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**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Special English  
Discipline Specific Elective  
Semester V (Paper VII) (DSE - E11) &  
Semester VI (Paper XII) (DSE - E136)

**Introduction to Literary Criticism**

(Academic Year 2021-22 onwards)

For

**B. A. Part III**

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Kolhapur. (Maharashtra)  
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## INTRODUCTION

Dear Students,

This textbook is prepared keeping in mind that you are distant learners. This course book is organized in such a way to help you study it on your own.

We hope that this book containing the Self-Instructional Material on Semester V and VI is basically learner-centered and will surely meet the needs of our dear students offering English as their special subject at B. A. Part-III. The material is designed and presented in such a way that it will encourage the students to read and enjoy the units independently. The Module writers have tried their best to present the relevant material in a simple manner, expressed in lucid, clear and easy but dignified language. You will find this book innovative in its approach, method and technique.

The course book offers the students opportunities for remediation, consolidation and extension of the language already learnt.

Each module is divided into sub-sections and at the end of each section, there are small tasks. You are expected to write answers on your own. Though at the end of every module, answers are given, do not look at them until you have written your own answers.

You are expected to read each sub-sections, answer the questions given in the tasks, check your answers and then go ahead. If you do this sincerely and honestly, it is hoped you will enjoy bright success.

We wish you great success.

– **Editors**

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Each Unit begins with the section Objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of :

1. What has been presented in the Unit and
2. What is expected from you
3. What you are expected to know pertaining to the specific Unit once you have completed working on the Unit.

The self-check exercises with possible answers will help you to understand the Unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answers only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as Study Tools to help keep you in the right track as you study the Unit.

# Module I

## Introduction to Literary Criticism

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- 1.0 Objectives
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### 1.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to :

- understand the concept of literary criticism.
- understand nature of literary criticism.
- learn about function of literary criticism.

### 1.1 Introduction :

Literature is the most common of fine arts shared by most people. So it is important that we have to know the quality of literature that we read. In developing our own interpretations, we can find the views of others very helpful. The literary

criticism is also helpful for supporting to write an essay about literature. Besides being useful, the literary criticism is the study of literature and we can not keep away from it.

It is considered that the Literary criticism is an extension of the social activity of interpreting. The reader of literature writes down his or her views on what a particular work of literature means so that others can respond to that interpretation. Generally, to make value judgments on a work, to explain his or her interpretation of the work, or to provide other readers with relevant historical or biographical information, is specific purpose of a critic. The critic's general purpose, is to enrich the reader's understanding of the literary work. It is literary criticism that helps us appreciate literature fully.

## **1.2 Why Study Literary Criticism :**

Since several years ago, Literary criticism has important role in literary studies. Criticism can analyzes all aspects of literary work, based on the critic used in seeing the literary work. The literary criticism is not only matter of how to read and understanding the work but how to interpret the text within the work. Furthermore, criticism can be used to analyze and see thing beyond the text, how the work relate to daily life, social community and the relationship within the community. Critics not only talk about good or bad literary work, not only talk about the weakness but also about the strengthens of literary work. In this connection there is more importance of literary criticism in literary studies. It proves that responses to literature needs to be strengthened by insights that literary criticism can offer us, without which we will love good books but will fail to know why we love them and what precisely are their good qualities.

### **Check your progress-I**

**I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below each sentence and complete the sentences.**

- 1) Literary criticism is an extension of the social activity of - - - - -  
a) interpreting    b) imaginative    c) analysis    d) valuation
- 2) Literary Criticism is not only matter of how to read and understanding the work but how - - - - - the text within the work.

- a) criticize      b) understand      c) interpret      d) explain
- 3) It proves that responses to literature needs to be strengthened by insights that ----- can offer us.
- a) Literary criticism                      b) literary critics  
c) Thinkers                                      d) literature
- 4) Literary criticism is the ----- on works of literature.
- a) exercise of valuation                      b) exercise of critic  
c) exercise of judgment                      d) exercise of writing
- 5) The word 'criticism' is derived from the Greek word 'kritikos' which was used in the -----.
- a) 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.                              b) 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.  
c) 5<sup>th</sup> century                                      d) 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

**II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.**

1. What would be the general purpose of any literary critic ?
2. Who said Criticism was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well?
3. Which are two general functions of criticism?
4. What does mean the Greek word 'kritikos' ?
5. Who said Criticism is the exercise of judgment in the province of art and literature.?

**1.3 Nature of literary Criticism :**

The term 'criticism' is taken from the Greek word 'kritikos' which means 'a judge of literature' was used in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is an exercise of judgment on works of literature. In fact, to evaluate the artistic worth of literature is the function of criticism. It is not as simple as it appears because we have a most of conflicting views, theories and definitions about literary criticism. So these varied views brings out the complexity of nature of criticism.

It was *Dryden* who first used the word 'criticism' in print at least, in the now familiar sense of 'any formal discussion of literature.' In the preface of *The State of Innocence* he writes, "Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well." Criticism cannot exist without creation. Creation comes first, criticism next. The function of criticism is to motivate creative writers to produce excellent works and the readers can understand and enjoy literature. In other words to interpret, and to judge literary works in an unbiased and dispassionate manner is function of criticism. *Abercrombie* writes, "Criticism enables the man who has the energy to create literature, to make the most intelligent, and therefore, the most efficient use of his energy; and just so criticism enables the capacity to enjoy literature, to make his enjoyment the most intelligent, and therefore the most discriminating and most illuminating, kind of experience." Criticism is, thus, distinct from creation and enjoyment and consists in asking and answering rational questions about literature. The critic rationally and intellectually examines a work of art or literature and, then, passes his own judgment about its worth and merit, works of art or literature.

From this it would appear that the nature and function of literary criticism is not simple as that. The diversity of views, clearly brings to notice the complex nature of criticism and its functions. As a matter of fact the view of criticism has varied from critic and age to age.

The following statements and definitions of criticism would satisfy to give students an idea and throws light on its nature and function of literary criticism.

- Criticism, as *The Random House Dictionary of the English language* defines, is "the act or art of analyzing and judging the quality of something, specially a literary or artistic work".
- *B. Worsfold* says, "Criticism is the exercise of judgment in the province of art and literature."
- *Rene Wellek* defines that, "Literary criticism in the most widely accepted sense is the judgment of books, reviewing and finally the definition of taste, of the tradition, of what is classic".
- The monumental *Oxford New English Dictionary* defines criticism as "the art of estimating the qualities and character of literary or artistic work"

- The most authoritative *American Dictionary*, *Webster's New International* defines criticism as "the art of judging or evaluation with knowledge and propriety the beauties and faults of works of art or literature". Both these definitions emphasize the importance of judgment in criticism.
- *Shipley* in his dictionary of *World Literature* defines criticism as "the conscious evaluation or appreciation of a work of art, either recording to the critic's personal taste or according to some accepted aesthetic ideas....."
- In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Edmund Gosse* defines criticism as "the art of judging the qualities and values of an aesthetic object, whether in literature or the fine arts."
- *The American Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* pronounces criticism to be "the appreciation or estimation of works of art, an activity that would seem to include the exercise of taste and hence an avowal of preference."

Besides these definitions, there are some critics whose arguments run counter to the traditional view of criticism as mere judgment. They believe that critic may analyze without judging. Here are some comments.

- Criticism is the play of the mind on the aesthetic qualities of literature, having for its object an interpretation of literary values - (*J.W.H. Atkins*).
- The true critic will dwell on excellences rather than imperfections - (*Addison*).
- Is the work good or bad that is the critics domain? - (*Victor Hugo*).
- Criticism is the art of estimating the quality and character of a work of art, and the function or work of a art - (*New English Dictionary*).
- Criticism is a published analysis of the qualities and characteristics of a work in literature or fine art - (*Edmand Gosse*).
- Criticism is a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world - (*Mathew Arnold*).
- To feel the virtue of the poet or the painter, to disengage it, to set it forth, are the three stages of the critics duty - (*Walter Pater*).
- To set up as a critic is to set up as judge of value - (*I. A. Richards*).

- Criticism is the “Commendation and exposition of works of art by means of written words” - (*T.S. Elliot*).
- The end of criticism is the “elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste” - (*T.S.Eliot*)

The above mentioned views about nature and function of criticism bring out the complexity of nature of criticism. Critics vary in their attitude, intellectual pre-occupation, prejudices etc. There is close connection between the theory of poetry and the theory of criticism. Critical theories are connected with the spirit of the age. The intellectual and moral environment in which a critic and poet, a live will have effect on their attitude and personality. As a matter of fact the view of criticism has varied from critic and age to age. Hence we see a change in development, social and behavioral sciences – psychological, sociologic, economic thoughts bringing out new approach to criticism. There are major approaches to literary criticism such as the biographical, sociological, psychological, formalistic, structuralists and linguistic approaches. The idea of criticism varies in accordance with the idea of literature. Thus neo-classical criticism is built upon neo-classical theory of literature and romantic emphasis on individualism accounts for the romantic impressionistic view of criticism. Marxism has given rise to Marxist theory of criticism and reflection of author’s life and personality or the life and personality of the characters in the work accounts for Biographical criticism. Thus the scope of criticism has widened so much, and there is lack of unanimity regarding the nature and function of literary criticism.

### Check Your Progress-II

**I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below each sentence and complete the sentences.**

- 1) The word 'criticism' is derived from the Greek word 'kritikos' which was used in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It means -- ----- - - - -
 

a) avaluation of literature	b) a judge of literature
c) interpretation of literature	d) a making of literature
- 2) It was -- -- - - - - - who first used the word 'criticism' in print at least, is the now familiar sense of any formal discussion of literature.

- a) Arnold      b) T.S. Elit      c) Dryden      d) Johnson
- 3) According to Webster's New International Dictionary, criticism is the art of .....
- a) Judging or evaluation      b) Judging the qualities
- c) Recording the critic personal taste      d) elucidation
- 4) .....defines criticisms as "the art of judging the qualities and values of an aesthetic object, ....." "
- a) Atkins      b) Coleridge      c) Sydney      d) Edmund Gosse
- 5) ----- - - --- - writes that "Criticism enables the man who has the energy to create literature.
- a) Arnold      b) Oxford Dictionary
- c) T.S. Eliot      d) Abercrombie

**II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.**

- 1) According to scholars, which comes first, criticism or creation?
- 2) Who said criticism is the play of the mind on the aesthetic qualities of literature?
- 3) Who said Criticism is a published analysis of the qualities and characteristics of a work in literature ?
- 4) What would be the critic's attention according to Addison ?
- 5) With what the theory of criticism is connected ?

**1.4 The Function of Criticism :**

Generally, it's considered that the business of literary critic is to differentiate between a good book and a bad one that help us to recognize for ourselves, and to get full value out of, literary quality. It is regarded that Criticism have two different functions i) that of interpretation and ii) that of judgment.

The interpretation of works of art or literature is that the main purpose of literary criticism. Interpretation is a way to arrive at judgment. It is a tool to go through the heart of a literary work. It helps a critic to disclose the beauty of work of literature that is hidden in itself. Regarding the interpretation of literary work is function of

critic, W. H. Atkins says that ‘Criticism is that the play of the mind on the aesthetic qualities of literature, having for its object an interpretation of literary values’. According to Walter Pater “Criticism is the art of interpreting art.” Carlyle remarked that, “Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired”. Considering these views we came to understand that the real interpretation of artistic work is function of literary criticism.

In its strict sense, criticism means judgment. The chief function of literary criticism is to judge the artistic value of artistic work. Therefore, the critic of literature is primarily an expert. He uses his special views and training to look at the merits and defects of a piece of literary art or the work of a author in order that he may reach at real judgment. In this connection we will observe the view of I. A. Richards that “To set up as a critic is to set up as a judge of values.” Literary criticism, says Rene Wellek, “is judgment of books, reviewing and finally the definition of taste, of the tradition, of what is a classic.” When a critic attempts to judge the value of a work of art or literature, he can be said to have assessed the work. “Evaluative, judicial, or normative criticism attempts to judge the merits of the literature in relation to a literary, social, moral, or other, value system.” Thus the evaluation of what has been written, in terms of aesthetic principles appropriate to literature is the function of literary criticism.

The interpretation and judgment of literature are the primary functions of criticism. According to some critics and their views, literary criticism is the art of judging, defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating the works of literature. A literary critic uses his art to examine the merits and defects of a piece of art so as to pass a judgment upon it.

