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Literary Criticism : Ancient to Modern

SEMESTER-VI

ENGLISH

BLOCK- 1



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COURSE INTRODUCTION

In this Course, the learners will be introduced to the Western critical tradition and its development till the beginning of twentieth century through several representative critical texts. As a compulsory course, **Literary Criticism: Ancient to Modern** traces the origin of the critical tradition in the common Graeco-Roman classical heritage from which the European intellectual tradition had emerged, and the subsequent development through the Neoclassical, the Romantic, the Victorian and the Modern periods. Criticism in the modern period is sought to be discussed in terms of New Criticism and the subsequent developments in the field of Literary Theory. For the convenience of reading, this Course is divided into two Blocks—Block 1 and Block 2 respectively.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 1 aims to introduce the concept of literary criticism to the learners. It comprises eight units– except for one introductory unit, in the other units the learners will be introduced to one very basic text of a particular critic whose contribution shaped the critical traditions of a particular period in the History of Criticism. The first unit provides a basic idea on criticism, chiefly reflecting on the characteristics and major works of Greek, Roman and English criticism. The second and third units deal with Aristotle's *Poetics* which is one of the most influential works in the history of criticism that shaped discussions on genre, prosody, style, structure, and form in future times to come. The fourth unit deals with "Ars Poetica" which is a long poem by Horace on the art of poetry and drama. The fifth unit deals with Longinus's "On the Sublime", a treatise which is fragmentary in nature and has a reputation of being one of the most influential classical works in the tradition of European criticism, despite the uncertainty that surrounds its authorship and date of composition. The sixth units explores John Dryden's "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" which aimed "to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French", establishing him as one of the first comparative critics of his time. The seventh unit deals with Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism". The poem covers a range of good criticism and advice, and represents many of the chief literary ideals of Pope's age. It is actually a verse essay primarily concerned with how writers and critics should behave in the new scenario of literary commerce in Pope's contemporary age. The eighth unit deals with William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* which is used to mark the end of the Neoclassical period and the beginning of the Romantic period of literature. The "Preface" was one of the first and most direct attempts to challenge the popular poetic practices of the 17th and 18th centuries and offers a new poetic theory to replace them.

After going through these units, you will be able to gain an idea on literary criticism in general besides describing several seminal texts that have a great role to play in the development of criticism. 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 some relevant ideas and concepts in "Let Us Know" along the text. We have kept "Check Your Progress" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study.

UNIT 1 : LITERARY CRITICISM: AN INTRODUCTION

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 A Brief Introduction to Greek Criticism

1.3 1 Major Characteristics

1.3.2 Major Critics and Works

1.4 A Brief Introduction to Roman Criticism

1.4.1 Major Characteristics

1.4.2 Major Critics and Works

1.5 A Brief Introduction to English Criticism

1.5.1 Major Characteristics

1.5.2 Major Critics and Works

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.9 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- define the term literary criticism
- discuss the development of criticism starting from Greek classics
- identify the different tendencies of criticisms from Rome, Greece and England
- discuss how the literary critics have provided the readers a perfect platform to appreciate a literary work in a better way

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Literary criticism is believed to have existed as old as literature. It is a term which cannot be defined easily. It is the study, evaluation,

and interpretation of literature. In a narrow sense, it as an attempt to determine the goodness or bad qualities of literary activities. As a prime tool in literary studies, critics play a vital role in studying or analysing literary works. Criticism, when applied, makes human focus on particular aspects or elements of literary works broader as well as sharper than giving a usual reading. It is true that criticism can see the whole aspect of literary works, based on the critic used in seeing the literary work. It teaches us not how to read a text but how to interpret from different perspectives. Criticism gives us a complete different picture of a literary work as it opens up various ways or possibilities to see a text or an idea in a new and fresh light. Critics belonging to different period offer structured views on how to perceive literary works or topics. The classical masters have set some standard parameters to dissect and see the inner world of a work. It also provides us with the opportunity to appreciate it properly.

Examples of various types of literary criticism are provided below:

- Comparative
- Biographical
- Pragmatic
- Feminist
- Expressive
- Ethical
- Mimetic
- Historical

Again broad schools of theory that have been considered crucial include historical and biographical criticism, Marxism, Feminism and French feminism, Formalism, New Criticism, Russian Formalism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism, Colonialism and Post-colonialism, New Historicism, Deconstruction, Reader-Response criticism and so on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is literary criticism? Explain.

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Q 2: Name any two schools of theory.

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Q 3: Mention the various types of literary criticism.

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1.3 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO GREEK CRITICISM

The Greeks had invented most of the literary genres, the reflection of which in literature, is indeed a great topic of interest. The Greeks were the originator of literary criticism and the Romans had joined hands in the dissemination of critical knowledge to the other branches or disciplines in different parts of the Western world. The Romans had adopted as well as adapted to the ideas of Greek criticism and made it a popular genre. G. M. A. Grube argued that they "not only transmitted the Greek heritage but made it their own in the process just as their literature, in its period of greatness, was Greeks in its forms but essentially Roman in its spirit as in language. When we come to Roman times the Greek and Roman critics are contemporaries and should not be studied in isolation from each other" (ix). One of the ways to study Greek literary criticism as marked by W. J. Verdenius is to arrange the reflections of the Greeks on literature according to their temporal succession and trace their development.

1.3.1 Major Characteristics

The main tendencies of Greek criticism appear to be based on five principles namely :

- The Principle of Form
- The Principle of Authority
- The Principle of Skill
- The Principle of Inspiration
- The Principle of Contemplation

These principles seem to be applicable for the first time in case of Homer. One of the major characteristics of Greek literary criticism is that those critics seemed involved in some conversational or dialogue form from which their criticism had evolved. The Roman writers and Greek scholars participated in a perpetual dialogue, exchanging views and ideas contributing to a common discourse of poetics, rhetoric and literary criticism. The Greek critics like Longinus, Dionysius and Hermogenes are conventionally studied as part of a Greek tradition that connects them with Aristotle, Plato, Theophrastus and Aristoxenus. Another aspect where Greek criticism seemed to be more concerned with is the prosody or the study of verse composition.

The Greek literary critics generally considered prosody as the definite part of grammar; it concerned itself with the rules and regulations determining the shortness or the length of a syllable, with syllabic quantity and with how the various amalgamation or combination of short and long syllables formed the metres of Greek as well as Latin Poetry.

1.3.2 Major Critics and Works

The following are some of the major Greek literary critics:

Plato : Born in 428 B.C., the Greek philosopher Plato was a student of Socrates and a teacher of Aristotle. His writings reflected different issues related with beauty, justice and equality, and also contained discussions on epistemology, theology, aesthetics, political philosophy, cosmology and the philosophy of language. He founded the ‘Academy’ in Athens, one of the foremost

institutions of learning in the Western era. He has expressed his views and ideas on literature in works like *The Republic* and *The Ion*. He perceived life, society and literature from a moral and social point of view. In *The Republic*, he discussed the idea of construction of ideal state and ideal man and vehemently condemned the art or poetry; because for him, the poet is inferior to the philosopher because he appeals to emotions and passions of the people, not to their intellect. He accused poetry for its lack of concern for truth and morality. According to Plato, pleasure alone cannot be the function of poetry. Poetry must contribute to the knowledge of virtue, promotion of truth and morality in society. A poet must be a good teacher.

Plato also propounded the theory of imitation, according to which, poetry is based on imitation or mimesis. He derived the theory of imitation from painting and imposed it as poetry. As a moralist, he condemned poetry because it is immoral. As a philosopher, he disapproved it because for him it is based on falsehood. He did pioneering work in the field of criticism. He was the first to point out the relation between poetry and life and was the first to emphasise the doctrine of artistic unity in poetry in works of art.

Aristotle: After Plato, the most significant writer of criticism is Aristotle who was a disciple of Plato and the person who had propounded the idea of aesthetic theory of criticism. His two famous works namely *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* clearly contain his critical theories. *Poetics* is an exposition of the theory and practice of poetry and on the other hand *Rhetoric* is a philosophical treatise of profound interest and greatness. According to him, the poetic art is imitative. He agreed with Plato on the view that the poet is an imitator like a painter or any other artist who imitates one of three objects –"things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be and things as they ought to be." To him, poetry is imitation like music or dancing not like painting. It is not mimicry.

The medium of poetic imitation is language. The word poetry may be used for the pure art of literature. He raised the question—what is the object of poetic imitation? The object of poetic imitation is men in action. By this, he did not mean men doing things; he meant things happening in terms of nature, events embodied in human lives. He believed that poetry is more philosophical and higher in essence than history.

Again, defining tragedy Aristotle said, “Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude; in language embellished in each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions”. Tragedy imitates the action of “rational human beings who think and will”. Aristotle had his own opinion regarding terms like ‘peripetia’ or reversal of action, ‘hamartia’ or tragic flow and ‘catharsis’ or purgation of emotion. Aristotle, like Plato, agreed with immense emotional appeal of poetry. Tragedy being the highest form of poetry arouses the emotions of pity and fear.

Aristotle did not elaborate his views on comedy in *Poetics*. According to him, characters in comedy had “some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive”. Epic is older than comedy or tragedy. It is also an imitation of a serious action, “whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle and an end”. Aristotle’s significance as a critic is immense in the field of criticism. He is the first great literary theorist and critic. The importance of *Poetics* is unquestionable and it is fundamental in the history of criticism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Give the name of a few Greek critics.

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Q 5: What does *Poetics* deal with?

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Q 6: How did Aristotle define tragedy?

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Q 7: Who has written *The Republic* and *The Ion*?

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Q 8: State the five principles of Greek criticism.

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1.4 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ROMAN CRITICISM

The Greek literary and critical tradition passed from Greece to Rome which in 85 B.C. was flourishing with literary and cultural activity. It was made glorious by the achievements of great writers— Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertious, Ovid and Quintilian. It is evident that Roman criticism as well as poetry greatly influenced famous writers like Ezra Pound and James Joyce and they continued to be the guides of most of the masters of literature in its boundary. Roman critics like Horace and Quintilian are known for their precision of thought and clarity of expression.

Roman literature and criticism were chiefly influenced by the ideas propounded by Aristotle, particularly his views on the three unities. The Roman writers seemed to agree with the Aristotelian view that an epic should contain a lofty theme and epic poems like “The Aeneid” are

illustrations of the limit to which Roman writers adhered to. This is why; it is called the Augustan age of neo-classicism, as Virgil wrote during the time of Augustus Caesar and produced his masterpiece. Its influence could be felt not only on Dante but also on the twentieth century writer like Broch from Germany.

1.4.1 Major Characteristics

It is seen that both Greeks and Romans analysed, interpreted and evaluated the texts of different poets and prose masters. They constructed various ideas about the nature of poetry, its effects and function in the broader society. They extensively commented on the style of the orators, historians and philosophers and developed different theories. One of the characteristics of the Roman critics, especially of Horace, is that they do not care much about philosophical questions. Those critics like the Greek ones were more concerned with the good taste of a writer. They were more concerned with the quality of a critical argument. Their belief regarding poetry is that “the main role of art is to keep everything in its right place and give it its right share in the whole.” The Roman critics praised the Greek writers and considered them their models. The principle of decorum as well as the doctrine of the cautious imitation of the ancients seemed to be the vital characteristics of the Roman critics. Even the idea of ‘organic unity’, employed and stressed by Aristotle and Plato, was also endorsed by these critics. The importance of sound and proper subject-matter along with precise or correct choice of meter and diction are also vital components in Roman criticism.

1.4.2 Major Critics and Works

The following are the most famous Roman literary critics:

Horace : Horace is one of the prominent literary critics of Rome. He formulated his critical theory in “Ars Poetica” known as “Art of

Poetry". He followed the ancient classical line. He advised the would-be writers to follow the Greek models faithfully and rigorously:

Be Homer's works your study and delight
Read them by day, and meditate by night

Horace's "Ars Poetica" is a compendium of rules and principles which the intending poets should follow. It deals with the art of poetry under three heads—

1. Poesis or the subject-matter
2. Poema or form
3. Poeta or the poet

He also dealt with the nature, function, subject matter, kinds, language, relative importance of nature and art. Poetry, according to Horace, is the combination of fact and fiction, which both instruct and please the readers. Thus, the function of poetry, according to Horace is to instruct and to delight. The nature of poetry is to "charm the mind". The theme of poetry should be "simple and uniform". Horace emphasised the right choice of words and their effective arrangement in composition. The poet must show "taste and care in arranging words". Order and connection are important in style.

Quintilian : He was influenced by Greek and Roman classicists—Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Pinder, Plato and Aristotle among the Greek classicists, and Virgil and Horace among Romans. In addition to the classical influences, he was also guided by his own experience, reason and voice of nature. He wrote on form alone and was silent on matter. His views are contained in works such as *De Causis*, *Corruptae Eloquiential* and *Institutio Oratorio*. He saw no logic in the distinction between art of oratory and that of writing. According to him, good style is the product of both nature and art. The writing of prose is an art. He disapproved "spontaneous utterance". He was with Aristotle and Horace in the belief that everyday subjects, that prose treats also needs familiar

words for their most convincing expression. The language of prose is the language of daily life, but it is not the language of the masses. Quintilian standardised the vocabulary of oral criticism. He pioneered comparative criticism. “He compares”, writes Scott James, “Greek literature with Roman, the Greek language with Latin.”



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Name some of the famous Roman literary masters.

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Q 10: Who is Horace?

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Q 11: Who is Quintilian?

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1.5 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH CRITICISM

In England, literary criticism began during the time of Renaissance. The first regular critics of England were three Cambridge friends Sir John Cheke, Roger Ascham and Thomas Wilson. The primary motive of these critics was to make improvement in English as a means of communication for literary and other purposes along the classical lines. John Cheke was of the opinion that English should be written clear and pure, unmixed and unmingled with the borrowings of other tongues. Ascham emphasised the need to keep English free from foreign influence. Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* might be influenced by Cicero and it could be considered “the first book or system of criticism.” He advocated free and lucid style of writing purged from any kind of obsolete and strange words, both native as well as foreign. These critics form the first stage of growth of the English literary critical thoughts. In the second stage, the most

notable critics were Sir Phillip Sidney, Gabriel Harvey, Edward Dyers, Spenser and a few others.

1.5.1 Major Characteristics

One of the major characteristics of English literary criticism is undoubtedly to bring about the trend of pure and native style of writing refined from any other tendencies. This trend of style took a new turn when New Criticism came into existence. Though literary criticism in general gives importance to evaluation as well as interpretation of a work of literature, New Criticism especially began laying emphasis to the objective evaluation of the text underlying in its inherent form and structure. Another feature or quality of the English literary criticism is undoubtedly its liberal approach unlike the strict rules and regulations followed by the classical literary critics of Greece and Rome.

1.5.2 Major Critics and Works

Some of the major critics and their works are discussed below:

Sir Philip Sidney : Sir Philip Sidney was one of the earliest English literary critics whose contribution cannot be considered obsolete even today. His *An Apology For Poetry* (1580) was occasioned by the publication of Stephen Gosson's treatise *The Scholl of Abuse* (1579). It is a rare and a valuable document of criticism which seems to be a ruthless attack on poetry. With proper logic, Sidney defended poetry and tried to explain its importance to a perplexed and confused readership. He closely followed Aristotle in defining poetry for whom poetry was "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word Mimesis, that is to say, a representing counterfeiting or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight." *An Apology for Poetry* is an earliest attempt in English to

deal with the poetic art, practically and not theoretically. This writing can be considered an example of Renaissance critical thought because it takes into account the critical doctrines of ancient critics like Plato, Aristotle and Horace. Sidney believed that poetry is natural human activity which enables men to sing of beauty and truth. As a critic, Sidney is judicious, original and creative. The value of his work is everlasting and can be felt forever.

Ben Johnson : Ben Johnson is an arden classicist who was heavily influenced by ancient masters of Rome and Greece—Aristotle, Horace, Seneca and many more. According to David Daiches, Johnson is “one of the first significant neoclassic critics in English.” As a follower of the classical principles, he ardently stood for balance, order, rules and restraint in literature and art. He vehemently condemned the excessive of human passions, expression and imaginative intensities pleading for “nothing too much”. He admired Shakespeare without being blind to his faults and shortcomings. *Timber or Discoveries* is a brilliant summation of Ben Johnson’s critical thoughts and principles published posthumously in 1641. He expressed his opinions and views on diction and style. Words communicate sense as well as meaning. He commented, “In all speech words and sense are as the body and the soul. The sense is as the life and soul of language, without which all words are dead.” For him, in order to cultivate lucidity and clarity of expression, a writer must know fully what he has to say, choose appropriate words to say it arranging them in a proper way in composition. In order to achieve excellence, a writer is required to read works of the finest writers, observe the best speakers and cautiously revise and rewrite his words and their arrangements. In this regard, he religiously followed Aristotle, Quintilian and Horace.

His best criticism can be noticed in dramatic criticism. He paid more attention to the theory of comedy than to tragedy. A comedy is undoubtedly reformative and therefore it reflects the

image of the time. It deals with “human follies, not with crimes.” In the field of tragedy, he seemed to follow the pattern of Seneca. He emphasised the unity of action, which should have a proper beginning, a middle and an end.

John Dryden : John Dryden was considered by Dr. Johnson as “the father of English criticism as the writer who first seems to teach us to determine upon principles the merit of composition”. He began a regular epoch of critics. For the first time, he convinced his countrymen that they could be as great critics as they had been poets.

