INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the course Literary Criticism. The aim of this hand-out is to give you additional information to buttress what you already have in the Study Guide. Please remember that the general aim of this course is to introduce you to the field of literary criticism and to develop critical literary analysis skills within the students in three major areas, namely, the Classical Age, the Romantic Period and New Critical movements with a view of enabling you to see the extent to which criticism refines your own view of contemporary texts in our world.

What you need to also bear in mind is that as you read this supplementary material, your Study Guide and other prescribed materials, on completing this course you should be able to articulate the specific learning outcomes as stipulated in your tutorial letter. Please also diligently check out the Course Content and go through each of the topics and make sure that you research further.

This supplementary material will therefore highlight some of the aspects which you need to take note of and also illustrate some points that you need to answer your assignments. I have also aligned the Units in this supplementary material document to the Units in your old study guide.

I wish you the best in your assignments.
UNIT 1

Nature and Function of Literary Criticism

i.  Definition

Etymologically the word criticism is derived from Greek word meaning ‘Judgement’. It is an exercise in judgement. Literary criticism is the exercise of judgement on works of literature. To examine the merits and demerits and finally to evaluate the artistic worth, is the function of criticism. Thus, literary criticism is the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of literature.

Literary criticism is the evaluation of literary works. This includes its classification by genre, structure, and judgement of value (Beckson & Ganz, 1989). Literary criticism asks what literature is, what it does, and what it is worth. (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

How would you interpret the definition of literary criticism in your own words? Let’s look at the answer below:

Literary criticism helps readers like you and me interpret the literature we read. Each literary theory provides us with a different way of looking at a given literary work, which can ultimately reveal important aspects about it.

But what are these important facts?

Literary criticism helps us to understand what is important about a literary text. For example:

- its structure
- its context: social, economic, historical
- how the text manipulates the reader

So in short, literary criticism helps us to understand the relationship between authors, readers, and literary texts. The act of literary criticism ultimately enhances the enjoyment of our reading of the literary work. Figure 1 below illustrates this relationship.

Figure 1: The Literary Criticism Map

Source: http://image.slidesharecdn.com/literarycriticism
What does this literary work mean? The work itself is placed in the center because all approaches must deal, to some extent or another, with the text itself. Hence:

- Different approaches or lenses help us to discover rich and deeper meaning.
- Each lens has its strengths and weaknesses
- Each lens is valuable
- Try to become a pluralist rather than an inflexible supporter of one

Criticism is the exercise of judgement in the area of art and literature. It is the overall term for studies concerned with defining, analysing, and evaluating works of literature. It refers to description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works. Literary criticism deals with different dimensions of literature.

According to Griffith (2002), prior to the 20th century, the investigation of the nature and value of literature had had a long and distinguished history, beginning with Plato and Aristotle and continuing into modern times with such figures as Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold. But their investigations focused primarily on evaluation, not interpretation. They explored what literature is and praised or condemned works that failed to meet whichever standards they deemed essential. In The Republic, to cite one extreme example, Plato condemned all literature because it stirs up the passions—lust, desire, pain, anger—rather than nurtures the intellect.

ii. The principles of criticism

We now consider what standard of judgement should a critic follow and what qualification and instruments/equipment should s/he possess.

Every literary work has three elements:

- matter
- manner
- capacity to please (aesthetic pleasure).

Earlier, critics devised rules by which technical excellence - plot construction, diction, style, meter and language - of literary work. These rules have always changed with time. Essential quality of literature is not how rigidly such rules are followed but appeal to the imagination. Human nature and subsequently principles of literature are held universal and permanent. We observe three such principles:

The first principle of criticism is the pursuit of truth, as poetic truth is the truth of ideas, and experiences of a work of art. The truth of literature is different from the truth of science. Poetic truth is the ideas, and experiences of a work of art.

The second principle is concerned with symmetry (construction) - which implies the right selection and arrangement of material.

This principle implies right selection and arrangement of material. The writer should select certain aspects of reality and not all reality and then his material should be so arranged as to throw the selected aspects of reality into sharp relief. Aristotle stressed on this. In his view it is essential for that artistic beauty on which the imaginative appeal of literature depends. The critic must examine if the various parts of the composition are originally related to each other or not, whether they are proportionate to each other and to the composition as whole or not. The test of the symmetry is indirectly a means by which the presence of the dominant artistic quality can be discovered and measured.
The final principle is that of idealisation -which implies the aesthetic (beauty) consciousness of the reader. The selection made for artistic treatment should be so made that unpleasant aspect to aesthetic consciousness of reader is kept away or minimised by virtue of which a work of art gives pleasure.

(Adapted from: http://www.tmv.edu)

iii. Functions of Literary Criticism

The function of literary criticism is to examine the merits and demerits or defects of a work of art and finally to evaluate its worth. The chief function of criticism is to enlighten and stimulate. The true critic is the one who is equipped for his/her task by a sound knowledge of his subject. The true critic can discover the qualities of power, beauty and depth of significance. S/he can give us a fresh point of view. S/he is sometimes a path finder, breaking new ground, with a friendly passion. As such the primary functions of literary criticism are interpretation and judgment.

Another important factor to note is that the view of criticism is directly related to the critic's own intellectual philosophy or outlook of life. It is determined by the likes, dislikes, and prejudices of the critic him/herself and this is equally shaped by the socio-political sensibilities of the critic's environment. As such, critical theories are shaped by the spirit of the age.

iv. Literary criticism vs Literary theory

Even though modern literary theorising and criticism emerged during the 19th century, both attained greater heights in the 20th century. In fact, the 20th century could be appropriately termed the age of criticism. The richness and the complexity of literary theory can be seen in the many critical movements that sprang up and in the enthusiasm with which many critics practised the art. The impact of the new psychologies was deeply felt in criticism.

In the preface to A History of Literary Criticism (1991), A. N. Jeffares gives no room for any doubt about the kinship of literature, literary criticism and literary theories. He says:

The study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote. What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background, etc?

The argument of Jeffares is that for literature to be on course, it becomes expedient that a structure is put in place to reveal its meaning beyond the literal level. Broadly, texts of literature would possess two levels of meaning - the literal and the super-literal. The super-literal meaning of texts of literature is the ideological implication of the same, which criticism attempts to resolve. The task of resolving the crisis engendered in literary texts is possible through the formulation of some principles, parameters and paradigms which are technically termed theories. Theories are meant to interpret and evaluate works of literature with the mind of revealing the in-depth implications of such works.

Thus, literary theory and criticism is an unavoidable part of studying literature. Literary theory and criticism aim to explain, entertain, stimulate and challenge the student of literature. Literary theory and criticism make literature refreshing, informative and stimulating in many ways. Some of the ways include:

Literary theory and criticism help us to achieve a better understanding of literature. A better understanding of the world in which we live, automatically, comes along when we study literature, and the study of critical theory makes that enterprise even more productive.
Literary theory and criticism can, not only show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses, but also strengthen our ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight in analysing works of literature.

So what then is the difference between literary theory and literary criticism?

A theory as a body of rules or principles used to appraise works of literature. Literary theories were developed as a means to understand the various ways people read literary texts. All literary theories are lenses through which we can see texts. You cannot say that one is better than another or that you should read according to any of them, but it is sometimes fun to “decide” to read a text with one in mind because you often end up with a whole new perspective on your reading. As you read the different texts in your literature courses, you will realise that to study literary theory is to seek to understand exactly how readers (critics) interpret (criticise) texts, especially literary ones.

Most scholars today would agree that there is no single meaning waiting to be simply found in any text. It is our role as readers to produce meaning. In other words, it is a function of the different interpretative strategies which we as readers apply to a text. Thus, a cardinal rule of modern literary criticism could be summed up as follows: the ‘answers’ you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of ‘questions’ you put to it. Strictly speaking, when we interpret a literary text, we are doing literary criticism, but when we examine the criteria upon which our interpretation rests, we are applying literary theory. In other words, literary criticism is the application of critical theory to a literary text, whether or not a given critic is aware of the theoretical assumptions informing his or her interpretation. In fact, the widespread recognition that literary criticism cannot be separated from the theoretical assumptions on which it is based is one reason why the word criticism is often used as if it includes the word theory. (Adapted from: http://www.nou.edu.ng/)

Let’s proceed to examine the qualities of a critic

The qualities (characteristics) of a critic

It is also important for you to know the qualities of a critic, namely:

1. He/she must be someone of rare sensibility - have a rare and unique sense of judgment.
2. He must be someone widely read.
3. He must have proper training and technical skill in different branches of literature.
4. He must rise above all prejudices, personal, religious, national, political or literary so as to be objective.
5. He must have imaginative sympathy - be sensitive and humane.
6. He must possess a sound knowledge of human psychology and human nature.
7. He must have knowledge in all branches of literature.
8. The critic must get at the mind of the author
9. The critic must have a philosophical mind.
10. Must be of varied experience - thoroughly acquainted with the great authors in several languages.
UNIT 2  
(Read these notes in conjunction with the old study guide content in Units 2 and 3)

THE CLASSICAL AGE: PLATO and ARISTOTLE

A. The Classical Age as exemplified by PLATO

2.1 Introduction

“All that is literature seeks to communicate power, all that is not literature seeks to communicate knowledge” says Thomas De Quincy. We shall study the literature of power and its evaluation. Literature of power is also referred as creative writing while evaluation of creative writing is referred as criticism.

The term classicism designates an attitude to literature that is guided by admiration of the qualities of formal balance, proportion, and decorum and restrained attributed to the major works of ancient Greek and Roman literature.

A classic is a work of the highest class. The term is applied to the writings of major Greek and Roman authors from Homer to Juvenal, which were regarded as the unsurpassed models of excellence. Plato and Aristotle are our classical thinkers and they lived in the 3-4th century BC. Plato, the great disciple of Socrates, was the first critic who examined poetry as a part of his moral philosophy. Plato was basically a moral philosopher and not a literary critic. Plato’s critical observations on poetry lie scattered in The Ion, The Symposium, The Republic and The Laws. In The Ion, he advocated poetry as a genuine piece of imaginative literature, but in The Republic which is a treatise on his concepts of Ideal State, he rejected poetry on moral and philosophical grounds.

2.2 Plato

Plato was a great moral philosopher and his primary concentration was to induce moral values in the society and to seek the ultimate Truth. So when he examines poetry his tool is rather moral and not aesthetic. He confused aesthetics with morality and ultimately concluded poetry as immoral and imitative in nature. Most of Plato’s philosophy is expounded in dialogue form, using a dialectical (to converse) method of pursuing truth by a systematic questioning of received ideas and opinions. The early dialogues are devoted (35 and 13 letters) to exploring and defining concepts such as virtue, temperance, courage, piety, and justice. The major dialogues of Plato’s middle period - Gorgias, Apology, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic - move into the realms of epistemology (theory of knowledge), metaphysics, political theory, and art (Habib, 2011)

These concerns are unified by Plato’s renowned theory of Forms. The theory sees:

The familiar world of objects which surrounds us, and which we perceive through our senses, as not independent or real but as dependent upon another world, the realm of pure Forms or ideas, which can be known only by reason and not by our bodily sense-perceptions.

Plato says that the qualities of any object in the physical world are derived from the ideal Forms.

For example, an object in the physical world is beautiful because it partakes of the ideal Form of Beauty which exists in the higher realm. And so with Tallness, Equality, or Goodness, which Plato sees as the highest of the Forms.

The connection between the two realms can best be illustrated using examples from geometry: any triangle or square that we construct using physical instruments is bound to be imperfect. At most it can merely approximate the ideal triangle which is perfect and which is perceived not by the senses but by reason: the ideal triangle is not a physical object but a concept, an idea, a Form.
According to Plato, because the world of Forms is changeless and eternal, **it constitutes reality.** It is the world of essences, unity, and universality. Contrary, the physical world is characterised by perpetual change and decay, mere existence (as opposed to essence), multiplicity, and particularity.

A central function of the theory of Forms is that it unifies groups of objects or concepts in the world by treating them as belonging to a class, by referring them back to a common essence, and thereby making sense of our innumerably diverse experiences (Adapted from Habib, 2011).

The great philosophers of the period discussed a great variety of matters including the value of literature of society and its nature and functions. The fourth century B.C. was an age of critical enquiry and analysis. Plato was not a professed critic of literature and there is no single work that contains his critical observations. His ideas are expressed in several books, chief among them being the “Dialogues” and the “Republic.” In these books, Plato gave initial formulation to the most fundamental questions:

- How can we define goodness and virtue?
- How do we arrive at truth and knowledge?
- What is the connection between soul and body?
- What is the ideal political state?
- Of what use are literature and the arts?
- What is the nature of language? (Habib, 2011, p.11)

Plato’s answers to these questions are still disputed; yet the questions themselves have endured.

### 2.3 Poetry in Plato’s Republic

Plato’s theory of poetry in the *Republic* is mainly concerned defining justice and the ideal nature of a political state. Plato views poetry as a powerful force in moulding public opinion, and sees it as a danger to his ideal city, ordered as this is in a strict hierarchy whereby the guardians (philosophers) and their helpers (soldiers) comprise an elect minority which rules over a large majority of farmers, craftsmen, and “money-makers” (415a-b; 434c). The program of education that he lays out for the rulers or guardians of the city consists of gymnastics and music.

According to Plato, it is music which primarily defines the function of guardianship. Hence, he condemns poetry on the grounds of:

1. the falsity of its claims and representations regarding both gods and men;
2. its corrosive effect on character; and
3. its “disorderly” complexity and encouragement of individualism in the sphere of sensibility and feeling.

Plato draws a powerful analogy between the individual and the state. In *book X*, he says that poetry appeals to the “inferior” part of the soul, the appetitive portion (X, 603b-c). In other words, it encourages variety and multiplicity, valuing the particular for its own sake, thereby distracting from contemplation of the universal.

In projecting this model onto the state as a whole, Plato aligns the mass of people with the unruly “multitude” of desires in the soul, and the guardians considered collectively with the “unity” of reason. The individuality of the guardians is to be all but erased, not merely through ideological conditioning but through their compulsory existence as a community: they are to possess no private property or wealth; they must live together, nourished on a simple diet, and receiving a stipend.
from the other citizens (III, 416d–417b). Collectively, then, the guardians’ function in the city is a projection of the unifying function of reason in the individual soul.

2.4 Plato’s Objection to Poetry

As a moralist, Plato disapproves of poetry because it is immoral. A poem for Plato is a collection of copies of the ideas or forms. His opinion has been outlined in his dialogues and in The Republic.

According to Plato, poetry tends to arouse emotions. So, the poet is not fit to be a good citizen. The moralistic approach believes that literature is morally good or has a capacity to influence people so as to make them morally better. Plato thought that bad and evil influences of literature should be kept from the young generation during their formative years.

Plato defends philosophy. His purpose is to demonstrate the practical superiority of philosophy over poetry. As a philosopher he disapproves of poem because it is based in falsehood. He is of the view that philosophy is better than poetry because a philosopher deals with idea / truth, whereas a poet deals with what appears to him / illusion. He believed that truth of philosophy was more important than the pleasure of poetry. He argued that most of it should be banned from the ideal society that he described in the Republic. Thus, Plato attacks poetry and drama on moral grounds. He says:

1. Poetry is not conducive to social morality
2. A poet “tells lies about gods” and gods and great heroes who are descended from the gods are represented as corrupt, dishonest, and subject to all faults and vices of common humanity. Works of poets like Homer must not be prescribed for school study.
3. Drama is even more harmful because dramatists and poets appeal to the baser instincts of men, their love of the sensational and the melodramatic.

What objections did Plato have with mimesis or poetry or poet? Do those objections apply to the sort of art we value today? Are they well-founded? These are the questions that we shall be discussing in this unit.

We note that Plato condemns poetry on intellectual, emotional and moral grounds, and demonstrate its usefulness, and its corrupting influences. He condemns the poets because “they feed and water the passions instead of drying them.”

As such, he condemns poetry on three grounds.

1. Poetic inspiration
2. The emotional appeal of poetry
3. Its non-moral character.

Now, let’s look at each one of these in detail.