The another function of a critic is to evaluate the literary work. A critic may evaluate the literary beauty hidden in literature after unfolding all the concealed aspects of it. In this way, in order to evaluate the worth of art or literature, the critic may examine the merits and demerits or defects of a work of art. Thus to enlighten and stimulate is the task of critic. The true critic is the one who is equipped for his/her task. In real sense it is the play of the mind. The purpose is better understanding and appreciation of the pleasure. Inquiry helps us think rightly about literature. The distinctive qualities of literature may be examined through inquiry. The matter, manner, technique and language are assessed. Certain rules could also be formed and literary composition tested against them, with reference to other similar

works of literature. Thus, reader is helped by critic to form the idea about the merits of literature. The writer is facilitated in this process. Therefore the modern critics believes that the function of criticism is not merely fault-finding, but making a just evaluation of an artistic work without showing any favors.

Criticism is the science of forming and expressing correct judgment upon the value and merit of works of literature. It is only through criticism that intellectual appreciation and clear understanding becomes possible.

Summing up, evaluation, interpretation and explanation, judging are now considered as the chief functions of literary criticism.

**There are a few more views about the function of criticism :**

1. According to Addison, the function of criticism is pure appreciation. The critic should provide aesthetic pleasure to the reader by showing the spots of beauty and loveliness of a book.
2. According to some critics, the great function of criticism is to evaluate properly the works of great artists so that the common reader maybe able to arrive at the real worth of an artist.
3. Another function of criticism is to make a comparative study of a work of art with reference to similar other works of art produced in other languages of the world.
4. It is the function of criticism to reconstruct the work of the creative vision of the artist.

However, we should remember that in actual practice the varied functions of criticism skip into each another. It, therefore, becomes difficult to draw a sharp line between them.

**Matthew Arnold's Views**

In the beginning of his essay, *On Translating Homer* Arnold says, "Of the literature of France and Germany, as of the intellect of Europe, generally, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical, in all branches of knowledge, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is". This sentence gives the importance of criticism. Arnold said that the creative faculty was superior to the critical faculty. Arnold feels that it is the critic's activity which makes

creation possible. He says that criticism is not merely judgment in literature; its function is much more noble, exalted and catholic.

In his another essay, entitled, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*. Arnold defines criticism as 'a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to determine a current of fresh and true ideas'. He clearly defines criticism, illustrates its functions, and also lays down the essentials of a competent critic. He regarded that the task of the critic is i) to learn and understand; he must 'see things as they are'. ii) He must convey his ideas to others and try to make the best ideas prevail iii) He must create an atmosphere favorable for the writer of the future by promoting 'a current of fresh and true ideas in the highest degree. In other words, in Arnold's view about the criticism and the critic, there is an element of propagandist. He must propagate noble ideas in order to promote culture.

According to Arnold criticism is a disinterested endeavor and the word 'disinterested' is very important. He wants to say that the critic's judgment must be free from any kind of prejudices. The critic must be disinterested in the sense that he should follow only the ends of cultural perfection, and should remain uninfluenced by the coarser appeals of the Philistines.

In fact disinterested means that the critic must be concerned with nothing else but his subject. However, this is not what Arnold means. On one hand he says that the critic should be free from ignoble interests; on the other hand he asks for his subjection to certain other interests. Arnold connects the critic with preconceived ideas of moral perfection which are likely to colour his judgment and make him over praise some and be unfair to others.

Arnold has a very high conception regarding the function of a critic and criticism. According to him the critic himself is not only cultured, but he helps others to become cultured. He knows the best that has been thought and known in the world. He makes literary activity possible by establishing a current of noble ideas when such a current is lacking. The critic, further, rouses men out of their self-satisfaction, and complacency because such a complacency is vulgarizing and retarding. He, thus, makes their minds think about what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things. The critic must rise above practical

considerations; he must always have ideal perfection as his aim, because it is only then that he can make others rise to it.

Arnold, thus, makes a really high demand on the critic. He must know the best that is known and thought in the world. He must know the best not in literature alone, but in other subjects as well. He must be a man with great knowledge and understanding so that he can rise above personal considerations. He must have missionary zeal to make the best ideas prevail. He must see things as they really are in themselves and finally he must apply to life the true and noble ideas that he has found. This is really a high conception of the function of a critic and criticism.

### **The Views of T. S. Eliot**

Eliot is the most influential of all modern critics. He is a classist and supports both in art and criticism. T. S. Eliot has defined the function and method of criticism in his essay *The Function of Criticism*. He states, "Criticism must always profess an end in view, which roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of the works of art and the correction of taste." He, further, says that "the critic, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavor to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible in the common pursuit of true judgment." He believes that the function of a critic is not to give his own impressions about a work but to supply to the reader with simple fact about a work and leave the rest to the reader himself.

According to Eliot, the chief tools of criticism are comparison and analysis. The function of criticism is to present facts about a work of art, but we must be masters of facts and not servants. A knowledge of fact about something can never mislead the reader. The critic isn't expected to offer his own opinion or fancy. From this point of view he finds Goethe's and Coleridge's criticism defective because they read their own personal feelings and sentiments in the characters of Shakespeare. The tools of comparison and analysis should be handled with care. The critic must know what to compare and how to analyse. According to him any book or essay or note which produces a fact about a work of art is a better piece of criticism. The fact cannot corrupt taste, it can at the worst gratify one taste - a taste for history or biography under the illusion that it is assisting another. The corruptors of criticism are those who supply opinion or fancy. Eliot puts emphasis on the need of a strict critical

method of the application of the method of science to the study of literature. Hence, he has been rightly recognized as the leader of modern criticism.

### Check Your Progress-III

#### I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below and complete the sentences.

- 1) Generally ..... are two different functions of criticism.  
a) exposition and elucidation      b) and appreciation  
c) assessment and correction      d) interpretation and judgment
- 2) - - - - - is a way to arrive at judgment.  
a) assessment    b) evaluation    c) interpretation    d) elucidation
- 3) ..... is the function of criticism according to Addison.  
a) clarification    b) explanation    c) elucidation    d) appreciation
- 4) According to Arnold the critic should - - - - - the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas.  
a) have knowledge of      b) learn and propagate  
c) criticize      d) evaluate
- 5) According to Eliot, the chief tools of criticism are - - - - -  
a) judging and evaluating      b) writing and reading  
c) strength and weakness      d) comparison and analysis

#### II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.

- 1) How does Arnold define function of criticism ?
- 2) What, according to Arnold, is the function of criticism ?
- 3) How does Elliot define function of criticism ?
- 4) What, according to Eliot, are the Chief tools of criticism ?
- 5) What does mean 'disinterested' ?

## 1.5 Summary

In this unit you have learnt the basic idea of literary criticism. The unit begins with the discussion on the need for literary criticism and then it explores the basic aspects like : what literary criticism is, its nature and its function. In the beginning an attempt is made to open the topic very lucidly so as to get the definite idea of literary criticism. Literary criticism is the only source through which we can understand the exact nature of pleasure we derive from what is the best in literature. With this insight, we move to the nature of literary criticism. Various reputed dictionaries tried to define the nature of literary criticism as well as some critics like Edmund Gosse, Atkins, Addison, Arnold and Eliot made an attempt to put light on the nature of criticism by their scholarly arguments. But this whole debate leads to conclude that one cannot define the exact nature of literary criticism as it is subject to critic and his age. The same is true with function of criticism. The poet-critics like Mathew Arnold and T.S. Eliot have formulated a theory about the function of criticism but there is lack of unanimity in their exposition. Such diversity of view, clearly brings to notice the complex nature of criticism and its functions. However, the sincere attempts made in this domain contributed to promote the idea of literary criticism.

## 1.6 Terms to Remember

**to enrich (v)** : to improve quality of something

**insight(n)** : the ability to have clear, deep understanding.

**unbiased (adj)** : able to judge fairly, not influenced by opinion

**dispassionate (adj)** : able to think clearly, not influenced by emotions

**rational (adj)** : clear thoughts based on reasons or logic

**province (n)** : particular areas, region

**aesthetic (adj.)** : concerned with beauty or appreciation of beauty.

**avowal (n)** : confession openly

**domain (n)** : an area of interest

**propagate (v)** : promote an idea, knowledge etc. widely

**disengage (v)** : to stop being involved in something

**elucidate (v)** : make clear, explain

**impressionistic (adj.)** : based on personal impression

**unanimity (n)** : fully in agreement

**reveal (v)** : to make know or show, expose

**verdict (n)** : an opinion or decision made after judging the facts

**normative (adj)** : related to rules

**stimulus (n)** : something that promotes activity, interest etc.

**facilitate (v)** : make easy or easier

**interpret (v)** : explain the meaning of

**Philistine (n)** : a person who is hostile to or not interested in culture and the arts.

**lignoble (adj.)** : not good or honest; dishonorable

**complacency (c)** : uncritical satisfaction with oneself

**profess (v)** : announce, declare one's faith in

**crank (n)** : an eccentric person

**Fine arts (n)** : art intended to appeal to sense of beauty, such as painting, sculpture, music etc.

**judgment (n)** : the ability to make sound decisions or form conclusions.

**estimate (n)** : a judgment

**appreciation (n)** : a favorable written assessment of a person or their work.

**gratify (v)** : to please someone or to satisfy

## **1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress**

### **Answers to Check Your Progress-I**

**I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below each sentence and complete the sentences.**

- 1) a) interpreting
- 2) c) interpret
- 3) a) Literary criticism
- 4) c) exercise of judgment
- 5) a) 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C

**II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.**

1. The critic's general purpose is to enrich the reader's understanding of the literary work.
2. Dryden
3. Interpretation and Judgment
4. A judge of literature
5. B.Worsfold

### **Answers to Check Your Progress-II**

**I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below each sentence and complete the sentences.**

- 1) b) a judge of literature
- 2) c) Dryden
- 3) a) Judging or evaluation
- 4) a) Atkins
- 5) d) Abercrombie

**II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.**

- 1) Creation.
- 2) W H Atkins

- 3) Edmund Gosse
- 4) According to Addison, the critic's attention would be on excellences rather than imperfections
- 5) The theory of criticism is connected with theory of poetry

### **Answers to Check Your Progress-III**

#### **I) Choose the correct alternative from the options given below each sentence and complete the sentences.**

- 1) d) interpretation and judgment
- 2) c) interpretation
- 3) d) appreciation
- 4) b) learn and propagate
- 5) d) comparison and analysis

#### **II) Answer the following questions in one word /phrases / sentence each.**

- 1) Arnold defines criticism as 'a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas'.
- 2) Its function is not merely judgment in literature but much more noble, exalted and catholic.
- 3) T.S. Elliot defines function of criticism as 'criticism must always profess an end in view, which roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of the works of art and the correction of taste'
- 4) According to Elliot, the chief tools of criticism are comparison and analysis.
- 5) Disinterested' means that the critic must be concerned with nothing else but his subject.

### **1.8 Exercise**

#### **Q.1 A) Answer the following questions in about 250 words each.**

- 1) Explain the nature of Literary criticism.

- 2) Write a note on the need of literary criticism.
- 3) Comment on various definitions and arguments of critics about the nature of literary criticism.
- 4) Explain the function of literary criticism.
- 5) Write note on the function of literary criticism.
- 6) Discuss various functions of criticism with special reference to the views of Mathew Arnold and T.S. Elliot

**B) Write Short notes**

- 1) Matthew Arnold's views about function of criticism.
- 2) The tools and functions of criticism ?

**1.9 References for further reading**

1. M.H. Abrams .A Glossary of Literary Terms. Prism Publication.
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3. Saintsbury, George. A History of English Criticism. Ginn and Company Bvston.
4. Abraham. Jacob. A Handbook of Literary Terms. Kalyani Publication.
5. Nicholas,Stephen. Rene Wellek's Concepts of Criticism. Yale U.P.
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## Module II

### Classical Criticism

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
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#### 2.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to understand –

- Aristotle's concept of Tragedy.
- Aristotle's concept of Ideal Tragic Hero.

#### 2.1 Introduction:

The critical enquiry had begun almost in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Greece. Plato, the great disciple of Socrates, was the first critic who examined poetry as a part of his moral philosophy. 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. Plato was a great moral philosopher. He was mainly concerned with inducing moral values in the society and seeking the ultimate truth. For him, poetry is immoral and imitative in nature. On the other hand, Aristotle, the most distinguished disciple of Plato, was a critic, scholar, logician and practical philosopher. He is known for his critical treatises: (i) *The Poetics* and (ii) *The Rhetoric*, dealing with art of poetry and art of speaking, respectively. Aristotle examines poetry as a form of art and evaluates its constituent elements on the basis of its aesthetic beauty. Aristotle actually observed the available forms of literature and analyzed them and codified the rules. In his work he has described the characteristics of Tragedy, Comedy and Epic in elaborative manner.