Dryden’s “An Essay on Dramatic Poesy” (1668) is a popular treatise on criticism. It is written in a dialogue form in which four persons participate. Every speaker frankly states his viewpoints. Neander who is Dryden himself demonstrated the superiority of English over the French. He has written two of his prefaces—“The Epistle Dedicatory to Rival Ladies”, asserting the importance of heroic couplet for the dramatic writings and “The Dedication to Annus Mirabilis” prior to this work. It was from Aristotle that he developed a respect for rules and principles. French Neo-classicism taught him prefer the epic to tragedy, to insist on a moral in it. He was also influenced by Longinus and Saint.

Dryden is considered a liberal classicist as he would adjust the rules and principles of the ancient masters to the genius of the age, to which a poet wrote. As a great scholar, he knew the art of combing merits of both the native tradition and that of the classical age. Johnson rightly called him the father of English criticism because he was the first critic in England who was seriously preoccupied with the exposition of literary principles. He was a progressive critic. In an era of Neo-classicism, he emerged as a liberal classicist. He was the first critic to recognise the importance of objectivity, detachment and reasoning in criticism. It was Dryden, who first introduced the notion that literature is an organic force which grows and develops with the growth and

development of the nation. He pioneered comparative, historical and descriptive criticism. Dryden's views on poetry are similar to those of Aristotle. For him the function of poetry was "the delight and instruction of mankind".

Alexander Pope : Alexander Pope's chief critical works are "Essay on Criticism" (1711), *Imitations of the Epistles of Horace to Augustus* (1733), *Preface to the Works of Shakespeare* (1725) and *Preface to the Translation of Illiad* (1715). His "Essay on Criticism", one of the most remarkable documents of neo-classicism, is modelled on Horace's "Ars Poetica", Vida's *De Arte Poetica* and Boileau's *L' Art Poetique*. He begins the poem by lamenting the corrupt taste of his day with an aims at restoring it. Conformity to nature is essential for the cultivation of sound judgement and taste, as he said.

First follow nature, and your judgement frame
By her just standard, which is still the same.

He defined criticism as "true taste" which is a gift of Nature, but it should be disciplined by the rules, devised by classical writers. According to Pope, criticism is the art of judging aright. A critic's natural ability for judgment should be properly trained. It should be well-versed with the rules of the ancients and should judge a work not in parts but as a whole. No undue importance should be attached to the false brilliance of conceits, diction, style or versification.

Dr Samuel Johnson : Johnson was a literary dictator of his age. In his magnum opus *The Lives of Poets*, "he explains his learned reputation to evaluate the English poets of the past hundred years, an inquiry into taste..." He had definite views about the nature, function and techniques of poetry. In "The Life of Milton", he remarked that poetry is "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason." This definition contains both the nature and function of poetry. In imitating truth, it is guided by reason and affords pleasure through imagination. In

the Preface to Shakespeare, he wrote that "the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing". For him, epic poetry is the best. He wrote on poetic diction that "words too familiar or too remote defeat the purpose of a poet". Such words should be carefully avoided. Johnson expressed his views on the nature of dramatic art and artist, the unities, dramatic pleasure and tragi-comedy. According to him, Drama must hold up "a faithful mirror of manners and of life". For him, "Drama is just a representation of human nature both in its workings in individuals and in humanity at large". He defended the use of three classical unities. He defended tragi-comedy because it is nearer to the appearance of life.

Johnson's *Dictionary*, an original work of great scholarship, has a critical purpose too. In it, he defined a critic as "a man skilled in the art of judging literature, a man able to distinguish the faults and beauties of writing". His *Lives of the Poets* is a collection of fifty two literary biographies. It is the "richest, most beautiful and indeed most perfect production of Johnson's pen".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Who were the first regular critics of England?

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Q 13: Name a few major critics of England.

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Q 14: Who has written *An Apology for Poetry*? What does it deal with?

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

From the above discussions, it can be summed up that literary criticism is undoubtedly a basic parameter to measure the qualities of a literary text. It is true that reading, researching and writing different works of literary criticism will help the common readers to make a better sense of a particular work, form sensible judgments about literature, and determine on an individual level whether a literary piece of work is worth-reading or not. The primary duty of a literary critic is to help the readers in making a standard judgement and thereby expand the mental horizon infinitely. Critics like Sidney, Johnson, and Dryden were of course the guiding light and will be helping the future generations to come in finding out the good taste in the world of literature. A sensible literary critic knows the art of communication with the reader. A constructive criticism can definitely guide us away from bad practices directing towards good ones. A critic's general motive, in most of the cases, is the enrichment of the reader's understanding of a literary work. In a nutshell, the study of literary criticism helps in appreciating the high standards of literature.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Literary criticism is a term which cannot be defined easily. It is the study, evaluation and interpretation of literature. In a narrower sense, it as an attempt to determine the goodness or bad qualities of literary activities.

Ans to Q No 2: Marxism, Feminism, Post-colonialism, Structuralism, etc.

Ans to Q No 3: Some of the types of literary criticism are: Comparative, Biographical, Pragmatic, Feminist, Expressive, Ethical, Mimetic, Historical, etc.

Ans to Q No 4: Two of the Greek critics are Aristotle and Plato.

Ans to Q No 5: *Poetics* is the earliest work of Aristotle on dramatic theory.

Ans to Q No 6: According to Aristotle, "Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude".

Ans to Q No 7: Plato.

Ans to Q No 8: The Principle of Form, The Principle of Authority, The Principle of Skill, The Principle of Inspiration and The Principle of Contemplation.

Ans to Q No 9: Some great Roman writers are— Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertious, Ovid and Quintilian.

Ans to Q No 10: Horace is one of the prominent literary critics of Rome.

He formulated his critical theory in "Ars Poetica" known as "Art of Poetry". He followed the ancient classical line. He advised the would-be writers to follow Greek models faithfully and rigorously:

Be Homer's works your study and delight
Read them by day, and meditate by night

Ans to Q No 11: Quintilian was a famous Roman critic. He was influenced by Greek and Roman classicists—Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Pinder, Plato and Aristotle among the Greek classicists and Virgil and Horace among the Romans.

Ans to Q No 12: The first regular critics of England were the three Cambridge friends Sir John Cheke, Roger Ascham and Thomas Wilson.

Ans to Q No 13: Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Johnson, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, etc.

Ans to Q No 14: Sir Philip Sidney has written *An Apology for Poetry* in 1580. It was occasioned by the publication of Stephen Gosson's treatise *The Scholl of Abuse* (1579). It is a rare and a valuable document of criticism which seems to be a ruthless attack on poetry. With proper logic, Sidney defended poetry and tried to explain its importance to a perplexed and confused age.



1.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Define literary criticism. Briefly discuss the importance of literary criticism.

Q 2: How did the Roman criticis provide their critical insights?

Q 3: How did the English literary critics show their potentialities in the field of criticism?

Q 4: Discuss the growth and development of literary criticism.

Q 5: Make a comparative study between English and Greek literary criticism.

Q 6: Mark the importance of literary criticism at the present time.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 2 : ARISTOTLE : *POETICS* I

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Greek Criticism: A Brief History

2.4 Aristotle: The Critic

2.5 Let us Sum up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.8 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- make a brief survey of Greek Criticism
- discuss the life and works of the critic, Aristotle
- discuss the importance of Aristotle in the context of Western philosophy and criticism

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of this block. It deals with one of the most prominent Greek critics, namely, Aristotle. It will introduce you to the main facets of Greek Criticism through Aristotle's *Poetics*— an important contribution to the intellectual world. Here, we shall mainly reflect on the history of Greek Criticism and get acquainted with some of its significant figures. It must interest you to know that Aristotle mastered every field of learning known to the Greeks, as demonstrated by his treatises, which cover subjects ranging from biology to public speaking and literary criticism. His *Poetics* is a pioneering work that identifies the criteria and establishes the standards for excellence in literature, particularly tragic drama.

2.3 GREEK CRITICISM : A BRIEF HISTORY

In Europe the art of criticism is stated to have begun around the 5th century BC. In Athens of that time, following a sudden intellectual awakening, many scholars and learned men started the discussion on different aspects of religion, philosophy, morality, politics, art and literature. This was also the period of learned men like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates and Aristophanes. The first among them to take note of the critical considerations of literature and to apply it was Aristophanes. In his comedy *The Frogs*, he discussed the relative merits of the works of the dramatists 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.

Thus, we may assume that the first regular criticism of the Western world begins with Aristophanes. The comparative study of Aeschylus and Euripides presupposes Aristophanes' familiarity with some kind of great literatures prior to them. Russell and Winterbottom [in the book *Classical Literary Criticism]* have stated, Aristophanes in his *The Frogs* made Euripides claim that a poet was to be admired "for his expertise and his sound advice and because we improve by our teachings/mankind's civic sense and their natures too", and Aeschylus, that "the poets alone are the teachers of youth". So, 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 was a time when books were rare and expensive. But, Aristophanes' familiarity with the former poets and their works was a product not of reading but of usually hearing the reading of those texts at different festivals. In such festivals comedy, tragedy and epics were also produced, and they attracted a larger number of audiences. It is important to note that in Classical Greece, only a minority could study literature, but it is interesting also to note that tragedy and epics, which were also considered poetic genres, could easily reach out to a larger section of people of that society.

Thus, we may argue that the main context for classical Greek

criticism can be traced in the discussions of the poet and poetry—which in the Greek sense meant tragedy, comedy and epic. However, any discussion of the history of criticism usually starts with the classical critics because of their influence on the development of criticism in subsequent times. The most important and influential classical critics of Western culture are Plato and Aristotle, followed roughly by Horace. However, the 20th century interest in Rhetoric has also brought in the other critics like Gorgias, Quintilian, and several others into the canon of Classical Criticism.

The classical Greek thinkers present a wide range of opinions about literature and its development over a millennium from around the 5th Century BC– the two most significant and interrelated issues of their time being ***Mimesis*** and ***Didacticism***. It was because the moral effect of poetry, along with the idea of the poet, was becoming even more important a critical preoccupation of both Plato and Aristotle. Both of them almost agreed that 'mimesis' is a key feature of poetry, but they evaluated it quite differently. Plato along with his mentor Socrates, often refused to accept poetry's 'imitation of reality' on the grounds that it cannot depict truth and teach morality, and that it is irrational and based on inspiration, not 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*, he 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.



LET US KNOW

Mimesis : In classical Greece, mimesis was an idea that governed the creation of works of art, in particular, with correspondence to the physical world understood as a model for beauty, truth, and the good.

Didacticism : It is a philosophy that emphasises instructional and informative qualities in literature and other types of art.

Transcendent : going beyond normal or physical human experience.

Aristotle, on the other hand reacts firmly to Plato's views on imitation as 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 considers 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 the 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 a random sequence of incidents but a unified whole with a beginning, a middle and an end, and structured by logical necessity. Unlike history, which is built on accidental details, poetry rises above the description of particulars to represent universal truths about nature. This new view of imitation springs from Aristotle's belief that human beings have a natural instinct for imitation, which is generally pleasurable and connected with learning.

Later developments in Classical Criticism developed from the groundbreaking works of the Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. For

example, Horace follows Aristotle while asserting that poets can and must imitate nature, and adds that it is also important for young poets to imitate great writers.

So, you have found that poetic imitation or representation has been at the core of classical Greek Criticism. It is against such a background, that our study of Aristotle's *Poetics* in this unit should be meaningful.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you know about Aristotle's *Poetics*?

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Q 2: Mention the significance of Aristophanes in the context of Greek Criticism.

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Q 3: What did Aristophanes have to say about the 'Poet'?

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Q 4: Why did Plato not accept poetry's imitation of reality?

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.....

Q 5: How is Aristotle different from Plato in relation to 'Imitation'?

.....

.....

2.4 ARISTOTLE: THE CRITIC

Aristotle (384–322 BC) was born in the small Greek town of Stagirus (now Stagira). His father, Nicomachus, spent some time serving as personal physician to Amyntas II, King of Macedonia, at the kingdom's capital of Pella. Aristotle's parents died when he was just a boy. Subsequently, he was brought up by other family members in the town of Atarneus in Asia Minor. In his late teens, Aristotle moved to Athens and

enrolled in Plato's famous Academy to study philosophy, mathematics, and the sciences. There he remained until Plato's death 20 years later. Aristotle and some of his friends soon settled in Atarneus, which was ruled by another Academy alumnus, Hermias, whose niece Pythias, Aristotle had married.

Around 343 B.C., Aristotle was invited by Philip of Macedonia, son of Amyntas II, to come to Pella and tutor his 13-year-old son, the future King Alexander the Great. The tutorship lasted only three years, for the young man was obliged to take a more active role in Macedonian affairs; he would become one of the most brilliant military leaders of all time. In 335 B.C., Aristotle returned to Athens to establish his own institution of higher learning, the Lyceum, where he taught and wrote. His surviving works, or treatises, were probably lecture notes or textbooks for his classes. Upon Alexander's death in 323 B.C., anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens turned violent, and Aristotle was forced to flee for his own safety.

He and his family then sought refuge at Chalcis, where he died shortly thereafter. Aristotle mastered every field of learning known to the Greeks, as demonstrated by his treatises, which cover subjects ranging from biology to public speaking and literary criticism. Indeed, he assumed the task of identifying the distinct characteristics of each of the scholarly disciplines. Because human beings are the only animals that possess the faculty of reason, Aristotle believed that to behave as a human being is to behave rationally. Furthermore, he defined three areas that comprise all possible human knowledge and activity in which the power of reason is expressed: theoretical, productive, and practical. Among them, theoretical is the purest form of rational knowledge, since it seeks truth only for its own sake. The person who pursues theoretical knowledge has no ulterior motive beyond understanding and insight. Examples of the theoretical areas of learning are natural sciences such as physics (bodies at rest and in motion), abstract mathematics, and metaphysics (the nature of being and reality). The productive sciences, such as the arts, use reason for a specific purpose: to generate an end product. Practical sciences employ rational abilities to organise life within society,

such as in the practices of ethics and politics. Living an honourable and productive life is the goal of the practical sciences.

Aristotle's *Physics* is a logical and methodical inquiry into such questions as how things come into being and how they are changed, and the difference between the fundamental nature of a thing and its incidental characteristics. In his *Metaphysics,* Aristotle states that all people, by their very nature, desire knowledge, and that is why, we value our senses so highly and our eyesight the most. Besides, they help us gather the information we desire most. The knowledge Aristotle seeks in this treatise is the very nature of being, the basic and eternal principles of reality itself. Because God is depicted as the ***quintessential*** eternal and unchanging being and the primary cause of all that is, *Metaphysics* is also read as a theological tract.



Quintessential :
representing the perfect or most typical example.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* (named for Aristotle's son, who edited it after his death), he states that "Every art of applied science and every systematic investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim at some good; the good, therefore, has been well defined as that at which all things aim." Happiness is the "good" toward which human activity aims, and people cannot be happy unless they live and act in a virtuous manner. Moral behaviour is to be learnt and becomes habitual as it is practised, according to Aristotle. However, actions are to be considered virtuous only if they are intentional and take place within the context of human society. Ultimately, Aristotle conceded that ethics was an imprecise science. In the category of the practical sciences, Aristotle wrote on such topics as ethics, politics, and rhetoric. In *Rhetoric* he offers, after careful observation of human behaviour, a practical psychology for teaching the art of persuasive public speaking. The practical analysis of thought and conduct contained in these books influenced Latin rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian and thereafter swayed thinkers in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and beyond.

Aristotle's *Politics* contains a discussion of the role of the individual in the government of the city-state. He describes humans as political and social beings; some individuals are meant to lead, and others must be



Condoned : to accept or forgive (an offence or wrongdoing).

led. He ***condoned*** slavery as a natural state of affairs because he believed that those who became slaves were not capable of rational thought; otherwise, they would be rulers instead of servants. This, of course, is a controversial argument.

Aristotle was one of the great philosophers, but not all of his ideas have borne the tests of time and scrutiny. *Poetics* is obviously an exception.



LET US KNOW

Plato's Academy: It was founded by Plato probably in 387 BC in Athens. Aristotle studied there for twenty years before founding his own school, the Lyceum. The Academy persisted throughout the Hellenistic period as a sceptical school, until coming to an end after the death of Philo of Larissa in 83 BC.

Lyceum: The Lyceum was a gymnasium and public meeting place in Classical Athens. It was named after the god of the grove that housed the Lyceum, Apollo Lyceus (Apollo as 'wolf-god'). Though best-known for its connection with Aristotle and the 'peripatetic school' he led there, the Lyceum was in existence long before Aristotle's formal founding of the same in 334 or 335 BC.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is Aristotle's expertise as a scholar critic?

.....

.....

Q 7: Which are the three areas in which the 'power of reason' is expressed, according to Aristotle?

.....

.....



2.5 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the unit, you have learnt that Aristotle is one of the greatest exponents of Classical Greek philosophy. Besides, you have gained a fair idea about classical Greek criticism. You are now aware that the classical Greek thinkers present a wide range of opinions about literature and its development over a millennium from around the 5th Century BC and the two most significant and interrelated issues of their time are Mimesis and Didacticism. We have discussed in detail the life and works of Aristotle in this unit and you must have realised how significant are his contributions to Greek criticism. In the next unit, we shall deal chiefly with Aristotle's *Poetics* in details.



2.6 FURTHER READING

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

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Aristotle's *Poetics* is an important contribution to the intellectual world. Poetics is believed to be a set of incomplete notes, and scholars speculate that we have discovered only half of the original text and that the other half, probably dealing with comedy, has been lost.

