eliot's concern with metaphor and symbol and even with irony represents a similar "classical" reaction. For these, as Eliot treats them, are all aspects of a dramatic presentation as distinguished from the personal or subjective expression of the poet (the Romantic poetic mode). The distinction here is crucial: once we have dissociated the speaker of the lyric from the personality of the poet, even the tiniest lyric reveals itself as drama. A poem is not a "statement about" something, but, as Aristotle said of tragedy, an action. Even metaphor is an action in this sense. It is a presentation of distinct entities, and the role of interpreting their relationship is forced upon the hearer or the reader. Since the identification asserted by a metaphor is literal nonsense, the interpretation, by implication, directs attention to the situation, the character of the speaker, and the occasion.

An acceptance that Winters' conception of poetry, like Eliot's, is ultimately dramatic need not impugn the useful distinction between motive (the reason for an emotion) and objective correlative (the symbol of an emotion). The perception

may, however, indicate why it is difficult to maintain the absolute distinction, especially with reflexive and highly allusive poetry like that of Eliot. It further indicates that Winters' "motive" is itself a kind of objective correlative. If the poet is to "control" emotion by providing "motives" for it, he is indeed compelled to make use of "a set of objects, a situation, or a chain of events." These are objective and can be presented; and since the emotion is generated by these objects and actions and, in so far as it is controlled, is controlled by the selection and rearrangement of these objectified elements, they may fairly be called the "correlative" of the emotion. For whether their "relation" to the emotion is that of cause or of symbolic equivalent, their correlation with the emotion is evident. If the smallest lyric can be regarded as a drama, conversely the most formidable tragedy can be regarded as symbolic. *Macbeth* is perennially interesting to us, not as a historic incident (even if the history in that play were undiscovered history), but because Macbeth is universal; he is in some sense ourselves. If his emotions are "motivated" by the events presented in the play, they are also meaningful symbols of our own emotions. Otherwise we should feel that Macbeth's emotional reactions were indeed "unmotivated:" he would seem perverse or incomprehensible.

The conclusion based on our discussion of Eliot as a critic may be put under two headings: the principle governing the various critical positions he took in different essays and at different times; and the poetic theory that he, as a poet-critic, evolved for himself and his age. We have said enough as way of explication and implication of his aversion to the custom of considering the main interest of poetry to be its revelation of the poet's personality. The key to all Eliot's work and thought is his personally evolved doctrine of traditionalism. It is to this doctrine that most of his predilections, most of what is distinctive in his poetry, and all that is valuable in his literary criticism, may be traced. A general summary of its evolution will be of use here. From his dissatisfaction with the American literary tradition Eliot was drawn to the European tradition in general, and to the English tradition in particular. His respect for the value of tradition in literary studies extended gradually to include some degree of dependence on the general cultural tradition, social, political, and religious.

Eliot's attraction for tradition was mirrored eventually in his adoption of English nationality as well as in his association with the Anglo-Catholic religious compromise. We know, however, that the blend between what he had rejected, yet could not entirely deny - the influences of his American background - and his innate sympathy with the somewhat authoritarian Anglo-Catholicism. Eliot's later work, poetry as well as prose, is the ground where the conflict between New England Puritanism and his adopted religion is most clearly illustrated. In fact, it was from this conflict the synthesis proceeded, and an answer to the moral problems that had been his preoccupation.

It can, therefore, be seen that there is, in the development of Eliot, a clearly defamed progress from rejection of the inchoate American tradition (largely romantic) to acceptance of the worth of Europe's rich culture and of the pattern that he saw in its development. The questionings and theorizings that accompanied this reveal a mind unwilling to accept too easily, desirous of justifying to itself any undertaking which seems to justify its needs. That it seems to satisfy them is not by itself enough. Precisely the same process is at work in Eliot's response to his religious questionings. They are answered by submission to the techniques of the Anglo-Catholic faith, to which he was originally drawn by his desire for a solid basis on which could rest the individual effort of the modern artist. That is to say, the original desire for stability in literature was satisfied by enquiry into the force of tradition. And it was precisely this that led him to apply the same process to satisfaction of his spiritual needs. That his original attraction to the religion may well have been partly the result of artistic susceptibilities is suggested by the possibility that in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" he has expressed his own experience of the aesthetic satisfaction of the Mass, a drama that recalls to us that it was in the church that the dramatic tradition began. Eliot's spiritual peace, then, he found in Anglo-Catholicism, child of a flux between two extremes, similar to the flux in the literary tradition. His religion is tempered too by the Puritan inheritance of his American background. Common to all this is, evidently, Eliot's desire for stability, prompted initially by the sense of loss born of his feeling of the inadequacy of the American tradition, guided on its way by a tenacious remnant of that American upbringing, by

the Puritan conscience. An unsatisfied desire for a well-defined background of tradition leads to search for fulfillment of the need. What is eventually accepted as the satisfaction of the need is subject to consistent probing and testing, which do not end with his final acceptance of what he considers the answer to his desires. We can see it illustrated, for instance, in his decision that humanist thought has a valuable function to perform - that of assuring that religion does not become slothful, and does not lapse into passivity. This questioning attitude he owes to the atmosphere of his American life, the rejection of which began the intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage. The influence of Eliot's American birth is therefore two-fold.

To attempt to place Eliot in any neatly ordered hierarchy of English poets and critics seems an unprofitable enterprise. Nevertheless, some tentative estimate of his position can be made. His poetic theory, violently opposing that in fashion when he began to write, tried to redefine whatever was classical and permanent in the European tradition. He did have to face attacks from the oldest artistic and newest political prejudices. Against them he maintained unbroken a consistent and sincere development, both of his poetic technique and of his philosophy. The only justification for his theories can be, ultimately, the success with which they operate in practice. Eliot's refusal to sacrifice to easy popularity his artistic and critical faiths (as well as his religious) must command our respect, even if he does not win our consent. The system to which Eliot related his work had a greater scope than Augustan classical authority, and it became a moral vital part of the criticism which depended upon it. By its relationship with Eliot's work the traditional system acquired new significance, and became a living part of the literary experiences transcribed in the work. Not only did tradition clarify the relationship between symbol and object, but it itself got altered by the relationship so shown to be a vital force. This is a more intimate contact than existed between the eighteenth-century classicism and Greek- Roman literature.

The distinctive contribution of Eliot's theory is its insistence that twentieth century poetry did not appreciate the value of authority at a time when authority was most needed. Perhaps of equal importance is its assessment of the function of poetry, which had at various times been looked on as a legislative body and a religious institution. To replace these and similarly limiting conceptions Eliot offered

the notion of the poet as an artist whose primary function is to maintain the pattern of tradition, within which is sufficient authority to offer a stable starting-point for any poetic creation. This notion does not emanate from a desire to defend the existence of poetry - as the others seems to - but sees the function of poetry as the maintaining and re-designing of the historical artistic pattern. That is, it defines the function of poetry in terms which are within the acknowledged province of poetry. The only objection which can be brought against it is that it assumes without evidence that art has a value in itself, which the other theories seemed to deny, if we can depend on the sincerity of their attempts to justify art by proving that it is something else. The poet is "involved with past and future." With the future because he is assuring the continuance of tradition, and therefore of art; with the past because he must do this by exploring the past to discover a basis for his experimenting. His experiments will be an adaptation of what has preceded him, while remaining essentially the same. His search is to discover again what has been found before, and to adapt his art to contemporary needs. His exploration depends on the working of his mind in the past, and as this exploration proceeds it will form a new mind and a new personality. Thus, Eliot's place, both as poet and critic, is very much secure in the history of Anglo-American literature and literary criticism. He will continue to be known as one of the major poets as well as one of the major critics in the tradition.

15.5 INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAY

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" was first published in 1919 in the avant-garde magazine *The Egoist*, as a critical article. Subsequently it was published in Eliot's first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920). This essay is considered as pertinent for any student of criticism as it can be considered as Eliot's critical manifesto. All his later criticism is derived from the ideas contained in this essay. The essay can be roughly divided into three parts on the basis of the different ideas they contain. The first part gives the idea of 'tradition', in the second part is developed his theory of impersonality and the third part sort of sums up the ideas contained in the first two parts. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is one of the most well-known works that Eliot produced in his critic capacity. It formulates Eliot's influential

conception of the relationship between the poet and the literary tradition which precedes him.

15.6 CONCEPTS OF 'TRADITION' AND 'INDIVIDUAL TALENT'

In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), F.R. Leavis made the claim that Eliot had effected 'a decisive reordering of the tradition of English poetry'. The emphasis on tradition by Eliot was a response to the cultural and intellectual crisis facing Europe after World War I when the entire generation was engulfed in anger and revolt. In such an atmosphere Eliot suggests that the answer does not lie in rejecting the old but embracing it in the form of tradition. In fact he claims that the real originality of a gifted or 'individual talent' was to be found in the 'reanimation and redirection' of tradition.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines tradition as ‘The action of transmitting’ or 'handing down', or fact of being handed down, from one to another, or from generation to generation; transmission of statements, beliefs, rules, customs, or the like. According to Eliot, tradition in English writing is seldom talked about and on rare occasions it is used with a sense of censure. The way the poets are criticized is based on how different their works are from their predecessors. This is not the best way to criticize - devoid of such a prejudice, we may find out that poems with ``ancestral ' influences are those that are more unique. Despite novelty being better than repetition, tradition has a wider significance. No solitary poet stands alone; his existence is based on his association with the poets of the past. Without the other poets, dead or still living, there would be no basis for comparison. A poet is inevitably judged by the standards of the past. For a work to be considered a work of art, it would have to be something new. What T.S. Eliot tries to point out in the first part of the essay is the significance of the relation of the poem to other poems of different authors and that all poetry is inspired from previous poetry written before, and finally, the relationship between the two. He wishes to correct for the fact that, as he perceives it, "In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence."

Eliot posits that literary progress should be acknowledged through its conformity to tradition although the conventional belief is that art progresses through change or novelty which entails a separation from tradition. Here one can discern the classicism of Eliot in his assertion on tradition which he felt was actually a thus far unrealized element of literary criticism as was its true incorporation into literature. According to Eliot, although tradition is recognized as a word that "seldom…appear in phrase of censure", nevertheless as a concept, it is multifaceted with a special and complex character.

It represents a "simultaneous order," by which Eliot means a historical timelessness - a fusion of past and present - and, at the same time, a sense of present temporality. A poet must embody "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer," while, simultaneously, expressing his contemporary environment. Eliot challenges the common perception that a poet's greatness and individuality lies in his departure from his predecessors. Rather, Eliot argues that "the most individual parts of his (the poet) work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Eliot claims that this 'historical sense,' is not only a resemblance to traditional works, but an awareness and understanding of their relation to poetry.

In his emphasis on tradition Eliot does not make novelty a casualty. Far from being an act of surrender to repetition, conformity to tradition implies a dynamic and progressive poetic process that is all-encompassing. It, infact, is the fountainhead of novelty. When a poet engages in the creation of new work, he realizes an aesthetic 'ideal order,' as it has been established by the literary tradition that has come before him. As such, the act of artistic creation does not take place in a vacuum. The introduction of a new work alters the cohesion of this existing order, and causes a readjustment of the old in order to accommodate the new. Thus, the inclusion of the new work alters the way in which the past is seen, elements of the past that are noted and realized. In Eliot's own words: "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it." Eliot refers to this organic tradition, this developing canon, as the "mind of Europe." The private mind of the poet is subsumed

by this more massive one.

The title of the essay distinctly mentions two aspects of creativity. Alongwith tradition, talent also figures in the little. Despite this, the essay seems to focus almost exclusively on tradition and talent is nowhere dealt with or dwelt upon. This lead to the obvious conclusion that in Eliot's definition, talent is not understood in the conventional framework but is in fact the ability to connect with tradition and create something which has the merit to become a part of it.

Thus Eliot's conception of talent is a far-cry from the conventional definition which sees talent, especially in the arts, as a genius that one is born with. Maybe due to this wide difference Eliot chooses not to directly christen it as talent. For Eliot (echoing Horace) talent is acquired through a careful study of poetry, claiming that Tradition, "cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour." Eliot asserts that it is absolutely necessary for the poet to be studied, to have an understanding of the poets before him, and to be well-versed enough that he can understand and incorporate the "mind of Europe" into his poetry. But the poet's study is unique - it is knowledge which "does not encroach," and which does not "deaden or pervert poetic sensibility." It is, to put it most simply, a poetic knowledge - knowledge observed through a poetic lens. This ideal implies that knowledge gleaned by a poet is not knowledge of facts, but knowledge which leads to a greater understanding of the mind of Europe. As Eliot explains, "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum."

Such is the essence of Eliot's widely influential argument. It is an argument that has given shape to large portions of subsequent literary critical awareness. Many more recent students of literature have taken their cues from this essay and other essays by Eliot. Eliot's presence can be felt even in works that travel in other directions. For example, the basic tension between the individual writer and traditions, between the poet and his forbears, is read quite differently in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry.* Across the Atlantic, Cleanth Brooks' *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) similarly praised

modernist poetry for a rediscovery of seventeenth-century use of 'wit', paradox and irony, while downplaying the importance of the romantic inheritance. The case for a more complex continuity between nineteenth-century poetry and the modernist revolution was proposed by Ifor Evans in *Tradition and Romanticism* (1940), in Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience*: *The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957) and by M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*: *Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971). Leavis extended the doctrine of tradition to the English novel in a study called simply *The Great Tradition* (1948), a book so influential that more catholic accounts of the subsequent terrain, such as Walter Allen's *Tradition and Dream* (1964), attempted to tackle (and broaden) the concept. In 1965, the year *Life Magazine* christened the foregoing cultural era the 'Age of Eliot', Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson Jr produced a weighty compendium of documents seeking to delineate the 'backgrounds' of modern critical thought, entitled *The Modern Tradition*. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1978), Elaine Showalter proudly announced the unearthing of a 'female literary tradition' that had arisen 'like Atlantis from the sea of English literature'. The proliferation of alternative traditions of English literature has often sought to recuperate rather than jettison the term, as, for example, in Bernard W. Bell's *The Afro- American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987), Jonathan Bate's *Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Karen R. Lawrence's collection *Decolonizing Tradition* (1991) and Gregory Wood's *A History of Gay Literature*: *The Men's Tradition* (1998).

15.7 THE HISTORICAL SENSE

One of the most debated concepts that Eliot advocates in this essay is the historical sense. True to his credo of redefining various concepts against the conventional grain, he defines historical sense of timelessness. The Oxford dictionary defines 'historical' as 'belonging to or dealing with the past'. But not so for Eliot. For him the historical sense is not the knowledge of the past as it was, but as it is. Thus historical sense is a perception that past is not something that is lost or invalid but is contemporaneous. It exists with the present. It is not redundant but continues to exert its influence through ideas,

thoughts and consciousness. By thus explaining the historical sense Eliot presents a non-linear and spatial view of tradition. Thus tradition is not something that can be marked chronologically in a time zone since the past and the present is coterminous.

Eliot, thus, holds that not only the past influences the present but the present, too, influences the past. Furthering this idea, Eliot presents the whole of literary as one indivisible order. To explain it through an analogy, if entire literature is taken as a family, then any new work of art is like the arrival of a new member in the family. The entire family is affected by the new presence, all the existing relationships undergo an alteration to accommodate the new member. Thus the entire order is modified and restructured. Similarly a new work of art alters the entire order of literature or tradition, so to speak. It is in this sense that the present modifies the past as the past modifies the present. The past is modified by the present also in the sense that we can look at the past literature always through ever renewing perceptive of the present.

A work of art has two dimensions- it is at once personal and universal. It is an individual composition, but at the same time, its inclusion into tradition determines its worth and universal appeal. A writer must be aware that he belongs to a larger tradition and there is always an impact of tradition on him. Individual is an element formed by and forming the culture to which he belongs. He should surrender his personality to something larger and more significant. In his conscious cultivation of historical sense, a writer reduces the magnification of personal self, which leads to depersonalization and impersonal act.

Like Arnold, Eliot views tradition as something living. For both the word "tradition" implies growth. Eliot recalls Edmund Burke what Burke did for political thought, by glorifying the idea of inheritance, Eliot has done for English literary criticism. Burke, famous English politician, gave emphasis on the experience of the past in politics. In the same Eliot also gives emphasis on the past regarding English criticism.

Tradition does not mean uncritical imitation of the past. Nor does it mean only erudition. A writer draws on only the necessary knowledge of tradition. He must use his freedom according to his needs. He cannot be completely detached. Often the most original moments of a work of art echo the mind of earlier writers. Though it sounds paradoxical, it is true. It is paradoxical but true that even the most original writings sometimes reflect the thinking of the past or earlier writers. So, there is nothing which is absolutely original.

A partial or complete break with the literary past is a danger. An awareness of what has gone before is necessary to know what is there to be done in the present or future. A balance between the control of tradition and the freedom of an individual is essential to art. Eliot said elsewhere that by losing tradition we lose our hold on the present. Hence, a writer should be aware of the importance of tradition.

15.8 THEORY OF IMPERSONALITY

Eliot attempts to define this "process of depersonalisation and its relation to the sense of tradition" in Part II of the essay by means of a scientific metaphor for the process of poetic creation. While speaking of the historical sense, Eliot posits that the poet should subsume his personality to the greater mind of Europe. He elaborates on this in the second part of the essay wherein his main pre-occupation is the theory of impersonality. This impersonal theory of poetic creation belies the expressive theory of Longinus and later the Romantics like Wordsworth who claimed sublimity of the poet's soul as a pre-requisite of sublime poetry.

Since the age so called the modern period that Eliot belonged to fostered a pervasive admiration for the discipline of sciences, Eliot uses a chemical analogy to outline his theory of impersonality. One can discern Eliot's attack on the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul or a pre-given identity that philosophers often label as an 'essential self'. It is from this point of view that he suggests that the poet "has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways". He argues that poems do not express the personal feelings and, by extension, the personality of the poet in the way that

the Romantics would have it. "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". In fact, the "more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates". Using an analogy drawn from the chemical sciences, Eliot suggests that the "poet's mind is . . . a receptacle for storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together". The poet's mind is akin to a "catalyst". Eliot compares the poet's mind to a "filament of platinum" under the influence of which the "elements" of the "emotions and feelings" (these two are compared to the gases oxygen and sulphur dioxide) combine to produce an emotional response in the reader (this is by analogy, the sulfurous acid produced by the chemical action). All this occurs at an unconscious level: there is no question of, in Wordsworth's famous formula, 'emotion recollected in tranquility.' All Longinian criteria of "sublimity", thus, fall short of their mark: for "it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotions, the components (the sublime soul, so to say), but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. For Eliot, in short, the "emotion of art is impersonal" and the best poetry expresses "emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet". Consequently, according to Eliot, to "divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim" because what he characterizes as "[h]onest criticism and sensitive appreciation" are "directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry" .

However, one should not confuse the impersonality of the artist with a mechanical objectivity. By impersonality he means a personality that is so consumed by the creative process that it submerges into the latter. It is understandable that Eliot denies an outright and blind adherence to some peculiar faiths and belief but an emancipation from what is very personal or peculiar. He says : "..the poet has not a personality to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experience combine in a peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in

the man, the personality."

It becomes clear from these lines that for Eliot an artist has two different aspects- as an individual, a person that has particular emotions, feelings and experiences and as a creator that transmutes the particular into the universal in this process of transmutation, the personal is rendered insignificant of absolute no worth. Infact dwelling on the personal becomes an obstacle to achieve something of much wider significance. Blatantly anti-romantic in his assertions, Eliot blasts at the idea that it is the self of the poet that acts as the progenitor of poetry. Thus Eliot discards the very idea of the personality of the poet. To confirm his assertion he compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst in a chemical reaction. He says : "When the two gases, previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place, only if the platinum is present, nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected." He further suggests : "... but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."

Echoes of this view are also heard in his much celebrated essay “The Metaphysical poets” when he says, "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamatic disparate experience; the ordinary experience is chaotic, irregular and fragmentary. The latter falls in love or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with noise of a typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes." It is obvious that Eliot aims at the recreation of a non-mechanical unity and of the store of impressions and experiences in the poet's mind.

As the above quotations reveal, to Eliot the desired quality of any poetry is its universality which can be achieved only if it is freed from the whims and eccentricities of a personality. Thus, the poet is to act only as a medium of creation and not a creator per se..... Here the views of William K Wimsatt and

Cleanth Brooks become relevant, when they say, "Such an emphasis was bound to bring down upon Eliot, the charges that has had reduced the poet to an automaton who secreted his poet in same unconscious and brainless way and that he had thus committed himself to the most romantic theory possible." Edward Lobb comes out with a just explanation of the possibility of levelling such charges against the theory of Eliot. Lobb points out that 'as a living thing, the poet's mind can create a non-mechanical unity out of diverse, even contradictory elements.' Eliot in his essay - "Yeats" (1940) reiterated the importance of personality in considering his later poetry to be superior to his earlier poetry as that is more profound revelation in the last phase of poetic existence. He says, "There are two forms of impersonality; that which is natural to a skilful craftsman and that which is more and more achieved by a maturing artist. The first is that of what I have called 'anthology pieces' of lyric by Loveless or Suckling or Campion a fine poet than either. The second personality is that of the poet who out of intense and passionate experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the peculiarity of his experience and make it a general symbol."

It is obvious from the above quoted excerpt that the impersonality of first type is the impersonality without a personality. He makes the idea more clear in "Tradition and Individual Talent" when he says, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of the personality but an escape from the personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from them." It is obvious from the above quotations that personality and emotions are pre-requisites of the impersonality.

In order that Eliot's views on impersonality of poetry acquire the clarity of vision and theory, it is obligatory to compare Eliot's view on poetry with those of Wordsworth who represents the apex of Romantic ideology. Wordsworth in the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads”, defines poetry and says, "Poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from the emotions recollected in tranquility till by a species of reaction tranquility gradually disappears and the emotion, kindered to that, which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced and does actually exists in the

mind of the poet." It is clear from the above definition of William Wordsworth that he aims at purifying the emotion to the most personal by 'a species of reaction' and the possibility of 'concentration' or 'digestion' or 'transmutation' or formation of 'new wholes' is virtually inexistent in the Romantic view of poetry.

Eliot's theory of impersonality can be better comprehended in the light of his doctrine of the objective correlative that he propounds in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems". He says, "The only way of expressing an emotion is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experiences are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to you by a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions; the words of Macbeth hearing of his wife's death strike us as if given the sequence of events, these words were automatically released by the last event in the series." Eliot's views expressed earlier, make the idea very clear that the emotion to be expressed in a work of art has a contextual significance only, and outside the context of the work of art, the emotion ceases to mean, and this results into a chaos. The theory of objective-correlative fully ratifies Eliot's adherence on the inevitability of impersonality of the emotion of art. Wimsatt and Brooks rightly observe that "the doctrine of the 'objective correlative' places thoroughly anti-romantic stress on craftsmanship."

It is also observed that the concept of impersonality continually grows and acquires new shades. Later, by the time of the publication of *After Strange Gods* the idea of impersonality was appareled in new form. Later Eliot propounded the view that the great work of art should conform to the idea of Christian orthodoxy. What Eliot exalted most in his earlier writings, the development of a point of view, and his concept of impersonality,

later merged with the confinement of the work to the principles and dogmas propounded by Christian orthodoxy. In *After Strange Gods* he categorizes writer according to the faith and beliefs expressed in their works.

It is thus clear that "Tradition and Individual Talent" is one of the most important essays of Eliot. It puts forth two very important aspects of his critical mindset - tradition and impersonality of art and poetry that determine the nature and scope of his criticism.

15.9 CONCLUSION

T.S. Eliot in this seminal essay redefines the canon of British Literature by evaluating the poets from the unconventional parameter of tradition rather than the widely accepted parameter of innovation. He advocates that the true literary genius encompasses within its folds not only its contemporaries but its predecessors as well. A historic sense which entails an insight not only into the pastness of the past but its presence in the present as well should be the defining attribute of any writer. Furthermore, the emotions and feelings expressed by the poets should not be particular but they should be generic. Thus literature is a medium to express the universal and not the personal that he posits through his theory of impersonality. To conclude, "this essay pioneers the new understandings of poetry, talent, tradition and even criticism. This essay heralded 'The New Criticism', 'The Chicago School', and 'The Practical Criticism'. At the base of the modern aesthetics and critical practices is Eliot's concept of poetry and tradition postulated in this essay “Tradition and Individual Talent”.

15.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How does Eliot define tradition and relate it to individual talent?
2. What is Eliot's theory of depersonalization?
3. Discuss Eliot's theory of depersonalization as anti-romantic.
4. According to Eliot historical sense is an awareness not only of the

pastness of the past but its presence in the present. Discuss.

5. Eliot in his "Tradition and Individual Talent" seems to champion classic ideas. Discuss with reference to the essay.
6. Write a critical note on Eliot's view of Tradition and its relation to individual talent.
7. Critically examine Eliot's theory of impersonality.
8. What according to Eliot is the function of criticism?
9. Write a note on Eliot's criticism of the Romantic poetry.
10. What are Eliot's objections to Wordsworth's theory of poetry?
11. How does Eliot respond to Arnold's function of criticism?
12. Write a review note on "Tradition and Individual Talent".
13. Write a review note on "The Function of Criticism".

15.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot argues that the poet's mind is:

A) A blank slate, ready to be filled with new ideas

B) A repository of all past literary works

C) An isolated and independent entity

D) Continuously shaped by literary tradition

Answer: D) Continuously shaped by literary tradition

According to Eliot, what is the relationship between the individual poet and tradition?

A) The individual poet should reject tradition entirely.

B) The individual poet is an insignificant part of tradition.

C) The individual poet must engage with and contribute to tradition.

D) The individual poet should create a separate literary tradition.

Answer: C) The individual poet must engage with and contribute to tradition.

Eliot believes that the "historical sense" of a poet is vital because it:

A) Anchors the poet's work in a specific time period

B) Fosters a sense of nostalgia for the past

C) Allows the poet to escape from the constraints of history

D) Enables the poet to connect with universal themes

Answer: A) Anchors the poet's work in a specific time period

According to Eliot, what is the function of criticism in relation to poetry?

A) Criticism should focus on the personal experiences of the poet.

B) Criticism should judge poetry based on its popularity.

C) Criticism should help readers better understand and appreciate poetry.

D) Criticism should ignore the role of tradition in poetry.

Answer: C) Criticism should help readers better understand and appreciate poetry.

What does Eliot mean when he says that "the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves"?

A) That all existing monuments are equally important

B) That literary tradition is a chaotic and disorganized entity

C) That literary tradition is already structured and interconnected

D) That existing monuments should be ignored in favor of new ones

Answer: C) That literary tradition is already structured and interconnected

Eliot asserts that "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." What does this statement imply?

A) Artists should focus solely on their own personalities.

B) Artists should never change or evolve their styles.

C) Artists should subordinate their personal feelings to the demands of their art.

D) Artists should abandon their artistic pursuits.

Answer: C) Artists should subordinate their personal feelings to the demands of their art.

According to Eliot, what is the role of "emotion" in poetry?

A) Emotion is the primary source of poetic inspiration.

B) Emotion should be expressed directly and vividly in poetry.

C) Emotion should be repressed in poetry.

D) Emotion is irrelevant to poetry.

Answer: B) Emotion should be expressed directly and vividly in poetry.

Eliot suggests that a poet's work should be seen as an "escape from personality." What does he mean by this?

A) Poets should hide their true personalities in their work.

B) Poetry allows poets to express their personal experiences freely.

C) Poets should focus on their individual personalities when writing.

D) Poetry enables poets to transcend their personal limitations and become part of a broader tradition.

Answer: D) Poetry enables poets to transcend their personal limitations and become part of a broader tradition.

What metaphor does Eliot use to describe the relationship between the poet and tradition?

A) A solitary island in the ocean

B) A continuous and unbroken chain

C) A battle between opposing forces

D) A clash of personalities

Answer: B) A continuous and unbroken chain

In Eliot's view, what does a poet's use of traditional forms and language contribute to their work?

A) It restricts creativity and originality.

B) It helps the poet connect with contemporary audiences.

C) It isolates the poet from tradition.

D) It provides a foundation for innovation and creativity.

Answer: D) It provides a foundation for innovation and creativity.

15.12 SUGGESTED READING

Eliot, T.S. “The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism”, 1964 edition, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

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Craig Raines. *T.S. Eliot*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

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T.S. ELIOT : "THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM"

STRUCTURE

16.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit exposes the learner to the background of Eliot's Criticism. It is equally important to know different aspects of criticism and its dynamic of evaluation of poetry. The unit also deals in detail with Eliot's Poetry: The Critical Background, Eliot's Classicism: Unification of Sensibility and T.S. Eliot and Functions of Criticism.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

A literary movement called New Criticism started in the late 1920s and 1930s and originated in reaction to traditional criticism that new critics saw as largely concerned with matters extraneous to the text, e.g., with

the biography or psychology of the author or the work's relationship to literary history. New Criticism proposed that a work of literary art should be regarded as autonomous, and so should not be judged by reference to considerations beyond itself. A poem consists less of a series of referential and verifiable statements about the 'real' world beyond it, than of the presentation and sophisticated organization of a set of complex experiences in a verbal form (Hawkes, pp. 150-151). Major figures of New Criticism include I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, David Daiches, William Empson, Murray Krieger, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, F. R. Leavis, Robert Penn Warren, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, Rene Wellek, Ausin Warren, and Ivor Winters.

Since the term criticism is clear and well-defined, it should be easy to determine whether a critic has performed his function well or not. However, this is not such an easy task. The difficulty arises from the fact that critics, instead of trying to discipline their personal prejudices and whims and composing their differences with as many of their fellow critic as possible and co-operating in the common pursuit of true judgment, express extreme views and vehemently assert their individuality, i.e. the ways in which they differ from others. This is so because they owe their livelihood to such differences and oddities. As a result, criticism has become like a Sunday Park full of orators competing with each other to attract as large an audience as possible. Such critics are a worthless lot of no value and significance. However, there are certain other critics who are useful, and it is on the basis of their works, that Eliot establishes the aims and methods of criticism which should be followed by all.

16.2 ELIOT'S POETRY : THE CRITICAL BACKGROUND

16.2.0. A Poet Critic

Eliot is one of the long line of poet-critics which stretches right from Ben Johnson to our day, and includes such names as Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold. He was a conscious

poet who had thought long and deep about the mysteries of his own art. His critical essays and editorial contributions and commentaries to *The Criterion* and *The Atheneum* throw a flood of light on his views of poetry. An understanding of his poetic creed is interesting and desirable in itself, as well as indispensable for a proper appreciation for his own practice of poetry.

16.2.1. Revolt Against Georgian Poetry

The Georgian and Edwardian poetry of England of the first quarter of the 20th century was in the thinned out romantic pre-Raphaelite tradition. It was weak, exhausted and enervated. The poets had lost originality and initiative and imitation was the general rule. It was frankly an escape poetry. The poets wandered along country-paths and toyed with the beauties of nature. It was simple, it was easy, and so it was popular, but it was not great. It was Eliot's reaction to this kind of poetry, "*that led to his formulating the literary theories from which all his poetry since has derived*" – (Maxwell). For example, this decadent poetry dispensed with all subtlety, metrical, linguistic, intellectual, or emotional. Eliot's own esotericism – complexity and difficulty – is in part a reaction or revolt to the esotericism (lack of subtlety) of this poetry. Reacting against the popular appeal of the poetry of the day, voluntarily cultivated subtlety and complexity in the hope of finding or creating an audience which, though small, would at least appreciate and understand.

16.2.2. Complexity of Eliot's Poetry: Its Causes

The contemporary poetry was decadent – it represented the decadence of the Wordsworthian tradition – it was escapist, and it was entirely cut off from the facts of real life. It had failed to adapt itself to the changed environment. Life had grown urban and industrialized, a corresponding change in poetry was needed, but the decadent poetry of the day was still concerned with, "rainbows,

cuckoos, daffodils and timid hares". This was a sign of immaturity and so Eliot advocated, "We must learn to take literature seriously". The audience was large for this poetry because it evaded the realities and complexities of life, and because the people had grown used to its restricted themes, stereotyped techniques, and poeticized vocabulary. Even when the Georgians tried to widen their themes, by bringing in urban life, urbanism itself becomes decorative paraphernalia in their hands. It could not enter into the essence of their poetry, because their outlook and their manner remain unchanged. They could delight, and so could be popular, but they could not express the complexity, variety and intricacy of modern life.

The Romantic tradition had exhausted itself out, and a radical change was the urgent need of the hour. Eliot in his pronouncements again and again emphasized the need of establishing a new tradition. He tried to establish that tradition through his own practice. His own theory is urban, and not a poetry of countryside, of insects, birds or flowers. Its complexity and intricacy is in part a reaction, in part a reflection of the complexity and variety of modern life. In his essay on *The Metaphysical Poets* he writes: "*Poets in our civilization must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning*." The poet must create new devices, cultivate all the possibilities of words in order to express entirely new conditions. His own poetry is a new kind of poetry, his technique is new, and this very novelty creates difficulties.

16.2.3. Rejection of Subjectivism: Poetry as a Craft

Eliot's poetry marks a complete break from the 19th century tradition. He rejected the romantic theory that all art is basically

an expression of the artist's personality, and that the artist should create according to the dictates of his own inner voice without owing allegiance to any outside authority. Reacting against this subjectivism, Eliot advocated his famous theory of the impersonality of poetry. He recognized the dangers of such an unrestricted liberty, and felt that, granted such license, there would be only, *fitful and transient bursts of literary brilliance. Inspiration alone cannot be a safe guide. It often results in eccentricity and chaos*. Moreover the doctrine of human perfectibility and faith in 'inner voice' received a rude shock as a result of the world war. It was realized that a man is not perfect, and hence perfect art cannot result from merely the artist's following his inner voice. Some sort of guidance, some discipline, some outside authority was necessary to save art from incoherence and emptiness. Thus Eliot condemned the inner light as, "the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity", and pointed out that the function of the critic is to find out common principles, objective standards, by which art may be judged and guided. Eliot rejected the romantic fallacy, says **Maxwell**, for it *"has resulted in a destruction of belief in central authority to which all men might owe allegiance, in objective standards by which all men might agree to judge art, and in any inspiration other than the shifting of personality through which adult, orderly art might be created"*.

16.3 ELIOT'S CLASSICISM: UNIFICATION OF SENSIBILITY

Eliot demands an objective authority for art and in this way approximates to the position of the classics. Rejecting the romantic theory and the romantic tradition, he emphasises that the classical school achieved, "*an elegance and a dignity absent from the popular and pretentious verse of the romantic poets*". In *The Function of Criticism* he writes that the difference between the two schools is that, "between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic".

This shows Eliot's appreciation of the order and completeness of classical poetry, qualities which he tried to achieve in his own practice as a poet. The classics could achieve this form and balance, this order and completeness, only because they owed allegiance to an objective authority which was provided for them by past tradition – "stores of tradition". Another sign of maturity, according to Eliot, is the unification of sensibility – of thought and feeling, of the critical and creative faculties. Such unification Eliot found in the Metaphysicals and hence his admiration for them.

16.3.0. Emphasis on Tradition

Since the romantic tradition has exhausted itself out and had lost its value and significance, it was necessary to search for some other tradition which may give a correct orientation to contemporary poetry. In his well-known essay *Tradition and Individual Talent*, he advocates the acceptance of the European literary tradition such as objective authority. Eliot views the literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day as a single whole, and pleads that English literature must be viewed as a part of that European literary tradition. According to Eliot, two kinds of constituents go into the making of a poem, (a) the personal elements, i.e., the feelings and emotions of the poet, and (b) the impersonal element, i.e., the 'erudition', the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past which are acquired by the poet. These two elements interact and fuse together to form a new thing which we call a poem. The impersonal element, the 'erudition', 'the sense of tradition', or the historic sense, must be acquired by the poet. He must, "develop or procure the consciousness of the past throughout his career". Some will acquire it more easily, while others have to sweat for it. But all must acquire it, for great art is not possible without this sense of tradition. Thus Eliot emphasizes painstaking effort through which the poet must equip himself for his task. Inspiration is not enough; perspiration too is necessary.