Classical criticism views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life. The primary criterion applied to a work is that of the “truth” of its representation to the subject matter that it represents, or should represent.

In his *Poetics* (fourth century B.C.), Aristotle defines poetry as an imitation (in Greek, *mimesis*) of human actions. The poem takes an instance of human action and represents it in a new “medium,” or material—that of words. Aristotle distinguishes poetry from other arts in terms of the artistic media, the kind of actions imitated, and in the manner of imitation (for example, dramatic or narrative). He also makes distinctions between the various poetic kinds, such as drama and epic, tragedy and comedy.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* provides a classic analysis of the form of tragedy. His analysis is based on the tragedies of Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Aristotle defined tragedy as follows; "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action, that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, through pity and fear effecting the proper catharsis or purgation of these emotions."

Aristotle further says that the tragic hero will evoke both pity and fear if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly evil but a mixture of both; and also that the tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such

a man suffers a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of a mistaken act, to which he is led by his hamartia—his “error of judgment”.

In this unit we are going to study the concepts like tragedy and tragic hero used by the classical critic, Aristotle.

## **1.2 Presentation of Subject Matter**

### **1.2.1 The Concept of Tragedy:**

Aristotle's *Poetics* is a celebrated work of literary criticism. It is basically an answer to Plato's *Republic*. The *Poetics* is about the art of poetry in general, but it mainly focuses epic and tragedy. There are 26 chapters in all, out of which 14 are devoted to tragedy only. So it is clear that Aristotle gave much importance to tragedy in it. It is because epic and tragedy were considered to be the ideal forms of literature in the ancient age. Hence the *Poetics* concentrates on tragedy, in particular. Aristotle's views on catharsis are found in chapters VI and XIV of the *Poetics*.

#### **Definition of Tragedy:**

Aristotle's definition of tragedy is familiar and famous. He says, "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate part of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pit and fear affecting the proper catharsis of these emotions." This definition has two parts: (1) The first part describes the nature of tragedy and distinguishes it from other forms of poetry. (2) The second part is concerned with the function and the emotional effects of tragedy.

#### **The Origin and Development of Poetry:**

Aristotle traces the origin and development of poetry in human life. The discussion is concentrated on dramatic poetry. Aristotle considers that the origin of poetry lies in two natural instincts. First, it is the natural human impulse to imitate things. Such impulse is found even in children. Secondly, it is in the delight in recognizing and appreciating a good imitation. It helps to appreciate even ugly objects, if imitated well. Then there is the instinct of getting pleasure in harmony and rhythm. Poetry grew out of these natural instincts. Poetry, later on, developed into two directions, according to the personal characters of the poets. Some poets with serious spirits represented noble personages and their actions. They composed

panegyrics and hymns to the gods. On the other hand, poets with lighter spirits presented frivolous characters with trivial actions. These were the comedies and satires. Aristotle considers Homer to be the unique poet who shared in both the tendencies.

### **Distinction between Tragedy and Other Forms of Poetry:**

Let us first see how the definition distinguishes tragedy from other kinds of poetry. Its' objects of imitation are serious actions and so it is different from comedy which imitates the non-serious. Secondly, tragedy on the basis of its manner of imitation is different from the epic which narrates and does not represent through action. Thirdly, on the basis of its medium, it is different from the lyric. It makes use of many kinds of embellishments in different parts. For example, verse in dialogue and song in the chorus parts. Aristotle says that the medium of imitation is "language embellished" which means that the manner of imitation is in the form of action, not narration. It means that tragedy is acted on the stage and not merely told by one voice as in the epic. Aristotle also considers spectacular equipment, costume and setting to be important aspects. He does not exclude music and diction for these are also the medium of imitation.

### **Tragedy as an Imitation of Action:**

Aristotle states in the beginning that tragedy is an imitation of action. Hence, action is the object of tragedy. This action should be serious, not trivial or ludicrous as in the case of comedy. The word 'complete' refers to the organic unity of the plot, i.e. it must have a beginning, middle, and an end. The beginning is that from which further action flows out and which is intelligible in itself and not consequent or dependent on any previous situation. The end is that which follows inevitably from what has gone before, but which does not lead to further action. It makes the completion of the tragic action. The middle is that which follows inevitably upon what has gone before, and also leads on to an inevitable conclusion. Thus, the action that tragedy imitates is its plot and it must always be in accordance with the laws of probability and necessity.

Further, Aristotle says that the action of a tragedy must be of a certain magnitude. The word 'magnitude' stands for its proper size length. The proper 'magnitude', says Aristotle, is comprised within such limits that the sequence of events, according to the laws of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from

bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad. Then action must be long enough to permit an orderly development of the plot to catastrophe. It should not be too long, for in that case, it will not be taken in as an artistic whole by the memory.

### **Aristotle's Theory of Mimesis:**

There is no doubt that Aristotle inherited the word 'mimesis' from Plato. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle has expressed his theory of mimesis. It is in chapters I to IV.

Aristotle added a new meaning, a new dimension to Plato's concept. He expanded and made it comprehensive. Aristotle's *Poetics* is an indirect answer to Plato. Aristotle breathed a new life, a new spirit in the theory of mimesis. He proved that poetry is not a servile copy, a blind imitation but a process of creation.

Aristotle considers mimesis or imitation to be the common principle of all fine arts. The term 'fine arts' includes poetry, comedy, tragedy, dancing, music, flute playing, painting and sculpture. All of them imitate something. Thus Aristotle agrees with Plato's theory in principle. He agrees that imitation is the common principle of all arts. At the same time, he differs from Plato by including music in the imitative arts. It clearly shows that Aristotle's theory of imitation is wider than that of Plato. The musician imitates not the outward form of appearances, but he presents the inward world of human feelings, passions and emotions. It is the inner life of man. Other arts like painting, dancing etc. also imitate something. It is the common basis of all arts, but there are differences too. All the arts differ from one another in three ways. They have different mediums or means of imitation. They differ in their objects of imitation. Finally, their manners or modes of imitation are also different. In this way, the mediums, the objects and the manners of imitation make differences among arts.

#### **I) Mediums or Means of Imitation:**

Some mediums of imitation are form, colour and sounds. Music uses rhythm, language and harmony. Poetry uses the medium of language.

#### **II) The Objects of Imitation:**

The objects of imitation or representation are 'human beings'. These are the men performing or experiencing something. They may be either good or bad. It means that the arts represent human beings, either better or worse than they really are. Thus, the objects of imitation are different in each art. In poetry, some poets present men

better than reality or as they are. They may be presented lower than the reality. It is the basic difference between tragedy and comedy. Tragedy presents men better than reality, whereas comedy presents them in the lower mode.

Thus, the objects of imitation differ in various arts. For Aristotle, imitation was not limited to outward appearance only. It was the reproduction of human nature and actions. It is a creative process.

### **III) The Manner of Imitation:**

Different arts imitate objects in different manners. There may be three modes of it. First, the poet may use the mode of narration throughout. Secondly, he may use narration as well as dialogues by characters. We find such mode in Homer's poetry. Lastly, a poet may represent the whole story in a dramatic manner. It is in the form of action.

For Aristotle, the manner of imitation helps us to classify poetry into epic, narrative and descriptive types. The dramatic poetry is further divided in tragedy and comedy on the basis of their objects of representation. This classification prepares the ground for further discussion of tragedy in later chapters. In this way, poetry differs from all other arts on the basis of medium, objects and manner of imitation.

### **The Origin and Development of Poetry:**

Aristotle traces the origin and development of poetry in human life. The discussion is concentrated on dramatic poetry. Aristotle considers that the origin of poetry lies in two natural instincts. First, it is the natural human impulse to imitate things. Such impulse is found even in children. Secondly, it is in the delight in recognizing and appreciating a good imitation. It helps to appreciate even ugly objects, if imitated well. Then there is the instinct of getting pleasure in harmony and rhythm. Poetry grew out of these natural instincts.

Poetry, later on, developed into two directions, according to the personal characters of the poets. Some poets with serious spirits represented noble personages and their actions. They composed panegyrics and hymns to the gods. On the other hand, poets with lighter spirits presented frivolous characters with trivial actions. These were the comedies and satires. Aristotle considers Homer to be the unique poet who shared in both the tendencies.

### **Imitation - a Creative Process:**

Aristotle thus took the term 'mimesis' from Plato. He gave it a wider significance and a new implication. Plato considered poetry or literature merely a replica, a blind copying. For Aristotle, it was an act of creative vision. No doubt, a poet takes his material from the phenomenal in the world, but he makes something new out of it. A poet may deal with the facts from the past, from the established beliefs or with the unrealized ideals. He transforms them into some universal and permanent characteristics of human life. Poetic imitation thus involves a creative faculty. It is the transformation of material into an art. Aristotle asserts: "It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity". Poetry is thus more philosophical than history. Aristotle refuted the charge against poetry being a 'mother of lies'. He brought out the higher truth involved in it. Poetry is an act of creative vision. Imitation, to Aristotle, was none other than 're-creation'.

### **Two Kinds of Plots:**

According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of plots of a tragedy. i) Simple, ii) Complex. The plot is simple, when the change in the fortunes of the hero takes place without Periphery and Discovery. The plot is complex, if it has either Periphery or Discovery or both. Periphery means the change in the fortunes of the hero. Discovery means the change from ignorance to knowledge. In his view, 'the complex plot is the best because it startles and captures attention, and therefore, it is likely to perform the tragic function more effectively than a simple plot.'

### **Aristotle's Interpretation of an Action:**

Action in Aristotle's definition of tragedy has a special meaning. It does not mean deeds, events or physical activity; it means rather the motivation from which deeds spring. It is an inward process which expresses itself extremely in the form of doing. In the words of Butcher, the action that art seeks to reproduce is mainly a psychic energy working outwards. Dante calls it a 'movement of spirit. Action is determined by the motive of the personal agent. The action should be the action of rational human being, who possesses the power of thinking and intellect and the ability to choose and react to a given situation.

### **The Elements of Tragedy:**

According to Aristotle, there are six formative elements of a tragedy: Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song. Two of these parts relate to the medium of imitation, one to the manner of imitation, and three to the object of imitation. Song or the lyrical element is to be found in the choric parts of a tragedy. It is one of the sources of the pleasure of tragedy. The spectacle has more to do with stage-craft than with the writing. Thought is the power of saying, whatever can be said, or required where a statement is made. Thought is the intellectual element in a tragedy and it is expressed through the speech of a character. The speech brings out the importance of language or diction in a tragedy. The language of tragedy must be unusually expressive. The language of tragedy must be clear, and it must not be mean. It must also be dignified and elevated. The characters in a tragedy must be good; they must be appropriate; they must have likeness, and they must have consistency. According to Aristotle, Plot is the very soul of tragedy. By plot, Aristotle means to A the arrangement incidents.

### **The Function and the Emotional Effects of Tragedy:**

Aristotle has used the word 'Catharsis' in his definition of tragedy in order to explain the function and the emotional effects of tragedy. He uses it while discussing the end of tragedy as - "tragedy effects, through pity and fear, a 'Catharsis' of such emotions." This theory of Catharsis is taken as Aristotle's answer to Plato. Plato thought that art nourishes the passions of human beings; and so, art is corrupted. Aristotle's reply to this charge is simple and remarkable. He asserts that art does not nourish the passions, but it gives a harmless and useful purgation to people. Hence, tragedy excites our pity and fear and enables us to leave the theatre in calm of mind and all passion spent. By Catharsis, Aristotle suggests the emotional effect of a tragedy. His vague use of the word 'Catharsis' has given rise to many interpretations. Scholars have suggested religious, moral, medical, psychological, and aesthetic meanings according to their interpretation of Catharses. However, we have to consider a true account of the effect of tragedy. When we go to the theatre to watch a tragedy, do we go to purge our emotions? Psychology may point out that the repressed emotions find a vent and the spectators may feel a sort of relief and that their emotions may be sublimated. But this is not what Aristotle meant by Catharsis.