Ans to Q No 2: Aristophanes was perhaps the first to apply his mind to critical considerations of literature. In his comedy *The Frogs*, he discussed the relative merits of the works of the dramatists 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.

Ans to Q No 3: Aristophanes in his *The Frogs* made Euripides claim that a poet was to be admired "for his expertise and his sound advice and because we improve by our teachings/mankind's civic sense and their natures too", and Aeschylus, that "the poets alone are the teachers of youth". So, the view of the poet as the instructor raised a whole lot of debate.

Ans to Q No 4: Plato often refused to accept poetry's "imitation of reality" on the grounds that it cannot depict truth and teach morality, and that it is irrational and based on inspiration, not actual knowledge. Plato, who was an idealist philosopher, located reality in a transcendent world of eternal Forms or Ideas that only 'reason' can properly apprehend.

Ans to Q No 5: Unlike Plato, 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.

Ans to Q No 6: Aristotle mastered every field of learning known to the Greeks, as demonstrated by his treatises, which cover subjects ranging from biology to public speaking and literary criticism. He assumed the task of identifying the distinguishing characteristics of each of the scholarly disciplines.

Ans to Q No 7: Aristotle defined three areas that comprise all possible human knowledge and activity in which the 'power of reason' is best expressed: theoretical, productive, and practical. Among them, theoretical is the purest form of rational knowledge, since it seeks truth only for its own sake.



2.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss some of the important aspects of classical Greek criticism with reference to Plato and Aristotle.

Q 2: Why, according to you, did critical enquiry become the main criterion to judge literature in Classical Greece?

Q 3: What do you mean by the idea of 'imitation' or poetic representation in the context of Greek criticism? Do you think that it is at the core of Greek Criticism?

Q 4: What was Aristotle's view on 'mimesis'? How did it differ from Plato's views? Discuss.

Q 5: Write short notes on :

a) Aristophanes

b) *Nicomachean Ethics*

*** ***** ***

UNIT 3 : ARISTOTLE : *POETICS* II

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Aristotle's *Poetics*

3.4 Aristotle as a Critic

3.5 Let us Sum up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.8 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify Aristotle's *Poetics* as a foundational text of Classical Criticism
- make a list of the important concepts in Aristotle's *Poetics*
- discuss the importance of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the context of Western philosophy and criticism

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is a continuation of the previous unit. Here we shall deal with Aristotle's *Poetics* which is believed to be a set of incomplete notes, and scholars speculate that we have discovered only half of the original text and that the other half probably dealing with comedy, has been lost. Perhaps you know that Aristotle (384-322 BC) is an important figure in Western Philosophy. He was the disciple of Plato. But unlike Plato, who used the dialogic mode to discuss philosophical ideas, Aristotle, relied more on categorisation and logical differentiation as he emphasised the distinctive qualities of a given object of study, systematically describing their specific features and construction. Unlike Plato and other Western thinkers who often commented on literary works, Aristotle inaugurated a systematic and distinctive discipline of literary criticism with his seminal work *Poetics.* This

unit will help you consider the importance of *Poetics* in shaping important discussions of genre, style, structure, and form of literature in subsequent times.

3.3 ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

Poetics is not more than 50 pages, containing 26 small chapters. We can assume that it is a collection of the lectures that Aristotle delivered to his pupils. It is also believed that there is a second part which is lost. If we have a look at the division of the chapters the first four chapters are devoted to poetry, the fifth chapter to comedy, epic and tragedy, the next fourteen chapters exclusively to tragedy, the next three to poetic diction, the last four chapters to epic poetry and its comparison to tragedy.

According to Aristotle, drama is superior to epic poetry because it is enhanced by song and spectacle, the plot is more unified, and it achieves the artistic goal in a shorter period of time because the episodes are short. In an epic poem, the episodes are longer, even if there is not much to the story. As an example, he says, Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey,* which is composed of over 12,000 lines, can be summed up as follows:

"A certain man has been away from home for many years, kept that way by [sea god] Poseidon, and he ends up being alone. Meanwhile, his affairs at home are in such a state that his wife's suitors are squandering his property and are plotting against his son. Tempest-tossed, he arrives home; he reveals himself to some; he attacks and destroys his enemies and is saved. That is the essence of the *Odyssey;* the rest is made up of episodes."

Poetics instructs its readers that the best tragedies feature a protagonist who possesses virtue and is prosperous. The transformation of his good fortune to misfortune is caused not by his wickedness or indulgence in some vile practice, but by hamartia: "an error from ignorance or bad judgment or some other such cause." The finest plots present events that follow one another of necessity as a matter of cause and effect. The fear and pity aroused in the audience should not be achieved by spectacle, Aristotle says, but rather by the structure of the events themselves, as was



Contrivances : a clever device or scheme, deliberately created rather than arising naturally.

practised by the better writers of tragedy such as Sophocles. Aristotle criticises the use of artificial dramatic devices. For instance, scenes of recognition between long-lost loved ones should occur as a consequence of events, he says, not through ***contrivances*** such as signs from the heavens, the detection of physical scars, or the recollection of keepsakes. He particularly disliked the practice of Deus ex Machina ("god from the machine"), a device used frequently in the plays of Euripides.

You should note that *Poetics* is important for Aristotle's consideration of 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. Then Aristotle describes how comedy, tragedy and epic poetry are born. Comedy became the representation of people who are rather inferior, tragedy of serious people, and epic poetry following tragedy in so far as it is a representation of serious people which uses speech in verse. Subsequently, Aristotle makes a comparative analysis between poetry and history. He reiterates that poetry is more philosophical than history.

Aristotle 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." According to him, tragedy has six parts—plot (mythos), characters (ethos), diction (lexis), reasoning (dianoia), spectacle (opsis), and song (melos). Similarly, he discusses that 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. While satire ridicules personalities, comedy ridicules general vices. He also states that 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.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle introduces such enduring concepts as unity of plot and action; catharsis, or a cleansing of the audience's emotions; and Hubris, arrogance that leads to a hero's downfall, which is itself an example

of **Hamartia**, a tragic flaw or ***catastrophic*** misjudgement. Human beings are possessed of a natural ability to imitate, Aristotle says, and enjoy both viewing and producing imitative works of art. The basic ingredients of tragedy are, in order of importance, plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle; and each element plays a part in artistic imitation.

Central to Aristotle's discussions in *Poetics* is the concept of representation ***(Mimesis)***, and he opines that the best plots should have ***verisimilitude***, which means they must be plausible. He also stresses a logically connected order—an appropriate starting point, elaboration, and a dramatic end or resolution. The best resolution is one that shows a reversal ***(Peripeteia)*** of position for the main character, as well as the character's recognition ***(Anagnorisis)*** of his or her fate. Aristotle feels that the characters in tragedy should come from high positions, otherwise their tragic circumstances would not be remarkable. He also prescribes that their fates be linked to their own error or **Hamartia,** rather than from some accident or wickedness. Aristotle concludes *Poetics* somewhat technically by classifying parts of speech in his discussion of diction, sketching solutions to problems of interpretation, and comparing the genres of tragedy and epic.

Poetics comes to an end with a citation of the relative importance of tragedy over other genres of poetry mainly the epic. Though rooted in the literature of his own time and focused especially on a form of drama quite different from ours, *Poetics* has continued to powerfully influence criticism. Only a fragment of *Poetics* remains for contemporary readers to enjoy. It has been accepted unanimously that since the Renaissance, the *Poetics* has been the foundation of both literary theory and 'practical' criticism, and it has been translated and retranslated, interpreted and applied so many times.



Catastrophic :
a sudden event causing great damage or suffering.

Versimilitude :
appearance of being true or real.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is drama superior to epic, according to Aristotle?

.....

.....

Q 2: How does Aristotle define tragedy in his *Poetics*?

.....

.....

Q 3: Name the concepts that Aristotle introduced with regard to tragedy?

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.....

Q 4: How does Aristotle divide his discussions of poetic art in his *Poetics*?

.....

.....

3.4 ARISTOTLE AS A CRITIC

Aristotle's intellectual achievement is very significant. 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 idea 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 in public affairs.



Reclusive : avoiding the company of other people.

Many Aristotelian scholars tend to state that only about a fifth of Aristotle's ***prodigious*** 150 speculated works survived and were transmitted, usually imperfectly through manuscript copies, during the Middle Ages. His treatises are often seen as obscure, as they were available only in libraries to be studied by other scholars, and not meant 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 shorthand 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.

It is believed that after his death, the Lyceum continued to perform its role in critical enquiry. In the century immediately after his death, Aristotle's works seem to have fallen out of circulation. But 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, the bulk of Aristotle's writings received extensive consideration in 'Byzantine' and Arabic Philosophy, where Aristotle was so prominent that he became known simply as "The First Teacher". Interest in Aristotle continued throughout the Renaissance in the form of 'Renaissance Aristotelianism'. However, the study of Aristotle has undergone several periods of relative neglect and interest. Today, philosophers of various schools continue to look to Aristotle for guidance and inspiration in many different areas.



Prodigious : remarkbly or impressively great in extent, size or degree.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Which are the achievements of Aristotle as a critic?

.....

.....

Q 6: Mention the important aspects of Aristotle's works?

.....

.....



3.5 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the various sections of this unit, you have learnt that Aristotle is one of the greatest exponents of Classical Greek philosophy. His *Poetics,* which mostly deals with poetry, can also be seen as an answer to Plato's criticism of representative art. In response to

Plato's idea that artistic representation of material objects are copies of copies and removed from reality, and hence imitation be discarded as a corrupting practice, Aristotle insists that imitation is natural to humans. Subsequently, in order to answer Plato's complaint that playwrights are only imitators of everyday life, Aristotle draws a contrast between poetry and history. Poetry is viewed by Aristotle to be more philosophical and important than history, for poetry speaks of the universal, history only the particular. The *Poetics* is famous for the definition of tragedy, which according to Aristotle, must contain episodes that arouse pity and fear so as to achieve 'catharsis', or "purification" of emotions. By catharsis, he perhaps meant that watching tragedy helps people to put their own sorrows and worries in perspective, because in it they observe how catastrophe can overtake anyone who is even their superior. Today much of Aristotle's works have survived as examples of his mastery over a number of important areas concerning human individuals in society.



3.6 FURTHER READING

1) Childs, Peter. (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Routledge.
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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Drama is superior to epic poetry because it is enhanced by song and spectacle, the plot is more unified, and it achieves the artistic goal in a shorter period of time because the episodes are short. In an epic poem, the episodes are longer, even if there is not much to the story.

Ans to Q No 2: Aristotle defines tragedy as the 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.

Ans to Q No 3: In *Poetics*, Aristotle introduces concepts like unity of plot and action; catharsis- a cleansing of the audience's emotions; and Hubris- arrogance that leads to a hero's downfall, which is itself an example of Hamartia- a tragic flaw or catastrophic misjudgement.

Ans to Q No 4: Aristotle devotes the first four chapters to poetry, the fifth chapter to comedy, epic and tragedy, the next fourteen chapters exclusively to tragedy, the next three to poetic diction, the last four chapters to epic poetry and its comparison to tragedy.

Ans to Q No 5: Aristotle was the first genuine scientist in history. He was the first author to have observed natural phenomena, and he was the first philosopher to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between observation and theory in scientific method. He was also the first great teacher to organise his lectures into courses.

Ans to Q No 6: His treatises are often seen as obscure, because they were available only in libraries to be studied by other scholars. They were not to be copied for reading by general readers. They were study guides rather than polished works mainly because of the abrupt transitions, frequent repetitions, and shorthand references to other works or writers. Most of them are also particularly difficult to date as they were probably composed and revised over an extended period.



3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Aristotle view Poetry in his *Poetics*? Discuss in detail.

Q 2: Discuss the important concepts related to tragedy that Aristotle develops in his *Poetics.*

Q 3: Assess the importance of Aristotle as one of the most important critics of classical Greek tradition.

Q 4: What are the main issues dealt by Aristotle in his *Poetics*? Discuss in some detail.

Q 5: Why did Plato opine that poets should be banished from the Ideal society?

Q 6: How does Aristotle react to Plato's idea of poetry? Discuss in detail.

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UNIT 4: HORACE: “ARS POETICA”

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Horace in the Context of Classical Roman Criticism

4.4 Horace: The Critic

4.5 Horace’s “Ars Poetica”

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.9 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss briefly the life and works of the critic Horace
- explain the nuances of poetry as described by Horace
- discuss the importance of model-a stalwart before plunging into the craft of poetry all by oneself
- appreciate Horace’s “Ars Poetica” as a treatise on the craft of poetry writing.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The Roman poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus, popularly known by his English name Horace, is remembered today for his epistles (letters), odes and satires. His phenomenal work appeared around 15 BC that established him as a critic to the Latin literary world due to the reign of Augustus. Also an eminent poet, his critiques revolve mostly around the art of poetry and drama. “Ars Poetica” is such a critique in verse in the form of an informal letter to Lucius Calpurnius Piso (a prominent Roman senator) and his two sons, together known as the Pisos. The poem was initially conceived in dactylic hexameter, which later was translated into

prose for better understanding. According to M. C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers, "The poem takes the form of a letter of advice on the pursuit of literature; addressed to a father and two sons…It exercised a great influence in later ages on European literature, notably on French drama (Howatson and Chilvers 1993, 63).

4.3 HORACE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLASSICAL ROMAN CRITICISM

Horace's critical works seem to exercise its influence on the works of his almost contemporary masters such as Ovid and Propertius. Horace's epistolary style provided a model to both the writers to design their own verse letters. Ovid was influenced by Horace's hexameter style and tried to imitate his natural style. Horace's *Odes* were a league in themselves and therefore, not easily imitable. However, it is also believed that his lyrical style inspired the Greek poet Pindar. It is also said that a renewed interest in the satires of Lucilius may have been inspired by Horace's critique of his crude style.

Horace wrote the *Epodes* and the *Satires* both of which are believed to have been published in 30 B.C., after Marc Antony's defeat in Actium. The first three books of the *Odes* were composed within a course of ten years, and they were probably published in 23 BC. The first book of the *Epistles* was probably published in 20 BC. The book *Carmen Saeculare* was commissioned by Augustus, a long ode probably written in 17 BC, as a sign of continuing the favour of his Highness and patronage of this poet. There are mainly three literary essays, two books that form a major part of Book II of the *Epistles* and *Epistle to the Pisos* most popularly known as *Ars Poetica.* These works generally characterise the last years of the poet's life.

The *Odes* were much ahead of their time and did not find much favour in the Middle Ages, but an interest in them was revived during the Renaissance along with his *Ars Poetica* which was seen as a complete treatise or handbook on poetry and drama.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who commissioned the ode *Carmen Saeculare* and why?

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Q 2: What is the other name of *Ars Poetica*?

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Q 3: Who were the Pisos to whom *Ars Poetica* was addressed?

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4.4 HORACE : THE CRITIC

As a poet of Roman antiquity, all his published works survived. A lot of details regarding his personal life can be known from his biography written by Suetonius and his own testimony. It was Virgil and Varius Rufus who introduced Horace to Maecenas; the latter took Horace under his patronage in 38 BC. In 33 BC, he was given a beautiful villa in the Sabine hills beyond Trivoli. It is this sojourn that provided him with the much needed inspiration that go reflected in his poetry. Horace's position in the Roman literary canon is one of unrivalled superiority, because of his perfection of form as reflected in his poetry. It is a reflection of the kind of person he is: good-humoured, urbane, patient, and a keen observer of every good and beautiful thing in his country. In the *Odes,* he makes use of his subtle irony and humour. He is among the most quoted of Latin poets. The *Odes* were not much read during the Middle Ages due to their unconventional prematurity in style, but they were savoured during the Renaissance. They saw another revival in the 18th century when his philosophy held a special appeal to the advocates of the Enlightenment.

4.5 HORACE’S “ARS POETICA”

Horace’s letters were published in the form of two books—*Epistularum Liber Primus (First Book of Letters)* and *Epistularum Liber Secundus (Second Book of Letters).* The second book consists of three epistles, the third of which is treated as a separate work of art and not a part of the second book. “Ars Poetica” is a long poem by Horace which is actually a treatise on the art of poetry and drama. The poem was written in hexameter, in the form of a letter (Epistle) to Piso and his two sons and that is why it is also referred to as “Epistle to the Pisos”. It was first mentioned by the classical literary critic Quintilian in his renowned work *Institutio Oratorio* as *Ars Poetica* and since then it is known by this name. Although the treatise appears in verse, later translations have always been in prose.

The poem consists of 476 lines and does not adhere to the norms of a conventional theory. It has no clear framework of poetry or drama. Rather, it is a loosely structured poem written in good humour and intended for his friends who take an interest in literature and poetry. His approach to poetry is very practical—he sees it as a craft and less as an abstraction as a theory. He mixes a number of literary maxims that might confuse an ordinary reader. Although for his doctrines and precepts, Horace is indebted to his ancestors, especially Aristotle’s *Poetics* yet his stance is very different from that of his predecessors—Aristotle and Plato. He does not see the poet as a liar, unlike Plato, and holds the poet in high regard. Where Plato concentrated on the didactic angle of poetry and pressed that poetry should make better citizens, Aristotle focussed on the aesthetic angle and synchronised both the functions of poetry, stating: “a poet should instruct, or please or both.”

In *Ars Poetica,* Horace invites young poets to practise harmony and integrity. He also asks them to choose a good subject rather than a mundane one. To generate thoughts on a grand subject, the diction cannot be ordinary. The young poet must choose a meter and style that coordinates with his wise choice of subject or theme. He states that

Homer can be a very good model to fall back on.