1. Poetic inspiration

The poet writes not because he has thought long over but because he is inspired. It is a spontaneous overflow or a sudden outpouring of the soul. No one can rely on such sudden
outpourings. It might have certain profound truth, but it should be suspected to the test of reason. Then only it will be acceptable. Otherwise they are not safe guides. So they can’t be substitutes to philosophy which is guided by the cool deliberation or reasoning. Poetry, on the other hand, is created by the impulse of moment. So it cannot make a better citizen or a Nation.

2. The Emotional Appeal of Poetry

Poetry appeals to the emotions and not to the reason. Its pictures of life are therefore misleading. Poetry is the product of inspiration. Hence it cannot be a safe guide as reason.

Plato illustrates this with reference to the tragic poetry. In tragedy, there is much weeping and wailing. This moves the heart of the spectators. It is harmful in its effect. If we let our own pity grow on watching the grief of others, it will not be easy to restrain it in the case of our own sufferings. Poetry feeds the passions and let them rule us.

3. Its non-moral character

Poetry lacks concern with morality. It treats both virtue and vice alike. Virtue often comes to grief in literature. Many evil characters are happy and many virtuous men are seen unhappy. It is seen that wickedness is profitable and that honest dealing is harmful to one’s self. Their portraits of Gods and Heroes are also objectionable. Gods are presented as unjust or revengeful or guilty and heroes are full of pride, anger, grief and so on. Such literature corrupted both the citizen and the state.

In addition, in ‘The Republic, ’Plato objected to poetry on three grounds. Let’s proceed to examine his objections.

2.5 What were his Objections?

Plato objected to poetry on three grounds, namely, Education, Philosophical and moral viewpoint.

1. Plato’s objection to Poetry from the point of view of Education:

a. In ‘The Republic’ Book II - He condemns poetry as fostering evil habits and vices in children. Homer’s epics were part of studies. Heroes of epics were not examples of sound or ideal morality. They were lusty, cunning, and cruel - war mongers. Even Gods were no better.

b. Plato writes: “if we mean our future guardians to regard the habit of quarrelling among themselves as of all things the basest, no word should be said to them of the wars in the heaven, or of the plots and fighting of the gods against one another, for they are not true.... If they would only believe as we would tell them that quarrelling is unholy, and that never up to this time has there been any quarrelling between citizens...... these tales (of epics) must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have allegorical meaning or not.”

c. Thus he objected on the ground that poetry does not cultivate good habits among children.
2. Objection from Philosophical point of view:

a. In ‘The Republic’ Book X: Poetry does not lead to, but drives us away from the realisation of the ultimate reality - the Truth.

b. Philosophy is better than poetry because Philosophy deals with idea and poetry is twice removed from original idea.

c. Plato says: “The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearance only .... The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior and has inferior offspring.

3. Objection from the Moral point of view:

a. In the same book in ‘The Republic’: Soul of man has higher principles of reason (which is the essence of its being) as well as lower constituted of baser impulses and emotions. Whatever encourages and strengthens the rational principle is good, and emotional is bad.

b. Poetry waters and nourishes the baser impulses of men - emotional, sentimental and sorrowful. Plato says: “Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily limited .... And therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered state, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthen the feelings and impairs the reason ... Poetry feeds and waters the passion instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue.”

2.6 Why He Objected to Poetry?

These are Plato’s principal charges on poetry and objection to it. Before we pass on any judgement, we should not forget to keep in view the time in which he lived. During his time:

• There was political instability

• Education was in sorry state. Homer was part of studies - and Homer’s epics were misrepresented and misinterpreted.

• Women were regarded inferior human beings - slavery was wide spread.

• Best time of Greek literature was over - corruption and degeneration in literature.

• Confusion prevailed in all sphere of life - intellect, moral, political and education. Thus, in Plato’s time the poets’ added fuel to the fire. He looked at poets as breeders of falsehood and poetry as mother of lies.
And so the chief reasons for his objection to poetry were:

- it is not ethical because it promotes undesirable passions,
- it is not philosophical because it does not provide true knowledge, and
- it is not pragmatic because it is inferior to the practical arts and therefore has no educational value. These were the reasons for Plato’s objections to poetry.

2.7 The Value of Plato’s Criticism

Plato is a discerning critic in both poetry and drama. In his attack on poetry, he exhibits a thorough insight into their nature, function and method.

He insists on truth as the test of poetry. He says that poetry is twice removed from reality. He disapproves of the non-moral character of poetry. He makes a distinction between the function of poetry and that of philosophy. He also derides the emotional appeal of poetry.

He makes valuable observations on the source of comic and tragic pleasure. He was also, perhaps, the first to see that all art is imitation of mimesis. He divides poetry into the dithyrambic or the purely lyrical, the purely mimetic or imitative such as drama and the mixed kind such as the epic.

He makes valuable observation on style of good speech and writing.

2.7.1 Plato’s Observations on Style.

Plato lays down a few principles of good speech. They apply equally to good writing. The first essential of a speech is a thorough knowledge of the subject matter. The speaker should also know the art of speaking. The presentation must have an organic unity. i.e. it must have a beginning, middle and an end. The speaker must also have a thorough knowledge of human psychology. These principles are equally true in the case of written word.

2.7.2 Plato’s Comments on Drama

Plato’s observation on poetry is equally applicable to drama. But he says a few more things about drama in particular. These are:

1. *Its appeal to the Baser Instincts*

Drama is meant to be staged. Its success depends upon a heterogeneous multitude. In order to please them all, the dramatist often introduces what they like. This is likely to lead to the arousal of baser instincts. It may affect morality. Hence such plays should be banished.

2. *Effects of Impersonation*

By constantly impersonating evil characters, the actors imbibe vices. This is harmful to their natural self. Acting, says Plato is not a healthy exercise. It represses individuality and leads to the weakness of character; However, Plato admits that if the actors impersonate virtuous characters, the same qualities are stimulated in them by the force of habit. These tragedies that represent the best and the noble are to be encouraged.

3. *Tragic and Comic pleasure*

Plato tries to answer what constitutes tragic pleasure. But his explanation is not scientific. He says that human nature is a mixture of all sorts of feelings such as anger envy, fear, grief etc.; these
feelings are painful by themselves. But they afford pleasure when indulged in excess. It pleases a man to be angry or to go on weeping; otherwise he would not do so.

In comedy, the pleasure takes the form of laughter when we see a coward behaving like a brave man, a fool as a wise man, a cheat as an honest person and so on. The source of laughter is the incongruity between what he is and what he pretends to be. Such a pleasure is malicious as it arises from the weakness of a fellow man. We derive pleasure from such a man only if we love him. If he were one whom we hate, he fails to arouse any laughter but contempt. Plato says: "no character is comic unless he is lovable”.

2.9 Plato’s theory of Mimesis

In his theory of mimesis, Plato says that all art is mimetic by nature; art is an imitation of life. He believed that ‘idea’ is ultimate reality. Art imitates idea and so it is imitation of reality.

He gives an example of a carpenter and a chair. The idea of ‘chair’ first came in the mind of carpenter. He gave physical shape to his idea and created a chair. The painter imitated the chair of the carpenter in his picture of chair. Thus, the painter’s chair is twice removed from reality. Hence, he believed that art is twice removed from reality.

He gives first importance to philosophy as philosophy deals with idea, whereas poetry deals with illusion - things which are twice removed from reality. So too Plato, philosophy is better than poetry. This view of mimesis is pretty deflationary, for it implies that mimetic art--drama, fiction, and representational painting-- does not itself have an important role to play in increasing our understanding of human beings and the human world. We note that Plato’s view of art is closely related to his theory of ideas. Ideas, he says are the ultimate reality and things are conceived as ideas before they take practical shape as things.

This implication would not be rejected by every lover--or indeed every creator--of imaginative literature. Ironically it was Plato’s most famous student, Aristotle, who was the first theorist to defend literature and poetry in his writing Poetics against Plato’s objection and his theory of mimesis.

B. The Classical Age as exemplified by ARISTOTLE

1. Introduction

Aristotle is the second figure you need to talk about when you discuss the classical age of literary criticism. He is one of the greatest ancients we discuss in this course and he is very important as his views are the ones carried over and modified by John Dryden - hence the reason why we say that John Dryden is a neo-classic.

Aristotle is also a Greek philosopher like Plato. Aristotle lived from 384 B.C. to 322 B.C. He was a student of Plato, a Greek philosopher and critic. Among his critical treatise, only two are extant-‘Poetics’ and ‘Rhetoric’, the former deals with the art of poetry and the latter with the art of speaking.

His famous work is The Poetics is Aristotle’s great work on the principles of drama. He believed that the major function of art is to provide satisfaction, for happiness is the aim of life. He argued that tragedy stimulates the emotions of pity and fear.
"The Poetics contains twenty six small chapters. The first four chapters and the twenty-fifth are devoted to poetry; the fifth in general way to comedy, epic, and tragedy; the following fourteen exclusively to tragedy; the next three to poetic diction; the next to epic poetry; and the last to a comparison of epic poetry and tragedy. Aristotle's main concern thus appears to be tragedy, which was considered the most developed form of poetry in his day. Poetry, comedy, and epic come in for consideration because a discussion of tragedy would be incomplete without some reference to its parent and sister forms.

In *The poetics*, he outlined tragedy, catharsis, the tragic hero and the three Unities: these are important unities which you must always remember and explain as well as compare with what Dryden as a neo-classical critic says. These three unities are the unity of **TIME, PLACE and ACTION**. He spoke at length about poetic drama and especially applied his principles to the drama of Oedipus the King by Sophocles. He refers to this play to illustrate his critical terms – plot, character, thought, language, spectacle, catharsis, tragic hero, the three unities, and hamartia. According to Plato and Aristotle, the tragic hero has to be noble and from a high class like Oedipus.

Since Aristotle was Plato’s student, let’s start by examining his response to Plato’s objection to poetry.

2. Aristotle's Reply to Plato's Objection

Aristotle replied to the charges made by his Guru Plato against poetry in particular and art in general. He replied to them one by one in his defence of poetry.

2.1 Plato says that art being the imitation of the actual is removed from the Truth. It only gives the likeness of a thing in concrete, and the likeness is always less than real.

But Plato fails to explain that art also gives something more which is absent in the actual. The artist does not simply reflect the real in the manner of a mirror. Art cannot be slavish imitation of reality. Literature is not the exact reproduction of life in all its totality. It is the representation of selected events and characters necessary in a coherent action for the realization of the artist’s purpose. He even exalts, idealises and imaginatively recreates a world which has its own meaning and beauty. These elements, present in art, are absent in the raw and rough real. While a poet creates something less than reality he at the same times creates something more as well. He puts an idea of the reality which he perceives in an object. This ‘more’, this intuition and perception, is the aim of the artist. Artistic creation cannot be fairly criticized on the ground that it is not the creation in concrete terms of things and beings. Thus considered, it does not take us away from the Truth but leads us to the essential reality of life.

2.2 Plato again says that art is bad because it does not inspire virtue, does not teach morality. But is teaching the function of art? Is it the aim of the artist?

The function of art is to provide aesthetic delight, communicate experience, express emotions and represent life. It should never be confused with the function of ethics which is simply to teach morality. If an artist succeeds in pleasing us in the aesthetic sense, he is a good artist. If he fails in doing so, he is a bad artist. There is no other criterion to judge his worth. R.A.Scott-James observes: "Morality teaches. Art does not attempt to teach. It merely asserts it is thus or thus that life is perceived to be. That is my bit of reality, says the artist. Take it or leave it - draw any lessons you like from it - that is my account of things as they are - if it has any value to you as evidence of teaching, use it, but that is not my business: I have given you my rendering, my
account, my vision, my dream, my illusion - call it what you will. If there is any lesson in it, it is yours to draw, not mine to preach.” Similarly, Plato’s charges on needless lamentations and ecstasies at the imaginary events of sorrow and happiness encourage the weaker part of the soul and numb the faculty of reason. These charges are defended by Aristotle in his Theory of Catharsis. David Daiches summarizes Aristotle’s views in reply to Plato’s charges in brief: “Tragedy (Art) gives new knowledge, yields aesthetic satisfaction and produces a better state of mind.”

2.3 Plato judges poetry now from the educational standpoint, now from the philosophical one and then from the ethical one.

But he does not care to consider it from its own unique standpoint. He does not define its aims. He forgets that everything should be judged in terms of its own aims and objectives, its own criteria of merit and demerit. We cannot fairly maintain that music is bad because it does not paint, or that painting is bad because it does not sing. Similarly, we cannot say that poetry is bad because it does not teach philosophy or ethics. If poetry, philosophy and ethics had identical function, how could they be different subjects? To denounce poetry because it is not philosophy or ideal is clearly absurd.

2.4 Aristotle’s Objection to the Theory of Mimesis

Aristotle agrees with Plato in calling the poet an imitator and creative art, imitation. He imitates one of the three objects - things as they were/are, things as they are said/thought to be or things as they ought to be. In other words, he imitates what is past or present, what is commonly believed and what is ideal.

Aristotle believes that there is natural pleasure in imitation which is an in-born instinct in men. It is this pleasure in imitation that enables the child to learn his earliest lessons in speech and conduct from those around him, because there is a pleasure in doing so. In a grown-up child - a poet, there is another instinct, helping him to make him a poet - the instinct for harmony and rhythm.

He does not agree with his teacher in - ‘poet’s imitation is twice removed from reality and hence unreal/illusion of truth’, to prove his point he compares poetry with history. The poet and the historian differ not by their medium, but the true difference is that the historian relates ‘what has happened’, the poet, ‘what may/ought to have happened’ - the ideal. Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical, and a higher thing than history because history expresses the particular while poetry tends to express the universal. Therefore, the picture of poetry pleases all and at all times.

Aristotle does not agree with Plato in the function of poetry making people weaker and emotional/too sentimental. For him, catharsis is ennobling and it humbles a human being. So far as the moral nature of poetry is concerned, Aristotle believes that the end of poetry is to please; however, teaching may be the by-product of it. Such pleasing is superior to the other pleasures because it teaches civic morality. So all good literature gives pleasure, which is not divorced from moral lessons.

Can you identify the similarities and the differences between Plato and Aristotle?

2.5 Aristotle’s Concept of Tragedy

According to Aristotle metre/verse alone is not the distinguishing feature of poetry or imaginative literature in general. Even scientific and medical treatises may be written in verses. Verse will not make them poetry. Then the question is, if metre/verse does not distinguish poetry from other forms of art, how can we classify the form of poetry along with other forms of art?

Aristotle classifies various forms of art with the help of object, medium and manner of their imitation of life. Let’s look at these classifications.
2.5.1 **Object:** Which object of life is imitated determines the form of literature. If the Life of great people is imitative it will make that work a Tragedy and if the life of mean people is imitated it will make the work a Comedy. David Daiches writes explaining the classification of poetry which is imitative: “We can classify poetry according to the kinds of people it represents - they are either better than they are in real life, or worse, or the same. One could present characters, that is, on the grand or heroic scale; or could treat ironically or humorously the petty follies of men, or one could aim at naturalism presenting men neither heightened nor trivialized ... Tragedy deals with men on a heroic scale, men better than they are in everyday life whereas comedy deals with the more trivial aspects of human nature, with characters 'worse' than they are in real life.”

2.5.2 **Medium:** What sort of medium is used to imitate life again determines the forms of different arts. The painter uses the colours, and a musician will use the sound, but a poet uses the words to represent the life. When words are used, how they are used and in what manner or metre they are used further classifies a piece of literature in different categories as a tragedy or a comedy or an epic.

The types of literature, says Aristotle, can be distinguished according to the medium of representation as well as the manner of representation in a particular medium. The difference of medium between a poet and a painter is clear; one uses words with their denotative, connotative, rhythmic and musical aspects; the other uses forms and colours. Likewise, the tragedy writer may make use of one kind of metre, and the comedy writer of another.

2.5.3 **Manner:** In what manner the imitation of life is presented distinguishes the one form of literature from another. How is the serious aspect of life imitated? For example, dramas are always presented in action while epics are always in narration. In this way the kinds of literature can be distinguished and determined according to the techniques they employ. David Daiches says: “The poet can tell a story in narrative form and partly through the speeches of the characters (as Homer does), or it can all be done in third-person narrative, or the story can be presented dramatically, with no use of third person narrative at all.”