- 4) Tragedy is an imitation of -----.  
a) action            b) people            c) life            d) world
- 5) The term 'mimesis' was first used by -----.  
a) Philip Sidney            b) P. B. Shelley  
c) Plato            d) Chaucer
- 6) What does Aristotle mean by the word 'magnitude'?  
a) management            b) proper size or length of the plot  
c) the function of tragedy            d) the theme of tragedy
- 7) 'Discovery' means the change of fortunes in hero's life from -----.  
a) adversity to prosperity            b) prosperity to adversity  
c) ignorance to knowledge            d) poverty to wealth
- 8) According to Aristotle, a tragedy has ----- formative elements.  
a) six            b) five            c) many            d) nine
- 9) ----- is the very soul of tragedy.  
a) character            b) dialogue            c) plot            d) catharsis
- 10) The word 'Catharsis' is used to denote -----.  
a) the action of tragedy            b) the list of characters  
c) the function or emotional effect of tragedy            d) the definition of tragedy

**B) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence.**

- 1) Where did Plato use the term 'mimesis'?
- 2) Which Greek word is represented 'imitation' in English?
- 3) What does Aristotle mean by "the action of tragedy must be complete"?
- 4) Which are the two kinds of plot, according to Aristotle?
- 5) What is meant by peripety?
- 6) How should be the language of tragedy, according to Aristotle?
- 7) What does Aristotle mean by the plot in tragedy?
- 8) What kind of emotions are given outlet through tragedy?

### 2.2.2. The Ideal Tragic Hero:

Having examined the art of characterization in general, Aristotle proceeds to examine the qualities which the ideal tragic hero must have. No passage in the *Poetics*, with the exception of the phrase catharsis, has attracted so much critical attention as his ideal of the tragic hero.

The function of a tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear, and Aristotle deduces the qualities of his hero from this function. He should be good, but not too good or perfect, for the fall of a perfectly good man from happiness into misery, would be odious and repellent. His fall will not arouse pity, for he is not like us and his undeserved fall would only shock and disgust. Similarly, the spectacle of an utterly wicked person passing from happiness to misery may satisfy our moral sense, but is lacking in the proper tragic qualities. Such a person is not like us, and his fall is felt to be well-deserved and in accordance with the requirement of justice. It excites neither pity nor fear. Thus, according to Aristotle, perfectly good, as well as utterly wicked persons are not suitable to be heroes of tragedies. However, Elizabethan tragedy has demonstrated that, given the necessary skill and art, even villains, like Macbeth, can serve as proper tragic heroes and their fall can arouse the specific tragic emotions. The wreck of such power excites in us a certain tragic sympathy; we experience a sense of loss and regret over the waste or misuse of gifts so splendid.

Similarly, according to Aristotelian canon, a saint—a character perfectly good would be unsuitable as a tragic hero. He is on the side of the moral order and not opposed to it, and hence his fall shocks and repels. However, his martyrdom is a spiritual victory and the sense of moral triumph drowns the feeling of pity for his physical suffering. The saint is self-effacing and unselfish, and so he tends to be passive and inactive. Drama, on the other hand, requires for its effectiveness a militant and combative hero. However, in quite recent times, both Bernard Shaw and T. S. Eliot have achieved outstanding success with saints as their tragic heroes. In this connection, it would be pertinent to remember that Aristotle's conclusions are based on the Greek drama with which he was familiar. In the same manner, he is laying down the qualifications of an ideal tragic hero; he is here discussing what is the very best, and not what is good.

Having rejected perfection as well as utter depravity and villainy, Aristotle points out that the ideal tragic hero, “must be an intermediate kind of person, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment.” The ideal tragic hero is a man who stands midway between the two extremes. He is not eminently good or just, though he inclines to the side of goodness.

The tragic hero is not depraved or vicious, but he is also not perfect, and his misfortune is brought upon him by some fault of his own. The Greek word used here is “hamartia”. The root meaning of hamartia is “missing the mark”. He falls not because of the act of some outside agency or vice or depravity, but because of his own error of Judgement.

Hamartia or miscalculation on his part. Hamartia is not a moral falling, and hence it is unfortunate that it has been translated rather loosely as “tragic flaw”, as has been done by Bradley. Aristotle himself distinguishes hamartia from moral falling, and makes it quite clear that he means by it some error of judgment. He writes that the cause of the hero’s fall must lie, “not in depravity, but in some error or hamartia on his part.” Butcher, Bywater, and Rostangi, all agree that hamartia is not moral state; but an error of judgment which a man makes or commits. However, as Humphrey House tells us, Aristotle does not assert or deny anything about the connection of hamartia with moral failings in the hero.

Thus, hamartia is an error or miscalculation, but the error may arise from any of the three ways: i) It may arise from ignorance of some material fact or circumstance, ii) It may be an error arising from hasty or careless view of the special case, iii) It may be an error voluntary, but not deliberate, as in the case of acts committed in anger or passion. Else and Martin Ostward, both critics interpret hamartia actively and say that the hero has a tendency to err, created by lack of knowledge, and he may commit a series of errors. They further say that the tendency to err characterizes the hero from the beginning—(it is a character-trait)—and that at the crisis of the play, it is complemented by the recognition scene (anagnorisis), which is a sudden change, “from ignorance to knowledge”.

As a matter of fact, hamartia is a word which admits of various shades of meaning, and hence it has been differently interpreted by different critics. However, all serious modern Aristotelian scholarship is agreed that hamartia is not moral

imperfection – though it may be allied with moral faults – that it is an error of judgment, whether arising from ignorance of some material circumstances. It may even be a character-trait, for the hero may have a tendency to commit errors of judgment, and may commit not one, but a series of errors. This last conclusion is borne out by the play *Oedipus Tyrannus* to which Aristotle refers again and again, and which may be taken to be his ideal. In this play, the life of the hero is a chain of errors, the most fatal of all being his marriage with his mother. If King Oedipus is Aristotle's ideal hero, we can say with Butcher that, "his conception of hamartia includes all the three meanings mentioned above, which in English cannot be covered by a single term." Hamartia is an error, or a series of errors, "whether morally culpable or not," committed by an otherwise noble person, and these errors drive him to his doom. The tragic irony lies in the fact that the hero may err innocently, unknowingly, without any evil intention at all, yet he is doomed no less than those who are depraved and sin consciously. He has hamartia; he commits error or errors, and as a result his very virtues hurry him to his ruin. Says Butcher, "Othello in the modern drama, Oedipus in the ancient, are the two most conspicuous examples of ruin wrought by characters, noble indeed, but not without defects, acting in the dark and, as it seemed, for the best."

In Chapter XV of the Poetics, Aristotle deals with the art of characterization on an extended scale. He lists four essentials of successful characterization.

#### **Four Essentials of Characterization:**

**i) The character must be good** - A character is good, if his words and actions reveal that his purpose is good. In ancient Greece, women were considered as inferior beings and slaves as worthless. But Aristotle says that, when introduced in tragedy, even women and slaves must be shown to have some good in them. Entirely wicked characters, even though assigned minor roles, are unfit for tragedy. Wickedness may be introduced only when required by the necessities of the plot.

Wanton introduction of wickedness must be avoided; and when introduced even wicked characters must be made good in some respects. Wickedness must be mixed up with some good as in actual life. In other words, Aristotle prefers complex characters. Just as a successful painter makes his portrait more beautiful than the original, in the same way the poet must represent his characters better and more dignified and must still preserve the likeness to the original.

**ii) The character must be appropriate** - According to Aristotle the character must be appropriate, that is to say each character must be true to 'type' or 'status'. For example, a woman must be shown as womanly and not 'manly'; a slave must be given a character which is appropriate to his 'status'. Manliness would not be appropriate in a woman, and dignity and nobility in a slave. If the characters are taken from some known myth or story, say the story of King Oedipus, and then they must be true to tradition. They must behave as King Oedipus is traditionally supposed to have behaved. In this respect, Aristotle had the practice of Greek dramatists in mind, who chose their tragic themes from history, myth, and other traditional sources.

**iii) Characters must have likeness** – The third essential of successful characterization is that characters must have likeness i.e. they must be like ourselves or true to life. In other words, they must have the virtues and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds, likes and dislikes, of average humanity. Such likeness is essential, for we can feel pity only for one who is like ourselves, and only his misfortunes can make us fear for ourselves. This in itself rules out perfectly good, or utterly wicked and depraved characters. Such characters will not be like us. They will be unreal and unconvincing. The characters must be of an intermediate sort, mixtures of good and evil, virtues and weaknesses like us.

**iv) The characters must be consistent** - They must be true to their own natures, and their actions must be in character. Thus a rash, impulsive person should act rashly and impulsively. There should be no sudden changes in character. If the dramatist has to represent an inconsistent person, then he must be 'consistently inconsistent'.

Aristotle emphasizes the point further by saying that the actions of a character must be the necessary and probable outcome of his nature. He should act as we may logically expect a man of his nature to act, under the given circumstances. Just as the incidents must be casually connected with each other, so also the various actions of a character must be the necessary and probable consequences of his character, and the situation in which he is placed. They must be logically interlinked with his earlier actions, and must not contradict the impression produced earlier.

### 2.2.3.1 Check Your Progress.

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question:**

- 1) The root meaning of hamartia is -----.
  - a) fixing the target
  - b) missing the mark
  - c) finding fault
  - d) right choice
- 2) According to Bradley, hamartia is -----.
  - a) tragic flaw
  - b) justice
  - c) fortune
  - d) right decision
- 3) Butcher and Bywater believe that hamartia means -----.
  - a) a missing of mark
  - b) misfortune of hero
  - c) an error of judgment
  - d) all of these
- 4) Hamartia is not -----.
  - a) moral falling
  - b) ideal truth
  - c) universal truth
  - d) none of these
- 5) Aristotle used the word hamartia for -----.
  - a) villain
  - b) ideal tragic hero
  - c) heroine
  - d) none of these.

**B) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence.**

- 1) How should be the tragic hero, according to Aristotle?
- 2) What is the root meaning of hamartia?
- 3) What is the meaning of hamartia according to Else and Martin Ostward?
- 4) What is the meaning of anagnorisis?
- 5) Who believes that hamartia is not moral state; but an error of judgment which a man makes or commits?

## 2.3 Summary:

Aristotle's *Poetics* is a celebrated work of literary criticism. It is basically an answer to Plato's *Republic*. The *Poetics* is about the art of poetry in general, but it mainly focuses on epic and tragedy. There are 26 chapters in all, out of which 14 are devoted to tragedy only. So it is clear that Aristotle gave much importance to tragedy in it. It is because epic and tragedy were considered to be the ideal forms of literature in the ancient age. Hence the *Poetics* concentrates on tragedy, in particular. Aristotle's views on catharsis are found in chapters VI and XIV of the *Poetics*.

Hamartia is a word which admits of various shades of meaning, and hence it has been differently interpreted by different critics.

However, all serious modern Aristotelian scholarship is agreed that hamartia is not moral imperfection – though it may be allied with moral faults – that it is an error of judgment, whether arising from ignorance of some material circumstances. It may even be a character-trait, for the hero may have a tendency to commit errors of judgment, and may commit not one, but a series of errors.

## 2.4 Terms to Remember:

**Mimesis:** copying something as it is

**disciple:** student

**treatise:** a written work dealing formally and systematically with a subject.

**Dithyrambic:** Greek religious song sung to Dionysus, originally sung by a single person.

**Catharsis:** a Greek word indicating the effect of tragedy. anarchy: disorder

**magnitude:** length

**language embellishments:** ornaments of language

**aesthetic pleasure:** joy concerned with beauty and appreciation

**inexplicable:** that cannot be explained

**Hamartia:** missing the mark or tragic flaw

**Anagnorisis:** a sudden change, “from ignorance to knowledge”.

## 2.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

### 2.2.1.1

- A) 1) Plato's 'Republic'  
2) Tragedy  
3) They imitate something  
4) action  
5) Plato  
6) proper size or length of the plot  
7) from ignorance to knowledge  
8) six  
9) plot  
10) the function or emotional effect of tragedy
- B) 1) Plato's Republic  
2) Mimesis  
3) 'The action of tragedy must be complete' means it must have a well beginning, a middle and an end.  
4) simple and complex  
5) Peripety means the change in fortunes of the hero.  
6) The language of tragedy should be dignified and elevated  
7) Plot is the arrangement of incidents.  
8) Emotions like pity and fear are given outlet through tragedy.

### 2.2.2.1

- A) 1) missing the mark  
2) Tragic flaw  
3) An error of judgment  
4) Moral falling

- 5) Ideal tragic hero
- B)
- 1) He should be good, but not too good or perfect, for the fall of a perfectly good man from happiness into misery, would be odious and repellent.
  - 2) The root meaning of hamartia is “missing the mark”.
  - 3) Both critics interpret hamartia actively and say that the hero has a tendency to err, created by lack of knowledge, and he may commit a series of errors.
  - 4) It is a sudden change, “from ignorance to knowledge”.
  - 5) Butcher, Bywater, and Rostangi,

### **2.6 Exercises:**

- 1) Define tragedy and discuss in detail its component parts.
- 2) What is the function of tragedy according to Aristotle?
- 3) What, according to Aristotle, is the proper pleasure of tragedy? How does tragedy achieve its ends?
- 4) Write a critical note on Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero.
- 5) What are the qualifications laid down by Aristotle for the ideal tragic hero?

