PGEG S2 04

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SEMESTER 2

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1: CLASSICAL CRITICISM

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SEMESTER 2
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 4: LITERARY CRITICISM: CLASSICAL TO MODERN
BLOCK 1: CLASSICAL CRITICISM

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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and III, and more extensively in Book X. You will finally learn that it is in *Republic* that Plato ponders over the moral effects of poetry in the discussion of which we come across the concept of "imitation" (*mimesis*).

Unit 3 introduces you to Aristotle and his *Poetics*—a seminal contribution to the intellectual world. Aristotle inaugurated the systematic and distinctive discipline of literary criticism and theory with *Poetics.* This unit shall help you to discuss the importance of *Poetics, which* is one of the most influential works in the history of criticism and theory, as it shaped discussions of genre, prosody, style, structure, and form in later times. *Poetics* is believed to be a set of incomplete notes, survived only in a few faulty copies. Scholars speculate that we have discovered only half of the original text and that the other half, probably dealing with comedy, has been lost.

Unit 4 is based on a discussion of the critical essay "On the Sublime" written by Longinus. Since the 18th century, "On the Sublime" has maintained the reputation as one of the most influential classical works in the tradition of European criticism, despite the uncertainty that surrounds its authorship and the date of its composition. You will learn that in the text of "On the Sublime", Longinus emphasises the felt effects induced by great mental conceptions or figures of speech or well-chosen diction. The Sublime became an important element in the broad Romantic reaction in Europe against Neoclassicism.

Unit 5, which is also the last unit of this Block, shall introduce you to English criticism during the Renaissance through a discussion of Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry.* Although Sidney is best known as a critic of the Renaissance period, he was also a great poet, a creative writer, a noble and virtuous man. Sidney is also the first to write literary criticism in English. *An Apology* enjoys significance far beyond its occasion for its synthesis of the Renaissance understanding of classical literary theory, which set the terms of literary debate in England for the next two centuries, and for its formidable handling of its genre-the defence of poetry, which Sidney adapted from classical and medieval models.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR

UNIT 1: HISTORY OF GREEK AND ROMAN CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE:

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 History of Greek Criticism

1.4 History of Roman Criticism

1.5 The tradition of Rhetoric

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *identify* the main lines of thought in classical criticism
- *discuss* the history of Greek criticism with reference to important critics like Plato and Aristotle
- *describe* the development of Roman Criticism with reference to the critics
- *trace* the history of Rhetoric
- *discuss* the important critical ideas in classical criticism in general

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this course you are studying. In this unit, we shall discuss the history of Greek and Roman criticism. You perhaps know that the word criticism has been derived from the ancient Greek term ‘krites’ meaning ‘judge’. It involves some kind of self-assessment, reflection and judgement. Anthologies covering the history criticism and literary theory usually begin with the classical critics, because their influence has continued up to the present. The most influential classical

However, Athens received her major challenge from Sparta, who established the Peloponnesian League. This struggle for supremacy between the two city-states led finally to the Peloponnesian War spanning over 21 years, and ending with the utter defeat of Athens in 404 BC.

Aristophanes was the first among them to apply his mind to critical considerations of literature. In his comedy *The Frogs,* he discussed the relative merits of Aeschylus and Euripides, making critical enquiry the criterion to judge the merit of poetry and drama, and to identify the relative importance of morality in art and the choice of language. We may state that the first regular criticism of the Western world begins with Aristophanes. The contrast between Aeschylus and Euripides presupposes Aristophanes' familiarity with some kind of great literatures prior to them. Although during that times, books were rare and expensive; this familiarity was a product not of reading but of hearing usually at different festivals where both comedy and tragedy were produced. Along with plays, epic was yet another genre that could attract a larger number of audiences.

You should note that in Classical Greece; only a minority could study literature, but it is interesting also to note that tragedy and epics could easily reach out to a larger section of people of the society. As Russell and Winterbottom have stated, Aristophanes in his *The Frogs* was able to make Euripides claim that a poet was to be admired "for his expertise and his sound advice, because we improve by our teachings/ mankind's civic sense and their natures too". He made Aeschylus claim, "The poets alone are the teachers of youth". The Aristophanic Aeschylus even asserts that the poets taught more than moral values. Therefore, the view of the poet as the instructor was something that was to raise a whole lot of debate in the subsequent days to come.

It can be assumed that the main context for classical criticism can be traced through the role the poet and poetry would play; and poetry in the Greek sense, meant tragedy, comedy and epic. However, any discussion of the history of criticism usually starts with the classical

imitation of reality because it cannot depict truth and teach morality, and that it is irrational and is based on inspiration, not on actual knowledge. Plato, as an idealist philosopher, locates reality in a transcendent world of eternal Forms or Ideas that only **reason** can properly apprehend. For him, this world is distinct from the illusory phenomenal world of our senses, which poetry seeks to represent. Since the material world is an imperfect copy of the original transcendent world of ideas, Plato believed that poetry is but a degraded copy of a copy. He finally concludes that poetic representation threatens social stability by offering false images and role models.

In his *Republic*, Plato has Socrates recommend that poets should be banished from the ideal society, except perhaps those poetry, which praise the gods. Plato takes this severe position as part of his reaction against the views of earlier sophists such as Gorgias and Thrasymachus who were less concerned with truth than with persuasion. They used language not simply to represent reality but to produce reality by shaping the beliefs of an audience. Such a background strongly influenced Plato's ethical position as a critic. According to Plato, epics and tragedy are based on a corrupting mythology, encourages human feelings that are to be tamed, and in any case, gives us a world that itself is somehow inferior to the ultimate realities of the Forms.

However, Plato's views met with reactions. The most famous came from his own disciple Aristotle who reacted firmly to Plato's views on imitation, because he believed that it is not the main duty of poetry to dictate a favourable view of human behaviour, and represent the world correctly, for 'this does not involve the essential nature of poetry'. Unlike Plato and Socrates, Aristotle makes imitation the foundation of his views on poetry, and asserts that the desire to imitate, which is basic in man, provides pleasures to the imitators as well as his audience. Poetic imitation can reveal truth precisely because it does not copy appearances: it is a more creative act. Poetry in this view is an organised whole, whose parts are organically related and subordinated to a single objective. He illustrates this with reference to tragic drama in which the plot is the key example of the organisation of poetry. For him, plot is not

criticism goes as far as the 8th century BC, which was also the era of the epic poets— Homer, and Hesiod, and of the lyric poets Archilochus, Ibycus, Alcaeus and Sappho. Around the 1st century BC when the age of Plato and Aristotle was over, the centre of literary and cultural activity shifted from Alexandria to Rome, the then capital of the Roman Empire. Various factors contributed to the flowering of literary and critical activity during the era. The Greek classics became a constant source of inspiration and stimulation for the Romans. This revival of Greek classical tradition was inaugurated by Virgil (70 BC-19 BC) and Horace (65 BC-8 BC). That way, the Roman Classical tradition seems to be a continuation of Greek thoughts, ideas, and values.

However, the Romans did manage to preserve something of their own identity. The Roman tradition in literary criticism began with Horace. He was both a critic and a creative writer. His first book of the *Satires* and the *Epodes* were originally not intended for publication, but were read to his friends. Horace himself calls these works *Sermones* or "Talks". He even disclaims the title of poet, though his "Talks" are in hexameters. His lyric poems are deliberate attempts to add to the beauty of Roman literature and thereby to the glory of the Roman Empire. In addition, it is chiefly to the poems that he owes his fame today.

"Epistle to Pisos" or *Ars Poetica* is the most important critical document written by Horace. It drew heavily on Alexandrian poetic theory and Roman Rhetoric. *Ars Poetica* is not a systematic treatise on poetry, but Horace derived his views in part from his own experience and part from his own reading. It is written in the form of an informal letter. He insists that each poem must have a consistent fundamental idea or plot. He advises care in the choice of a subject. Throughout the letter or treatise, he constantly impresses upon his readers his conviction that good poetry is the result of hard work. Therefore, it is a treatise on the art of writing poetry, which aims to lay down rules and precepts for the guidance of would-be writers. According to him, the aim of poetry is 'to instruct, or to delight' or both. The concept of 'decorum' runs like an undertone throughout *Ars Poetica*. The satires and the epistles are full of



LET US KNOW

There is no mention of "On the Sublime" in any ancient text still extant, and it was largely unknown prior to its rediscovery during the Italian Renaissance. Following Boileau's popular translation of 1674, however, the treatise became a standard object of study for literary critics from Dryden onwards. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Neoclassical critics, primarily in England, frequently cited the text. Its influence is evident in such works as Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, and extends to such critics as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Burke, Joseph Addison, Coleridge, and Alexander Pope. Despite its relative anonymity prior to the 17th and 18th centuries, modern critics have found "On the Sublime" to prefigure their own literary perspectives and to be as relevant and insightful as other standard ancient texts by Aristotle, Horace, and Quintilian.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Who is Horace? What is his historical significance?

Q 7: Describe the significance of *Ars Poetica*?

Q 8: Why is the Second Sophistic period historically significant?

1.5 THE TRADITION OF RHETORIC

The term Rhetoric is derived from the Greek word, *rhetor* meaning 'speaker'. This term, which initially referred to the method of public speaking, also deals with the methods of persuasion on the part of a speaker. Towards the end of the 5th century BC, Rhetoric originated as an art in Greece. Nearly 50 years before the birth of Aristotle, the Sophists Corax and Tisias taught legal Rhetoric in Syracuse. Gorgias of Leontini was another great Rhetorician who enthralled audiences in Athens after arriving there in 427.