2.6 Aristotle’s Definition of Tragedy

Another very important contribution of Aristotle to literary criticism is his definition of tragedy and his definition is critical.

For Aristotle; “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in the language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation-catharsis of these and similar emotions” (Poetics, p. 10).

You have to always remember this definition and when we move on to John Dryden you must then compare and contrast their views.

Let’s try to explain this definition:

2.6.1 **Aristotle’s Explanation of the Definition**

The first part of this definition distinguishes tragedy from comedy; the second one; from the lyric; the second and third distinguish it from the epic; the last one describes its effect.

The definition may be analysed in another way. The first part describes the subject matter of tragedy, that is, an action that is serious, long enough and complete. The first part distinguishes it from comedy whose subject matter is not of such serious significance. The second and third part refers to its means, that is, acting, not narration. The second part distinguishes it from the lyric.
This and the next distinguish it from the epic which employs a single meter and is narrative in form. The fourth part mentions the end, i.e. arousing pity and fear and their catharsis. Thus, it mentions the feelings that a work should arouse if it should be considered a tragedy. The last line of the definition —

‘through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions’

substantiates the theory of Catharsis. His theory of Catharsis consists in the purgation or purification of the excessive emotions of pity and fear. Witnessing the tragedy and suffering of the protagonist on the stage, such emotions and feelings of the audience is purged. The purgation of such emotions and feelings make them relieved and they emerge better human beings than they were. Thus, Aristotle’s theory of Catharsis has moral and ennobling function.

Now, for a more detailed explanation: Read the following extract.

**Explanation of the definition:**

The definition is compact. Every word of it is pregnant with meaning. Each word of the above definition can be elaborated into a separate essay. All art is representation (imitation) of life, but none can represent life in its totality. Therefore, an artist has to be selective in representation. He must aim at representing or imitating an aspect of life or a fragment of life. Action comprises all human activities including deeds, thoughts and feelings. Therefore, we find soliloquies, choruses etc. in tragedy.

The writer of ‘tragedy’ seeks to imitate the serious side of life just as a writer of ‘comedy’ seeks to imitate only the shallow and superficial side. The tragic section presented on the stage in a drama should be complete or self-contained with a proper beginning, proper middle and proper end. A beginning is that before which the audience or the reader does not need to be told anything to understand the story. If something more is required to understand the story than the beginning gives, it is unsatisfactory. From it follows the middle. In their turn the events from the middle lead to the end. Thus the story becomes a compact & self-sufficient one. It must not leave the impression that even after the end the action is still to be continued, or that before the action starts certain things remain to be known.

Tragedy must have close-knit unity with nothing that is superfluous or unnecessary. Every episode, every character and a dialogue in the play must carry step by step the action that is set into motion to its logical dénouement. It must give the impression of wholeness at the end.

The play must have, then, a definite magnitude, a proper size or a reasonable length such as the mind may comprehend fully. That is to say that it must have only necessary duration, it should neither be too long to tire our patience nor be too short to make effective representation impossible. Besides, a drama continuing for hours - indefinitely may fail to keep the various parts of it together into unity and wholeness in the spectator’s mind. The reasonable duration enables the spectator to view the drama as a whole, to remember its various episodes and to maintain interest. The language employed here should be duly embellished and beautified with various artistic ornaments (rhythm, harmony, song) and figures of speech. The language of our daily affairs is not useful here because tragedy has to present a heightened picture of life’s serious side, and that is possible only if elevated language of poetry is used. According to need, the writer makes use of songs, poetry, poetic dialogue; simple conversation etc. is various parts of the play.

Its manner of imitation should be action, not narration as in epic, for it is meant to be a dramatic representation on the stage and not a mere story-telling.
Then, for the function/aim of tragedy is to shake up in the soul the impulses of pity and fear, to achieve what he calls Catharsis. The emotions of pity and fear find a full and free outlet in tragedy. Their excess is purged and we are lifted out of ourselves and emerge nobler than before.

Source: http://www.bhavuni.edu

Let’s look at a more detailed explanation of Aristotle’s definition by summarising his observations on tragedy.

2.7 Aristotle’s Observation On Tragedy

2.7.1. Its origin

Poetry can imitate two kinds of actions — the nobler actions of good men or the mean actions of bad men. Tragedy was born from the former and comedy from the latter. Tragedy has resemblances to epic and comedy to satire. Aristotle considers tragedy superior to epic. Tragedy has all the epic elements in a shorter compass.

2.7.2. Its characteristics

By a serious action Aristotle means a tale of suffering exciting the emotions of pity and fear. The writer of ‘tragedy’ seeks to imitate the serious side of life just as a writer of ‘comedy’ seeks to imitate only the shallow and superficial side. All art is representation (imitation) of life, but none can represent life in its totality. Therefore, an artist has to be selective in representation. He must aim at representing or imitating an aspect of life or a fragment of life. Action comprises of all human activities including deeds, thoughts and feelings (so, soliloquies, chorus etc. is also Action).

The action should be complete which means that it must have a proper beginning, middle and end. It should also be arranged sequentially also. In other words it should have an organic unity. The tragic section presented on the stage in a drama should be complete or self-contained with a beginning, middle and an end. A beginning is that before which the audience or the reader does not need to be told anything to understand the story. If something more is required to understand the story than the beginning gives, it is unsatisfactory. From it follow the middle. In their turn the events from the middle lead to the end.

Thus the story becomes a compact and self-sufficient one. It must not leave the impression that even after the end the action continues or that before the action starts certain things remain to be known.

The action must have a definite magnitude, that is, it should have a proper size or a reasonable length. It should be neither too long nor too short. Then only it can be easily remembered. It should have a length enough to unfold the events naturally. That is to say that it must have only necessary duration, not longer than about three hours, or shorter than that. Longer duration may tire our patience and shorter one make effective representation impossible. The reasonable duration enables the spectator to view the drama as a whole, to remember its various episodes and to maintain interest. Thus, the story must have close-knit unit with nothing that is superfluous or unnecessary. Every episode, every character and a dialogue in the play must carry step by step the action that is set into motion to its logical dénouement. It must give the impression of wholeness at the end.

By artistic ornament, Aristotle means rhythm, harmony and song. They are all designed to enrich the language of the play. The language employed here should be beautified with various artistic ornaments (rhythm, harmony, song) and figures of speech. The language of our daily affairs is not useful here because tragedy has to present a heightened picture of life’s serious side, and that is
possible only if elevated language of poetry is used. According to need, the writer makes use of songs, poetry, poetic dialogue, simple conversation etc. in various parts of the play.

The form of action in tragedy distinguishes it from narrative verse. In tragedy, the tale is told with the help of characters. Their speeches and actions make the tale. In the narrative the poet is free to speak in his own person.

In tragedy, the dramatist is nowhere seen. All is done by his characters. It is meant to be acted as well as read. Its manner of imitation should be action, not narration as in epic, for it is meant to be a dramatic representation, not a mere story-telling. The narrative, on the other hand is meant to be read only.

2.7.3. Its constituent Parts

After discussing the definition of tragedy, Aristotle explores various important parts of tragedy. He asserts that any tragedy can be divided into six constituent parts. They are: Plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle. The Greek equivalents of these terms are: ethos, muthos, dianoia, lexis, melos and opsis.

The Plot is the most important part of a tragedy. The plot means ‘the arrangement of the incidents’. Normally the plot is divided into five acts, and each Act is further divided into several scenes. The dramatist’s main skill lies in dividing the plot into Acts and Scenes in such a way that they may produce the maximum scenic effect in a natural development.

By plot Aristotle means the arrangement of incidents. Incidents mean action, and tragedy is an imitation of actions, both internal and external. That is to say that it also imitates the mental processes of the dramatic personae. In answering a question once he said that a tragedy could be written without a character but not without a plot. Though his overstatement on plot, he accepts that without action there cannot be a tragedy. The plot contains a beginning, middle and an end.

Characters are men and women who act. The hero and the heroine are two important figures among the characters. The characters serve to advance the action of the story, not vice versa. The ends we pursue in life, our happiness and our misery, all take the form of action. Tragedy is written not merely to imitate man but to imitate man in action. That is, according to Aristotle, happiness consists in a certain kind of activity rather than in a certain quality of character.

Diction and Thought are also less significant than plot: a series of well-written speeches has nothing like the force of a well-structured tragedy.

Thought means what the characters think or feel during their career in the development of the plot. The thought is expressed through their speeches and dialogues.

Diction is the medium of language or expression through which the characters reveal their thoughts and feelings. The diction should be ‘embellished with each kind of artistic element’.

The song is one of these embellishments. The decoration of the stage is the major part of the spectacle.

The Spectacle is theatrical effect presented on the stage. But spectacle also includes scenes of physical torture, loud lamentations, dances, colourful garments of the main characters, and the beggarly or jocular appearance of the subordinate characters or of the fool on the stage. These are the six constituent parts of tragedy.

Lastly, Aristotle notes that forming a solid plot is far more difficult than creating good characters or diction. Having asserted that the plot is the most important of the six parts of tragedy, he ranks
the remainder as follows, from most important to least: Character, Thought, Diction, Melody, and Spectacle.

Character reveals the individual motivations of the characters in the play, what they want or don't want, and how they react to certain situations, and this is more important to Aristotle than thought, which deals on a more universal level with reasoning and general truths. Diction, Melody/ Songs and Spectacle are all pleasurable accessories, but the melody is more important in tragedy than spectacle.

2.8 Aristotle's Theory of Catharsis and the function of tragedy

As discussed in the explanation of the definition of tragedy, theory of Catharsis emerges as the function of tragedy. Catharsis - this is defined as purgation or purification. Pity and fear are related feelings. We pity others whereas we fear for ourselves. The tragic sufferer is a man like us.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy indicates that the function of tragedy is to arouse 'pity and fear' in the spectator for both moral and aesthetic purpose. The function/aim of tragedy is to shake up in the soul the impulses of pity and fear, to achieve what he calls Catharsis. The emotions of pity and fear find a full and free out-lot in tragedy. Their excess is purged and we are lifted out of ourselves and emerged nobler than before.

So, in a sense, the tragedy, having aroused powerful feelings in the spectator, has also a salubrious effect; after the storm and climax there comes a sense of release from tension, of calm. His theory of Catharsis consists in the purgation or purification of the excessive emotions of pity and fear. Witnessing the tragedy and suffering of the protagonist on the stage, such emotions and feelings of the audience are purged. The purgation of such emotions and feelings make them relieved, and they emerge as better human beings than they were. Thus, Aristotle’s theory of Catharsis has moral and ennobling function.

2.9. The Three Unities

1. The unity of action: a play should have one single plot or action to sustain the interest of the spectators and it can also lead him to proper purgation.

2. The unity of time: the action in a play should not exceed the single revolution of the sun.

3. The unity of place: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.

These three principles are called unities, and the Three unities were unity of action, place and time. Let us understand them.

Unity of action refers to the structure of the plot. The combination of incidents which are the action of the play, should be one - one story told, which is not to say it has to be about only one person, since characters are not in the centre of the tragedy, but the action itself is. This unity of action evidently contains a beginning, middle and an end. The plot is the soul of the tragedy. It should have unity of action. It means that only those actions in the life of the hero which are intimately connected with one another and appear together as one whole forms the plot. If any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjoined. The events comprising the plot will concern only one man. Otherwise there will be no necessary connection between them.

A good tragic plot arouses the feelings of pity and fear in the audience- pity for the undeserved suffering of the hero and fear for the worst that may happen to him. The plot is divisible into two parts- complication and denouement. The former ties the events into a tangle knot, latter untie it. Complication includes all the actions from the beginning to the point where it takes a turn for good
or ill. The denouement extends from the turning point to the end. The first is commonly called the rising action, and the second the falling action.

**By unity of time,** Aristotle means the conformity between the time taken by the events of the play and that taken in their representation on the stage. The unity of place means the conformity between the scene of tragic events and the time taken by them to happen. The Unity of Time limits the supposed action to the duration, roughly, of a single day.

According to the **Unity of Place,** the setting of the play should have one place. Aristotle never mentioned the Unity of Place at all. The doctrine of the three unities, which has figured so much in literary criticism since the Renaissance, cannot be laid to his account. He is not the author of it; it was foisted on him by the Renaissance critics of Italy and France.

However, he makes a distinction between the two types of plots, the simple and the complex plots:

**Simple and Complex Plot**

The plot may be simple or complex. In a simple plot there are no puzzling situations such as peripeteia and anagnorisis. Peripeteia is generally explained as ‘reversal of the situation’ and anagnorisis as ‘recognition’ or ‘discovery’. By reversal of situation is meant reversal of intention (e.g. a move to kill an enemy turning on one’s own head, or killing an enemy and later discovering him to be a friend.) The discovery of these false moves is anagnorisis. In other words it means a change from ignorance to knowledge. Both peripeteia and anagnorisis please because there is an element of surprise in them. A plot that makes use of them is complex. A perfect tragedy should be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plot.

**2.10. Tragic Hero**

According to Aristotle, the ideal tragic hero should be good but neither too bad not too perfect. He should be a man whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depriving but by some error or frailty. This error is hamartia or the tragic flaw. For example, in ‘Hamlet’, it is his procrastination or inability to take action that leads to his down-fall. It is not a deliberate vice but flaw of characters and it makes the play tragic one.

The ideal tragic hero, according to Aristotle, should be, in the first place, a man of eminence. The actions of an eminent man would be ‘serious, complete and of a certain magnitude’, as required by Aristotle. Further, the hero should not only be eminent but also basically a good man, though not absolutely virtuous. The sufferings fall and death of an absolutely virtuous man would generate feelings of disgust rather than those of ‘terror and compassion’ which a tragic play must produce. The hero should neither be a villain nor a wicked person for his fall; otherwise his death would please and satisfy our moral sense without generation the feelings of pity, compassion and fear. Therefore, the ideal tragic hero should be basically a good man with a minor flaw or tragic trait in his character. The entire tragedy should issue from this minor flaw or error of judgment. The fall and sufferings and death of such a hero would certainly generate feelings of pity and fear.

**The tragic hero should also have the following characteristics:**

According to Aristotle, in a good tragedy, character supports plot. The personal motivation / actions of the characters are intricately involved with the action to such an extent that it leads to arouse pity and fear in the audience. The protagonist / tragic hero of the play should have all the characteristics of a good character. By good character, Aristotle means that they should be:

1. True to the self
2. True to type
3. True to life
4. Probable and yet more beautiful than life.

The tragic hero having all the characteristics mentioned above, has, in addition, a few more attributes. In this context Aristotle begins by the following observation,

- A good man - coming to bad end. (Its shocking and disturbs faith)
- A bad man - coming to good end. (neither moving, nor moral)
- A bad man - coming to bad end. (moral, but not moving)
- A rather good man - coming to bad end. (an ideal situation)

Thus, he is a man with the following attributes:

- He should be a man of mixed character, neither blameless nor absolutely depraved.
- His misfortune should follow from some error or flaw of character; short of moral taint.
- He must fall from height of prosperity and glory.
- The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so that his change of fortune can be from good to bad.
- The fall of such a man of eminence affects entire state/nation.
- This change occurs not as the result of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character. Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience.
- The ideal tragic hero should be an intermediate kind of a person, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just yet whose misfortune is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgement.

Let us discuss this error of judgement in following point.

2.11. The meaning of *Hamartia*

*Hamartia* is a term which is linked to Aristotle, meaning a tragic flaw or error. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must fall through her own error or hamartia. The term is also interpreted as “tragic flaw” and usually applied to the tragic hero’s overweening pride or hubris (pride), which causes a fatal error leading to his fall.

*Hamartia* (‘fatal flaw’ or ‘tragic flaw’) may consist of a moral flaw, or it may simply be a technical error/ error of judgement, or, ignorance, or even, at times, an arrogance (called *hubris* in Greek). It is owing to this flaw that the protagonist comes into conflict with Fate and ultimately meets his/her doom through the workings of Fate (called *Dike* in Greek) called *Nemesis*.