### **2.7 Further Reading:**

- 1) Butcher, S. H. (1894) Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts. London: Macmillan.
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- 3) Fyfe, Hamiton. (1940) Aristotle's Art of Poetry. London: Oxford University Press.
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**Module III**  
**Neo-Classical Criticism**  
***Preface to Shakespeare***

**Dr. Samuel Johnson**

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**3.0 Objectives**

After studying this unit you will be able to :

1. Understand Dr. Samuel Johnson as a literary writer
2. Know his contribution to literary criticism
3. Acquaint with his critical essay *Preface to Shakespeare*
4. Explain his views about Shakespeare as universal dramatist
5. Distinguish Shakespeare's tragedy, comedy and tragi- comedy
- 6.

### **3.1 Introduction**

Dear students, you have studied Aristotle's concept of Tragedy and concept of Ideal Tragic Hero. Aristotle's theory of tragedy as well as of poetry is the fundamental part of criticism. In this unit, you will study Dr. Samuel Johnson as a literary writer and his contribution to area of critical works.

#### **3.1.1 Introduction to Samuel Johnson**

Dr. Samuel Johnson was born at Litchfield in 1709 in a poor and obscure family. He was educated in Pembroke College and then studied in Oxford University where he enjoyed a certain reputation for wit and scholarship but he left without a degree in December 1729. He started his writing career by helping to write for the Gentlemen's Magazine. He wrote Dictionary, *The Rambler*, *The Idler*, *The Lives of the Poets* and *Preface to Shakespeare*. He was also a letter writer. His famous letter to the 'Earl of Chesterfield' talks about his sufferings and struggles of a young writer.

Dr. Johnson was one of the greatest literary writer of England. His critical works are:

1. *Preface to the Dictionary of the English languages*
2. *Preface to Shakespeare*
3. *Lives of the Poets*

#### **3.1.2 Introduction to *Preface to Shakespeare***

*Preface to Shakespeare* is a classic of criticism. It displays all Johnson's gifts at their best. His lucidity, style and massive knowledge of English language and literature are reflected while dealing with Shakespeare. He rises above all such narrow – mindedness and is fair as well as impartial in his judgment. He shows a surprising insensibility to the dramatists higher flights of imagination and poetry gifts.

### **3.2 *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765)**

It was quite early in his literary career that Johnson began to take interest in Shakespeare. In 1745, he published *Observation on the Tragedy of Macbeth*. Then his proposal for an edition of the works of Shakespeare are published in 1756 which

are magnificent in their range. He explains the entire duty of an editor and critic of Shakespeare: the complete collection of the early editions the elucidations of obscurities, the comparison of Shakespeare's works with those of other dramatists, both ancient and modern etc. Originally he intended to bring out the edition in 1757 but he could not, the work Preface could be published only in 1765. He worked over the edition for full nine years and its preface has been warmly praised by all.

### **3.2.1 Preface to Shakespeare : Explanation and Analysis:**

*Preface to Shakespeare* appeared in 1765, is a monumental and memorable work of Shakespearean criticism. In the work of Adam Smith it is the most manly piece of criticism that was ever published in any country. John Baily praises it by saying that the world cannot show any sixty pages about Shakespeare exhibiting so much wisdom and truth as these. It ranks as one of the great works in English critical history. According to John Watson, Johnsons preface is in essence a brilliant exercise in descriptive criticism, Johnsons first extended attempt at the form – with a major essay in theoretical criticism, the refutation of the unities of time and place inserted midway and a long appendix an editorial method. It is divided into seven parts – Shakespeare as a poet of nature, defence of his tragic - comedy, his central style, his defects, attack upon the unities, the historical background and editorial method.

#### **Johnson's Views on Shakespeare's treatment of nature:**

Johnson began the preface by stressing the realism of Shakespeare. He is a poet of nature i.e he is one who faithfully represents human nature in his plays. There is a just representation of general human nature. His characters are the faithful representation of humanity. He deals with passions and principles which are common to humanity. He does not merely depict the particular meanness and customs of any country or age. His characters are not mostly kings and Romans, they are above all human beings. But this does not mean that they do not have any individual qualities. His characters are universals as well as individuals. The speech of one cannot be placed in the mouth of another and they can easily be differentiated from each other by their speeches. They are also true to the age, sex or profession to which they belong. They are, in addition, true to type.

### **Johnson's Justification of Shakespeare's Tragi-Comedy:**

Johnson admires Shakespeare's adroit admixture of the comic and the tragic elements. In this respect also he is true to nature. Joys and sorrows, smiles and tears, victory and defeat, good and evil co-exist in human life. So by mixing tragedy and comedy Shakespeare holds the mirror to nature. In this connection, it should be remembered that his works are neither tragedies nor comedies but composition of an entirely different kind, representing the real state of human nature on this earth. His tragi comedy is nearer to life than either tragedy or comedy and so it combines within itself the pleasure as well as the instruction. It is more effective as it is more sincere to life. Tragi- comedy can satisfy a greater variety of tastes. His tragi-comedy is criticised, because we fail to understand the real nature both of tragedy and comedy.

### **Johnson's Critical Evaluation of Shakespeare's greatness as a writer of comedies:**

According to Johnson, comedy came natural to him and not tragedy. In tragedy he writes with great appearance of toil and study but in comic scenes he seems to produce without labour. In his tragic scenes there is something always wanting but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct. His comic scenes are natural and durable. The language of his comic scenes is the language of real life. His language is nearer to us than that of any other poet of his age. He is one of the great and original masters of the language. His comic personages are real human beings and they act and speak as human beings would be under the circumstances. In short, Shakespeare is greater as a writer of comedy than of a tragedy.

### **Johnson's view on Shakespeare's Defects :**

Dr. Johnson points out some serious faults in the plays of Shakespeare. First there is no poetic justice and no moral purpose. He sacrifices virtue to convenience and is much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. Secondly his plots are loosely formed. A little carefulness would have improved him. He neglects the opportunities of instruction which his plots offer him. In many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. His catastrophes often seem forced and improbable. Thirdly Johnson objects to his anachronisms or violations of chronology. Fourthly in his comic scenes he is seldom very successful

when he engages his characters in reciprocation of smartness and contacts of sarcasm their jests are commonly gross and their pleasantry licentious, neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners. Fifthly there is a tendency in Shakespeare to amplify unduly his narratives and set of speeches. His diction is spoiled by disproportionate point of diction and a wearisome train circumlocution and tells the incident imperfectly in many words which have been more plainly delivered in a few. His declamation or set of speeches are commonly cold and weak. Sixthly he is not always consistent. The readers are disappointed to find him falling down at moments of highest excellence. Some contemptible conceits spoil the effects of his pathetic and tragic scenes. Seventhly he is too fond of funs and quibbles, which are sure to lead him out of his way and sure to engulf in the mire.

#### **Johnson's Defence of Shakespeare's approach to unities:**

Shakespeare's historical plays are neither comedies nor tragedies. The only unity they need is consistency and naturalness in character. In his other works he has well maintained the unity of action. His plots have complexity and variety of nature, which might also be certain superfluous incidents. But his plots have a beginning, a middle and an end, one event is logically connected with another and the plot makes gradual advance towards the denouement. He shows no regard for the unities of time and place and in the opinion of Johnson, these unities have been more trouble to the poet than pleasure to the audience. Unity of action alone is essential; the other two unities of time and place arise from false assumption and circumscribe the drama and lessen as variety. Hence it is good that Shakespeare violates them. Their violation becomes his comprehensive genius. In short, unities are not essential to drama. Their violation often results in variety and instruction. The rules may be against Johnson but he defends Shakespeare on grounds of nearness to life and nature.

#### **Johnson's Historical Evaluations of Shakespeare**

Dr. Johnson shows a rare critical acumen by judging Shakespeare with reference to his age. Many of his faults are the faults of the age he lived in the English nation was in its infancy and was struggling to emerge from barbarity. He believed in the magic and the supernatural and hence Shakespeare amply uses the supernatural machinery in his plays. He generally borrowed his plots from novels. So his plots whether historical or fabulous, are always crowded with incidents by which the

attention of rude people was more easily caught than by sentiment or argumentation. These are many extravagances in his plays. But they are justified by the requirement of his audiences. He remarks about Shakespeare that he found the English stage in a state of utmost rudeness. No essays either in tragedy or in comedy had appeared from which it could be discovered to what degree of delight either one or the other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue was yet understood. Shakespeare also perfected the English blank verse imparted to it diversity and flexibility and brought it nearer to language of prose and that of everyday conversation. He discovered the harmony of English tongue, and imparted to it both softness and vigour.

### **Johnson's opinion about The Editorial Method:**

Johnson's remark on the emendation of the texts of Shakespeare's plays also reveal his sound common sense. He condemns hasty emendation. The method he proposes for connecting the texts are remarkable. He recommends a careful collection of the oldest copies of the text of Shakespeare plays because the readings of the earliest versions were most likely to be true and were not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity or more improvement of the sense. Where alternative readings were possible it was necessary to select the reading most in keeping with Shakespeare's last of thought and turn of explanation. He decries all wanton and licentious emendations, urges that conjectures were more safely based on a knowledge not only of manners and traditions, but also of literature of Shakespeare's day. In the course of his edition, he gives a new meaning to many of the earlier mangled readings. His common sense is also seen in the advice that a play of Shakespeare should be read as a whole for a concentration on particular passages is likely to weaken the effect of the whole.

In this way, Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare is a classic example of descriptive criticism. It ranks as one of the great works in English critical history.

### **3.3 Check your progress:**

#### **I) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each.**

- 1) Who is the poet of nature according to Dr. Johnson?
- 2) By mixing what Shakespeare holds mirror to nature?
- 3) Where does Shakespeare stand for greatness as a writer?

- 4) What is the first defect in Shakespeare's plays?
- 5) Which unity is alone essential according to Shakespeare?
- 6) When did the edition of Preface to Shakespeare appear?
- 7) How are the characters of Shakespeare's plays?
- 8) Who is the pioneer of historic and comparative method of criticism?
- 9) In which period Johnson's criticism was neglected temporarily?
- 10) What is ignored by Johnson in justification of Shakespeare?

**II) Chose the correct option and complete the sentence.**

- 1) According to Johnson, many of Shakespeare's faults of the \_\_\_\_\_ he live in.  
 a) age                    b) century                    c) time                    d) place
- 2) Shakespeare generally borrowed his \_\_\_\_\_ from novels.  
 a) characters    b) plots                    c) settings                    d) dialogues
- 3) Shakespeare's characters are \_\_\_\_\_ as well as individuals.  
 a) particular    b) general                    c) universal                    d) natural
- 4) According to Johnson \_\_\_\_\_ come natural to Shakespeare.  
 a) tragedy                    b) tragic-comedy    c) romances                    d) comedy
- 5) Shakespeare also perfected the English \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) blank verse    b) elegy                    c) ballad                    d) ode
- 6) The preface has been widely praised as a classic of \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. criticism                    b. poetry                    c. drama                    d. prose
- 7) Shakespeare's characters are not moved only by one passion of \_\_\_\_\_ but by counters passions.  
 a. hatred                    b. love                    c. kindness                    d. pity
- 8) Johnson is never blinded by \_\_\_\_\_ worship  
 a. Milton                    b. Donne                    c. Shakespeare                    d. Dryden

- 9) Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare is valued in the \_\_\_\_\_ country  
a. 18<sup>th</sup>                      b. 19<sup>th</sup>                      c. 20<sup>th</sup>                      d. 21<sup>st</sup>
- 10) In his works Shakespeare holds a mirror to \_\_\_\_\_  
a. society                      b. century                      c. passions                      d. nature

### 3.4 Summary

Johnson began to take interest in Shakespeare early in his literary career, but his edition appeared only in 1765. The preface has been widely praised as a classic of criticism. Despite a few blemishes it displays Johnson at his best. It is if contact with the immortal dramatist inspired the critic and made him rise above his usual prejudice. In his justification of Shakespeare's violation of the unities of Time, Place, Action and the mixing of the tragedy with comedy, Johnson breaks free from the shackles of classicism and becomes almost a romantic. His analysis of the dramatist's performance and popularity is shrewd and masterly. He tries him by the tests of life and nature and finds that Shakespeare is great only because in his works he holds a mirror to nature and rises from the particular to the general. His characters are real and life-like. They share the variety of life. They are not moved only by one passion-love-but by countless passions. Shakespeare is thus more true to life than most other dramatists. Johnson is never blinded by Shakespearean worship. He rises above it and gives a masterly analysis of his faults. His account of the causes of dramatist's obscurities remains unchallenged even to this day.