However, many Sophists did flourish in later periods, especially during the Roman history, and they came to be known as the Second Sophists. It developed in the Roman world with Cato, Cicero, and Quintilian and came to be nearly equivalent with higher education therein. Greek Rhetoric was introduced into Rome in the 2nd century BC. Alexandria, the famous centre of the Hellenistic world, was home to scholars working in various fields like poetic composition, literary criticism, and science. Hellenistic education concerned itself with practical skills of written and oral composition. Hermagoras of Temnos, of the 2nd century BC, wrote an important work on Rhetoric, and he was the major influence behind two early Roman texts on Rhetoric, namely—*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Cicero's *De inventione*. The first text, of anonymous authorship, presents a detailed discussion of the five-part system of Roman Rhetoric. Cicero's work, *De invention,* was published at an early age in the 1st century BC and it highlights the political importance of Rhetoric. Here, Cicero stresses the point that a speaker must not only be eloquent but also wise, as Rhetoric promotes a just society based on common welfare. Some of Cicero's other works include *De oratore*, *Brutus*, *Orator*, *De optimo genere oratorum*, *Partitione oratoria* and *Topica*. You will note here that in *De oratore*, Cicero inquires into the connection between Philosophy, Rhetoric and other forms of knowledge.



'LET US KNOW

Rhetoric arose in 5th century BC in ancient Greece. It developed in the hands of the Sophists, later Aristotle in the Greek world, and then Cato, Cicero, and Quintilian, in the Roman world. In its classical form, until the time of Cicero, there were five parts or "offices"—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

Cicero identifies six parts of a speech: the introduction and the insinuation, the narrative, the partition, the confirmation, the refutation, and the peroration.

Quintilian was another figure whose influence rivaled that of Cicero's. His *Institutio Orataria* shows in detail the importance of

Thomas, Keith. (Gen ed.) (1999). *Greek Philosophers.* (Past Masters Series). UK: Oxford University Press.

Wimsatt, William K., & Brooks, Cleanth. (1957). *Literary Criticism*: *A Short History.* New Delhi: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.



1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Aristophanes brought the first regular criticism in the Western world… **…**in his comedy *The Frogs,* he made 'critical enquiry' the criterion to judge the merit of poetry and drama, and to identify the relative importance of morality in art and the choice of language … …this play deals with the relative merits of Aeschylus and Euripides, which also shows Aristophanes' familiarity with the kind of great literatures prior to him.

Ans to Q 2: Plato dismissed the idea of mimesis thinking that it corrupts the poets with false ideas… … However, Aristotle makes mimesis the foundation of his views on poetry… …he asserts that the desire to imitate is basic in human beings… …imitation provides pleasures because it is more creative an act.

Ans to Q 3: Socrates appears as a character/speaker through a kind of "Socratic conversations"… …Plato recreated Socrates as a fictional or dramatic character… …"the main point of the Dialogues in which Socrates confronts sophists is to bring out the contrast between his genuine philosophising and their counterfeit."

Ans to Q 4: Plato opined that the poets should be banished from the ideal society, except perhaps those poetry which praise the gods… …Plato takes this severe position as he reacted against the views of sophists such as Gorgias and Thrasymachus who were less concerned with truth than with persuasion… … Plato held the view that poets are liars… …For Plato, epics and tragedy are based on a corrupting mythology.

Ans to Q 5: Plato believed that it is not the main duty of poetry to dictate a favourable view of human behaviour and represent the world



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is meant by the term Criticism? Give an account of the major premises of Greek criticism with particular reference to Plato and Aristotle.

Q 2: In what ways, did the tradition of classical criticism evolve? Discuss.

Q 3: What kind of intellectual and historical conditions provided a boost to the emergence of classical criticism? Discuss.

Q 4: Who are the Sophists and why did they mess up with the critics like Plato and Aristotle?

Q 5: Make a survey of Roman criticism and try to discuss the important concerns of the Roman critics.

Q 6: What is meant by the term Rhetoric? Write an account of the evolution of Rhetoric in ancient times with reference to some of the famous Rhetoricians.

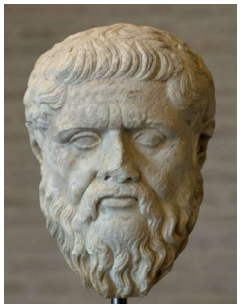
Q 7: Explain the main facets of classical Greek criticism. Why, according to you, did critical enquiry become the main criterion to judge literature during that time?

* * *

the Renaissance and continues to be crucial to an understanding of philosophical issues even today. Although, the acceptability of his ideas and doctrines has always been the subject of energetic debate, no one can deny Plato's persistent influence on the history of Western philosophy. This unit shall try to address Plato's views on poetry as available in his *Republic* (Book X). Plato discusses his views on poetry in Book II and III, and more extensively in Book X. You will finally learn that it is in *Republic* that Plato ponders over the the moral effects of poetry in the discussion of which we come across the concept of "imitation" (*mimesis*).

2.3 PLATO: THE CRITIC [Adapted from Norton Anthology]

A colossal figure in the history of Western philosophy; Plato looms large in the history of European literary theory. Many literary scholars often argue that Plato marks the beginning of the tradition of literary theory, although his choice of the dialogue form suggests that the issue he raises had already been debated among the historical personages like the pre-Socratic philosophers. Nearly all Dialogues attributed to Plato hint at almost every important issue that interests philosophers, such as – the nature of being; the question of how we come to know things; the proper ordering of human society and the nature of justice, truth; the good, beauty, and love.



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org

Plato was born about four years after the beginning of the twenty-five-year-long Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, and just after the death of the great Athenian statesman Pericles. His parents both came from distinguished Athenian families, and his stepfather, an associate of Pericles, was an active participant in the political and cultural life of 5th century Athens. Plato had two older brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, who appear as characters in his longest dialogue; *Republic* (375 BC). As a young man, growing up in a city at war and in constant political turmoil, Plato seems to have been destined for a

Plato's Socrates is not the historical Socrates. These complications, which thwart efforts to fix Plato's thought within a series of propositional statements, have attracted much attention, especially from late-20th century poststructuralist philosophers like Jacques Derrida.

The chronology of Plato's dialogues is highly controversial, but most scholars divide the works roughly into three periods. The earliest works, begun after 399, include the *Apology of Socrates* and *Crito,* in which Plato defends Socrates against the charges that led to his death; *Gorgias,* in which Socrates' opponent is the sophist Gorgias; and *Ion*, which examines poetry as a kind of divine madness. Characteristic of these early Platonic dialogues is Socrates' disarming claim of ignorance and a formal technique of cross-examination called *elenchus* a method of questioning designed to lead a learner through stages of reasoning and to expose the contradictions in an opponent's original statement. This method of "emptying out" the question by Socrates to reveal his opponents' ignorance is especially evident in his discussion of poetry with Ion, a rhapsode (professional reciter of epic poetry).

The middle period, from 380 to 367, includes the *Symposium, Cratylus,* and *Republic,* all begun after the founding of the Academy. They develop the theory of Forms or Ideas anticipated in the early dialogues. The Forms constitute a realm of unchanging being to which the world of individual mutable objects is subordinate. Because the Forms are immutable, they are more real-and truer than the changeable material world. The Form of the Good enjoys a unique status, for it is responsible for the being and intelligibility of the world as a whole.

To the late period (366-360) belong *Timaeus,* which throughout the Middle Ages was Plato's most widely known work; *Critias; Sophist;* and *Phaedrus,* the latter closing with a notorious attack on writing.

In *Ion,* Plato's Socrates engages Ion in a debate about the nature of the rhapsode's knowledge of poetry, about the nature of poetry, and about the status of knowledge itself. Poetry, Socrates maintains, is not an art; it is a form of divine madness: "the poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and

encoded and passed on through the devices of music and poetry. The instruction provided by the Sophists and by Plato's main rival, Isocrates, was almost exclusively Rhetorical and literary. Even in *Republic,* a book concerned with the ideal education of the guardians and citizens, Socrates divides schooling into physical training for the body and music and poetry for the soul. Socrates' criticism of poetry and its representations appears to be directed against a culture that, believed literally "that poets know all crafts, all human affairs." In such a culture/ Socrates' insistence makes more sense: a poet needs to know a horse the way a horseman knows a-horse. In his Academy, however, Plato promoted a learning whose foundation was dialectics, dialogue, and philosophical, reasoning.

The critique of mimesis in both the *Allegory of the Cave* and *Republic (Book X)*, explore the nature of knowledge and its proper objects. The world we perceive through the senses, Socrates argues, is illusory and deceptive; it depends on a prior realm of separately existing Forms, organised beneath the Form of Good. The realm of Forms is accessible not through the senses, as is the world of appearances, but only through rigorous philosophic discussion and thought, based on 'mathematical reasoning'. For Plato's Socrates, measuring, counting, and weighing all bring us closer to the realm of Forms than do poetry's pale representations of nature. All art and poetry, because they represent what is already an inferior representation of the true original (the Forms), can only lead further away from the truth, and further into a world of illusion and deception. Virtually every subsequent defence of poetry (memorable examples include those by Aristotle, Sir Philip Sidney, Aphra Behn, P B Shelley) has had to come to terms with Plato's devastating attack on poetry as inferior and deceptive mimesis.