In the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough. The role of the hamartia in tragedy comes not from its moral status but from the inevitability of its consequences. This error of judgment may arise form: (i) ignorance (Oedipus), (ii) hasty - careless view(Othello) (iii) decision taken voluntarily but not deliberately(Lear, Hamlet).

The error of judgement is derived from ignorance of some material fact or circumstance. Hamartia is accompanied by moral imperfections (Oedipus, Macbeth). Hence the peripeteia is really one or more self-destructive actions taken in blindness, leading to results diametrically opposed to those that were intended (often termed tragic irony), and the anagnorisis is the gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking.
2.12 Aristotle’s opinion about Comedy

Aristotle regards comedy as inferior to tragedy. He traces its roots to satire. Satiric verse originated in phallic songs sung in honour of Dionysus, the god of fertility, as epic originated from hymns to gods and praises of famous men. Consequently tragedy represents men as noble as they can be, and comedy taking its origin from satirical verse, represents men as worse than they are, but satire ridicules personality or rather the “sinner” while comedy ridicules sin or rather human vices. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not consider the characters in comedy as vicious. According to him they are rendered ludicrous by some defect that is neither painful nor destructive. They are not contemptible also. Like poetry, comedy shows not what has happened, but what may happen. The characters are presented in particular situations in which every human being would have acted in the same way. Thus, general, not individual weakness is displayed in them.

2.13. Aristotle’s opinion about epic

The epic is earlier in origin than tragedy or comedy. In its nature it resembles tragedy, for it is an imitation of a serious action, whole, with a beginning, middle and an end. The structure also is like that of the tragedy, for the plot has a complication, and denouement, it can be complex, or simple, with or without peripeteia and anagnorisis. Its effect is the same, namely catharsis. But it lacks the song and spectacle found in tragedy. In its form it is different from tragedy, for it is narrative and is much longer than a tragedy. It is meant to be read or recited. While the tragedy presents only one main event, an epic contains several events which add to its variety and grandeur. Thirdly, an epic poet can introduce many improbable but marvellous incidents which presented on the stage may appear absurd, while they remain unnoticed when perceived by the imagination. They add to the pleasure of the poem, and Aristotle recommended probable impossibilities though not improbable possibilities. The supernatural element in the epic is an example of it. Aristotle still considers tragedy superior to epic though the latter appeals to the cultured, refined people and has no need of theatrical aid to achieve its effect. But Aristotle finds that tragedy with its music produced greater pleasure and its limited length attains more unity.

2.14. Aristotle’s observation on Style

Aristotle lays down clearness and propriety as two essentials of good writing. According to him current words are the best. But writing should aim at dignity and charm. These are best attained by the use of archaic words, foreign words, dialect words and newly coined words. They have an element of surprise in them. Metaphorical use of words is to be preferred to the plain. Aristotle says that a perfect poetic style uses words of all kinds in a judicious combination. Compound words are the most suitable for the lyric, rare or unfamiliar words suit the epic form, and metaphorical use of language is best for drama. In the “Rhetoric” Aristotle comments that common, familiar words are best for prose that deals with everyday subjects. But metaphorical language may be employed to introduce an element of novelty and surprise. Multiplicity of clauses, parenthesis and ambiguity should be avoided in prose. Words may be arranged in two ways called loose style and periodic style. The former consists of a whole sentence with a beginning and an end. The periodic style is more intelligible and graceful.

2.15. The Value of Aristotle’s Criticism

Aristotle’s approach to literature is that of a scientist. Aristotle wanted literature to be an art and not to do the work of morality. He points the difference between politics and poetry. Politics is a social science, therefore it should be judged by the contribution it makes to social well-being. Poetry, on the other hand, should be judged by its capacity to please the audience. He judges literature by aesthetic standards alone. Unlike Plato, he does not regard poetry as twice removed from reality. Instead, he considers the representations in poetry as true to the facts of human life. He points out its capacity to see the permanent features of life. He suggests what kind of plot,
character and style please men. He finds that perepetiea and anagnorisis, please most in a tragic plot, hamartia in the tragic hero, and metaphor in style. Tragedy, comedy and epic are all, in this way, considered with reference to the effect on the minds and hearts of their spectators. Poetics deals with the art of poetry and many more problems of literature and has therefore attracted greater attention than any other works of criticism. (https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/literary-theory-and-criticism)

However, we need to always note that Plato and Aristotle had similarities and differences. I will give you some of their similarities and let you think about some of their differences. Some of their similarities are as follows:

Aristotle agreed with Plato that:

1. Poetry is an imitative art
2. Poetry arouses emotions
3. Poetry gives pleasure
4. Emotion has an effect upon the whole personality of the spectator or reader and on his emotional behaviour in real life.
5. Both considered poetry from a practical and utilitarian point of view.

3. Aristotle's Observation on Poetry

3.1. Its Nature

Aristotle calls the poet an imitator. The poet imitates things ‘as they were or are’, ‘as they are said or thought to be’ or ‘as they ought to be’. In other words the poet imitates what is past or present, what is commonly believed, and what is ideal.

He believes that there is a natural pleasure in imitation. This is an inborn natural instinct.

There is also another inborn instinct i.e. the instinct for harmony and rhythm. This manifests itself in metrical composition.

But unlike Plato, Aristotle does not consider the poet’s imitations of life as twice removed from reality, but reveal universal truths.

To prove this, Aristotle makes a comparison between poetry and history. The poet does not relate what has happened, but what may happen. The historian relates what has happened. Poetry therefore is more philosophical and higher than history. Poetry expresses the universal, history the particular. The pictures of poetry are truths based on facts on the laws of probability or necessity. Thus Aristotle answers Plato's severest charge against poetry.

3.2. Its functions

Aristotle considers pleasure as the end of poetry. Poetry springs from the instincts of imitation and rhythm and harmony. They are indulged in for the pleasure they give. Poetry is pleasing both to the poet and to the reader. Aristotle nowhere states that the function of poetry is to teach. However, he considers teaching desirable, if it is incidental to the pleasure it gives. Such a pleasure is regarded as superior to all others, for, it has a dual purpose i.e. teaching as well as pleasing.
3.3. Its emotional appeal

Poetry makes an immediate appeal to the emotions. For example, tragedy aroused the emotions of pity and fear—pity at the undeserved suffering and fear for the worst that may befall him. Plato considers them harmful to the healthy growth of mind. Aristotle has no such fear. According to him these emotions are aroused with a view to their purgation or catharsis. Everybody has occasions of fear and pity in life. If they go on accumulating they become harmful to the soul. But in tragedy, the sufferings we witness are not our own and these emotions find a free and full outlet. Thereby they relieve the soul of their excess. We are lifted of ourselves and emerge nobler than before. It is this that pleases in a tragic tale. Thus tragedy transmutes these disturbing emotions into “calm of mind”. So the emotional appeal of poetry is not harmful but health-giving.

Let’s complete this Unit by looking at the significance of Classical Criticism.

4. Relevance of Classical Criticism

Study of Classical Criticism gives insight to a student into the critical way of thinking. By studying Classical Criticism students get sense and understanding about how the literary theories increase his/her capacities to think critically without the bias or prejudice or preconceived notions.

The student also has a chance to study different points of view in the context of different genres of literature. Furthermore, s/he can develop critical sight and insight not only to judge the literature but also to evaluate any good piece of literature of the present time.

The Greek and Roman critics belong to the classical school of criticism which is still relevant today. The basic concepts they have given us to study literature with are still important and supply us with the basic ideas whereby to examine the literary text. When we study Plato’s theory of Mimêsis we come to know that literature is an imitation of nature.

Further in Aristotle when we study his definition of tragedy, we come to appraise that this imitation is nothing but the imitation of an action.

Since Aristotle, in Europe tragedy has never been a drama of despair, causeless death or chance disaster. The drama that only paints horrors and leaves souls shattered and mind un-reconciled with the world may be described as a gruesome, ghastly play, but not a healthy tragedy, for tragedy is a play in which disaster or downfall has causes which could carefully be avoided and sorrow in it does not upset the balance in favor of pessimism. That is why, in spite of seriousness, even heart-rending scenes of sorrow, tragedy embodies the vision of beauty. It stirs noble thoughts and serves tragic delight but does not condemn us to despair. If the healthy notion of tragedy has been maintained throughout the literary history of Europe, the ultimate credit, perhaps, goes back to Aristotle who had propounded it in his theory of Catharsis.

Catharsis established tragedy as a drama of balance. Sorrow alone would be ugly and repulsive. Beauty, pure would be imaginative and mystical. These together constitute what may be called tragic beauty. Pity alone would be sentimentality. Fear alone would make us cowards. But pity and fear, sympathy and terror together constitute the tragic feeling which is most delightful though, it is tearfully delightful. Such tragic beauty and tragic feeling which it evokes, constitutes the aesthetics of balance as propounded for the first time by Aristotle in his theory of Catharsis. Therefore, we feel, the reverence which Aristotle has enjoyed through ages, has not gone to him undeserved. His insight has rightly earned it.
UNIT 3
(Read these notes in conjunction with the old study guide content in Unit 3)

Neoclassical Criticism: John Dryden

2.1 Introduction: John Dryden as the father of English literary criticism

"The father of English criticism" is the title conferred on John Dryden by Dr Johnson who said, "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." Dr Johnson's verdict has been supported by critic after critic. Even a modern critic like T. S. Eliot supports this view. And George Saintsbury very aptly remarks: "He established the English fashion of criticising, as Shakespeare did the English fashion of dramatising—the fashion of aiming at delight, at truth, at justice, at nature, at poetry, and letting the rules take care of themselves."

John Dryden (9 August 1631 – 1 May 1700) was a prominent English poet, critic, translator, and playwright who dominated the literary life of the Restoration Age; therefore, the age is also known as the Age of Dryden. He was both a writer and a critic and he had rather a dogmatic bent. Most of his critical interpretations are found in the prefaces to his own works. Dryden’s mature thoughts of literary criticism on ancient, modern and English Literature, especially on Drama, are presented in dialogue forms in An Essay on Dramatic Poesy. He gives an account of the Neo-classical theory. He defends the classical drama saying that it is an imitation of life, and reflects human nature clearly. He also discusses the three unities, rules that require a play to take place in one place, during one day, and that it develops one single action or plot.

2.1.1 First Original Critic

Before Dryden English criticism was just a blind imitation of the ancients. It was he who liberated it from classicism and rightly therefore, "it is in virtue of his 'liberal classicism' and sturdy independence of spirit that Jonson deserves the title of being the first English critic." Not that there was no criticism in England before Dryden. There had been critics like Sir Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson. But they were critics merely by chance; their critical works are merely occasional utterances on the critical art. Sidney's *Apology* arose out of the need to defend poetry against Puritan attack, and the learned Ben's critical utterances are in the nature of jottings on just a few things that interested him. While Jonson is ruthless, Dryden is tolerant; while Jonson is limited, Dryden is urbane in his critical range. Jonson's criticism is sketchy and relatively small in output: "Dryden with a diverse literacy tradition behind him and a much greater critical output remains the true father of English practical criticism."

2.1.2 His Liberal Classicism

The earlier criticism was 'magisterial' or dogmatic. Dryden, on the other hand, is never magisterial; he is sceptical. He does not lay down the rule; he rather sets out to discover the rules for his guidance in writing plays, as well as in judging of those written by others. He rather derides those who are dogmatic or too sure in knowing the correct thing. The sceptical tone of his criticism is but a reflection of his personality—gentle, modest, unassuming, intelligent, free from dogmatism and vanity of every kind.

Dryden agrees in general terms with Aristotle’s definition of poetry as a process of imitation though he has to add some qualifications to it. The generally accepted view of poetry in Dryden’s day was that it had to be a close imitation of facts past or present. While Dryden has no problem with the prevalent neo-classical bias in favour of likeness to reality, he also allowed more liberties and flexibilities for poetry. In *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* he makes out a case for double-legged imitation. While the poet is free to imitate “things as they are said or thought to be”, he
also gives spirited defence of a poet’s right to imitate what could be, might be or ought to be. He cites in this context the case of Shakespeare who so deftly exploited elements of the supernatural and elements of popular beliefs and superstitions. Dryden would also regard such exercises as ‘imitation’ since it is drawing on “other men’s fancies”.

Scott-James has aptly remarked, "he clears the ground for himself by brushing away all the arbitrary bans upon freedom of composition and freedom of thought. He refuses to be cowed by the French playwrights and critics. He sees no reason why tragi-comedy should be forbidden because it mingles mirth with serious plot, nor will he join blaming the variety and copiousness of the English plays, with their under-plots or by-concernments, because they do not conform to the French ideal of singleness of plot. Even to Aristotle he refuses to render slavish homage. 'It is not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides: and, if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.'

2.1.3 His Contribution to Descriptive Criticism

"The first Englishman to attempt any extended descriptive criticism," says George Watson, "was John Dryden." The earlier English criticism was either theoretical or legislative. The critics were merely content to lay down the rules. It is Dryden who inaugurates the era of descriptive criticism; he was qualified for the function by his wide reading and learning. He had, 'not only read and digested Sophocles, Euripides, Theocritus and Virgil, but also Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Fletcher, and a host of other writers, both ancient and modern. It is in his criticism that literary analysis, the dominant concern of the modern critic, emerges for the first time. There is no surviving Elizabethan analysis of an Elizabethan play, and no contemporary analysis of a Metaphysical poem. It is in Dryden's examen of The Silent Woman that we get the first elaborate critical analysis of a literary work in English. Both Saintsbury and George Watson agree that the "Examen is something quite new" in the history of English literary criticism. Equally unique are his enthusiastic and loving appreciations of Shakespeare, Fletcher and Beaumont, and Ben Jonson. Nothing like this had previously been seen in English, while to this day his character of Shakespeare is 'one of the pieces of universal criticism.' Dryden thus affirms at the right moment, "the native element," in literature.

2.1.4 Pioneer in the field of historical criticism

Dryden is also a pioneer in the field of historical criticism. He recognises that the genius and temperament differ from age to age, and hence literature in different periods of history is bound to be different. He traces the decay of literature in the Pre-Restoration era to historical causes and its revival, "to the restoration of our happiness." Thus he recognizes that the Elizabethan Drama and the Restoration Drama are governed by different literary conventions.

2.1.5 His Contribution to Comparative Criticism

Dryden has added a new dimension to criticism by his method of comparative analysis. His comparative studies of Greek, Roman, French and English writers show not only the wide range of his knowledge but also the catholicity of his taste and sensitiveness to literary values in whatever literature they may be found. In this connection, as David Daiches observes, 'We must remember, too, that Dryden's method shifts according to the work he is discussing; he was intelligent and sensitive enough as a critic to realize that different kinds of works require different critical approaches. He would never have analysed Shakespeare the way he analysed Jonson, for he knew that they were doing different sorts of thing.' This makes Dryden's criticism highly individualised and free from the rigidity of a system.

2.1.6 His Contribution to Theoretical Criticism
In the field of theoretical criticism, Dryden's best contribution lies in the modification of the ancient doctrines rather than in the creation of new theories. He tested every accepted critical canon of the ancients in the light of 'modernity' and exploded some of their outmoded concepts. He recognised the fundamental truth that 'the climate, the age, the disposition of the people, to which a poet writes, may be so different, that what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience.'

2.1.7 The affirmation of the Native Element

"The great work of Dryden in criticism," observes T. S. Eliot, "is that at the right moment he became conscious of the necessity of affirming the native element in literature." His vindication of the English dramatist of the preceding age is regarded as a glorious example of 'national self-appreciation'. "In an age of transition and much confusion, he set criticism on new and fruitful lines, pointing to other standards and methods than those commanded by the French neo-classical school" (Atkins).

2.1.8 His Faults

His criticism suffers from well-marked faults. He is often prejudiced in favour of his country, and his own age, often his criticism is in the nature of special pleading, sometimes he commits errors of fact or conveniently ignores awkward facts. He is guilty of many inconsistencies and is often vague and desultory. But despite these faults it must be acknowledge that "he established the English fashion of dramatizing.....the fashion of aiming at delight, at truth, at justice, at nature, at poetry, and letting the rules take care of themselves" (Saintsbury).