Regarding dramatic art, Horace draws heavily from Aristotle and exercises his ideals under three divisions: plot, characterisation and style. Dramatic or narrative poetry requires special attention—like characterisation, unity in representation, length of a play, actors, the role of music and chorus, different forms of verse, a separate set of all these props for the satiric type of poetry and reference to Greek models. According to him, the plot can be drawn from familiar materials, such as Greek legends, but the young poet can exercise his originality even in such a case. And even if the poet chooses to introduce a new theme, he can still remain consistent throughout.

Horace opines that it is very important to maintain consistency in the chain of events. The structure of the story should be indivisible, that is, the middle should cohere with the beginning and the conclusion must necessarily follow after the middle. Even the behavioural traits of the characters must cohere with their respective virtues or vices. He illustrates with the example of Achilles who must be spirited, ruthless and fierce; Medea must be defiant and untamed; Orestes must be forlorn and sad and so on.

Horace advises the sons of Piso to give a fitting representation to the manners of every age they attempt to show on stage. He stresses a judicious representation of every age to hold the interest of the audience till the end. He further advises that those incidents that are unacceptable to our eyes should best be avoided on stage. Such incidents could be narrated or reported rather than enacted.

Horace maintains a special censure for the use of Deus ex machina or the intervention of gods in a play. While discussing the length of a play, Horace maintains that a play should have five acts. However, gods should not be allowed to intervene in human actions on stage as far as possible. In only rare and necessary cases, Deus ex Machina should be allowed.

Horace attaches a special and significant function to the Chorus. It should be put into exercise in parts that cannot be enacted through action. It should not be allowed tossing between the scenes. In fact, the

Chorus should be an integral part of the play and for no reason should it hang loosely outside the scheme of themes that constitutes the play. Horace opines that not more than three characters must be allowed to speak in a scene.

According to Horace, the ‘iambic meter’ is the most suitable for both tragedy and comedy. He suggests this because, according to him, the iamb is the closest to the spoken speech and the second syllable is accented so that the audience could hear the words clearly and loudly.

Finally, speech in drama should observe propriety and suit the character, its age, sex, class, station in life and its temperament. A god will obviously speak differently from a mortal, a man from a woman, an old man from a youth, a merchant from a peasant, a morose person from a happy one.

According to the epistle, a poet has to qualify as man with a fair knowledge of common sense and character, with high regards for lofty ideals, and with a sense of intellectual superiority. The poet must nurture the love for history and the great objective or purpose of poetry. The poet, above everything, must be willing to listen to criticism with impartiality and an eagerness to improvise his art.

The following is a brief discussion of some of the major concepts discussed by Horace in the epistle :

- There should be unity of plot or theme in the poem. It should also be simple.
- The poet must not be tempted to by any extremes; that is, the poet must not be overwhelmed at any given point.
- A poet must be aware of one’s own capability as a writer while actually writing a piece of work.
- Before inventing or coining new words, the poet must be aware that even coinages are subject to change and they are never static.
- Horace discusses the different forms of poetry like epic, elegy, dramatic and lyric. And accordingly, the poet has to adopt the respective styles of each different form.

- There must be coherence between the words or diction as a whole and the actor who expresses or voices them.
- A poet must follow one's masters and the traditions that are already in practice. There cannot be a better Muse than Homer, according to Horace.
- A poet must also keep in mind the age of each character he designs and accordingly compose words for them.
- The role of the Chorus, according to Horace, is something that needs serious attention.
- The variation of music according to the situation and fortune of the actor is another important area for a poet to work on.
- According to Horace, satiric drama originated from tragedy and cannot be considered as similar to comedy and therefore, has its separate set of rules and restraints.
- With regards to the two forms of verse meter—the iambic and the spondaic, the Greek model is to be followed rather than that of the Roman poets.
- Horace also discusses the origin of tragedy and comedy. According to him, the Latin poets deserve some praise but their work was also not free from flaws since they were carelessly and slovenly composed.
- Just because a poet is good, one cannot disregard the rules of poetry. The critic deserves a special place in literature.
- Before writing anything, one must be well read. In other words, knowledge is the foundation of all good poetry.
- The purpose of a poet is two-fold—to instruct and to delight.
- It is not possible to attain perfection in poetry, but according to Horace, a poet's sincerity is noticeable in his piece of work, in the care he takes and the pain he undergoes in the process of creation.
- According to Horace, mediocrity in poetry is inexcusable. That is why, he warns the poet before the poet publishes his work.
- Horace also discusses the origins and offices of poetry in earlier times.
- There must be ingenuity in the genius of a poet but if one stops

practicing, one's genius will be of no use.

- The poets, according to Horace, must not be carried away by the words of flatterers. Similarly, a good poet is always open to constructive criticism. Here, he cites the example of Quintilius who would tell unpleasant truths about one's work.
- A poet must be controlled lest he turn into a madman, according to Horace. He gives the example of Empedocles here.

The first English translation of *Ars Poetica* was done by Thomas Drant in 1566. It was translated later by Ben Jonson which was published posthumously in 1640. There are some Latin phrases in *Ars Poetica* that stand popular even today in the field of literary criticism:

- **Ab ovo :** literally means "since the egg" or "since the beginning" referring to Leda's egg from which Helen of Troy was hatched.
- **Bis repetita placent :** meaning, "the things that are repeated again and again are pleasant".
- **Media res :** this phrase means, "in the middle of something" describing a popular narrative technique that frequently appeared in ancient epics but also is in use today. In this technique the narrative starts in the middle of the tale and the characters, plots and conflicts open up or are introduced through a series of flashbacks or by characters referring to past events and other characters.
- **Bonus dormitat Homerus :** this literally means "sometimes even the good Homer nods off". This indicates that even a good poet can make mistakes in long works like the epic. Works like *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, according to Horace, is not without faults and therefore, even Homer could not escape such literary lapses.
- **Ut pictura poesis :** literally means "as in painting so is poetry". By this phrase, Horace meant that poetry requires the same amount of careful perusal and interpretation as painting.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: When and by whom was the first English translation of *Ars Poetica* attempted?

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Q 5: Who, according to Horace, was known for telling unpleasant truths to his friends?

.....

.....

Q 6: How many lines does *Ars Poetica* consist of?

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.....



4.6 LET US SUM UP

After you have read the unit, you have become familiar with Horace's works, more specifically his "Ars Poetica". It must be noted how he carried out the progress of drama from the "uncultivated, crude" form in Greece to a more refined one in the days of great masters like Aeschylus. Aeschylus gave drama a finer touch and delivered it from its uncultivated, raw form. Horace further accentuated the dramatic art by discussing in *Ars Poetica* different aspects like structure, style, speech, theme and language, characterisation, propriety, role of chorus, length of the play and number of actors in a scene.



4.7 FURTHER READING

1) Brink, C.O. (1971). *Horace on Poetry: The 'Ars Poetica'.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2) Howatson, M.C. & Ian Chilvers. (2010).*The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature.* Oxford: OUP.

3) Leitch, Vincent B. et al. (Eds). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* New York: W.W. Norton and Co.

4) BLowrie, Michele. (2009). *Horace: Odes and Epodes.* Oxford: OUP.



4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The book *Carmen Saeculare* was commissioned by Augustus, a long ode probably written in 17 BC, as a sign of continuing his highness's favour and patronage on this poet.

Ans to Q No 2: *Epistle to the Pisos.*

Ans to Q No 3: Horace's *Ars Poetica* was originally an epistle or a letter to Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who was a prominent Roman senator, and his two sons. Lucius Calpurnius Piso and his two sons were together known as the Pisos.

Ans to Q No 4: The first English translation of *Ars Poetica* was done by Thomas Drant in 1566.

Ans to Q No 5: Quintilius was known for telling unpleasant truths to his friends.

Ans to Q No 6: *Ars Poetica* consists of 476 lines.



4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss some of the major concerns of Horace regarding poetry as expressed in his *Ars Poetica.*

Q 2: Comment on the particular emphasis on decorum in poetry as articulated by Horace in *Ars Poetica.*

Q 3: Discuss Horace's emphasis on diction in poetry.

Q 4: Write briefly on the importance of Horace's *Odes*.

Q 5: State briefly Horace's views on the following :

a) Chorus

b) Meter

c) Deus ex Machina

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UNIT 5: LONGINUS: *ON THE SUBLIME*

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Roman Classicism: A Brief History

5.4 Longinus: The Critic

5.5 Longinus' *On the Sublime*

5.6 Longinus as a Critic

5.7 Let us Sum up

5.8 Further Reading

5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.10 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- make a brief survey of Roman Classicism
- identify Longinus as an important critic of antiquity
- discuss *On the Sublime* as a foundational text of Roman classical criticism
- explain the concepts and issues implicit in the text
- evaluate the contributions of Longinus in terms of the 'Sublime'

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth unit of this block which introduces you to yet another most important critical essay of classical literary criticism—*On the Sublime* written by Longinus. Also known as "the Golden Treatise" this work ranks only slightly less important than Aristotle's *Poetics* in the field of literary criticism and the history of aesthetics. *On the Sublime* is also one of the earliest manuals on "how to write", and it is believed that nearly one third of the original document is missing. Longinus defines the sublime as "an image reflected from the inward greatness of the soul."

This quality, also translated as “height,” distinguishes the greatest writing and explains the impact that the most profound poetry has upon the readers. *On the Sublime* is fragmentary in nature because there are many frequent and extensive gaps in the text. Since the 18th century, the ancient text *On the Sublime* has maintained a 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.

5.3 ROMAN CLASSICISM: A BRIEF HISTORY

In the previous unit, you have read briefly about classical Roman Criticism. Around the 1st century BC when the age of Plato and Aristotle was almost 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 activities 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 is a continuation of Greek thought, ideas and values. Yet the Romans managed to preserve something of their own identity. As we have already noted in the previous unit, the Roman tradition in literary criticism began with Horace who had been both a critic and a creative writer.

After the period of the early Roman Empire, two broad intellectual currents emerged during the first four centuries, viz., the Second Sophistic (27 BC-AD 410) and Neo-Platonism. The Second Sophistic was named after a new generation of ***rhetoricians*** who took for their model the language and style of classical Athens. In this period, speakers focused on style and delivery and rhetorical ornamentation rather than everyday life and the actual affairs of the state. The focus was on imitation of earlier models, especially those of fourth century Athens. Hence, the art of rhetoric lost its public role because of its focus on formalisation of



Rhetorician: One who studies the technique and rules for using language effectively.

rules for literary composition. Longinus's *On the Sublime* is the most influential rhetorical text produced during the period of Second Sophistic. This treatise was originally written in Greek entitled, *Peri Hupsous*. It has exerted a powerful influence on literary criticism and critics of the modern period who are fascinated by his treatment of the 'sublime' as a quality of the soul or spirit rather than mere technique. As a critical piece of work, it remains ***unsurpassed*** for its sheer originality and power.



Unsurpassed : better or greater than any other, unmatched, unparalleled.

The philosophy of Neo-Platonism, on the other hand was developed by Plotinus. The Neo-Platonists preferred allegorical and symbolic modes of interpretation, opening the way for Christian medieval conceptions of allegory and discourse. Along with Plotinus, the other exponents of the trend were Macrobius and Boethius. Like the rhetoricians of the Second Sophistic, the Neo-Platonists had great reverence for the classical texts.

So, the study of the Roman tradition of classical criticism has to be studied keeping the above mentioned thinkers and critical issues propounded by them in mind. You will do well by reading any good book on classical literary criticism in this regard.



LET US KNOW

It is to be noted that in modern times, the concept of the Sublime owes its resurgence to a translation in 1674 by Nicolas Boileau, the most important figure of French neo-classicism. The Sublime became an important element in the broad Romantic reaction in Europe against Neoclassicism, as well as in the newly rising domain of aesthetics in the work of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what way is the Roman Classical tradition a continuation of Greek thought?

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Q 2: Discuss Horace's contributions to Roman Classicism.

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Q 3: How is *On the Sublime* connected to the second Sophistic period?

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5.4 LONGINUS: THE CRITIC

Longinus, sometimes referred to as Pseudo-Longinus (because his real name is unknown), was a Greek teacher of rhetoric or a critic who may have lived in the 1st or 3rd century AD. Much remain unknown about Longinus' early life. His writings describe early travels with his parents, which to him enlarged his mind and diversified his experience. He studied humanities and philosophy and was well acquainted with the genius and spirit of Greek literature. Eventually, he established residence in Athens, a seat of learning in the world of ancient Greece. One tradition identifies him with the third-century Cassius Longinus, described in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* who was hired by Queen Zenobia to educate her children. When she was defeated by Emperor Aurelian, she and Longinus fled but were captured, and Longinus was executed.

For centuries this commonly held but possibly inaccurate belief had casted a heroic glow on the man otherwise established as an important literary critic. The majority of scholars place him in the first century, but most modern researchers recognise that it is now next to impossible to identify the real man. If he indeed lived in the first century, Longinus would have been contemporary with Dionysius of Halicarnassus, another critic of the Augustan age. The early biographer Eunapius described Longinus as "a living library and a walking university."

It is believed that to Longinus's credit he wrote several texts, the majority which were based on philosophical and critical subjects. However,

he is best known for *Peri Hupsous* or *On the Sublime*. Besides, a general portrait of the author can be made from a reading of this work. 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 still remains. Most translators and commentators, then, have adhered to the convention of referring to the unknown author of *On the Sublime* simply as Longinus.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who is Longinus?

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Q 5: State the significance of Longinus's *On the Sublime*?

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5.5 LONGINUS' *ON THE SUBLIME*

Longinus's *On the Sublime* is a critical document of immense worth and significance, and the author takes **Sublimity** to be a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse. The original text of *On the Sublime* starts with an address to one Postumius Terentianus whose identity cannot be traced now. This address helps us to consider the context which necessitated a detail discussion on the idea of sublime by Longinus.

Longinus begins the treatise with an address to his friend Terentianus declaring his threefold purpose:

- To outline a method,
- To be useful to those who use the art of public speaking, and
- To provide a moral answer to the question: "How can we develop our natural capacities to some degree of greatness?"

Longinus takes the sublime to be a source of the distinction of the

greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame. Longinus also points out some defects of style, which he considers false sublime and 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'.



Bombastic *:* high sounding but with little meaning.

Pedantic *:* excessively concerned with minor details or rules.

Pompous *:* affectedly grand solemn, or self-important.

Restraint *:* a measure or condition that keeps someone or something under control.

Longinus then points out to the sources of the sublime which lie in the capacities of the speaker or writer. His scheme for recognising and cultivating the sublime involves a combination of nature and craft. He opines that the artist must possess the following qualities:

- The ability to perceive or entertain important thoughts ("high thinking");
- The ability to experience profound emotion ("high feeling"); and
- The command of imagery, diction, and composition that would enable the best expression of these combined thoughts and emotions.

The five most productive sources of the sublime can be explained as the following:

- **Grandeur of Thought :**

  Longinus opines that nobody can produce a work of pure sublime unless his thoughts are sublime. He refers to this faculty as "natural genius", affirming that it is a gift of nature rather than something acquired. Lofty and natural expression is possible only when there are noble and lofty thoughts. Elevating thoughts that remain as the "echo of great soul" are possible only when the author has the power of forming great conceptions. Hence, it is 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. This source actually reflects the classicism of Longinus.

- **Strong and Inspired Passion :**

  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.

- **Use of Figurative Language :**

  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 Expression :**

  The fourth 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 endures 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 lost.

- **Elevated Composition**

  The fifth source of the sublime is the dignity of composition which



Asyndeton *:* the absence of a conjunction between parts of a sentence.

Anaphora *:* the repitition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses.

Polysyndeton *:* the use of several conjunctions in close succession, especially where some could otherwise be omitted.

Hyperbaton *:* an inversion of the normal order of words, for the sake of emphasis.

Periphrasis *:* the use of indirect and circumlocolony speech or writing.

relates to the arrangement of words in a certain order and various elements of a particular passage into a unified whole. A harmonious composition alone sometimes makes up for the deficiency of the other elements. Words must be harmoniously arranged for both persuasion and pleasure.

Out of these five sources 'Use of Figurative Language', 'Nobility of Expression' and 'Elevated Composition'— are matters related to art that can be acquired by practice; but the first two sources are largely innate. Longinus' examples of sublime passages in poems range from the epics of Homer through the tragedies of Aeschylus to a love-lyric by Sappho; his examples in prose are taken from the writings of the philosopher Plato, the orator Demosthenes, and the historian Herodotus.

Longinus adds another factor to his notion of sublimity: the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole. Closely connected with this is the device of 'amplification' i.e., the accumulation of relevant details of a subject. Sublimity, he suggests, "lies in elevation" and is found "in a single idea", whereas amplification lies in quantity and ***redundancy***. Longinus suggests another way to attain sublimity: the path of imitation. The imitation of great historians and poets of the past can pave the way in achieving sublimity since these great ancient masters are the standards of excellence.



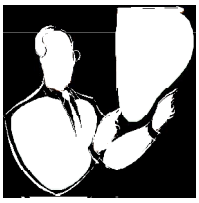
Redundancy*:* the state of being no longer needed or useful.
Homer*:* Ancient Greek epic poet.
Aeschylus*:* Greek tragedian.
Plato*:* Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician and student of Socrates.
Sappho*:* Ancient Greek lyric poet.
Demosthenes*:* prominent Greek statesman and orator of ancient Athens.
Herodotus*:* Ancient Greek historian.