This way, we can assume that Plato is the progenitor of Western didactic criticism and theory: the idea that literature should serve moral and social functions: *Republic,* where he describes an ideal well-regulated community in which the educational curriculum promotes respect for law, reason, authority, self-discipline; and piety, has been especially influential.

his Dialogues, Plato points to inspiration behind poetry rather than wisdom: poetry as an element of education' the aims of poetic composition, the difference between speech and writing, and the relation of words to things. In *Ion*, Socrates cross-examines a rhapsode (a singer) regarding his art. As the investigation proceeds, it becomes clear that since a rhapsode only interprets what the poet conveys through divine inspiration, the rhapsodes are "interpreters of interpreters". What the rhapsode knows is not through knowledge but through divine inspiration.

In the *Republic*, Plato mentions an "ancient quarrel" between poetry and philosophy. The question of mimesis is closely linked to Plato's concern with justice. Mimesis, for him, is not simply an aesthetic category. It involves wider issues of social organisation, political structure, education. Mimesis is seen to run counter to reason and justice. In the ideal state, where its future guardians will receive their education and training, the ethical training will have to include stories since these will be important to their moral education. It is, while on this question of the kind of stories to be told to the future guardians that Plato turns deeper into the issue. The stories should be such as to induce good behaviour, not the opposite. In Book X of *Republic* containing the 'allegory of the cave', Plato views the world as an imitation, a copy of the world of essences. Following on this argument, artistic images are mere shadows of what they imitate. Artistic images present the appearances of things and not their real truth. Thus, images are inherently corrupting because they deal with appearance. Mimesis gives us 'phantoms', not essential, real things. Since images do not give us rational truth, they are inherently corrupting for the philosopher as well. Since the poet, like the painter or the artist, makes images or appearances of 'phantoms', it follows that the poet's activity which is far from proper knowledge, must be strictly monitored.

So, what was Plato's view of poetry in relation to his ideal Republic? The argument can be traced through the ways in which Socrates, as the speaker in the *Republic*, reveals the notion of justice to be in keeping with poetic tradition. In other words, the notion of justice is derived from Homer's epic. In Book III of the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes

Within a century (276 BC), the school had become a centre for the philosophy of the Skeptics under Archesilaus. Revivals of some versions of Platonism were undertaken both at the Academy itself under Antiochus of Ascalon (87 BC) and elsewhere. For example, “Middle Platonism” developed at the same time in Athens and Alexandria (which included Plutarch). Neoplatonism began with Plotinus in Rome and continued until Justinian closed the pagan schools in 529 CE. In many ways, the Neoplatonism continued to provide a significant source of ideas for later medieval thinkers.

Plato’s influence though transformed and reshaped by the Middle Platonists and the Neoplatonists, can be found later in the conceptions of temporal order and eternity in Augustine and Boethius, and in other ideas among the medieval rationalists, especially Anselm. The Platonic conception of knowledge, as derived from and secured by innate and infallible cognitive capacities, makes contact with a truth or reality that is independent of the human senses, continued after the Enlightenment in the philosophies of what have come to be known as the Continental Rationalists, most notably Rene´ Descartes, Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. It echoes even later in the transcendentalism of Immanuel Kant, the British idealist Francis Herbert Bradley, and, later still, in the American transcendentalists, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Despite the persistent debate about the nature of Plato’s writings, they continue to be read in philosophy, justice, and history courses alike because the works pose philosophical problems and questions that remain intricate enough to challenge those who think critically about serious issues.



2.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt about many important aspects of Plato’s criticism. Although Plato did not set out to write systematic literary theory, unlike his disciple Aristotle who produced a treatise on poetics, his consideration of philosophical issues in several of the dialogues leads him to reflect on poetry which has often set the terms of literary debate

the arts of Rhetoric and persuasion, Plato focused primarily on mathematics, logic and philosophy.

Ans to Q 2: Plato places his arguments in the mouths of characters who may or may not be based on historical persons… …the speakers can never be assumed to be voicing Plato's own views or the views of those whose names they bear… … Socrates is the focal character and Plato's mouthpiece in most of the dialogues.

Ans to Q 3: In *Ion* Socrates engages Ion in a debate about the nature of the rhapsode's knowledge of poetry, about the nature of poetry, and about the status of knowledge itself… … poetry is not an art; it is a form of divine madness.

Ans to Q 4: The first period include the *Apology of Socrates* and *Crito* in which Plato defends Socrates against the charges that led to his death; *Gorgias;* and *Ion* which examines poetry as a kind of divine madness… …the middle period includes the *Symposium, Cratylus,* and *Republic* all develop his theory of Forms… …the last include *Timaeus,* which throughout the Middle Ages was Plato's most widely known work; and other works such as *Critias; Sophist;* and *Phaedrus.*

Ans to Q 5: The world we perceive through the senses, Socrates argues, is illusory and deceptive; it depends on a prior realm of separately existing Forms, organised beneath the Form of Good. The realm of Forms is accessible not through the senses, as is the world of appearances, but only through rigorous philosophic discussion and thought, based on 'mathematical reasoning.

Ans to Q 6: The world of forms is the world of essences, of universality, changeless and eternal, each Form being a wide category capable of including many objects in the physical world. For Plato, the world of Forms, alone constitutes reality because these Forms are eternal and unchanging. These are essences; they are universal and exist in a world of unity.

Ans to Q 7: Plato's view on poetry begins with Plato's idea of 'mimesis'… …In his Dialogues, Plato points to inspiration behind

Unit 3: ARISTOTLE: *POETICS*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Aristotle: The Critic

3.4 Aristotle's *Poetics*

3.5 Important Concepts of the Text

3.6 Reception of Aristotle as a Critic

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss Aristotle's *Poetics* as a foundational text of classical criticism
- explain the different concepts and issues raised in the text
- examine how Aristotle's text provides fresh insights into the notion of imitation
- evaluate the status of Aristotle in the context of Western philosophy and criticism

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to Aristotle and his *Poetics*—a seminal contribution to the intellectual world. You should note that Aristotle (384-322 BCE) is an important figure in the history of Western Philosophy. He invented the scientific method of analysis, and in a series of treatises, he codified the divisions of knowledge into disciplines and sub-disciplines that still continue in the form of physics, chemistry, zoology, biology, botany, psychology, politics, logic, and epistemology. Unlike his master

Philip, invited Aristotle to tutor his heir, Alexander, who was then about 13 years old. Aristotle perhaps finished tutoring him around 340, and probably lived in Macedonia or Stagira and completed *Rhetoric.* In 335, when Alexander ascended the throne and departed for his campaigns in Asia, Aristotle returned to Athens and began his own school at the Lyceum. There, he taught poetics, Rhetoric, politics, ethics, and metaphysics, and probably also worked on his famous treatises like *Politics, Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Poetics.* After the death of Alexander in 323, when public sentiment against Macedonia was rising, Aristotle left Athens to live in Chalcis on the island of Euboea, where he died in 322.

Aristotle's intellectual achievement is stupendous. He was the first genuine scientist in history. He was the first author whose surviving works contain detailed and extensive observations of natural phenomena, and he was the first philosopher to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between observation and theory in scientific method. He identified the various scientific disciplines and explored their relationships to each other. He was the first great teacher to organise his lectures into courses. In that sense, the Lyceum was the first academic institute in which a number of scholars and investigators joined in collaborative inquiry and documentation. He was also one of the first persons in history to build up a library, a systematic collection of works to be used by his colleagues and his posterity.

Aristotle believed that the life of the philosopher was not reclusive and scholarly but absorbed with public affairs. Many Aristotelian scholars tend to state that only about a fifth of Aristotle's prodigious 150 speculated works survived and transmitted, usually imperfectly through manuscript copies during the Middle Ages. His treatises are often seen as obscure, because they were available only in libraries for study by other scholars, and not to be copied for reading by general readers. Another important aspect of his works is that they are study guides rather than polished works, which is mainly because of the abrupt transitions, frequent repetitions, and short hand references to other works or writers. Most of them are also particularly difficult to date, since they were probably composed and revised over an extended period.

mainly from Sophocles' celebrated tragedy *Oedipus Rex,* Aristotle in *Poetics* presents six salient parts of tragedy, in order of their importance—plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* suggests a different avenue for the study of literature. If you remember from your reading of Unit 1, Rhetoric as the study of figures of speech, but Aristotle defined it more broadly as the ability to see the available means of persuasion. Rather than seeing literary works in terms of their distinctive features and internal construction, it opens for consideration their affective and political dimensions as forms of public speech. Because of its focus on types of public speaking, the impact of the *Rhetoric* on literary study has been less direct than that of *Poetics.* However, its emphasis on audience response foreshadows subsequent theoretical approaches concerned with the reader, interpretation, and the political effects of literature. His distinction between poetics and Rhetoric reflects a perennial division in literary theory: the split between theories concerned with the internal properties of literature and those concerned with literature's external effects, especially on readers and society. Although Aristotle alludes to audience response in his discussion of catharsis in *Poetics,* he is most concerned with the material and formal causes of poetry. Such a focus has strongly marked modern Literary Criticism notably that of the New Critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley who explicitly disallow considerations of the audience as "the affective fallacy".