2.2 John Dryden's Contributions

John Dryden is rightly considered as “the father of English Criticism”. He was the first to teach the English people to determine the merit of composition upon principles. With Dryden, a new era of criticism began. Before, Dryden, there were only occasional utterances on the critical art. (e.g. Ben Jonson and Philip Sidney) Though Dryden’s criticism was of scattered nature; he paid attention to almost all literary forms and expressed his views on them. Except An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden wrote no formal treatise on criticism. His critical views are found mostly in the prefaces to his poetical works or to those of others.

2.2.1 Nature of poetry

Dryden agrees with Aristotle's definition of poetry as a process of imitation. It imitates facts past or present, popular beliefs, superstitions and things in their ideal form. Dryden defends Shakespeare's use of the supernatural founded on popular beliefs. For, it is still an imitation though of other men's fancies. According to him, poetry and painting are not only true imitations of nature but of the best nature, i.e., a much greater criticism.

2.2.2 Function of poetry

While, Plato wanted poetry to instruct the reader and Aristotle to delight, Dryden incorporated both views. The final end of poetry, according to Dryden is delight and transport rather than instruction. To realise it, it does not merely imitate life, but offers its own version of it - 'a beautiful resemblance of the whole'. The poet is neither a teacher nor a bare imitator - a photographer - but a creator. He is one who, with life or nature as his raw material, produces a new thing altogether, resembling the original in its basis but different from it in the super structure - a work of art rather than a copy. According to Dryden, poetry is a work of art rather than mere imitation

2.2.3 Dramatic poetry
Drama claimed most of Dryden's attention. On the introduction of unpalatable or incredible scenes such as battles and deaths on the stage, he says that death can never be imitated to a just height and it can be avoided. He sees nothing wrong in other physical action - battles, duels and the like.

Dryden does not subscribe to the accepted interpretation of the three Unities; that the plot should be single, the time of action twenty four hours, and the place the same everywhere (where scene leads to scene in unbroken chain). He favours the weaving of a sub plot into the main plot. He feels that the plot time can be increased a little more to allow for greater maturity of the plot. In the same way, the unity of place cannot be maintained as the time taken by the events of the play determines the location of the scene and the unity of place can be waived. Dryden considers the unities of Time and Place too rigorous and they leave little scope for the development of plot and character.

2.2.4 Tragedy

Dryden's definition of tragedy is the same as Aristotle's: 'an imitation of one, entire, great and probable action; not told but represented, which by moving in us fear and pity is conducive to the purging of those two emotions in our minds'. Dryden merely follows Aristotle and Horace in his remarks on the tragic hero and other characters in Tragedy. Dryden has no use for the group of characters called 'chorus' in the Greek Tragedy.

2.2.5 Comedy

Dryden has not much of his own to say on comedy. Following Aristotle, he calls it 'a representation of human life in inferior persons and low subjects. To the question whether comedy delights or instructs, Dryden says that the first end of comedy is delight and instruction only the second. The persons in comedy are of a lower quality, the action is little and the faults and vices are but the sallies of youth and frailties of human nature; they are not premeditated crimes. Dryden wanted English comedy to be more refined than it was. According to him, Ben Jonson had only specialised in 'humour' and what it lacked was 'wit'. As repartee is 'one of the chiefest graces of comedy', the greatest pleasure of the audience is 'a chance exchange of wit, kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed'. Beaumont and Fletcher were adept in the art. What Dryden wanted in comedy was 'refined laughter' rather than the coarse one arising out of the display of 'humours' or eccentric traits in individuals. While in a comedy of 'humours' the spectators laughed at the 'humorous' character, in a comedy of wit (or comedy of manners as it grew) they laughed with the witty one.

2.2.6 Epic

Dryden is with the French critics in considering the epic superior to the tragedy. He asks, 'what virtue is there in a tragedy which is not contained in an epic poem. He stresses that the epic is certainly the greatest work of human nature. Aristotle had preferred the tragedy to the epic. Regarding the visual appeal of the tragedy, Dryden urges three points: that it is the actor's work as much as the poet's and so the poet alone cannot deserve credit for it that the stage is handicapped to show many things - big armies, for instance - in words; and that while we have leisure to digest what we read in the epic, we miss many beauties of a play in the performance. Dryden disagrees with Aristotle again in insisting on a moral in the epic.

2.2.7 Satire

In the first instance, the satire must have unity of design, confining itself for that purpose to one subject or principally one. In other words, the satirist should choose one vice or folly for his target, as the epic poet chooses one character for his special praise and make all others subservient to it as the epic poet does the other characters. In the same way, he should extol 'someone precept of moral virtue'. For the manner of the satire, Dryden would prefer 'fine raillery'.
2.3 An Essay on Dramatic Poesy: An Introduction

In An Essay on ‘Dramatic Poesy” there are four speakers. Each one argues strongly as to which one is better, “Ancient or Modern, and French or English?” The Essay is written in the form of a dialogue involving four gentlemen: Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius and Neander. Neander seems to speak for Dryden himself. Eugenius takes the side of the modern English dramatists by criticising the faults of the classical playwrights who did not themselves observe the unity of place. But Crites defends the ancient and pointed out that they invited the principles of dramatic art enunciated by Aristotle and Horace. Crites opposes rhyme in plays and argues that though the moderns excel in science; the ancient age was the true age of poetry. Lesideius defends the French playwrights and attacks the English tendency to mix genres. He defines a play as a just and lively image of human and the change of fortune to which it is subject for the delight and instruction of mankind. The dialogue will be discussed in detail later in this unit.

Neander favours the Moderns, respects the Ancients, critical to rigid rules of dramas and he favours rhyme if it is in proper place like in grand subject matter. Neander a spokesperson of Dryden argues that tragic comedy is the best form for a play; because it is the closest to life in which emotions are heightened by both mirth and sadness. He also finds subplots as an integral part to enrich a play. He finds the French drama, with its single action.

Neander favours the violation of the unities because it leads to the variety in the English plays. The unities have a narrowing and crumpling effect on the French plays, which are often betrayed into absurdities from which the English plays are free. The violation of unities helps the English playwright to present a mere, just and lively image of human nature.

In his comparison of French and English drama, Neander characterises the best proofs of the Elizabethan playwrights. He praises Shakespeare, ancients and moderns. Neander comes to the end for the superiority of the Elizabethans with a close examination of a play by Jonson which Neander believes a perfect demonstration that the English were capable of following the classical rules. In this way, Dryden’s commitment to the neoclassical tradition is displayed.

(https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/reflections/)

2.3.1 Definition of Drama

Dryden defines drama as a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.

According to the definition, drama is an ‘image’ of ‘human nature’, and the image is ‘just’ and ‘lively’. The word ‘just’ seems to imply that literature imitates (and not merely reproduces) human actions. For Dryden, ‘poetic imitation’ is different from an exact, servile copy of reality, for, the imitation is not only ‘just’; it is also ‘lively’.

When the group talks about the definition of Drama, Lisidieus expresses his views about Drama as “a just and lively Image of Humane Nature.” And then each character expresses his views about Drama and they compare French Drama and English Drama and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of French and English Drama. The debate goes on about the comparison between ancient writers and modern writers. They also discuss the importance of “Unity in French Drama”. So far as the Units of Time, Place and Action are concerned French Drama was closer to the classical notions of Drama.

Crites objects specifically to the use of rhyme as he privileges the authenticity of the scene while citing Aristotle. On the other hand, Neander favours the natural rhyme since that, according to
2.3.2 Violation of the Three Unities

The age of pseudo-classic criticism, the French playwrights and critics had precise rules that guided them in their writing. However, Dryden had the boldness to defend the claims of genius to write without regard for the prescription and rules which had been laid down for good writing. He cleared the ground for himself by brushing away all the arbitrary bans upon freedom of judgment and refused to be cowed down by the set rules. Let's examine Dryden's defence.

As regards the unities, his views are as follows:

a) The English violation of the three unities lends greater copiousness (existing in large amounts, profuse in speech) and variety to the English plays. The unities have narrowing and cramping effects on the French plays, and they are often betrayed into absurdities from which English plays are free.

b) The English disregard of the unities enables them to present a more 'just' and 'lively' picture of human nature. The French plays may be more regular but they are not as lively, not so pleasant and delightful as that of English. e.g., Shakespeare's plays which are more lively and just images of life and human nature.

c) The English when they do observe the rules as Ben Jonson has done in The Silent Woman, show greater skill and art than the French. It all depends upon the 'genius' or 'skill' of the writer.

d) There is no harm in introducing 'sub-plots', for they impart variety, richness, and liveliness to the play. In this way the writer can present a more 'just' and 'lively' picture than the French with their narrow and cramped plays.

e) To the view that observance of the unities is justified on the ground that (i) their violation results in improbability, (ii) that it places too great a strain on the imagination of the spectators, and (iii) that credibility is stretched too far, Dryden replies that it is all a question of 'dramatic illusion'. Lisideius argues that "we cannot so speedily recollect ourselves after a scene of great passion and concernment to pass to another of mirth and humour and to enjoy it with any relish". What Neader implies by this is that satisfying the senses is primary while that of the soul is secondary and that sensory perception helps in dramatic illusion.

2.3.3 Eugenius Arguments on Superiority of Moderns over the Ancients

Eugenius says that "the moderns have profited by the rules of the ancients" but moderns have "excelled them." He notes some discrepancies in the applications of the Unities. While there four parts in Aristotle's method: the entrance, the intensifying of the plot, the counter-turn, and the catastrophe, Horace's plays developed five acts and the Spanish only 3. With regards to the action, Eugenius contends that they are transparent, everybody already having known what will happen. As far as the unity of place is concerned, he suggests that the Ancients were not the ones to insist on it so much as the French, and that insistence has caused some artificial entrances and exits of characters. The unity of time is often ignored in both. As to the liveliness of language, Eugenius counters Crites by suggesting that even if we do not know all the contexts, good writing is always good, wit is always discernible, if done well. He goes on to say also that while the Ancients portrayed many emotions and actions, they neglected love, "which is the most frequent of all passions" and known to everyone. He mentions Shakespeare and Fletcher as offering "excellent
scenes of passion."
(Adapted from (https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/reflections/))

2.3.4 Crites’s Arguments in favour of the Ancients

Crites develops the main points in defending the ancients and raises objections to modern plays. The Moderns are still imitating the Ancients, using their forms and subjects. They rely on Aristotle and Horace and nothing new has been added and have not followed their good advice closely either, especially with respect to the Unities of time, place and action. He notes the following:

- While the unity of time suggests that all the action should be portrayed within a single day, the English plays attempt to use long periods of time, sometimes years.
- In terms of place, the setting should be the same from beginning to end with the scenes marked by the entrances and exits of the persons having business within each. The English, on the other hand, try to have all kinds of places, even far off countries, shown within a single play.
- The third unity that of action, requires that the play "aim at one great and complete action", but the English have all kinds of sub-plots which destroy the unity of the action.

Crites uses Ben Jonson as the example of the best in English drama, saying that he followed the Ancients "in all things" and offered nothing really new in terms of "serious thoughts".

2.3.5 Lisideius’s view in favour of Superiority of the French Drama over English Drama

Lisideius speaks in favour of the French. He agrees with Eugenius that in the last generation the English drama was superior. Then they had their Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. But English drama has decayed and declined since then. They live in an awful age full of bloodshed and violence, and poetry is an art of peace.

Thus, he argues that in the present age, it flourishes in France and not in England. The French are superior to the English for various reasons:

1. They follow the Ancients. They favour the Unity of time and they observe it so carefully. When it comes to the Unity of Place, they are equally careful. In most of their plays, the entire action is limited to one place. And the Unity of Action is even more obvious. Their plays are never overloaded with sub-plots as is the case with the English plays. The English playwrights constantly divert from one action to the other, and have its due effects. This fault of double-action gives rise to another fault till the end. Lisideius therefore concludes: no drama in the world is as absurd as the English tragic-comedy. The French plays also have much variety but they do not provide it in such a bizarre manner. The English are guilty of the folly, while the French are not.

2. The Plots of the French tragedies are based on well-known stories with reference to the theory and practice of the Ancients. But these stories are transformed for dramatic purposes; in this regard they are superior even to the Ancients. So their stories are mixture of truth with fiction, based on historical invention. They both delight and instruct, at one and the same time. But the English dramatists for example Shakespeare do not modify and transform their stories for dramatic purpose. In order to satisfy the human soul, the drama must have a likeness to reality. The French plays have it, while the English do not.

3. The French do not burden the play with a fat plot. They represent a story which will be one complete action, and everything which is unnecessary is carefully excluded. But the English burden their plays with actions and incidents which have no logical and natural connection with the main
action so much so that English play is a mere compilation. Hence the French plays are better written than the English ones.

4. The English devote considerable attention to one single character, and the others are merely introduced to set off that principal character. It seems one character is more important than the others, and quite naturally, the greater part of the action is concerned with him. Since in real life it is not so, it is only very proper and reasonable that it should be so also in the drama. In French plays, very correctly the other characters are not neglected. Also, unlike in the English plays in the French plays such narrations are made by those who are in some way or the other connected with the main action. Similarly the French are more skilled than the Ancients.

5. Further, the French narrations are better managed and more skilful than those of the English. The narration may be of two kinds. The action of the play which is dull and boring, and is often not listened to by the audience. Secondly, there’s the narration of things happening during the course of the play. While French are able to avoid the representation of scenes of bloodshed, violence and murder on the stage, such scenes of horror and tumult has disfigured many English plays. In this way, the French avoid much that is ridiculous and absurd in the English plays.

6. The major imperfection of English plays is the representation of Death on the stage. All passions can be in a lively manner represented on the stage, only if the actor has the necessary skill, but there are many actions which cannot be successfully represented, and dying is one of them. The French omit the same mistake. Death should better be described or narrated rather than represented.

7. It is wrong to believe that the French represent no part of their action on the stage. Instead, they make proper selection. Cruel actions which are likely to cause hatred, or disbelief by their impossibility, must be avoided or merely narrated. They must not be represented. The French follow this rule in practice and so avoid much of the tumult of the English plays by reducing their plots to reasonable limits. Such narrations are common in the plays of the Ancients and the great English dramatists like Ben Jonson and Fletcher. Therefore, the French must not be blamed for their narration, which are judicious and well managed.

(Adapted from https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/reflections/)

2.2.6: Neander’s view in favour of Modern (English) Drama

Based on the definition of the play, Neander suggests that English playwrights are best at “the lively imitation of nature” (i.e., human nature). He even says that the newer French writers are imitating the English playwrights. One fault he finds in their plots is that the regularity also makes the plays too much alike. He defends the English invention of tragi-comedy by suggesting that the use of mirth with tragedy provides “contraries” that “set each other off” and gives the audience relief from the heaviness of straight tragedy. He suggests that the use of well-ordered sub-plots makes the plays interesting and help the main action. Further, he suggests that English plays are more entertaining and instructive because they offer an element of surprise that the Ancients and the French do not. He brings up the idea of the suspension of disbelief. While the audience may know that none of them are real, why should they think scenes of deaths or battles any less “real” than the rest? Here he credits the English audience with certain robustness in suggesting that they want their battles and “other objects of horror.” Ultimately he suggests that it may be there are simply too many rules and often following them creates more absurdities than they prevent.

(https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/literary-theory-and-criticism)
2.3: Mixture of Tragedy and Comedy

Dryden is more considerate in his attitude towards the mingling of the tragic and the comic elements and emotions in the plays. He defends tragi-comedy on the following grounds:

a) Contrasts, when placed near, set off each other.

b) Continued gravity depresses the spirit, a scene of mirth thrown in between refreshes. It has the same effect on us as music. In other words, comic scene produces relief, though Dryden does not explicitly say so.

c) Mirth does not destroy compassion and thus the serious effect which tragedy aims at is not disturbed by mingling of tragic and comic.

d) Just as the eye can pass from an unpleasant object to a pleasant one, so also the soul can move from the tragic to the comic. And it can do so much more swiftly.

e) The English have perfected a new way of writing not known to the Ancients. If they had tragic-comedies, perhaps Aristotle would have revised his rules.

f) It is all a question of progress with the change of taste. The Ancients cannot be a model for all times and countries. Similarly, what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience. Had Aristotle seen the English plays “He might have changed his mind. The real test of excellence is not strict adherence to rules or conventions, but whether the aims of dramas have been achieved. They are achieved by the English drama.