The sublime was not simply the result of natural genius, but aptitude disciplined with knowledge. Longinus wrote that "greatness, when left to itself with no help from knowledge, is rather precarious—unsupported and unballasted…as greatness often needs the spur, so too it needs the rein." Good fortune, he concludes, must be tempered with good judgment. To support his points, Longinus draws examples of both successes and failures from the long tradition of Greek literature, including ***Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Xenophon, Demosthenes*** and ***Euripides***. The treatise comes to an end with a lament that materialism, moral decline, and greed are responsible for the decline in the quality of literature. This sentiment, it must be observed, was already a literary commonplace by the first century, also expressed by but not original to Plato. For Longinus,

the sublime was a moral as well as a stylistic ideal, and integrity was a prerequisite for great writing. Only "the man of dignity and integrity who does his duty in human society and understands his station as a citizen of the cosmos" was capable of high thought and feeling.

On the Sublime differs fundamentally from Platonic doctrine, which distrusted the irrational flights of poetic inspiration and banned poetry from the ideal republic. Longinus cleverly points out that Plato does not practice what he preaches. While citing Plato in an example of sublime writer, Longinus reinterprets the philosopher, highlighting the unconscious ways in which he too is "carried away by a sort of literary madness". *On the Sublime* also differs from Horace, who in the *Ars Poetica* stresses rhetorical strategies rather than the erratic genius of authors. Horace would have been comfortable with the last three sources of the sublime. In some respects, Longinus' treatise is more like Aristotle's *Poetics,* for they both take note of the formal techniques and psychological effects of literature, Aristotle famously focused on the emotional "catharsis" that an audience experiences during the performance of a tragedy. An important distinction between Aristotle and Longinus is that the latter considers the emotional psychology of the author as well as that of the audience.

Longinus's text appears not to have been read during ancient or medieval times perhaps because it was lost. It re-emerged as an important text first during the Renaissance, with the Italian translation of Niccolo da Falgano in 1560, but especially in Nicolas Boileau's 1674 French rendering. The latter made *On the Sublime* a central text in European criticism throughout the eighteenth century.



LET US KNOW

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. The extant text of *On the Sublime* derives from a tenth-century medieval manuscript that offers conflicting statements with regard to the identity of its creator.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: State the three purposes of the essay *On the Sublime*?

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Q 7: Which are the three main defects/faults of style, according to Longinus?

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Q 8: What are the sources of the Sublime, according to Longinus?

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Q 9: What do you mean by 'Grandeur of Thought'?

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Q10: Why are 'figures of language' so important for Longinus?

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Q11: Why is the name Nicolas Boileau important while discussing Longinus' *On the Sublime*?

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5.6 LONGINUS AS A CRITIC

Longinus' *On the Sublime* is the first and a unique treatise on style. Critic R. A. Scott James calls him the 'first romantic critic' because of his insistence on passion, ecstasy, transport, imagination, intensity and exaltation. He attaches utmost importance to emotion, imagination

and beauty of words. He is a romanticist in his theory of Sublimity as he recommends judging a work of art on the basis of its power to carry away, transport and moving to ecstasy by its grandeur and passion. His stress on emotion as a vital element of the sublime, however, does not rest on a simple appeal to the heart over abstract reasoning but is an intrinsic expression of his view of the purpose of humankind.

We should be cautious in observing that he was not a thorough romantic critic because he fused romanticism and classicism together. Throughout, he is concerned mainly with ancient Greek models. The classical qualities of Longinus as a critic are quite obvious. He shows a great reverence for the ancient Greek models, for tradition. He is a classicist in curbing the license of the artist in his emphasis on order and grandeur of thought and language. He likes inspiration but does not ignore perspiration. He is also a classicist in his balance between genius and unimpassioned hard work. He believes in rules and regulations and stands for the use of a refined and cultivated poetic style.

Longinus shares this ideal with other Latin rhetoricians, including Cicero, Seneca, and Quintilian. D. A. Russell observes that the work of Longinus had “an immense influence on critical thinking” and “retains a power of immediate attraction.” Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, in their works of literary criticism, stressed the importance of reading Longinus’ work. Philosophical thought focused once more on the sublime in the 18th century and the beginning of the Romantic movement in English literature. Even to the modern eye the book has a certain appeal, perhaps because, as D. A. Russell says, Longinus simply “loves literature and wants to communicate his love to others.”

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. Sublimity became a central concern not only in 18thcentury criticism, but also in 18th century literature, especially in the works of the so-called pre-Romantic poets—Thomas Gray, William Collins, and in the works of Gothic



Obscurity: the state of being unknown or unimportant.

novelists—Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Thomas Gray and William Collins, the writers of the sublime ode, sought to achieve effects of wildness and ***obscurity*** in their descriptive style and abrupt transitions. Their sublime odes also rendered the wildness, vastness and obscurity of the sublime objects they described. Authors of the gothic novels exploited the sublimity of delightful horror both in the natural and architectural settings of their narratives and in the actions and events that they narrated.

Longinus exerted a persistent influence on literary criticism. He makes use of both the historical and comparative method. He is also a pioneer in the field of analytical criticism. He analysis passages from particular works to estimate the aptness of the words, images, ***epithets***, etc. It helped establish both the expressive theory of poetry and the critical method of impressionism. Longinus illustrates the rhetorical practice of close textual reading. Such close attention to the text was the monopoly of modern formalists and new critics. In a broad sense, Longinus' ideas anticipate various consensual theories ranging from those of Edmund Burke to reader-response critics. Despite its relative anonymity prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth 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.



Epithets: an adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned.

From Longinus's author-centered perspective, writers and orators achieve greatness not just by rhetorical techniques but also by deep feelings, profound thoughts, and natural genius: "Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q12: Mention the Romantic and Classical elements in Longinus' *On the Sublime.*

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Q13: How did the meaning of sublimity undergo changes in the 18th century?

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

The above sections must have given you a comprehenensive idea on what the essay *On the Sublime* is all about. *On the Sublime* was largely unknown prior to its rediscovery during the Italian Renaissance. Following Nicholas Boileau's popular translation of 1674, however, the treatise became a standard object of study for literary critics from Dryden onwards. You have learnt that *On the Sublime* is a "how to write" manual, and it is believed that nearly one third of the original document is missing. Longinus considered the sublime as a source of the distinction of the greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they gave eternal life to their own works. You have read that Longinus also pointed out some defects of style like "turgidity", "puerility", "parenthyrson" which he calls false sublime and which tends to spoil the loftiness of language. You have also read about the various sources of the sublime which involves a combination of nature and craft, like—the ability to perceive or entertain important thoughts, the ability to experience profound emotion, the command of imagery, diction, and composition that would enable the best expression of these combined thoughts and emotions.



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Websites :

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5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 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 is a continuation of Greek thought, ideas and values.

Ans to Q No 2: Horace's lyric poems were the deliberate attempts to add to the beauty of Roman literature and thereby to expose the glory of the Roman Empire. However, *Ars Poetica* is the most important critical document written by Horace. 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.

Ans to Q No 3: Longinus's *On the Sublime* is the most influential rhetorical text produced during the period of Second Sophistic. In the Second

Sophistic period, there emerged a new generation of rhetoricians who took for their model the language and style of classical Athens. In this period, speakers focused on style, delivery and rhetorical ornamentation rather than everyday life and the actual affairs of the state. The focus was on imitation of earlier models, especially those of fourth century Athens. Hence, the art of rhetoric lost its public role because of its focus on formalisation of rules for literary composition.

Ans to Q No 4: Longinus, also referred to as Pseudo-Longinus (because his real name is unknown), was a Greek teacher of rhetoric or a critic who may have lived in the 1st or 3rd century AD. However, very little is known about Longinus. His writings describe early travels with his parents, which he said enlarged his mind and diversified his experience. He studied humanities and philosophy and was well acquainted with the genius and spirit of Greek literature.

Ans to Q No 5: It is believed that Longinus's credit extend to several of his works, and majority of these were philosophical and written on critical subjects. However, it is *Peri Hupsous* or *On the Sublime* that Longinus is best known for. Besides, a general portrait of the author can be made from a reading of this work.

Ans to Q No 6: a. To outline a method, b. To be useful to those who use the art of public speaking, c. To provide a moral answer to the question: "How can we develop our natural capacities to some degree of greatness?"

Ans to Q No 7: 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" which is a pedantic type of conceit adding to a pompous and frigid style which spoils sublimity. The third fault is "parenthyrson" which refers to 'emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed or unrestrained where restraint is required'.

Ans to Q No 8: The five most important sources of the Sublime are

grandeur of thought, strong and inspired passion, use of figurative language, nobility of expression and elevated composition. Two other sources are—amplification and the path of imitation.

Ans to Q No 9: Longinus opines that Lofty and natural expression is possible only when there are noble and lofty thoughts. Elevating thoughts that remain as the "echo of great soul" are possible only when the author has the power of forming great conceptions. Hence, it is impossible for people having mean ideas and habits, to produce anything that is admirable and worthy. 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.

Ans to Q No10: Longinus devotes nearly one third of his essay to it. Figures of speech help in the elevated style. The grandeur of any figure will depend upon its being employed in an effective manner. Some of the important figures cited by Longinus are—rhetorical questions, asyndeton, anaphora, polysyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis and so on.

Ans to Q No 11: Longinus's text appears not to have been read during ancient or medieval times perhaps because it was lost. It re-emerged as an important text first during the Renaissance in Nicolas Boileau's 1674 French translation. Boileau made *On the Sublime* a central text in European criticism throughout the eighteenth century.

Ans to Q No 12: Like the Romantics, he attaches utmost importance to emotion, imagination and beauty of words. Like a romantic he recommends judging a work of art on the basis of its power to carry away, transport and moving to ecstasy by its grandeur and passion. But he is also concerned with ancient Greek models. He shows a great reverence for the ancient Greek models. He is a classicist in curbing the license of the artist in his emphasis on order and grandeur of thought and language.

Ans to Q No 13: 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. Sublimity became a central concern in the works of the so-called pre-Romantic poets—Thomas Gray, William Collins, and in the works of Gothic novelists—Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis.



5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: What, according to you, are the major concerns of Classical Roman criticism? Elaborate.

Q 2: Make a summary of Longinus's *On the Sublime*.

Q 3: What are the five important sources of the sublime, according to Longinus? Discuss.

Q 4: **'**Sublimity is the echo of a great soul'. Substantiate your answer with reference to the sources of the Sublime.

Q 5: What are the controversies attached to the name Longinus? Assess Longinus' importance in Roman Criticism.

Q 6: In Longinus we can find a mix of both Classical and Romantic elements. Discuss.

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UNIT 6: JOHN DRYDEN: "AN ESSAY ON DRAMATIC POESIE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 John Dryden in the Context of Neoclassical Criticism

6.4 John Dryden: The Critic

6.5 Dryden's "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"

6.6 Dryden as a Critic

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.10 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe some of the important aspects of Neoclassical criticism.
- discuss John Dryden as an important Neoclassical writer and a critic
- explore the important ideas implicit in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"
- explain the significance of "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy" as a manifesto of Neoclassicism
- make an assessment of the significance of Dryden as a Neoclassical critic

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses John Dryden's work "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie." Dryden is one of the renowned figures in the world of literary criticism and he had been called by Dr. Johnson as "the father of English criticism who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of

composition". Dr. Johnson seems to be quite correct in giving this honour as there was no consistent critic in England at that time except John Dryden. He did not provide only occasional observation in written forms like Sidney and Ben Johnson; he was systematic in delivering his views and ideas. Dryden's "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy" certainly establishes him as the first comparative critic, the first historical critic as well as the first independent descriptive critic of England. He highly regards the ancient classical masters but at the same time his liberal attitude towards his own arguments is commendable. "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" which was written in defence of English drama against the champions of both ancient Classical dramas and the Neoclassical French theatres; is also an earnest attempt to explore the general principles of dramatic criticism.

6.3 JOHN DRYDEN IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOCLASSICAL CRITICISM

The Neoclassicists emphasised the classical values of balance, objectivity, rationality and moderation. Thus, Neoclassicism is inspired by the style of classical masters such as Aristotle. Though generally readers place John Dryden in the fold of neoclassical criticism, he in fact accepted neoclassicism with broader perspective. He followed the rules as given by the classical masters but not in the strict sense. Dryden was both a writer and a critic and most of his critical interpretations are to be found in the prefaces to his own works. In Dryden, we find an utmost interest in the fundamental issues of criticism rather than in a close study of a specific text. He is an independent literary critic who urges his readers a close study of the ancient models from Greece and Rome not to imitate them blindly but as a thorough going neoclassicist would do. As a critic of the neoclassical age, his understanding of imitating the ancients is unconventional. He seems to believe that true imitation must be genuine and it should have the power to improve and enrich human thought process.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who is John Dryden?

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Q 2: Write a few words on "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy".

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Q 3: What did the Neoclassicists emphasise?

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6.4 JOHN DRYDEN : THE CRITIC

It can be considered that following John Milton and John Donne, John Dryden was the most celebrated English poet of the seventeenth century. Dryden was an English bard, a renowned literary critic, a translator and a playwright who became England's first 'Poet Laureate' in 1668. It would not be exaggerated to comment that none of his contemporaries could match him as a prose writer, especially in the field of literary criticism, and as a dynamic translator in his time. Dryden had written the greatest heroic or epic play of his century named *The Conquest of Granada* and the outstanding tragicomedy, *Marriage A-la-Mode* in the year 1671. He also has written the celebrated tragedy of the Restoration period, *All for Love* (1677), the greatest tragicomedy, *Don Sebastian* (1689), along with one of the notable comedies, *Amphitryon* (1690).

As a critic of the Neoclassical age, he developed an amalgamation of different methods— dialogic, analytical, historical, evaluative—that helped in the growth of the neoclassical theory of criticism. Being a translator he developed an easy and lucid manner of what he termed as paraphrase that gave rise to excellent versions of Homer, Horace, Lucretius, Ovid, Juvenal, Boccaccio, Chaucer, as well as Virgil that occupies a significant place in the literary world.

John Dryden as the poet of England is also best known among the readers as a pure satirist, in spite of writing only two famous original satirical works: *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) and *The Medall* (1682). His most famous other poems include "Annus Mirabilis", "Absalom and Achitophel" *,* "Religio Laici", "The Hind and the Panther", "Anne Killigrew", "Alexander's Feast", and "To My Honour'd Kinsman". His place as a critic is undoubtedly of high esteem as he was considered "the father of English criticism". Regarding his "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" Johnson rightly said that "modern English prose begins here". With the arrival of Dryden, a new epoch of literary criticism had taken a definite shape. Replacing the different occasional utterances made by various intellectuals on the art of criticism, Dryden is the first known figure to give criticism a particular direction to be followed by his contemporaries and successors.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name the literary works of John Dryden

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Q 5: Name the famous poems by Dryden.

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Q 6: Who has declared that "modern English prose begins here" with regard to "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"?

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6.5 DRYDEN'S "AN ESSAY ON DRAMATIC POESIE"

John Dryden's "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" is a famous literary critical work that reflects the idea of Neo-classical theory of literature. Dryden, with the help of his arguments had successfully defended the classical drama stating that it is an imitation of human life and it has the power to explore human nature clearly. "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy" establishes

him as the first comparative critic, the first historical critic as well as the first descriptive critic of England who had written independently. The main purpose of the essay is "to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French". This work is developed in the pattern of a dialogue or a discussion among four interlocutors who represent four different literary ages with various critical positions. They are as follows:

- **Crites** speaks for the old playwrights
- **Lisideius** speaks for the French.
- **Eugenius** speaks for the English literature.
- **Neander** speaks for England as well as liberty.

Here Neander's voice is the voice of Dryden himself. He brilliantly delivers a comparative form of criticism finally giving his independent comment through the mouth of Neander. The other interlocutor Eugenius seems to favour modern English dramatists by criticising negatively the classical playwrights, who did not themselves regularly observe the unity of place. Again, Crites provides arguments favouring the ancients: they had established the idea of unities; dramatic rules were framed by Aristotle that are still being followed judiciously by the esteemed French playwrights; and Ben Jonson, the greatest English playwright, as Crites argues, followed the ancient classical rules adhering himself to the unities.

After that, Lisideius forcefully argues that the French plays are superior to the English plays, basing his estimation or opinion on the French writer's tight support for or adherence to the classical division of tragedy and comedy. For him "no theater in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragicomedy; in two hours and a half, we run through all the fits of Bedlam".

Neander favours the moderns, but has not shown contempt for the ancients. He also appears to favour English plays and has some critical comments on French drama: "those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man". Neander defends tragi-comedy saying, "contraries, when placed near,

set off each other. A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes." Producing tragi-comedy can never be a disappointing endeavour for the playwrights; in fact, tragi-comedy, being the mixture of two genres, increases the effectiveness of both tragic and comic components with the help of contrast. Neander vehemently asserts that "we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage ...tragicomedy."

Neander criticises the French plays basically for its smallness. Its inclination to show too little action, its journey of having only one plot without subplots as well as its "servile observations of the unities…dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination" are all qualities which causes it lower in value and status than the English drama. Preferring Shakespeare over Ben Jonson Neander says, Shakespeare "had the largest and most comprehensive soul," while Jonson was "the most learned and judicious writer which any theater ever had."