Other surviving works of Aristotle include the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 10 books, the *Eudemian Ethics* in 7 books, and the *Magna Moralia* (or "Great Ethics" in Latin). The *Nicomachean Ethics* is generally regarded as the most important of the three. It consists of a series of short treatises. In the 19th century, the *Eudemian Ethics* was often suspected of being the work of Aristotle's pupil Eudemus of Rhodes, but there is no good reason to doubt its authenticity. The concerns of Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* are explicit in this line: "It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits."

using for the representation (i) different media, (ii) different objects, or, (iii) a manner that is different and not the same…Some people use colours and forms for representations, making images of many objects (some by art, and some by practice), and others do so with sound; so too all the arts we mentioned produce a representation using rhythm, speech and melody, but use these either separately or mixed."

After going through such a declaration, it should be clear to you that Aristotle's first consideration is the nature of the poetic art in general and representation or imitation in particular. While mentioning representation, Aristotle refers to three points of difference—its media, its objects and its manner. Like Plato, he too calls the poet an imitator, who like a painter or any other artist, imitates one of the three objects—'things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be'. Like Plato, he too believes in the natural pleasures of imitation. Look at these lines:

"Two causes seem to have generated the art of poetry as a whole, and these are natural ones. (i) Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation. (ii) Everyone delights in representations."

So, it is the pleasure of imitation that enables a child to learn his earliest lessons in speech and behaviour. It is quite natural for a poet or an artist to imitate. However, there is also another natural instinct helping the poet—the instinct for harmony and rhythm manifesting itself in metrical composition. Hence, Aristotle states:

"Those by nature most disposed towards these generated poetry from their improvisations, developing it little by little. Poetry was split up according to their particular characters; the grander people represented fine actions, i.e. those of fine persons, the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones, at first composing invectives, just as the others composed hymns and praise-poems. We donor know of any composition of this sort by anyone before Homer, but there were probably many [who composed invectives]."

B. Aristotle's Observations on Tragedy:

Aristotle deals broadly with the characteristics of tragedy. He defines tragedy "as a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements used separately in the various parts of the play; represented by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions." This has so far been one of the best definitions of tragedy. By "embellished speech," he means which has rhythm and melody. Since the actors of a tragedy produce the representation, the ornament of spectacle will necessarily be a part of tragedy. And then, 'song' and 'diction' become the media in which they produce the representation. By "diction", Aristotle means the construction of the [spoken] verses itself; and by "song", he means that of which the meaning is entirely obvious. Since tragedy is a representation of an action, and is enacted by actual people, these people are necessarily of a certain sort according to their character and their reasoning. It is because of these that we say that actions are of a certain sort, and it is according to people's actions that they all succeed or fail. Action thus comprises all human activities, deeds, thoughts and feelings. It should be complete or self-contained with a beginning, middle and ending. If this order is somehow gets dismantled, the action is never complete or whole, and becomes haphazard or loose.

Then Aristotle moves on to discuss the constituent parts of tragedy. As he states: "So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts...These are plot (mythos), characters (ethos), diction (lexis), reasoning (dianoia), spectacle (opsis),and song (melos)." The media in which the poets make the representation comprise two parts – diction and song, the manner in which they make the representation, plot, character and reasoning, spectacle and the objects which they represent. Then, he proceeds to describe each constituent part one by one. Plot is described as the soul of tragedy. Plot is primary while characters are secondary. However, a character in a tragedy should be good, appropriate, life like and consistent. Since tragedy is a

The Three Unities:

Lodovico Castelvetro (1505-1571) was an important figure in the development of Neo-classicism. It was his reading of Aristotle that led to a widespread adoption of a tight version of the Three Unities, as a dramatic standard. Subsequently, his "The Poetics of Aristotle in the Vulgar Language" came to be considered as one of the most famous Italian Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics.* In *Poetics,* while discussing action in a play, Aristotle states that the fable should be the imitation of one action, and of the whole of this and the parts of the transactions should be so arranged, that any one of them being transposed, or taken away the whole would become different and changed. Of time he states that Tragedy endeavours to confine itself to one revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit. Of space, he is less explicit, merely saying (when contrasting epic and tragedy), that tragedy should be confined to a narrow compass. In the 16th and 17th century Neo-classical critics of the drama in Italy and France strongly adhered to the unities.

C. Aristotle's Observations on Comedy:

In the text of *Poetics*, we find very little about comedy. However, as Aristotle discusses, the roots of comedy perhaps lie deep in satirical verses, which owes its origin to the earlier phallic songs in honour of the fertility God Dionysus. Comedy represents men as worse than they are. Satire ridicules personalities, while comedy ridicules general vices. While referring to men as worse than the average, he does not actually mean men who are wicked or vicious but men who have some defect or ugliness, which is not painful or destructive. They simply provoke laughter but cause no harm or pain either to themselves or to others. They are simply ludicrous which is a subdivision of the ugly.

D. Aristotle's Observations on the Epics:

The epic is earlier in origin than either tragedy or comedy. In its nature, it resembles tragedy closely, but differs from it in terms of form. As Aristotle states: "As for the art of exposition and representation in verse, it is clear that, just as in tragedies, the epic poet should also

how they differ, and what are the causes of doing well or not in them, and regarding questions raised and their solutions, let this account suffice."

Russell and Winterbottom write, *Poetics* is a work that does not so much describe the genres of tragedy and epic as analyse them to see what makes them what they are, how they have developed with some admixture of historical information. From *Poetics*, we somehow come to learn about the kinds of plays that Aristotle likes or dislikes. *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method. We find Aristotle turning to the various categories of human artefacts, differentiating those made in language and eventually focusing on poetry, especially on epic and tragedy. He assumes a distinction between the wide class of objects that are humanly made and those that are naturally produced-between, say, a chair and a tree. Aristotle limits his study of poetry to its observable kinds and its formal construction, more or less ignoring questions about its affective origins, which he regards as falling under the auspices of other pursuits, such as psychology or Rhetoric.



LET US KNOW

Plato and Aristotle:

Arguing against Plato, Aristotle defined and defended tragedy as a worthy form. Plato had condemned poetry in his *Republic* on several grounds like—poets don't know what they are doing, but merely reproduce the surface of things, theirs is expressions of emotion, rather than illustration of the dangers of giving way to emotion and exalting the greater privilege of thinking, as philosophers do. In his defence of tragedy in *Poetics,* Aristotle gives poetry the knowledge and moral weight that Plato had denied. Aristotle undertakes to examine the nature and differentiating qualities of imaginative literature with a view to demonstrating that it is true, serious and useful, unlike Plato who had shown it to be false, trivial and harmful. Aristotle's Catharsis is in fact an answer to Plato's notion that art corrupts by nourishing the passions. Instead, Aristotle implies that art gives them real and useful purgation. For example, by exciting pity and fear in us, tragedy enables us to leave the theatre 'in calm of mind, all passion spent.'

has continued to powerfully influence criticism. Let us now briefly discuss the important concepts of *Poetics* in some detail.

Mimesis or "imitation", "representation":

In literary criticism, mimesis or imitation has two applications— (1) to define the nature of literature and the other arts, and (2) to indicate the relation of one literary work to another which served as its model. In *Poetics* however, Aristotle defines poetry as an imitation of human actions. By imitation, he probably means something like 'representation' in its root sense. The poem imitates by taking an instance of human action and re-presenting it in a new medium or material—that of words. By distinguishing differences in the artistic media, in the kind of actions imitated, and in the manner of imitation (for example, dramatic or narrative), Aristotle first distinguishes poetry from other arts, and then makes distinctions between the various poetic kinds, such as drama and epic, tragedy, and comedy. You should note that from the 16th through the 18th century, the term imitation was central in discussing the nature of poetry. Critics differed radically, however, in their concept of the nature of the mimetic relationship and the kinds of things in the external world that works of literature imitate. With the emergence *Expressive Criticism* (the view that poetry is essentially an expression of the poet's feelings or imaginative process) in the early 19th century, imitation seems to have been displaced from its central position in criticism and literary theory.

Catharsis or "purgation", "purification", "clarification":

Aristotle uses the word Catharsis in his definition of tragedy in *Poetics*, but there has been much inconclusive debate on exactly what he meant. The key sentence is: "Tragedy through pity and fear effects catharsis of such emotions." Therefore, in a sense, tragedy having aroused powerful feelings in the spectator has also a therapeutic effect. After the conflict-ridden climax, there comes a sense of release from tension. Traditionally, Catharsis is rendered as 'purgation' and refers to the psychological effect of tragedy on the audience. Against Plato's condemnation of art for unhealthily stimulating emotions, which should be suppressed, Aristotle argues that audiences are not inflamed or

through some error. For example, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* Oedipus impulsively kills his father and marries his mother out of ignorance. To understand Hamartia, we may look at the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as 'the imitation of an action that is serious . . . with incidents arousing pity and fear'. Although in *Poetics* Aristotle attempts a classification of the elements proper to tragedy, but very few Greek tragedies conform to his model. However, his concept of Hamartia, the act of the hero, which initiates the fatal process, suggests a basis for a more developed theory of tragedy. This Hamartia may be anything—a mistake over identity or deliberate crime or sin. This is always horrifying as it leads to the consequences of pain and destruction. Tragedy is a dramatisation of an individual's sense of life and society as constantly under threat from the arbitrary chances of fate and humanity's own innate savagery.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Discuss the main concepts that Aristotle raises in his discussion of tragedy in *Poetics*.