Dryden’s view on Tragi-comedy (Dryden’s own phrase is ‘Tragic-comedy’) clearly brings out his liberal classicism, greatness and shrewdness as a critic. Dryden is of the view that mingling of the tragic and the comic provides dramatic relief.

2.4 Conclusion: The Ultimate Value of His Criticism

According to Dryden, a critic has to understand that a writer writes to his own age and people of which he himself is a product. He advocates a close study of the ancient models not to imitate them blindly as a thorough going neo-classicist would do but to recapture their magic to treat them as a torch to enlighten our own passage. It is the spirit of the classics that matters more than their rules. Yet these rules are not without their value, for without rules, there can be no art. Besides invention (the disposition of a work), there are two other parts of a work – design (or arrangement) and expression. Dryden mentions the appropriate rules lay down by Aristotle. But it is not the observance of rules that makes a work great but its capacity to delight and transport. It is not the business of criticism to detect petty faults but to discover those great beauties that make it immortal.

Atkins calls his criticism ‘supra-rational’. With him begins a regular era of criticism. He showed the way to his countrymen to be as great critics as they had been poets—to know what makes for greatness in literature. In spite of the scattered nature of his criticism, no literary problem that confronted his age escaped his attention: the nature and function of poetry, tragedy, comedy, epic, satire and other ‘kinds’, the question of tragi-comedy, the unities; rhyme and blank verse: the other harmony of prose; the critical art itself. His pronouncement—‘Here is God's plenty’ used of Chaucer—applies to him as well. The most impressive qualities of Dryden as a critic are "his breadth of view, his skill at comparison, his sense of changing artistic conventions, his readiness to bear new evidence and if necessary change his mind, his concern with the practical questions of craftsmanship,” his uncommon common-sense, and his gentlemanly tone. For these qualities and for his native sensibility, for his liberal classicism, for his catholicity of taste and breadth of outlook, his conversational pace, the gentlemanly tone and cool, judicious posture and above all for his animate and easy style that Dryden deserves to be called the father of English criticism.
UNIT 4
(Read these notes in conjunction with the old study guide content in Units 4 and 5)

Romanticism: William Wordsworth

4.1 Introduction

The Romantic Period in English Literature had its beginning in 1785 or alternately 1789, the year in which the French Revolution started or 1798, the year in which “Lyrical Ballads” was published by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Romanticism is a revolt against the stereotyped diction and content of neoclassicism.

Although the Romantic Period was not initiated by the French Revolution, it enriched the Romantic Movement’s content. Let’s look at this impact briefly.

4.2 The Impact of the French Revolution

The Romantic Revival is the result of many forces. One of the significant forces that shaped Romantic Revival is the French Revolution (1789–1799). The French Revolution in its bottom line brought a violent end to feudal powers and monarchy and asserted the right and supremacy of the individual free will. The new philosophy of the rights of all men was expressed both in politics and literature. This led to the “Liberalism in Literature.” The political liberalism of French Revolution inspired the liberation, individuality and rejection of prescribed rules in the Romantic Literature.

The Romantic poets were inspired by the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty. They revolted against the tyranny of set formulas, rules and conventions. They asserted the dignity of individual spirit. This new form of philosophy became one of the main guidelines of a new school of Romantic poets, writers and philosophers. Romantic’s search for fresh subject, their belief in nature, their emphasis upon spontaneity and their belief that everyone has a right to express his own idea are the features of individualism which was the prime demand of French Revolution.

4.3.1 What the term ‘Romantic’ means in Literature

This is the literary period usually around 1780 up to 1830 even though not all literature written during that time is romantic. Romanticism refers also to the new set of ways of thinking and feeling about the world which swept across Europe during that period. The Romantics wrote during a time of upheavals and stormy moments - there was war and unrest. Therefore without this knowledge we may not fully grasp the breadth and depth of romantic poetry (Croft & Cross, 2000, p. 249).

In terms of the revolution, there were several political revolutions in European countries and the most influential was the French Revolution which began around 1789. The revolutions aimed to bring an end to traditional systems of governance in favour of societies based on ideals of freedom, equality and the brotherhood of man. This resulted in France plunging into a reign of terror - resulted in shock and disillusionment of the people. This was thus reflected in the poetry of the day. For example in Blake’s poetry; it is written and illustrated using complex and obscure symbolism, which is partly a way of expressing, in disguise, the visions and ideals of the revolution (Croft & Cross, 2000, p. 250). Yet still, the disguise was not sufficient to protect Blake from being charged with offences against the State.

The most prominent writers who immerged during this period include:

- William Blake (1757-1827)
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 -1834)
- William Wordsworth (177- 1850)
• Lord Byron (1788 -1824)
• John Keats (1795 - 1821)
• Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792 -1822)

4.3.2 Wordsworth’s Preface to the Lyrical Ballads

Wordsworth’s “preface to the Second edition of “Lyrical Ballads” in 1800 may be considered to be the manifesto of Romanticism. Wordsworth denounced the ‘poetic diction of the poets of the preceding 18th century neo-classical writers and dealt with materials taken from ‘common life’ in a ‘selection of language really used by men’.

Wordsworth’s Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads, which expresses the spirit of Romanticism in his words, is a critical document that puts stress on the relationship between poet and poetry rather than on the relationship between poetry and reader.

He defines poetry in terms of the author’s creative activity. So, he discusses the idea of poetry after discussing the idea of poet. For him, a poet is affected more than others by imagining things not immediately present to his perceptions.

The definition given by Wordsworth refers to this process of poetic composition emphasising the roles played by memory and contemplation. Wordsworth, while defining poetry, goes beyond the Aristotelian concept of poetry as an imitation of an action. The Preface also contains his views on poetic diction. He attacks the everyday verbal conventions of eighteenth century poetry and stresses that the conversational language should be used to compose poems. It would not be wrong to say that Wordsworth contradicts himself because at the stage of contemplation a poet chooses words very carefully, therefore it is not possible to use the language “really used by men.” In spite of such criticism, the ‘Preface’ remains one of the most significant critical documents in the history of English Criticism. It has been a source from which the next generation critics have derived ideas and exploited them to the fullest. (https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/3-1-1-the-romantic-revival)

The romantic writers conceived feelings as important in literature. Wordsworth defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which takes its origin from emotions recollected from tranquillity”. The romantic poets democratised poetry. According to Wordsworth ‘a poet is a man speaking to men” and hence should relate incidents and situations taken from ordinary life in a language really used by men. The subject of poetry is nature. Nature provides an impetus for the poets to think. The romantic poems are poems of meditation which is concerned with the central problems of human life.

The Romantic poets and the writers not only sought to emancipate themselves from the fetters of neo-classical rules but also experimented with the old forms, revived some of them which went into the oblivion because the neo-classical writers considered them to be vulgar and undignified. In course of such experimentation with forms, revival of form or creations of new forms, following tendencies were noticed: (https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject). The poets put more emphasis on imagination rather than intellect. They allowed free play of imagination in their poetry. Their free flights of fancy often led them to the strange, unfamiliar and the distant.

The infatuation for the remote, the exotic and the mysterious enkindled in the romantic poets a love for the medieval. Just as the writers of the eighteenth century turned to classical writers for inspiration, the poets of the romantic revival turned to medieval age for inspiration. Thus, the essential elements of the romantic spirit are curiosity and the love of beauty.
They gave free reign to their emotion and passion. They abhorred classical restraint and obsession with reason.

- Their preoccupation with imagination and emotions made their poetry primarily subjective. This was in contrast with the classical preference for objectivity in poetry. For them poetry was not genuine if it was not personal.
- Poetry became closer to everyday life of common man. The ‘poetic diction’ of the eighteenth century was rejected as artificial and unnatural.
- ”Return to nature” was their motto. They turned away from the artificial urban life and found refuge in the country life and nature. They worshipped nature. Love of nature for them meant love of mankind, humanism and a more world view that encompassed the idea of freedom and equality.

The following table presents the contrast between the neo-classicism and romanticism:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romantic</th>
<th>Neo-Classical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on Imagination</td>
<td>Emphasis on Intellect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Play of Emotions and Passions</td>
<td>Restraint and Obsession with Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to the everyday life of common man</td>
<td>Remoteness or aloofness from everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration sought from country life and nature</td>
<td>Incidents from urban life prevailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily Subjective</td>
<td>Primarily Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turned to Medieval Age for inspiration</td>
<td>Turned to Classical writers for inspiration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/3-1-1-the-romantic-revival

William Wordsworth attacks the neo-classical doctrine of a special language for poetry. In his preface to 1800 Lyrical Ballads, he claimed: “There is no difference between language of poetry and language of prose.” He states that the poetic diction of eighteenth century writers as artificial and unnatural. The neo-classical poetic diction was mainly derived from the classical poets such as Virgil, Spenser, Milton and was based on the principal of decorum. Prominent features of the eighteenth century poetic diction were archaism, preference for resounding words derived from Latin, a personification of inanimate objects and to avoid what were regarded as low, technical or common place terms by means of substitute phrase that was dignity and decorum.

Wordsworth’s prime concern is not only with the single word or the grammatical order of discourse, but with figurative departures from literary discourse. He rejects the idea of language as artificial and metres and figures of speech as embellishments of the language. He justifies its use only when they are naturally suggested by passion unlike ‘supposed ornaments.’ In a nutshell, so the natural expression of feeling cannot be communicated with the help of a version of the upper class speech, but with the actual speech of “humble and rustic life.”

4.4 The Genesis of Preface

Wordsworth’s aim in writing the ‘Preface’ was not to give an elaborate account of his theory of poetry or to make a systematic defence of his point-of-view. He wanted to introduce his poems with a prefatory argument. He added the ‘Preface’ because he felt that his poems were different in theme and style, and therefore, he should not present them without an introduction. It is a well observed phenomenon that every new poet struggles to carve a niche. That is what Wordsworth tried to do with the help of the ‘Preface’.

Aims of the preface

- The primary object which Wordsworth proposed to propagate through the poems was to select incidents and situations from common life.
The great innovation was to be in the language. The poetic diction of the eighteenth century, sought to substitute the selection of the language really used by men. The "Advertisement" included in the 1798 edition shows Wordsworth’s concern about the language of poetry. Wordsworth says that the poems in the volume are “experiments” since his chief aim is to see if the conversational language in use among the middle and lower classes of society can be employed expeditiously and fruitfully to write poems.

4.5 Definition of Poetry

4.5.1 Wordsworth’s Conception of Poetry: Passion and Reflection
Wordsworth propounded his views on poetry, its nature and functions and the qualification of a true poet in his Preface. So far as the nature of poetry is concerned, Wordsworth is of the opinion that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Poetry has its origin in the internal feelings of the poet. It is a matter of passion, mood and temperament. Poetry cannot be produced by strictly adhering to the rules laid down by the Classicists. It must flow out naturally and smoothly from the soul of the poet.

But it must be noted that good poetry, according to Wordsworth, is never an immediate expression of such powerful emotions. A good poet must ponder over them long and deeply. In the words of Wordsworth, “poetry has its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility.”

4.5.2 Process of Poetic Composition
There are four stages which play a very crucial role in converting an experience into a pleasing composition.

Stage One: Observation
First comes observation or perception of some object, character or incident which sets up powerful emotions in the mind of the poet.

Stage Two: Recollection
Next comes the contemplation or recollection of that emotion in tranquility. It must be noted that at this stage memory comes into play and brings out what had been lying in the unconscious for days, months or years. A similar kind of incident triggers the poet to visit the past experiences stored in the unexplored regions of his mind.

Stage Three: Filtering
The third stage is that of filtering wherein the poet is purged of non-essential elements and thus makes his experience communicable to all men.

Stage Four: Composition
The fourth stage is when the actual composition begins. The poet seeks to convey his emotions through print and turns into a communicator. In the words of Wordsworth he becomes a man speaking to men. What is important to him is not just expressing his joy but sharing it with his readers.

*The Solitary Reaper* by Wordsworth demonstrates this poetic process.

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?--
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o’er the sickle bending;--
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

*The Solitary Reaper*, William Wordsworth

Feelings started overflowing spontaneously as the poet listened to the song of the Highland girl: “the Vale profound / is overflowing with the sound.” Removed from the scene he started recollecting his experiences in tranquility and exhuming theme of the song and causes its joyousness. Slowly, but gradually, this state of mind disappears. Then an emotion which is quite similar to the original is generated. It soon turns into feeling and starts resonating and he begins composing his poem with “the music” he feels in his heart “Long after it was heard no more” causes its joyousness.

(Adapted from: [https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/](https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/))

4.6 Concept of Imagination

In the neo-classical literary theory the human mind is regarded as the passive recorder of sense impressions. Imagination is thought to be a mode of memory which brings images from the memory and so represents sense objects not actually present. Secondly, the imagination is thought to be the power which originally links together different impressions to form images of things that do not exist in the sense. For example, the mythological characters are the products of imagination. Hence, the neo-classicists believe that Imagination is a combining power, not a creative one. On the other hand, the Romantics place imagination to a higher position. For them it is a highly creative faculty. It just rearranges materials but also shapes, orders, modify and colours sense objects with the minds own light. Imagination integrates different elements to generate a new reality. It’s a faculty that allows the mind to see beyond the material world.

(Adapted from: [https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/](https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/))
4.7 Themes and Subject Matter of Poetry

Any subject between heaven and earth can be treated poetically and the similar idea is noted by Wordsworth in 1798, “It is the honourable characteristic of poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind.” Wordsworth states that subjects are poetic and unpoetic in themselves. A slight incident of village life may be material for poetry, if the poet can make it meaningful. Thus Wordsworth extends the scope of poetry, by bringing within its folds themes chosen from humble and common life. Wordsworth’s aim was to choose incidents and situations from common life, to relate them in a selection of language really used by men. The reason that he gave was that the rustic people were close to nature and hence free from artificiality and vanity.

(Adapted from: https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/)

4.8 Function of Poetry

There are two schools of thought holding opposite views with regard to the function of Literature or Art in general.

First, the view of the moralists is that the writer can and does influence the lives and characters of his readers; and therefore it should try to be a good influence. For them art is food or poison. This view is called ‘art for Life’s sake’.

Second, the view of the aesthetes is that the function of poetry is to give pleasure to its reader irrespective of the moral ideas. For them art is wine. Only its pleasure-value matters. Among the classicists, Plato hardly falls under the category of ‘Art for Art’s sake’ and believed that the art should be bound to the moral values. Dryden believes, “Delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy”. Dr. Johnson remarks, “The end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life, or to endure it”.

For most of the Romantics, life was sacred and valued it.

For instance, Wordsworth too favours the view of Arts for Life’s sake. He emphasized the didactic view of literature when he said, “I am nothing if not a teacher”. Poetry, in the words of Wordsworth, “is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science”. Thus, for him the function of poetry is to ennoble the reader. It is like the torch that leads its readers on the dark path. Poetry is the moral guide that imparts moral lessons but in sugar-coated form so that the learning becomes implied and plausible.

Wordsworth’s poems confirm this concept of the function of poetry. His poems are full of moral lessons, philosophical truths about life and religion packaged with delight. In Wordsworth’s own words:

“... a poetry of revolt against the moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; A poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life”.

(Adapted from: https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/collections/)

Now let’s look at some basic tenets of William Wordsworth’s romanticism

4.9 Basic Tenets of Romanticism

In the preface to Lyrical Ballads, a collection of poems by himself and Coleridge, William Wordsworth wrote a kind or ‘revolutionary manifesto’ for literature, in which he outlines some of the ideas that lie behind what we now call Romantic Poetry. The question is then, do you think that the following is useful information when you are analysing a poem and defining what poetry should be about?
- **Nature** - The natural world should be the most important source of inspiration for poets. Being ‘natural’ or ‘at one’ with nature is seen as an ideal state, a paradise that human beings have lost and to which they yearn to return.