In a nutshell Neander, who represents Dryden himself, prefers Shakespeare for his broader scope as well as his much greater faithfulness to human life, as compared to Jonson's relatively narrower scope or limit. One of the significant aspects related to Neander is that his ideas are all encompassing; for him favouring the modern does not necessarily demand hatred or contempt for the ancients. Dryden believes that the masters like William Shakespeare did not follow the rules of the classical writers but still he is far more superior to any regular writers of England.

From his critical works, it can be argued that Dryden is undoubtedly a neo-classical critic but with some liberal attitudes unlike those masters of Greece and Rome. He knew how to give respect to the principles provided by the ancient Roman and Greek but he refused to adhere or to imitate them, especially regarding tragi-comedy and the observance of the three Dramatic Unities of Time, Place and Action.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Who are the four interlocutors as depicted in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"?

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Q 8: Who is called the 'father of English criticism'?

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Q 9: What are the views propounded by Neander?

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Q 10: Who is representing Dryden in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"?

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6.6 DRYDEN AS A CRITIC

John Dryden was a prolific literary personality in both criticism and literature developed during the Restoration period and later 17th century, and evidently the most influential critic of the entire century. With his arrival, a new era of criticism attained prominence as he had given critical attention to almost all literary forms expressing his own notions and ideas on them. Dr. Johnson has rightly mentioned that, "Dryden may be properly considered as the father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition". Johnson also adds that along with "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie " "modern English prose begins here". It is evident that before Dryden there was no prominent and reliable literary critic in England. He was both a writer and a prolific critic whose critical interpretations are normally found in the prefaces to his own works or to those of other writers. His work shows his professionalism as he was not a

nobleman writing for the sake of his contentment. Writing was the source of his bread and butter and he wrote to find some patrons for his works.

The readers find in Dryden an interest in the fundamental issues of criticism rather than an interest in a close study of a specific text. He is well-known as a neoclassical critic as he seems to endorse as well as emphasise particularly on the neoclassical rules and regulations. His most celebrated critical work, "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy", partially reflects Dryden's commitment and adherence to classical norms and behaviours. It is in a dialogue form that has frequently been criticised as having no definite conclusion, but in reality, as in most of his dialogues, there is a representative figure more significant than the others.

Dryden carried out his critical thoughts effectively, stating his own ideas but leaving some room for differences of opinion. Neander's overall statement on the literary standards is that, the norms can be added to make the work ideal, but the norms will not improve a work which does not contain some degree of perfection. And as Dryden believes, we may find writers like Shakespeare who did not follow the rules but are nevertheless obviously superior to any 'regular' writer. In Dryden, we find a liberal neo-classicist, although he is most coherent (a trait of classicism) when he is dealing with that which can be understood and reduced to rule. Dryden is neither a great analyst of texts nor a significant historian in the field of literature, but a few of his literary writings like "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" are important steps in the growth of criticism in England. His value and status as a literary critic comes from his place in history at the beginning of the epoch of neoclassicism, whose principles and ideas contributed a lot to uplifting the standard of criticism.

Dryden's criticism is partially influenced by the principles propounded by Aristotle, and partially by the French Neoclassicists and sometimes he deviates from both under the influence of Saint Evremond and Longinus. He learnt a reverence for rules and regulations from Aristotle. Along with that, the French Neo-classicists taught him how to give preference to the epic rather than to tragedy. Dryden learnt respecting one's own judgement from Longinus and Saint Evremond.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What did Samuel Johnson state regarding Dryden?

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Q 12: Is Dryden truly a strict follower of Classical rules and regulations?

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Q 13: What does a reader find in John Dryden?

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6.7 LET US SUM UP

From the sections above, it can be concluded that John Dryden is truly a representative of the tendencies of the neo-classical age and he occupies a seminal platform in the critical history of England. He is a man of learning who gathers knowledge from various personalities representing diverse ages thereby moulding his criticism in a liberal way. With Dryden, a new era of critical thoughts respecting both the old and the new began. In spite of being a neoclassical writer who upholds rules and regulation religiously, his attitude is of a liberal classicist who respects all the literary inclinations developed at different places in different time period. Dryden showed more flexibility in assimilating the values of classicism. Dryden's critical works was quite extensive and varied covering diverse genres such as tragedy, epic, satire, comedy, dramatic performances as well as poetical works.



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6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: John Dryden is truly a representative of the tendencies of the neoclassical age and he occupies a seminal platform in the critical history of England.

Ans to Q No 2: "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" is a famous literary critical work that reflects the idea of Neoclassical theory of Literature. It is a celebrated piece of work that shows the views of the Neoclassical master John Dryden. The main purpose of the essay is "to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French". This work is developed in the pattern of a dialogue or a discussion among four interlocutors who represent four different literary ages with various critical positions.

Ans to Q No 3: Neoclassicists emphasise the classical values of balance, objectivity, rationality, and moderation.

Ans to Q No 4: John Dryden had written the greatest heroic or epic play of his century named *The Conquest of Granada* and the outstanding tragicomedy, *Marriage A-la-Mode* in the year 1671. He also had written the celebrated tragedy of the Restoration period, *All for Love* (1677), the greatest tragicomedy, *Don Sebastian* (1689), along with one of the notable comedies, *Amphitryon* (1690).

Ans to Q No 5: Dryden's most famous poems include–"Annus Mirabilis", "Absalom and Achitophel" *,* "Religio Laici"*,* "The Hind and the Panther"*,* "Anne Killigrew"*,* "Alexander's Feast"*,* and "To My Honour'd Kinsman".

Ans to Q No 6: Samuel Johnson.

Ans to Q No 7: "An Essay on Dramatic Poesic" is developed in the pattern of a dialogue or a discussion among four interlocutors who represent four different literary ages with various critical positions. They are as follows:

1. **Crites** speaks for the old playwrights
2. **Lisideius** speaks for the French.
3. **Eugenius** speaks for the English literature.
4. **Neander** speaks for England as well as liberty.

Ans to Q No 8: John Dryden is called the 'Father of English Criticism'.

Ans to Q No 9: Neander favours the moderns, but has not shown contempt for the ancients. He also appears to favour English plays and has some critical comments on French drama: "those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man". Neander defends tragi-comedy saying, "contraries, when placed near, set off each other. A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes." Producing tragi-comedy can never be a disappointing endeavour for the playwrights; in fact, tragic-comedy, being the mixture of two genres, increases the effectiveness of both tragic

and comic components with the help of contrast. Neander vehemently asserts that "we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage ...tragicomedy." Neander criticises French plays basically for its smallness.

Ans to Q No 10: Neander is representing Dryden in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie".

Ans to Q No 11: Dr. Johnson has rightly mentioned that, "Dryden may be properly considered as the father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition". Johnson also adds that along with "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie" "modern English prose begins here".

Ans to Q No 12: Dryden follows rules as given by the classical masters but not in the strict sense. In spite of being a neoclassical writer who upholds rules and regulation religiously, his attitude is of a liberal classicist who respects all the literary inclinations developed at different places in different time period. Critics like Ben Johnson, Dryden shows more flexibility in assimilating the values of classicism.

Ans to Q No 13: The readers find in Dryden an interest in the fundamental issues of criticism rather than in a close study of a specific text.



6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are some of the main characteristics of the Neoclassical age? Discuss.

Q 2: What is Neoclassical Criticism? Prepare a note on Dryden's contribution to the field of criticism.

Q 3: How does Dryden's work conform to the norms of the Neoclassical age? Does he completely accept it?

Q 4: Make an assessment of Dryden as a Neoclassical author with reference to his works.

Q 5: Make an assessment of the four characters representing different views and ideas as reflected in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie".

Q 6: "John Dryden is truly a representative of the tendencies of the neoclassical age who occupies a seminal platform in the critical history of England". Elaborate.

Q 7: Who is Neander as found in "An Essay on Dramatic Poesie"? What does he argue?

*** ***** ***

UNIT 7: ALEXANDER POPE: "AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Neoclassicism: The Basic Features

7.4 Alexander Pope: The Critic

7.5 Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism"

7.6 Pope as a Critic

7.7 Let us Sum up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.10 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain some of the important aspects of Neoclassicism
- discuss Alexander Pope as an important Neo classical writer and critic
- explain the important ideas implicit in the poem "An Essay on Criticism"
- discuss the significance of the poem as a manifesto of Neoclassicism
- assess the significance of Pope as a Neoclassical critic

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with some aspects of Neoclassical criticism through Alexander Pope's poem "An Essay on Criticism". Perhaps you know that neoclassicism and neoclassical literature embrace prescribed, formal conventions and styles of literature existing in classical Greece and Rome. Such literature focuses upon the control of human passions and the search



Vogue : the prevailing style on trend of a particular period or time.

for order in all aspects of life, and emphasises the importance of societal needs over individual ones. Neoclassical writing often inculcates a sense of optimism, although some texts feature a strong satirical element that coincides with this sense. In England, neoclassical literature was in ***vogue*** from approximately 1660 to 1798. John Dryden's *All for Love,* Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* Alexander Pope's *Essay* and *Rape of the Lock,* and Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* essays and *Preface to Shakespeare* are but a few examples of neoclassical writing in England. "An Essay on Criticism" is one of the first major poems written by Pope. It is written in a type of rhyming verse called Heroic Couplets. The poem covers a range of good criticism and advice, and represents many of the chief literary ideals of Pope's age. When you finish reading the unit, you will find that it is actually a verse essay primarily concerned with how writers and critics should behave in the new literary commerce of Pope's contemporary age.



Neoclassical Period: You will note that the Neo-classic period is usually taken to be the hundred-odd years 1660-1780. The main English authors in this period were: John Dryden (1631-1700), Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), Joseph Addison (1672-1719), Richard Steele (1672-1729), Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773), Fielding (1707-54), Johnson (1709-84), Goldsmith (1730-74) and Gibbon (1737-94).

7.3 NEOCLASSICISM: THE BASIC FEATURES

Neoclassicism belongs to the period stretching from the early17th to the middle of the 18th century. This period is signified by a return to the ideals preserved in the works of the ancient Greek and Roman authors and thinkers. Neoclassicism gave its own meaning to terms like 'nature' and 'imitation', terms which remind us of typically classical ideas. M. H. Abrams in his *Glossary* defines Neoclassicism in terms of the features shared in varying degrees by all the major writers of the age who also attained fame as renowned critics of their age. Abrams makes a list of ideas and characteristics shared by authors such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, and so on to sketch some prominent features of ***Neoclassical*** literature. They are as the following :

- These Neoclassical authors exhibited a strong traditionalism, against radical innovation, and they expressed great respect for classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome—who were thought to have achieved excellence, and established enduring models, in all the

major literary *genres.* Hence, the term "neoclassic" is used.

- Literature was conceived to be primarily an "art"; that is, a set of skills which, though requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice and consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers. The Neoclassical ideal, founded mainly on Horace's "Ars Poetica", demanded finish, correction, and attention to detail. The prevailing view was that a natural genius such as Homer or Shakespeare is extremely rare, and probably a thing of the past, and even the best of artful poets, literary "graces" come only occasionally. The representative neoclassic writer commonly emphasised on "correctness" as they were careful to observe the complex demands of stylistic *decorum,* and respected the established "rules" of his art. The Neoclassic Rules of Poetry were, in theory, the essential properties of the various genres (such as epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral) that have been abstracted from classical works whose long survival has finally proven their excellence.
- Human beings, as an integral part of a social organisation, were regarded as the primary subject matter of literature. Poetry was held to be an imitation of human life—in a common phrase, "a mirror held up to nature". And by the human actions it imitates, and the artistic form it gives to the imitation, poetry is designed to yield both instruction and aesthetic pleasure to the people who read it. It was not 'art for art's sake', but 'art for humanity's sake', that became central to Neoclassical humanism.
- Both in subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on what human beings possess in common—representative characteristics and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes. "True wit", as stated by Alexander Pope in a much-quoted passage of his *"An Essay on Criticism",* is "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." That is, a primary aim of poetry is to give new and ***consummate*** expression to the great



Consummate *:*
Showing great skill or flair.



***Durability**:* the ability of lasting long.
***Warrant**:* guarantee.
***Great Chain of Being**:* It refers to the classical concept which considered that everything in the Universe was divinely planned in a hierarchical order almost like a chain of order e.g. God, angels, demons, stars, moon, kings, princes, nobles, men, wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, other plants, precious stones, precious metals and other minerals.

commonplaces of human wisdom, whose prevalence and ***durability*** are the best ***warrant*** of their importance and truth.

- Neoclassical writers, like the major philosophers of the time, viewed human beings as limited agents who ought to set themselves only accessible goals. Many of the great works of the period, satiric and *didactic*, attack human "pride," or presumption beyond the natural limits of the species, and enforce the lesson of the golden mean (the avoidance of extremes) and of humanity's need to submit to its restricted position in the cosmic order—an order sometimes envisioned as a natural hierarchy, or **Great Chain of Being**.

In literary theory and practice most writers of this period were traditionalist, and had a great respect for the Classical authors, and especially the Romans, who, they believed, had established and perfected the principal literary genres for all times. Literature was regarded as an art, in which excellence could be attained only by prolonged study. Thus, the writers of the period were expert craftsmen who had a deep respect for the rules of their art. These rules could best be learnt from a close study of the Classical authors (for example, Horace was a favourite) and by careful (if not sedulous) imitation of their works. Thus, Neoclassicism could be seen thoroughly as a professional approach towards the study of literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you mean by the term Neoclassicism?

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Q 2: How did Neoclassicism conceive the idea of 'arts'?

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Q 3: What are the main characteristics of the Neoclassical age?

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7.4 ALEXANDER POPE: THE CRITIC

Alexander Pope was born in London in 1688. His father was a linen merchant. This was also a time, when the Glorious Revolution broke out and the Catholic King James II was deposed in favour of the Protestant William III and Mary II. For being the son of a Roman Catholic, Pope had to endure the constraints of England's Anti-Catholic laws. You should note that during that time, various restrictions were imposed on the Catholics as they were not allowed to practise their relationships freely, to join any of the universities, to vote or hold any possible offices or seats in the Parliaments and so on. Subsequently, in 1711, when Pope was only 12 years old, his family moved to Binfield in Windsor Forest. He was educated partly by priests at home, then at a Catholic school in Twyford near Winchester, and subsequently under the tutelage of a former fellow of University College, Oxford, who had set up a school near Marylebone. During that time, Pope also learnt French and Italian for a short period in London. Pope's father encouraged him to write verses insisting on perfections in rhyme.

So encouraged by his father and some influential friends, Pope started his first youthful literary endeavours which can be traced in the publications like *The Pastorals* in 1709, *An Essay on Criticism* in 1711 and the first version of *The Rape of the Lock* in 1712, which most surprisingly brought him immediate fame and success. This was also a period of endearing friendship with leading literary figures like the satirist Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, and Dr. John Arbuthnot. Pope's early poetry brought him to the attention of the contemporary literary men, with whom he began to be associated in the world of coffee-houses and taverns, where he preferred to play the rake. Between the years 1706-1711, he came to be associated with William Congreve, William Walsh, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison among others, most of whom were Whigs. But after the fall of the ***Whigs*** in 1710, and the formation of the ***Tory*** Government under Robert Harley, Pope had made access to another group of writers, all Tories including Jonathan Swift, Dr. John Arbuthnot, and John Gay. In 1714, this group, at the instigation of Pope, formed the **Scriblerus Club**, for satirising all sorts of false learning.



Whigs*:* a member of the British reforming and constitutional party that sought supremacy of the Parliament.

Tory*:* a member of the conservative party who supported traditional political and social institutions as against reform or democratisation.

LET US KNOW



The **Scriblerus Club** was formed by a group of friends that included Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John and Thomas Parnell in 1712. Among the members, Pope and Swift were perhaps the most prominent as authors. The club in Pope's words was designed to ridicule 'all the false tastes in learning' under the character of Martinus Scriblerus that dipped into every art and science but unjudiciously in each. Also Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728) and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) owe much to this association with the club.

Since his boyhood, Pope had contracted a form of tuberculosis which resulted in curvature of the spine that stunted growth so that he could never grow more than 4 feet 6 inches. This condition worsened with age and entailed physical pain and dependence on others. Pope used fictional or type-names, although he most often had an individual in mind, like 'Sappho', 'Atossa', 'Atticus', or 'Sporus'. His purpose was to raise his victims as symbols of folly and vice. These semi-fictional figures appeared as 'detached observers', somewhat removed from the city, town and court which were the centres of corruption. They were fond of peace, country life, the arts, morality and truth. This way Pope got an opportunity to address the major religious, political and intellectual problems of his time. He developed the heroic couplet beyond the achievement of any previous poet.

Pope conceived poetry, criticism, and moral sense as being internally related. True wit, true judgment and true taste are only possible when literary endeavours are fully integrated with the rest of life. "An Essay on Criticism" offers a useful introduction to Pope as a poet, but its real importance lies in the fact that it challenges us as readers to examine both the grounds of our taste, and the criteria we apply in making our judgements. In the poem, Pope implies that the decaying state of criticism reflects a broad historical decline since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans—the golden age of art, when critics generously sought to advise authors and to instruct readers on how to appreciate them. The best work of art, as Pope observes,

draws the raw materials from a deeply felt, well-reasoned study of nature, and the study of the best works of the past leads one to see their reliance on their principles of harmony and order that nature itself teaches.