Q 13: How would you like to discuss the idea of Catharsis?

Q 14: What do you mean by Anagnorisis and Peripeteia? How are they connected?

Q 15: How is Hamartia connected with a more mature sense of tragedy?

3.6 RECEPTION OF ARISTOTLE AS A CRITIC

In the century immediately after his death, Aristotle's works seem to have fallen out of circulation. However, eventually they came to form the backbone of some seven centuries of philosophy in the form of the commentary tradition. From the 6th through the 12th centuries, although the bulk of Aristotle's writings were lost to the West, they received extensive consideration in Byzantine and Arabic Philosophy, where Aristotle was so prominent that he became known simply as "The First Teacher". In this tradition, the notably rigorous and illuminating

European writers such as the French dramatist Pierre Corneille. While the 18th century writers sought to revive its precepts as "neoclassicism". In 20th century literary theory, *Poetics* was often considered foundational for formalist methods, which apply objective modes of analysis to linguistic artefacts. Subsequently, it influenced a wide array of critics, ranging from the Russian formalists like Boris Eichenbaum and the American New Critics like William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe c. Beardsley to the archetypal critics like Northrop Frye and the French Structuralists like Tzvetan Todorov.

Aristotle's systematic categorisation of genus and species and his comparison of tragedy and epic underlie all genre theory. Perhaps, most decisively, in Aristotle's systematic description of plot and its component parts, is grounded contemporary narrative theory. His scientific examination of poetry has been championed by the New Critics– W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks as "Aristotle's answer" to Plato, responding both to Plato's view of poetry as a degraded imitation twice removed from the reality of eternal Ideas or Forms, and to his suspicion of poetry as stirring emotions in a way that is dangerous for society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 16: In what ways, as the New Critics would like to suggest, is Aristotle's *Poetics* an answer to Plato's idea of poetry?



3.7 LET US SUM UP

Poetics, as you must have realised by now, deals mainly with poetry. Among other things, it aims to answer Plato's criticisms of representative art. According to Plato's theory of Forms, material objects are only imitations of original or 'real' Forms. Artistic representations of material objects are therefore only copies of copies, and so removed from reality. Moreover, drama has a specially corrupting effect, because

Vincent B. Leitch. (Ed). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton.

Web Resources :

plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/34560/Aristotle/254726/Rhetoric-and-poetics



3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Yes,he is the first genuine scientist in history… …He is the first to observe natural phenomena purposefully… …he is the first philosopher to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between observation and theory… …he is the first to identity the various scientific disciplines and explored their relationships… …he is the first great teacher to organise his lectures into courses.

Ans to Q 2: It is believed that Aristotle wrote nearly 150 books… …some of his great contributions are – *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia… …*one important aspect of his works is that they are study guides rather than polished works… …most of them are particularly difficult to date, since they were probably composed and revised over a period of time.

Ans to Q 3: *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method… …here he turns to poetry and especially to the species-specific traits of epic and tragedy… …in treating poetry as a craft, Aristotle differs from Plato, who discusses poetry in terms of inspiration and the emotive transport of the poet… …here he draws mainly from Sophocles' celebrated tragedy *Oedipus Rex* to present the six salient parts of tragedy—plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle.

Ans to Q 4: Aristotle *Rhetoric* deals with the ability of a work of art to persuade… …rather than seeing literary works in terms of their distinctive features and internal construction, it is concerned with an external effect of literature… …its emphasis on audience response foreshadows twentieth century theoretical approaches

embraced by the memory… …thus, he brings in the ideas of the three unities – Unity of Action, Unity of Time, and Unity of Place to discuss the structure of the plot.

Ans to Q 10: In the text of *Poetics* very little is available on Comedy… …comedy represents men as worse than they are to arouse laughter… …while epic in its nature resembles tragedy closely, the only difference being its form.

Ans to Q 11: *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method… …we find Aristotle turning to the various categories of human artifacts, differentiating those made in language and eventually focusing on poetry and especially on the specific traits of epic and tragedy… …but he limits his study of poetry to its observable kinds more or less ignoring questions about its affective origins… …finally, we end up knowing about the kinds of play that Aristotle likes or dislikes.

Ans to Q 12 to 15: For the answers, you are advised to go through the section 3.5 carefully.

Ans to Q 16: Instead of directly disagreeing with Plato, Aristotle implicitly validates poetry by examining it as a legitimate branch of study… …countering Plato's notion of poetry as degraded imitation, Aristotle sees poetry as a source of universal knowledge of human behaviour… …he also felt that unlike history, which produces knowledge only of specific situations, poetry describes the actions of characters who might be any humans… …moreover, he claims that good poetry has a positive emotional effect on its audience, which he calls Catharsis-perhaps the most important and variously interpreted word in *Poetics.*



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you mean by the idea of imitation or poetic representation in the context of Greek classical criticism? Discuss with reference to Plato and Aristotle.

Q 2: How does Aristotle view Poetry in his *Poetics*? Discuss in detail.

UNIT 4: LONGINUS: *ON THE SUBLIME*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Longinus: The Critic

4.4 Reading Longinus' *On The Sublime*

4.5 Important Concepts of the Text

4.6 Reception of Longinus as a Critic

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make a survey of the life and works of Longinus
- discuss "On the Sublime" as a foundational text of Roman classical criticism
- appreciate the treatise "On the Sublime" for its originality and power
- explain the different concepts and issues that are raised in the text and evaluate the contributions of Longinus in terms of the concept of the 'Sublime'
- assess the importance of Longinus as a critic in terms of the different aspects of his life and works

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will be discussing another most important critical essays of classical literary criticism—"On the Sublime" written by Longinus. This essay about which you are going to read in this unit is fragmentary in nature because there are many frequent and extensive gaps in the text. Since the 18th century, "On the Sublime" has maintained

However, it is **Peri Hupsous** or “On the Sublime” on which his fame has been founded and erected. When “On the Sublime” was first published in its original Greek by an Italian critic, Robortelli in 1554, the volume was attributed to “Dionysius Longinus” which further led ancient scholars to ascribe the work to either Dionysius of Halicarnassus or to Cassius Longinus, the 3rd century critic and Rhetorician. However, the controversy regarding its authorship remains. Most translators and commentators, then, have adhered to the convention of referring to the unknown author of ”On the Sublime” simply as Longinus.

The essay is personal in tone and addressed to Postumius Terentianus, his friend. This friend, as Longinus recalls in the first sentence, once accompanied him in a study of Caecilius’s monograph ‘On Sublimity’, but they found the work greatly lacking in the treatment of its subject matter and in the attitude, it took toward its readers. Longinus points out that “every specialised treatise...should clarify its subject,” and, second, “it should tell us how and by what methods we can attain it”. Longinus adopts a rather amiable, intimate, yet soberly critical attitude here and views his inquiry into the nature of the sublime or greatness in writing as a collaborative enterprise. His work, deliberately and inter-textually dependent upon another work of the same title, appears to originate in a scene of collaborative critical reading. It is written in the epistolary form and the final part, possibly dealing with public speaking, has been lost. Longinus critically praises and blames literary works as examples of good or bad styles of writing. Longinus ultimately promotes an “elevation of style” and an essence of ”simplicity”.

Such a reference is quite distinctive: no other known pagan writer employs the Bible in this manner. While scholars continue to attribute *On Sublimity* to Cassius Longinus, they do so as a matter of convenience. Despite seven lengthy gaps that make up approximately one-third of the original text, the intended organisation of *On Sublimity* is reasonably certain. After the formal preface addressed to Postumius Terentianus (about whom we know nothing) and the enumeration of common faults that arise when authors attempt to achieve sublimity, Longinus provides

to blame our author for what he has left out as to commend him for his originality and enthusiasm…You have urged me to set down a few notes on sublimity for your own use. Let us then consider whether there is anything in my observations, which may be thought useful to public men. You must help me, my friend, by giving your honest opinion in detail, as both your natural candour and your friendship with *me require*. It was well said that what man has in common with the; gods is "doing good and telling the truth."

Soon you will find that Longinus's "On the Sublime" is a critical document of immense worth and significance, as he cites **Sublimity** to be a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse. It is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame. Here he discusses those vices of style, which constitute contemporary oratory, which Longinus calls a 'false sublime'. Then, he points out some defects of style, which tends to spoil the loftiness of language. **The first fault** is "turgidity" when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into folly, producing effects, which are overblown or bombastic**. The second fault** is "puerility". The use of puerility spoils the sublimity. It is a pedantic type of conceit adding to a pompous and frigid style. **The third fault** is "parenthyrson". To Longinus, this term refers to 'emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed or unrestrained where restraint is required'. Thus, the false sublime consists merely of a gorgeous exterior where pompous language is used to clothe thoughts, which are essentially trivial or puerile. The poet can avoid these faults by having a clear knowledge and appreciation of what is truly sublime. At this stage, Longinus tells his friend about the marks of true sublimity: "At this stage, the question we must put to ourselves for discussion is how to avoid the faults which are so much tied up with sublimity. The answer, my friend, is: by first of all achieving a genuine understanding and appreciation of true sublimity. This is difficult; literary judgement comes only as the final product of long experience. However, for the purposes of instruction, I think we can say that an understanding

process of influence not as passive and static but as an active endeavour of the contemporary writer to vie with the ancient poets. His vision is comprehensive, and everywhere he stresses the emotional and imaginative appeal of great literature. It is the creative imagination, which modifies and transforms, and produces works of beauty. The appropriate use of imagination in rhetoric, says Longinus, 'is to introduce a great deal of vigour and emotion into one's speeches, but when combined with argumentative treatment it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them'. In such cases, the imaginative conceptions of the speaker far surpass "mere persuasion".