16.3.1. Dynamic Conception of Tradition

Like the classics, Eliot insists that individual talent must work within the frame of tradition. However, his view of tradition is not passive, static or unchanging. In this respect he differs from the classics who believed in a blind adherence to a fixed and unchanging tradition. According to Eliot the literary tradition constantly grows, changes and becomes different: "*When a really great work of art is created, the whole existing order is altered. In this way, the past is altered by the present and the present is directed by the past*". The historic sense or the sense of tradition implies that the poet is conscious, "*not only of the pastness of the past, but its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order*".

16.3.2. Impersonality of Poetry

Reacting against the romantic insistence on poetry being a spontaneous overflow of powerful passion, Eliot advances his theory of impersonality of poetry. He observes, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape of emotion, it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality". The greatest art is objective: "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates". As a matter of fact, the poet has no personality, he is merely a receptacle, a shred of platinum, a medium which fuses and combines feelings and impressions in a variety of ways.

16.3.3. Advocacy of Intensity

Eliot believed that poetry is not concerned with personal emotion. Even imagined experiences will do. The poet's imagination

can work as well upon what he has experienced as on what he has read. Further, Eliot points out that it is wrong to suppose that poetry is concerned with the beautiful. The subject of poetry is life with all its horror, its boredom, its glory. It is the poet's consciousness of the human situation—the human predicament, which has been the same in all ages—which should inspire poetic creation. Such is the source of inspiration of his own *Gerontion*, *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock*. If the poet's sense of his own age is intense enough, he will be able to pierce beneath the superficial differences between one age and another, and realise the fundamental sameness of human life in all ages. Then he will realise the horror, the ugliness as well as the glory of life, and communicate it to his readers. It is the intensity of the poetic process, and not the romantic spontaneity, which is the important thing.

16.3.4. Objective Co-relative

Further, Eliot points out that the poet can achieve impersonality and objectivity by finding some 'objective co-relative' for his emotions. He defines *objective co-relative* as a *set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula*, for some particular emotion of the poet. Thus Milton could find a perfect objective co-relative for the release of his personal emotions in the story of Samson. Eliot himself uses European literature, ancient myths and legends, as objective co-relatives in his poetry.

16.3.5. The Function of Poetry

As regards the function of poetry, Eliot suggests that the poet is an artist whose primary function is to maintain the pattern of tradition as well as to redesign it by his own creation. Thus poet is, *involved with the past and future*: with the future because he is assuring the continuance of tradition, and therefore of art; with the past because he must explore and study the tradition, as well as modify it, and in this

way transmit it to the future. His search is to discover again what has been found before, and to adapt it to contemporary needs.

16.4 LITERARY CRITICISM: T.S. ELIOT AND FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM

Eliot defines criticism as, "the commentation and exposition of works of art by means of written words. Criticism always has one and only one definite end, and that end is, "elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." "In his essay *The Frontiers of Criticism*, he further explains the aim of criticism as, "the promotion of understanding and enjoyment of literature."

Eliot deals with the problem of criticism in all its manifold aspects. In the very beginning, he comments upon the terms 'critical' and 'creative'. He ridicules Matthew Arnold for having distinguished rather bluntly between the 'critical' and the 'creative' activity. He does not realise that criticism is of capital importance in the work of creation. As a matter of fact, "the large part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing". Eliot further expresses the view that the criticism employed by a writer on his own work is the most vital and the highest kind of criticism. Elsewhere, Eliot calls such criticism, 'workshop criticism'. Its high worth and value cannot be defined, for a poet who knows from personal experience the mysteries of the creative process is in a better position to write about it than those who have no such knowledge. Eliot goes to the extent of saying that some creative writers are superior to others only because their critical faculty is superior. He ridicules those who decry the critical toil of the artist, and hold the view that the greater artist is an unconscious artist. He commends those who, instead of relaying on the 'Inner voice' or 'inspiration', conform to tradition, and in this way try to make their works as free from defects as possible.

According to Eliot it is a mistake to separate critical and creative activities. A large part of creation is in reality, criticism. But critical

writing cannot be creative, there can be creative criticism. Creative criticism is neither criticism nor creation. This is so because there is a fundamental difference between creation and criticism. Creation of a work of art, has no conscious aims and other than itself. In other words, it is no autotelic activity, its aim being the commentation and elucidation of works of art. The critical activity finds its highest fulfilment when it is fused with creation, with the labour of the artist.

16.4.0. Orderliness in Literature

Eliot stands for orderliness both in art and in criticism. Art means search of an order in life. Criticism is a search of order in art. Each, therefore, must be orderly itself. The real aim of criticism is 'the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste'. In England, however, it was a place for quiet co-operative labour. Each critic endeavours to 'compose his differences' with other critics as possible.

16.4.1. Classicism and Eliot

English criticism has been divided between the contending claims of classicism and romanticism. Classical criticism is said to follow the principle of allegiance to an outside authority. Romaniticism follows individual liberty. Thus, the issue between classicism and romanticism is 'a national and racial issue'. However, Eliot says that the right approach to criticism is classical. Those who stand for individual liberty in art listen to their Inner Voice only. They have nothing to refer to confirm their opinion. Due to this, instead of facts about the author or work, one is supplied with the critic's opinion or fancy. The function of criticism is fact finding. Only the facts can prove what the author or what the work really is. This is best done when the critic has something outside himself to guide him: some standard of perfection, to judge a work, based upon tradition and the accumulated wisdom of time.

16.4.2. Objectivity

The approach of a critic to a work should be objective. He must have a highly developed sense of facts. Such a sense would allow him to preclude the imposition of his own opinion on it. Also, he should have his tools - 'comparison and analysis'. Comparison helps him to see how a work modifies past tradition and is itself modified by it.

Analysis helps him to see it as it really is. 'Any book, any essay, any note which produces a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art is a better piece of work than nine-tenths of the most pretentious critical journalism, in journals or in books.'

16.4.3. Impressionism

Criticism is about something other than itself. Interpretations done by critics putting as much of him in it is not criticism. Similar is the case of impressionism - the exposure of a sensitive and cultivated mind before a work of art to form its true impression. Interpretation is the impression of a mind predisposed by former impressions in particular direction. It is the critic's idea of the work rather than a faithful elucidation of it. It is a new work of the critic's own, stimulated by the author's.

16.4.4. Abstract style in Criticism

Eliot decries the abstract style in criticism. The duty of a critic is not to coerce. He must not take judgement of worse or better. He must simply elucidate. The reader will form the correct judgement for himself.

16.4.5. True Criticism

True criticism is the institution of a scientific enquiry into a work of art to see it as it really is. It is 'the disinterested exercise of intelligence', such as Aristotle brought to bear on his work. Aristotle

analysed a work to the point of discovering the principle underlying its composition. The modern critic has to do the same. This is similar to what a botanist or zoologist do by dissecting a specimen. He looks not for what is interesting in it, but for the principle that makes it what it is. All other criticism is but the satisfaction of some inner urge of the critic.

16.4.6. Author is a Best Critic

During the creation of a work, the author himself becomes a best critic of his own work. The frightful toil of the author in the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing etc., is as much critical as creative. The criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism. Some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior.

16.4.7. Impersonality of Poetry

According to Eliot, the poet and the poem are two separate things.The feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet. Eliot proves this by examining, first, 'the relation of the poet to the past' and, next, 'the relation of the poem to its author.'

The past is never dead. It lives in the present. The best and most individual parts of a poet's work may be those in which his ancestors assert their immortality most vigorously. One can see a continual surrender by the poet to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. Through his work, the past and present fuse and form a new compound.

Thus there is no connection between a poet's personality and the poem. He has a mind in which special or varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations. The feelings need not be his own. But, his mind is a medium to combine the feelings to a new

shape. It may partly make use of his experiences. Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion. It is an escape from emotion. It is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. The emotion of art is impersonal. It has its life in the poem. So honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.The emotion cannot be simply transmitted from the mind of the poet to the mind of the reader. It can only be done through something concrete.

The object in which emotion is thus bodied forth is its external equivalent or "objective correlative". The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative" or a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of the particular emotion. For example, to convey the full sense of Lady Macbeth's mental malady in the last Act of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare merely makes her do over again what she had done before. This unconscious repetition of her past actions is the objective correlative, the objective equivalent; of her present agony of the heart. Her lack-lustred eyes and the burning taper in her hand aid the effect of this objectification.

16.4.8. Dissociation of Sensibility

When the poet's thought is unable to convert itself into feeling, the result is dissociation of sensibility and therefore bad poetry. Dissociation of sensibility means a split between thought and poetry. A poet may have the best ideas to convey but they serve no purpose unless they issue forth as feelings. Opposite to this is unification of sensibility. It means a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or recreation of thought into feelings. When this happens, as in the poetry of Chapman or Donne, the result is good poetry. Thought is transformed into feeling to steal its way into the reader's heart. It is this union of the two that constitutes poetic sensibility.

16.5 THE VALUE OF HIS CRITICISM

Eliot's model critic is Aristotle. Aristotle had a scientific mind, which is wholly devoted to inquiry. Everything he says illuminates the literature. This is what England ever lacked, says Eliot. Eliot calls himself a classicist. As Aristotle did, he applies the method of science to the study of literature to see it as it really is. This is what he has to offer to present day criticism.

16.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS : "THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM"

T.S.Eliot's systematic discussion made his criticism a source of origination of theoretical criticism. He coined the new concepts of criticism like 'objective corelative','dissociation of sensibility' and 'unification of sensibility' and 'theory of impersonality' which had much practical and rational approach in them. In one of his letters, he stated:

> "My chief reason for writing this letter is my desire that the problem of critical principles should be more pondered and discussed, and that both critics and readers should apply themselves to consider the nature of criticism." (Eliot V. , p. 381)

In appraising or criticizing a work of criticism, Eliot gives greater importance to time, age and circumstances to which the critic belongs. For giving a judicious judgment on a critic, one must place oneself in one's place and see one in the same context. Although, it is a bit complicated task because the impact of the time in which one is living, cannot separate one to make a tour in critics' world and give judgment accordingly. Eliot gives his own estimate about time and circumstances which affected his writings. He puts a glaring question before his readers that when on reviewing his own critical writings of past, he could not recall all those previous circumstances under which he wrote a particular writing, then how can an unfamiliar critic receive all the information, both subjective and objective while criticizing a critic and if a critic cannot have all the above information, how can his criticism be called apt and judicious?

Eliot chose contemporaries of Shakespeare to write an article upon and not Shakespeare himself because they were best suitable to his 'stage of development' at that time. At the age of fifty five, he imitated Dante knowing exactly the work he was doing. Here and everywhere in his criticism we find Eliot using subjective vision. The critics of Eliot raise question on his term 'objective correlative' and 'dissociation of sensibility' and their applicability in his own writings. In the same essay, he again defends his subjectivity against his own theories of objectivity and sensibility. Eliot points out that the authors who have influenced his writings can be of value to future readers because they will see the applicability of all his theories and make necessary modifications there; but to study few great authors leave you only in the mesmerizing gallery of those great authors.

Lastly, Eliot discusses that upto what degree can critics change the taste of general readers. He makes the assessment of his own success as a critic in 'arousing interest and promoting appreciation of the early dramatists or of the metaphysical poets'. And finds himself at a loss in doing so. The taste, on the parameter of age, fashion and style in literature vary that ultimately do not let the readers accept the views or theories of a particular critic. According to Eliot, even a good critic cannot create taste. He himself had read, so many critics like Coleridge and Browning but when Grierson's *Metaphysical Poets* was offered to him for writing a review, he did it in better way than other critics could do. In the end, Eliot takes out a pure literary criticism that is the criticism in which authors write about their own art like Johnson, Wordsworth and Coleridge. For him, historians, philosophers, moralists, sociologists and grammarians also can play an important role in criticism but he favours the pure literary criticism.

Thus, the whole essay of Eliot focuses on his personal experience about critics and their writings through which a literary work can be judged without any bias. He amazingly raises those points which are inherently placed in the mind of each critic but these critics cannot raise any of these points because their criticism comes under the category of

any of these points and is far from the world of pure criticism or criticism for the sake of literature.

16.7 CONCLUSION

"The Function of Criticism" was written by Eliot as the result of a literary controversy in 1919. A famous romantic critic Middleton Murray published an essay challenging Eliot's views, in his essay "Romanticism and Tradition". This essay "The Function of Criticism" is a replay to the essay written by Murray. Eliot begins his essay stating or repeating his views which he had already expressed in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Eliot repeats that there is a close bond [relation] between the present and the past in the world of literature, as in the other fields of life. We cannot claim any superiority which is our own. In other words we continue the work of the past. But it does not mean total dependence. Eliot calls the bond a kind of tradition. All literary works from the time of the ancient masters Homer to the present generation form a single tradition. A writer's significance or importance is measured in relation to this tradition.

By criticism Eliot means the analysis of literary works. Criticism can never be an autotelic [directed towards an end in itself] activity. This is because criticism is always about something. So that 'something' is to be considered. The main aim of criticism is the clear explanation of literary texts and the correction of taste. But often critics try to differ from one another. This happens because of their prejudices and eccentricities. Eliot holds the view that critics should conform and co-operate in the common pursuit of true excellence. The result of differences in reviews is that criticism has become like a Sunday park, full of orators competing with each other to attract more audience. Even in this troubled situation, there are some critics who are useful. It is on the basis of their works that Eliot intends to establish the aims and methods of criticism.

In the second part of his essay on 'The Function of Criticism' Eliot mentions Middleton Murray's views on Classicism and Romanticism. Murray makes a clear distinction between the two and states that one

cannot be Romanticist as well as a Classicist at once. Eliot does not agree with this view of Murray. Murray seems to make it a national or a racial problem, suggesting that the genius of the French is classic and that of the English is romantic. Eliot does not agree with the view of Murray who says that the English as a nation are romantics, humourists and non-conformists. Eliot does not agree with Murray who says that the French are naturally classical.

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

16.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

Q.1. Why was " The Function of Criticism" written?

Ans. "The Function of Criticism" was written by Eliot as the result of a literary controversy in 1919.

Q.2. What are the views of Eliot about critics?

Ans. Eliot holds the view that critics should conform and co-operate in the common pursuit of true excellence.

Q.3. What is the best kind of criticism?

Ans. In Eliot's view an author's self-criticism is the best kind of criticism.

Q.4. What should be the approach of a critic?

Ans. The approach of a critic to a work should be objective.

Q.5. What is the primary function of the poet?

Ans. The primary function of the poet is to maintain the pattern of tradition as well as to redesign it by his own creation.

Q.6. What two kinds of constituents go into the making of a poem ?

Ans. According to Eliot, two kinds of constituents go into the making of a poem, (a) the personal elements, i.e., the feelings and emotions of the poet, and (b) the impersonal element, i.e., the 'erudition', the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past which are acquired by the poet.

Q.7. Why did Eliot reject romantic theory?

Ans. Eliot rejected the romantic theory as all art is basically an expression of the artist's personality, and that the artist should create according to the dictates of his own inner voice without owing allegiance to any outside authority.

Q.8. What is Objective co-relative ?

Ans. Objective co-relative is a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for some particular emotion of the poet.

Q.9. Who is ridiculed by Eliot?

Ans. He ridicules Matthew Arnold for having distinguished rather bluntly between the 'critical' and the 'creative' activity.

Q.10. Name some other writings of Eliot.

Ans. *Gerontion*, *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock*.

Q.11. What is the critical background of T.S.Eliot?

Ans. Eliot's poetry marks a complete break from the 19th century tradition. He rejected the romantic theory that all art is basically an

expression of the artist's personality, and that the artist should create according to the dictates of his own inner voice without owing allegiance to any outside authority. Reacting against this subjectivism, Eliot advocated his famous theory of the impersonality of poetry.

In Eliot's best known early essays, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "The Function of Criticism," he spoke of tradition and classicism as desirable for art. The artist's work did not express a personality or an emotion, but rather contributed to an "ideal order" of tradition above and hermetically sealed off from the vital interior world in which the poet's heart was supposed to palpitate with feeling, according to the conventions of Romantic and late Victorian poetry. In the latter essay, Eliot defined classicism specifically against romanticism; if the romantics judged the goodness of art by sincerity and strength of emotion, then the classicist judged it by some external, objective standard. What that standard was, Eliot did not fully clarify, but the point was made: the reigning conventions of literary London and the previous century were expired. While the readers of Tennyson had trusted his lines to express the poet's true feelings and approved him accordingly, Eliot demurred. In “The Function of Criticism,” he instructed us that there is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position.

Q.12. What are the Dynamic Conception of Tradition as referred by Eliot?

Ans. Eliot's dynamic Conception of Tradition means 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 historic sense feels that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day, including the literature of his own country, 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 historic 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, the 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.

Q.13 What is the critical background of T.S.Eliot?

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Q.14. What are the Dynamic Conception of Tradition as referred by Eliot?

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Q.15. Explain the term 'Objective Co-relative'.

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Q.16. Elucidate 'Criticism can never be an autotelic'.

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Q17. Throw light on Eliot's functions of Criticism.

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T. S. ELIOT : AS A CRITIC

STRUCTURE

17.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with T.S. Eliot and his criticism.

17.2 T.S. ELIOT AS A CRITIC

17.2.0 THE CRITICAL BACKGROUND

The "modernist" criticism headed by T.S. Eliot emanated largely from the "Modernist" reaction against romantic poetry. Eliot being the greatest poet of the modernist period was more involved than any of his generation in evolving the new theory of poetry as well as of poetic criticism. Like Arnold in the Victorian Age, or Coleridge in the Romantic, Eliot produced a large body of critical essays, both theoretical and practical - more theoretical like Coleridge and Arnold, being crusader for a new kind of poetry. Before we take up in detail the critical writings of Eliot, we need to glance backward to the years around the close of the

nineteenth century which produced a sort of poetry that provoked a strong reaction from the new band of poets headed by Eliot and Pound.

From 1890's (the decade of decadence) until the beginning of First World War in 1914, poetry in England remained for the most part on the country paths laid down by the Romantics of the early nineteenth century, unaware of the fact that those paths had become ruts, and that a more suitable track was now the pavement. New forces were emerging on the scene, although their influence in the early years of the twentieth century, especially on the Georgians, who commanded the popular favour available at the time for poetry, was not significant. Even Eliot's own earliest (undergraduate) poetry had a Georgian tinge, but the association was brief. In fact, it was Eliot's later reaction to Georgian poetry that led to his formulating the literary theories from which all his mature poetry was derived. To discover all this demands a knowledge of his criticism, for there at the back of the poet's mind, if not as his express purpose, he seems always attempting to defend the kind of poetry he himself wrote, or to formulate the kind he wanted to compose. Valuable as an introduction to the theory is a study of Eliot's opinion of Georgian practice, for this not only launched his search for a philosophy of literature, but also provided it at once with one of its components, a demand for a greater esotericism in poetry. The poetry that made Eliot strongly react against, the Georgian poetry, was purely a poetry of escape, creating romance of remote lands, sentimentalizing the English countryside. Swinburne's poetry, representative of Georgian poetry, played with the music of words, tending to divorce from their relations with the objects they represent.

When Eliot came of age as a poet he realized, even while acknowledging Swinburne's genius, that his was not the kind of poetry which could offer a satisfactory model for a generation "struggling to digest and express new objects... new feelings, new aspects." This, then, is the test of tradition - its relevance to contemporary conditions. It is this which will decide, in Eliot's words, "what in the past is worth preserving, and what

should be rejected," as the immediate practical need of poetry are concerned. Looking back on the immediate predecessors in the nineteenth century (both Victorians and Romantics included), Eliot felt that even in the greatest romantic poetry no help seemed available for the "modern" poet. His feeling at the time was that the disembodied convolutions of Swinburne's poetry, and the escapism of the Georgians were equally symptoms of the same disease - decadence of the tradition. The Georgian experiment showed the intensity of the decadence, revealing the extent to which romantic tradition was unrelated to the artistic problem of Eliot's time. In his reaction against the nineteenth century tradition of poetry Eliot emphasized what Arnold had done before him - that the vague is a more dangerous path for poetry than the arid; that the serious writer of verse must be prepared to cross himself with the best verse of other languages, and the best prose of all languages. As Eliot puts it, "we must learn to take literature seriously"; "Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth punish us from their graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian anthology."

In the failure of most Georgians and in the success of Walter de la Mare one can read the implication of Eliot's reasons for seeking esotericism. One can also see the cause of his belief that only through the poet's willingness to accept as his objective dissemination of his work through a small group (like Arnold's delivered and disinterested men of culture), might poetry regain some of its lost powers, and absorb vital influences. Precisely the same emphasis - of foreign import of ideas and resistance to popular debased taste - Arnold had made in, is more voluminous critical writings. Thus, the poetry that emerged to replace the Georgian brand was marked by the three qualities, defined by Ezra Pound - the master craftsman of Eliot's designation: "(1) Melopoeian, to wit, poetry by its music, whether it be a music in words or an aptitude for, or suggestion of, accompanying music; (2) Imagism, or poetry wherein the feelings of painting and sculpture are predominant...; and where is (3) logopeia, or poetry that is akin to nothing but language; which is a dance of intelligence among words and ideas and modifications of ideas and words." Something of each of these can be found

in good poetry. Such poetry must also resolve the distinctive characteristics of its own time - which are temporary - into universality, must show them as part of a greater pattern. Its ability to do so makes it at once individual and yet comfortable to the pattern of tradition. Further, it demands from the reader conception and intellectual acuity as well as sensuous receptivity. So good poetry will always be more esoteric than will be second rate.

At the time when T. S. Eliot began to write a degree of esotericism, voluntarily sought, even greater than usual was required, in reaction to the exotericism of the preceding age. As Eliot himself argued, "I sometimes think that our own time, with its elaborate equipment of science and psychological analysis is even less fitted to the Victorian age to appreciate poetry as poetry." Realizing this, Eliot discarded the popular style of the Georgians in favour of esotericism. An appeal to a smaller audience will make the effort required for appreciation of the "new" poetry, rather than to "the average human being" who "no longer cares to feel the keen edge of life, to have freshness in vision or zest and savour in the senses. He prefers to face life in the armour of boredom and cynicism, fending off despair with the brazen shield of dissipation. ... But rich or poor, it is the same fever to escape from reality - above all from art, which is the mirror in which the reality of life is accentuated." Partly, then, the esotericism of Eliot's poetry is sought voluntarily, in protest against the demands of a public kept in being in England by Georgian poetry, and in the hope of finding or creating an audience, which, though smaller, should at least realize that poetry makes demands of the reader as well as of the poet. Incidentally, the description of "the average human being" is just about the same as Arnold gave of "the Philistine," nor is the description of the reading and appreciating minority any different from Arnold's description of the men of culture.

We need to put a qualifier here: when Eliot chose the way of esotericism, it was not entirely out of reaction against the preceding poetry. As Eliot explains in his essay, "The Metaphysical Poets," "we can only

say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult, Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." Quite apart from the shortcomings of Georgian poetry, it was inevitable that the poetry coming after it should have been esoteric, "cultivating all the possibilities of words as a medium," and, "when the speech of one sense is insufficient to convey [the] entire meaning, [using] the language of another." That it should, in other words, be esoteric because of its necessity to create new devices essential to the expression of entirely new conditions.

Thus, it can be seen that the causes of esotericism in Eliot's poetry are more than one. First of all, the unprofitableness of popular appeal to an audience incapable of proper appreciation, the result of social factors, and of Georgian usage with its debased playing upon the low artistic responses of a large audience. Instead of this, the poet of Eliot's conception, the "modern" poet, appeals to a small public in the hope that by a process of diffusion his work may reach, and be fully appreciated by a large part of society. Once again the argument is the same that Arnold had advanced earlier - the "delivered" men of culture will deliver, as a matter of duty, the others. Secondly, the demands of a civilization infinitely more complex than in any earlier age, whose representation in art requires the resurrection of lost and the development of new artistic devices. Esotericism, therefore, was, for Eliot, both a discipline for the easier desires of the artist as well as the audience, and a necessary result of the conditions in which the poet's sensibility had to operate. Behind all Eliot's poetry lies the critical sense which led him to examine the past for a new source of strength, and from his examination to produce a traditionalism very different from the barren *laissez-faire* of most of his contemporaries. Georgian poetry was only the ultimate development of a tradition with which Eliot was

entirely out of sympathy. It was by finding, just as Arnold had done before him, romantic fallacious that he turned to older tradition, and tradition embracing the European continent. Arnold, too, had made a similar search in the continental sources after he got disenchanted with the Romantic poetry of his predecessors.

In the case of Eliot, the revolt against romanticism involved the rejection of the liberal doctrine which held man's chief end to be the complete development of his personality. It is with approval, significantly, that Eliot quotes Arnold's condemnation of the group of Romantics, that "proceeded with having its proper data," which made "Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent." Eliot came to believe that romantic poetry is for "those who demand of poetry a day-dream, or a metamorphosis of their own feeble desires and lusts, or what they believe to be 'intensity' of passion." For Eliot, art based on the romantic fallacy will become music which we seize to body forth our own vacuity.

Thus, for Eliot, what is important is not "what the author felt," for this makes poetry no more than "a collection of psychological data about minds of poets." This attack on the Romantics made in his "Preface to The Sacred Wood" (1920) is reiterated in "*After Strange Gods*" when Eliot attacks a contemporary romantic, D.H. Lawrence, for "having had no guidance except the Inner light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wondering humanity." Earlier in "The Function of Criticism," Eliot had already elaborated the condemnation of artistic self-sufficiency dismissing the inner voice as "an old principle which has been formulated in the now familiar phrase of 'doing as one likes'"

In Eliot's view, if the critic's aim is to discover common principles among men, objective standards by which art may be judged, he cannot simply "do as he likes." For this must inevitably result in the multiplication (or pluralism) rather than in the resolving into order of critical standards. The Romantic fallacy, he thought, had resulted in a destruction of belief in central authority to which all men might owe allegiance, in objective standards by which men might agree to judge art; and in any inspiration

other than the shifting of personality through which adult, orderly art might be created. We can see what, in Eliot's view, is lacking in Romantic poetry, and what he demands from the poetry of his age and the best poetry of all times. In his view, the Romantic poetry lacked cohesion, which was to be achieved only by dependence on objective authority. Making frequent reference to the neoclassical poetry of the Augustans, Eliot emphasizes that this poetry achieved "an elegance and a dignity absent from the popular and pretentious verse of the Romantic poets." Eliot argues this point in his critical "Preface" called "Homage to Dryden". Eliot goes on to say that the difference between the two schools (the classic and the Romantic) is that "between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic." This later, and rather devastating for the Romantic school comment Eliot makes in his famous critical essay "The Function of Criticism." Quite clearly, Eliot admires the classical school and condemns the Romantic.

In her preface to *Poetry and Criticism* Edith Sitwell begins with a quotation from Abraham Cowley: "A war-like, various, and a tragical age is best not to write of, but to write in." The Modern Age of Eliot is one of those ages to which Cowley's description is most befitting. The political hysteria of the inter-war years was paralleled by a wild outburst of artistic experiment justified by its "modernity" and the extent to which it broke with the past. That the term "modernity" is rather relative, and that experiment conducted on such a basis could establish nothing but a sort of disorder of its own, did not perhaps occur to its practitioners. Their argument, if they had an argument, was that as life was formless and chaotic, it was chaos and formlessness that art must represent. It may make some sense, but it cannot be accepted the only sense possible. One may not represent chaos by creating it, as one does not recreate in a literary work an observed atmosphere of boredom by boring the reader. When we come upon towards the end of *The Waste Land*,

These fragments I have shored against my ruins,

Eliot seems to imply, by his various allusions to dead authors, that the

ruins of traditional ethics and aesthetics that form the modern world's spiritual store are to be rebuilt by synthesizing the peculiarities of the modern world with the universality contained in the classics. In Julien Benda's description of contemporary French society Eliot found an analysis capable of wider application. The destruction of belief in organization in art, and the sacrifice to emotional appeals of its rational Eliot thought, were widespread, and tradition, "the common inheritance" of all artists, offers to them the medium through which they could attain a sense of community, and hence the creation of order out of chaos. In Eliot's view a sense of community was essential to a mature, authoritative art, capable of revealing the hidden significances in, and the connections between, the disparate elements of reality. Art, the end of which, according to Eliot, is to show that coherence and meaning exist where none appeared, must first achieve coherence itself. It is as true of artistic endeavour as it is of the religious life.

There is no life that is not in continuity. Although it is possible that such a community of feeling can be achieved without any deliberate effort, "our instincts of tidiness imperatively command us not to leave to the haphazard of the unconscious what we can attempt to do consciously." In his *After Strange Gods*, Eliot emphasizes that the struggle of our time is to "re-establish a vital connection between the individual and the race." Correspondingly, he thinks, the struggle in art is to make the poet aware of "the mind of Europe... a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind." It is perhaps because Eliot was an American that he was unable to accept the European tradition as a matter of course, despite his obvious desire to find an authority greater and more stable than the compulsion of personality. His own (the American) tradition offered to him no authority to which he could attach his creative belief. For this reason he turned to the European tradition, which was not his natural inheritance. Viewed in this perspective one can appreciate his laboured and elaborate thesis on the tradition, which a critic like Arnold had taken for granted and made brief mention of. Thus, we can see that Eliot's theory of poetry was formulated in reaction against the all-prevailing listlessness at

the time. It stresses the importance of tradition, which is the history of man's artistic and spiritual enquiries. Even more than that, it demands of the poet that he should struggle to gain awareness of the mind of Europe, that he should sacrifice his personal whims to the compulsions of this external authority.

We need to remember here that what is being emphasized by Eliot had, as a matter of fact, been equally hammered by Matthew Arnold half a century before Eliot's time. Arnold's "current of ideas" and Eliot's "mind of Europe" are just about the same things. Adherence to the mind of Europe, or the compulsions of the external authority, the tradition, requires that the poet should partake of the general subjection of self that must come before chaos may be resolved into order, and spiritual apathy become spiritual effort. Against the view that poetic truth - which is the perception of an order composed by all the facts of life - may come unbidden in a flash of inspiration, Eliot proposes the theory that it may be discovered only through effort. Interestingly the Romantic egotism, individualism, or spiritualism (mysticism) are reduced, by Eliot and other modernists, to emotional individualism, eccentricity, whimsicality, egotism, etc. We know the attempt here is to distort the facts for the purpose of under rating, even maligning, Romanticism. Wordsworth and his contemporaries never wrote about individual self rather, the self in Romantic poetry is always representative of the universal human self, and so-called individualism is never to "divide man from man," but rather to see "many in one" and "one in many." It is, unfortunately, the bane of polemical criticism that it always distorts the case of its adversary to its own advantage.

In his various critical essays Eliot keeps labouring and elaborating his idea of integral relationship between individual poet and the European tradition, making the idea favourable to the poets of his liking, Donne and Dryden in special, and unfavourable to those he did not like Wordsworth and Arnold in particular. He considered the latter not his predecessors but his adversaries, taking them and those like them, not a part of the

Tradition, but outside of that Tradition. In that sense, Eliot's criticism is more contentious than that of Arnold whose urbanity and sophistication, light and sweetness, restrained him from harsh attacks on those not of his liking. Away from the adversaries, Eliot takes great pains to elaborate his idea of tradition, and in a manner as if it had not been known to anyone before him. He directs attention to the value of tradition which must, because of the pattern it composes, form a part of the poet's experience. To experience it in Eliot's view, demands a conscious effort, valuable not only because it shows the poet more surely than uncontrolled emotion how best he may practice his art, but in itself as a discipline preliminary to the toil of creation.

Once again Eliot sounds like Arnold, as he lays emphasis on the toil, the effort that must precede the creation. One recalls here the necessity, for the critic as well as the poet, to know the best known and thought in the world. The one problem that seems to arise in the case of Eliot is his theory of creation, in which the poet's mind is imagined as a gas chamber where different elements (ideas and images) combine to create a composition in verse or prose, in which the mind has played no role except as a catalytic agent. Now, the problem is, if the mind does not play any part in the composition except as a catalytic agent, facilitating a meeting or merging of different elements, how can the poet then "consciously" put in an "effort" to submit himself to the "authority" of the "tradition"? It is hard to reconcile these two views of the poet's mind that Eliot advances in his critical writings, even in the same essay. Arnold too, laid stress on objectivity (born of distinterestedness), but that objectivity is different from the idea of impersonality that Eliot propounds. While in Arnold's theory, stress falls on a spiritual attainment of human personality, in Eliot's it falls on a psycho-scientific process - a process which I.A. Richards explains in more precisely-scientific terms. In the case of Eliot, the personality is subordinated to a process, which is not altogether conscious (in fact, it is more unconscious than conscious), whereas in the case of Arnold the personality rises into the spiritual scale to become an objective consciousness, a pure intelligence.

It is also interesting to note that while in Arnold tradition consists of the best that is known and thought in the world which is to remain with

the critic as well as the poet in the form of almost an instinct and has to act as touchstone, in the case of Eliot, it has to be used in the form of symbol or allusion within the poet's own creation. Eliot's use of allusion is, of course, not always for emphasis by parallelism. Frequently a contrast is implied; sometimes one allusion may contain at once a parallel and a contrast. By his technique of allusion and quotation he indicates his acceptance of an objective symbolism, as the Augustans accepted that of the classical gods and goddesses, nymphs and satyrs. It has also been emphasized that Eliot in going to tradition for his symbols does not disturb what he uses. By relating the past to contemporary life in this way he not only charges his poetry with an added significance, but stresses the continued virility of the past. Eliot substitutes tradition for the classical mythology as the background which will provide imagery and symbolism. It can intensify the feeling, the content of the poem, retain the suggestiveness which does so much to differentiate poetry from prose, and yet assure that the suggestiveness will be confined to the demands of the poem's purpose. As a critic, then, Eliot's attempt all along remained to justify the kind of poetry he himself produced. Arnold, on the other hand, deprecated his own poetry being in the Romantic tradition. But this very difference gives the two critics different objectives; while Eliot expends his energies, directly or indirectly (more indirectly) to justify his type of poetry, Arnold expended his energies in justifying the best, the most excellent type of poetry. Although the two great poet-critics coming in succession share a good deal with each other, they also disagree on several key issues of poetics.

17.2.1 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss T.S. Eliot as a Critic.

b) Explain T.S. Eliot's views on Romantic Poetry.

17.3 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

In general, what is the primary function of literary criticism?

A) To create new literary works

B) To promote the author's personal beliefs

C) To provide an objective evaluation and interpretation of literature

D) To generate profits for publishers

Answer: C) To provide an objective evaluation and interpretation of literature

What does literary criticism primarily aim to do according to Eliot and many other literary critics?

A) To determine the author's personal life story

B) To expose hidden meanings in a text

C) To suppress individual creativity in literature

D) To provide readers with a deeper understanding of literature

Answer: D) To provide readers with a deeper understanding of literature

What does Eliot suggest about the value of traditional forms of criticism?

A) They are irrelevant in the modern world.

B) They are the only valid forms of criticism.

C) They can provide insights but may need adaptation to fit contemporary literature.

D) They should be completely abandoned.

Answer: C) They can provide insights but may need adaptation to fit contemporary literature.

According to Eliot, what is the relationship between the critic and the creative artist?

A) They are adversaries, with opposite goals.

B) The critic has no role in relation to the creative artist.

C) They share a common goal of promoting personal creativity.

D) They complement and support each other in the world of literature.

Answer: D) They complement and support each other in the world of literature.

What is the primary focus of Eliot's essay on criticism?