- **Feelings** - Being ‘natural’ involved being able to feel and respond spontaneously, from the heart. Logical thinking, or reason, is a limited or inadequate way of responding to the world.

- **Imagination** - Imagination is a quality that enables you to see something special in ordinary things. It casts a glow over every day events or memories.

- **Power to People** - People who are in some way powerless or on the fringes of society are given a voice: the poor, particularly those who work in the countryside, the uneducated, the ‘mad’, women, and especially children. They are seen as more ‘natural’ and more in touch with their feelings - their imagination is not tainted by too much ‘reason’ and or education.

- **Individual experience** - and the private lives of ordinary people are suitable subject matter for poetry, not just the public exploits of kings, politicians, or the famous.

- **Real Language** - Wordsworth suggests that the ‘real language of men’ - by which he means the clear, simple, natural language of ordinary people, men, women and children - is the best way to express feelings and describe experiences in poetry. Complicated, ‘flowery’ or witty language only gets in the way.

(Adapted from Croft & Cross, 2000, 251)

Now consider the following poem which illustrates some of the revolutionary ideas above. Try to discuss the poem with a friend.

**My heart leaps up**

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began;  
So is it now I am a man;  
So be it when I shall grow old  
Or let me die!  
The Child is father of the man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.

* (William Wordsworth)

How did you fare?

Now that you know some of William Wordsworth’s romanticism basic tenets, try to compare them to British Romantic poetry in general. Can you draw any similarities or differences?

4.10 Major Tenets Of British Romantic Poetry: (1780-1832)  
(Adapted from: https://sites.google.com/a/communityschool.org/english-10-huss/romanticism-1785-1830/10-tenets-of-romanticism)
1. Poetry heralded emotions and imagination over logic and reason.

2. Poets believed in the potential of each man to reach an ideal state: "Mankind is not perfect, but perfectible" and therefore supported the freedom of the individual.

3. Poets focused upon wild nature as a source of inspiration as land became privately owned and society moved from the agrarian to the industrial.

4. Focused upon the lives of common, rustic people in local landscapes

5. Poetry expressed emotions: William Wordsworth's definition of Romantic poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity." (Preface to Lyrical Ballads)

6. Poetry focused upon common language and resisted poetic diction of past: Wordsworth claims in his Preface to his Lyrical Ballads that his poems "choose incidents and situations from common life and relate and describe them throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men." (Preface to Lyrical Ballads)

7. Poets focused upon intuiting the divine as interfused and ever present in nature and in man.

8. Poets focused upon the ability of move from perceiving nature to perceiving the influence it has upon the human mind, from perception to apperception.

9. Poets quest for emotional permanence within change: achieved by memory and art, and powerful moments in nature that develop the mind's reaction to nature:
   There are in our existence spots of time
   Which with distant pre-eminence retain
   A vivifying Virtue, whence...our minds
   Are nourished and invisibly repaired.

10. Poets exalted the divine insights of the child as instructive to the adult.
NEW CRITICISM

6.0 Definition and History

New Criticism is a method of literary evaluation and interpretation practiced mainly in the mid-20th century; it emphasizes close examination of a text with minimum regard for the biographical or historical circumstances in which this text was produced (Makaryk, 1993).

The name New Criticism was given by John Crowe Ransom, who describes the new American formalists in his book *The New Criticism* in 1941 as New Critics, which gave the movement its name (Ransom, 1971). Before the rising of New Criticism, it was common practice to interpret a literary text by studying other elements associated with the text such as the author’s life, political events, and times to determine the meaning that the author intended the text to have. The author’s letters, his journals of experiences and observations, and the circumstances that shaped his life were taken as evidences of *authorial intention* as they were autobiographies, biographies, and history books. However, in its extreme form “the biographical-historical criticism seemed to examine the text’s biographical-historical context instead of examining the text.” (Eagleton, 2001, p. 35)

Hence, New Criticism assumes a close and causative relationship between society and literature and between society and the writer. It emphasizes textual criticism and this is what has made it new. Otherwise there is nothing new in it. It had its origin in the writings of T. E. Hulme; but it is now mainly an American movement. The term was first used by J. E. Spingam. Its chief exponents in America are Kenneth Burke, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Richard Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, etc. In England its leading representatives are I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, William Empson, etc.

The New Critics developed theoretical positions and techniques of reading that provide a lively complement to the literary and artistic appearance of modernism. The New Critics wanted to avoid:

1. impressionistic criticism, which is the immediate judgement of literary work determined by reader’s personality and past experiences (Lynn, 1998).
2. social/ historical approaches which might easily be expressed by some cultural or political restraints.

What do we understand by this?

This means that to study literature, New Criticism devised a system that emphasized a strict study of the text itself. They opposed the biographical, historical, sociological and comparative approach of conventional criticism. They also rejected the traditional division of literature into periods and groups for the purpose of criticism. They regarded all such considerations as extrinsic and irrelevant. They believed that a work or art is judged solely on its own merits. Their criticism is Intrinsic or Ontological, and not Extrinsic.

The New Critics believed that a poem, a piece of literature, is the thing in itself, with a definite entity of its own separate both from the poet and the socio-cultural environment in which it is produced. The emphasis is laid on the study of the text, and its word by word analysis and interpretation.

The music of a poem, its imagery and verse, and its total structure must be taken into account to arrive at the poem’s meaning. Words in the poem must be studied with reference to their sound, and their emotional and symbolic significance. Thus, New Criticism is predominantly textual, and the new critics have rendered valuable service to literature by their study and interpretation of literary classics.

In addition, New Criticism regards the poem as the thing, and that it must be studied in itself.
6.1 The Method of New Criticism

The method of New Criticism stresses on close reading while concentrating on such formal aspects as rhythm, meter, theme, imagery, metaphor (Eagleton 2001, p. 42). The interpretation of a text shows that these aspects serve to support the structure of meaning within the text. It emphasises close attention to the features from inside the text itself, and it discourages the use of external evidence to explain the work. What external evidence can you think of?

Let’s examine the method of New Criticism closely.

6.1.1 Close reading

Close reading is meant to emphasise the authentic literary elements of the text. It does not concern itself with the kinds of emotions and thoughts this text provokes but rather it studies the literary composition of the text (Bressler, 2002). It is this literary composition which makes a text unique.

This close reading has become the essence of New Criticism, “for many critics in North America and Britain, it became not a method of criticism, but criticism itself” (Makaryk, 1993). Poetry was the literary form which supported their ideas, so the New Critics paid more attention to it compared to other forms of literature. In other words, poetry conveyed the “literary pillars” in a condensed fashion; these include metaphors, imagery, rhythm, meter, and theme. However, the techniques of close reading and structural analysis of texts have also been applied to fiction, drama, film and other literary forms. These techniques seem to remain the dominant critical approach in many modern literature works.

6.1.2 The Intentional and Affective Fallacies

According to New Criticism:

- Any attempt to look at the author’s relationship to a work is called the intentional fallacy (Wimsatt and Monroe, 1998). The intentional fallacy is a term used by two important New Critics, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1998), to describe what they considered the error of assuming a text means what its author intended it to mean.

- Any attempt to look at the reader’s individual response is called the affective fallacy. The critic assumes that the meaning of the work is defined by its effect on the reader.

Thus, while the intentional fallacy confuses the text with its origins, the affective fallacy confuses the text with its affects, that is, with the sentiments or emotions it produces. The New Critics believe that the affective fallacy leads to impressionistic responses; for instance, if a reader doesn’t like a character, then that character must be evil or bad and hence producing a relative text which means whatever any reader thinks it means. The result of these practices is confusion because there are no standards for interpreting or evaluating literature. As a result, New Critics oppose allowing such confusing variations because they see the distinctions of texts in their own make up rather than their variable trailing emotions and thoughts.

6.1.3 The Text itself

For New Critics, the text itself became the main point to focus the attention on the literary work as the only source of evidence for interpreting it. As such, the New Critics note that (i) the life and times of the author and (ii) the mood of the age in which he or she lived, are significant to the literary historian, and not to the literary critics. In addition, they pointed out that confident knowledge of the author’s intended meaning is usually hard to attain (Bressler, 2002). Even if it is available, all what someone can know is what the author wanted to accomplish, not what he or she accomplished. To add to this complication, sometimes a literary text does not live up to the author’s intention; and occasionally, it is even more meaningful, rich, and complex than the author realised.
Thus, knowing an author’s intention tells almost nothing about the text. To explain this, New Critics made the term \textit{intentional fallacy} to refer to the mistaken belief that the author’s intention is the same as the meaning of the text. The two are totally different.

Moreover, the author’s intention does not help to determine the reader’s personal response, either. Authors can write for different reasons, but readers presume meaning as they find it fits.

\subsection*{6.1.4 A Central Unity}

New Criticism argues that each text has a \textit{central unity}. The responsibility of the reader is to discover this \textit{unity}. In other words, the reader’s job is to \textit{interpret} the text. The reader then shows in what ways each of its parts contributes to the \textit{central unity}.

Another primary interest is in \textit{themes}. A text is spoken by a \textit{persona} (narrator or speaker) who expresses an \textit{attitude} which must be defined. The persona also speaks in a \textit{tone} which helps to define the attitude such as \textit{ironic, mockery, sincere, straightforward or ambiguous} (Bressler, 2002). Thus, the value of a text is based on the \textit{richness of the attitude} and the \textit{complexity} and the \textit{balance} of the text. The key phrases are \textit{ambivalence, ambiguity, tension, irony and paradox} (Jefferson and Robey, 1998).

The reader’s analysis of these elements leads to an examination of the themes. A work is said to be good or bad depending on whether the themes are complex and whether or not they contribute to the central, unifying theme. What then does this mean? It simply means that if the themes are complex and they contribute to a central theme (unity), the better the work (Bressler, 2002).

The words must be comprehended to be \textit{ambiguous}. “The more possible meanings a word has, the richer the \textit{ambiguity} (Ray, 1966).

The reader should look for \textit{irony, ambiguous and paradox}. The reader must discover tensions in the work that they review. These will be the results of \textit{thematic oppositions}, though they may also occur as \textit{oppositions} in imagery such as white versus black, sky versus earth, light versus dark, good versus evil, beautiful versus ugly and so forth (Bressler, 2002). The \textit{oppositions} may also be in the words chosen such as concrete versus abstract, energetic versus mellow, static versus dynamic. Words are considered to have power to a certain extent, that is, the way they are used in the text. For instance, “autumn should not make the reader sad unless the poem directs sadness at the thought of autumn and the second is idiosyncratic (affective) responses (Culler, 1981). Another example, “Lush grass should not make the reader think of cows however often he or she has seen cows in lush grass unless the poem clearly directs the reader to associate cows and lush grass” (Culler, 1981).

It is also common for the New Critics to define their themes as \textit{oppositions}: life and death, good and evil, love and hate, harmony and strife, order and disorder, eternity and time, truth and falsehood, emotion and reason, simplicity and complexity, nature and art, and so on. The analysis of a text is an exercise in showing how all of its parts contribute to a \textit{complex} but single \textit{unified} statement about human’s problems (Wellek and Austin, 1956).

\subsection*{6.1.5 The Heresy of Paraphrase}

For New Criticism, a literary work is a \textit{timeless, autonomous (self-sufficient) verbal object}. Readers and readings may change, but the literary text remains the same (Wellek and Austin, 1956). New Critics believe that the meaning of a poem is constructed of words placed in a specific relationship to one another. The words are placed in a specific order and this creates a complex meaning that cannot be reproduced by any combination of words. This is why New Criticism asserted that the meaning of a poem could not be explained simply by paraphrasing it, or translating it into everyday language, a practice of New Critics refers to as the \textit{heresy of paraphrase} (Bressler, 2002). They argue that changing a line, an image, punctuation, a word of the poem, or even changing the order of the lines, will have a different poem. Although the New Critics do not assert that the meaning of a poem is unimportant, they reject approaches which view the poem as an attempt to represent the “real world” (Bressler, 2002)
The New Critics justify why the discussion of a poem’s content should be avoided through the doctrine of the heresy of paraphrase. Cleanth Brooks, American teacher and critic, describes the heresy of paraphrase in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn*. The heresy of paraphrase states that the meaning of a poem is complex and precise, and that any attempt to paraphrase it inevitably distorts the poem (Brooks, 1968). This means that any attempt to say what a poem means is heretical, because “it is an insult to the integrity of the complex structure of meaning within the work” (Brooks, 1968).

So, what can we conclude from all this? Do you understand the New Critics’ argument? We can thus conclude by saying, what the New Critics were careful to consider in each individual poem were:

- the choice of words
- imagery
- rhyme and rhythm
- symbols
- connotations
- rhetorical and structural details
- different possible layers of meaning, etc.—and most important,
- the artistic unity that all the concrete details of the poem created.

What does all this mean to a student of literature? Do you know? We can conclude by saying that:

- The New Critics wanted to provide freedom for students from having to judge poetry according to tired old lecturers’ dead data or personal tastes, and also from uninformed young lecturers’ enthusiasms.
- They wanted to provide students with new skills of analysis and interpretation.
- They required that the reader had to judge the details of any poem by their individual quality and by how well they contribute to some artistic unity.

These were intellectual tools and objective criteria that students could learn and use equally as well as their teachers. In this sense, New Criticism was to have a big impact on the actual teaching of literature.

Now, let’s examine the basic tenets of New Criticism:

6.2 The Basic Tenets of the New Critics

It is yet too early to make any definitive evaluation of their work and contribution. Therefore, it would be more fruitful to consider their basic tenets, tenets to which they all subscribe despite their individual differences. These basic doctrines and principles may be summarised as follows:

(a) To the New Critics, a poem, or a work of art, is the thing in itself, and the critic must concentrate all attention on it and illuminated it. The function of the critic is to analyse, interpret and evaluate a work of art. A poem is distinct from the poet and his social milieu; it is a definite entity in itself and must be studied as such. The critic must devote himself to close textual study, unhampered by any extraneous concerns.

(b) Moral and religious considerations, social, political and environmental conditions, the details of the poet’s biography, are all irrelevant and are all obstacles in the way of a real understanding of a work of literature. The literary critic must rid himself of all such extrinsic bias and prejudices. He must approach the work with an open mind, ready to study it, “as is in itself.”

(c) The critic must not allow himself to be hampered and prejudiced by any literary theories also.

(d) A poem has both form and content and both should be closely studied and analysed before a true understanding of its meaning becomes possible.

(e) Words, images, rhythm, metre, etc., constitute the form of poetry and are to be closely studied. A poem is an organic whole and these different parts are inter-connected and these inter-connections, the reaction of one upon the other, and upon the total meaning, is to be closely followed, and examined. That is why a prose paraphrase cannot convey the total, and poetic, meaning of a poem.
The study of words, their arrangement, the way in which they act and react on each other is all important. Words, besides their literal significance, also have emotional, associative, and symbolic significance, and only close application and analysis can bring out their total meaning. The new critics, in their minute scrutiny of words, and the structure of poetry, have propounded different theories. "From I. A. Richard's concept of the 'behaviour' of words, through Empson's seven categories of 'ambiguity' with their subdivisions, to John Crowe Ransom's principle of 'texture' of Robert Penn Warren's preoccupation with symbols, or Allen Tate's theory of 'tensions', we find the same search for the meaning of words, for the strange transformation they undergo as they react on one another for the way they contribute to build up the structure of the poem—the unified whole of which they are the parts.

Poetry is communication and language is the means of communication, so the New Critics seek to understand the full meaning of a poem through a study of poetic language. Thus, for the New Critics words are all important, and their study is the only key to the poetic meaning of the poem.

The New Critics are opposed both to the historical and comparative methods of criticism. Historical considerations are extraneous to the work of literature, and comparison of works of art is to be resorted to with great caution and in rare instances alone for the intent and aim of writers differ, and so their method, their techniques, their forms, are bound to be different.

They are also anti-impressionistic. Instead of giving merely his impression, which is bound to be vague and subjective, the critic must make a close, objective and precise study of the poem concerned.

In short, they concentrate on close textual study, on the study of the form, design and texture of poetry. The psychological state of the poet, at the time of creation, as well as the effect of the poem upon the readers are not to be allowed to divert attention from the text.