The essay then proceeds to discuss the use of figures. Longinus holds the view that the use of figure allows the speaker "to carry the audience away with him". However, he recommends that a figure is most effective when it is unnoticed. Figures should be used in a natural manner. He cites a number of important figures. One of these is the figure of **rhetorical question and answer**, which involves the audience emotionally. Another figure is 'Asyndeton', which consists in the removal of connecting particles. The effect produced is one of rush and torrent (heavy uncontrolled outpouring) of passion. The union of certain figures imparts strength, beauty and persuasiveness to the language. In order to produce a powerful emotional effect, figures such as 'Anaphora' (repetition of words) and 'Diatyposis' (vivid description) may be combined together. 'Hyperbaton' is a figure, which consists in the inversion of the natural order of words or thoughts. It carries the very effect of violent, mental agitation and thus, gives a touch of reality to speech and produces the natural effect of emotion. 'Polyptoton' consists in the interchange of one case for another, of one number for another, of one tense for another, and of one person for another. It contributes to sublimity and enlivens exposition. 'Periphrasis' contributes much to the sublime and adds much to the beauty of language.

Longinus then examines the importance of diction. The choice of correct and magnificent words is a source of immense power to entice and charm the reader. Metaphors, Hyperboles and Similes contribute a great deal to the sublime. Vulgar idioms should be avoided because low

in Nicolas Boileau's 1674 French rendering. The latter made "On the Sublime" a central text in European criticism throughout the 18th century, and set the stage for many discussions of the sublime, including those by Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, and, most notably, Immanuel Kant. With Kant's Critique of Judgement (1790), the theory of the sublime reached a level of analytical rigor considerably beyond Longinus, who, by comparison is content merely to enact the sublime and work intuitively. Still, Longinus manages to anticipate many of Kant's major themes, especially his fascination with the uplifting sense of the "supersensible" (the transcendent). He also anticipates Romantic theories of literature, which focus on the creative genius of the author.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: In what ways, is Longinus's "On the Sublime" a reaction to Caecilius' monograph *On Sublimity?*

Q 3: What do you mean by Sublimity? Mention the three faults, which tend to spoil Sublimity?

Q 4: Mention the sources of the sublime as available in the text of Longinus. Which ancient writers does Longinus quote as examples of Sublimity?

Q 5: What is the nature of Sublimity, according to Longinus?

Q 6: What direct or indirect connections does Longinus's text have with Plato, Horace and Aristotle?

4.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF THE TEXT

The following are some of the most important concepts of "On the Sublime".

Sublime:

The concept was introduced into the criticism of literature and art by a Greek treatise **Peri Hupsous** or "On the Sublime" by Longinus. It is a quality whose effect is to "transport" (ekstasis) the reader out of

impossible for people having mean ideas and habits, to produce anything that is admirable and worthy. It is also because; great thoughts come from the imagination of a great creative genius and from a sound interpretation of the imitation of nature and of the great predecessors. Those who would attain distinction of style must feel the greatness of the masters such as Homer, Plato and Demosthenes, and capture from them some of their greatness.

Capacity for Strong Emotion:

The second source of the sublime is forceful and inspired emotion. The emotion should be strong and natural and it is to be expressed in lofty and elevated language so that it can move the readers with pleasure and persuasion. Longinus asserts that nothing contributes to loftiness of tone in writing than genuine emotion.

Appropriate Use of Figures:

The third source of attaining excellence of style is the use of figures of speech, which he considers very important. Longinus devotes nearly one third of his essay to it. Figures of speech should not be used mechanically. They must be ingrained in genuine emotion. They help in the elevated style. The grandeur of any figure will depend upon its being employed in an effective manner. The figures cited by Longinus are Rhetorical questions, asyndeton, anaphora, polysyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis. Other figures include accumulation, variation and climax ranging over changes of case, tense, person, number, and gender.

Nobility of Diction:

The forth source of the sublime is nobility of diction, thought and metaphor. It is fine diction, which gives the style “grandeur, beauty, a classical flavour . . . and endues the facts as it were with a living voice”. Metaphors are used in treating commonplace descriptions. However, majestic diction should be used in important situations. The discussion of diction however is incomplete because it is believed that some parts of the book are unfortunately lost.

Dignity of Composition:

The fifth source of the sublime is the dignity of composition which relates to the arrangement of words in a certain order and various

selection and balance. He believes in rules and regulations. He stands for the use of a refined and cultivated poetic style.

"On the Sublime" was largely unknown prior to its rediscovery during the Italian Renaissance. Following Boileau's popular translation of 1674, however, the treatise became a standard object of study for literary critics from Dryden onwards. In the 18th century an important phenomenon was the shift in the location of the sublime from a quality of linguistic discourse that originates in the powers of a writer's mind, to a quality inherent in external objects, and above all in the scenes and occurrences of the natural world. Thus, Edmund Burke's highly influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, attributes the source of the sublime to whatever things are 'in any sort terrible'—that is, to whatever is "fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger"—provided that the observer is in a situation of safety from danger, and so is able to experience what would otherwise be a painful terror as a 'delightful horror.' The qualities of objects conducive to sublime horror that Burke stresses are obscurity, immense power, and vastness in dimension or quantity. His examples include vast architectural structures and natural phenomena.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, neoclassical critics, primarily in England, frequently cited the text. The domain of aesthetics was influenced by the sublime in the work of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* (1790) is an extended analysis of the sublime. Kant made division of the sublime objects specified by Burke into two types: the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime includes in its scope the sublime of magnitude, of vastness in size or infinitude in number. Whereas the dynamic sublime encompasses the objects that tend to bring terror, provided that the terror is rendered pleasurably by the safe situation of the observer. He takes as examples of sublimity the scenes and events in the natural world. According to him, sublimity resides not in the object of nature itself, but only in the mind of the judging subject who contemplates the object. In his view, the ability to experience the sublime exemplifies the limitations of finite humanity on the one hand, but on the other hand its pre-

mind." Often the experience of reading a great author or listening to a great speech leads us to a feeling of ecstasy or transport (ekstasis), which is distinct from the more rational effects of persuasion, the goal of Rhetoric. For Longinus, sublimity uplifts the spirit of the reader, filling him or her with unexpected astonishment and pride, arousing noble thoughts, and suggesting more than words can convey.

From a contemporary perspective, Longinus's view of the sublime has limitations. It focuses mainly on the profound feelings and thoughts of geniuses and audiences, without attending to the ways in which they are structured or determined by language. Longinus does discuss figurative language, Rhetoric, and composition, but the ideas and emotions of the genius precede such linguistic "ornamentation". The audience's experience, moreover, is said to transcend words.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: State the importance of Longinus' criticism.

Q 11: From your reading of the essay, what ideas do you get of Longinus as a romantic?



4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have made yourself familiar with Longinus one of the greatest critics of antiquity. The decline of literature in his age made Longinus talk about Rhetoric. In this connection, he points out Caecilius' monograph "On Sublimity" which, he felt, had failed to touch the essential points. His "On the Sublime" is written in order to make correction of what Caecilius has written. He distinguishes between other compositional skills and the sublime. Through a composition, inventive skill and appropriate use of facts are expressed. However, the sublime reveals the power of the speaker 'at a single stroke'. The sublime appears like a bolt of lightning. The different sections of this unit must have helped you to understand what the essay is all about. By now, you must have also realised the features that might effect sublimity—bad and affected rhythm; the

Ans to Q 3: According to Longinus, Sublimity is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers… …The first defect is "turgidity" when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into folly… …the second fault is "puerility" meaning a pedantic type of conceit adding to a pompous and frigid style… …the third fault is "parenthyrson" which refers to 'emotion misplaced'.

And to Q 4: Longinus cites five sources of the sublime: 'grandeur of thought', 'strong and inspired passion', 'use of figurative language', 'nobility of expression' and 'elevated composition'… …while discussing sublimity he cites the epics of Homer, the tragedies of Aeschylus, the love-lyrics of Sappho, the writings of Plato, the orator Demosthenes, and the historian Herodotus.

Ans to Q 5: Sublimity lies in the capacities of the speaker or writer . . .it can be acquired by the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole . . .it is the path of imitation . . .it suggests the appropriate use of imagination in Rhetoric.

Ans to Q 6: Longinus points out that Plato does not practice what he preaches… …Longinus reinterprets Plato, highlighting the unconscious ways he is "carried away by a sort of literary madness."… …he differs from Horace, who in the *Ars Poetica* stresses Rhetorical strategies rather than the erratic genius of authors… …Longinus' treatise is more like Aristotle's *Poetics,* for they both take note of the formal techniques and psychological effects of literature.

Ans to Q 7: Its a quality whose effect is to transport the reader out of themselves… …style of writing that elevates itself above the ordinary… …mechanism of recognition of the greatness of a spirit, of the depth of an idea, of the power of speech… …a certain distinction and excellence in expression… …it expresses itself in a single phrase, like a flash of lightning.