A) To advocate for the abolition of literary criticism

B) To promote the superiority of poetry over prose

C) To explore the historical development of literary criticism

D) To examine the functions and responsibilities of the literary critic

Answer: D) To examine the functions and responsibilities of the literary critic

Eliot believes that good criticism should possess which of the following qualities?

A) Subjectivity and personal bias

B) A focus on the author's biography

C) Objectivity and an awareness of tradition

D) A disregard for literary tradition

Answer: C) Objectivity and an awareness of tradition

What does Eliot mean when he suggests that criticism should be "historical"?

A) Criticism should only focus on ancient literature.

B) Criticism should consider the historical context of the work being analyzed.

C) Criticism should ignore historical factors in literature.

D) Criticism should be focused solely on the author's biography.

Answer: B) Criticism should consider the historical context of the work being analyzed.

Eliot emphasizes that criticism should be "incarnational." What does he mean by this term?

A) Criticism should focus on the spiritual aspects of literature.

B) Criticism should involve the physical presence of the critic.

C) Criticism should take on a human form.

D) Criticism should embody the text being analyzed.

Answer: D) Criticism should embody the text being analyzed.

According to Eliot, what is the ultimate goal of criticism?

A) To impose the critic's personal opinions on readers

B) To undermine the value of literature

C) To aid the reader in a better appreciation and understanding of literature

D) To replace creative writing with critical analysis

Answer: C) To aid the reader in a better appreciation and understanding of literature

How does Eliot view the relationship between the critic and the past?

A) Critics should ignore the past and focus on the present.

B) Critics should be detached from the influence of the past.

C) Critics should be deeply connected to and influenced by the past.

D) Critics should strive to surpass the achievements of past authors.

Answer: C) Critics should be deeply connected to and influenced by the past.

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I. A. RICHARDS

STRUCTURE

18.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with I.A. Richards as a critic and introduce his poetics of tension.

18.2 I.A. RICHARDS : "A POETICS OF TENSION"

From Plato to the present critical approaches to literature have been numerous - of these some have been so much in vogue that they have acquired the status of a school. For instance, we have the school of historical criticism, Neo-Aristotalian school of criticism, school of psychological criticism, etc. Similarly, there has been the school of "Affective Criticism," to which I.A. Richards appropriately belongs. Affective criticism is so called because it studies the effect of a literary work on the audience or the reader. This school of criticism is as old as criticism itself. The very first European critic, whose writings are available to us, the Greek writer Plato, belonged to this tradition of criticism. In Plato's view, poetry "feeds and waters the passion." He banishes poets from his ideal Republic because they make

citizens sentimental and cowards. They cloud the mind of their readers or viewers with emotions which excite their writings. Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis, though formulated as an answer to Plato's charges against poets, belongs to the same critical tradition. He may speak of a sobering (rather than exciting) effect of literature (of purging the excess emotions of pity and fear), he is still speaking of the effect of a literary work upon its audience or readers.

The methods of affective criticism received special attention in the nineteenth century, perhaps because of the decay of metaphysics and the unusual growth of the physical sciences. Gustav Fechner, for example, took the problems of aesthetics into the laboratory. He set out to construct an aesthetic theory, not *Von open* but *Von unten*. His methods of investigation were to be empirical and inductive. Then, in the twentieth century came the unprecedented impact of psychology upon literary criticism through the famous works of scientists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Freud's theory of the wit and the comic gave rise to a spate of studies making applications of his various theories. Though he himself did not directly make an application of his theory of wit, certain parallels clearly suggested themselves. In his view, the creation of wit draws upon the unconscious; so does the creation of poetry, one can see. Both wit and poetry are in some sense "inspired." Many of the techniques of poetry, like those of wit and dream, are evidently to be subsumed under a principle of condensation. "Rhyme, alliteration, refrain, and other forms of repetition of similar sounding words in poetry" afford us pleasure and that pleasure is a pleasure gained through economy of psychic expenditure.

When Freud does come to address himself directly to the subject, his account of art is rather disappointingly simple: the pleasure of art is quite badly reduced to that of a "substitute-gratification." Freud lumps the artist and the neurotic together in their reversion to fantasy - giving credibility to the old half serious aligning of genius and madness. Art, in his view, represents a vicarious fulfillment of wishes denied to the

artist by reality. But the artist differs from the neurotic in several very important ways, as Freud elaborately explains. He makes pleasure a specific means used by the artist ("attach. .. so strong a stream of pleasure") as well as the general end of his art; moreover, he is willing to lump together, quite indiscriminately, the various kinds of pleasure to which art may conduce, including the quite solid and material pleasures which financial success may bring. But Freud, as he more than once pointed out, made no pretense to a total literary theory. He was apparently willing to leave the task of discriminating specific aesthetic pleasure or pleasures to the aesthetician and literary critic.

Although several more critics (like Max Eastman and George Santayana) contributed to the continuance of the affective approach to literature, the need for clarification of the ideas in this realm was pressed with a special urgency by I. A. Richards. He was the critic (in the Modern period) through whose mediation psychology made its greatest impact upon literary criticism. He asked readers to purge their critical thinking of all such animistic habits as cause us to make unwarranted connections between our inner feelings and the nature of objective reality. The specific contribution of Richards lies, however, in his account of the way language bears on the problem. In his famous book, *The Principles of Literary Criticism (1924),* he made a fine distinction between "two uses of language":

A statement may be used for the sake of the reference, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude. . .. This is the emotive use of language. Thus, science makes statements, but poetry makes what Richards calls "pseudo statements"; their referential value is nil. Poetry makes an emotive use of language. That is its specific character. However, in the opinion of Richards, not every instance of such emotive use is aesthetically valuable. He criticizes both Eastman and Santayana for not discriminating between emotional intensity and valuable emotional experience. His earliest books *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1921),

written in collaboration with C.K. Ogden and James Wood, provides a handy scheme for summing up the more typical affective theories of the last century. At the same time, it sets forth the choices and rejections by which Richards arrived at his own special theory. Richards and his collaborators list, in the book just mentioned, sixteen meanings of the term beauty, the last seven of which they label "psychological views." The simplest of these sixteen defines the beautiful as anything "which excites Emotions." As the three authors comment, such a definition is much too wide. For it is not easy to ascribe the highest value to emotions in general, merely as emotions. They may be often experienced without particular significance, and have their place without necessarily being the concern of art.

Richards expresses a somewhat more restricted view in specifying pleasurable emotions that is "Anything is beautiful - which causes Pleasure." He and his colleagues choose to refer this definition of beauty to Santayana, its "most accomplished modern advocate." But the great disadvantage of any pleasure view of art, they point out, "is that it offers us too restricted a vocabulary." Criticism exhausts itself in recording that the art-work is indeed pleasing. Among the writers who have felt constrained to narrow the field of emotions expressed by art to "some unique emotion," Richards and his colleagues name Clive Bell and Roger Fry. The difficulty with such a peculiar emotion, Richards points out, is that any attempt to define it is bound to be circular: death-dealing things, for example, do not necessarily have anything in common except that they all cause death, and by the same token, we are told, "beautiful" things need have in common only the fact that they can cause someone to avow that they are beautiful. But if the critic proposes to connect beautiful things nothing further than the assertion that he feels them all to be beautiful, Richards points out, then he has not advanced beyond his original assertion: namely, that they provoke in him that "peculiar" emotion. Thus, there have been a large number of affective theories - how art-work affects a reader or an audience. We have

mentioned here some of these for example. We need not bring them all on record. Only the ones that Richards takes up for showing their limitations have been stated in our discussion.

This review, however brief, of affective theories does suggest some of the reasons for Richards' choice of synaesthesis as the one affective theory that seemed to him adequate to serve as the foundation of an aesthetic. One of Richards' reservations about these theories is that they apply to so much non-realistic experience as well that they fail to isolate the specific values of art. The element constant to all experiences that have the characteristic of beauty, concluded Richards, is synaesthesis - a harmony and equilibrium of our impulses. The thesis that Richards advances in this regard is that any given experience must involve the arousal and interplay of various impulses, but in the experience of beauty, Richards contends, our impulses are organized in a peculiar way, which constitutes synaesthesis, avoiding the rivalry of conflicting impulses, not by suppressing the impulses, but, paradoxically, by our giving them free rein. Using his knowledge of science, Richards draws a picture of the human mind, and explains its working when faced with an experience, say, of an art object:

Not all impulses... are naturally harmonious, for conflict is possible and common. A complete systematization must take the form of such an adjustment as will preserve free play to every impulse, with entire avoidance of frustration. In any equilibrium of this kind, however momentary, we are experiencing beauty.

Such a reduction of human mind's functioning into a scientific system is bound to present its difficulties, for an equilibrium of conflicting impulses can be easily confused with the state of "balance" that we find in impulses in which the mind, like the fabled donkey poised between the equally attractive bales of hay, can only remain suspended in inaction. Richards and his co-authors warn us that this is not at all what they mean by synaesthesis, which is no such oscillation but is rather a harmonization, where the competing impulses sustain not two states of mind but one. They do not

split the human ego into two, but complete and enrich it. In the experience of synaesthesis, our interest, we are told, "is not canalized in one direction," and there is a sense of detachment and disinterest. Our lack of commitment to any particular course of action means in reality that we are, like the poised athlete, in readiness for any kind of action.

Continuing to use his resource of science, which is psychology, Richards offers a technical psychological explanation for this kind of special "disinterest." He says that whereas two perfectly simple impulses must either oscillate or lock, a "more complex initial conflict" may discharge itself "through its branch connections." Such a complex conflict may "solve" itself "in the arousal of the other impulses of the personality." At any rate, whatever the precise nature of the psychological explanation, Richards is confident that the sense of disinterest in the aesthetic experience means, paradoxically, that the maximum number of interests is actually involved, and that the feeling of "impersonality" that synaesthesis induces means that the "whole of the personality" has been brought into play. By the equilibrium of synaesthesis Richards would evidently suggest, then, not the lifeless balance of deadlock but the vibrant poise of the completely coordinated personality. Richards also warns us that there is a second state of mind also with which synaesthesis is not to be confused. He remarks that the feelings of "lucidity, self possession and freedom" that characterize the experience of synaesthesis may also attach to the state of mind that arises when one is possessed by an intense emotion such as anger or joy. In one of his later poems, W.B.Yeats admirably describes this state of "simple resolution":

Know that when all words are said

And a man is fighting mad, Something drops from eyes long blind,

He completes his partial mind,

For an instant stands at ease

Laughs aloud, his heart at peace. . . .

But, since such a state of mind achieves its "harmony" by having no warning impulses to harmonize, its resemblance to synaesthesis is only superficial. Richards offers test by which it can be distinguished from synaesthesis. The mark of distinction of the real state of synaesthesis is that it "refreshes and never exhausts".

One thing decidedly becomes evident from Richards' explanation of his term synaesthesis that he has moved beyond any simple pleasure which the earlier critics had designated as the experience of art. A few years after the publication of *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, Richards made a significant assertion that the pleasure felt by a competent reader "is no more the aim of the activity in the course of which it arises, than, for example, that noise made by a motor-cycle - useful though it is as an indication of the way the machine is running - is the reason in the normal case for its having been started." The main value of literature, in other words, is to be found in its after-effects upon the mind. Another pertinent observation that the authors of *The Foundations of Aesthetics* make on synaesthesis is: Though Richards explores Kant's having created a "phantom problem of the aesthetic mode" through his attempt to define the "judgment of taste" as a judgment "conceiving pleasure which is disinterested, universal, unintellectual, and not to be confused with the pleasures of sense or of ordinary emotions," his own doctrine of synaesthesis courts, if it does not actually demand, the same series of epithets.

No doubt, the term synaesthesis has a psychological orientation, not a metaphysical, but the term is certainly disinterested, and this aspect comes out quite clearly when Richards tries to distinguish it from the false equilibrium of irresolution or from that of full emotional commitment. As Richards defines them, attitudes are incipient or "imaginal" actions. In synaesthesis, these incipient actions are so ordered and so balanced that the maximum number of them is involved and the minimum number is blocked - but they remain incipient; that is, no action takes place. Synaesthesis is, thus, defined as readiness "to take any direction we choose," but in synaesthesis evidently we do not choose. Presumably if we did choose and acted upon

that choice, that very fact would indicate that the supposed state of synaesthesis was illusory, not real. As Richards puts it,

> When works of art produce such action, or conditions which lead to action, they have either not completely fulfilled their function or would in the view of equilibrium here being considered be called not "beautiful" but "stimulative."

Synaesthesis, says Richards, is the ground-plan of all aesthetic experience. No doubt, a lot of people have had this experience in the past, but they have confused the experience with a revelation of some sort. He admits that the arts do seem "to lift away the burden of existence" and we do seem "to be looking into the heart of things," truth belongs to science, which represents a "different principle" upon which impulses may be organized," and which has a very different function from that of the arts.

Richards, in his *Principles of Criticism*, never, in fact, uses the key term synaesthesis instead, the terms he uses are "inclusion" and "synthesis" for naming the character of the greatest and most valuable poetry. Synaesthesis, and the key paragraph devoted to defining synthesis bears a remarkable resemblance to one of the paragraphs in Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty*. Let us put these passages side by side so that we can see how similar they actually are. First, Santayana, who, in a section of his book, which he significantly entitles "The Liberation of the Self," writes the following:

> Now, it is the essential privilege of beauty to so synthesize and bring to a focus the various impulses of the self, so to suspend them to a single image, that a great peace falls upon that perturbed kingdom. In the experience of these momentary harmonies we have the basis of the enjoyment of beauty, and of all its mystical meanings. But there are always two methods of securing harmony: one is to unify all the given elements, and another is to reject and expunge all the elements that refuse to be unified. Unity by inclusion gives us the

beautiful; unity by exclusion, opposition, and isolation gives us the sublime. Both are pleasures: but the pleasure of the one is warm, passive, and pervasive; that of the other cold, imperious and keen. The one identifies us with the world, the other raises us above it.

Now, compare with this one by Santayana the following one by Richards:

There are two ways in which impulses may be organized; by exclusion and by inclusion, by synthesis, and by elimination. Although every coherent state of mind depends upon both, it is permissible to contrast experiences which win stability and order through a narrowing of the response with those which widen it. A very great deal of poetry and art is content with the full, ordered development of comparatively special and limited experiences, with a definite attitude, Love, Indignation, Admiration, Hope, or with a specific mood, Melancholy, Optimism or Longing. And such art has its own value and its place in human affairs. No one will quarrel with "Break, break, break," or with the Coronach or with Rose Aylmer or with Love's Philosophy, although clearly they are limited and exclusive. But they are not the greatest kind of poetry; we do not expect from them what we find in the Ode to a Nightingale, in Proud Maisie, in Sir Patrick Spens, in the Definition of Love or in the Nocturnal! upon S. Lucie's Day.

One thing that emerges from a comparison of these two statements is that the two kinds of poetry are not, for Richards as they evidently are for Santayana, on the same level. Further, Richards does not seem to be interested in distinguishing that beautiful Poem is not needed in that shape; and what the proper shape would be we are not likely to know. "I for one feel that I cannot know even what it is in the poem which constitutes its stimulus". It is, thus, questionable whether Richards actually succeeds in cutting his desiderated "balanced poise" cleanly off from all relation to "the

structure of the stimulating object." Richards' carefulness in pointing out that such balance poise is "not peculiar to Tragedy" not withstanding, significantly it is in tragedy the form of literature in which conflicts and tensions are obvious structural features, that he discovers his clearest illustrations. It is pertinent to recall here that Nietzsche, too, had discovered that his tragedy "contrasts are overcome" and "oppositions conquered." In fact, Nietzsche also anticipated Richards in his insistence that the greatest artists are those "who make harmony ring out of every discord." This clearly anticipates Richards' conception of a "poetry of inclusion," though Nietzsche gave his "inclusion" a clear structural, and not psychological reference. For the discordance in the composition, and the larger harmony in which these momental disharmonies are finally resolved is evidently to be referred to the total structure of the literary work. Not the least important of the "musical" characteristics that Nietzsche attributes to tragedy is this conception of a richer and more intricate harmony, achieved by the resolution of apparent discords, as opposed to the "thinner" harmony of less ambitious literary works. When Richards suggests that the stability of such poetry can be tested by exposing it to ironic contemplation, he does seem to regard the different "inclusive" poetry as structural. For, though the reader supplies the ironical squint, the subsequent collapse in the objective poem is a structural collapse.

Richards' insistence that irony is "so constantly" a characteristic of the highest order of poetry also calls for comparison with T. S. Eliot's notion that the function of wit is to provide an "internal equilibrium" for the poem in which it occurs, it is at best a symptom of the stability. Eliot says that wit calls to our attention the potentially discordant; that is, the unity of the poem of wit is not a unity easily won by glossing over the discordant elements of human experience. Such restatements of Richards' conception of "inclusion" and of "tension" would, however, appease a critic like Ransom. He impartially criticizes both Richards and Eliot for talking about the reconciliation of what he insists are in fact, irreconcilables. Richards has been certainly careful in distinguishing the poetry of "harmonious

equilibrium" from the poetry of mere "irresolution." Ransom, on the other hand, argues that ironic poetry can represent only irresolution, that is the oppositions "produce an indecisive effect."

Thus, Richards gifted us his "A Poetics of Tension" which tends to explain the nature of a poem as well as its impact on the reader in psychological terms. Everything gets reduced in this poetics to being a matter of impulses, which a poem's experiences balance either by exclusion or by inclusion. The more impulses a poem balances, the richer and greater is that poem. Also, the more conflicting emotions a poem reconciles, still greater is that poem. More or less, the impulses a poem balances exist before the act of balancing in a state of tension. Hence arrives the name for Richards' theory of poetry as the "poetics of tension." The aesthetic pleasure of art lies in the balancing or reconciling the conflicting impulses. Art is beautiful because it creates harmony in its structure. Its experience gives us pleasure. Beauty, therefore, lies in the form or structure, not in the object as such, nor in the beholder's eye.

18.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Trace the contribution of I.A. Richards to Literary Criticism.

b) Briefly discuss Richards' "A Poetics of Tension".

18.4 SUGGESTED READING

Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953).

Robert Graves and Laura Riding, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (New York, 1929).

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THE FOUR KINDS OF MEANING

STRUCTURE

19.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with Richards' concept of "The Four Kinds of Meaning" from his book *Practical Criticism*.

19.2 THE FOUR KINDS OF MEANING

Appearing as a chapter (in Part III: Analysis, numbering chapter I), in I.A. Richards' famous book, *Practical Criticism* (1929), "The Four Kinds of Meaning" constitutes a part of the author's rigorous exercises in

making the reading of literature an intensive activity, requiring expert knowledge of language and linguistics as well as of human psychology. However, before we examine at length the prescribed piece, we better know about the book itself of which the piece in hand is only a part. In his detailed introduction to the book, Richards says the following in the very opening paragraph:

> I have set three aims before me in constructing this book. First, to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture whether as critics, as philosophers, as teachers, as psychologists, or merely as curious persons. Secondly, to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it. Thirdly, to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read.

Here, we can see Richards' approach to literary criticism emerging out of the Arnoldian tradition - of considering criticism as an adjunct of culture, focusing on its present state - adding to it scientific dimension of measuring reader response to literary texts in more precise terms than Arnold's. Culture's interdisciplinary concern is also common to both Arnold and Richards. Besides, the book is also a companion volume to Richards' earlier work, *The Principles of Criticism*. What is propounded first is applied later, the reason why the second volume is called *Practical Criticism*.

In his general epigraph to Part III, of *Practical Criticism* called "Analysis," Richards uses a quotation from *The Bubis of Fernando Po* ('Let us go closer to the fire and see what we are saying'), which indicates the direction of his enquiry to follow. The chapter "The Four Kinds of Meaning" also opens with a quotation, this time from *Laviathan*, which runs as under:

> From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they last up many little summes into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not; and at last finding the errour visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds, know not which way to clear themselves; but spend time in fluttering over their books; as birds that entering by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glass window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in.

Richards opens the discussion, "The Four kinds of Meaning," with a preliminary question: "What is meaning?" "What are we doing when we endeavour the meaning," is the starting point for any inquiry into the nature of a literary text. The "master-keys" provided here, we are told, if made use of, can open to us "the locked chambers and corridors of the theory of poetry." By so doing, "a new and impressive order, is discovered even in the most erratic twists of the protocols." No doubt, there are certain readers, says Richards, "who, by a natural dispensation, acquire the 'Open Sesame'" (reference to the famous phrase khul ja sim sim in "Ali Baba and Forty Thieves")! "to poetry without labour, but for the rest of us, certain general reflections we are not often encouraged to undertake can spare us time and fruitless labour."

"The all-important fact for the study of literature - or any other mode of communication - is that there are several kinds of meaning." In Richards' view, all of us, whether we know it or not, "are all jugglers when we converse, keeping the billiard-balls in the air while we balance the que on our nose." "We may be active as in speech or writing, or passive, as readers or listeners, the Total Meaning we are engaged with is, almost always, a blend, a combination of several contributory meanings of different types." It is well known, and Richards reiterates it, that language, especially the language of poetry, performs several tasks at one and the same time. Unless this point is understood, says

Richards, "we shall misconceive most of the difficulties of criticism." In his view, it is also important for us to take note of the differences between these functions. According to Richards, the language functions are of four types, or four types of meaning:

It is plain that most human utterances and nearly all articulate speech can be profitably regarded from four points of view. Four aspects can be easily distinguished. Let us call them Sense, Feeling, Tone, and Intention.

19.2.0 Sense

In the opinion of Richards, we speak "to say something." Similarly, when we listen, we expect "something to be said." Explaining his point, Richards remarks that we use words "to direct our hearers' attention upon some state of affairs," to present to our hearers some items for consideration and to "excite in them some thoughts about these items." In other words, we always speak or write to Convey some sense to our listener or reader, to communicate some "message," expecting some response from the other side. On this level, our uttered or written words carry some sense, some meaning, which is the literal meaning, so to say. While interpreting a literary text, it is this literal, also called dictionary meaning which we try to make out in the first place. It is only later that we go into the submerged meaning or the sub-text of the literary work, which we do by considering imagery, tone, texture etc. All the meanings, however, combine to yield a complete and whole view of the text in hand.

19.2.1 Feeling

The next thing about our uttered or written words is that, as a rule, we also have "some feelings about these items, about the state of affairs we are referring to." We must also understand what Richards means by the word feeling. As he puts it, "Under 'Feeling' I group for convenience the whole conative-affective aspect of life - emotions, emotional attitudes, the will, desire, pleasure-unpleasure and the rest. 'Feeling' is shorthand for any or all of this." Methodical as Richards

is, he defines, describes and delineates every term and every statement, just as a scientist does, precisely and systematically. After defining feeling, as he uses it here, he elaborates his definition into an explanation so that we can fully comprehend the feeling aspect of language as it accompanies a verbal communication - oral or written:

We have an attitude towards it, some special direction, bias, or accentuation of interest towards it, some personal flavour or colouring of feeling; and we use language to express these feelings, this nuance of interest. Equally, when we listen what we receive; and this whether the speaker be conscious himself of his feelings towards what he is talking about or not. I am, of course, here describing the normal situation, my reader will be able without difficulty to think of exceptional cases (mathematics, for example) where no feeling enters.

Thus, besides the literal message one communicates in a spoken or written statement a "feeling" of one's inclination or desire, bias or prejudice, of attachment or association, etc. And that has to be peculiar to the speaker or writer, for it relates to one's making, so to say. Therefore in order to get at the full import of one's statement. We also need to take into consideration not just the literal meaning but also the feeling the statement carries within itself or attached to it. The feelings are imported by the author directly or through a variety of indirections. There is no literary work which is entirely free from feelings.

19.2.2 Tone

After "Sense" and "Feeling," what we need to look for in a communication, oral or written, in order to get at the "whole" meaning of it is "tone." Richards defines "tone" in the following passage:

Furthermore, the speaker has ordinarily an attitude to his listener. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate recognition of his relation to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness

of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. Again, the exceptional case of dissimulation, or instances in which speaker unwittingly reveals an attitude he is not consciously desirous of expressing, will come to mind.

Thus, tone can be implied consciously, as well as unconsciously, by the speaker or writer, and it would vary with the attitude the speaker or writer adopts towards his listeners or readers. One may, for instance, advise or instigate, admire or taunt, implore or excite. Similarly, one can be angry or annoyed, pleased or obliged, reverential or worshipful towards one's addressee. The speaker's attitude, therefore, becomes of vital importance in imparting meaning to a statement. We know how Dryden and Pope use ironic or sarcastic tone to undercut the seeming or literal meaning of a statement.

19.2.3 Intention

Finally there is besides "sense", "feeling" and "tone" the "intention" of a communication. While "sense" relates to what someone says, "feeling" to what he is talking about, and "tone" to his attitude to his listener, "intention" relates to his aim, conscious or unconscious, the effect that he is endeavouring to promote. We know how every speaker ordinarily speaks for a purpose, and his purpose modifies his speech. The understanding of intention, therefore, is part of the whole business of apprehending his meaning. Unless we know what the speaker or writer is trying to do, we can hardly estimate the measure of his success. The writer's intention may govern stress laid upon points in an argument, for example, shape the arrangement, and even call attention to itself in such phrases as 'for contrast's sake,' or 'lest it be supposed'. As Richards explains, "Intention"

....controls the 'plot' in the largest sense of the word, and is at work whenever the author is 'hiding his hand.' And it has especial importance in dramatic and semi-dramatic literature. Thus the influence of his intention upon the language he uses is additonal to,

and separable from, the other three influences, and its effects can profitably be considered apart.

Therefore, unless one is aware of the different functions of language, one is likely to misunderstand one or another or even all the various functions it performs in a given usage. One can garble the sense, distort the feeling, mistake the tone, or disregard the intention. The possibilities of human misunderstanding are numerous.

If a survey is made of our uses of language as a whole, it is clear that now one knows another of the functions may become predominant, depending on the kind of use a language is put to in a given composition. A man composing a scientific treatise, for example, will put the sense of what he has to say first, he will subordinate his feelings about his subject or about other views upon it. He will take every care that his feelings do not interfere to distort his argument or to suggest bias. His tone will be determined by academic convention. It will be well if his intention, as it shows itself in the work, be on the whole confined to the clearest and most adequate statement of what he has to say. Now consider a different case where a writer is engaged upon popularizing some of the results and hypotheses of science. In this case, first of all, precise and adequate statement of the sense will have to be sacrificed, to some degree, in the interests of general intelligibility. Popular writing, meant for the common reader, will have to keep out the professional jargon, technical vocabulary, and the like. Simplifications and distortions may be necessary if the reader is to 'follow.' Secondly, says Richards, "a much more lively exhibition of feeling on the part of the author towards his subject-matter is usually appropriate and desirable, in order to awaken and encourage the reader's interest." Thirdly, says Richards, "more variety of tone will be called for; jokes and humorous illustrations, for example, are admissible, and perhaps a

certain amount of cajolery."

In a poetic composition, the language functions will assume a different order altogether. In this case, "Feeling (and sometimes Tone) may take charge of and operate through Sense in another fashion, one more constantly relevant in poetry." When this happens, "the statements which appear in the poetry are there for the sake of their effects upon feelings, not for their own sake. Hence to challenge their truth or to question whether they deserve serious attention as statements claiming truth, is to mistake their function." The point that Richards is trying to make here is that "many, if not most, of the statements in poetry are there as a means to the manipulation and expression of feelings and attitudes, not as contributions to any body of doctrine of any type whatever." In verse, too, there are various kinds of poetry. With narrative poetry, for instance, there is little danger of any mistake arising, but with 'philosophical' or meditative consequences.

A crucial passage in Richards' discussion of the various functions of language is the following:

On the one hand there are many people who, if they read any poetry at all, try to take all its statements seriously - and find them silly. 'My soul is a ship in full sail,' for example, seems to them a very profitless kind of contribution to psychology. This may seem an absurd mistake but, Alas ! It is none the less common. On the other hand there are those who succeed too well, who swallow "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" as the quintessence of an aesthetic philosophy, not as the expression of a certain blend of feelings, and proceed into a complete stalemate of muddle-mindedness as a result of their linguistic naivete. It is easy to see what those in the first group miss the losses of the second group, though the first group miss the losses of the second group, though the accountancy is more complicated, are equally lamentable.

Thus, the two responses to the poetic (or emotive) use of language are pitted against each other as the two extremities. One is total literalness of language in which statements in poetry are read as those in science; the other is total aestheticism, a religious worship of art, in which statements are accepted on faith. To Richards both are fallacious: while the first shows lack of imagination, the other lack of sense; both show linguistic ignorance in varying degrees.

Further, Richards focuses on the language of poetry, warning that within the emotive use (the poetic) of language itself there are innumerable modes. What happens with the language in poetry is that the statement is subjugated to emotive purposes, which are numerous. As Richards puts it:

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

What Richards is trying hard to emphasize here is only what Sidney had said in the sixteenth century, that "poet.... nothing a ....., and therefore never lieth." We are shown by Richards how, in so many ways, the poet uses language for different purposes in different contexts, and that whatever statements appear they have meanings within their contexts. If taken out of context, a poetic statement, taken as an assertion of fact, may sound silly and senseless - like Shelley's 'Bird

thou never wert.' To quote Sidney, 'Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation... a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture....'"

Richards concludes his discussion in the given chapter by saying that criticism, when it uses the same devices that poetry does, becomes much more fallacious than the pseudo-statements of poetry themselves.

But these indirect devices for expressing feeling through logical irrelevance and nonsense, through statements not to be taken strictly, literally or seriously, though pre-eminently apparent in poetry, are not peculiar to it. A great part of what passes for criticism comes under this head. It is much harder to obtain statements about poetry, than expressions of feelings towards it and towards the author. Many apparent statements turn out on examination to be only these disguised forms, indirect expressions, of Feeling, Tone and Intention. Dr. Bradley's remark that Poetry is a spirit, and Dr. Mackail's that it is a continuous substance or energy whose progress is immortal are eminent examples. Remembering them, we may be more ready to apply to the protocols every instrument of interpretation we possess. May we avoid if possible in our own reading of the protocols those errors of misunderstanding which we are about to watch being committed towards the poems.

The chapter, thus, ends on a note of caution for the critics, that they should not try to express, in the name of criticism, their feelings and opinions about poems and poets; that they should rather be more "scientific" in the use and study of languages. They must know the various nuances of language, and try to understand them in linguistic terms, rather than respond to them emotionally.

As it must have been observed, what we have summarized here, with some critical observations, is only a chapter, a part, which is

actually a slice from a whole. It is for this reason, for its being a part, not a whole, that it hangs loose on both ends needing links with what has gone before as well as with what is to follow. Discussing a chapter from a book is almost like discussing a few lines from a long composition, say a poem. However, the chapter in question does indicate Richards' approach to language and literature, his scientific way of studying language and its various uses for various purposes. Like Eliot, his target of attack, too, are the nineteenth-century poetics and critics, both being offsprings of the Romantic movement. The new classicism of Eliot and Richards was also, in a way, a form of new scientism; they tried to make criticism a sort of science, grounding it on the principles which could be verified, rather than on the impressions and feelings which would always remain subjective and vague.

19.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) What is the concept of "Four kinds of Meaning," as given by I.A. Richards.

19.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

What is the first kind of meaning discussed by I.A. Richards in his theory?

A) Emotional meaning

B) Referential meaning

C) Semantic meaning

D) Sense meaning

Answer: D) Sense meaning

According to Richards, the sense of a word or expression primarily concerns:

A) The emotional impact it has on the reader

B) The specific referent it points to in the real world

C) The logical and denotative aspects of its meaning

D) The cultural connotations associated with it

Answer: C) The logical and denotative aspects of its meaning

Which kind of meaning is concerned with the emotional or affective response a word or phrase can evoke in the reader?

A) Referential meaning

B) Emotional meaning

C) Tone meaning

D) Sense meaning

Answer: B) Emotional meaning

When Richards discusses "tone" as one of the kinds of meaning, what does he primarily refer to?

A) The pitch and pronunciation of a word

B) The author's attitude or mood in a text

C) The historical context in which a word is used

D) The specific referents of a word

Answer: B) The author's attitude or mood in a text

What is the fourth kind of meaning that Richards identifies, which relates to the specific things or ideas referred to by words or expressions?

A) Emotional meaning

B) Referential meaning

C) Tone meaning

D) Sense meaning

Answer: B) Referential meaning

Which of the following best describes "referential meaning" in Richards' theory?

A) It involves the emotional associations of a word.

B) It focuses on the logical and denotative aspects of a word.

C) It concerns the tone and atmosphere conveyed by a word.

D) It deals with the cultural context of a word.

Answer: B) It focuses on the logical and denotative aspects of a word.

In Richards' theory, why is it important to distinguish between the four kinds of meaning?

A) To demonstrate the complexity of language

B) To emphasize the importance of emotional responses in reading

C) To show that words have only one fixed meaning

D) To highlight the impact of culture on language use

Answer: A) To demonstrate the complexity of language

When analyzing a poem, which kind of meaning might be concerned with the images and sensory experiences evoked by the language?

A) Emotional meaning

B) Tone meaning

C) Referential meaning

D) Sense meaning

Answer: D) Sense meaning

Which kind of meaning is closely related to the overall mood or atmosphere of a text?

A) Referential meaning

B) Emotional meaning

C) Tone meaning

D) Sense meaning

Answer: C) Tone meaning

How does Richards' theory of four kinds of meaning contribute to the study of literature and language?

A) It simplifies the analysis of literary texts.

B) It highlights the importance of emotional responses over logical analysis.

C) It provides a framework for exploring the multifaceted nature of meaning in language and literature.

D) It suggests that words have fixed and unchanging meanings.

Answer: C) It provides a framework for exploring the multifaceted nature of meaning in language and literature.

19.5 SUGGESTED READING

Ernest Kris, *Psychoanalytic Exploration in Art* (New York, 1952).

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PSEUDO-STATEMENTS

STRUCTURE

20.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with Richards' concept of pseudo- statements.

20.2 PSEUDO-STATEMENTS

A section of I. A. Richards' *Science and Poetry*, "Pseudo-statements" deals with the subject of the language of poetry. The opening paragraph of this piece makes clear what the critic intends to argue:

> The business of the poet, as we have seen, is to give order and coherence, and so freedom, to a body of experience. To do so through words which act as its skeleton, as a structure by which the impulses which make up the experience are adjusted to one another and act together. The means by which words do this are many and varied. To work them out is a problem for linguistic psychology, that embarrassed young heir to philosophy. What little

> can be done shows already that most critical dogmas of the past are either false or nonsense. A little knowledge is not here a danger, but clears the air in a remarkable way.

Thus, it is made clear in the very beginning that Richards is going to dwell upon the place of words in poetry, their nature and significance. His tool for investigation remains, as ever, "linguistic psychology." More pronounced than elsewhere becomes here Richards' attitude of contempt towards the established criticism, especially the one immediately preceding his own. His utter contempt for the past "critical dogmas," products of the ignorant ages when there was neither psychology nor linguistics, is shown by the dismissive words, such as "false or nonsense," he uses for them.

As usual, Richards proceeds systematically and logically, classifying and defining, like Aristotle, the various terms and types concerning the language of poetry:

> Roughly and inadequately, even in the light of present knowledge, we can say that words work in the poem in two main fashions. As sensory stimuli and as (in the widest sense) symbols. We must refrain from considering the sensory side of the poem, remarking only that it is not in the least independent of the other side, and that it has for definite reasons prior importance in most poetry. We must confine ourselves to the other function of words in the poem, or rather, omitting much that is of secondary relevance, to one form of that function, let me call it *pseudo-statement*.

Richards explains here how words in a poem perform two functions, namely, as sensory stimuli and as symbols. He further says that the first function of words need not be discussed, and that it is not independent of the other function. It is in the context of the second function of words in a poem that Richards coins the term pseudo-statement, statement which fits

into this system of assumptions would be regarded as “poetically true” one which does not, as “poetically false.” This attempt to treat “poetic truth” on the model of general “coherence thesis” is very natural for certain schools of logicians but is inadequate on the wrong lines from the outset.