Now that we understand what New Criticism is, let's examine its weaknesses of shortcomings by the Chicago critics.

6.3 Limitations and Shortcomings of New Criticism

The limitations of the New Critics were pinpointed by a group of critics who have come to be known as the Chicago critics. They are called 'Chicago critics' because they all worked at the University of Chicago, and they form a homogenous group with little difference in their views and critical methods. Ronald Crane is the most important member of the group. He in his book Critics and Criticism (1952) has criticised the New Critics. Other members of this group are Elder Olson and others.

The, Chicago Group of Critics has done the criticism of criticism and mentioned the following limitations of the New Critics:

(a) Pre-occupied with textual analysis: The New Critics are too much pre-occupied with textual analysis. Their excessive pre-occupation with words, images, paradox, irony, etc., makes them forget that the poem is an organic whole. In their pre occupation with the parts they ignore the beauty of the whole. Textual analysis can establish only the literary quality of a work, but to determine its greatness other methods are also necessary. Literature is certainly an art-form, but it has other values also, besides the literary.

(b) Their Approach: Their approach is dogmatic and narrow. According to them, it is through textual study and analyses alone that truth can be arrived at. However, there are a number of other approaches—the historical, the sociological, the psychological, etc., and each has its own value and significance. All possible ways should be tried to arrive at the full truth about a poem.

(c) Functions: A work of art has two functions, artistic and moral. While the older criticism erred in its over-emphasis on the moral concern of literature, the New Critics go to the other extreme in their entire neglect of it. Art cannot be divorced entirely from life.

(d) An art-form: Literature is certainly an art-form, but it has other values also, besides the literary. Stylistic analysis can establish only the literary quality of a work, to determine its greatness. Other methods are also necessary.
(e) Documentary approach: The textual or documentary approach may work well with some categories, but it is not equally effective with all categories. There are different kinds of poetry, and different critical techniques are needed for their evaluation. The same technique cannot be effective both with the lyric and the epic.

(f) A poem is an artistic structure: A poem is certainly an artistic structure, and it must be studied as such. The understanding of the poetic meaning of a poem is essential, and textual and structural study is an effective tool for the purpose. But social and biographical factors may also determine its meaning and knowledge of them may also help the critic to brighten the work under study. Hence, the new critics are wrong in totally ignoring the social milieu of the poet.

(g) Fault: The New Critics are wrong in ignoring the study of the history of literary criticism. A historical study shows that various critical tools have been used effectively in different ages and countries, and their use may be worthwhile in the present also. Thus, for example, the Aristotelian literary philosophy and poetics may still be of use in evaluation and interpretation. A historical study is the only way of understanding the comparative merits of the rival schools of criticism. The critic must, therefore, master the critical traditions and from among the rival critical techniques choose the one best suited to his purposes.

(h) Objective and scientific study: In their insistence on the objective and scientific study of a work of art, they entirely ignore the reactions of the critic. The subjective element cannot be totally done away with, and the impressions of the critic have their own significance.

(Adapted from: https://neoenglish.wordpress.com/2010/12/16/write-an-essay-on-the-new-critics-and-new-criticism-of-the-twentieth-century/)
UNIT 7
(Read these notes in conjunction with the old study guide content in Unit 7)

7.0 T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

Besides being a poet, playwright and publisher, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was one of the most seminal critics of his time. ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ has been one of his extraordinarily influential critical works. It was first published in 1922 in Sacred Woods, and was subsequently included in the ‘Selected Essays’ (1917-1932). In this essay, Eliot has primarily dealt with his concepts of:

1. Historical Sense, and Tradition
2. Interdependence of the past and the present
3. Impersonality in art in general and poetry in particular

Eliot begins the essay by pointing out that the word ‘tradition’ is generally regarded as a word of censure. When the English praise a poet, they praise him for those aspects of his work which are ‘individual’ and original. It is supposed that his chief merit lies in such parts. This undue stress on individuality shows that the English have an uncritical turn of mind. They praise the poet for the wrong thing. If they examine the matter critically with an unprejudiced mind, they will realise that the best and the most individual part of a poet’s work is that which shows the maximum influence of the writers of the past.

7.1 “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Tradition means a belief, principle or way of acting which people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or all of these beliefs, etc. in a particular society or group.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes ‘Tradition’ an ‘inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behaviour (as a religious practice or a social custom)’. Eliot commences the essay with the general attitude towards ‘Tradition’. He points out that every nation and race has its creative and critical turn of mind, and emphasises the need for critical thinking. ‘We might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing.’

In ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’, Eliot introduces the idea of Tradition. In this section we will first make an attempt to summarise Eliot’s concept of tradition and then will seek to critique it for a comprehensive understanding of the texts.

At the very outset, Eliot makes it clear that he is using the term tradition as an adjective to explain the relationship of a poem or a work to the works of dead poets and artists. Tradition does not mean a blind adherence to the ways of the previous generation(s), which mean a mere repetition of what has already been achieved. Tradition in the sense of passive repetition is to be discouraged. For Eliot, Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. Tradition in the true sense of the term cannot be inherited; it can only be obtained by hard labour. This labour is the labour of knowing the past writers. It is the critical labour of sifting the good from the bad, and of knowing what is good and useful. Tradition can be obtained only by those who have the historical sense. The historical sense involves a perception, “not only of the pastness of the past, but also of its presence: One who has the historic sense feels that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day, including the literature of his own country, forms one continuous literary tradition” (Eliot, 1962). He realises that the past exists in the present, and that the past and the present form one simultaneous order. This historical sense is the sense of the timeless and the temporal, as well as of the timeless and the temporal together. It is this historic sense which makes a writer traditional. A writer with the sense of tradition is fully conscious of his own generation, of his place in the present, but he is also acutely conscious of his relationship with the writers of the past.
In brief, the sense of tradition implies:

(a) a recognition of the continuity of literature,

(b) a critical judgment as to which of the writers of the past continue to be significant in the present, and

(c) a knowledge of these significant writers obtained through painstaking effort. Tradition represents the accumulated wisdom and experience of ages, and so its knowledge is essential for really great and noble achievements.

Eliot regrets that in our appreciation of authors we hardly include their connections with those living and dead. Also our critical apparatus is significantly limited to the language in which the work is produced. A work produced in a different language can be considered for a better appreciation of the work. In this connection, he notices “our tendency to insist...those aspects” of a writer’s work in which “he least resembles anyone else”.

Thus, our appreciation of the writer is derived from identifying the unique aspects of his work. In the process, we focus on identifying the writer’s difference from his predecessors. Eliot critiques this tendency in literary appreciation and favours inclusion of works or parts of work of dead poets and predecessors.

By ‘Tradition’, Eliot does not refer to a legacy of writers which can be handed down from a generation to another generation. It has nothing to do with the idea of inheritance. Rather, Eliot wants to emphasise that the writer or the poet must develop a sense of the pastness of the past and always seek to examine the poem or the work in its relation to the works of the dead writers or the poets. In other words, no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. Every poet’s significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and the artists (Eliot, 1962). In this, he treats tradition not as a legacy but as an invention of anyone who is ready to create his or her literary pantheon, depending on his literary tastes and positions. This means that the development of the writer will depend on his or her ability to build such private spaces.

7.2 Dynamic Conception of Tradition: It’s Value

To emphasise the value of tradition, Eliot points out that no writer has his value and significance in isolation. To judge the work of a poet or an artist, we must compare and contrast his work with the works of poets and artists in the past. Such comparison and contrast is essential to determine the real worth and significance of a new writer and his work.

Eliot’s conception of tradition is a dynamic one. According to his view, tradition is not anything fixed and static; it is constantly changing, growing, and becoming different from what it is. A writer in the present must seek guidance from the past; he must conform to the literary tradition. But just as the past directs and guides the present, so the present alters and modifies the past. When a new work of art is created, if it is really new and original, the whole literary tradition is modified, though ever so slightly.

The relationship between the past and the present is not one-sided; it is a reciprocal relationship. The past directs the present, and is itself modified and altered by the present. Every great poet like Virgil, Dante, or Shakespeare, adds something to the literary tradition out of which the future poetry will be written.

7.3 The Function of Tradition

The work of a poet in the present is to be compared and contrasted with works of the past, and judged by the standards of the past. But this judgment does not mean determining good or bad. It does not mean deciding whether the present work is better or worse than works of the past. An
author in the present is certainly not to be judged by the principles and the standards of the past. The comparison is to be made for knowing the facts, all the facts, about the new work of art. The comparison is made for the purposes of analysis, and for forming a better understanding of the new.

Moreover, this comparison is reciprocal. The past helps us to understand the present, and the present throws light on the past. It is in this way alone that we can form an idea of what is really individual and new. It is by comparison alone that we can sift the traditional from the individual elements in a given work of art.

7.4 Sense of Tradition: It’s Real Meaning

Eliot now explains further what he means by a sense of tradition. Let’s examine how he does this.

Firstly, he notes that the sense of tradition does not mean that the poet should try to know the past as a whole, take it to be a lump or mass without any discrimination. Such a course is impossible as well as undesirable. The past must be examined critically and only the significant in it should be acquired.

Secondly, he notes that the sense of tradition does not also mean that the poet should know only a few poets whom he admires. This is a sign of immaturity and inexperience.

Thirdly, a poet should not be content merely to know some particular age or period which he likes. This may be pleasant and delightful, but it will not constitute a sense of tradition.

The sense of tradition in the real sense means a consciousness, of the main current which does not focus on the most distinguished reputations only. In other words, to know the tradition poet must:

- judge critically what are the main trends and what are not.
- confine himself to the main trends to the exclusion of all that is incidental or topical.
- possess the critical gift in ample measure.
- also realise that the main literary trends are not determined by the great poets alone. Smaller poets also are significant. They are not to be ignored.

7.5 Works of Art: Their Permanence

The poet must also realise that art never improves, though its material is never the same. The mind of Europe may change, but this change does not mean that great writers like Shakespeare and Homer have grown outdated and lost their significance.

The great works of art never lose their significance, for there is no qualitative improvement in art. There may be refinement, there may be development, but from the point of view of the artist there is no improvement.

For example, it will not be correct to say that the art of Shakespeare is better and higher than that of Eliot. Their works are of different kinds, for the material on which they worked was different.

7.6 Awareness of the Past: The Poet’s Duty to Acquire It

T.S. Eliot is conscious of the criticism that will be made of his theory of tradition. His view of tradition requires, it will be said, a ridiculous amount of intellect and scholarship. However, we note that not every poet is learned. There have been great poets who were not learned, and further that too much learning kills sensibility.
Also, we note that knowledge does not merely mean bookish knowledge, and the capacity for acquiring knowledge differs from person to person. Some can absorb knowledge easily, while others must sweat for it. Shakespeare, for example, could know more of Roman history from Plutarch than most men can from the British Museum.

As such, it is the duty of every poet to acquire, to the best of his ability, this knowledge of the past, and he must continue to acquire this consciousness throughout his career. Such awareness of tradition sharpens poetic creation.

7.7 Impersonality of Poetry: Extinction of Personality

In the beginning, the poet, his individuality, may assert itself, but as his powers mature there must be greater and greater extinction of personality. This hints at the actual beginning of ‘New Criticism’ where the focus will shift from author to the text.

As such, Eliot here defines the poet’s responsibility.

- The poet is not supposed to compose poetry which is full of his personal emotions.
- He must subscribe himself to something more valuable, i.e., what others have composed in the past.
- He must acquire greater and greater objectivity.
- The artist must continually surrender himself to something which is more valuable than himself, i.e. The literary tradition.
- The poet must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past.
- He must continue to acquire the sense of tradition throughout his career and merge his personality with the tradition
- His emotions and passions must be depersonalized; he must be as impersonal and objective as a scientist.
- Eliot believes that some sort of ‘physical distancing’, is necessary for successful composition.

The personality of the artist is not important; the important thing is his sense of tradition. A good poem is a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. He must forget his personal joys and sorrows, and be absorbed in acquiring a sense of tradition and expressing it in his poetry. Thus, that is why Eliot believes that honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry (Eliot, 1962).

7.8 The Poetic Process: The Analogy of the Catalyst

In the second part of the essay, Eliot develops further his theory of the impersonality of poetry. He compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of poetic creation to the process of a chemical reaction. He believes that the progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. The mind of the poet is a medium in which experiences can enter new combinations.

He exemplifies this process as when oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. This combination takes place only in the presence of platinum, which acts as the catalyst. But the sulphuric acid shows no trace of platinum, and remains unaffected. The catalyst facilitates the chemical change, but does not participate in the chemical reaction, and remains unchanged. Eliot compares the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum. It remains inert, neutral and unaffected. The mind of the poet is like the catalytic agent. It is necessary for new combinations of emotions and experiences to take place, but it itself does not undergo any change during the process of poetic combination.
The mind of the poet is constantly forming emotions and experiences into new wholes, but the new combination does not contain even a trace of the poet's mind, just as the newly formed sulphurous acid does not contain any trace of platinum.

Eliot sees the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."

He says that concepts like "greatness" or "intensity" of emotion are irrelevant. It is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic process takes place, that is important.

The man suffers, i.e. has experiences, but it is his mind which transforms his experiences into something new and different. The personality of the poet does not find expression in his poetry; it acts like a catalytic agent in the process of poetic composition.

7.9 Poetry as Organisation: Intensity of the Poetic Process

Eliot next compares the poet's mind to a jar or receptacle in which are stored numberless feelings, emotions, etc., which remain there in an unorganised and chaotic form till, "all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." Thus, poetry is organisation rather than inspiration. And the greatness of a poem does not depend upon the greatness or even the intensity of the emotions, which are the components of the poem, but upon the intensity of the process of poetic composition.

Just as a chemical reaction takes place under pressure, so also intensity is needed for the fusion of emotions. The more intense the poetic process, the greater the poem.

There is always a difference between the artistic emotion and the personal emotions of the poet. The poet has no personality to express; he is merely a medium in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may find no place in his poetry and those which become important in the poetry may have no significance for the man.

7.10 Artistic Emotion: the Value of Concentration

According to Eliot, the emotion of poetry is different from the personal emotions of the poet. His personal emotions may be simple or crude, but the emotion of his poetry may be complex and refined.

The belief that the poet must express new emotions that result in much peculiarity in poetry, is not true. It is not the business of the poet to find new emotions. He may express only ordinary emotions, but he must impart to them a new significance and a new meaning. And it is not necessary that they should be his personal emotions. Even emotions which he has never personally experienced can serve the purpose of poetry. For example, emotions which result from the reading of books or watching movies can serve his purpose.

Thus, Eliot rejects Wordsworth's theory of poetry having, "its origin in emotions recollected in tranquillity." Instead, he points out that in the process of poetic composition there is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor tranquillity. In the poetic process, there is only concentration of a number of experiences, and a new thing results from this concentration. And this process of concentration is neither conscious nor deliberate; it is a passive one.

There is, no doubt, that there are elements in the poetic process which is conscious and deliberate. The difference between a good and a bad poet is that a bad poet is conscious where he should be
unconscious and unconscious where he should be conscious. It is this consciousness of the wrong kind which makes a poem personal, whereas mature art must be impersonal. But Eliot does not tell us when a poet should be conscious, and when not. The point has been left vague and unspecified.

7.11 Poetry an Escape from Personality and Personal Emotions

Eliot concludes that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” Thus Eliot does not deny personality or emotion to the poet. Only, he must depersonalise his emotions. There should be an extinction of his personality. This impersonality can be achieved only when poet surrenders himself completely to the work that is to be done. And the poet can know what is to be done, only if he acquires a sense of tradition, the historic sense, which makes him conscious, not only of the present, but also of the present moment of the past, not only of what is dead, but of what is already living.

Conclusion

We can conclude by noting that Eliot denounces the romantic criticism of the nineteenth century, particularly, Wordsworth’s theory of poetry. Secondly, he underlines the importance of ‘tradition’ and examines the correlation between ‘tradition’ and ‘individual talent.’ Finally, in his essay, he announces the death of the author, i.e., the empirical author, the author in the biographical sense of term and shifts the focus from the author to the text.

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