Ans to Q 8: The use of figures allows the speaker to carry the audience away with him… … figure of Rhetorical question and answer involves the audience emotionally… …use of Asyndeton imparts strength, beauty and persuasiveness to the language… …Anaphora and Diatyposis may be combined together… …Hyperbaton consists in the

Unit 5: SIR PHILIP SIDNEY: *AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY* OR *THE DEFENCE OF POESY*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 English Criticism in the time of the Renaissance

5.4 Sidney: The Critic

5.5 Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*

5.6 Important Concepts of the Text

5.7 Reception of Sidney as a Critic

5.8 Let us Sum up

5.9 Further Reading

5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.11 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to read about English criticism during the time of the Renaissance

- discuss Sidney as one of the greatest English critics
- trace the importance *An Apology of Poetry* in terms of the various issues raised by Sidney
- discuss the major concepts dealt with by Sidney in the text
- identify the relevance and influence of Sidney's doctrine in the history of English criticism

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this Block. In this unit, you will be introduced to English criticism during the Renaissance through a discussion of Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry.* Although Sidney is best known as a critic of the Renaissance period, he was also a great poet, a creative writer, a noble and virtuous man. He is also one who embodies the

John Cheke, Roger Ascham, and Thomas Wilson. On the one hand, they were devoted scholars of the Classics, on the other; they were equally devoted to the native English tradition like the poetry of Chaucer. Thus, you should note that in their critical discussion, two things become apparent: On the one hand, they adore the classics as model for guidance, and on the other, they advocate the purity of the native tongue from foreign influences like Latin, French and Italian. One may also argue that the birth of Renaissance criticism begins with the recovery of classical texts, most notably, Giorgio Valla's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The work of Aristotle, especially *Poetics*, was the most important influence upon literary criticism until the late 18th century. Lodovico Castelvetro was one of the most influential Renaissance critics who wrote commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1570.

English criticism, during the 16thand 17th centuries, passed through many distinct stages of development, which may be seen as the following:

a. The first stage was characterised by a purely rhetorical study of literature, probably beginning with Leonard Coxe's *Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke* (1524), a handbook for young students. This was followed by Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorike* (1553), a more extensive and certainly more original text than Coxe's. Warton calls it "the first book or system of criticism in our language." It was at this time that English writers for the first time began to appreciate form and style to be the distinguishing features of literature. This appreciation led to the formation of an English prose style.
b. The second stage of English criticism—a period of classification and especially of metrical studies—commences with Gascoigne's *Notes of Instruction concerning the making of Verse*, published in 1575. Besides this brief pamphlet, this stage also includes Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, the first systematic classification of poetic forms and subjects, and of Rhetorical figures; Bullokar's *Brief Grammar*, the first systematic treatise on English grammar; and Harvey's *Letters* and Webbe's *Discourse of*

probably Lodovico Castelvetro, whose 1570 commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* encouraged the writing of tightly structured plays.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention the two main characteristics of English criticism during the Renaissance.

Q 2: What makes Renaissance criticism an important area for the students of English literature?

5.4 SIDNEY: THE CRITIC

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) was one of the most eminent poets of the Elizabethan period. His influence can be seen throughout the history of English literary criticism because of *The Defence of Poesie*, which is also frequently referred to by its other title, *An Apology for Poetry*. In *An Apology for Poetry* he both explores the core concepts and answers to earlier criticism of poetry. The text itself deals with three major topics: the dignity or power of poetry, the general critique of poetry, and an examination of the current state of English literature.

His Life:

Sidney's father was Sir Henry Sidney and his mother was Lady Mary Dudley who was the daughter of the Duke of Northumberland. The eldest of three sons and four daughters, he was born in 1554. Philip Sidney entered Shrewsbury School on Oct 17, 1564 where he befriended Fulke Greville, his future biographer. Sidney made the second great friendship of his youth with Edward Dyer, a man of quality. From 1568 to 1571, Sidney went to Christ Church, Oxford, but he left without a degree in the spring of 1571, probably because of an outbreak of Plague. In the following year, he left England for a three-year visit to the continent to complete his education. During that time, he travelled through many countries namely, France, Germany, Italy and Austria.

Sidney's body was returned to London and buried in St. Paul's Cathedral on 16th February 1587. He had become for many English people the epitome of a courtier—learned and politic, but at the same time, generous, brave, and impulsive. Never more than a marginal figure in the politics of his time, he was memorialised as the flower of English manhood in Edmund Spenser's "Astrophel", one of the greatest English Renaissance elegies.



LET US KNOW

The Battle of Zutphen was a confrontation of the Eighty Years War on 22 September 1586, near Zutphen (Warnsveld), the Netherlands. It was fought between forces of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, aided by the English, against the Spanish, who sought to regain the Northern Netherlands. It ended in a victory for Spain. Important English soldiers included Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Peregrine Bertie, George Whetstone, Henry Unton, and Robert Sidney, whose brother, Philip Sidney, was mortally wounded during the battle and died in Arnhem at the age of 31.

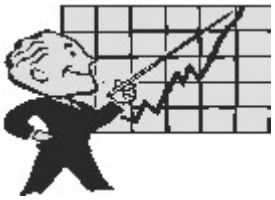
'**The Eighty Years' War':** The Eighty Years' War, or Dutch War of Independence (1568–1648), began as a revolt of the Seventeen Provinces against Philip II of Spain, the sovereign of the Habsburg Netherlands.

His Works:

The time in which Sidney lived was marked by vigour and thoroughness, chivalry and love of adventure. Sidney's first important literary work was the result of a temporary retirement from the world of politics in which he had meddled somewhat too boldly. "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia", also known as *Arcadia*, is by far Sidney's most ambitious work. His style here is little affected by the prevailing taste for **Euphuism**. It is not improbable that Lyly's *Euphues* (1579), suggested to

The Lady of May is one of Sidney's lesser-known works, a masque written and performed for Queen Elizabeth in 1578 or 1579. It is a one-act play and is notable for its allegorical content relating to Queen Elizabeth I, for whom the first production was performed at the Earl of Leicester's country estate at Wanstead. Queen Elizabeth was asked to mediate the outcome of the masque itself. The plot is about selection and marriage. The May Lady asks the Queen to judge her two suitors, Therion and Espilus. A schoolmaster Rombus moderated the debate. At the end, the Queen favoured Espilus, and the entertainment ends with dancing.

Thus, we can conclude that Sidney showed his powers as one of the great thinkers and prose-writers of England.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Discuss the literary significance of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*.

Q 4: Discuss the context following which Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetry*.

5.5 SIDNEY'S *AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY*

The importance of *An Apology For Poetry* is great since it exhibits not only the temper of the generation, which actually produced the first fruits of the greatest Elizabethan poetry but also the enthusiasm of the successive generations. As already stated, it was occasioned by an attack on poetry entitled *The School of Abuse* (1579) by a Puritan minister, Stephen Gosson, who had indicted poetry on four grounds:

(a) That men could employ his time more usefully than in poetry

(b) That poetry is the mother of lies

(c) That poetry is the nurse of abuse

(d) Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal Commonwealth

gives the examples of the astronomers who observed the stars as ordered in nature, the geometrician and arithmetician who examine the diverse sorts of quantities as ordered in nature, the natural philosopher who examines physical nature, the moral philosopher who considers the natural virtues, vices and passions of men; the grammarian, Rhetorician and logician who expound the rules of speech, persuasion and reasoning respectively as based on nature. His point is that unlike each of these disciplines, whichdepend on some aspects of nature, the poet is not restricted by Nature:

"Onely the Poet, disdayning to be tied to any such subiection, lifted up with the vigour of his owne invention, doothgrowe in effect another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anewe,formes such as never were in Nature, as the *Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies*, and such like . . . feely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit." (Sidney, 8)

Commenting on the creative powers of the poet, Sidney further states:

"Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapistry as divers Poets have done, neither with so plesant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever els may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden." (Sidney, 8)

Thus, for Sidney, poetry is higher than nature. However, he also holds poetry as an art of 'imitation', its chief function being to teach and delight. Imitation does not mean mere copying or a reproduction of facts. It means representing or transmuting of the real and actual, and sometimes creating something entirely new. In the section devoted to the divisions or kinds of mimetic poetry and their practitioners, Sidney conceives three types: **Divine poets** like David and Solomon who imitate the "inconceivable excellences of God," **Pagan poets** like Orpheus, Amphion, and Home rare; and poets who imitate "matter philosophical" of which there are four subtypes (moral, natural, astronomical, and historical); and **Right poets**. Sidney is primarily concerned with the Right poets as he states: "these third be they which

made delightful in poetic imitation. The poet does not begin with obscure definitions which load the memory with doubtfulness, 'but he cometh to you with words sent in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner.' Poetry also gives imaginary examples, which are more instructive than the real examples of History. Since the historian is tied to reality, he is not at liberty to present the ideal pattern of people or events, whereas the poet can frame his example to that which is most reasonable. Moreover, what the historian can relate in terms of true events, the poet can make his own imitation, "beautifying it both for further teaching, and more delighting".