Though his notes Johnson has succeeded in clearing away many obscure passages. He stemmed the tides of rash emendation, emphasised the need and value interpretation and thus guided criticism along right lines. He is also the pioneer of historic and comparative methods of criticism. In short, the merits of Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare are such that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we are again realising its value after temporary neglect during the romantic era.

### 3.6 Answer to check your progress

(I) 3.1.4

1. Shakespeare

2. tragedy with comedy
  3. as a writer of comedy
  4. no poetic justice or no moral purpose
  5. unity of action
  6. 1765
  7. real and life like
  8. Dr. Samuel Johnson
  9. Romantic
  10. violation of unities of time, place and action
- (II)
1. a – age
  2. b - plots
  3. c- universal
  4. d – comedy
  5. e – blank verse
  6. a – criticism
  7. b – love
  8. c – Shakespeare
  9. d – 20<sup>th</sup>
  10. e – nature

### **3.7 Terms to Remember :**

**adroit** – skilful

**personage** – character sketch

**catastrophe** – disastrous event

**anachronism** – a chronological mistake

**reciprocation** – interchange of act

**sarcasm** – the lowest form of wit

**licentious** - unlawful

**disproportionate** – unequal, dissimilar

**circumlocution** – a roundabout expression

**declamation** – loud speaking in public

**contemptible** – deserving contempt

**mire** – undesirable situation

**acumen** – quick perception analysis

**barbarity** – brutality

**fabulous** – not believable

**argumentation** – a verbal dispute

**extravagancy** – abuse

**emendation** – editing

**perspicuity** – clarity lucidity

**conjectures** – supposition

**obscurities** – difficulties to understand

### 3.8 Exercises

1. Write a note on Johnson's defence of Shakespearean tragedy – comedy
2. Write note on Shakespeare's realism with particular reference to his art of characterisation.
3. What are various faults of Shakespeare commented by Johnson?

### 3.9 Reference for Further Study

1. Enright and Chikora (1962): English Critical Text, Oxford University, New Delhi.

2. Wimsatt and Brooks (1974): *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, Oxford University, New Delhi
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## **Module IV**

### **Literary Terms**

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#### **4.0 Objectives**

After studying this unit you will be able to...

- understands the major literary terms.
- recognize the contribution of different authors in the development of literary works.
- analyze and interpret literary work in the light of different literary and critical terms.

## **4.1 Introduction :**

A literary term is a general term refers to the technique, style and formatting used by the writers and speakers to masterfully emphasize and strengthen their compositions. It also refers to the playful techniques employed by comedians to make us laugh. Literary terms are important in a wide variety of ways. They allow writers and speakers to make comments on society, politics and trends. The major literary terms discussed in this unit are Symbolism, Realism, Humour and Paradox. These terms have importance in literary criticism as they represent the trends in literature. The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the literary terms, discussion of some representative authors and their works. Let us discuss all these terms in detail.

## **4.2 Presentation of the Subject Matter:**

### **4.2.1 Symbolism:**

Symbolism is a literary device that refers to the use of symbols in a literary work. It is derived from the word ‘symbol’ which means a sign of recognition. A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something else; it represents something beyond literal meaning. In literature, a symbol can be a word, object, action, character, or concept that embodies and evokes a range of additional meaning and significance. The main object of symbolism was to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols and symbolized language. Symbols are endlessly suggestive.

The movement symbolism originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France to express individual emotional experience through subtle and suggestive use of symbols. The writers utilize many types of symbolism, both as a way to convey meaning to their overall readership and as a method of allowing individual readers to make their own interpretations and discover meaning. They believed that arts should represent absolute truths that could only be described. They wrote in a very metaphorical and suggestive manner. Jean Moreas published the symbolist manifesto in *Le Figaro* in 1886. It names Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarme and Paul Verlaine as the leading poets of the symbolist movement.

"Symbolism transforms the phenomenon into idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in

the image, and even if expressed in all languages, still remain inexpressible". - Goethe

Symbolism may be defined as an attempt by careful studied means - a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors - to communicate unique personal feelings. Symbolism is mainly a French Movement in art and literature. It assumed the status of a literary movement in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in France and in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in England.

Symbolism means '*representation of ideas by the use of symbols*'. It is literary and artistic movement that used artistic invention to express sensually ideas, emotions, and abstractions in place of realism. It is a system of symbols used to represent a particular group of ideas. Symbolism is quite common in speech. For example, in Britain the word 'Crown' is used as a symbol for the state, the government. The crown was the symbol of the king or queen's authority. In religion the 'crescent moon' is a symbol of Islam while the 'cross' is a symbol of christianity. From proverbs such as 'wise as serpents' or 'harmless as the dove' are derived symbols of wisdom, peace etc.

Symbolism, then is very important in poetry and the students must be on the look - out for it. For example, John Millton's poem *On the death of a fair infant dying of a cough* begins :

O Fairest flower ; no sooner blown but  
blasted.Soft silken primrose fading  
timelessly, Summer's chief honour.....

Here the flower is the symbol of life which is lovely but brief. Naturally a poet takes his or her symbols from the world around him or her. Such symbols may not be familiar with other people. After all, some of the main themes of poetry are universal like the cycle of birth, maturation and death which is often symbolized by planting, ripening and harvesting.

Take another example of 'rose'. It literally signifies a kind of flower. When we consider different colours of roses, they symbolize different meanings :

red rose - love, anger.

white rose - calmness, student - teacher relationship

yellow rose - friendship, peers similarly in Robert Burns' line

"O my love's like a red, red rose", the word 'rose' is used as a *simile* and in Mackworth's line "She was our queen, our rose, our star".

the word 'rose' is used as a *metaphor*.

There are two particular types of symbolism :

**a) Use of associated objects:**

Something which is associated with a person, an institution and activity is sometimes used to symbolize the whole. For instance,

'*the crown*' is associated with *royalty*,

'*the peacock*' for *immortality*' *the phoenix*' for the *resurrection* and the *dragon* or the *serpent* for *satan*.

**b) Use of a part of the whole:**

Sometimes a part of the whole is used to symbolize the whole thing. For example,

When we say 'factory hands', here 'hand' means a person who works with his or her hands in a factory.

When we say 'five hundred souls were lost in the shipwreck', here 'souls' means people, lives.

In short, the symbolism was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century movement in literature and art that sought to express individual emotional experience and abstract ideas through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols.

**4.2.1.1 Check Your Progress:**

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question:**

1. The symbolist movement was originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in.....  
a) France                      b) India                      c) America                      d) England
2. Symbolism means '*representation of ideas by the use of .....*'  
a) works                      b) symbols                      c) literature                      d) techniques

3. The symbolists were interested in the .....life of individual.

- a) Social                      b) imaginative    c) internal              d) cultural

**B) Answer the following questions in one word / phrase/ sentence.**

1. What is symbolism?
2. What is the main objective of symbolism?
3. Who provided inspiration for the development of symbolism?

#### **4.2.2 Realism:**

The term Realism refers to any work that attempts to portray life accurately without romantic idealization. Realism in the arts is generally the attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding speculative fiction and supernatural elements. Realism is a literary doctrine originating with Balzac and Flaubert in France. They established the novel as a major literary genre to represent the subject matter truthfully, without artificiality. It sought to record life objectively as it is. George Eliot and William Dean Howells introduced the realistic novel in England and the United States respectively. These novelists depicted the life and the social world in their work realistically.

William Sharp defined realism in literary art as 'the science of exact presentation of many complexities, abstract and concrete factors in the work of art'. Chernishevsky maintains 'the first purpose of art is to produce reality'. Reality in artist's sense is always something created.

Realism in literature and art means showing of real life, facts etc in a true way, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. It is behaviour based on the facing of facts and disregard of sentiment and convention. It is a theory that matter has real existence apart from over mental perception of it. In realism, everything is without illusions. Thus, realism is neither ideal sentimental nor illusion but a real existence.

Realism is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways :

- c) to identify a movement in the writing of novels during the 19th century and
- d) to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature.

Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. Realism could be identified in terms of the effect on the reader. Realistic fiction represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader. Realism is concerned with 'objective reality'. It represents everyday activities, primarily among the middle and lower class society. The difference between the realistic and romantic fiction is that realistic fiction is said to represent life as it really is and the romantic fiction is said to represent the life more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic rather than reality.

The major novelists like Balzac, Flaubert, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Daniel Defoe, Richardson, Henry Fielding etc. developed realism by representing human life and society realistically in their novels. The novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe seem to readers a mirror held to reality. The novels of Franz Kafka are also written in a realistic manner.

In England, Samuel Richardson presented realistic fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His novel *Pamela*, conveys realities about truth, morality and vice. Samuel Clemens was the early pioneer of realism in America. His novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the best example of realistic fiction. The realistic novel really developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the work of Balzac, George Eliot, Austen, Tolstoy etc. The major reasons for the emergence of realism in literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, a relative rise in middle-class and reader's interest in understanding the rapid shifts in culture.

In short, realism was a movement that represented everyday activities in various contexts, primarily among the middle or lower class society.

#### 4.2.2.1 Check Your Progress:

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question:**

- .....is the science of exact presentation of many complexities, abstract and concrete factors in the work of art
  - Realism
  - Surrealism
  - Naturalism
  - Symbolism
- Realism is concerned with .....!
  - idealization of human life
  - images and symbols



Some examples of Humor in Literature are as follows -

Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* is one of her most popular works. Throughout the entire novel, Jane Austen uses humor. She presents a very hilarious scene between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. Bennet endlessly breaks down and makes complaints for her husband's lack of understanding her nerves, and then he responds by saying:

*"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least."*

He constantly pokes fun at her. Likewise, Austen bursts with humor in the case of Elizabeth and Darcy as, upon their first meeting, both feel a sense of disgust for one another. However, later they enjoy teasing each other.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (By Mark Twain)

*"No, don't you worry; these country jakes won't ever think of that. Besides, you know, you'll be in costume, and that makes all the difference in the world; Juliet's in a balcony, enjoying the moonlight before she goes to bed, and she's got on her night-gown and her ruffled nightcap. Here are the costumes for the parts."*

In this example, the duke is unable to notice the silliness of his own actions, instead he makes comments on the low level of understanding of the country jakes.

In short, humour is one of the most effective literary weapons to please the audience, as it develops characters and makes plots useful and memorable. Humor plays many functions in a literary work.

#### **4.2.3.1 Check Your Progress:**

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question:**

1. ....is a literary tool that makes audiences laugh, or that intends to induce amusement or laughter.  
a) Humour                      b) Surrealism      c) Naturalism      d) Symbolism

2. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is written by.....

- a) Mark Twain
- b) Jane Austen
- c) Elizabeth
- d) none of the above

**B) Answer the following questions in one word / phrase/ sentence.**

1. What is humour?
2. What are the objectives of humour?

#### **4.2.4 Paradox**

A paradox is a logically self contradictory statement or a statement that runs contrary to one's expectations. It is a statement that despite apparently valid reasoning from true premises, leads to a seemingly self- contradictory or logically unacceptable conclusion. It is a statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns to be interpretable, in a way that makes good sense.

For example, John Donne's sonnet *Death, Be Not Proud* ends :

One short sleep past, we wake eternally

And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

The paradox is used occasionally by almost all poets. It is also a frequent component in verbal wit. For instance, in Donne's *The Cannonization* sexual lovers are saints.

If the paradoxical utterance conjoins two terms that are contrary in ordinary usage is called an oxymoron. see the following examples

- i) O *Death in life, the days that are no more.*
- ii) His *honour* rooted in *dishonour stood.*

*And faith unfaithfull kept him falsely true.* It is also found in Elizabethan love poetry in phrases like 'pleasing pains', 'I burn and freeze', 'loving hate'.

Paradox was a prominent concern of many new critics. They extended the term (paradox) from its limited application to a type of figurative language. It was done to make it encompass all surprising deviations from common perceptions or common place opinions. Cleanth Brooks claims 'the language of poetry is the language of paradox'.