His first success as a poet was "An Essay On Criticism" (1711), which was written when he was only 23, and which brought him Joseph Addison's approval and an intemperate personal attack from the critic John Dennis, who was enraged by a casual reference to himself in the poem. It was actually published anonymously on May 15, 1711. Pope in this poem, sought to clarify the principles necessary for the formation of good judgement and the spirit in which the true critic should play his role in a society. He also explored, in contemporary terms, the traditional humanist ideas about art and its relation to the nature of things.

These poems were followed by "The Rape of the Lock" (published in 1712, and revised in 1714) the most popular poem of his whole career. By making a trivial episode a part of the structure of an epic Pope showed his exemplary reputation in handing the mock heroic themes. In 1717, Pope published a collection which included poems like "Eloisa to Abelard" and "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady". The first modelled on the Heroic Epistles of Ovid, and the second being a melodramatic treatment of a ghost of an unfortunate beautiful lady who killed herself. It was, however, with the translation and publication of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from 1714 to 1726, that Pope became financially secure. Pope opined that Homer had enabled them to see clearly how man stood in relation to nature, to things as they were.

Pope also brought out an edition of Shakespeare, which silently 'regularised' his meter as he rewrote his verse in several places. Lewis Theobald and other scholars attacked Pope's edition, which incurred his wrath and inspired the first version of his satire *The Dunciad* (1728), the first of the moral and satiric poems of his last period. His other major poems of this period were *Moral Essays* (1731-1735), *Imitations of Horace* (1733-1738), *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), *Essay on Man* (1734), and an expanded edition of *The Dunciad* (1742), in which Colly Cibber took Theobald's place as the 'hero'. *The Dunciad*, a mock heroic poem, was



***Pedantry**: excessive concern with minor details and rules.*

designed originally as a contribution to the war against dullness and ***pedantry*** carried on by Pope's fellow members of the "Scriblerus Club". The poem "An Essay on Man", on the other hand marked the arrival of Pope at maturity as he could combine moral seriousness with satiric wit.\



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who were the members of the Scriblerus Club?

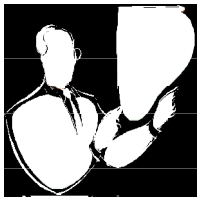
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Q 5: What is the significance of Pope's poem "An Essay on Criticism"?

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LET US KNOW

- Imitating the ancient Greek and Roman authors and adopting the critical precepts that these authors and their texts embody one can have an idea Pope's 'Neoclassicism'. Reading Homer and Virgil, Pope believed sharpened taste and enabled readers to perceive the immediate relationship between art and nature.
- "An Essay on Criticism" was famously and fiercely attacked by John Dennis, who is mentioned mockingly in the work. Consequently, Dennis also appears in Pope's later satire, "The Dunciad". The "Essay" is however just the beginning of his critical attacks on false learning, improper study, short views, narrow interests, and bad taste as reflected in his later poems. Most importantly, Pope in his later poems asserted his principle by which he sought to guide his own life, that criticism and poetry should serve human ends in the widest sense.

7.5 ALEXANDER POPE'S "AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM"

"An Essay on Criticism" was published anonymously on May 15, 1711 when the poet was going to be just 23 years of age. Though Pope had written the poem quickly, the manuscripts show that he revised it carefully. For the subsequent editions, Pope provided a table of contents and divided the 750 line poem into three parts—the second part starting from line 201 and the third part from line 560. Pope wrote this poem in heroic couplets just to remind his readers of the principles of writing poetry they should know. Like many writers of the 17th and 18th centuries, Pope considered literature to be plagued by ill-informed, careless, proud and pompous critics, whose evaluation of texts often bore the danger of misleading both the authors and readers. In the essay, he wrote that the deplorable condition of criticism reflects a broad historical decline from the Greek and the Roman past—also considered the golden age of art, when the critics generously tried to advise authors and instruct readers on how to appreciate them.

In the poem, Pope explains that the best works of art derive from a deeply felt and well reasoned study of Nature, and that a study of the great works of past leads one to see their reliance on the stable principles of harmony and order that Nature itself reaches. Pope particularly admired the authors like – Virgil, Ovid, and Horace who flourished during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (27 BC—14 CE), and wanted to make his own era 'Augustan' in terms of his own literary writings. Pope believed that the classical texts are a standard and a guide, and reading Homer and Virgil sharpens taste and judgment and enables us to perceive the relation between art and Nature.

According to Walter Jackson Bates, Pope's "An Essay on Criticism" is not only the last but perhaps the most rewarding of the important critical essays in verse modelled on Horace's "Art of Poetry". It draws upon the previous verse-essays of Horace, Vida, and Boileau, as well as those of two minor Restoration writers, the Earls of Mulgrave and Roscommon. It also draws upon precepts from the Roman Quintilian and the French critics,

Rapin and Le Bossu. Above all, its general tone is kept comparatively liberal and flexible by the influence of Dryden, and, to some extent, of Longinus. The background is broad. Bates discusses the essay in three parts, with the following subdivisions:

A. General Qualities Needed by the Critic *(*1-200*)*:

Awareness of his own limitations *(*46-67*),* Knowledge of Nature in its general forms *(*68-87*)*. Nature defined *(*70-79*),* Need of both wit and judgment to conceive it *(*80-87*)*, limitation of the ancients, and the use of rules *(*88-200*)*.

B. Particular Laws for the Critic *(*201-559*)*:

Digression on the need for humility *(*201-232*),* consider the work as a total unit *(*233-252*),* seek the author's aim *(*253-266*),* Examples of false critics who mistake the part for the whole *(*267-383*)*. Need for tolerance and for aloofness from extremes of fashion and personal mood *(*384-559*)*.



Eulogy*:* a speech or piece of writing that praises someone or something highly, especially a tribute to someone who has died.

C. The Ideal Character of the Critic *(*560-744*)*:

Qualities needed: integrity *(*562-565*)*, modesty *(*566-571*)*, tact *(*572-577*)*, courage *(*578-583*)*. Their opposites *(*584-630*)*, Concluding ***eulogy*** of ancient critics as models *(*643-744*)*.

Pope, in lines 201-18 of the poem, also rebukes 'pride' and 'envy' which might seem to some readers as less about literature and criticism than about morality. However, according to Pope good authors or critics must truly know themselves and possess a finely developed moral sense and purpose. He further opines that such people know the limits of human aspirations and are always in search of models for the right aesthetic and moral conduct.

Some critics tend to state that Pope uses the terms like Nature, wit and judgment rather loosely and that the poem lacks a coherent structure. However, Dr. Johnson has made a memorable assessment of the poem: "The Essay exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactic composition selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendor of illustration, and propriety of digression." You would like to note that the poem "The Dunciad" show Pope's angry realisation of

the difficulty in winning wide acceptance for the Neo-classical views that he had advocated and had described in "An Essay on Criticism".

Pope contends in the poem's opening couplets that bad criticism does greater harm than bad writing :

- Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
- Appear in Writing or in Judging ill,
- But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
- To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense
- Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,
- Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;
- A Fool might once himself alone expose,
- Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose. ... (1–8)



***Cliched**:* cliche refers to repeated phrases or opinions that show a lack of originality or newness.

Despite the harmful effects of bad criticism, literature requires worthy criticism. Pope delineates common faults of poets, like settling for easy and ***cliched*** rhymes:

- And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:
- While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
- With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
- Wher'er you find "the cooling western breeze",
- In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";
- If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep",
- The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep" . . . (347–353)

Throughout the poem, Pope refers to ancient writers such as Virgil, Homer, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. It is a testament to his belief that the "Imitation of the ancients" is the ultimate standard for taste. Pope also says, "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learned to dance" (362–363), meaning poets are made, not born. As is usual in Pope's other poems, "An Essay on Criticism" also concludes with a reference to Pope himself. Walsh, the last of the critics mentioned, was a mentor and friend of Pope who had died in 1710.

The "Essay" has also give these famous lines:

- "A little learning is a dangerous thing" (from **Part II**)
- "To err is human, to forgive divine" (from **Part III**)

- "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" (from **Part III**)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What were the causes of the deplorable condition of criticism according to Pope?

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Q 7: How does Walter Jackson Bates divide the Essay?

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Q 8: What does Dr. Johnson say about the "Essay"?

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Q 9: How did Pope judge literature?

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7.6 POPE AS A CRITIC

In addition to the rewards of recognition, Pope also had to endure critical attacks from the beginning of his literary career. In the preface to an edition of his *Works* in 1717, he declared: 'The life of a wit is a warfare upon earth', and in the early eighteenth century this warfare was often prosecuted with a ferocity that may surprise and shock us in our present century. Pope used his lively heroic couplets to remind readers of principles they should know. Like his contemporaries, he judged literature as being crippled by ill-informed, careless, proud, and pompous critics, whose mistaken evaluations of the texts misled authors as well as readers. He had the support of friends, but was always a controversial figure in the literary life of his times. Even the translation of *Homer* invited controversy when he quarrelled with the more genial figure of Joseph Addison over the latter's promotion of a rival (and inferior) version of the first book of the

Iliad. His private response to this incident was to compose the portrait of 'Atticus' included in "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (1735). But, it was not until Lewis Theobald in his edition on *Shakespeare* in 1726 pointed out the deficiencies of Pope's own Shakespearian venture, published in the previous year, that Pope entered the warfare of the wits with a vengeance that delighted his supporters and dismayed his enemies.



7.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have gained some relevant ideas about Neo classical criticism in this unit. You must have also realised Alexander Pope's importance as a Neoclassical critic. You have learnt that Neoclassicism and Neoclassical literature embraces prescribed formal conventions and styles of literature produced in classical Greece and Rome. You must have learnt that Neoclassicism embraces prescribed, formal conventions and styles of literature existing in previous eras, especially those of classical Rome and Greece. Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism" is an important example of neoclassical writing. You have found out that the poem covers a range of good criticism and advice, and represents many of the chief literary ideals of Pope's age. It is actually a verse essay primarily concerned with how writers and critics should behave in the new literary contexts of Pope's contemporary age.



7.8 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams, M. H. (2003). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Singapore: Thomson Asia Pvt. Ltd.

2) Habib, M.A.R. (2005). *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Malden: Blackwell.

3) Sowerby, Robin. (1988). *Alexander Pope Selected Poetry and Prose.* London: Routledge.

4) Thomas, C. T. (ed). (1986). *Samuel Johnson Preface to Shakespeare*. Macmillan India limited. Johnson, Samuel. Preface to Shakespeare. UK, Dodo Press.

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

Website:

http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/batewj/pope.htm

7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Neoclassicism refers to the period stretching from the early 17th to the middle of the 18th century. This period is signified by a return to the ideals preserved in the works of the ancient Greek and Roman authors and thinkers. Neoclassicism gave its own meaning to terms like 'nature' and 'imitation', terms which remind us of typically classical ideas.

Ans to Q No 2: Literature was conceived to be primarily as a set of skills which, though it requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice and consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers.

Ans to Q No 3: These Neoclassical authors expressed great respect for classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Literature was conceived to be primarily a set of skills which, though it requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice. Human beings were regarded as the primary subject matter of literature. representative characteristics and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes of human beings were emphasised. Neoclassical writers viewed human beings as limited agents who ought to set themselves only accessible goals.

Ans to Q No 4: The Scriblerus Club was formed by a group of friends that

included Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John and Thomas Parnell in 1712. Among the members, Pope and Swift were perhaps the most prominent as authors.

Ans to Q No 5: The poem offers a useful introduction to Pope as a poet, but its real importance lies in the fact that it challenges us as readers to examine both the grounds of our taste, and the criteria we apply in making our judgements. In the *Essay*, Pope implies that the decaying state of criticism reflects a broad historical decline since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans—the golden age of art, when critics generously sought to advise authors and to instruct readers on how to appreciate them.

Ans to Q No 6: Pope considered literature to be plagued by ill-informed, careless, proud and pompous critics, whose evaluation of texts often bore the danger of misleading both the authors and readers. He further stated that that the deplorable condition of criticism reflects a broad historical decline from the Greek and the Roman past.

Ans to Q No 7: Bates divides the poem into three parts— A. General qualities needed by the critic (1-200), B. Particular laws for the critic (201-559), and C. The ideal character of the critic (560-744):

Ans to Q No 8: Dr. Johnson states that "The Essay exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactic composition selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendor of illustration, and propriety of digression."

Ans to Q No 9: Pope judged literature as being crippled by ill-informed, careless, proud, and pompous critics, whose mistaken evaluations of the texts misled authors as well as readers.



7.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1. What are the main characteristics of the Neoclassical age? Discuss in detail.

Q 2. "The best works of art derive from a deeply felt and well reasoned study of Nature." Discuss.

Q 3. How does Pope's poem *"An Essay on Criticism"* conform to the norms of Neo classicism?

Q 4. Make an assessment of Pope as a Neoclassical author with reference to his works.

Q 5. What are the important aspects of critics and criticism that Pope deals with in "An Essay on Criticism"?

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UNIT 8: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: "PREFACE" TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Romantic Criticism: A Brief Survey

8.4 William Wordsworth: The Poet Critic

8.5 Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*

8.6 Wordsworth as a Critic

8.7 Let us Sum up

8.8 Further Reading

8.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.10 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss some of the important aspects of English Romantic criticism
- state Wordsworth's status as an important Romantic poet
- read the "Preface" as an important contribution to English Romantic Criticism
- explain the major concerns and issues raised by Wordsworth in the "Preface"
- make an assessment of the significance of Wordsworth as a Romantic critic

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will deal with Romantic Criticism through William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition *of Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. Wordsworth wrote the famous "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* to explain his theory of poetry. The "Preface" was one of the first and most direct attempts

to challenge the popular poetic practices of the 17th and 18th centuries and offers a new poetic theory to replace them. For this reason, *Lyrical Ballads* is used to mark the end of the Neoclassical period and the beginning of the Romantic period of literature that lasts from about 1798 to 1850 and emphasises nature, imagination, and the importance of personal experience rather than scientific logic. Wordsworth defends the unusual style and subjects he applied in the poems of the collection, written in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as experiments to see how far popular poetry could be used to convey deep feeling. You will note that there are three general reasons guiding the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The first is in the choice of subject matter, which is limited to the experiences of common life in the country, and Wordsworth states that the challenge for the poet is to make the ordinary experiences interesting to readers. By the time you finish reading the unit, you will learn that the 'Preface' is regarded as the poetic ***manifesto***, or statement of the revolutionary aims of Romanticism.



Manifesto*:* a declaration of intentions.

8.3 ROMANTIC CRITICISM: A BRIEF SURVEY

[adapted from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, fifteenth edition, 2005]

This section will help you discuss the important aspects of Romantic criticism. The beginnings of Romanticism can actually be traced to the late 18th century although it gained maturity in the early 19th century. It was a time when the Neoclassical ideals had been replaced by a new emphasis on individual experience. In some ways, Romanticism shares similarities with the Enlightenment thought which had great faith in progress and which emphasised the authoritative nature of experience. Soon, there emerged an interest in originality, creative imagination and genius.

However, for any discussion of Romanticism in England, we cannot but refer to its origin in Germany. The poets in Germany could create their own world from reality and turn whatever they liked into the subject matter of poetry. Several innovations were made in content and style by many talented writers who emerged all over Germany. This new generation felt free and able to revise all the accepted representative values, not only in

art and literature, but in other spheres as well. Among the most common topics in vogue were nature and spirit in all their manifestations, particularly the supernatural, the subconscious, and the mystical.

German Romanticism can be stated to have started with figures like Schiller, Heinrich Heine, Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Novalis. The poet, Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), too was profoundly influenced by the concept of Romanticism and saw the aesthetic space as allowing freedom, and reconciling sensation and reason. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) put stress on the ego or self as the primary reality which mediates between appearance and reality. Friedrich von Schelling (1775–1854) is to be remembered as yet another chief exponent of Romantic philosophy who proposed in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) that consciousness is centred on itself and that knowledge of the world mediates though self-consciousness.

However, the foundations of Romanticism were laid in Germany by Immanuel Kant and Freidrich von Schlegel. Kant's advocacy of aesthetic autonomy helped to reinforce the Romantic stress on the creative imagination and its originality. While, Friedrich von Schlegel's reliance upon the concept of Romantic irony as giving poetry its special status, became influential in many ways. Schlegel conceived the idea that irony is a form of ***paradox*** in the sense that it accommodates divergent perspectives on the world. However, it was in 1798, that the first Romantic school originated in Jena. It was partly inspired by the subjective idealism of Fichte, but its principal philosopher was Schelling, whose *Naturphilosophie* asserted the unity of nature and the human spirit.



Paradox*:* a statement that contradicts itself.

English Romanticism, starts with the *Lyrical Ballads*, co-authored by William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge and published in 1798. While Wordsworth stressed the need for the language of common men in writing poetry, Coleridge's use of the supernatural element in poetry draw our attention to the many important aspects of Romantic poetry written by them. However, the use of imagination by the Romantic poets became even more important in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry* (1840), on the other hand, expounded fundamentally Romantic

principles showing the superiority of the imagination over reason, and the higher status of poetry. William Hazlitt (1778–1830), in his essay "First Acquaintance with the Poets" wrote of his deep appreciation of Coleridge and of Wordsworth which is identical with what he expresses in *Lectures on the English Poets*. Hazlitt was also influenced by Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

To include John Keats (1795–1821), Keats derived his critical ideas from Hazlitt and Wordsworth. But he expressed his critical ideas in his own unique way mostly in his letters. The best known and most striking passages in Keats's *Letters* are those on the notion of 'impersonality', and "negative capability" of the poet. Thus, "Negative capability" means to "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." By this standard, the poet should not be committed, should not be like Coleridge, a philosopher "incapable of remaining content with half knowledge." Thus, "Negative capability" is a phrase which defines Keats's grasp of the nature of an aesthetic which is not the same as the intellectual or the didactic. Thus, poetry is to Keats mainly self-expression and an expression of feeling rather than of ideas or moral precepts.