Sidney here emphasises the poet's freedom, which allows him to choose his material and to frame it in an ideal pattern. His tone is persistent in attempting to overturn the conventional hierarchy of knowledge. The poet, of course, "standeth for the highest form in the school of learning" because he is the moderator between the philosopher and the historian. Through the art of mimesis, the poet unites in one event the philosopher's precept and the historian's example. Rephrasing his earlier argument on fore-conceit and image, Sidney proclaims that the poet gives "a perfect picture" of something. He then lists exemplary precepts that poets encode in speaking pictures: anger, wisdom, temperance, valour, friendship, remorse, pride, cruelty, and ambition. However, the greatest of these is "the most excellent determination of goodness," as in **Xenophon**'s "feigning" of the prince in Cyrus, in **Virgil**'s fashioning of a virtuous man in Aeneas and in Sir **Thomas More**'s representation of an entire commonwealth in his *Utopia* (1516). The reference to the Catholic Thomas More prompts a brief digression in which Sidney states a general tenet of mimesis he had not made before—if the poetic artefact is flawed, the fault lies with the poet, not with poetry. Having made this point, he cites from the practices of Jesus, who provided his teachings in lively stories.

3. The third charge against poetry is that its entire species are infected with love themes and amorous conceits, which have a demoralising effect on readers. To this charge, Sidney replies that poetry does not abuse man's wit, man's wit abuse poetry. Even the word of God, says Sidney, when abused, can breed heresy and blasphemy.
4. Sidney is rather perplexed at the last charge, that is, Plato was right when he rejected poetry. In fact, Plato warned men not against poetry but against its abuse by his contemporary poets who filled the world with wrong opinions about the Gods. So, Plato's objection was directed against the theological concepts. In *Ion*, Plato gives high and rightly divine commendation to poetry. His description of the poet as 'a light winged and sacred thing' in that dialogue reveals his attitude to poetry. In fact, by attributing unto poetry a very inspiring of a divine force, Plato was making a claim for poetry, which he for his part could not endorse. Sidney also cites the authority of many great figures who admired poetry, including Aristotle, Alexander, Plutarch and Caesar.

Sidney ends his text with a lamentation over the impoverished state to which poetry has declined in England. He thinks that it is so because poetry has come to be represented by 'base men with servile wits' or to men who, however studious, are not born poets. Another cause is the want of serious cultivation of the Poetic Art. Three things necessary for producing good poetry Art, Imitation, and Exercise, according to Sidney are lacking in the present generation of poets. After this, he deals with the low repute into which poetry had fallen in England, attributing it partly to a sort of lethargy in the people and partly to the inferiority of the poets. Sidney says that few good poems have been produced in England since Chaucer. Chaucer did marvellously well in 'Troilus and Cressida' or 'The Mirror of Magistrates' which contains some beautiful passages. Earl of Surrey's lyrics also deserve praise. Spenser's 'The Shepherds Calendar' is worth reading. Thus, he reviews the state of poetry in England from Chaucer to his own time. Regarding drama,

oration with the standard seven parts (exordium; proposition, division, examination, refutation, digression, peroration); Sidney's text is more usefully understood as treating three major topics.

The first part defends the dignity of poetry demonstrating its superiority to philosophy and history. Along the way, Sidney discusses the ethics of genres; ranging from pastoral, elegy; and satire to comedy, tragedy, and epic.

The second part deals with the specific objections raised against poetry, in particular the charge that the poet is a liar.

The third part of the essay examines the current state of English literature. Here Sidney offers some critical comments on diction, poetic figures, meter, rhyme, rhythm, and the English vernacular compared to other languages. Of particular interest is Sidney's pointed criticism of the English drama for failing to adhere to the unities of time and place sketched in Aristotle's *Poetics.*

A fundamental aesthetic problem of the late 16th century concerns the object and purpose of representation. Sidney's definition of poetry sets an agenda for the discussion of poetry that brings together many of the learned commonplaces of Renaissance criticism: the nature of imitation, the problem of defining nature, and the injunction that poetry serve moral ends.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What are the four grounds on which Stephen Gosson had indicted poetry?

Q 6: Mention the three different types of poets as discussed by Sidney while expressing his idea of imitation in *An Apology for Poetry*.

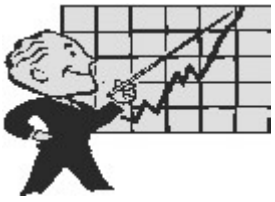
Q 7: How does Sidney defend the idea of poetry against the attacks raised by Gosson?

Q 8: **"**Sidney's text is more usefully understood as treating three major topics". Discuss.

mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, least by profane wits, it should be abused". In addition, he curses those who are possessed of "so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up, to look to the sky of poetry". In *An Apology*, poetry is elevated to that sacred status: in its very nature it is opposed to worldliness and "earth creeping" concerns.

Nature of Imitation:

Although the principle of imitation reigned unchallenged in literary criticism from the Renaissance to the end of the 18th century, not all critics meant the same thing by *imitation,* nor did they necessarily agree on the existing notion of imitation. At the centre of the controversy over imitation was a debate about nature itself—what constituted nature and, what was the status of representations of reality? Like the third-century philosopher Plotinus, Sidney uses the Platonic theory of Forms to refute criticism against poetry. Sidney held that the nature poets imitated the ideal, and not the material. During the Renaissance, the ideal of nature was God's cosmological plan. Sidney perhaps best represents this viewpoint when he argues that the Right poets "imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or, shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what, may be and should be." This view of imitation is based on a religious belief in providential design; because the universe is the product of divine wisdom. Hence, the purpose of the poet is ultimately to affirm the rule of justice. In the next century, this view of nature runs head on into the scientific revolution, and the debate is recast in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and elsewhere.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the major concepts of Sidney in his *Apology*?

Q 10: What kind of argument on poetry does Sidney in his Apology provide?

writers of the succeeding age, we must note in particular "A Defence of Poetry" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Another writer belonging to the Romantic age whose work showed strong influence of Sidney was S. T. Coleridge in his treatise titled "On Poesy or Art". Sidney's perspectives on poetry and poets as well as his use of metaphoric language influenced several critics in the latter age. One of the significant themes or ideas represented in *An Apology* is "portraiture". His main point is that poetry is an "arte of imitation . . . that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speake metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end to teach and delight" (Sidney, 10). In fact, Sidney also influenced the metaphysical poets like John Donne.



5.8 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you must have realised the important role played by Sir Philip Sidney in the history of English literary criticism. His *An Apology for Poetry* written in a 16th century is concerned mainly about the aesthetic problems regarding the object and purpose of poetic representation. It is in many ways a seminal text of literary criticism. It is not only a defence but also one of the most acclaimed treatises on poetics of its time. While its ideas are not original, it represents the first synthesis in the English language of the various strands and concerns of Renaissance literary criticism, drawing on Aristotle, Horace, and more recent writers such as Boccaccio and Julius Caesar Scaliger. It raised issues – such as the value and function of poetry, the nature of imitation, and the concept of nature – which were to concern literary critics in numerous languages until the late 18th century. Sidney's writing of the *Apology* as a defence of poetry was occasioned by an attack on poetry entitled *The School of Abuse* published in 1579 by a Puritan minister, Stephen Gosson. As you have already read, Sidney rejected Gosson's Protestant attack on courtly pleasure, effectively defending poetry as a virtuous activity.

Ans to Q 2: The main concerns of Renaissance has been the revival of interests in classical Greek and Latin criticism… …it was also the time in which English writers were concerned over the appreciation of form and style as the distinguishing features of literature… …it was also the time for the first systematic classification of poetic forms and subjects… …this period is also marked by an emergence of philosophical and apologetic criticism.

Ans to Q 3: The sonnet cycle *Astrophel and Stella* is the first Elizabethan sonnet sequences… …It includes 108 sonnets and 11 songs… …most of the sonnets are influenced by Petrarchan conventions in which the abject lover laments the coldness of the lady he peruses… …this sonnet sequence is autobiographical as Stella is modelled on Penelope Devereux, who was supposed to marry Sidney.

Ans to Q 4: The *Apology* is an answer to Stephen Gosson, who dedicated his "School of Abuse" to Sidney in 1579, without taking his consent… …Gosson presented a puritanical standpoint which condemns all the beauties of present life… …Sidney argues that poetry is more effective than either history or philosophy in rousing its readers to virtue.

Ans to Q 5: That men could employ his time more usefully than in poetry… …that poetry is the mother of lies… …that poetry is the nurse of abuse… …Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal commonwealth.

Ans to Q 6: Divine poets who imitate the "inconceivable excellences of God"… …Pagan poets who imitate "matter philosophical"… …and Right poets who imitate to teach and delight.

Ans to Q 7: There can be no "more fruitful knowledge" than we derive from poetry… …what a poet presents is not fact but fiction embodying truth of an ideal kind… …poetry does not abuse man's wit, it is man's wit that abuses poetry… …Plato was right when he rejected poetry because he warned men not against poetry but against its abuse by his contemporary poets.

imitation? Discuss with reference to Sidney's preoccupation with classical masters like Plato and Aristotle.

Q 5: How does Sidney refute the main accusations against poetry? Who, according to Sidney, is a true poet?

Q 6: What, according to you, is the importance of Sidney's criticism? How did it influence the future generations of English critics?

Q 7: How does Sidney extol the cause of poetry during his time? Elaborate with examples from the text.

Q 8: Write a note on the reception of Sidney as a critic.

* * *

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Web Resources:

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