### 4.3 Summary:

Literary terms refer to a period of time in which different authors followed similar patterns of writing or approaches. These authors are considered part of a movement because they have similar ideas about a number of things ranging from content, style, philosophy, art study, sociological concern etc. While studying, understanding and analyzing the literary works, it is necessary to have thorough knowledge of the trends of literary writings. Some literary terms like Symbolism, Realism, Humour and Paradox are very useful to understand, analyze and interpret the works of literature.

### 4.4 Terms to Remember:

- **fantastic** – unbelievable
- **upsurge** – expansion
- **outgrowth** – development
- **prominent** – important, famous
- **subtle** – delicate, fine
- **encompass** – surround and have or hold within
- **depict** – represent by a drawing, painting
- **quest** – search for something
- **frequent** – regularly or habitually
- **mystery** – something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain
- **materialism** – a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values
- **to explore** – to discover
- **ranging** – place oneself or be placed in opposition to

## **4.5 Answers to Check Your Progress:**

### **4.2.1.1**

- A
1. a) France
  2. b) symbol
  3. c) internal
- B
1. Symbolism is an artistic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestion to express mystical ideas, emotions, and state of mind.
  2. The main object of symbolism was to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols and symbolized language.
  3. Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarme provided inspiration for the development of symbols.

### **4.2.2.1**

- A
1. a) realism
  2. c) objective reality
  3. b) George Eliot
- B
1. The term realism refers to any work that attempts to portray life accurately without romantic idealization.
  2. The increasing rates of democracy and literacy and the rapid growth in industrialism and middle class reading public.
  3. Balzac and Flaubert

### **4.2.3.1**

- A
1. a) humour
  2. a) mark Twain
- B
1. Humour is a literary tool that makes audiences laugh, or that intends to induce amusement or laughter. Its purpose is to break the monotony, boredom, and tedium, and make the audience's nerves relax.

2. It arouses interest among readers, sustains their attention, helps them connect with the characters, emphasizes and relates ideas, and helps the readers picture the situation. Through this tool, writers can also improve the quality of their works by pleasing the audience.

#### 4.2.4.1

- A
1. d) paradox
  2. a) a) Cleanth Brooks
- B
1. A paradox is a logically self contradictory statement or a statement that runs contrary to one's expectations.
  2. O Death in life, the days that are no more.

### 4.6 Exercises

**Write short notes on the following.**

1. Symbolism
2. Realism
3. Humour
4. Paradox

### 4.7 Further Reading

Abrams, M. H. (2007) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (8<sup>th</sup> Edition) New Delhi: Akash Press.

Cuddon, J.A.(2000) *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). London and New York: Penguin.

Gray, Martin. (2009) *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (York Handbooks), Pearson Education.



## Module V

### William Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction

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#### 5.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit, you will be able to know:

- The term poetic diction.
- The issue of poetic diction being a topic of debate throughout the history of English literature.
- Wordsworth's views about the poetic diction and the subject of poetry.
- Wordsworth's idea and process of poetic composition.

## 5.1 Introduction:

To begin, the term poetic diction needs to be defined. The term diction refers to the kind of words, phrases, sentences, and sometimes figurative language that constitute any work of literature. It also refers to the operating language of poetry, language employed in a manner that sets poetry apart from other kinds of speech or writing. It involves the vocabulary, phrasing and the grammar considered appropriate and inappropriate to poetry at different times. – *A Poet's Glossary* by Edward Hirsch.

In his *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (1928), Owen Barfield writes, “When words are selected and arranged in such a way that their meaning either arouses, or is obviously intended to arouse, aesthetic imagination, the result may be described as poetic diction.”

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), William Wordsworth argued against the ornate effects of his predecessors (Neo Classicals) and insisted upon the essential identity of poetic and non-poetic language. He argued that poetry should employ “the real language of men in any situation.” Wordsworth revolutionized the idea of poetic diction by connecting it to speech. Poetry is linked to speech, to the way that people actually talk at any given time, but it is also framed and marked differently.

Throughout the history of English literature, there have been various debates over the suitable language of poetry in different ages. Wordsworth also wrote substantially on what he believes to be the proper language of poetry. Actually, he was compelled to write his “*Preface*” chiefly because of this debate only. His take on poetic diction was a strong rejection of the neo-classical idea of poetic diction.

There can be noticed two types of protests against poetic diction in the history of western literatures; the first one being that of the classicists voicing against pedantry and affectation and advocating the use of polite learned words while the second one that of the romantics advocating for the native, primitive and the passionately and directly spoken words. Wordsworth remains a pioneer in the second category in English literary history.

## 5.2 Presentation of the Subject Matter:

### 5.2.1 Wordsworth's theory of Poetic Diction

The high priest of Nature, William Wordsworth was the harbinger of Romanticism in the eighteenth-century English literature. He along with his friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge initiated the Romantic Revival. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, a joint venture by Wordsworth and Coleridge is still regarded as a milestone in the history of literature. It was published in the year 1798 under the title, *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*. This first edition was published anonymously. Coleridge's contributions included the well-acclaimed *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* and three minor poems *The Foster-Mother's Tale*, *The Nightingale* and *The Dungeon*. Wordsworth in fact contributed nineteen poems and 'Tintern Abbey' was one among them.

The first edition failed to capture the interest of the readers. A second edition appeared in 1800, under Wordsworth's name alone, with one additional poem composed by Coleridge- *Love*. It was this edition in which Wordsworth incorporated his famous *Preface*. The third edition appeared in 1802 and it was followed by a fourth and final edition in 1805.

The *Preface* is considered as a significant work of Romantic criticism and is one of the masterpieces in English literary criticism. However, Wordsworth was primarily a poet and not a critic. In the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*, he informed the readers that the *Lyrical Ballads* was an experiment. In the *Preface*, he explained in detail what were his theories about the new kind of poetry and what needed to be looked for in his own poems.

Wordsworth's aim in writing the *Preface* was not to give an elaborate account of his theory of poetry or to make any systematic defence of his point-of view. His prime intention was to introduce his poems with a prefectorial argument. He added the *Preface* because he felt that his poems were different and new in theme and style, and therefore, he should not present them without a proper introduction. *Every new and original poet has to create the taste by which he is read and enjoyed and the creation of such a taste was Wordsworth's basic objective in writing the Preface.* That is what Wordsworth tried to do with the help of his *Preface*.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is merely a reaction against 'the Neo Classical' theory of poetic diction. His first impulse was less a revolt against Pseudo-classical diction, "than a desire to find a suitable language for the new territory of human life which he was conquering for poetic treatment". His aim was to introduce the language of rustic and humble life and to advocate simplicity of themes in his so-called new kind of poetry. Moreover, he was of the opinion that the poet is essentially a man speaking to men and so he must use such a language as is used by men. The Neo Classics believed that the language of poetry is different from the language of prose while Wordsworth believes that there is no essential difference between both of them. The poet can communicate effectively in the language which is really used by men. Thus, he condemns the use of artificial language in poetry and he favours the language really used by common men in day-to-day situations.

Wordsworth's predecessors, the neo-classically oriented writers of the so-called Augustan Age (1701 to 1750), Addison, Jonathan Swift, Gay and Steele, Pope, and to a lesser extent Richardson and Fielding, took Latin authors of the time of the Pax Romana as their models. They admired Virgil and Horace for correctness of phrase and their polished urbanity and grace. They wrote and criticized according to what they considered to be the proper and acceptable rules and regulations of taste of that time. They did not hold with simple tutelage at the hands of nature; reason and good sense had to intervene. Reason, indeed, was the prime source of inspiration; emotion had to be subordinated to thought. Thematically, conditions in "high" society furnished many of the plots and characters, and humble life tended to be contemptuously ignored.

Wordsworth's purpose, as he states in the Preface was, "to choose incidents and situations from common life", and, he also intended to use, "a selection of language, really used by men". He thought of writing about humble and rustic life and so he should also use the language of the rustics, farmers, shepherds who were to be the subjects of his poetry. The language of these men was to be used but it was to be purified of all that is painful or disgusting, vulgar and coarse in that language. He wanted to use the language of real men because the aim of a poet is to give pleasure and such a rustic language without selection will cause disgust.

Wordsworth points out the following advantages of using such a simple language in a poetic composition:

- i. The simplicity of rustic speech is highly emotional and passionate and deep-seated.
- ii. In situations of emotional excitement such as love, separation, marriage, death etc, the rustic's emotions are unrestrained and natural.
- iii. The emotions of the rustics came directly from their hearts and so their language is genuine or real.
- iv. Being in constant touch with Nature, the language of the rustics possessed a depth and nobility which is the great source of poetry. Since the aim of poetry is to arouse feelings of sympathy and love for the subjects and characters, the natural speech of the rustics becomes the fittest vehicle for communication, through the poem.
- v. Since, the aim of poetry is to universalize particular aspects of life and truth, language must be universal to fulfil this aim, that is, language spoken by the common people.

Wordsworth, strongly, felt that words commonly used in day-to-day life and conversation, by every member of every profession must find a place in poetry. This is a difficult task to achieve, but Wordsworth succeeded in following his own precept only in the shorter lyrics and a few longer ones.

The rustic language in its simplicity is highly emotional and passionate. This is at its peak when the humble people are in a state of the highest emotional excitement. It is charged with the emotions of the human heart. Such a language is the natural language of the human passions. It comes from the heart, and thus goes directly to the heart. In other words, the essential truths about human life and nature can be more easily and clearly communicated through the use of such a language. Such a rustic language tends to be more 'philosophical' because its use can result in a better and clearer understanding of the basic truths. But on the contrary, in urban life, emotions are not freely expressed.

Wordsworth intended to write about simple life in simple and rustic language and also proposes that, the language of poetry must not be separated from the language of men in real life. Figures of speech, similes and metaphors and other such decorations should not be used unnecessarily. Sometimes in a state of emotional excitement, men tend to use a metaphorical language to express themselves

forcefully. The earliest poets used such metaphors and images as result of the expressions naturally descended from powerful excitement and emotions. The later poets misunderstood the conception of using of this kind of diction and forcefully used a figurative language which was not necessarily the result of genuine passion. They merely imitated the manner of the earlier poets and arose the artificial language and diction of Pseudo-classics. A stereotyped and mechanical phraseology thus became the common practice in the neo classical age. The poet should avoid the use of such artificial diction both when he speaks in his own person, or through his characters.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is of enormous value when considered it as a corrective to the artificial, inane and unnatural phraseology current at the time. But on the contrary, it is full of a number of contradictions in itself and suffers from a number of limitations. Coleridge observed that a language chosen from common speech and then purified might cease to be genuine rustic speech as actually used by them. Secondly, poetic imagination might be impaired by the rustic language, which is largely inexpressive. Eliot objects to the word 'real' and asks who is to make the selection, which will adapt the 'real' language to poetry. Wordsworth's concept seems to be vague for he doesn't define the term 'language'. 'Language' generally includes syntax, vocabulary, imagery, figures etc. how can anyone standardise, all these remains unanswered by Wordsworth.

### Check Your Progress - I

#### A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives:

- i) Wordsworth argued in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should employ \_\_\_\_\_ of men in any situation.
  - a) ornamental language
  - b) real language
  - c) exaggerative language
  - d) fake language
- ii) Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is merely a reaction against \_\_\_\_\_ theory of poetic diction.
  - a) Classical
  - b) Elizabethan
  - c) modern
  - d) Neo Classical
- iii) Wordsworth's purpose was to choose incidents and situations from \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) common life
- b) political life
- c) city life
- d) fashionable life
- iv) The emotions of the rustics come directly from their hearts and so their language is \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) ornamental
- b) rare
- c) genuine
- d) exaggerative
- v) The essential truths about human life and nature can be more easily and clearly communicated through the use of \_\_\_\_\_ language.
- a) rustic
- b) philosophical
- c) urban
- d) polished

**B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each:**

- i) When was the *Preface* added to the *Lyrical Ballads*?
- ii) What was the aim of Wordsworth behind writing the *Preface*?
- iii) What kind of language does Wordsworth favour in his theory of poetic diction?
- iv) Which language is the natural language of human passions?
- v) What was Eliot's objection on Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction?

**5.2.2 Subjects/Themes of Poetry:**

The issue of the ideal subject matter or theme of poetry has always been a much debated question throughout the history of literary criticism since the age of Aristotle himself. Wordsworth proposes a simple answer to this question, he advocates the projection of the life of humble, rustic people as the most appropriate subject matter of poetry. Wordsworth had a deep influence of the ideas of the French Revolution upon him. The notion of 'noble savage' is the source of inspiration for Wordsworth to state that the man in the wild of nature is more true than his sophisticated urban counterpart. Based on this notion, Wordsworth suggests that natural is always superior to the cultural. In other words, the entire Romantic idealization of nature has its starting point in Wordsworth's famous definition of the ideal subject matter of

poetry. Wordsworth seems to share the belief that evil has its roots in man's distancing himself away from nature and his suggested solution is a return to nature, the Mother earth. His glorification of the rustics is the result of his conviction that the rustics live close to nature and hence there is greater authenticity and truth in their mode of existence as compared to the urban life and manner life living.