Thus, the various aspects of Romanticism in the 18th century England can be seen as the following:

(a) An increasing interest in Nature, and in the natural, primitive and uncivilised way of life.

(b) A growing interest in scenery especially its more untamed and disorderly manifestations.

(c) An association of human moods with the 'moods' of Nature - and thus a subjective feeling for it and interpretation of it.

(d) A considerable emphasis on natural religion.

(e) Emphasis on the need for spontaneity in thought and action and in the expression of thought.

(f) Increasing importance attached to natural genius and the power of the imagination.

(g) A tendency to exalt the Romanticism of individual and his needs, and emphasis on the need for a freer and more personal expression.

(h) The cult of the Noble Savage.

Such characteristics of Romanticism will help you to discuss and analyse the works of the Romantic poets in a more engaging manner.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the contributions of the German poets to the development of Romanticism?

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Q 2: What connection does English Romanticism have with the German poets?

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Q3: What were the contributions of Immanuel Kant and Freidrich von Schlegel to Romanticism?

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Q 4: Name some of the important works that became instrumental in popularising the concept of Romanticism in England.

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Q 5: What are the characteristics of Romanticism?

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8.4 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: THE POET CRITIC

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, in England's Lake District. He was one of five children of John Wordsworth and Anne Cookson. When Wordsworth's mother died in 1778, he was sent to a grammar school in the village of Hawkshead. But he was not interested in studies and wandered the nearby countrysides,

which he alludes to in his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1805).

In 1787, Wordsworth began his studies at Cambridge University, but he was not particularly a good student and preferred walking in the country sides to his studies. Subsequent trips to France, Switzerland, and Germany in 1790 had a tremendous influence on his development as a poet. In November 1791, after graduating, Wordsworth travelled again to France, hoping to improve his command of the language with the thought of becoming a language tutor.



Wordsworth famously stated in his *Preface* that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."

Wordsworth began his career as a writer in 1793 with the publication of the poem *An Evening Walk,* addressed to his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. In the same year, he published *Descriptive Sketches,* about the walking tour in the Alps in 1790. Such works foreshadow Wordsworth's mature ability to evoke a landscape and the link between humanity and the natural world.

In 1795, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy settled down at Racedown, Dorset. In the same year, he also met the poet S. T. Coleridge, with whom he developed a deep friendship. Wordsworth and his sister subsequently moved to the county of Somerset to meet Coleridge where he lived. There, the two poets collaborated to produce *Lyrical Ballads,* which marked the beginning of Romanticism in England. The first edition, published anonymously in 1798, contained poems by both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Wordsworth wanted to show that poetry is inherent in everyday objects and conversations, while Coleridge dealt with supernatural subjects.

In 1800, a revised edition of *Lyrical Ballads* appeared. It included Wordsworth's famous "Preface" about which you will study in this unit. You should pay attention to the fact that the ideas about politics, humanity, and poetic diction expressed in the "Preface" and practised in the poems were too ***radical*** for most reviewers, and the volume received criticism. Following the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth began to write *The Prelude,* a poem in which he attempted to describe the "growth of a poet's mind." In 1799 Wordsworth and Dorothy settled at Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake district. There, Wordsworth began to plan a great philosophic poem *The Recluse* based on the theme on Man, Nature, and



Radical*:* farm beyond the norm, markedly new.

Society, although it was never completed. In 1802, he inherited money owed to his father, who had died in 1783, and subsequently married Mary Hutchinson, a friend of Dorothy.

In 1807 Wordsworth published *Poems in Two Volumes,* which contained most of his important verses, for which he is particularly remembered today, including "The Solitary Reaper," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," "Sonnet Composed upon Westminster Bridge," and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." From 1807 on, Wordsworth's poetic powers declined. Backing away from his youthful support of the French Revolution, Wordsworth became increasingly conservative. Later editions of *Lyrical Ballads,* for instance, contain poems celebrating capital punishment. Abandoning his ***pantheistic*** views of a God within man and nature, Wordsworth became increasingly conventional in his religious beliefs. In 1814, he published "The Excursion," intended to be a part of the longer, philosophical poem, *The Recluse.* In 1843, after the death of Robert Southey, Wordsworth was named Poet Laureate of England.



Pantheistic: finding the divine in all creation.

You will find that in most of the poetry of Wordsworth, written between 1793 and 1807, Wordsworth sought to address the truth about human nature. These are the poems in which he also tries to express his vision in the simple language of everyday speech, and in which he sought out the sublime in nature as a moral compass for mankind.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are some of the memorable poems of William Wordsworth?

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Q 7: Mention the characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry?

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8.5 WORDSWORTH'S "PREFACE" TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*

You have read that the *Lyrical Ballads* is a collection of poems written by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The collection was a direct response to poetry of the Neoclassical era. Neoclassical poetry is defined by its use of decorated language and rigid poetic form. Writers such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, produced poems that adhered to strict, formal metrical patterns, used complicated poetic diction, and emphasised the importance of logic and rational thought. *Lyrical Ballads,* on the other hand, was a clear and intentional challenge to that literary tradition. The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in two volumes in 1800 in Wordsworth's name alone. In the first 1798 edition, there had been a mere "advertisement" to orient the readers to the poems included in this volume. In 1800, Wordsworth wrote the famous "Preface" to satisfy his friends who had urged him to write a defence of the collection, but he preferred to write instead a "simple" introduction. This turned out to be a somewhat long explanation of the Wordsworth's Romanticism.

In essence the "Preface" can be read as Wordsworth's poetic manifesto. The most obvious point that Wordsworth makes here relates directly to the style and technique used and the subject matter dealt in writing the poems themselves. Besides, the focus of the poems resides in common, everyday scenes of rural life and folk. It must be kept in mind that though a reader of today may find nothing unusual in the style employed throughout the *Lyrical Ballads*, the simplicity of language and the depiction of 'common' people, places and events used by Wordsworth, was in open opposition to the poetic convention of his day. Early critics were harsh in their evaluation of the *Lyrical Ballads* declaring the subject matter 'shocking' and the style 'unpoetical'.

Wordsworth starts the "Preface" by justifying his reasons for having departed from current fashions— "Poems so materially different from those upon which general ***approbation*** is at present bestowed." Then, he proceeds to give an explanation on the choice of subject, the purpose behind the poetic venture, and what he had hoped in his poetic exercise. In the fifth paragraph, Wordsworth states some of his important undertakings:



Approbation*:* official recognition.

"incidents and situations from common life", "a selection of language really used by men", "a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect", "tracing…the primary laws of our nature" and "the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" and so on.

You will note that Wordsworth's poetic attempt was directed by a deliberate choice of subject and language: "common life" in a language "really used by men". Again, the treatment called for an imaginative "colouring" so as to show everything in "an unusual aspect" which would make them interesting. Wordsworth's search for a better poetic language gives us several important elements: 'simple life as opposed to an over-refined one'; 'plain, unadorned language instead of an artificial and ornate one'; 'language infused with passion or language capable of conveying emotions' etc. As Wordsworth seeks to explain and clarify his objections to the language of established poetic diction, he also touches upon the relation of poet to society and the impact on the language to be used in poetic composition. His endeavour had been, in his poems, "to bring my language near to the language of men" and in so doing he marks out the similarity of prose and poetry "It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Such statements later were controverted by Coleridge.

As you have learnt, Wordsworth was protesting against the standards of poetic language in his time, because Neoclassicism did not give license to affected speech but set its own strictures regarding the use of the polite idiom. Wordsworth instead advocated the adoption of unadorned speech but he is also turning to the rural community for new inspiration. He argues that those "essential passions of the heart" give rise to the "manners of rural life" and that such a rural life makes these "elementary feelings" "more easily comprehended" and makes them "more durable". The reason he cites is, "in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." The conditions of rural life in which men are in direct contact with the beautiful and lasting forms of natural objects give rise, in Wordsworth's view, to "a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is substituted for it by Poets,



***Capricious**:* determined by chance or impulse rather than by reason.

who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and ***capricious*** habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation." The argument thus turns upon the social responsibilities of the poet.

Wordsworth also asks— What is a Poet? To whom does he address? And what language is to be expected from him? The answer he gives is that he is a man speaking to men. He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. And thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature. We find it remarkable to note that Wordsworth's concern with the relationship of poet to reader makes him claim that "Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men."

Again, Wordsworth turned against the "triviality and meanness" of contemporary poetry by naming a "purpose" behind his work thus bringing in his famous dictum that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. You may be able to perceive here not only how poetry is exalted through its association with the best conditions of social rural life, but also how it flows from deep emotions and thought. In line with this estimation of the Poet, Wordsworth proclaims one of the ideas central to Romanticism, that "Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge". It is also infused with pleasure and enjoyment.

Wordsworth's "Preface" thus involves a comprehensive statement of the various aspects of poetry and poetic diction. What is remarkable is that it articulates so fully some of the basic tenets of Romanticism. You should be interested in reading Coleridge's critical response to this essay and the points he contested. You are advised to read the text of the "Preface" for gaining clarity on the issued raised by Wordsworth.



LET US KNOW

In his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth repeatedly declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." According to this view, poetry is not primarily a mirror of men in action but is essentially a component in the poet's own feelings. Similarly, another Romantic poet Keats also wrote: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all."

Wordsworth's treatment of lowly subjects in 'common language' violated the basic Neoclassical rule of *decorum,* which asserted that the serious genres should deal only with the momentous actions of royal or aristocratic characters in an appropriately elevated style.

Wordsworth's choice of men, women and children from a rural setting as his characters, as opposed to the more cosmopolitan characters of his contemporaries, leads to another important facet of his poetry as expounded by the poet in his "Preface". He argued that one who lives close to nature (as he himself did for most of his life residing in the English Lake District), lives closer to the well-spring of human-nature. Many of Wordsworth's poems are autobiographical in as far as they display a love and deep appreciation of the natural environment as experienced by the poet himself. However, Wordsworth also believed that there was an element of the Divine in nature, which held a tremendous potential to mould and instruct the minds of men who live in its midst.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Mention the importance of Wordsworth's "Preface".

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Q 9: In what way, did Wordsworth react to the Neoclassical poets?

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Q10: What does Wordsworth state about the poetic language?

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Q11: Why does Wordsworth turn to the rural community?

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Q12: How does Wordsworth consider the poet?

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8.6 WORDSWORTH AS A CRITIC



***Rhetorical**:* emphasing style at the expense of thought.

As a poet critic Wordsworth believed that the ***rhetorical*** figures used in the 18th century poetry were distortions of the original language which is spontaneous. But the early poets used the language actually spoken by men because the occasion which demanded the use of such language was presumably heroic or extraordinary. But, Wordsworth was also deeply interested in folk poetry. Where poetry was regarded as arising from powerful feelings, Wordsworth saw it as expressing the self, as a release of emotions. Wordsworth's views on poetic diction are based on the assumption that art and nature are at odds with each other. A.C. Bradley has observed that in the poetry of the Romantics, "the center of interest is inward. It is an interest in emotion, thought, will, rather than in scenes, events, actions...." The lyric poem was at the centre of Romantic poetical theory. Wordsworth and Coleridge both looked to the lyric poem for good poetry. The forms of the lyric poem: – song, elegy, and ode—were all cultivated by the poets to a high degree. As Abrams points out, there was a tendency to collapse the "I" of the lyric with the "I" of the poet as person, the poem expressing experiences and those states of mind which could be supported with the testimony of private diaries and letters.

As a critic Wordsworth was actively concerned about the pressures entering into the lives of those living in the newly industrialised cities, the pressures that lead individuals to immerse themselves in reports and stories

of sensational incidents. In so far as the "Preface" is concerned, Wordsworth anticipates themes and issues articulated by writers ranging from P. B. Shelly to D. H. Lawrence in matters related to social and cultural lives. In an appendix added to 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth added: "The poet is the rock of defense of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love." As he proclaimed, future poets would be obliged to defend the worth of their activity as against that of the scientists. This is the struggle to which Matthew Arnold in the 19th century and the New Critics like I. A. Richards in the 20th century return with greater urgency.



8.7 LET US SUM UP

Having read this unit, you have gained a detailed idea on the characteristics of Romanticism as well as that of the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*. In the "Preface", Wordsworth describes poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Poetry is not dependent upon rhetorical and literary devices, but is the free expression of the poet's thought and feeling. The poet is a teacher and must strive to reveal truth, not through scientific analysis and abstraction, but through an imaginative awareness of persons and things. He may broaden and enrich our human sympathies and our enjoyment of nature in this way. He must communicate his ideas and emotions through a powerful re-creation of the original experience. For this, he must have a sensibility far beyond that of the ordinary individual. You have also learnt that Wordsworth's treatment of lowly subjects in common language violated the basic Neoclassical rule of *decorum,* which asserted that the serious genres should deal only with the momentous actions of royal or aristocratic characters in an appropriately elevated style.



8.8 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams, M. H. (2003). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Singapore: Thomson Asia Pvt. Ltd.

2) M.A.R. Habib. (2006). *A History of Literary Criticism*: *From Plato to the Present*, Blackwell Publishing.

3) Prasad, Birjadish. (1965). *An Introduction to English Criticism.* Macmillan India Limited.

4) René, Wellek. (1955). *A History of Modern Criticism*: *1750 – 1950*, Vol.2: *The Romantic Age*; London: Jonathan Cape.



8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The poet Friedrich von Schiller saw the aesthetic space as allowing freedom, and reconciling sensation and reason, Johann Gottlieb Fichte laid stress on the ego or self as the primary reality which mediates between appearance and reality, Friedrich von Schelling proposed in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* that consciousness is centred on itself and that knowledge of the world mediates self-consciousness.

Ans to Q No 2: The poets in Germany could create their own world from reality and turn whatever they liked into the subject matter of poetry. They made several innovations in content and style. Among the most common topics in vogue were nature and spirit in all their manifestations, particularly the supernatural, the subconscious, and the mystical. All these aspects influenced the English Romantic poets immensely.

Ans to Q No 3: Kant's advocacy of aesthetic autonomy helped to reinforce the Romantic stress on the creative imagination and its originality.

While, Friedrich von Schlegel's reliance upon the concept of Romantic irony as giving poetry its special status, became influential in many ways.

Ans to Q No 4: Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) co-authored by S. T. Coleridge where he stressed the need for the language of common men in writing poetry; Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) where he discussed the role of Imagination; Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1840) expounded the fundamentally Romantic principle of showing the superiority of the imagination over reason; William Hazlitt essay "First Acquaintance with the Poets" where he expresses his deep appreciation of Coleridge and Wordsworth as poets.

Ans to Q No 5: The characteristics are: an increasing interest in Nature; a growing interest in untamed natural world; an association of human moods with the 'moods' of Nature; an emphasis on the need for spontaneity in thought and action; an increasing importance attached to natural genius and the power of the imagination; a tendency towards a freer and more personal expression etc.

Ans to Q No 6: "The Solitary Reaper", "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", "Sonnet Composed upon Westminster Bridge", "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and so on.

Ans to Q No 7: In most of the poetry of Wordsworth, written between 1793 and 1807, he seeks to address the truth about human nature. In his poems he also tries to express his vision in the simple language of everyday speech. Besides, in his poems, he seeks out the sublime in nature as a moral compass for mankind.

Ans to Q No 8: The "Preface" can be read as Wordsworth's poetic manifesto. The most obvious point that Wordsworth makes here relates directly to the style and technique used and the subject matter dealt in writing the poems themselves. Besides, the focus of the poems resides in common, everyday scenes of rural life and folk.

Ans to Q No 9: Neoclassical poetry is defined by its use of decorated language and rigid poetic form. Poets such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, produced poems that adhered to strict, formal

metrical patterns, used complicated poetic diction, and emphasised the importance of logic and rational thought. Wordsworth instead argued that the focus of poems should reside in common, everyday scenes and languages of rural life and folk.

Ans to Q No 10: Wordsworth opined that poetry should be written in a language "really used by men". He also called for an imaginative "colouring" to show everything in "an unusual aspect" which would make them interesting. His search for a better poetic language gives us several important elements: 'simple life as opposed to an over-refined one'; 'plain, unadorned language instead of an artificial and ornate one'; 'language infused with passion or language capable of conveying emotions' etc.

Ans to Q No 11: He argues that those "essential passions of the heart" give rise to the "manners of rural life" and that such a rural life makes these "elementary feelings" "more easily comprehended" and makes them "more durable". Besides, "in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Ans to Q No 12: According to Wordsworth, the poet is someone who is interested in man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure. The poet considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge.



8.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you understand by the term Romanticism? Give an account of its development in Germany and England.

Q 2: What are the major characteristics of Romanticism? Discuss with reference to Wordsworth's poetry.

Q 3: In what way, do you think, *Lyrical Ballads* is a reaction to the Neoclassical school of poetry?

Q 4: Which are the major arguments that Wordsworth place in the "Preface" regarding poetry and the poet?

Q 5: "Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Discuss the contexts in which Wordsworth uttered this famous line.

Q 6: The "Preface" was one of the first and most direct attempts to challenge the popular poetic practices of the 17th and 18th centuries. Discuss.

Q 7: "Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men." Discuss the validity of this statement with reference to Wordsworth's "Preface".

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