Thus stating the scope of his investigation, Richards proceeds to explicate and elaborate what he has briefly stated in the first two paragraphs:

> It will be admitted - by those who distinguish between scientific statement, where truth is ultimately a matter of verification as this is understood in the laboratory, and emotive utterance, where “truth” is primarily accepted by some attitude, and more remotely is the acceptability by this attitude itself - that it’s *not* the poet’s business to make scientific statements. Yet poetry has constantly the air of making statements, and important ones; which is one reason why some mathematicians cannot read it. They find the alleged statements *false*. It will be agreed that their approach to poetry and their expectations from it are mistaken. But what exactly is the other, the right, the poetic, approach and how does it differ from the mathematical.

Richards’ distinction, so clearly made out here, between two uses of language, is indicated by two types of statements, the scientific statements and the pseudostatement. In the scientific use, the prose is discursive, in which the appeal is to mind, its faculties of reason and logic; in the poetic or emotive use, the language is metaphoric or symbolic; in which appeal is made to heart, its faculties of emotion and feeling. In the former use, statements, their truth or falsehood, can be verified by making reference to the world of facts. In the latter use, statements, which are pseudo rather than genuine, truth is not a matter of fact, it is a matter of attitude. The mathematical mind would be inclined to read scientific writing, but would find the poetic writing false and misleading.

Making clear the mathematical approach and what it looks for in any writing, Richards proceeds to explain the poetic approach and how it differs from the mathematical:

> The poetic approach evidently limits the framework of possible consequences into which the pseudo-statement is taken. For the scientific approach this framework is unlimited. Any and every consequence is relevant. If any of the consequences of a statement conflicts with acknowledged fact, then so much the worse for the statement. Not so with the pseudo-statement when poetically approached. The problem is - just how does the limitation work? One tempting account is in terms of a supposed universe of discourse, a world of make-believe, of imagination, of recognized fictions common to the poet and his readers. A pseudo-statement which fits into this system of assumptions would be regarded as "poetically true." One which does not, as "poetically false." This attempt to treat "poetic truth" on the model of general "coherence thesis" is very natural for certain schools of logicians but is inadequate on the wrong lines from the outset. To mention two objections, out of many; there is no means of discovering what the "universe of discourse" is on any occasion, and the kind of coherence which must hold within it, supposing it to be discoverable, is not an affair of logical relations. Attempt to define the system of proportions into which
>
> O Rose, thou art sick!
>
> must fit, and the logical relations which must hold between them if it is to be "poetically true" the absurdity of the theory becomes evident.

This distinction that Richards draws here between the referential and the emotive uses of language is, of course, the best-known and the most radical of his "separations." He does, of course, deny here to poetry

any truth of reference and argues that the "truth" as applied to poetry or any work of art could mean only the "internal necessity" or "rightness" of the work of art: that is, scientific truth has to do with correspondence to the nature of reality, artistic "truth" is a matter of inner coherence.

Of course, Richards raises objections to certain logicians' explanation in terms of the "universe of discourse", the "coherence theories," on the grounds that such coherence between what the poet creates and what the reader perceives is never there, certainly not in all societies. He, thus, rejects the theory of a shared world between the poet and his readers, although all is not wrong with the theory he rejects; for there certainly is a "world", an experience, real, possible, or imagined, which the two do share. However, Richards has a more convincing theory to offer about the acceptability of "poetic-truths", even though they cannot be proved or verified:

> We must look further. In the poetic approach the relevant consequences are not logical or to be arrived at by a partial relaxation of logic. Except occasionally and by accident logic does not enter at all. They are the consequences which arise through our emotional organization. The acceptance which a pseudo-statement receives is entirely governed by its effects upon our feelings and attitudes. Logic only comes in, if at all, in subordination, as a servant to our emotional response. It is an unruly servant, however, as poets and readers are constantly discovering. A pseudo-statement is "true" if it suits and serves some attitude or links together attitudes which on other grounds are desirable. This kind of "truth" is so opposed to scientific "truth" that it is a pity to use so similar a word, but at the present it is difficult to avoid the malpractice.

Making the separation on grounds of his own or discovered by him, grounds different from those put forth by the earlier logicians, Richards goes on defining the difference in the nature of the two "truths"

- scientific and poetic. He analyses to show how in the poetic truth emotional organization supersedes the logical, and, in fact, subordinates the latter. Continuing his analysis further, Richards argues:

> This brief analysis may be sufficient to indicate the fundamental disparity and opposition between pseudo-statements as they occur in poetry and statements as they occur in science. A pseudo statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes...; a further, statement, on the other hand, is justified by its truth, i.e., its correspondence, in a highly technical sense, with the fact to which it points.

Thus, Richards gives more comprehensive definitions of two types of statements than he did before. He shows here the fundamental disparity between the two. But then he goes on into further elaboration of the difference between them, offering greater clarification to the reader. In the process of doing so, however, Richards takes a wider sweep, like Arnold, and relates the relevance or irrelevance of the two types of statement to the contemporary civilization. Without making any reference to Arnold, one can see, Richards is following the same two-pronged function of criticism - to make it a general activity beyond the mere literary, and to seek its relevance "at the present time."

Although professedly a pronounced opponent of Arnoldian tradition, Richards, like Eliot, turns out, in some significant ways, as Arnoldian himself. Note, This is the paragraph:

> Statements true and false alike do, of course, constantly touch off attitudes and action. Our daily practical existence is largely guided by them. On the whole true statements are of more service to us than false ones. None the less we do not and, at present, cannot order our emotions and attitudes by true statements alone. Nor is there any

> probability that we ever shall contrive to do so. This is one of the new great dangers to which civilization is exposed. Countless pseudo-statements - about God, about the universe, about human nature, the relations of mind to mind, about the soul, its rank and destiny - pseudo-statements which are pivotal points in the organization of the mind, vital to its well being, having suddenly become, for sincere, honest and informal minds, impossible to believe as for centuries they have been believed. The accustomed incidences of the modes of believing are changed irrevocably; and the knowledge which has displaced them is not of a kind upon which an equally fine organization of the mind can be based.

Here is, then, the larger historical perspective brought upon Richards' study of statements and pseudo-statements, how the two determine our daily life, our attitudes and emotions to various aspects of life, including religion and art. Most statements, Richards finds, have been rather "false" than "true," which cannot stand the test of verification, but which organize our minds, condition our attitudes. Reflecting on the contemporary condition, where old beliefs and attitudes no longer hold good, and the new ones are yet to appear to replace them, Richards observes the following:

> This is the contemporary situation. The remedy, since there is no prospect of our gaining adequate knowledge, and since indeed it is fairly clear that genuine knowledge cannot meet this need, is to cut our pseudo-statements free from that kind of belief which is appropriate to verified statements. So released, they will be changed, of course, but they can still be the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and to the world. This is not a desperate remedy, for as poetry conclusively shows, even the most important among our attitudes can be aroused and maintained without any

> believing of a factual or verifiable order entering in at all. We need no such belief, and indeed we must have none. If we are to read King Lear, pseudo-statements to which we attach no belief and statements proper, such as science provides, cannot conflict. It is only when we introduce inappropriate kinds of believing into poetry that danger arises. To do so is from this point of view a profanation of poetry.

One hears here echoes of Arnoldian higher destiny of poetry, higher than religion as well as science, for while poetry makes only pseudo-statements, the other two dogmatically insist on the "truth" of their statements. Richards' argument is that the "truth" of *King Lear* has nothing to do with objective truth. The "effects of the narrative" which determine the "acceptability" of the "things we are told" are psychological effects. The happy ending that Nahun Tate imposed on *King Lear* was "false," according to Richards, because it was at odds with the rest of the play. The play as a whole is "true," argues Richards, only in virtue of giving rise to the proper psychological effects, in helping us, that is to "order our attitudes to one another and to the world." That is why, he says further and writes that we must not have any beliefs, if we are to read '*King Lear* aright; for belief, with its claims to objective truth, would disturb the play if contained coherence, the "internal necessity" which is the only "truth" that chords will allow to the play.

Such was, then, Richards' solution to the conflict between science and poetry: it is as drastic as it is neat. There could be no conflict for the good reason that there was no common ground upon which science and poetry (properly understood) could meet. They were held to utilize radically different aspects of language. There are, for example, certain things that Lear cannot do because they would violate our sense of his character as built up in the play. The happy ending that Nahun Tate clapped into *King Lear* simply does not accord with the earlier parts of the play. And yet more would seem to be operative in forming the rejections than

what is contained in earlier scenes of the play. Our appeal to world are influenced by our whole previous acquaintance with human beings. When we decide that Lear cannot do this or that, we are relying upon notions of human psychology - very general notions perhaps - but notions that refer to a world outside the formal limits of the art-work itself. Even the world of Aesop's fable's or of the fairy tale or of "science fiction" has not cut all connections with the world of our experience.

Some critics do not accept Richards' theory separating the "poetic truth" from the "scientific truth," although no one questions the necessity of doing so, Or the difference in the two uses of language. There would have been little debate if Richards' severance of poetry from all "reference" had amounted to more than saying that the reader of Shakespeare did not need to worry about the inaccurate Scottish history in *Macbeth*, or that the reader of Coleridge had cause to be disturbed by such scientifically impossible descriptions as that which places a star within the neither tip of the moon. On this level, the difference between poetry and history and poetry and science had been made by the ancients. But Richards goes further than the ancients. He seems to argue that poetry was literally nonsense, though, for reasons bound up with his psychologistic theory, a peculiarly valuable kind of nonsense. It was difficult for critics like Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom to see how one could deny all truth to poetry, and yet at the same time argue in the fashion of Matthew Arnold that "poetry could save us."

Richards is not prepared to accept "poetic statement" as any kind of truth, except that it is "pseudo" or "false." He rejects the earlier attempts to designate "poetic statement" with any sort of truth:

> Yet an important branch of criticism which has attracted the best talents from pre-historic times until consists of the endeavour to persuade men that the functions of science and poetry are identical, or that the one is a "higher form" of the other, or that they conflict and must choose between them.

> The root of this persistent endeavour has still to be mentioned; it is the same as that from which the Magical View of the world arose. If we give to a pseudo-statement the kind of unqualified acceptance which belongs by right only to certified scientific statements... , if we can contrive to do this, the impulses and attitudes with which we respond to it gain a notable stability and vigour. Briefly, if we can contrive to believe poetry, then the world seems, while we do so, to be transfigured. It used to be comparatively easy to do this, and the habit has become well established. With the extension of science and the neutralization of nature it has become difficult as well as dangerous. Various subterfuges have been devised along the lines of regarding Poetic Truth as figurative, symbolic; or as more immediate, as a truth of intuition transcending human knowledge; or as a higher form of the same as a collective of science are very common. One point can be made against them all they are never worked out in detail. There is no equivalent of Mill's Logic expounding any of them. The language in which they are framed is usually a blend of obsolete psychology and emotive exclamations.

Coming to the condition of civilization in modern times of the increasing influence of science, which has neutralized nature, making impossible for men to continue to believe in the Magical View of the world. "And when the world picture ceases to assist, is collapsed. Over whole tracts of natural emotional response we are today like a bed of dahlias whose sticks have been removed. And this effect of the neutralization of nature is only in its beginnings. However, human nature has a prodigious resilience. Love poetry seems able to outplay psychoanalysis".

We can see how Richards' view of modern civilization is very similar to that of Arnold, and of Eliot, the "Waste-land" view, and how, like Arnold, he pines his hope, for salvaging the hopeless situation, on "love poetry" -

"Ah love let's..." (Dover Beach). As Richards goes on with his lengthy description of the condition of contemporary civilization, the echo of Matthew Arnold becomes more and more pronounced:

A sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavour, and a thirst for life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed, are the signs in consciousness of this necessary regeneration of our lives. Our attitudes and impulses are being compelled to become self-supporting; they are being driven-back upon their biological justification, made once again sufficient to themselves. And the only influences which seem strong enough to continue unflagging are commonly so crude that, to more finely developed individuals, they hardly seem worth having. Such people cannot live by warmth, food, fighting, drink, and sex alone. Those who are least affected by the change are those, who are emotionally least removed from the animals.

Here is a sort of paraphrase of Eliot's 'The Waste Land' to which, Richards acknowledges, his "debt is evident." One also hears here the familiar Leavis' distinction between the minority culture and the mass civilization. This tradition of culture, to which both Eliot and Leavis belong, is essentially Arnoldian. Although Richards endorses Arnold-Leavis-Eliot's view that the modern civilization is "sick" and "sterile," he disagrees when it comes to diagnosing the ailment. His analysis of the problem is pertinent: "It is important to diagnose the disease correctly and to put the blame in the right quarter. Usually it is some alleged "materialism" of science which is denounced. This mistake is due partly to clumsy thinking, but chiefly to relics of the Magical View. For even if the universe were "spiritual" all through (whatever that assertion might mean; all such assertions are probably nonsense), that would not make it any more accordant to human attitudes. It is not what the universe is made of but how it works, the law it follows, which makes knowledge of it incapable of spurring on our emotional responses, and further, the nature of knowledge itself makes it inadequate . ."

The justification, or the reverse, of any attitude lies, not in the object, but in itself, in its serviceableness to the whole personality. Upon its place in the whole system of attitudes which is the personality as all its worth system of attitudes depends. This is equally true for the subtle, finely compounded attitudes of the civilized individual as for the simpler attitudes of the child.

In brief, the imaginative life is its own justification and this fact must be faced, although sometimes - by a lover, for example - it may be very difficult to accept. When it is faced, it is apparent that all the attitudes to other human beings and to the world in all its aspects, which have been serviceable to humanity, remain as they were, as valuable as ever. Hesitation felt in admitting this is a measure of the strength of the evil habit I have been describing. But many of these attitudes, valuable as ever, are now that they are being set free, more difficult to maintain, because we still hunger after a basis in belief. Thus, ends this present piece by Richards, a part of his longer treatise *Science and Poetry*, leaving no ambiguity about his strong commitment to the scientific reason and analysis, nor about his strong antipathy to the Magic View of life and the world. Unlike Arnold and Eliot, he is not mourning the death of faith, nor is he cursing the coming of science; on the contrary, he welcomes the light of science, and has no regrets about the death of darkness. His assertion that "imaginative life is its own justification," though readily acceptable to the man of imagination, is no less of an altruism than the traditional "virtue is its own reward." His dilemma is apparent: He cannot accept the Magical View; at the same time, he cannot discard the universal attitudes towards good and bad, human and inhuman. He may not find any scientific explanation for these attitudes, but he still finds them serviceable, and still holds them valuable.

20.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) How does Richards' Concept of Pseudo-statements deals with the language of poetry.

20.4 SUGGESTED READING

Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, 1957).

Daniel E. Schneider, *The Psycho-Analyst and the Artist* (New York, 1950).

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RICHARDS AS A CRITIC

STRUCTURE

21.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with I.A. Richards as a critic.

21.2 RICHARDS AS A CRITIC

I.A. Richards made attempts to distinguish between the emotional effect produced in the reader and the means by which it is produced. His attempts further gives rise in his criticism to a whole series of related separations: between value (content) and communication to the reader of a worthless experience and the "badness" that results from the faulty communication of what was presumably a valuable experience; between technical criticism (which Richards defines as dealing with the make-up of the stimulating object) and evaluative criticism (which deals with the value of the experience communicated). An exploration of some of these topics supplies striking instances of the difficulties with which an affective theory burdens a critic

who has genuine literary sensitivity and whose deepest allegiance is evidently to poetry rather than to the psychology of the readers' response.

In his well-known book, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards illustrates the two types of "badness" by using a short Imagist poem by Hilda Doolittle (better known by her initials H.D.) and a rather glib love sonnet by Ella Wheeler Wilcox. He identifies the cause of H.D' s failure in her Imagist poem, its insufficiency of communication with regard to the valuable experience which, the critic concedes, the poet may have had. On the other hand, the Wilcox sonnet, says Richards, fails because the experience which it communicates - all too clearly - is hardly of any value. The sonnet, apparently, is dominated by an elaborate analogy between Summer and Love, and Friendship and Autumn. Richards' point is that those readers "who have adequate impulses as regards any of the four main systems [of impulses] involved" in this poem are not "appeased" by the poem. "Only for those who make certain conventional, stereotype maladjustments instead, does the magic work."

What Richards does with these poems is not, of course, the best way to deal with a poem. For instance, it would have been simpler to deal with the adequacy of imagery rather than with the adequacy of "impulses." The poem's critic could have simply said that any reader who attended to the imagery of the poem would find it absurdly confused. If the reader knew anything about the autumn, he would know that a autumn day with a "touch of frost. .. in the air" tends to be crisp and sparkling, not hazy with the mellowness of St. Martin's summer. If he knew anything about love, he would not be satisfied with the metamorphosis of love into "large-eyed friendship" through a kind of fade out dissolve of one obviously trumped-up allegorical figure into another.

A certain superficial plausibility notwithstanding, the distinction between "badness" of communication and the "worthlessness" of the experience communicated cannot in fact be maintained. We can only speculate about values that are not revealed in the poem itself. That there

might have been a valuable experience behind H.D.' s "The Pool" is, and must remain, pure hypothesis. On the other hand, it could be argued that the alleged clarity of the Wilcox sonnet is actually an illusion since what is inextricably confused cannot have "clarity." The "badness" of this poem consists in a pretension to coherence that is not made good; the analogy between Summer-Autumn and Love-Friendship is asserted but never realized dramatically. The essential act in condemning the poem consists therefore in exposing the basic incoherence.

Looking for the roots of Richards' various "separations," one discovers that they are related to his desire to discuss poetry in terms of stimulus and response. This fact comes out more clearly in his attempt to distinguish "technical" remarks from "critical" (i.e., evaluative) remarks. He seems to regard the distinction as important because, as he writes, the trick of mistaking "the means for the end, the technique for the value, is in fact the most successful of the snares which waylay the critic." Yet on the same page Richards expresses his belief in an organic theory of poetry. We can see problems arising from the conception of his theory. One of these is: in what sense can a part of a poem be regarded as the means to an end? There is a sense, to be sure, in which all the parts of an organic whole may be regarded as reciprocally means and ends. The hand is a "means" to the functioning of the head. But within the poem, it is not clear how there can be ends and means; the correct relation would seem to be that of parts to a whole.

Perhaps under the influence of Coleridge, Richards had committed himself, in his early phase of writing, to the organic theory of poetry. But by 1934, he had grown suspicious of the distinction we discussed above. In his well-known book *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934), we get to have a glimpse of that suspicion:

It is with deceptive ease... that the enquiry [into poetic meaning] divides into questions about the what and the how. Or into questions about

the methods a poet uses and the feats he thereby achieves. Or into questions about his means and his ends. Or about the way of his work and the whither.

Though Richards regards the division as for some purposes "necessary" and for other purposes "convenient," he warns that it tends to distort the whole meaning of the work by abstracting "some component to be treated as its whither and to be set over against the rest as its way."

The temptation to make such severances and separations as Richards does, has remained stubbornly persistent in the literary criticism coming after him. Although critical of Richards' theory on several counts, Ransom's work has a striking instance of making similar separations and severances. Ransom's denial that there can be any "fusion" of "experiences that ordinarily repel one another" - as that notion is held either by Richards or by Eliot provides a crucial distinction between the texture and the structure of a poem, Ransom, is constituted of its rich local values, the quality of things in their thingness." The structure is the argument of the poem. It gives the poem such hope as it has, it regulates the assemblage of sensory data, providing order and direction. Science has, properly speaking, no texture; it is content with pure structure and exhibits no rich particularity. A poem, on the other hand, has a texture and a structure. Though the texture is strictly irrelevant to the logic of the poem, yet it does after all affect the shape of the poem; it does so by impeding the argument. The very irrelevance of the texture is thus important. Because of its presence we get, not a streamlined argument, but an argument that has been complicated through having been hindered, and diverted, and leaving thus had its very success threatened.

Ransom's separation between texture and structure, we know, was the result of his dissatisfaction with Richards' theory of "affectivity." Ransom stressed the cognitive element in his own theory. But this would have to be described as a sort of "bifocal" cognitive theory: poetry gives us through its structure and texture, respectively, knowledge of universals and knowledge

of particulars. Although it immediately echoes Aristotle, it is not very far from Richards' tension between content and form, value (universal) and experience (particular).

Ransom's argument that poetry is the complement of science which, restricting itself to universal, can mirror only a world of abstractions, instance hands over the realm of the universals to science, and in effect retains to poetry no more than an apprehension of particulars. As can be easily seen, there are problems here: are the two knowledges on the same level? Can they be from fusing? Or do they function intermittently, and if they do, is there any reason why notion of the union of the levels as an impossible oil-and-water texture: neither components will dissolve into the order? What Ransom seems of local "knowledge" suspended in, and diffused through, the other "knowledge" of universals :

[The imagination] presents to the reflective mind the particularity of nature; whereas there is quite another organ, working by a technique of universals.

On a strict interpretation, Ransom would seem to confine the imagination to such matters as the reflection of orders, tactile impressions, tone, colours, and other sensations, leaving out larger patterns such as those woven by the "moral" imagination.

Thus, we can see that in his attempt to depart from Richards' order of separation Ransom lands in the difficulties that Richards was able to avoid. Richards' psychologism makes greater sense than does Ransom's separation between texture and structure. Richards' context and form separation had the backing of the long literary tradition, whereas Ransom's appears more of a freak idea in that tradition. On close examination, however, the function that Ransom accords to "statement" or "structure" in poetry resembles very closely that accorded to statement in poetry by Richards. Richards makes it plain that referential statements in poetry are not important in themselves, though they frequently occur

and indeed usually must occur "as conditions for, or stages in, the ensuing development of attitudes" the elements that are important. Ransom, likewise lays stress on the fact that a poem cannot do without structure (i.e., a determining argument): the human mind is so constituted that it has to have an argument to follow. But the arguments of most poems, Ransom concedes, are in themselves, usually dull affairs; we follow the pathway of the argument really for the sake of the details that border the path. One is tempted to pick a daisy or to investigate an oddly shaped bush (the elements of "texture"). We keep returning to the path and eventually arrive at our elected destination, but we arrive having seen the country - as we would not have, had we kept to the value. Thus, for Ransom as well as for Richards, the statements made in the poem are important only in so far as they are a means to something else.

Looking for further collaboration of Richards' theory in Ransom, we can note that Ransom's justification of poetic structure, no less than Richards' rests upon an appeal to psychology, that is human beings demand at least an apparent argument; we will not swallow our local detail. Ransom observes that "it is hard to say what poetry intends by its odd structure," and the makeup of poetry, as he has described it, is odd - so odd that one must despair of accounting for it in terms of any entelechy of its own. Only the cravings of the human psyche can account for it, and Ransom, in a later phase of this theory, came to seek for the explanation in Freudian psychology. The conscious and reasonable ego flourishes upon neat and tidy orderliness, but the unconscious Id requires the concrete and unpredictable particulars for its sustenance. Poetry thus ministers to the health of the mind, and Ransom's later position tends to approximate in some features the earlier position of Richards. This fact, taken together with the counter-fact that Richards, in his own later criticism, moved towards a cognitive position, is a clear evidence of the difficulties inherent in any critical theory which begins by slicing the emotive use of language free from the referential or Ransom's cutting the valuable illogical

"texture" free from logical "structure". In so far as the value of the poem is something that cannot be figured forth in the poetic meaning before us, psychology will have to be called in, either at the beginning or at the end, to justify the irrational elements in which the value has been made to reside. Thus is the influence of Freud on the literary criticism since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some of the most fruitful and intensive application to literature of something like a new "science of tropes" did, in fact, come out of the influence of Richards rather than that of Freud. This fact also serves to mark a difference between Richards' theory of affectivity and that of Freud. William Empson, who is even more deeply indebted to Richards, tends to confirm this point. As Susan Langer has put it: "to make all art a natural self-experience function like dream and "make-believe" tends to put good art and bad art on a par". "One does not say of a sleeper that he dreams clumsily, nor of a neurotic that his symptoms are carelessly strung together; but a poem may certainly be charged with ineptitude or carelessness." Richards, on the other hand, from the very beginning, focused attention upon the problem of discriminating good art from bad. To a remarkable degree, he stressed the organic structure of the work itself, and despite his own more extravagant theories.

Richards' contribution, more than any other of his contemporaries such as Ransom or Eliot, was to introduce the scientific (more precisely psychological) investigation of literary works. Beginning with the composition of the human mind he went on to explain the composition of the literary work, returning finally to the impact of the mind's creation back on the mind. The mind of the reader who is to be "affected" by the poem is, after all, the same as that of the poet who is to "affect" the reader through his composition. Like the scientist, the critic was made to perform clinical operations on the poems, one by one, showing what each poem is made of in terms of its different elements, with what combination of those elements, and in which particular chemical reaction the elements have come to fuse into each other to form a new compound called poem.

Further, when the reader goes through the poem, how the new experience of reading it first disturbs the balance of the reader's mind by arousing certain impulses, and then how the aroused impulses are resettled into a new balance. Thus, from the creation of art work to its effect on the reader's mind, theories were churned out comparable to scientific discoveries about the phenomena in the natural world. The entire modernist movement, we know, was focused on making experiments, like the scientists, in discovering an unprecedented experimentation, more so in the field of criticism than in that of creativity, and the volumes of criticism that came out of this gigantic effort in experimentation is astounding indeed.

The modernists initiated a sort of revolution, in which Richards was in the forefront, which the post-modernists have completed. The revolution was, first of all, to shift the terms of critical discussion from the moral and ethical values to those of technical and scientific. Detaching the work from the author's personality, making creation a matter of chemical reaction, that too unconscious, converting criticism into a matter of scientific investigation, all went into taking away from the business of criticism the discussion of the good and bad, or the right and wrong of the experience embodied in an art-work. Since the art work was declared as nothing more than a structure of words (in place of bricks), the only relevant questions that remained to be investigated by criticism were those of structural excellence or structural flaws, of efficiency, of perfection or imperfection, and not of moral or immoral, virtuous or villainous, pious or pernicious.

Blake had said - to dissect is to kill. Richards and his colleagues and their followers just did that - they killed literature. Human affairs are not for dissection; they are for experiencing, and experiencing in wholeness, to which we respond instinctively and emotionally, getting attracted or repelled by the good or the bad action of the various characters figuring in the work. Reducing literature to a scientific product, and making criticism an activity even more scientific, led to taking away the moral sense which Arnold had attached to the general question of

'how to live?' Literature no longer remained a reading for "purpose through pleasure;" it became a reading for "knowledge" (scientific knowledge) about men and their affairs.

Another devastating effect of Richardsian revolution in literary criticism was to defect and detract the reader's interest from literature to criticism. Richards initiated his investigations in the psychology of the poet's mind and the psychology of the reader's response. In the postmodernist era of the "Theory", literature has been further degraded into something most mundane, having nothing special about it either in the matter of its content or in the use of language. It has been reduced to being a part of a period's discourse, an item of cultural representation, as good or bad as a film or a popular dance or a newspaper piece. The wheels of critical production have received supersonic acceleration, with literature left out in the cold. For it is the theory about literature, and not literature itself, which alone attracts attention and examination; no wonder, the theorists refer to each other, not to the writers and their works.

Thanks to Richards that he derailed us from the pleasant and purposeful path of beauty and truth on to the path of statements and pseudo-statements, impulses and emotions, Ego and Id, structure and texture. The pleasure of reading is gone; the purpose of receiving moral education is gone; only technical or scientific knowledge remains. Theory reigns supreme.

21.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Richards as a literary critic, highlighting his contribution to literary criticism.
2. Write a note on Richards' separation between the language of poetry and the language of science.
3. Examine Richards' theory of poetry - how it is created and how it works on the reader's mind ?

4. Write a note on Richards' views on the aspects of content and form in a poem.

5. What are Richards' tools of criticism? Examine their usefulness as a reader.

21.4 SUGGESTED READING

Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*: *A Short History* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1957).

Yvor Winters, *The Anatomy of Nonsens*e (New York: Alan Swallow Publishers, 1957).

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JOHN CROWE RANSOM: CRITICISM, INC.

STRUCTURE

22.1 INTRODUCTION

John Crowe Ransom (April 30, 1888 – July 3, 1974) was an American educator, scholar, literary critic, poet, essayist and editor. He was a leading figure of the school of literary criticism known as the New Criticism, which gained its name from his 1941 volume of essays *The New Criticism*. The New Critical theory, which dominated American literary thought throughout the middle 20th century, emphasized close reading, and criticism based on the texts themselves rather than on non-textual bias or non-textual history. In his seminal 1937 essay, "Criticism, Inc.", Ransom laid out his ideal form

of literary criticism stating that, "criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic." To this end, he argued that personal responses to literature, historical scholarship, linguistic scholarship, and what he termed "moral studies" should not influence literary criticism. He also argued that literary critics should regard a poem as an aesthetic object. Many of the ideas he explained in this essay would become very important in the development of The New Criticism. "Criticism, Inc." and a number of Ransom's other theoretical essays set forth some of the guiding principles that the New Critics would build upon. Still, his former students, specifically Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren, had a greater hand in developing many of the key concepts (like "close reading") that later came to define the New Criticism.

22.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the movement of New Criticism and specially with Ransom's deliberations on the business of criticism on the part of the artist, the philosopher and the critic (the university teacher of literature), as expressed in his famous essay, 'Criticism, Inc.'. It is a comprehensive subject. In this essay, Ransom discusses the issues involved with academic fervor.

22.3 THE NEW CRITICISM

It is a dominant Anglo-American critical theory that originated in the 1920s and 1930s, stressing the importance of reading a text as an independent and complete work of art.

One of the most influential movements in modern critical scholarship, the New Criticism is a philosophy of literary interpretation that stresses the importance of studying literary texts as complete works of art in themselves. Although the term New Criticism was first coined in the nineteenth century, it was not until American critic and poet John Crowe Ransom, founder of the *Kenyon Review* wrote a book titled *The New Criticism* (1941) that it became established in common academic and literary

usage. In essence, the New Critics were reacting against established trends in American criticism, arguing for the primacy of the literary text instead of focusing on interpretations based on context. They are grouped together due to their reaction against previously established schools of criticism, such as impressionist criticism, the humanist movement, the naturalist movement, and the Marxists, and the fact that many of them taught at Southern universities at the time they created the theory of New Criticism. In addition to rallying against traditional modes of literary interpretations, the most significant contribution made by the New Critics was the success with which they established criticism itself as a major academic discipline.

The most simplistic definitions of New Criticism identify it as a critical movement that propagates the idea of "art for art's sake." Yet the New Critics did concern themselves with the history and context of a work of literature. For them, to truly understand a work of literature, it was important to "embrace a total historical scheme," using it as the standard against which one judges a literary text. But in contrast to traditional literary criticism, which emphasized the context and background of a text almost as much as the text itself, the New Critics argued that literary texts were complete in and of themselves. Additionally, theories of New Criticism elevate the role of criticism in academics—according to them, criticism is crucial to help maintain poetry and language, and in aiding their development, the New Critics propose, criticism is really an integral part of social development. Most studies of New Criticism identify it as a formalist mode of critical interpretation, focusing on a close reading of the technicalities, structure, themes, and message of the literary text. Many of the literary qualities held in high esteem by the New Critics were first espoused in the prose works of Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the New Critics considered his work on critical theory as a fundamental starting point in their principles of literary criticism. One of the most well-known texts detailing New Criticism theory was published by Cleanth Brooks in 1947, titled *The Well-Wrought Urn*. In this work, Brooks, in addition to articulating the theories of New Criticism, also interprets many seminal poetic texts using the principles of the New Critics.

Although New Critics applied their principles of literary study to many genres in literature, they held poetry in high regard, viewing it as the best exemplification of the literary values they espoused. Among the American New Critics, a nucleus of writers and critics, including Penn Warren, Ransom, and Tate set about defining their notion of a literary aesthetic, especially as it related to poetry, during the 1920s. They published their views in a bi-monthly literary review called *The Fugitive,* and worked to create what they believed was a literary renaissance in the South, a view of writing and studying poetry that they saw as the essence of modernism, and a sustained and valid response to the traditionally sentimental literary conventions of the South. In later years, the New Critics expanded their definition of the poetic aesthetic, theorizing that poetry, as a work of art, is the ultimate form of communication, complete in meaning and form in itself. One of the most influential writers of New Criticism poetic theory was I. A. Richards—his book *Practical Criticism* (1929) detailed experiments in critical interpretations of poetry in which students were asked to study texts of poems with no accompanying information on the author, or even the title of the works. An unexpected result of the wide variety of student responses was a realization regarding the importance of teaching the act of critical thinking and interpretation. For later New Critics, including William Empson, it was this, the study of language and form that became the subject of his book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*(1930), a work in which he explored the development of systematic modes of literary interpretation.

New Criticism continues to be studied as part of twentieth-century formalist theories of literature. In his essay outlining the history and development of the New Criticism, John R. Willingham points out that although the proponents of New Criticism are considered creators of a modernist mode of literary interpretation, many of their theories derive from earlier poetic principles, such as those articulated by Coleridge. As a literary movement, New Criticism achieved its most popularity in the 1940s, and a large number of periodicals espousing these ideas began to be published at

that time, including *Southern Review, Kenyon Review,* and others. Established journals also eagerly accepted many New Critics as contributors, making criticism itself a dominant field of study in the classroom. In a few decades, however, especially in the 1970s, the New Criticism began waning in popularity, and in fact, was rejected as being "intellectually naïve and methodologically fruitless" writes Willingham. The main charge against the New Critics was their insistence on disregarding historical and biographical information in the study of a literary text, and the stress they placed on the "correct" reading of a text. Their method of critical study was perceived as being too restrictive, and their demands on the reader seen as too authoritarian. More recent evaluations of the New Criticism have defended their original intent—to refocus attention on the literary work itself, rather than the writer or even the reader. In this, concludes Willingham, the sustaining principle advocated by the New Critics was their insistence that "literature requires and deserves responsible reading and readable response."

22.4 CRITICISM INC.: FIVE PARTS

The theoretical essay 'Criticism, Inc.' by Ransom is neatly divided into five parts. Though the renowned critic refrains from giving sub-titles to the parts yet we may say that the essay deliberates upon these five major points: (i) delineating the proper business of criticism, (ii) reforms of the courses in English, (iii) the role of the university departments of English, (iv) drawing lines between- what is criticism and what is not, and lastly, (v) the nature of criticism.

22.4.1 Business of Criticism

Ransom says that nobody is perfectly knowledgeable about the proper business of criticism. Most of the critics are amateurs in the field. '*They have not been trained to criticism so much as they have simply undertaken a job for which no specific qualifications were required. It is far too likely that what they call criticism when they produce it is not the real thing'.*

Ransom identifies three performers competent enough to be critics- the artist himself, the philosopher and the university teacher of literature. The artist's understanding is intuitive rather than dialectical. He cannot afford to be objective with reference to his work of art.

'It is true that literary artists, with their command of language, are better critics of their own art than are other artists; probably the best critics of poetry we can now have are the poets. But one can well imagine that any artist's commentary on the art-work is valuable in the degree that he sticks to its technical effects, which he knows minutely, and about which he can certainly talk if he will.'

Secondly, the philosopher who is skilled in the function of the fine arts and is well versed with critical theories is apt to see 'a lot of wood and no trees'. He may come out with handsome generalizations rather than intensive study of a given work.

The third one is the university teacher of literature who is a competent scholar in the field. His critical observations are official and academic with no commitment or responsibility. '*The third is the university teacher of literature, who is styled professor, and who should be the very professional we need to take charge of the critical activity. He is hardly inferior as critic to the philosopher, and perhaps not on the whole to the poet, but he is a greater disappointment because we have the right to expect more of him. Professors of literature are learned but not critical men. The professional morale of this part of the university staff is evidently low. It is as if, with conscious or unconscious cunning, they had appropriated every avenue of escape from their responsibility which was decent and official; so that it is easy for one of them without public reproach to spend a lifetime in compiling the data of literature and yet rarely or never commit himself to a literary judgment.'*

However, the university professors must professionally erect standards of criticism. Criticism must be scientific, precise and systematic. It must be evolved by collective and sustained efforts of scholars. Therefore, the proper seat of literary criticism is in the universities.

By scientific study, Ransom means, systematic studies in the field of literature and poetry.

Scientific: but I do not think we need be afraid that criticism, trying to be a sort of science, will inevitably fail and give up in despair, or else fail without realizing it and enjoy some hollow and pretentious career. It will never be a very exact science, or even a nearly exact one. But neither will psychology, if that term continues to refer to psychic rather than physical phenomena; nor will sociology, as Pareto, quite contrary to his intention, appears to have furnished us with evidence for believing; nor even will economics. It does not matter whether we call them sciences or just systematic studies; the total effort of each to be effective must be consolidated and kept going. The studies which I have mentioned have immeasurably improved in understanding since they were taken over by the universities, and the same career looks possible for criticism.

The whole enterprise of criticism should be handled by learned and competent professionals rather than the amateurs who happen to write occasional criticism. Ransom tosses the term

'Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd.', calling it the need of the hour.

22.4.2 On the Reforms of the Courses in English

Ransom appreciates Prof. Ronald S. Crane, University of Chicago, for the innovating suggestion that historical perspective of literature should be replaced by critical perspective. '*To me this means, simply: the students of the future must be permitted to study literature, and not merely about literature.'* Prof. Crane has initiated systematic

teaching of literary criticism in the Department of English, Chicago University. He has begun with Aristotle's *Poetics* and proceeded further. Prof. Robert Morss Lovett is his colleague.

'If the department should now systematically and intelligently build up a general school of literary criticism, I believe it would score a triumph that would be, by academic standards, spectacular. I mean that the alive and brilliant young English scholars all over the country would be saying they wanted to go there to do their work. That would place a new distinction upon the university, and it would eventually and profoundly modify the practices of many other institutions. It would be worth even more than Professor Crane's careful presentation of the theory.' It is quite possible now that the professors of English have tilted against the historians/scholars. The New Humanists have introduced a recent diversion from the orthodox course of literary studies. '*The New Humanists were, and are, moralists; more accurately, historians and advocates of a certain moral system. Criticism is the attempt to define and enjoy the aesthetic or characteristic values of literature, but I suppose the Humanists would shudder at "aesthetic" as hard as ordinary historical scholars do. Did an official Humanist ever make any official play with the term? I do not remember it. The term "art" is slightly more ambiguous, and they have availed themselves of that; with centuries of loose usage behind it, art connotes, for those who like, high seriousness, and high seriousness connotes moral self-consciousness, and an inner check, and finally either Plato or Aristotle.*'

Ransom mentions Mr Babbitt who made war on Romanticism: his preoccupation was ethical rather than aesthetic i.e. he attacked romantic literature as a moralist. T.S. Eliot also toed Babbitt's line. T.S. Eliot's grievance against romantic poetry/ literature was that it was not objective and did not maintain 'aesthetic distance' with the poet. The Leftist critics ferreted out the ideas of class consciousness and comradeship in literature. 'Debate could never occur between a

Humanist and a Leftist on aesthetic grounds, for they are equally intent on ethical values. But the debate on ethical grounds would be very spirited, and it might create such a stir in a department conducting English studies that the conventional scholars there would find themselves slipping, and their pupils deriving from literature new and seductive excitements which would entice them away from their scheduled English exercises.'

The professional writing of literary criticism is not everybody's cup of tea. Ransom says that contemporary literature is waiting for its adequate criticism but there are few critics available for the purpose. Generally homemade critics and amateurs furnish the journals and reviews with their critical articles and studies. It is still regarded as a lowly assignment or preoccupation of a professor of literature. '*Here is contemporary literature, waiting for its criticism; where are the professors of literature? They are watering their own gardens, elucidating the literary histories of their respective periods. So are their favorite pupils. The persons who save the occasion, and rescue contemporary literature from the humiliation of having to go without a criticism, are the men who had to leave the university before their time because they felt themselves being warped into mere historians; or those who finished the courses and took their punishment but were tough, and did not let it engross them and spoil them. They are home-made critics. Naturally they are not too wise, these amateurs who furnish our reviews and critical studies. But when they distinguish themselves, as some of them do inevitably since distinction is comparative, the universities which they attended can hardly claim more than a trifling share of the honor.'* Contrasting literary criticism with other branches of learning like economics, chemistry etc., and Ransom says that there it is taken for granted that criticism is the prerogative of the men who have had formal training in its theory and technique. *'The historical method is useful, and may be applied readily to any human performance whatever. But the exercise does not become an obsession with the*

university men working in the other branches; only the literary scholars wish to convert themselves into pure historians. This has gone far to nullify the usefulness of a departmental personnel larger, possibly, than any other, and of the lavish endowment behind it.'

22.4.3 The Role of the Departments of English

It is presumed that the Departments of English exist in order to communicate the understanding of literature. It does include criticism and appreciation of a given work of art. The university students and teachers are familiar with finer poetry. The professors are more or less 'curators'- the caretakers of the masterpieces of literature just as curators of museums are the caretakers of ancient paintings, antiques and treatises. *'They conduct their squads from one work to another, making appropriate pauses or reverent gestures, but their own obvious regard for the masterpieces is somewhat contagious, and contemplation is induced. Naturally they are grateful to the efficient staff of colleagues in the background who have framed the masterpieces, hung them in the proper schools and in the chronological order, and prepared the booklet of information about the artists and the occasions. The colleagues in their turn probably feel quite happy over this division of labor, thinking that they have done the really productive work, and that it is appropriate now if less able men should undertake a little salesmanship.'*

Behind appreciation, which is private and criticism, which is public, there is historical scholarship in the field of English studies. *'It is indispensable. But it is instrumental and cannot be the end itself. In this respect historical studies have the same standing as linguistic studies: language and history are aids.'* Chaucer or any other author cannot be studied fruitfully unless he is placed in his historical perspective.

Ransom says that 'the mind with which we enter into an old work

is not the mind with which we… enter into a contemporary work'. A contemporary work is studied under a different mindset.

The achievement of modern historical scholarship in the field of English literature has been prodigious and enormous. It seems as if historical scholarship were an end in itself. Sufficient material on Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton etc. , written from historical perspective are available in the form of hand books, voluminous bibliographies, and the period books. The officially prescribed course on Chaucer in a university is ninety five percent historical and linguistic and less than five percent aesthetic or critical. *'A thing of beauty is a joy forever. But it is not improved because the student has had to tie his tongue before it. It is an artistic object, with a heroic human labor behind it, and on these terms it calls for public discussion. The dialectical possibilities are limitless, and when we begin to realize them we are engaged in criticism.'*

22.4.4 What is Criticism and what is not?

What criticism is and what criticism is not remains a notoriously arbitrary and vague question. One feels that critical act is not what the professor of literature habitually perform or get their students to perform. Prf. Crane excludes from criticism the works of historical scholarship and Neo-Humanism. Ransom enumerates six points that he wishes to exclude:

(i) Personal Registration: Criticism must be objective-free from physiological effect-shedding of tears, visceral and laryngeal sensations. It must not make one oblivious of the external world in favor of an illusion or a spiritual ecstasy or a catharsis of emotions. Subjective criticism denies the autonomy of the artist in his work. A work of art exists as an object in its own right: it exists for its own sake with no strings attached. Ransom suggests that the adjectives such as moving, exciting, entertaining, pitiful, great, beautiful etc. should

be avoided in the objective criticism. They describe the effect of the properties of an object and not the object itself.

(ii) Synopsis and Paraphrase: Synopsis and paraphrase are school children's and school teachers' exercises on literary works. A critic does not consider plot or story as 'identical with the real content': 'Plot is an abstract from content'- not content itself.

(iii) Historical Studies: Historical studies have a vast range and include studies of general literary background; author's biographical information with special references to autobiographical evidence in the work itself; the citation of literary originals and analogues. It is more or less comparative literature. Ransom says, "Nothing can be more stimulating to critical analysis than comparative literature." Up to 1960's most of the university syllabi of MA (English) included a paper on English literary history from Chaucer and Langland down to W.B. Yeats and the war poets- Rupert Brooke, Owen and W.H. Auden. The studies copied out passage after passage from L. Cazamian's and Hudson's books of literary history and prepared a fat volume of notes they did not fully understand, and which could not be adequately reproduced in the examination.

(iv) Linguistic Studies: The linguistic studies are in vogue now. In India, with the establishment of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) at Hyderabad, the studies of linguistics came into focus. Substantial information was furnished on syntax, phonology and poetry of the English language. The name of Noam Chomsky became central to linguistic parlance. Every school of English had some smattering of Transformational Generative Grammar, Deep Structure and Surface Structure under the umbrella of Linguistic studies. Many new words and phrases were tossed in literary criticism and interpretation. Linguistic orientation among advanced students of English still prevails. However Ransom says that, *'Acquaintance with all the languages and literatures in the world would*

not necessarily produce a critic, though it might save one from damaging errors.'

(v) Moral Studies: Moral content in the studies of literature was never relinquished whether it was Nicomachean (Aristotelian) ethics or Christian ethics or Marxist attitude.

22.4.5 The Nature of Criticism

Ransom admires Austin Warren's writings. He is devoted to the academic development of the critical project. He is 'a fair representative' of 'a good deal of academic opinion' as to why criticism should dissociate itself from historical and other scholarly studies: why not let them flourish together with sustained attention and interest in the scheduled courses of literature at the tertiary level. But Ransom believes that criticism has not prospered under this synthetic arrangement though it had the chance to go ahead in the hands of the university professors of English literature. Therefore, it is high time that the academic policy introduced is changed to let 'criticism receive its own charter of rights and function independently'.

Reviewing the books cannot be transformed into pure criticism. Actually the reviewer has to perform the multi-dimensional job of presentation, interpretation and criticism. It is not possible for him to segregate them exclusively. Ransom states that, 'The present critic must be his own authority' as there is no outside authority to dictate terms to him. He, however, suggests a class of studies for ambitious studies: Studies in the technique of art surely belong to criticism. There can be technical studies in the field of poetry. It could include meter, inversion, solecisms, and syntactical deviations from the prose norms of language, images, tropes and several other devices by which it secures 'aesthetic distance' or objectivity distancing poetry from history and prose. A competent critic is not content with the compilation

of the devices only. He makes use of them with a purpose of a unifying structure. *'The critic speculates on why poetry, through its devices, is at such pains to dissociate itself from prose at all, and what it is trying to represent that cannot be represented by prose.'* Ransom asserts that 'Poetry distinguishes itself from prose on the technical side by the devices which are, precisely, its means of escaping from prose.' There is something 'experiential' which the poet wants to preserve but prose destroys it continually. *But this must be put philosophically. Philosophy sounds hard, but it deals with natural and fundamental forms of experience.*

The critic should regard the poem an ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre. The poet himself, in agony of the creation of poetry, experiences something like labor pains. Ransom comes very close to Wordsworth's experience of poetic creation when he is 'neither sick nor well' and is in a 'vexed' state of mind which is elaborated in Book I of *The Prelude*. The poet perpetuates in his poem an order of existence. His poem celebrates the object which is real and individuated-'qualitatively infinite'. The poem exists as an object which tends to be universalized at the hands of the great poet. Actually things are not what they are but they are stirring to be in the poet's eye.

A poet evolves his own style. His poetry is distinguishable in terms of his style. Style is, of course, a very comprehensive term. All the technical devices as employed by the poet contribute to it in his elaborating and individualizing the core subject (object). A good poem is a 'living integrity'. *'The critic has to take the poem apart, or analyse it, for the sake of uncovering these features. With all the finesse possible, it is rude and patchy business by comparison with the living integrity of the poem. But without it there could hardly be much understanding of the value of poetry, or of the natural history behind any adult poem.'*

22.5 LET US SUM UP

At the end of the essay, the learned critic expresses his confidence that *'a profound criticism generally works by some such considerations.'* He also believes that similar considerations hold for the critique of fiction or of non-literary arts as the arts are fundamentally one. This is all to say that John Crowe Ransom was the most philosophical of the new critics, and yet we must remember that he regularly denounced the abstraction that is often associated with philosophical thinking and always demanded concreteness and specificity in poetry. Therefore for him the true richness of a poem was to be found in its local texture of language and metaphor—not in the intended fable and theme, the logical structure or argument.

22.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. The volume of essays *The New Criticism* was published in:

   (A) 1941

   (B) 1935

   (C) 1947

   (D) 1950

2. New Criticism was a reaction against:

   (A) impressionist criticism

   (B) the humanist movement

   (C) the naturalist movement

   (D) All of these

3. Many of the literary qualities held in high esteem by the New Critics were first espoused in the prose works of:

   (A) William Hazlitt

   (B) William Wordsworth

(C) S.T. Coleridge

(D) Charles Lamb

4. Who wrote *Practical Criticism* (1929)?

(A) I.A. Richards

(B) John Crowe Ransom

(C) T.S. Eliot

(D) Cleanth Brooks

5. The theoretical essay *Criticism, Inc.* by Ransom is divided into:

(A) six parts

(B) five parts

(C) three parts

(D) eight parts

6. Which of the following performers CANNOT be competent enough to be a critic:

(A) the artist himself

(B) the philosopher

(C) the university teacher of literature

(D) The translator of an epic

7. The philosopher who is skilled in the function of the fine arts and is well versed with critical theories is apt to see

(A) 'a lot of wood and no trees'

(B) 'a lot of trees and no wood'

(C) ‘woods that are lovely, dark and deep’

(D) ‘only a greenwood tree’

8. The proper seat of literary criticism is in the

(A) Ivory tower

(B) Critic’s writing table

(C) universities

(D) well equipped library

9. Prof. Ronald S. Crane worked in the Department of English of the university of

(A) Ohio

(B) Chicago

(C) Columbia

(D) Boston

10. Who, according to Ransom, attacked romantic literature as a moralist?

(A) Prof. Ronald S. Crane

(B) Cleanth Brooks

(C) Dr. Johnson

(D) Mr Babbitt

11. What was Ransom’s concern regarding contemporary literature?

(A) Generally homemade critics and amateurs furnished the journals and reviews with their critical articles and studies.

(B) It was still regarded as a lowly assignment or preoccupation of a professor of literature.

(C) The professors of literature were simply elucidating the literary histories of their respective periods.

(D) All of these

12. Which of the following is NOT the job of the reviewer:

(A) Summarization

(B) Presentation

(C) interpretation

(D) criticism

Answers: 1 (A); 2 (D); 3 (C); 4 (A); 5 (B); 6 (D); 7 (A); 8 (C); 9 (B); 10 (D); 11 (D); 12 (A)

22.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on 'New Criticism'.
2. What has been the traditional approach of the university teachers while teaching literature?
3. Who, according to Ransom, are the three knowledgeable persons to become literary critics?
4. In what context does Ransom mention Prof. Ronald S. Crane in his essay 'Criticism Inc.'?
5. What should literary criticism include and what should it exclude?
6. Who is the ideal critic, according to Ransom?
7. Discuss Ransom's notion of the poem as an ontological object.

22.8 SUGGESTED READING

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JOHN CROWE RANSOM: POETRY: A NOTE ON ONTOLOGY

STRUCTURE

23.1 INTRODUCTION

John Crowe Ransom accepted the challenge of correlating empirical fact with the shadowy world of feeling. One of the original Fugitive Agrarians, an influential circle of Southern scholars, critics, and poets, he was the most distinguished critic and editor of his age. His verse, composed during a complex period of phenomenal scientific and technological advancement, registered a modern paradox — the intellectual delight in progress set against the spirit's ambivalence, a tortuous state that the poet described as a "[walk] in hell." Ransom developed into a skilled, restrained wordsmith and a master of clarity who admired dense texts enhanced by precise diction and technical skill. Ransom wrote poems and essays in *American Review*, *Southern Review*, and *The Fugitive*, Vanderbilt's literary-social journal that professed agrarian values and rejected modern technology, big business, and human displacement. Ransom established himself among America's finest poets while at the same time growing as a teacher, critic, and philosopher.

In 1937, Ransom founded and edited *Kenyon Review*, a leading literary journal for twenty-two years. He decided that he was finished with poetry, but issued revisions in subsequent collections in 1945, 1963, and 1969. Ransom then concentrated on essays, which he published in *The World's Body* (1938) and *The New Criticism* (1941), a call for literary analysis that focuses on the work alone, excluding considerations of movement, age, and the author's life.

Ransom remained active, publishing critical essays on poetry and a collection, *Beating the Bushes: Selected Essays*, 1941-1970, and serving as visiting professor at Northwest University and Vanderbilt. Posthumous works include *Selected Essays of John Crowe Ransom* (1984) and a compendium of letters in 1985.

23.2 OBJECTIVES

The very objective of this lesson is to highlight John Crowe Ransom's approach to assert the ontological status to poetry and his ontological criticism which is based on the text of the work of literature. It is high time the learner

was told that the text of a literary work had its own ontology- its own existence.

23.3 THREE BROAD SPECTRUM CATEGORIES OF POETRY

Poetry may be distinguished by virtue of its subject matter which, in turn, may be differentiated with reference to its ontology. Ransom's poetic criticism is based on ontological analysis. There are three broad spectrum categories of poetry-

(a) Poetry which deals with ideas,

(b) Poetry which deals with things, and

(c) Poetry which deals with both things and ideas.

Ransom defines these brands as Physical poetry, Platonic poetry, and Metaphysical poetry respectively.

23.3.0 Physical Poetry

Physical poetry makes use of physical things or objects. The poets are concerned with material and surface appearance but not with ideas. It is concrete form of poetry. Its language is plain, literal, simple and scientific. It is the poetry of things. The poets are preoccupied with the presentation of things, not ideas. Physical poetry is pure poetry because of its visual context. It is realistic.

23.3.1 Platonic Poetry

Platonic poetry is associated with ideas, not things. It does not concern itself with real poetry. Ransom says that Romantic poetry as well as Victorian poetry is platonic. Platonic poetry seeks to express truth, philosophy and morality. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is an excellent example of platonic poetry. It revels in abstraction and idealism. Ransom is against both physical and platonic poetry. He favors metaphysical poetry.

23.3.2 Metaphysical Poetry

Ransom is enamored of metaphysical poetry which is a fusion of thought and emotion, reason and feeling, mind and heart. Ransom noted how the metaphysical poets applied their intelligence and knowledge in making conceits in their poems. Needless to say, a conceit is a kind of indirect metaphor incorporating far-fetched images. In the seventeenth century, the poets like John Donne and Cowley made ample use of conceits to express both the physical and platonic aspects of poetry.

23.4 AGAINST VICTORIAN AND ROMANTIC POETRY

Ransom revolts against the tyranny of ideas and is against that brand of poetry which highlights ideas. He is hostile to Victorian poetry. According to him, the critics who appreciated Victorian poetry or the poetry of ideas were apparently incapable of ontological perception. He says that Plato, who was not modern, was just as clear as we are about the basic distinction between the ideas and the things, and yet stands apart from the aforesaid conscious moderns in passionately preferring ideas over things. The weight of Plato's testimony fell on the side of the Victorians. But a few years ago some poets triumphantly illustrated the new mode.

23.5 IMAGERY

Imagism was a movement in early 20th-century Anglo-American poetry that favored precision of imagery and clear, sharp language. The Imagists were important figures in the history of poetry as theorists and creators: it was their intention to present things in their quintessence. Their orientation was wholesome. What the public was inclined to seek in poetry was ideas to live by and die but what the Imagists identified with the stuff of poetry was things. They had artistic talent. Ransom appreciates Miss Lowell's poem *Thomson's Lunch Room- Grand Central Station* for its intention to show her heroic effort.

Jagged green-white bowls of pressed glass
Rearing *snow*-peaks of chipped sugar
Above the lighthouse-shaped castors

Of grey pepper and grey-white salt.

Ransom likes the nature of cross imagery in the poem. Imagists identified images with ideas. No image is ever formed without the idea in the background. There is 'no precept without a concept'. Imagism conforms to naïve poetry. It is 'motivated by a distaste of systematic abstractness of thought'. The children are occupied with things because they are unfurnished with systematic ideas.

Ransom calls 'pure poetry' as a kind of physical poetry. Its visible content lies in things. The art of poetry depends more frequently on 'the faculty of presenting images' which resist 'the catalysis of thought'. All true poetry is, therefore, a phase of physical poetry.

Ransom denominates the poetry of ideas as platonic poetry: it is a discourse which seeks to employ only abstract ideas with no images. It is more or less a scientific documentation rather than poetry. Ransom quotes Robert Browning's famous lines:

THE year's at the spring,

And day's at the morn;

Morning's at seven;

The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;

The lark's on the wing;

The snail's on the thorn;

God's in His heaven—

All's right with the world!

In this little piece, as many as six co-ordinate images are marched, like six little lambs to the slaughter. Platonic poetry is like an allegory of ideas, a discourse in things which are translatable into ideas. Shelley expresses his subjective sorrow in his *Ode to the West Wind*:

Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed

One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Shelley's poetry is platonic and it has romantic irony. This platonic impulse is native to us all. The images have reference to ideas. The poetic impulse is imagistic to reconstitute the world of perceptions. Art always sets out to create 'aesthetic distance' between the object and the subject. It is easier to obtain our aesthetic experience from art than from nature because nature is reality and art is perception.

23.6 MIRACULISM AND RANSOM

Dr. Samuel Johnson tossed the term 'metaphysical poetry' and since then it has been added to the official vocabulary of criticism. Johnson took the term from Pope who probably took it from Dryden, who used it to describe the poetry of a certain school of poets thus, 'He (John Donne) affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign...In this Mr Cowley has copied him to a fault.' But the meaning of the term 'metaphysical' which was common in Dryden's time, having come down from the middle ages through Shakespeare, was simply 'supernatural' or 'miraculous'. The context of Dryden's passage indicated it. Dryden, then, noted a miraculism in poetry and repudiated it; except where it was employed for satire, where it was not seriously intended and had the effect of wit. Dryden himself employed miraculism in satires but elsewhere he seemed to avoid it. He employed it in his translations of Ovid and in an occasional classical piece where he was making pointed use of myths... In his amorous pieces, he found the reign of nature sufficient... he was on the whole a naturalist. According to Ransom, a naturalist was a person who studied nature not because he loved it but because he wanted to use it, approached it from the standpoint of

common sense and saw it 'thin and not thick'. Dryden might have remarked that Donne himself had a change of heart and confined his miraculism at last to the privileged field of a more or less scriptural revelation.

Dryden found his way to accept Milton for his miraculism: it was mostly not a contemporary sort but classical and scriptural, pitched in a time when the age of miracles had not given way to science. He knew that Cowley had shamefully recanted from his petty miraculism, which formed the conceits and turned to the scriptural or large order of miraculism to write his heroic verses about David. He had written a Pindaric ode in extraordinary praise of 'Mr Hobbes', whose naturalist account of nature seemed to render any other account fantastic. It is certain that Mr Hobbes affected Dryden too and the whole of Restoration literature. The name of Hobbes is critical in the history that would account for the chill which settled upon the poets at the very moment when English poetry was attaining magnificently the fullness of its power. The name of Mr Hobbes stood for common sense and naturalism and the monopoly of the scientific spirit over the mind. Ransom says that 'metaphysics' or 'miraculism' informs poetry which is the most original and exciting and intellectually the most seasoned that we know in our literature, and probably has no equivalent in other literatures. Metaphysical effects may be large scale or small scale in poetry. Donne and Cowley illustrate the small scale effects; Milton illustrates the large scale effects. Milton in his *Paradise Lost* narrated the story which is heroic and miraculous. In doing so, he dramatized it, allowed the scenes and characters to develop on their own. The virtue of a long poem on a metaphysical subject consists in the dramatization or substantiation of its constituent parts, the poet not being required to devise fresh miracles on every page. The *Paradise Lost* is a model of excellent metaphysical poetry.

23.7 CONCEITS AND METAPHYSICAL POETRY

For the critical mind, metaphysical poetry means a corpus of conceits

that constitute its staple. According to Ransom, 'To define the conceit is to define small scale metaphysical poetry'. A conceit originates into a metaphor which is a subtle evolution of a simile. Shelley says in *Adonais*: "Thou young Dawn, Turn all thy dew to splendor…" (Shelley means that the dew, with sunshine upon it, should look splendid). Tennyson is affecting a metaphor:

"The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near;"
And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"
The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear;"
And the lily whispers, "I wait."

Ransom says that these are like a school girl's made up metaphors. There is plurality of images which do not sustain individually. They are not well coordinated and synthesized. He appreciates Humbert Wolfe's attempt at a conceit in 'Green Candles':

'I know her little foot,' grey carpet said:
'Who but I should know her light tread?'
'She shall come in,' answered the open door,
'And not,' said the room, 'go out any more.'

According to Ransom, Wolfe's conceit works but Tennyson's does not. For a conceit to be correct, the poet should know that the miracle must have a basis of 'verisimilitude'. Metaphysical poetry is the extension of a rhetorical device.

Specifically, the miraculism arises when the poet discovers by analogy an identity between objects which is partial and proceeds to an identification which is complete. It is to be contrasted with the simile which says 'as if' or 'like' and is scrupulous to keep the identification partial. In Cowley's passage, the lover happens to say, 'She and I have exchanged our hearts'. What has actually been exchanged is 'affections' and 'affection' means 'hearts'. Hearts are unlike affections as engines which pump blood and form the body. It is a miracle if the poet represents the lady's affection as rendering his outside into woman and his affection as rendering her inside into woman. This is an

image of very strong emotion/affection. It is a metaphysical conceit. It will be in fitness of things to refer to a conceit in John Donne's poem *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.

The conceit of twin compasses is quite elaborate. The two legs of the compass, when parted, go utterly separate from each other. But while describing a circle, one leg is in the centre while the other one runs on the periphery. Both of them describe the full circle leaning on each other. The leg in the centre represents the beloved and the other in the periphery represents the lover. If both the lovers are stiff (faithful lovers by implication) the circle (of love) will be perfect.

Another equally remarkable conceit occurs in '*A Valediction:*

Of Weeping"

Let me pour forth

My tears before thy face, whilst I stay here,

For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear,

And by this mintage they are something worth,

For thus they be

Pregnant of thee;

Fruits of much grief they are, emblems of more,

When a tear falls, that thou falls which it bore,

So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse shore.

On a round ball

A workman that hath copies by, can lay

An Europe, Africa, and an Asia,

And quickly make that, which was nothing, all;

So doth each tear

Which thee doth wear,

A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,

Till thy tears mix'd with mine do overflow

This world; by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

O more than moon,

Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,

Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear

To teach the sea ...

The falling tears are like coins being minted. The comparison sounds apparently absurd. The tears of the lover become valuable as they bear the stamp of his beloved's face just as a coin bears the stamp of the sovereign. Donne, thus, exalts the beloved to the status of the sovereign figure. If the beloved pours forth her tears, there will be a Deluge and both of them will be drowned. Such elaborate and geographically, theologically multidimensional conceits are rare in the entire corpus of metaphysical poetry.

The metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century particularly admired the methodology of science. Platonic poetry is too idealist while physical poetry is too realistic. Realism is tedious. The metaphysical poets, therefore, introduced the psychological device of the miracle. Ransom says that the predication of metaphysical poetry is true. The conceits incorporating the generalizations of science suggest that the objects/ things are perceptually and physically remarkable.

Cleanth Brooks and T.S. Eliot as poet- critics noticed a similarity between some of the French symbolists and the English metaphysical. This similarity has been commented upon and illustrated by Edmund Wilson in his book *Axel's Castle*. The resemblance is evident. Actually Edmund Wilson visualized at the theoretical level symbolism was a 'second flood' on the tide of Romanticism, and apparently an anti- scientific movement. He recognized the 'serious aesthetic' and the 'conversational-ironic' forms of symbolism with reference to Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière respectively. T.S. Eliot comes closest to Tristan Corbière's symbolism. Eliot was clearly associated by Edmund Wilson with romantic escapism or de-romanticization in his poetry. *The Wasteland* was an illustration of the decadence of romantic poetry. He harked back to the later Elizabethans, French Symbolists and the seventeenth century English metaphysical poets and accepted them as his masters as he did the Greek and Roman classicists too.

23.8 CRITICISM AS PURE SPECULATION

John Crowe Ransom regards literary criticism as pure speculation or assumption. To begin with, he discusses psychological and moral modes of criticism. According to him, psychological criticism fails. Moral criticism also fails because it also disregards the text as self sufficient and unified whole. Ransom as a New Critic rejects biographical, psychological and moral modes of criticism. He relies completely on the text which is autonomous or auto telic. According to Ransom, Ontological is the best kind of criticism which tells us the very essence of the text/ poem. He believes that the text has its own ontology- its own existence. In every poem, there is an interaction between structure and texture. These structure and texture are to be studied by the critic. Structure is the 'paraphrasable core' of the text. Texture refers to meter, metaphor, assonance, rhyme and other literary devices. They serve as an aid to the critic for interpreting the text. All literary criticism is thus, text oriented- everything within the text, nothing beyond the text.

Ransom talks of two kinds of discourses- poetic and scientific. Poetic discourse is not authoritative. Only the author's voice is dominant and its free interpretation is possible. As a result of which, there is no single meaning. Since there is irony and ambiguity in poetry, it can be variously interpreted. On the contrary, scientific discourse is authoritative: there is absolute meaning. Ransom as a New Critic does not believe in single meaning. He disregards the ways of critics to base their criticism on conventional mode. If conventional approach is repeated, there can be no progress in literature. Therefore, a good critic must possess new techniques of experiment and innovation. Ransom believes that separation is impossible between texture and paraphrasable core in poetry. The merger of texture into structure (paraphrasable core) makes poetry an ontological being and gives it existential status.

23.9 THE 'TEXTURE' OF TEXTS

Ransom propounded that literary criticism should adopt more scientific approaches that would be "more precise and systematic". Ransom's concept

of ‘texture’ in relation to literary analysis and criticism was primarily in application to poetry. It was meant as an approach that would seek to study the ‘organic’ essence of the poem, devoid of the ‘politics’ of subject content, as well as plot narrative. The ‘organic’ elements can be found mainly in relation to imagery and probably even metaphor and simile a poem would carry. One may even venture to suggest that devices for literary expression such as quotes or phrases too may be part of the elemental core that gives the poem a particular aesthetic form. Ransom argued in his book *The New Criticism* that the focus of criticism, tends to take moralistic approaches when analyzing a poem which relates to the ideological tenants in the work that relate to the larger context of the outside world. Such analysis may look into ‘theme’ and thereby the ‘content’ of the poem. The interpretations along such lines would take on a discussion of the ‘politics’ that may be identifiable in the composition.

Ransom identified two camps of moralistic critics: one the neo-humanists and the other the Marxist critics. The Marxists in particular would have a marked tendency to interpret a poem purely in terms of the elements in relation to its socio-economic determinants, and would do so by studying how the poem has been affected by social and historical factors. Therefore the critique would be essentially an interpretation on the lines of Marxist interests. It is ‘content’ and how such content came into the poem that is the focus and concern of moralistic critics as opposed to the poem’s form and/or structure. What Ransom proposes is to study the poem for what it is about and how it has been put together- both ‘content’ and ‘form’. It is thereby seen as a ‘structural understanding of poetry’.

In his propounding as an approach to analyze poetry, what Ransom suggests may be divided into two parts as a ‘logical core’ and ‘local texture’. The former of the two aspects would be what the poem is about, the situation, event, object, idea, feeling etc, about which the poem is written. It could be more as to ‘what’ the poem narrates, as opposed to ‘how’ it is narrated. The

latter aspect takes focus upon how the 'object' of the poem is presented and what elements have given 'form' to the work. In this regard stylistic features are of great significance. Diction, imagery, metaphor, rhyme and meter and elements which shape the aesthetic nature of the work come into this scope. 'Local texture' in Ransom's view cannot be discussed as mere 'padding' or 'fillers' in a poem since a poet's choice of imagery, metaphor etc would have an impact on how the object (generally speaking what the poem is about) is perceived by the reader and inflects the 'logical core'. Ransom's theorem expounds how a poem may be studied for its 'form' and 'content', thereby providing a fair idea of how ideological and aesthetic elements may be differentiated. In this regard the reader may wonder whether 'form' is merely a vehicle or a 'casing' for 'content'. Ransom believes that form and content have strong linkage and greatly affect each other.

'Texture' has become an approach by which the form/structure of a text is analyzed and interpreted since Ransom propounded it through *The New Criticism*. And today studies in letters have adopted Ransom's method for texts other than poetry and have expanded significantly as framework for study and analysis of textual-structure(s). The word 'texture' originates from the Latin word '*texere*' which means 'to weave'. The stem of the word's meaning therefore gives the impression that 'texture' looks at how a text is 'woven'; as in 'how' and 'what' make up the text if viewed as a 'fabric.' One may suggest that a 'textural' analysis of a work looks into the elemental composite of a text and adopts a focus on the 'form' of a text as opposed to only on the 'content'. The study of a work's textual-structure could focus on the 'assemblage' of the text and place attention upon the 'stylistic' and 'characteristic'. For example a textural study/analysis of a particular work (short story, novel etc) may reveal how its aesthetic base is formed. And it may also reveal how the work has (or for that matter has not) characteristics which evince it as belonging (or not) to a certain genre.

23.10 LET US SUM UP

New Criticism is a method that provides the reader with a formula

(or a way) for arriving at the correct interpretation of a text using only the text itself. This method gives the reader an objective approach for discovering a text's meaning regardless of his\her level.

Ransom's principles are to seek for an ontological critic. A text can be analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author's intention, or the emotional state, or the values and beliefs of either its author or reader. He begins by assuming that imaginative literature is valuable. To study poetry or any literary work means engaging oneself in an aesthetic experience that can lead to truth. The truth that is discoverable from an aesthetic experience differs from that truth that science provides us. Science speaks propositionally telling us whether a statement is true or false however, poetic truth involves the use of intuition and imagination which is a form of truth that is discernible only in poetry.

Ransom defines a poem as an object which has an ontological status. In effect a poem becomes an artifact, an objective, self-contained, autonomous entity with its own structure. As a poem is an object of its own then a poem must not be equated with the author's feelings or implied intentions. Believing that a poem's meaning is not more than an expression of a private experience or intentions of the author's feelings is committing a fundamental error of interpretation called the Intentional Fallacy. Ransom also believes that a poem must be a public text that can be understood. He gives little importance to the biographical or contextual history of the poem arguing that the poem's real meaning cannot reside in this extrinsic or outside the text information. He also argues that a reader's emotional response to the text is neither important nor equivalent to the interpretation of it and such an error in judgment is called the Affective Fallacy. A poem and its structure can be analyzed scientifically. He also believes that the poet is an organizer of the human experience. The chief characteristic of the poem is the coherence and interrelatedness of its structure.

The New critics borrow their ideas from Samuel T. Coleridge in forming what they call the Organic Unity of a poem which is the concept in

which all parts of the poem are interrelated and interconnected with each part reflecting and helping to support the central idea of the poem. The Organic Unity allows the harmonization of conflicting ideas, feelings, and attitudes and results in the poem's oneness. The New Critics declare that superior poetry achieves such oneness through paradox, irony, and ambiguity. Because the poem's chief characteristics is its oneness, New Critics believe that a poem's form and content are inseparable. They also believe that form is more than the external structure of the poem however it is the overall effect that the poem creates. They believe that all the elements of the poem both structural and aesthetic work together to achieve a poem's effect or form, it is impossible to discuss the overall meaning of the poem by isolating or separating form and content. Finally it is also impossible to believe that a poem's interpretation is equal to a mere paraphrased version of the text.

23.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. John Crowe Ransom was a:

   (A) teacher

   (B) critic

   (C) philosopher

   (D) all of these

2. Ransom founded and edited *Kenyon Review*, a leading literary journal for:

   (A) twenty years

   (B) two years

   (C) twenty-two years

   (D) ten years

3. Pure poetry is:

(A) Physical poetry

(B) Metaphysical poetry

(C) Platonic poetry

(D) All of these

4. Ransom favors:

(A) Physical poetry

(B) Metaphysical poetry

(C) Platonic poetry

(D) None of these

5. Who among these present things in their quintessence?

(A) The Victorians

(B) The Romantics

(C) The Realists

(D) The Imagists

6. Which Victorian poet does Ransom quote to show that in one of his verses as many as six co-ordinate images are marched, like six little lambs to the slaughter:

(A) Tennyson

(B) William Thackeray

(C) G.M. Hopkins

(C) Robert Browning

7. Which among these tossed the term ‘metaphysical poetry’?

(A) John Dryden

(B) Alexander Pope

(C) Samuel Johnson

(D) John Donne

8. According to Ransom, a naturalist was a person who studied nature because:

(A) He loved nature

(B) He wanted to use nature

(C) He saw God in nature

(D) He worshipped nature

9. For a conceit to be correct, the poet should know that the miracle must have a basis of:

(A) Verisimilitude

(B) Supernaturalism

(C) Disbelief

(D) Apparent similarity

10. In which of the metaphysical poets’ passage, does the lover happen to say, ‘She and I have exchanged our hearts’?

(A) John Donne

(B) George Herbert

(C) Henry Vaughan

(D) Abraham Cowley

11. Which poet- critics noticed a similarity between some of the French symbolists and the English metaphysical poets?

(A) Cleanth Brooks

(B) T.S. Eliot

(C) Both of these

(D) None of these

12. *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot was an illustration of the decadence of:

(A) Victorian poetry

(B) Romantic poetry

(C) Classical poetry

(D) Symbolists' poetry

13. Ransom as a New Critic rejects:

(A) Biographical mode of criticism

(B) Psychological mode of criticism

(C) Moral mode of criticism

(D) All of these

14. 'The text has its own ontology' means:

(A) It has its own existence

(B) It has its own structure

(C) It has its own texture

(D) It has its own devices

15. A judgment based on a reader's emotional response to the text is called:

(A) Argumentum ad hominem

(B) Emotional Fallacy

(C) Affective Fallacy

(D) Pathetic Fallacy

Answers: 1 (A); 2 (C); 3 (A); 4 (B); 5 (D); 6 (D); 7 (C); 8 (B); 9 (A); 10 (D); 11 (C); 12 (B); 13 (D); 14 (A); 15 (C)

23.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What is the distinction between Physical Poetry and Platonic Poetry?
2. What is 'miraculism', according to Ransom?
3. What does Ransom say about the Imagist poets?
4. Write an elaborate essay on conceits in metaphysical poetry.
5. Evaluate John Crowe Ransom's approach to criticism of poetry.
6. Write a note on Ransom as a champion of New Criticism.

23.13 SUGGESTED READING

James A. Magner. *John Crowe Ransom*: *Critical Principles and Preoccupations*. The Hague/Paris: Mouton. 1971.

Thornton Parsons. *John Crowe Ransom*. Boston, MA: Twayne. 1969.

Thomas Daniel Young (editor). *John Crowe Ransom*: *Critical Essays and a Bibliography*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press. 1968.

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NEW CRITICISM: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

STRUCTURE

24.1 INTRODUCTION

The New Criticism was a reaction against historical- biographical criticism. The New critics thought, they were breaking completely new grounds in literary criticism. Hence, they called themselves New Critics. The New Critics emphasized the formal structure of literary works, isolating the work from the author's personality and social influences. The foundations of the New Criticism were laid in books and essays written during the 1920s and 1930s by I. A. Richards (*Practical Criticism* [1929]), William Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity* [1930]), and T. S. Eliot (*The Function of Criticism* [1933]).In England, at Cambridge, I. A. Richards and his student, William Empson developed the importance of ambiguity and other rhetorical 'tropes' for packing additional meanings into literary language. The New Critics emphasized the formal structure of literary works, isolating the work from the author's personality and social influences. Though critics like Richards, Eliot, Leavis, and Empson's viewpoints were common with New Critics, yet they had their independent approaches. According to Selden, T.S. Eliot was the single most influential figure behind New Criticism. His essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, written in 1919 was a building block for much Anglo-American criticism. In his essay, Eliot argues that writers must have 'the historical sense,' which can be seen as a sense of tradition. Tradition to Eliot is the presence of the past. Eliot says that whenever a new work is written it will be compared to the past and that the value of existing works will be readjusted to accommodate the new work: this is conformity between the old and the new. Therefore, a poet should be aware that they will be judged by the standards of the past and compared to works that are thought to be 'good.' Certain elements of the works of I. A. Richards were essential to the development of the New Criticism movement. Richards' approach to poetry is a psychological one. The purpose of poetry is psychological rather than cognitive. Well-known works by Richards include *The Meaning of Meaning*, *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*. One of the essential elements found in these works is Richards' concept that poetry is psychological and not cognitive. Richards also pays a great deal of attention to the use of

language in poetry. According to Richards: 'It has to be recognised that all our natural turns of speech are misleading, especially those we use in discussing works of art. We become so accustomed to them that even when we are aware that they are ellipses, it is easy to forget the fact'. F. R. Leavis was not entirely a New Critic, but his close analysis of the poem itself (the words on the page) and his belief that a poem should be self-sustaining (its reason for being should exist only inside its text and meaning), make him important to New Criticism. Leavis' criticism did not have a clearly defined theory, (in fact he refused to define his theories at all), but it was based on a 'common sense' approach which dealt closely with the text of the poem. However, the focus of Leavis' criticism was always on the text in terms of words and how they related to one another.

24.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying two comprehensive critical essays by John Crowe Ransom, it would be worthwhile to have an overall view of the New Criticism, championed by Ransom. After glancing through some of the major proponents of New Criticism, the learner shall also have an idea of how some critics, later, reacted against New Criticism. Besides, the learner will also grasp the idea of 'close reading', the term used by the new critics, with the help of one of the famous sonnets by Shakespeare.

24.3 NEW CRITICISM: A SCHOOL OF THE FORMALIST MOVEMENT

New Criticism has been considered a school of the formalist movement and both are closely associated with modernism which focused mainly on the literary form of a text. It occurred as a revolutionary movement of poets and iconoclasts against the aestheticism. Before the New Criticism became dominant, English professors in America focused their writings and teaching on historical and/or linguistic scholarship surrounding literature rather than analyzing the literary text itself. New Criticism is distinctly formalist in character. It stresses close attention to the internal characteristics of the text itself, and it discourages the use of external evidence to explain the work. New Criticism is quite well connected with the term "close reading",

which means the careful analysis of a text with paying attention to its structure, syntax, figures of speech, and so on. In this way, a New Critic tries to examine the "formal elements" of the text, such as characterization, setting of time and place, point of view, plot, images, metaphors and symbols to interpret the text and find the theme. New Criticism searches for meaning within the structure of the text, and finds it by examining the text through the close reading and analyzing the formal elements (elements that form the text) within the text. These formal elements, as well as linguistic elements (i.e., ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension) are the critic's references to interpret and support the theme of a literary work. In New Criticism, one may examine "all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself: its images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, plot and so forth", to find their relationship with the theme, in a way that confirms the single best interpretation of the text, because New Criticism believes that there is such a single complete interpretation, which is timeless and is not related to individual readers or social events. The interpretation of a text shows that these aspects serve to support the structure of meaning within the text. It rejects old historicism's attention to biographical and sociological matters. Instead, the objective determination as to 'how a piece works can be found through close focus and analysis, rather than through extraneous and erudite special knowledge. Also, at that time, this kind of close reading (or explication *de texte*) was considered the work of non-academic 'critics' (or book reviewers) and not the work of serious scholars. But the New Criticism changed this. New Critics are primarily concerned with the language (verbal meaning) and the organization (overall structure) of a text. New Criticism, incorporating Formalism, examines the relationships between a text's ideas and its form, between what a text says and the way it says it. New Critics 'may find tension, irony, or paradox in this relation, but they usually resolve it into unity and coherence of meaning'.

24.4 POETRY: A CLOSE READING

The term 'close reading' is being frequently used in this lesson with reference

to New Critics. By learning how to 'close read' a poem you can significantly increase both your comprehension and enjoyment of the poem. You may also increase your ability to write convincingly about the poem.

The following exercise uses one of William Shakespeare's sonnets (116) as an example. This close read process can also be used on many different verse forms. This resource first presents the entire sonnet and then presents a close reading of the poem below. Read the sonnet a few times to get a feel for it and then move down to the close reading.

CXVI

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

O no! it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come:

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Performing the close read

CXVI.

The number indicates the sonnet's place in a cycle or sequence of sonnets. Although you may examine the poem on its own terms, realize that it is connected to the other poems in the cycle.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments.

Form is one of the first things you should note about a poem. Here it is easy to see that the poem is fourteen lines long and follows some sort of rhyme scheme (which you can see by looking at the final words in each line). The rhyme of words makes a connection between them. Our first rhyme combination is "minds/finds." What do you make of this pairing of words?

The first phrase (in this case a full sentence) of the poem flows into the next line of the poem. This is called enjambment, and though it is often made necessary by the form of the verse, it also serves to break up the reader's expectations. In this case, the word "impediments" is placed directly before the bleak and confusing phrase "love is not love," itself an enjambment. How does this disconnection between phrase and line affect the reader? How does it emphasize or change the lines around it?

Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

Notice all of the repetition or use of similar words in the last two and a half lines. When close reading a poem, especially a fixed verse form like the sonnet, remember the economy of the poem: there's only so much space at the poet's disposal. This makes repetition very important, because it places even more emphasis on the repeated word than does prose. What does the repetition in these lines suggest? Also, note that we've come to the end of our first quatrain (four-line stanza): usually the first stanza of a sonnet proposes the problem for the poem. What is this problem?

O no! it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Our next quatrain gives a pair of metaphors for the "thesis" argued in the first stanza. Look carefully at these images as they relate to the subject of the poem. What actual objects do they describe? Do they bear any similarity to each other? Is there a connection between the use of 'ever' in line 5 and 'every' in line seven?

The image in lines 5-6 is especially complex: What is the 'mark' Shakespeare is talking about and how does it 'look'? Answers to some of these questions may require some research into older definitions of words in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come:

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Our third and final quatrain uses all of its four lines to expand a single metaphor. Consider how this metaphor relates to the previous ones, and why so much space in the poem is devoted to it, especially as it relates to the poem's argument. Also, look at similarity of phrasing between line 9's 'rosy lips and cheeks' and line 11's 'brief hours and weeks.' They certainly rhyme, but how does the similar construction affect the reading?

If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

This is our closing couplet (two-line stanza), meant to 'resolve' the problem addressed in the poem. Look carefully at the way the couplet starts. Does it provide resolution or not? Note that the first person ('me/I') has returned (last seen in the first line of the poem). Consider also the negations in the final statement. Have we seen something similar in the poem before? Where and why are the connections

made?

From reading to writing

The observations and questions in the close reading notes are by no means complete, but a look over them suggests several possibilities. Among these possibilities are:

The repetition of similar words and phrases in the poem

The use and relationship of the three main metaphors in the poem

The ambiguity, which begins ('let' suggests that something may or may not be allowed to happen) and ends (the weighty word 'if') the poem

The connection between the physical and the spiritual.

These ideas need not be exclusive, either. The observations gained from the close reading should provide you with examples and insight for what the New Critics mean by 'close reading'.

24.5 POEM AS THE PUREST EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE LITERARY VALUES

The New Critics privileged poetry over other forms of literary expression because they saw the poem as the purest exemplification of the literary values which they upheld. New Critical methods can work with any work of literature, but they are especially effective at explaining works like lyric poems in which meaning is very densely packed in elliptical sentences or phrases, i.e., sentences in which words are simply left out for economy and to force readers to supply them. For this reason, many New Critics call all literature 'poems' including works in prose. However, the techniques of close reading and structural analysis of texts have also been applied to fiction, drama, and other literary forms. But, New Critics solely focused on poetry and not fiction. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was among the first ones who claimed that poetry stands for its own, and in his essays asked critics to pay attention to the poem, rather than the poet. He believed that 'the poet does not influence the poem with his or her personality and emotions,

but uses language in such a way as to incorporate within the poem the impersonal feelings and emotions common to all humankind'.The aesthetic qualities praised by the New Critics were largely inherited from the critical writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was the first to elaborate on a concept of the poem as a unified, organic whole which reconciled its internal conflicts and achieved some final balance or harmony.

24.6 A PURELY TEXT- ORIENTED APPROACH

Though their interest in textual study initially met with heavy resistance from the establishment, the practice eventually gained a foothold and soon became one of the central methods of literary scholarship in American universities until it fell out of favor in the 1970s as post-structuralism, deconstructionist theory, and a whole plethora of competing theoretical models. It is a purely text- oriented approach to a literary work. New Critics claimed that the text itself is the only source or evidence that a critic should focus on. As a result, New Criticism stated that the text is our sole evidence or reference, not the author's claim and the only important materials are the printed words on the page. New Criticism dealt with how a work can be read objectively and accurately by examining the structure and form. New Criticism is not concerned with external circumstances like the historical context, social conditions at the time of production, effects on the reader and biography of the author. Therefore, New Critics conclude that there is one single or correct interpretation of a text. Its focus was mainly on the autonomy, anatomy, ontology, and organicity of poem and wit, irony, paradox, symbol, metaphor, conceit and dramatic attitude are its nerves and organs leading an organic growth of the poetic form. It lays emphasis on internal organism, ambiguity, complex and nuances of work. They have a minimal interest in the content of the text. New Criticism attempts to be a science of literature, with a technical vocabulary, patterns of sound, imagery, narrative structure, point of view, and other techniques discernible on close reading of the text, they seek to determine the function and appropriateness of these to the self-contained work. Critics like Ransom, W.K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Monroe Beardsley and R.P. Blackmur to

name some of them are regarded as pure New Critics.

24.7 CLEANTH BROOKS: CONCEPT OF ORGANIC NATURE OF POETRY

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994), the founder of the *Southern Review* and one of the foremost American literary critics of the twentieth century, spent fifteen years as a professor in the English Department at Louisiana State University. He was the central architect of the New Criticism. His best-known works, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), *Understanding Poetry* (1938) argue for the centrality of ambiguity and paradox as a way of understanding poetry. With his writing, Brooks helped to formulate formalist criticism, emphasizing "the interior life of a poem" and codifying the principles of close reading. His *Understanding Poetry* is a revelation and a classic statement on the exact method of reading and teaching of a poem in the classroom. It is a textbook of a group of selected individual poems with detailed introduction and a glossary of literary terms. In this book Brooks condemns the three long established notions: poetry is the best realization of the best mind, poetry is not a substitute for an actual emotional experience and poetry is a beautiful statement of some high truth. Brooks brushes aside all these approaches and argues that the true function of literary criticism is neither message-hunting, emotion-catching, nor explaining the beauty in terms of the characteristics of poetry. He propounds the concept of 'organic nature of poetry'. *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) is an outcome of the synthesis of various ideas about poetry and here Brooks appears as an advocate of modern poetry. His tradition of poetry is in terms of the poetic language which is special and characterized by paradox, irony, wit, ambiguity, dramatization of experience, organic interrelationship and complexity. He considers a poem an independent structure. All poems possess some common structural properties- such as metaphor, paradox, irony, tone and attitude. Structure and form are not the same thing in poetry. Form (elegy, ode, ballad, sonnet etc.) is just like envelopes in which content is contained. Brooks considers

examining a poem in terms of structure, not of content or subject matter. He rejects Ransom's dualistic theory of structure and texture. He argues in favor of an organic unity of structure. This unity is achieved through psychological, imaginative and dramatic process; logic and reason have no place in the unity of the poem. The essence of poetry is metaphor and metaphor is ontological not logical. Since a poem is an organic whole like a plant or human body, it can't be paraphrased. By paraphrasing we demolish the parts and the whole poem as well. Its metaphor, irony, ambiguity, tone, attitude and the total experience of the poet embodied in the poem get disintegrated and subsequently lose meaning. They do not convey meaning outside the poem or in isolation. Brooks' three very important essays- *The language of Paradox*, *The Heresy of Paraphrase*, and *Irony as the Principle of Structure* are considered the main marrow of the language and structure of his poetic theory.

24.8 BLACKMUR: A BALANCED CRITIC

Richard Palmer Blackmur (1904-1965) was one of America's foremost literary critics. He is in many ways the paradigmatic New Critic and essayist. Blackmur in particular reflects an increasing degree of sophisticated concentration on matters of poetic form, technique, and value. His criticism, like his poetry, reflects his conviction that literature is the bearer of all the modes of understanding of which words are capable. In 1935 the publication of his first volume of essays, *The Double Agent*, marked the beginning of what was to become known as the New Criticism. He approached criticism as the necessary expression of the man of letters contemplating the modes of words and their value. Blackmur has a sense of penetrating vision. He has an approach to appreciate both literature and criticism. He is a poet in his criticism because every sentence of his prose struggles to be poetry and in his essays criticism has become a part of literature or literature has become a part of criticism. To him both creation and criticism are works of art which present an organic expression of culture because art and culture are interrelated to each other, he says. He is concerned with the power and precise use of language and its structure of poem. To Blackmur, the poet can get control over his

material by employing most appropriate words and good poets always use words faithfully and avoid the blending and warping of words. Words encounter with each other by producing tension among them and generate a new kind of language. In view of Blackmur, language goes beyond the denotative and connotative activity and takes the reader into the season of myth, dream, history, religion and even silence. Blackmur has been commented by a number of critics by calling him a botanist of the stanza, verse, phrase, even of the single word and he has a surgical skill and makes his criticism 'a demonstration of poetic dissection by a master anatomist', 'criticism so driven to a sensibility machine-test, conscience, and mind working as gears, levers and wheels', 'a great master of explication of text', 'without rival the critic as taxonomist'. However, he is not free from criticism and he fails to achieve a due recognition because of various charges leveled on him.

Blackmur's theory of creativity is based on the two faculties of mind-reason and imagination which should be balanced and integrated to express felt experience of the poet. He advocates that the artist should synthesize his experience into an organic whole. Through imagination, the artist perceives his felt experience in images and symbols, whereas through reason he controls, orders, and patterns them in an organic and artistic design. This unified sensibility makes sense experience of the artist 'intelligible and communicable'.

Blackmur is more than a new critic because he is quite conscious of the empty methodology of the new criticism. Further, the spiritual health of society plays an important role in his criticism of poetry. Blackmur's criticism of poetry reveals that the poem cannot exist in isolation because poetry is not a self-contained autonomous entity but has a serious social nexus between the poet and his society and reader. In a nut-shell Blackmur is a balanced critic, incorporating neo-classical, romantic and modern elements in the whole body of literary criticism. His critical insights are distilled in his essays particularly in essays titled *A Critic's Job of Work*, *Language as Gesture*, *A Burden for Critics* and *A Featherbed for Critics*.

24.9 WILLIAM K. WIMSATT, JR.: OBJECTIVE APPROACH TO CRITICISM

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. (1907–1975) Professor of English at Yale University, was a leading apologist and theoretician of formalist criticism. He formulates his theory by drawing inspiration from both the ancient critics (Aristotle and Longinus) and the contemporary (T.S. Eliot and Chicago School). He lays stress on the objective approach to criticism denying affective theory as 'less a scientific view of literature than a prerogative' because affective theory is purely a psychological method interested in exploring the mind and the intention of the poet, the poem, and the reader. He argues to disregard these factors while evaluating a poem because 'since the poet and the reader both are outside the poem, their implications will be an importation of meaning from outside'. So, this type of interpretation is quite irrelevant. Only the words on the page are relevant for interpretation. Wimsatt produced important books- *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the meaning of poetry* (1954), *Hateful Contraries* (1965), and *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) in collaboration with Cleanth Brooks. The 'Grammar of Criticism' is discussed in his *Hateful Contraries* on the basis of diction, imagery, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity, irony, myth, theme, and genre. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* contains seventeen critical essays in four sections which is regarded as the milestone in the history of objective literary criticism in America. Two of the important essays- *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Affective Fallacy* co-authored by his young philosopher friend Monroe Beardsley (1915–1985) reflect the organicity, autonomy of poem and how it should be interpreted. A fallacy is an invalid mode of reasoning, and Wimsatt and Beardsley claimed that it is fallacious to base a critical judgment about the meaning or value of a literary work on 'external evidence' concerning the author's intentions. Aimed at biographical and impressionistic criticism, the former dismissed attempts to gauge the poet's intentions through examination of historical context, whereas the latter argued that the poem is not to be judged based upon its emotional impact on the reader. Its target was a certain kind of Romanticism (a concept that crops up several times in the original article) along with an assortment of associated notions, including 'sincerity', 'fidelity', 'spontaneity', 'authenticity',

'genuineness', 'originality'. The dispute between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists has been the basic issue of New Criticism; as the former believe in pure linguistic artifact. Here is a clash not only between styles of criticism but between fundamentally different conceptions of literature: the Romantic conception which sees literature as a vehicle of personal expression and the Modernist conception which sees Literature as pure Linguistic artifact or, in Wimsatt's terms, as 'verbal icon'. It has been a vogue to explore the mind of the poet to judge or evaluate his performance or quality. Critics determine the meaning of a work in the origin of the poet's mind or his intention. The main thing according to the authors in a poem is neither a product of inspiration nor a fit; it is related to the intellect not with the heart. The key words of the intentional school are: sincerity, fidelity, spontaneity, authenticity, genuineness, originality. The authors suggest replacing these words with 'integrity, relevance, unity, function, maturity, subtlety, adequacy' because the latter are concerned with the aesthetic aspect of work. The authors also explain the difference between the external and internal evidence for the meaning of a poem. Finally, the authors discuss the question of the poetic use of allusions and notes which should be studied within the framework of the verbal expression, not the oracle of the poet. *The Affective Fallacy* is a critical document of affective psychology. Both the fallacies go side by side and are the long cherished obstacles to objective approach of criticism. In author's view, the affective fallacy is an erroneous way of analyzing a work because the critic or reader lays emphasis on his personal, emotional and psychological bias influencing the interpretation of the work. The affective fallacy is confusion between the poem and result, meaning what it is and what it does. Both the fallacies undermined poetry and criticism as an art.

24.10 REACTION AGAINST NEW CRITICISM

There is almost always another opposite reaction for every critical approach, and New Criticism faced the same trouble. Two major controversial issues of New Criticism were its full dependence on the text, and its rejection of extra-text materials, which went to extreme. This text-isolation was

not acceptable for some who thought that New Criticism have "trivialized literature and literary study by turning critical interpretation into an over-intellectualized game whose object was the solution of interpretive puzzles. Because this way of viewing literature tended to ignore or destroy the moral, political, and personal impact that literature might possess". New Criticism is frequently seen as uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature and as unhistorical, for 'it isolates the work of art from its past and its context.' When New Critics considered a poem an objective work of art, they ceased unrelated interpretations to exist, but on the other hand, they ignored all other areas as well. They ignored external influences to be studied, such as gender, race or the social class. There were reactions against New Criticism very soon by Ronald S. Crane of the Chicago School of Neo- Aristotelians who pleaded for a more liberal approach. Because New Criticism is such a rigid and structured program for the study of literature, it is open to criticism on many fronts. They charged, New Criticism is too restrictive, dogmatic and narrow. It is too arbitrary in its emphasis on complexity, excessive preoccupation with individual word, image, irony, paradox and metaphor. In its insistence on excluding external evidence, New Criticism disqualifies many possibly fruitful perspectives for understanding texts, such as historicism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. Since New Criticism aims at finding one "correct" reading, it also ignores the ambiguity of language and the active nature of the perception of meaning described by poststructuralists. Finally, it can even be perceived as elitist, because it excludes those readers who lack the background for arriving at the 'correct' interpretation.

24.11 LET US SUM UP

So, The New Criticism practically lost its importance after the 1960s. There was not much New about it so far as the method is concerned. It was treated as a limited and inadequate approach. When New Criticism evolved, it was a historical necessity however, having served its purpose, it faded out. Of course, the New Criticism has certain limitations, but this movement offers a number of techniques and methods to read and teach poetry at a time when there was a complete chaos in critical approaches. However,

New Criticism reminds us that this approach is meant to deal with the poem on its own terms. While New Criticism may not offer us a wide range of perspectives on texts, it does attempt to deal with the text as a work of literary art. But it had a great influence on its following literary theories, and still is useful in order to explore a text and interpret its elements for a better understanding. Compared to modernism, New Criticism is 'a more systematic, more philosophical or more academic articulation of formalist undercurrents within modernism'. Close reading or close analysis of a text is what New Criticism introduced and is a fundamental tool in today's modern literary criticism. Some of the New Criticism's "most important concepts, concerning the nature and importance of textual evidence-the use of concrete, specific examples from the text itself to validate our interpretations-have been incorporated into the way most literary critics today, regardless of their theoretical persuasion, support their readings of literature". The main credit of New Criticism is that it shifts the importance from the author to text and it leaves an indelible mark on the evolution of modern literary criticism in America. It opened a doorway through which the upcoming Structuralists, Poststructuralists and Deconstructionists were all too eager to run–by rejecting the New Critical principle but keeping many of its implications and practices. New Criticism has left a permanent mark on the history of literary criticism, and is worthy not only of serious study, but also deep respect.

24.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Which of the following approaches is not similar to or compatible with New Criticism?

(A) formalism

(B) expressive school

(C) aesthetic criticism

(D) textual criticism

2. Which of the following are the objects of study for New Criticism?

(A) paradox

(B) textual ambiguity

(C) narrative voice

(D) All of these

3. What view of human identity is implied in New Criticism? Humans are…

(A) born evil

(B) sharing universal values

(C) contradictory

(D) None of these

4. Do you think that New Critics like to analyze translated poems?

(A) yes

(B) no

(C) depends on who the poet is

(D) cannot tell.

5. Which of the following cannot be the short-comings of New Criticism?

(A) ahistorical

(B) privileging certain poets

(C) blind to the text's inconsistencies

(D) ignoring textual complexities

6. The New Critics believe in:

(A) autonomy of literature

(B) psychological approach

(C) both (A) and (B)

(D) none of these

7. The term 'New Criticism' is derived from

   (A) I.A. Richards' *Principles of Criticism*

   (B) Ransom's *The New Criticism*

   (C) Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*

   (D) Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon*

8. Who is believed to be the pioneer of New Criticism?

   (A) John Crowe Ransom

   (B) F.R. Leavis

   (C) I.A. Richards

   (D) T.S. Eliot

9. Who is the author of *The Meaning of Meaning*?

   (A) F.R. Leavis

   (B) I.A. Richards

   (C) David Daiches

   (D) Northrop Frye

Answers: 1 (B); 2 (D); 3 (B); 4 (B); 5 (D); 6. (A); 7 (B); 8 (A); 9 (A)

24.13 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by 'close reading'? Attempt a 'close reading' of the following poem by John Crowe Ransom:

Blue Girls

Twirling your blue skirts, travelling the sward
Under the towers of your seminary,
Go listen to your teachers old and contrary

Without believing a word.

Tie the white fillets then about your hair

And think no more of what will come to pass

Than bluebirds that go walking on the grass

And chattering on the air.

Practice your beauty, blue girls, before it fail;

And I will cry with my loud lips and publish

Beauty which all our power shall never establish,

It is so frail.

For I could tell you a story which is true;

I know a woman with a terrible tongue,

Blear eyes fallen from blue,

All her perfections tarnished — yet it is not long

Since she was lovelier than any of you.

2. What was 'new' in the New Criticism?

3. Why do New Critics call all literature 'poems'?

4. How does Brooks condemn the three long established notions of poetry?

5. How can we say that Blackmur is a balanced critic?

6. What do you understand by Affective Fallacy?

7. What were the two major controversial issues of New Criticism?

24.14 SUGGESTED READING

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CLEANTH BROOKS:
IRONY AS A PRINCIPLE OF STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE

25.1 INTRODUCTION

Cleanth Brooks (1906 –1994) was an influential American literary critic and professor. He is best known for his contributions to New Criticism in the mid-20th century and for revolutionizing the teaching of poetry in American higher education. His best-known works, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), argue for the centrality of ambiguity and paradox as a way of understanding poetry. With his writing, Brooks helped to formulate formalist criticism, emphasizing "the interior life of a poem" and codifying the principles of close reading. Brooks was also the pre-eminent critic of Southern literature, writing classic texts on William Faulkner, and co-founder of the influential journal *The Southern Review* with Robert Penn Warren.

25.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to analyze, interpret and explain the theoretical orientation of Cleanth Brook's essay *Irony as a Principle of Structure*. Besides, the lesson will acquaint the learner with the semantics of meaning with reference to the poem. Since meaning is the soul of poetry, it is to be derived and churned out of the very text of a given poem. We shall specifically point out how the structure of a poem has its complex relationship with its meaning.

25.3 THE EMPHASIS ON STRUCTURE

Cleanth Brooks, a formidable critic of poetry, talks of meaning and its universal significance as encoded in the text, suggested through the device of irony which the poet incorporates within the structure of a poem. The emphasis on structure as a device to convey meaning is really very significant. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, assigned a great deal of importance on the structure of the plot of tragedy, which he regarded as the noblest form of art. He did not deny the role of the poet's sublime imagination and vision but he gave due importance to tectonics of the plot construction. He appreciated the craftsmanship of the poet. He did not underestimate the *kathya* (content or subject matter) but he certainly overestimated the *shilp* (craftsmanship) in

the plot of tragedy. It is definitely through the element of structure that unity is created in a work of art through which cerebral content of ideas is expressed.

Cleanth Brooks states in his celebrated essay *Irony as a Principle of Structure* that meaning is implicit in the battery of metaphors. Modern poetic technique calls it 'rediscovery of metaphor'. The poet legitimately steps out into the universal by going through the narrow door of the particular. The meaning must naturally issue from the particulars: it must not be forced upon the reader. It is high time that our conventional habits of language were reversed in the realm of poetry: It is very amusing to state that the tail must wag the dog and not vice versa. It is the tail of the kite that makes the kite fly. It is the tail that renders the kite more than a frame of paper blown crazily in mid air.

The tail of the kite seems to define the kite's function and weighs it down though it was meant to rise. Similarly, the concrete particulars with which the poet loads himself seems to deny the universal to which he aspires. The poet wants to 'say' something but he doesn't say it in a straightforward way- as Emily Dickinson's remarkable lines say:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —

Success in Circuit lies

Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased

With explanation kind

The Truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind —

25.4 ORGANIC QUALITY OF POETRY

The poet speaks through his metaphors: he risks saying, what he wishes to say, partially and obscurely. If he fails, he cannot convey anything. Too much

obscurity can make his metaphors impervious: they may not yield meaning. But the risk is to be taken because direct statement leads to abstraction and is rather unpoetic. Metaphor must bear its organic relationship to the poem. A collection of beautiful poetic images is not like blossoms and flowers juxtaposed into a bouquet but they must be related to one another intrinsically as they are related to the whole plant on which they grow. The beauty of the poem is the overall growth of the plant- with its stalks, roots, leaves and buds. A poem, like a plant, relies on all its component parts for life; there is a fundamental arrangement within a poetic creation which depends upon interrelationships. Words are the individual building blocks of a poem, and like the cells of a plant, each must be considered individually as being important to the structure. Each word is understood according to the words which surround it. It is the relationship between each of these words which creates a context out of which meaning evolves. Brooks terms the relationship between the component parts of a poem as the pressures of context. Just as the cells of a plant rely on adjoining cells for water, nutrients and energy, so in poems, words rely on surrounding words for their meaning. It is the structural, organic unity of the parts which allows for the production of meaning. This is brought about through the pressures of context.

25.5 POEM AS A LITTLE DRAMA

The significance of words to the structure of poetry in Brooks' essay finds a counterpart – the importance of the elements of the plot. He says, 'The poem is like a little drama.' In the drama, the totality of effect proceeds from all the elements of drama. In order to be significant, a work must be a whole, that is, it must have a beginning, middle and an end, according to Aristotle. These parts are akin to the words in a poem in Brooks' theory because in a likewise manner they display a unity. For example right from the beginning of the poem the meaning of the whole depends on the deliberate placement of each of the elements of poem and the organic relationship between those parts.

Brooks claims irony is produced by the pressure of context and proceeds to explain these pressures in a poem. These pressures define the relationship between the components of a poem which are the words that produce meaning.

Irony is the tension between multiple meanings of a word (ambiguity in meaning caused by connotative aspect of language), meanings which are pressured by the presence of surrounding words and the situation in which they are said.

Brooks compares poetry to drama in order to describe how pressures of context produce irony: i.e., what is said is said in a particular situation and by a particular dramatic character. Contextual irony (tension) is a key to meaning. Because there is always a speaker who narrates a poem, and in a setting for that narration, words will never exist in isolation, and must be considered in relation to, as affected by, their context. For Brooks, context forces ironies, which are the key to meaning. A successful poem has its structure dependent on the tensions produced by context. It is in these fusions that harmony exists and it is in the tensions that meaning exists. Therefore, meaning, in Brooks' view, is the product of contextual pressures. Context is the relationship between the parts of the poem that creates the unity of the poem through its pressures. The end (blossoms) of action should grow naturally out of the beginning (roots) and middle (stalk), if we grasp the argument in Brooks' plant metaphor, which affirms the organic nature of poetry.

25.6 METAPHOR V/S IRONY

Brooks finds specific, concrete particulars essential for the form of a poem. The particular become the units or metaphors and references. He claims that metaphors, even as they risk obscuring larger themes, are absolutely necessary because direct statement lends to abstraction and threatens to take us out of poetry altogether whereas indirect statements appeal in a poem. Brooks finds poetry an effective vehicle for conveying meaning instead of concrete language. Poetry creates metaphors which instead of giving us abstract thoughts leads us to ideas in an indirect manner. Poetry takes human beings as its subject (if for no other reason than because language which is its

structural element is a human device). It attempts to make explanation of the human condition in terms of causes and effects of human actions.

Thus the elements of structure are metaphors and symbols which make the meaning in a poem, according to Brooks. Irony and plot function similarly to create meaning through indirection. Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* instructs his son Laertes to find 'through indirections, directions out'. Brooks does not approve of direct statement of abstract ideas. Organic unity of parts in a poem is essential to convey the sense of universal truths- universal constants of human nature- as Aristotle puts it in his *Poetics*. Meaning is inherent to the structure of the artifact.

Brooks begins the essay by stating that the modern poetic technique is a rediscovery of the metaphor. The metaphor is so extensively used by the poet that it is the particular through which he steps into the universal. The poet uses particular details to arrive at general meanings. But these particulars must not be chosen arbitrarily. This establishes the importance of our conventional habits of language.

Now the question that can be raised is that the poet does not say things directly. It is as if he is taking a risk by not saying things directly but only through metaphoric language, indirectly: he doesn't call spade a spade.

Direct statements pull the reader out of the range of poetry. A metaphor says things partially and obscurely, yet it makes the text poetic rather than a direct statement which makes the text unpoetic.

Therefore, metaphor means indirection. It is a principle of poetic writing, there is a vital relationship between an organic relationship between particular images and statements.

This kind of a relationship between the idea and the metaphor is described by Cleanth Brooks as an 'organic relationship'. That is to say the poem is not an assemblage or collection of poetic images and beautiful passages, but a meaningful relationship between object and idea. So by merely arranging

many poetic images one after another do not result in a poem. Brooks says that all the elements of a poem are related to each other, not as blossoms lying next to each other in a bouquet, but as blossoms related to other parts of a growing plant. The wholeness of the poem through its details is the flowering of the whole plant. This statement is very similar to what Matthew Arnold says in the "Preface" to his own poems. Earlier than that, during the eighteenth century, poetry was rhetorical, a matter of formal eloquence: poetry as prescription for what we should believe or do. Think of Pope's finely chiseled couplets:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan

The proper study of mankind is man.

Poetry should not be a collection of isolated, even if excellent, lines. Brooks continues that "The structure meant is certainly not 'form' in the conventional sense in which we think of form as a kind of envelope which 'contains' the 'content'." The meaning isn't outside the poem. It is generated within the poem, which is a largely self-sufficient meaning system.

Giving another example, Brooks says that a poem is like a drama. The total effect proceeds from all the elements in the drama. So also in a good poem the total effect proceeds from all the elements of the poem. There are no superfluous parts in a good poem.

Therefore the parts of the poem are related to each other organically and related to the total theme indirectly. From this we can conclude that context is very important. So it is not just the idea and the metaphor being related organically and the whole poem linked internally through all its elements, but the context in which the connection between the idea and the metaphor or analogy is made. What is said in a play, as in a poem, is said in a particular context and it is this context that gives the words their particular meaning. Here Brooks takes the example of two sentences from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The first line that he quotes is "Ripeness is all". Brooks says such a philosophical statement becomes meaningful because of particular context in which the dramatist places it. So also when Lear repeats the word "Never"

again and again five times, the same word said over and over again, having the same meaning, nevertheless becomes especially significant because the playwright places them in a context where the words gather richness of meaning. The context endows the particular word or image or statement with significance. Statements which are so charged with meaning become dramatic utterances. This is how context makes an impact upon the meaning of words. In other words, the part or particular element of a poem is modified by the pressure of the context. For example, if you meet a friend who has won a lottery prize and say "What a rain of fortune!" in the particular context of the situation, the words have a specific meaning. For example, when everything in a situation has gone wrong and the person says, "This is a fine state of affairs!" What he really means is quite the opposite of what is being said. The actual state of affairs is very bad. But by sarcastically saying, "This is a fine state of affairs!" and perhaps with the use of a particular tone of voice an ironic statement is uttered. This is sarcasm, the most obvious kind of irony. Sarcasm is a form of irony where there is a complete *shirshashana*- reversal of meaning. The tone of voice and the context contribute to it. Brooks says that the tone of irony can be effected by the skillful disposition of the context. He gives the example from Gray's Elegy:

Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,

Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of death?

In its context, the questions are obviously rhetorical and ironical. The answers have been implied in the characterization of the breath as fleeting and of the ear of death as dull and cold. The form is that of a question, but the manner in which the question has been asked shows that it is no true question at all. Many of Hardy's poems and nearly all of Housman's, for example, reveal irony quite as definite and overt as this. Cleanth Brooks dwells on tragic irony, self irony, playful, arch, mocking or gentle irony. A statement devoid of an ironical

potential would be quite 'unpoetic'. Similarly, "The square on the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the two sides." This Pythagorean Theorem is true but it is unpoetical. The meaning of the above cited statements cannot be modified by an inch or an ounce.

25.7 THE CONCEPT OF IRONY

In an ironical situation, the result of an action is reverse of what the doer expects. Macbeth murders King Duncan hoping that in becoming the next king of Scotland, he would achieve great happiness. However, 'Macbeth murders sleep' nor does Lady Macbeth sleeps well. She suffers from somnambulism. Macbeth is finally beheaded in the castle on Dunsinane hill. Irony is born because there is contrast between literal meaning of what is said and what is meant. A character may make a brilliant plan but it may prove foolish. Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony. Irony can be defined as the conflict of two meanings. If the conflict is resolved, there is harmony or unity in the composition.

There are other statements which hold their meaning as it is, in spite of the context in which they occur. 'Two plus two is four' will retain the same meaning in any context. Every sentence denotes a meaning. In poetry, the pressure of context is inevitable. Even philosophical generalizations bear the pressure of context. Their relevance, their rhetorical force and meaning cannot be divorced from the context in which they are embedded: connotations are important in poetry. Therefore, modern critics tend to use the term irony while discussing poetry. According to Cleanth Brooks, irony is an important structural principle to the meaning of the poem. Reading a line in a poem in its proper context gives it its particular meaning, its ironic content. Brooks emphasizes importance of the pressure exerted by context. He illustrates the point by quoting from Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*. The lines of a poem are to be justified in terms of the context:

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits; on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The speaker says that the world '*which seems /To lie before us like a land of dreams,... Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,'*. The statement yields its meaning but its inherent irony makes its poetic coherence possibly more subtle. Irony, in the sense of 'pressures of the context' is the main way in which a poem yields its meaning.

25.8 POETRY OF SYNTHESIS

The statement of the speaker in *Dover Beach* stated above seems an obvious truism. It may be true or false but in an attempt to 'prove' the proposition, many perplexing metaphysical questions would be raised. It would mean moving away from the poem and from the justification of the poem, for the lines are to be justified in terms of the context. In the poem, the lover is standing with his beloved and looking out of the window at the sea. The moonlight has thrown a deceptively white sheet over everything. Listening to

the roar of the waves as they ebb and flow, the speaker makes this philosophical observation. This is the way in which the statement can be validated. It is an experiential content of the mind of the speaker and it is true in the charmed world 'blanched' by moonlight. The psyche of the reader accepts it as coherent, mature and founded on the experience outlined within the poem. But if he raises the questions as the following:

(a) Does the speaker seem carried away with his own emotions?

(b) Does he seem to oversimplify the situation?

(c) Or does he, on the other hand, seem to have acquired a kind of detachment and objectivity?

In other words, we are forced to raise the question as to whether the statement flows properly out of a context; whether it acknowledges the pressures of the context; whether it is "ironical" or merely sentimental.

Cleanth Brooks suggests that such a poem as *Dover Beach* conforms to I.A. Richards' 'poetry of synthesis' i.e. that poetry which does not leave out what is apparently hostile to its dominant tone. It is able to fuse the discordant elements and comes to terms with itself and becomes invulnerable to irony. 'Invulnerability to irony is the stability of a context in which the internal pressures balance and mutually support each other.' The stability is like that of the arch: the very forces which are calculated to drag the stones to the ground actually provide the principle of support- a principle in which thrust and counter thrust become the means of stability.

If we read Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* between the lines, we shall notice that discordant elements are synthesized:

(a) The sea is calm tonight v/s The tide is full.

(b) The moon lies fair v/s the light gleams and is gone…the moon blanched land.

(c) …with tremulous cadence slow v/s the grating roar of pebbles.

(d) … in the tranquil bay v/s which the waves draw back and fling

(e) The sea of faith like folds of bright girdles furled … The world like a land of dreams v/s Hath really neither joy nor love nor light nor certitude, nor peace, nor help from pain

(f) As on a darkling plain ignorant armies clash by night v/s come to the window…Sweet is the night air.

Only a competent poet- an expert craftsman and visionary- can synthesize discordant and hostile elements in the form and structure of a poem. Again and as Coleridge would agree, a drama or poem "balances and reconciles opposite or discordant qualities." The poem's structure works rather like Coleridge's power of imagination: 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," etc. It does not cancel out the complexity and richness of life, but preserves it in a publicly accessible manner, in the structure of a work of art. Generally human mind does not accept universal statements of truth unless they are contextualized. Every reader is more or less skeptic. He doesn't take anything for granted.

25.9 THE REASONS FOR THE USE OF IRONY IN MODERN POETRY

There is a general breakdown in belief and the modern mind does not accept universal statements of truth. There is a depletion and corruption of language itself. The modern poet is burdened with the task of rehabilitating a drained and tired language. It is the responsibility of the poet to make language capable of qualifying and modifying meaning. Brooks asks the critic to remember that the modern poet is addressing a public who have already developed a taste for popular and commercial art. So by using irony, the modern poet succeeds in bringing both clarity and passion into his evoke of art or the poem. Here, Brooks cites the example of Randall Jarell's poem *English Air Force* as an example of success of this sort. This poem incorporates irony in the structure and holds apposing meanings in the context of the poem. On the

one hand the poet talks about the essential justness of man and on the other he uses the image of Pontius Pilate who washes hands in blood:

...Shall I say that man

Is not as men he said a wolf to man?

Men wash their hands, in blood, as best they can:

I find no fault in this just man.

The poem dramatizes the situation of the Air Force fighters. The poem eloquently presents the source from where all our understanding and beliefs begin. According to Cleanth Brooks, this is the function of good poetry. Without making any abstract generalization the poem makes a statement of truth.

So we may conclude that statements in poetry are validated by the context in which they occur. In poetry, therefore statements get their viability by virtue of their context.

25.10 BROOKS' IDEA OF IRONY *VIS-À-VIS* CLASSICAL RHETORIC AND CONTEMPORARY FIGURATIVE THEORY

Brooks seemed to think of irony as a principle of order and unity: not so much a feature of language or meaning as a sort of coherence yoking disparate elements together, rather like Aristotle's conception of wholeness and integrity in *Poetics*. Brooks was not, of course, the first to say this kind of thing, nor was the New Criticism the first to draw attention to irony as a source of literary value. The history of Romanticism is filled with similar sentiments, and they are among the factors that define what Romanticism is, or was. It was the first of the rebellions against the Enlightenment, and not least against the ideal of a Cartesian clarity of language. The early Wittgenstein said that everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly, and everything that can be put into words can be put clearly. Nearly a century and a half earlier, Wordsworth had written that the best poetic diction was the language of ordinary men — the very language that, according to Wittgenstein, "disguises thought". Keats, far from being impressed by the notion of thinking clearly, said that poets should be

content with half-knowledge. Friedrich Schlegel spoke of "the impossibility … of total communication". It was also Schlegel who made the memorable remark that irony can be defined as "logical beauty."

Irony as a figure of speech — verbal irony — has three necessary and sufficient conditions:

(i) the speaker's meaning is partly stated and partly unstated;

(ii) the stated and the unstated meanings are in semantic contrast with one another;

(iii) the meaning intended by the speaker, and understood by the listener, consists of the stated and the unstated meanings taken together.

The first condition is also the best known. The definition of irony as saying one thing but meaning another is at least as old as Quintilian, and Paul Grice has examined the oddities of this kind of locution in some detail. Grice, however, has also made it clear that irony is a special case of saying one thing and meaning another. Very often irony does not occur at all. One of Grice's own examples will illustrate this point:

A. I am out of petrol.

B. There is a garage round the corner.

B's reply means more than it says, and could be written in full as, "There is a garage round the corner, which I believe is still open, and you should be able to get petrol there". The latter part of the reply, the unstated part, is what Grice calls an "implicatum", and it is characteristic of most implicata that they complement and complete the stated part of an utterance. It is their function to make conversational sense of remarks which would otherwise seem irrelevant or tangential.

Sometimes, however, the unstated part of an utterance, instead of being semantically continuous with the stated part, is in semantic contrast with it. This is the mark of irony, and is the second condition of irony.

There are two relevant kinds of semantic contrast. One is a divergence between sense and reference. If we describe the wearing of a nose-stud as a "revolutionary outrage", the sense and the reference clearly do not match. Nor do they match if I call a major gun-battle an "altercation". In the first of these the description connotes more than, and in the second it connotes less than, what is required by the thing to which it refers. Ironies generated in this manner are "ironies of scale", and in the language of traditional rhetoric they are, respectively, hyperbole and meiosis.

The other kind of semantic contrast occurs whenever the contrast between the stated and the unstated meanings is so complete that one is a negation of the other. The negation can take the form of a contradiction: for instance, Mark Antony's statement that Brutus is an honorable man is contradicted by his unstated claim that Brutus is not an honorable man. Negation can also take the form of contrariety: for instance, if the statement "It's a marriage made in Heaven" has the unstated meaning "It's a marriage made for money", these two assertions are contraries of one another. Contrariety and contradiction are types of logical opposition, so we can refer to both of these as "ironies of opposition".

We now come to the third necessary condition, and we can best approach it by considering the difference between hyperbole and meiosis on the one hand, and bombast and euphemism on the other. The purpose of the latter is to conceal or disguise the truth. When a man who empties dustbins is called a sanitary engineer, this is designed to conceal or disguise the fact that his job is menial, smelly, and poorly-paid. When a dictator is called Our Great Leader this is meant to conceal his mediocrity and his fear. Both euphemism and bombast may have unstated meanings for at least some people, but their intention is really to minimize and eventually to abolish any unstated meanings. What is actually said is meant to replace what is not said. Their role is to disguise thought — and that is, in effect, to change from one thought to another.

It is quite otherwise in the case of hyperbole and meiosis, and, in general, in the case of irony. The purpose of all kinds of irony is to reveal the truth, or,

at any rate, to focus our attention on it. It may seem an odd way of doing so — revealing or emphasizing a truth by not stating it explicitly, by actually stating the contrary or the contradictory, or over stating or understating it. Yet that is how irony works, as we well know. Understanding irony requires a complex act of interpretation: not just an interpretation of the words uttered, but also an inference of the unstated meaning, and an understanding of the relation between the two. Many studies of irony suggest that we interpret an irony by mentally setting aside the stated meaning and replacing it by the unstated meaning. This is clearly, and fundamentally, wrong. The ironic statement "Brutus is an honorable man" does not have the same meaning as the non-ironic statement "Brutus is not an honorable man". They may make the same assertion; they do not have the same meaning. The meaning of an irony is not determined by its true conditions, but by an interaction between what is stated and what is not. If a slightly deaf Roman turned to his neighbor and asked what Mark Antony had said, and got the reply, "He said that Brutus was not an honorable man", this would be a distortion, a sort of falsification, of the facts. The deaf Roman would not have been told a lie, but he would have been prevented from understanding what Mark Antony had said.

Besides verbal irony, other kinds of irony are commonplace in literature — narrative irony in Swift, dramatic irony in Sophocles, conversational and intellectual irony in Plato — and all forms of Romantic irony depend on the supposition that there are some truths that cannot be stated, but which can be vaguely glimpsed or half-known through our encounters with words. If they cannot be put into words clearly, they can at least be hinted at by words, and these half-known truths are in some ways deeper and more important and more personal than other truths.

It is irony in this sense that was meant by Brooks. He wanted to say that a hidden, glimpsed-at, half-known level of meaning produces the wholeness and integrity of a literary work. No matter how disparate, fragmented and circuitous its language and its surface meaning might be, there is a second, unstated layer of meaning which holds it together and gives it sense and coherence. As with

verbal irony, the stated and the unstated meanings may dialectically conflict, but ultimately they combine to produce an integrated and meaningful whole.

In some ways, therefore, Brooks' use of the term irony is significantly close to its primary usage in Classical rhetoric and contemporary figurative theory. Irony uses words to point beyond language. Irony shows that there are some truths which, though they cannot be articulated in words, can nonetheless be expressed by means of words. Irony, like many other figures, is a way of transcending and ultimately extending the limited resources of everyday language, of ensuring that it does not disguise thought but is both the midwife and the medium of thought. Not everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly, but everything that can be thought at all can be put into words.

25.11 LET US SUM UP

The focus of Cleanth Brooks in the essay *Irony as Principle of Structure* is evaluation of poetry with regard to the use of irony in a text's structure. His thesis is that irony is the tension of the parts of the text and the pressure from the context. A successful text should have "the stability of a context in which the internal pressures balance and mutually support each other". The author explains the idea of irony and the importance of context first and then elaborates on the idea, using examples of poetry to illustrate how irony works in a text to make it complex and rich. He gives the idea of irony that it is the obvious warping of a statement by the context we characterize as ironical. Context, which is different from the "universe of discourse," plays an important role in the making of poetry. The structure of irony is everywhere, even in the simple lyric. A successful poem should be recognized by the complexity of its structure, which should be dramatized with accuracy and honesty (clarity and passion, in other words). When the use of irony becomes the standard of evaluating poetry, the author highlights the structure of the poems and therefore is able to set up a new standard of good (or at least "better") poetry. Therefore, simple lyrics are looked down on when compared to ironical modern poetry. The author also criticizes the "corruption" of language brought by the circulation of popular culture.

25.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Which of the following statements is FALSE?

   (A) The poet speaks through his metaphors.

   (B) Indirect statement leads to abstraction.

   (C) Words are the individual building blocks of a poem.

   (D) The relationship between the component parts of a poem is the pressure of context.

2. Which of the following statements is FALSE?

   (A) Metaphor must bear its organic relationship to the poem.

   (B) Contextual irony is a key to meaning.

   (C) Metaphor means direction.

   (D) Denotations are important in poetry.

3. 'Poetry of synthesis' is a term tossed by:

   (A) Cleanth Brooks

   (B) I.A. Richards

   (C) John Crowe Ransom

   (D) T.S. Eliot

Answers: 1. (B), 2, (D), 3. (B)

25.13 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the organic growth of a poem?

2. Discuss Meaning as yielded by the context in a poem.

3. What is meaning in meaning in poetry. Which of the two meanings- denotative and connotative- is acceptable in poetry, according to Brooks?

4. Illustrate how discordant elements are fused together in Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*?

5. What is meant by 'autotelic artifact'?

6. How can you say that Brooks' use of the term 'irony' is significantly close to its primary usage in Classical rhetoric and contemporary figurative theory?

25.14 SUGGESTED READING

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. III **LESSON : 26**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : VI**

CLEANTH BROOKS : KEATS' SYLVAN HISTORIAN: HISTORY WITHOUT FOOTNOTES

STRUCTURE

26.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Charles Kaplan and William David Anderson, until the early nineteen forties the typical academic approaches to analyzing a literary work were historical, social, biographical, philosophical, psychological, mimetic, and moral, in any combination. However, the New Criticism directed literary study to the words on the printed page, to the text itself: it made literary criticism text-oriented. It was the objective approach. According to them, the task of the critic or the teacher of literature was to analyze and describe objectively the formal properties of a literary text by a close, detailed reading, without regard to extrinsic considerations. The New Critics rejected the idea of the work as an expression of a specific time and place; they rejected the idea of authorial intention, considered a Romantic fallacy; and they rejected the idea that a literary work was to be studied as an expression of its author's personality. As formalist critics, they were concerned only with the poem as poem, with an analysis of its form, structure, and imagery. By 'structure,' the New Critics, like Cleanth Brooks, referred to the interrelationships between the parts of a poem, how the complex organization of its parts created coherent meaning. They popularized the words like unity, ambiguity, irony, integrity, and paradox as some of the new terms describing desirable literary qualities. Although its influence is still strong today yet New Criticism became an old hat by the end of the nineteen sixties. It declined into the industrious search for ambiguities, ironies, and paradoxes in the works of literature. Besides, New Criticism was more effective in analyzing poetry than fiction or drama. The critical essay *Keats' Sylvan Historian: History without Footnotes* is an analysis of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by the formidable New Critic, Cleanth Brooks.

26.2 OBJECTIVES

The present lesson concentrates on Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn,* to discuss Cleanth Brooks' famous critique *Keats' Sylvan Historian: History without Footnotes*, which is an excellent example of 'close reading' that the New Critics advocate.

26.3 BROOKS' ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Let us begin with Cleanth Brooks' analysis of John Keats' poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Brooks quotes the closing line of Archibald MacLeish's poem *Ars Poetica*: "A poem should not mean / But be" as a poetic dictum at the beginning of his essay. Brooks notes that Keats, contrary to this dictum, closes his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* with a meaningful statement "beauty is truth". This sententious statement means that "this bit of wisdom sums up the whole of mortal knowledge". Often it is good to begin a literary essay by citing some previous critics of a poem. Brooks cites here a few critics who commented on the ending of Keats' poem. T. S. Eliot called the line "a serious blemish on a beautiful poem". Middleton Murray, an advocate of Pure poetry, agrees with Eliot. H. W. Garrod, a traditional critic, also objected to the tailpiece of the poem.

Brooks next gives the thesis of his essay; he says that the very ambiguity of the poem's closing statement ought to warn us against insisting very much on the statement in isolation. In other words, no statement exists in vacuum i.e. without its context. It must drive us back to a consideration of the context in which the statement is set. One may ask a specific question whether Keats, the poet, was able to exemplify the relation of beauty and truth in this particular poem. The relation of the final statement in the poem to the total context is all-important, i.e. the final statement must have its strings attached to the context. This idea about the organic unity of a poem, that lines cannot be understood out of the poem's context, was stressed by Coleridge, although it can be traced to Aristotle and Longinus.

In the third paragraph of the essay, Brooks argues that the paradox of the concluding statement of the poem is prepared for by earlier paradoxes in the poem: Readers "must not be too much disturbed to have the element of paradox latent in the poem emphasized".

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,

Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

(Stanza 1)

The poem "begins on a note of paradox, though a mild one: for we ordinarily do not expect an urn to speak at all". The urn is called a "bride of quietness" and a "foster-child of silence," but the urn is a "historian" too. "Historians tell the truth, or are at least expected to tell the truth". However, the urn as historian "supplies no names and dates". The actions described on the urn are passionate, but "the urn is cool marble". "And the paradox goes further: the scene is one of violent love-making, . . . but the urn itself is like a 'still unravish'd bride".

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;

She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

(Stanza 2)

The first lines of the second stanza state a rather bold paradox. It is a statement which is preposterous, and yet true. The unheard music is sweeter than any audible music. The general paradox runs through the stanza: action goes on though the actors are motionless; the song will not cease; the lover cannot leave his song; the maid, always to be kissed, never actually kissed, will remain changelessly beautiful. "The beauty portrayed is deathless because it is lifeless".

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed

Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;

And, happy melodist, unwearied,

For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love! more happy, happy love!

For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,

For ever panting, and for ever young;

All breathing human passion far above,

That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,

A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

(Stanza 3)

Brooks finds the third stanza to be a recapitulation of the ideas of the first two stanzas, but adds that it enhances the paradoxical element more vividly. For instance, the songs are forever new because they cannot be completed. The paradox is carried further in the case of the lover whose love is 'Forever warm and still to be enjoy'd'"; however, paradoxically enough in the next line, this love becomes 'All breathing human passion far above.' If it is above all breathing passion, it is, after all, outside the realm of breathing passion.

It is not human passion at all. "For Keats in the 'Ode' is stressing the ironic fact that all human passion does leave one cloyed; hence the superiority of art". Keats is perfectly aware that the frozen moment of loveliness is more dynamic and young because it is not human flesh at all. It doesn't belong to the fluid and evanescent world of reality only because it is frozen. The love depicted on the urn remains warm and young because it is cold, ancient marble. The poet juxtaposes the charmed world of art and imagination with that of human existence. Both of them are paradoxical.

The next stanza emphasizes not individual aspiration and desire but collective/ communal life:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

(Stanza 4)

If the earlier stanzas have been concerned with such paradoxes as the ability of static carving to convey dynamic action, of the soundless pipes to play music sweeter than that of the heard melody; of the figured lover to have a love more warm and panting than that of breathing flesh and blood, so in the same way the town implied by the urn comes to have a richer and more important history than that of actual towns. The Urn, as a 'historian', speaks

a lot about the town through silence. The silence of the Grecian Urn is more expressive, effable and articulating than the documents by historians.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

(Stanza 5)

The central paradox of the poem, thus, comes to conclusion in the phrase, 'Cold Pastoral.' The word 'pastoral' suggests warmth, spontaneity, the natural and the informal as well as the idyllic, the simple and the informally charming. The urn itself is cold, and the life beyond life which it expresses is life which has been formed, arranged. The urn itself is a 'silent form,' and it speaks, not by means of statement, but by 'teasing us out of thought.' The marble men and women of the urn will not age as flesh-and-blood men and women will. Cleanth Brooks notices an unfailing and inevitable relationship between one stanza and another. There is a threading needle of paradox sewing through the verbal structure of the poem, making it an 'organic whole'. The Grecian Urn is a timeless representative of time i.e. eternity- transcending present, past and future. Therefore, it assumes the role of the historian who is *trikaaldarshi*- omniscient. It shows the imaginative insight and intuitive grasp of the totality of human perception in the fleeting evanescent world. The Urn is beautiful: It is a true and authentic specimen of beauty. Moreover,

the 'truth' which the sylvan historian reveals is the only kind of truth which we are likely to experience during our earthly existence. It is beyond names, dates, and special circumstances; the wealth of data. The sylvan historian quietly ignores them all. The urn "does better than that. We have not only beauty but insight into essential truth. Its 'history,' in short, is a history without footnotes. Thus 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' . . . is a statement validated by its context. The formulaic assertions in the poem are integral parts. We should resist the temptation of interpreting them in isolation in order to grasp the philosophy or 'truth' or the world view of the poem in terms of wholeness.

26.4 URN: AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL FOR THE NEW CRITICS

John Donne (1572–1631), the great metaphysical poet, provides a metaphor that is useful for close reading. In *The Canonization* (1633) he writes:

We'll build sonnets pretty rooms;

As well a well-wrought urn becomes

The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,

And by these hymns, all shall approve

Us canonized for Love.

Another poet returns to the same metaphor 118 years later. Thomas Gray, in *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), writes:

Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

Both Donne and Gray use the image of the urn in their poetry. An urn, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), is 'an earthenware or metal vessel or vase of a rounded or ovaloid form and with a circular base, used by various peoples especially in former times…to preserve the ashes of the dead. Hence vaguely used (esp. poet.) for 'a tomb or sepulcher, the grave.' Donne and Gray use the urn poetically, or metaphorically, for the urn is an image, a container

to hold poetic meaning. To Donne, the poet can "build sonnets pretty rooms; / As well a well-wrought urn becomes"; to Gray the urn becomes "storied" or an "animated bust" capable of containing stories and meaning. As an image, then, the urn becomes symbolic: poets argue that a poem is like an urn, a container for artistic meaning. Sixty-nine years from Gray's poem, John Keats writes at the end of his poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1820):

> *When old age shall this generation waste,*
>
> *Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe*
>
> *Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,*
>
> *'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all*
>
> *Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

Donne's "well-wrought urn" became the title of a book by Cleanth Brooks—*The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947).—a central manifesto of the New Criticism. New Criticism is synonymous with close reading, so the urn becomes an important symbol for the New Critics: the urn as artistic container of beauty and meaning represents the New Critical enterprise. A poem, a play, a novel, a short story is like a "storied urn" or "well-wrought urn," capable of conveying poetic beauty and truth.

The New Critics regard a literary work as an urn—a well-wrought, storied urn, or a Grecian urn. As Keats writes, this urn contains not only beauty but also truth: a work of literature has some objective meaning that is integral to its artistic design. In other words, literature is the art of conveying truth about the world. Thus the New Critics view the study of literature as an inherently valuable enterprise; literary criticism, it follows, is fruitful because it clarifies art by assigning a truth value to this art. To quote the nineteenth-century poet and critic Matthew Arnold, as he writes in *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1865), literature reflects "the best that is known and thought in the world." To the New Critics, literature—in particular the analysis of it—was a profound activity.

A central concern of the New Critics is to understand how meaning and form interweave into a total artistic effect, the well-wrought urn. A New Critical reading assumes that the literary work has an organic structure that leads to unity or harmony in the work. An important concern for New Critics, consequently, is to show how meaning is achieved or dependent on the organic structure—the form—of the work. A New Critical reading, then, focuses on the various elements of literature that complement and create the theme.

26.5 BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF CLOSE READING

A New Critic's toolbox will hold those elements of literature that allow for the discussion of form and technique as it applies to meaning. Since New Critics perform a close reading of the text to illustrate how structure and theme are inseparable, they are eager to tell us both how to read and how not to read. They identify various fallacies of reading that must be avoided:

26.5.0 The Intentional Fallacy

The intentional fallacy occurs when readers claim to understand an author's intended meaning for a work of literature. The New Critics believed that a literary work belongs to the readers, to the public, which suggests that we should read the work isolated from what the author may have said about the work. In other words, the critic never knows specifically what the author intended. Indeed, an author may have conveyed meanings he or she did not intend at all, but those meanings are still present in their work. The literary critic, then, must concentrate solely on the extrinsic formal qualities of the poem, play, short story, or novel.

26.5.1 The Biographical Fallacy

Related to the intentional fallacy is the biographical fallacy, which, as you might suspect, is committed when you use an author's life as a frame of reference to interpret a work of art. The New Critics took painstaking measures to keep the focus on the work of art itself.

26.5.2 The Affective Fallacy

The affective fallacy is produced when the critic brings in his or her personal feelings about how a literary work moves them. While New Critics were aware that many readers found meaning in the emotional impact of literature, they were careful to distinguish between subjective emotional responses and objective critical statements about a literary work. Critics, then, should stick closely to the work of art, eliminating the author's intention from consideration, and they should also eliminate their emotional involvement in the reading experience. We discover later in our study that many critical theories—psychoanalytic and reader-response theories, in particular—are diametrically opposed to New Criticism: both psychoanalytic and reader-response theories highlight the way a literary work affects a reader's emotional and intellectual responses.

26.5.3 The Heresy of Paraphrase

Finally, the New Critics warned against the heresy of paraphrase, which happens when readers artificially separate meaning from structure or form. You have probably fallen into this trap once or twice when you concentrated on summarizing a work's plot rather than analyzing its meaning. New Criticism teaches us not to assign a meaning to a literary work unless that meaning can be supported by a close examination of the artistic elements of the text. To say that Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is about the death of a migrant worker fails to acknowledge that the poem does not support such a reading.

Thus, a close reading, as defined by the New Critics, focuses narrowly on the literary work as a well-wrought urn. All we need for our interpretation is the literary work itself, where we examine how the artistry of the work leads to a larger theme that reflects the truth value of the work. Easy to state, more difficult to do! So let's now turn to see how a close reading can be connected to the writing process itself.

26.5.4 The Writing Process and the Protocols of Close Reading

If New Critics provide us with so many strategies for not reading a text, they should present us with strategies for reading texts. And they do. They suggest protocols of reading that are the heart of traditional close readings of texts. In a nutshell, a close reading exposes a problem or issue that needs examination to bring unity to the work; a close reading demonstrates how a literary work's meaning is unified, balanced, and harmonized by its aesthetic—or literary—structure. Your close reading, then, often identifies a tension or ambiguity—the issue or problem—that can be resolved by showing that the literary work achieves unity even in the apparent tension or ambiguity. Consequently, the critic can often examine how language creates tension through paradox or irony. Paradox (when something appears contradictory or discordant, but finally proves to be actually true) and irony (when a perceived meaning or intention is eventually found not to be accurate) are a result of a writer's use of language in a metaphorical way.

26.5.5 Brooks' Close Reading

There is no more famous example of a professional critical reading than Cleanth Brooks' *Keats' Sylvan Historian: History without Footnotes*.

Brooks' reading of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* begins by disagreeing with T. S. Eliot, who believed the concluding lines of the poem—"Beauty is truth, truth beauty"—constituted a major flaw in the poem, for, as Brooks relates, "the troubling assertion is apparently an intrusion upon the poem—does not grow out of it—is not dramatically accommodated to it." Eliot feels the urn's speech doesn't make much sense—and that the statement simply isn't true. Eliot goes on to contrast the closing lines of the "Ode" with a line from *King Lear*, "Ripeness is all." Keats' lines strike him as false; Shakespeare's, on the other hand, as not clearly false, and as possibly quite true. Shakespeare's

generalization, in other words, avoids raising the question of truth. But is it really a question of truth and falsity? One is tempted to account for the difference of effect which Eliot feels in this way: "Ripeness is all" is a statement put in the mouth of a dramatic character and a statement which is governed and qualified by the whole context of the play. It does not directly challenge an examination into its truth because its relevance is pointed up and modified by the dramatic context. Now, suppose that one could show that Keats' lines, in quite the same way, constitute a speech, a consciously riddling paradox, put in the mouth of a particular character, and modified by the total context of the poem. If we could demonstrate that the speech was "in character," was dramatically appropriate, was properly prepared for-then would not the lines have all the justification of "Ripeness is all"? In such case, should we not have waived the question of the scientific or philosophic truth of the lines in favor of the application of a principle curiously like that of dramatic propriety?

Brooks sets out to counter Eliot and prove that the poem is unified around the central paradox of the poem: "What is the relation of the beauty (the goodness, the perfection) of a poem to the truth or falsity of what it seems to assert?"

Brooks contends that the poem is "a parable on the nature of poetry, and of art in general" and that the concluding lines must be taken in the "total context of the poem". When read in this manner, the urn's speech was "in character", was dramatically appropriate, and was properly prepared for. To support his contention, Brooks provides a stanza-by-stanza close reading in which he suggests that the paradox of the speaking urn is naturally part of each stanza and related to a key thematic concept: the poem highlights the tension between bustling life depicted on the urn and the frozen vignettes of the "Cold Pastoral." Brooks concludes, "If the urn has been properly dramatized, if we have followed the development of the metaphors, if we have been alive to the paradoxes which work

throughout the poem, perhaps then, we shall be prepared for the enigmatic, final paradox which the 'silent form' utters.'" In concluding his essay, Brooks warns readers not to fall into the trap of paraphrase, for we must ultimately focus on "the world-view, or 'philosophy,' or 'truth' of the poem as a whole in terms of its dramatic wholeness."

Brooks' reading of Keats' ode is an example of New Critical reading. Remember, a close reading will examine a literary work and find some objective meaning (a theme) that is harmonized with structure, thus balancing theme and form.

26.6 KEATS' SYLVAN HISTORIAN: *ODE ON A GRECIAN URN*

In Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker seeks to escape and transcend the world of change, decay and death through a flight "on the viewless wings of Poesy" into the intensely beautiful world of the nightingale. He wants to share the "ecstasy" of a creature which, unlike himself, has never known the conditions inherent to human life: the pain, the suffering, the death of the young, the sense that nothing can last "where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow." In *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, which appeared immediately after the *Ode to a Nightingale* when the poems were first published together, the speaker contemplates a work of art which embodies this conquest of misery, transience and mortality. What the speaker of the *Nightingale* ode had sought unsuccessfully through poetry, the artist of the urn has achieved for the figures he has created: they are full of beauty, vitality, passion and creativity, but are immune to the effects of time. Yet, although the speaker does address the urn and the figures on it, he never strives to join or fuse with them, as the speaker of the *Nightingale* ode had with the bird. It is an *Ode on*, not an *Ode to* and the tone is correspondingly more detached. And this detachment, particularly evident in the last two stanzas, arises from the speaker's growing realization that to arrest a moment of ecstasy may also be to arrest a moment of desolation. The two opening lines of the poem draw attention to the urn's close association with silence and time. After

the death of its artist it was, so to speak, fostered out to "silence and slow time", and then maintained the connection with silence by becoming the "bride of quietness". Both the urn's silence and its capacity to survive through the ages are qualities which preoccupy the speaker throughout the poem, and they are emphasized too in the implications of the phrase, 'still unravish'd": the urn has not been damaged in the centuries since it was made-or perhaps, as the "bride of quietness", has not been forced to speak. It is interesting however that at this early stage of the speaker's response he does not describe the urn as being silent or long-lasting in itself, but as being "related" to these qualities-it is as if he is not yet quite able to define exactly what it is. The following lines assert that its association with silence and time gives the urn a power of expression superior to that of poetry: *"Sylvan historian, who canst thus express A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme*." But the speaker, who can only communicate through such "rhyme", asks the urn a series of questions, piling them on one another so as to create both a sense of urgency and an impression of excited, spontaneous response to the figures on the urn, as if he is turning it round in his hands and reacting to everything as he sees it: *"What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape Of deities or mortals, or of both, In Tempe or the dales of Arcady? What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"* But the urn does not identify the figures as "deities or mortals", specify where they are, or explain the "mad pursuit" and "wild ecstasy"-it cannot answer these kinds of questions, and in failing to give any account of the scenes on it, it fails in fact to fulfill the role expected of an "historian". It may "express" in its still marble the feelings of the maidens, the madness of the chase, the wildness of the ecstasy, but the speaker has not been able to "ravish" it away from silence. In the next stanza, however, the speaker leaves off his questions, as if acknowledging that the urn's special way of communicating does not enable it to answer them. The celebrated dictum which begins it *Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard Are sweeter* . . . claims in fact that the urn's silent music is

superior to earthly tunes. “still” here could mean “as yet”, or “motionless”, or both. Just as the urn-historian tells its story “more sweetly” than poetry, the melodies of the piper on the urn are “sweeter” than those heard on earth because they speak “to the spirit” rather than to the “sensual ear”. So, having come to understand and value the urn’s means of expression, the speaker goes on to examine the scenes represented on it more closely, and to discover the paradox they convey. The scenes described in the second and third stanzas encapsulate three important aspects of life on earth: the natural landscape, sexual love, and artistic (more specifically, musical) creation. It is springtime, and the trees are covered with leaves; the passionate lover is on the point of catching his beautiful beloved; the piper of silent, spiritual melodies is endlessly creative. Each has been caught at a moment of intensity and held there for all time, so that spring, the maiden’s beauty, the youth’s love, and the piper’s songs are made eternal. It is the ideal for which the speaker longed in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, for now “Beauty” can “keep her lustrous eyes” and “new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow”. He celebrates the fact that the lover will love “for ever”, with a love “for ever warm” and “for ever panting”, a maiden who “cannot fade”, while the “happy, happy boughs!” will always keep their springtime leaves and the “happy melodist” has perpetual powers of invention. Yet parts of the speaker’s response here suggest a more ambivalent attitude to this apparently enviable state. Before celebrating this eternal happiness, he has acknowledged that trees, lover and piper are all restricted in some way by their privileged condition: *“Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare; Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss*,” The trees and piper have no choice but to continue as they are-note the use of “can” rather than “will” -and although the beloved maiden may remain beautiful forever, the lover can never reach her. Moreover, the last three lines of the third stanza, although ostensibly celebrating again the kind of passion represented by the love-pursuit scene on the urn, can also be interpreted as hinting at the inadequacies of the life which the urn portrays: *“All breathing human passion far above, That*

leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, A burning forehead, and a parching tongue." The idea that the love it expresses is "above" human passion recalls the earlier assertions that silent art is superior to audible poetry, spiritual music better than sensual. But a heart which is "cloy'd" has at least reached its goal, unlike the lover on the urn, and has thus reached an intensity of feeling of which the latter is not capable- "burning" and "parching" rather than merely "warm" and "panting". An earthly, sensual lover can at least "burst Joy's grape against his palate fine", as the *Ode on Melancholy* was to put it, experiencing joy, albeit destroying it at the same time. There is even the sense that the speaker is finding the scenes on the urn difficult to describe-he writes of the superiority of the "love" shown on the urn largely in terms of what it is not, and otherwise relies heavily on the repetition of "happy" and "for ever". All this reflects perhaps is the speaker's inability to find words in "our rhyme" adequate to paraphrase the urn's "flowery tale"-but it could mean that his response to the figures is flagging, that his own world of change and suffering is easier for him to imagine. The idea that the speaker is having trouble in maintaining, or expressing, his enthusiastic response to the scenes on the urn is perhaps borne out by the next stanza, where he turns to another scene and reverts to questioning his silent historian: *"Who are these coming to the sacrifice? To what green altar, O mysterious priest, Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies, And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?"* And once again, of course, the urn fails to answer him: the "priest" he addresses can tell him nothing about the meaning of the sacrifice, and he and his companions remain "mysterious". But this time, instead of desisting from his questions and acknowledging the superiority of the urn's silence to speech, the speaker probes further, speculating now about a scene not actually depicted on the urn: *"What little town by river or sea shore, Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel, Is emptied of this folk, this pious mom?"* The people on the urn have become so real to him that he can imagine their life "outside" the urn. But in achieving this heightened response, he realizes that, if the townspeople are all transfixed in one spot, forever on the way to the

sacrifice, then they will never return to the town to communicate the meaning of the ceremony, and so the town itself will remain forever silent, empty, and desolate. And, little town, *thy streets for evermore Will silent be; and not a soul to tell Why thou art desolate, can e'er return*. The use of "for evermore" recalls the "for ever" repeated in the preceding stanza, but this time it refers to eternal silence and emptiness, not eternal passion, and the added syllable expresses a strong sense of finality. To arrest a moment in time means not only to preserve beauty, springtime, artistic creativity and love, but also to preserve ignorance and desolation. Moreover, whereas the unsatisfied lover portrayed on the urn will at least remain "warm" and "panting", a procession towards a religious ceremony has no value unless the ceremony itself takes place. Carrying out the sacrifice would presumably have propitiated the gods or provoked some kind of omen from them, but this has not happened-it is only through activity, process, that the figures could undergo an experience which spoke "to the spirit". Ironically, then, it is when the speaker's response to the urn is at its most intense that he begins to draw away from it, a change reminiscent of the *'Ode to a Nightingale* . At the point that he aspires to share the bird's "ecstasy" through the "rich" experience of death, he realizes that death would instead cut him off irrevocably from the nightingale, making him but a "sod". Here, he has become so involved with the "life" of the figures on the urn that he can construct a town for them in his imagination, only to become aware that their eternally static condition means that they will never return to it. He comes to reconsider too the "silence" he had earlier believed to be superior to sound: the urn cannot tell the speaker, "sweetly" or otherwise, even the potential significance of the sacrifice, and the town's complete and unalterable silence communicates nothing "to the spirit" but desolation. Hence in the last stanza the speaker seems to distance himself from the urn, both physically and emotionally. He apostrophizes it: *"O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede Of marble men and maidens overwrought."* As in the opening lines, he is looking at it as a whole, but it no longer has the quasi-human qualities suggested by the epithets "bride" and "foster-child".

Instead, it is an object, an artifact, whose "shape" or "form" is more notable than the life-like quality of the figures on it-they are only ornamentation in marble after all. It is almost as if the speaker is becoming an "historian" himself, and is defining or labeling the urn with the only facts the "silent form" will yield him. But the poem does not finally dismiss the urn as an attractive but trivial object of little value to mankind. The speaker's attitude remains ambivalent, as is made especially clear in: *"Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!"* It remains mute, a work of art which seems remote, even forbidding, but it impresses us in the way "eternity" does-it still has a spiritual quality. Keats had used the expression "tease us out of thought." The phrase implies that the urn baffles and perplexes man, that it, like "eternity", is beyond his comprehension-possibly even, that if it did give answers to his questions, he would not understand them. In the last lines of the poem the speaker tries to spell out the meaning the urn can have for mankind. To a large extent, it has the same function as the nightingale's song, which, although immortal and hence unlike the fleeting "hungry generations" of men, can be a recurrent source of comfort to them: *"The voice I hear this passing night was heard In ancient days by emperor and clown: Perhaps the self-same song that found a path Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, She stood in tears amid the alien corn*;" Similarly, the urn's "eternity", its continuing survival through "slow time", makes it essentially different from man, who must inevitably suffer and die, but also enables it to offer friendship to each generation: Here "attitude" has the technical meaning of "the disposition of a figure in statuary or painting" (OED), not the modern sense. "Overwrought" could mean "worked up to too high a pitch; overexcited" (OED), or simply "wrought (i.e. worked) over". *When old age shall this generation waste, Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe Than ours, a friend to man . . .* The nature of this friendship seems to be explained in the last two lines of the poem, but in a way that has bewildered many readers and caused more critical debate than anything else. Keats wrote: *"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"-that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know*.

Part of the problem is deciding who actually speaks these lines, and to whom. Grammatically, the aphorism, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” seems to be a message from the urn to mankind (“ … a friend to man, to whom thou say’st/’Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ ”), but it is not clear whether or not the remaining line and a half is part of the same message. It could be the speaker addressing the readers, asserting hence the all-sufficiency of the urn’s message for mankind, or the speaker addressing the figures on the urn-that is, defining all they know and need to know on earth, without necessarily believing that this knowledge is adequate for man. However, the whole of the two lines is probably a message from the urn to mankind, since a second change of speaker would be very abrupt. If this is so, it seems that the urn has been accorded an absolute value and ultimate authority, in that it prescribes the limits of knowledge for mankind. Perhaps, speaking of its own beauty, it is saying that this is beyond normal human understanding, a beauty which, teasing us out of thought like eternity, transcends human concerns and values to become an absolute, a truth. The speaker of the poem has already drawn attention to limitations in the urn, in both the kind of life it expresses and the kind of information it can communicate, limitations which might make it a dubious source of ultimate wisdom. It can after all be seen merely as a “Cold Pastoral”. The temptation is then to read the urn’s message ironically, as reflecting its own limitations: the urn may be asserting that the beauty it embodies is some kind of all-sufficient truth for man, but since it knows little of life “on earth”, its “friend” man-and the reader-must be skeptical about the validity and value of its message. What the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* shows is, not indeed a creation of something out of nothing by the speaker’s imagination, but his strong imaginative response to a beautiful artifact. And it is a response which gives him some insights: he “seizes” the urn’s “beauty” and it yields him “truth”. It reveals that art can embody escape from decay and mortality, expressing eternal spring, eternal creation, eternal beauty, eternal love-but that it can also imply coldness, impotence, stasis, unfulfilled potential. By the same token, human beings can leave off their songs, consummate their

love, fulfill their religious observances, but their life inevitably entails changing seasons, fading beauty, hearts "cloy'd" with passion, the flagging of artistic invention. Moreover, our awareness of this disparity between art and real life can make us feel that art is remote from us, lesser than us, like a "Cold Pastoral", or greater than us, like "eternity". In other words, the "truth" expressed by the urn's "beauty" is the poem we have just read.

26.7 LET US SUM UP

Throughout the poem the poet has stressed the paradox of the speaking urn. First, the urn itself can tell a story, can give a history. Then, the various figures depicted upon the urn play music or speak or sing. If we have been alive to these items, we shall not, perhaps, be too much surprised to have the urn speak once more, not in the sense in which it tells a story-a metaphor which is rather easy to accept-but, to have it speak on a higher level, to have it make a commentary on its own nature. If the urn has been properly dramatized, if we have followed the development of the metaphors, if we have been alive to the paradoxes which work throughout the poem, perhaps then, we shall be prepared for the enigmatic, final paradox which the "silent form" utters. But in that case, we shall not feel that the generalization, unqualified and to be taken literally, is meant to march out of its context to compete with the scientific and philosophical generalizations which dominate our world. Keats is trying to say something about the Urn without adding anything to it. So he writes no footnotes but instead an ode.

26.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. New Criticism became an old hat by the end of the:
   (a) nineteen sixties
   (b) nineteen seventies
   (c) nineteen forties
   (b) nineteen fifties

2. Which of the following critics is an advocate of Pure poetry?

   (a) Middleton Murray

   (b) T.S. Eliot

   (c) Cleanth Brooks

   (d) H. W. Garrod

3. Who said- literature reflects "the best that is known and thought in the world."?

   (a) T. S. Eliot

   (b) Cleanth Brooks

   (c) Samuel Johnson

   (d) Matthew Arnold

4. If we say that Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is about the death of a migrant worker, we are making an error of:

   (a) Intentional Fallacy

   (b) Biographical Fallacy

   (c) Affective Fallacy

   (d) Heresy of Paraphrase

Answers: **1. (A), 2. (A), 3. (D), 4. (D)**

26.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the significance of the symbol of the Urn for the New Critics.

2. Compare and contrast Keats' *Ode to Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

3. How does Brooks refute T. S. Eliot's comment that the concluding lines of *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is "a serious blemish on a beautiful poem"?

4. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" has precisely the same status, and the same justification as Shakespeare's "Ripeness is all." Discuss.

26.10 SUGGESTED READING

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt, 1947.

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M.A. ENGLISH SEM. III **LESSON : 27**

COURSE CODE : ENG-311 **UNIT : VI**

CLEANTH BROOKS : EXPERIENCING A POEM

STRUCTURE

27.1 INTRODUCTION

There have been some formulations that deal with art as an experience of our mind's freedom from being determined by nature or by our fellows. For example, according to Immanuel Kant, fine art follows two paradoxes: it is intentionally produced, yet remains purposive without a purpose, and is fabricated, essentially unnatural, yet must appear natural to its viewers. Friedrich Schiller developed the concept of the play drive, a conjoining through contradiction of man's experience of the infinite and finite, freedom and time, sense and reason, life and form. Cleanth Brooks' way of experiencing a poem could be traced back to Kantian disinterestedness, Schiller's play drive, and others. However, it isn't so much that we are free to say anything we like about the poem, but rather that if we approach it with due regard for its connotative workings and formal integrity, we will be granted an authentic experience of a very different kind than we can have in the busy everyday world, where everything is done for some other purpose beyond itself. Poetry is an end in itself, and we are privileged to see that we, too, can exist in this fashion.

27.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, we shall examine Cleanth Brooks' idea of experiencing a poem in the light of earlier critical theories and that of his own New Criticism. It will go a long way in sharpening your perception of the various formulations down the ages and what Cleanth Brooks stands for in his critical understanding of poetry.

27.3 REVOLT AGAINST BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

Biographical criticism is a form of literary criticism which analyzes a writer's biography to show the relationship between the author's life and their

works of literature. Biographical criticism is often associated with Historical-Biographical criticism, a critical method that "sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times". This longstanding critical method dates back at least to the Renaissance period, and was employed extensively by Samuel Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81).

Like any critical methodology, biographical criticism can be used with discretion and insight or employed as a superficial shortcut to understanding the literary work on its own terms through such strategies as Formalism. Hence 19th century biographical criticism came under disapproval by the so-called New Critics of the 1920s, who coined the term "biographical fallacy" to describe criticism that neglected the imaginative genesis of literature.

Notwithstanding this critique, biographical criticism remained a significant mode of literary inquiry throughout the 20th century, particularly in studies of Charles Dickens and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others. The method continues to be employed in the study of such authors as John Steinbeck, Walt Whitman and William Shakespeare.

Biographical criticism shares in common with New Historicism an interest in the fact that all literary works are situated in specific historical and biographical contexts from which they are generated. Biographical Criticism, like New Historicism, rejects the concept that literary studies should be limited to the internal or formal characteristics of a literary work, and insists that it properly includes knowledge of the contexts in which the work was created. Biographical criticism stands in ambiguous relationship to Romanticism. It has often been argued that it is a development from Romanticism, but it also stands in opposition to the Romantic tendency to view literature as manifesting a "universal" transcendence of the particular conditions of its genesis.

Historical-critical methods are the specific procedures used to examine the text's historical origins, such as: the time, the place in which the text was

written, its sources, the events, dates, persons, places, things, and customs that are mentioned or implied in the text.

Cleanth Brooks, like other New Critics, rebels against purely biographical and historical criticism.

27.4 FORMALIST CRITICISM

Formalism is a school of literary criticism and literary theory having mainly to do with structural purposes of a particular text. It is the study of a text without taking into account any outside influence. Formalism rejects (or sometimes simply "brackets," i.e., ignores for the purpose of analysis) notions of culture or societal influence, authorship, and content, and instead focuses on modes, genres, discourse, and forms.

In literary theory, formalism refers to critical approaches that analyze, interpret, or evaluate the inherent features of a text. These features include not only grammar and syntax but also literary devices such as meter and tropes. The formalist approach reduces the importance of a text's historical, biographical, and cultural context.

Formalism rose to prominence in the early twentieth century as a reaction against Romanticist theories of literature, which centered on the artist and individual creative genius, and instead placed the text itself back into the spotlight to show how the text was indebted to forms and other works that had preceded it. Two schools of formalist literary criticism developed, Russian formalism, and soon after Anglo-American New Criticism. Formalism was the dominant mode of academic literary study in the US at least from the end of the Second World War through the 1970s.

The formalists transfer romantic claims about the genesis and value of poetry to the text itself. They want to purge the romantic metaphysics and keep the claims about art's value to keep humanity together. So we still get a stirring Defence of the poetic word, without any romantic talk about inspiration or genius. The poetic symbol is critical; poetry is a site for the recovery of

common passions that link people together in a community—it is therapeutic. Brooks insists he does not see poetry as therapeutic, but his theory as a whole belies this claim.

Brooks' main points are that a good poem's formal structure has all the integrity of a biological organism. Poetry is autonomous or self-contained and is not therapeutic in any way that critics need to concern themselves with. Poetic language thrives upon connotation, not denotation, and irony and paradox are central to poetic structure because they are the way poetry "warps" and transforms ordinary language into meanings rich and strange. Anglo-American formalism is to some extent humanistic since it transfers the romantic exaltation of poetic imagination to the language of the poem. An irony of formalist discourse is that although it generally tries to carve out a space for the study of literature in a world obsessed with the scientific paradigm, it is compelled to do so mainly in terms acceptable to science.

Brooks refutes some of the main criticisms leveled against formalism. His list of articles of faith is interesting in that it defines the object of formalist criticism, the "successful work." He doesn't say all literature responds equally well to formalist analysis or that formalism is the only worthwhile kind of criticism. Brooks rejects a couple of common criteria for judging a text's excellence: the "author's sincerity" criterion and "it gave me an intense reaction" standard. Neither, Brooks insists, tells us much. As for the first one, well, Oscar Wilde said that (to paraphrase) "all bad poetry begins with sincere emotion." Poetry isn't simply self-expression. The second criterion is equally objectionable in that it strips poetry of any value other than the emotional bash it packs. And surely, that's like saying all music should take as its theme, "I'm so lonesome I could die" just because it's common. Such notions diminish the range of humanity to what can be encapsulated in a saccharine pop song. Certainly a poem ought to spark some kind of reaction, probably both on the emotional and intellectual level.

27.4.0 Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism provides an economical overview of the approach the Formalists advocated, which included the following basic ideas:

- The aim is to produce "a science of literature that would be both independent and factual," which is sometimes designated by the term *poetics*.

- Since literature is made of language, linguistics will be a foundational element of the science of literature.

- Literature is autonomous from external conditions in the sense that literary language is distinct from ordinary uses of language, not least because it is not (entirely) communicative.

- Literature has its own history, a history of innovation in formal structures, and is not determined by external, material history.

- What a work of literature says cannot be separated from *how* the literary work says it, and therefore the form and structure of a work, far from being merely the decorative wrapping of an isolable content, is in fact part of the content of the work.

Russian formalists believe that "defamiliarization" is one of the crucial ways in which literary language distinguishes itself from ordinary, communicative language, and is a feature of how art in general works, namely by presenting the world in a strange and new way that allows us to see things differently. Innovation in literary history is partly a matter of finding new techniques of defamiliarization. The plot/story distinction separates out the sequence of events the work relates (the story) from the sequence in which those events are presented in the work (the plot). Both of these concepts are attempts to describe the significance of the form of a literary work in order to define its "literariness." For the Russian Formalists as a whole, form is what makes something art to begin with,

so in order to understand a work of art as a work of art (rather than as an ornamented communicative act) one must focus on its form.

According to Brooks, "The structure meant is certainly not 'form' in the conventional sense in which we think of form as a kind of envelope which 'contains' the 'content'." The term "form," therefore, means structure. The meaning isn't outside the poem. It is generated within the poem, which is a largely self-sufficient meaning system. As Brooks explains, "The structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings." The poem's structure works rather like Coleridge's power of imagination: 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," etc. A poem doesn't cancel tensions or give us reductive propositions; it unifies and harmonizes things otherwise discordant, and preserves the richness and complexity of experience. A poem is a formal object that allows us to understand it only on its own terms, which it generates from within itself. Brooks writes, "The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. It is a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue but an achieved harmony." All of this is very similar to Coleridge.

27.4.1 Anglo-American New Criticism

To the New Critics, poetry was a special kind of discourse, a means of communicating feeling and thought that could not be expressed in any other kind of language. It differed qualitatively from the language of science or philosophy, but it conveyed equally valid meanings. Such critics set out to define and formalize the qualities of poetic thought and language, utilizing the technique of close reading

with special emphasis on the connotative and associative values of words and on the multiple functions of figurative language—symbol, metaphor, and image—in the work. Poetic form and content could not be separated, since the experience of reading the particular words of a poem, including its unresolved tensions, is the poem's "meaning." As a result, any rewording of a poem's language alters its content, a view articulated in the phrase "the heresy of paraphrase," which was coined by Brooks in his *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947).

27.5 ORGANIC UNITY OF THE POEM

Brooks does not agree that poetry makes referential statements. When this claim is set forth, "the critic is forced to judge the poem by its political or scientific or philosophical truth; or, he is forced to judge the poem by its form as conceived externally and detached from human experience." As the romantics say, genius works according to its own laws; Coleridge declares in "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to His Genius," "No work of true genius dare want its appropriate form." Brooks gives us the same claim, the same organic metaphor, without the direct spiritual overtones since he is talking about poetic language, not the mind of the poet. Poetry's meaning is dependent on its own contexts and connotations—it need not refer to the world of denotation. Whatever the outside context of a poem or play may be, the essentials of that outside context need to be transformed into terms intrinsic to the work itself. As Brooks puts the matter, "Whatever statement we may seize upon as incorporating the 'meaning' of the poem, immediately the imagery and the rhythm seem to set up tensions with it, warping and twisting it, qualifying and revising it." What would have been a scientific or denotative statement must be submitted to the poetic process, which, again to borrow from Coleridge on secondary imagination, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create".

Brooks writes, "let the reader try to formulate a proposition that will say what the poem 'says.' As his proposition approaches adequacy he will find, not

only that it has increased greatly in length, but that it has begun to fill itself up with reservations and qualifications—and most significant of all—the formulator will find that he has himself begun to fall back upon metaphors of his own in his attempt to indicate what the poem 'says.' In sum, his proposition, as it approaches adequacy, ceases to be a proposition." So if we try to paraphrase a poem, the paraphrase keeps leading us back to the original situation, to the context, to the connotative aspects of the text's language. Poetry has to do with metaphor and figure, and it does not refer to the world in utilitarian contexts. It generates its own contexts. Brooks says that we tend "to take certain remarks which we make about the poem ...for the essential core of the poem itself.... Form and content, or content and medium, are inseparable." Brooks, like Wordsworth in his "Preface" emphasizes how good poetry links disparate experiences vitally, and how it rejects artificial, abstraction-dependent language that doesn't speak to common human nature. He emphasizes the autonomy and integrity of the text, even to the point where the formalist critic becomes something of a natural scientist, describing how that "acorn-poem" grows into an "oak-poem," or observes how it holds together as an organic unity.

27.6 THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEM

"To refer to the structure of the poem, to what is finally a paraphrase of the poem is to refer it to something outside the poem." Brooks argues that if we try to maintain a distinction between form and content, "we bring this statement to be conveyed into an unreal competition with science or philosophy or theology." We cannot win at that game. Trying to make poetry yield objective knowledge will always fail. It would be best to recognize that literature connects us to another dimension of language, one perhaps most proper to us as human beings. Brooks offers several metaphors for poetic structure.

27.6.0 The Metaphor of Architecture or Painting

"The essential structure of a poem... resembles that of architecture or painting: it is a pattern of resolved stresses. Or, to move closer still

to poetry by considering the temporal arts, the structure of a poem resembles that of a ballet or musical composition. It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations, developed through a temporal scheme." We may see tensions in a building's structure, but the edifice stands and it is beautiful—consider arches, flying buttresses, and so forth. Perhaps Brooks' rhetoric here will remind us of John Ruskin's spiritualized way of interpreting architecture in *The Stones of Venice*. In this book Ruskin gives his views on how society should be organized:

We want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense. As it is, we make both ungentle, the one envying, the other despising, his brother; and the mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers and miserable workers. Now it is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.

27.6.1 The Metaphor of Music

As for Brooks' comparison between poetry and music, we don't take musical notes as representations of anything else; it is obvious that with music we can't distinguish between form and content. Brooks will develop indirectly another dimension of the music metaphor later on, when he insists that although poetry certainly involves emotion, that quality is embodied in the poem and need not be traced to the author. Music, too, seems to generate its own affective or emotional weather. The notes engender and embody feeling, so to speak—we don't look outside the music for an explanation. Brooks evidently thinks language should be treated with the same respect.

27.6.2 The Metaphor of Drama

The third metaphor Brooks offers is that of drama. Here again, we feel comfortable not referring opinions and feelings back to the artist, but even more importantly, "conflict" is built right into plays. What the characters say gets its value from how the words relate to other characters and events in the play. As Samuel Coleridge declares, "a willing suspension of disbelief" governs our response to poetry—we do not insist that it refer directly to life. We take it as a genuine experience in its own right. Brooks deals with the notion of unity in poetic composition as follows: "The characteristic unity of a poem... lies in the unification of attitudes into a hierarchy subordinated to a total and governing attitude. In the unified poem, the poet has 'come to terms' with his experience.... the conclusion of the poem is the working out of the various tensions—set up by whatever means—by propositions, metaphors, symbols. The unity is achieved by a dramatic process, not a logical one; it represents equilibrium of forces, not a formula". The play must resolve its own conflicts within the contexts that it has itself established. Then Brooks considers attitudes and feelings, saying that "the effective and essential structure of the poem has to do with the complex of attitudes achieved." Again and as Coleridge would agree, a drama or poem "balances and reconciles opposite or discordant qualities." It does not cancel out the complexity and richness of life, but preserves it in a publicly accessible manner, in the structure of a work of art. What is most worthwhile in terms of thought and feeling should not be allowed to collapse into a private world, solipsism. Brooks is offering another means of salvaging humanism, one more compatible with scientific demands than were older kinds of humanism.

27.7 POETRY IS NOT THERAPEUTIC

From the beginning of time, poetry has been a means for people to express their deepest emotions and create healing in ritual and ceremony.

The counselors often read a poem to a client that seemed to capture an issue she/he was struggling with, offering not only understanding, but hope. After the tragedy of 9/11, the airwaves and internet rang with poems of solace. When war in Iraq was imminent, a website developed where people could send poems expressing their feelings. When we read a poem that speaks to our experience, there is a shift, a click within. Someone has understood our darkness by naming their own. We feel less alone. Therapeutically, the "I" of us gathers energy and insight. Our world expands. However, Brooks does not make extravagant claims about poetic language, the power of figure and connotation. He professes, "I have in mind no special ills which poetry is to cure." Poetry is not therapeutic. Brooks renders somewhat more precise what he means by the sort of sea change language undergoes in literature: "Irony is the most general term that we have for the kind of qualification which the various elements in the context receive from the context." He explains that the "terms of science are abstract symbols which do not change under the pressure of the context. They are pure (or aspire to be pure) denotations; they are defined in advance". But in poetry things are different: "When we consider the statement immersed in the poem, it presents itself to us, like the stick immersed in the pool of water, warped and bent." Essentially, Brooks accepts the scientific outlook and its understanding of language. This acceptance combines with the hardening of the binary opposition between poetry and science. The formalist method objectifies emotion in order to preserve it. It flattens out what the romantic critics posited as depth of soul. Feeling is embodied in the poem; feeling does not involve reference back to the human author.

Brooks cites John Donne's poetry as a good example of irony and in general of the warping of language within poetic contexts. Donne employs logic, to paraphrase Brooks, "to fight the devil with fire." That author "proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony—to the drama of the structure—in the hope that the fires will refine it." In other words, "the poet

wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned, that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience." He continues that "It is not enough for the poet to analyze his experience as the scientist does, breaking it up into parts, distinguishing part from part, classifying the various parts. His task is finally to unify experience. He must return to us the unity of the experience itself as man knows it in his own experience". Such claims are reminiscent of Coleridge or Wordsworth or Percy Shelley in the way that they contrast the man of science with the poet.

Brooks makes a qualified statement about the experiential status of a poem: "The poem, if it be a true poem, is a simulacrum of reality—in this sense, at least, it is an 'imitation'—by being an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience." Archibald Macleish in *Ars Poetica* had said much more directly, "A poem should not mean but be." Brooks tells us that the poet is "giving us an insight which preserves the unity of experience and which, at its higher and more serious levels, triumphs over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern."

That's an impressive claim for a critic who insists that poetry is not or should not be therapeutic. It is every bit as grand a claim as the ones made by the romantic poets a century and a half before Brooks. The poet will deliver to us something science cannot give and, perhaps, something we had thought was utterly lost—a sense that all experience is unified. We derive this sense from a species of encounter with language unavailable to us when we use it in other ways. We might ask just how different any of this really is from romantic emphasis on a renewal of spirit and a revivification of language by means of poetic encounters. How much does transferring the concept of "interiority" from the poet to the poem differentiate new critical formalism from romantic expressivism? And does Brooks' doctrine still seem compelling when it comes at the expense of separating poetic language from the world of reference? Wordsworth had argued that his poetry employed "the language

really used by men," which at least had the virtue of not separating poetic language from ordinary life. Some critics of Brooks might say that you cannot leave things at this level, that you must reconnect words with the world if your theory is to be compelling. They might say you cannot just claim by means of a discussion of something so two-dimensional as "structure" that poetic language preserves human potential and interiority. Why, the skeptical reviewer wants to know, should we preserve this connotative potential of language if doing so is not somehow good for us? Brooks insists he does not see poetry as therapeutic, but his theory as a whole belies this claim.

27.8 ART FOR ART'S SAKE MOVEMENT

The phrase 'art for art's sake' condenses the notion that art has its own value and should be judged apart from any themes which it might touch on, such as morality, religion, history, or politics. It teaches that judgments of aesthetic value should not be confused with those proper to other spheres of life. The idea has ancient roots, but the phrase first emerged as a rallying cry in 19th century France, and subsequently became central to the British Aesthetic movement. Although the phrase has been little used since its legacy has been at the heart of 20th century ideas about the autonomy of art, and thus crucial to such different bodies of thought as those of formalism, modernism, and the avant-garde. Today, deployed more loosely and casually, it is sometimes put to very different ends, to defend the right of free expression, or to appeal for art to uphold tradition and avoid causing offense.

Oddly enough, Brooks' New Critic Defence of poetry in the name of its formal, structural properties shares a common problem with the art for art's sake movement of the 1890s. Brooks wants to change people's minds and bring them over to his views about the nature and value of poetry. He is in fact defending poetry, just like a long line of critics and poets before him. That is unarguably a humanistic enterprise. He is

interested in poetry as mediating between a modern, scientific way of understanding the world and another, more ancient one that seems to have much going for it. Movements based on shock and confrontation—including modernism, to be sure—share this problem. They're trying to preserve older, metaphysical, spirit-suffused notions about humanity without really believing in the old philosophical terms that made it possible to "come right out and say it." The formalists talk about literature as its own place, an autonomous realm that critics, even though they are no scientists, can analyze with much the same precision as a scientific researcher. They find themselves defending literature as relevant in the terminology lent to them by an imperious scientific paradigm, which paradigm or course they say is opposed to or very different from that of the arts. But this maneuver may only further isolate literature as something separate from the main part of life, as something we can study with clinical precision but not really connect with any other area of our lives. So how does such a program of criticism change the way people see their world and their place in it? Of course, those who make such remarks may be expecting formalist critics to accomplish more than they themselves find possible.

27.9 LIFE AND LITERATURE

Brooks acknowledges that literary works may, indeed, have a great deal to do with life experience and with ideas. Literature deals with ideas. Many "literary ideas" are drawn from areas of life that have nothing to do with literature proper. Authors such as Eugene O'Neill and William Faulkner benefited greatly from the study of Freud. Brooks counters that "knowing what a given work 'means'" is a "basic" sort of knowledge; it must be derived from close study of the work itself, not from the application of methods more proper to psychoanalysis. That returns us to the claim that formalist analysis is foundational because it puts us most directly in touch with what is proper to the realm of literature.

We can imagine that Brooks would have quite a problem with the claims of a cultural studies author who might say, for example, that the "meaning" of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has mostly to do with how the play is scripted by and inflects a nascent western discourse of imperial definition and domination, which claim we propose to validate by referring almost continually to the historical record left to us by Shakespeare's contemporaries and to the writings of historians and critics of our own time. That is to treat a literary text, he would almost certainly say, as if it were just like any other kind of writing, any old historical document or newspaper clipping, rather than as an extraordinary performance that "deals with" this real-life issue (among others) in an embedded, dramatic manner most proper to itself.

27.10 LET US SUM UP

Good criticism makes readers (whether they be general readers or sophisticated critics) want to go back and re-experience the text first-hand. Whatever methodology the critic brings to the text (formalism included), it ought to have that effect, or it fails in an important respect. Cleanth Brooks doesn't fail us. His ideas about experiencing a poem are a case in point.

27.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* is an example of:

(a) Historical- Biographical Criticism

(b) Formalist Criticism

(c) New Criticism

(d) Romantic Criticism

2. The term coined by the New Critics of the 1920s to describe criticism that neglected the imaginative genesis of literature was:

(a) Affective Fallacy

(b) Biographical Fallacy

(c) Pathetic Fallacy

(d) Intentional Fallacy

3. Which of the following statements is NOT TRUE regarding Formalist criticism?

(a) It has mainly to do with structural purposes of a particular text.

(b) It is the study of a text without taking into account any outside influence.

(c) It rejects notions of culture or societal influence, authorship, and content.

(d) It is often associated with Historical-Biographical criticism.

4. Which of the following statements is TRUE?

(a) Brooks insists he does not see poetry as therapeutic, but his theory as a whole belies this claim.

(b) Brooks sees poetry as therapeutic, but his theory as a whole belies this claim.

(c) Brooks insists he does not see poetry as therapeutic, and his theory as a whole validates this claim.

(d) Brooks sees poetry as therapeutic, and his theory as a whole validates this claim.

5. What are central to poetic structure, according to Brooks?

(a) Denotation and Connotation

(b) Simile and Metaphor

(c) Irony and Paradox

(d) Form and Content

6. Who said, “all bad poetry begins with sincere emotion.”?

(a) Samuel Johnson

(b) T.S. Eliot

(c) Cleanth Brooks

(d) Oscar Wilde

7. Which of the following statements is not acceptable to Brooks?

(a) Form is a kind of envelope which 'contains' the 'content'.

(b) The term "form" means structure.

(c) The meaning isn't outside the poem.

(d) The meaning is generated within the poem.

8. According to Brooks, any rewording of a poem's language:

(a) enhances its beauty of expression

(b) illustrates its content

(c) alters its content

(d) makes no difference

9. Which of the following metaphors for poetic structure is not offered by Brooks?

(a) Architecture or Painting

(b) Spider's Web

(c) Music

(d) Drama

10. John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* is a description of:

(a) trade by sea in Venice

(b) Shylock, the usurer

(c) the beauty of the architecture of Venice

(d) spiritualized way of interpreting architecture

11. Which poet employs logic 'to fight the devil with fire,' according to Brooks?

    (a) John Donne

    (b) S.T. Coleridge

    (c) Wordsworth

    (d) Matthew Arnold

12. According to Brooks, the poem is an 'imitation' by being:

    (a) an experience

    (b) a statement about experience

    (c) an abstraction from experience

    (d) a copy of experience

13. "A poem should not mean but be." From which book has this statement been taken?

    (a) *Poetics*

    (b) *Biographia Literaria*

    (c) *Ars Poetica*

    (d) *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

14. The phrase 'arts for art's sake' first emerged as a rallying cry in:

    (a) 19th century British Aesthetic movement

    (b) 19th century France

    (c) 19th century Russia

    (d) 19th century Germany

15. Authors such as Eugene O'Neill and William Faulkner benefited greatly from the study of:

(a) Josef Breuer

(b) Alfred Adler

(c) Carl Jung

(d) Sigmund Freud

Answers: **1 (A), 2 (B), 3. (D), 4 (A), 5 (C), 6 (D), 7 (A), 8 (C), 9 (B), 10 (D), 11 (A), 12 (A), 13 (C), 14 (B), 15 (D)**

27.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by biographical and historical criticism? How does Brooks rebel against this theory?
2. How does Brooks refute some of the main criticisms leveled against formalism?
3. Explain the Russian formalists' belief in "defamiliarization".
4. The poem's structure works rather like Coleridge's power of imagination. Elaborate.
5. Explain Brooks' concept of the Organic Unity of a Poem.
6. Write an essay on Brooks' several metaphors for poetic structure.
7. Why does Brooks say that Poetry is not therapeutic?
8. How does Brooks' New Critic Defence of poetry share a common problem with the art for art's sake movement?

27.13 SUGGESTED READING

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