Wordsworth also strongly felt that the poetry of the Pseudo-classical school was very artificial and unnatural. It was extremely limited in its themes. It was restricted exclusively to the artificial and unnatural life of the fashionable lords and ladies of the city of London. It did not care for the beauties of Nature or for the humble humanity which was visible in the life of farmers, shepherds, wood-cutters etc., who lead the simple and natural life in the lap of the nature. Wordsworth reacted sharply and sought to increase the range of English poetry by taking the themes from so called 'humble and rustic life'. He himself was living in the lap of nature and he was well familiar with the life of these humble people, and he has rendered it in his poetry, realistically and accurately. He claims that the essential passions of human heart usually find free and unrestrained expression in humble and rustic life. The fundamental human feelings exist in simplicity and purity only in the surroundings of unsophisticated life of rustic people. The rustic people live an unpretentious life and they openly express their passions without any restraint. The passions of rustics are genuine and deeply related to the real forms of nature and hence their emotions are permanent and noble.

There are the following reasons why Wordsworth preferred incidents and situations from humble and rustic life as the themes of his poetry.

1. One of the major reasons behind this was, in this way he would enlarge the scope and range of English poetry and make a whiff of fresh air to blow through the suffocating atmosphere of contemporary poetry i.e., the Neo-Classical poetry.
2. He knew the simple and rustic life intimately and he was in sympathy with it and so could render it accurately and feelingly.
3. He believed that a poet is essentially a man speaking to man. Since he is a man and he has to appeal to the heart and mind of man, he must study human nature and try to understand 'the primary laws of our nature'. These primary instincts and impulses which govern human conduct can best be understood by studying

the simplest and most elementary forms of life. He chose rustic and humble life because the village farmers, shepherds, even idiots, represent human life reduced to its simplest. It is for this reason also that he glorified the child and stressed the value of childhood memories and experiences. In such simple forms of life, behaviour is instinctive and manners are natural and uninhibited. Feelings and passions are expressed without any reserve and human conduct is guided and controlled by instincts and impulses and not by artificial social codes as in sophisticated and artificial city life. In humble and rustic conditions of life, man is more natural and so a proper subject of study for a poet who must write 'on man, on nature and on human life'. He did not think city life to be a proper subject for poetry because there the fundamental passions of the human heart are not expressed freely and forcefully, but they are inhibited by social codes and considerations of public opinions.

4. In rustic and humble life, the fundamental passions of the human life can be easily studied. From a study and understanding of these elementary feelings the poet can proceed to study 'the primary laws of our nature.' In other words, through a process of contemplation and reflection, the poet can derive certain universal principles of human conduct which are not true only of individuals or of particular places but are universal and general in their applications. Feeling and passions of humble life are not peculiar to them but are common to all humankind. They will last as long as human nature lasts, and are not subject to fluctuations from age to age and society to society. They are universal, they are permanent, as contrasted with those of socially inhibited societal man. Universal significance of human experience and human emotion can be studied only through life reduced to its simplest levels.
5. He preferred rustic and humble life because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. They live in the midst of the grandeur and beauty of nature and as Plato much earlier has taught us that they must absorb some of the beauty and grandeur. In this connection it will not be out of place to refer to the romantic glorification of the primitive and the cult of the noble savage. In one of his own Lucy poems, Wordsworth refers to the education of nature and the vital feelings which nature confers on those who live in her. Their emotions are noble and permanent

because their souls have been moulded by the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.

### **Wordsworth's Vies on Metre:**

Wordsworth does not consider metre as essential to poetry. He regards it as merely 'pleasure superadded', but all the same he allows its use, while rejects the use of poetic diction. Metre is needed in poetry to heighten and improve the pleasure which coexist with it. Metre yields a unique kind of pleasure even in pathetic situations. He rejects poetic diction because it is artificial, capricious and lawless, and he allows the use of metre for metre obeys definite laws, and its use is sanctified by tradition and authority.

### **Check Your Progress - II**

#### **A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives:**

- i) The Pseudo-classical poetry was very \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) artificial and unnatural                      b) simple and rustic  
c) genuine and original                         d) none of the above
- ii) Wordsworth believed that a poet is a man speaking to \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) man     b) god  
c) nature    d) destiny
- iii) In the simple form of life, behaviour is usually \_\_\_\_\_ and manners are natural and uninhibited.  
a) pessimistic                                        b) adventurous  
c) instinctive                                        d) optimistic
- iv) The fundamental passions of human life can be easily studied in the \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) city life     b) industrial life  
c) modern life                                        d) rustic life
- v) Wordsworth sought to increase the range of English poetry by taking themes from \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) classical literature                              b) urban life

- c) humble and rustic life                      d) fashionable life

**B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each.**

- i) Does Wordsworth consider metre as an essential to poetry?
- ii) What were the subjects/themes of the pseudo classical poetry?
- iii) Why did he prefer rustic and humble life?
- iv) Why it is necessary for a poet to study human nature?
- v) Why did Wordsworth reject the city life to be a proper subject for poetry?

**5.2.3 Wordsworth's Conception of Poetry and the Process of Poetic Composition:**

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. When the mood is on him, it flows naturally and without any labour. Poetry, true poetry, can never be composed without this proper mood and temperament. We can't ask a poet to write at our will or at our request; poetry cannot be produced to order; it should flow out voluntarily and willingly from the soul of the poet. It is well said, *The clear springs of poetry must flow freely and spontaneously – it cannot be made to flow through artificially laid pipes.* 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. Poetry is a matter of feelings, powerful feelings at that. It is generated in the heart and not in the mind; it is not at all an intellectual process. "Poetry is born not in the mind but in the heart overflowing with feelings." Poets are gifted with greater organic sensibility than ordinary individuals. They have greater capacity to receive sense impressions. Beauties of nature, which may leave ordinary people cold and untouched; but it excites the powerful feelings in the poet and he feels an urge to express those emotions and thus convey his joy to others. Wordsworth himself was such an individual; his heart leapt up with joy on beholding a rainbow in the sky or daffodils dancing in the breeze and he thought of expressing his powerful, overflowing

feelings spontaneously of his own accord in his immortal poems. 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 tranquillity.”

### **Process of Poetic Composition:**

For Wordsworth, a good poetry is never an immediate expression of powerful feelings. A good poet must mediate and ponder over them long and deeply. In other words, *Poetry has its origin in emotions recollected in tranquillity*. 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. An interval, of time, it may be quite long, can be of ten years, must elapse, during which the first experience sinks deep into the poet's consciousness and becomes a part and parcel of his being. As during the interval the mind contemplates in tranquility the impression received by it. 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 interrogation of memory by the poet set up or revives the emotion in “the mind itself”. It is very much like the first emotion. The third stage is that of filtering of the emotion wherein, the poet is purged of nonessential elements and thus makes his experience communicable to all men. This constitutes a state of enjoyment in the heart of the poet.

#### **Stage Four: Composition**

The fourth and the last stage, is the stage of composition. The poet must convey his *overbalance of pleasure*, his own *state of enjoyment* to others. He differs from

ordinary individuals not merely in his greater sensibility but also in his capacity to communicate his experience to others, and to communicate them in such a way as to give pleasure. Metre is justified for it is pleasure super added, "*Verse will be read a hundred times where prose is read only once.*" 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

There was a spontaneous overflow of feelings as the poet listened to the song of the Highland girl: “the Vale profound / Is overflowing with the sound.” Removed away from the actual scene, where he saw the Highland girl, he started recollecting the same experiences in tranquillity and exhuming theme of the song and causes its joyousness. Slowly and gradually this state of mind disappears, and an emotion which is quite similar to the original is generated. It soon turns into feeling and starts resonating and he starts composing his poem with “the music” he feels in his heart “Long after it was heard no more” causes its joyousness.

### Check Your Progress - III

#### A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives.

- i) Wordsworth propounded his views on poetry, its nature and functions and the qualification of a true poet in his \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Preface
  - b) Lucy
  - c) Daffodils
  - d) Tintern Abbey
- ii) Poetry has its origin in \_\_\_\_\_ recollected in tranquillity.
  - a) intellect
  - b) wisdom
  - c) memory
  - d) emotions
- iii) Poetry must flow out naturally from the \_\_\_\_\_ of the poet.
  - a) idea
  - b) mind
  - c) soul
  - d) imagination
- iv) According to Wordsworth, there are \_\_\_\_\_ stages of the poetic creation.

- a) four
- b) five
- c) three
- d) two
- v) In the filtering stage, the poet is purged of \_\_\_\_\_ elements.
  - a) essential
  - b) realistic
  - c) subjective
  - d) non-essential

**B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each.**

- i) How does Wordsworth define poetry?
- ii) Which poem of Wordsworth demonstrates his poetic process?
- iii) Which is the first stage in Wordsworth theory of poetic process?
- iv) What does filtering mean in his process of poetic composition?

**5.3 Summary:**

*The Preface* is a revolutionary piece of writing in the matter of choosing the subjects for poetry. Wordsworth discards the Neo-classical approach of poetic diction. His approach is romantic. He advocates that the theme of poetry should be simple and rustic life. The poet should choose incidents and situations from common and rustic life. According to Wordsworth in this rustic and humble life, the fundamental passions of the heart develop smoothly and grow harmoniously. They are not controlled by the artificial rules of the society.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is a protest against the pseudo classical theory. This was primarily against pedantry and affectation; and it is based on an appeal to the primitive, the passionate, and the natural spoken words. He stresses the communicative power of poetry. He advocates the use of the language of the rustic and humble people for the purpose of poetry. According to him the language of the rustic is capable of being poetic. It is because the rustic and humble people convey their feelings and passions in simple and unelaborated way. Thus, such language is more permanent and more philosophical. In short, Wordsworth advocates the use of the language really spoken by men in real life situations.

Wordsworth's *Preface* explains his concept of poetry. His concept has newness. Wordsworth rejects the intellectual aspect of the origin of poetry. For the first time, he emphasises the role of emotions in poetic composition. For him, 'Poetry is the

spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; recollected in tranquillity.' Poetry springs from the soul of man. As has been well said, "the clear spring of poetry must flow freely and spontaneously. It can't be made to flow through artificially laid pipes. Poetry is born not in the mind but in the heart overflowing with feeling".

Thus, poetry is the product of feeling, mood and temperament. According to Wordsworth, there are four stages of the process of poetic creation. These stages are observation, recollection, filtering and composition. The poet observes certain objects of nature. It excites in him certain emotions. He carries those emotions in his heart. Later on, he recollects those emotions in the tranquillity, contemplates upon them and as a result poetic creation takes place.

#### **5.4 Terms to remember :**

**Arouse (v)** : evoke or awaken (a feeling, emotion or response)

**Predecessors** : a thing that has been followed or replaced by another.

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

**Affectation** : behaviour, speech, or writing that is pretentious and designed to impress.

**Romantic revival** : The romantic revival or the Romantic age is the age in the English literature which falls after the Neo-classical age of the 18th century. The romantic age is also called "The age of Wordsworth" Romantic Revival has its own Features which distinguish it from other periods of English literature.

**Prefectorial (adj)** : of or relating to a perfect

**Augustan Age** : The eighteenth century in English literature has been called the Augustan Age, the Neoclassical Age, and the Age of Reason. The term 'the Augustan Age' comes from the self-conscious imitation of the original Augustan writers, Virgil and Horace, by many of the writers of the period. Specifically, the Augustan Age was the period after the Restoration era to the death of Alexander Pope (~1690 - 1744). The major writers of the age were Pope and John Dryden in poetry, and Jonathan Swift and Joseph Addison in prose.

**Tutelage (n)** : instruction especially of an individual

**Contemptuous (adj)**: manifesting, feeling or expressing deep hatred or disapproval; feeling or showing contempt

**Pseudo classical** : the imitative use of classicism in art and literature, especially shown during the 18th century.

## **5.5 Answers to check your progress:**

### **Answers to check your progress - I**

#### **A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives:**

- i) b
- ii) d
- iii) a
- iv) c
- v) a

#### **B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each:**

- i) in the second edition, which appeared in 1800
- ii) to introduce his poems from Lyrical Ballads with a prefatorial argument
- iii) a selection of language, really used by men
- iv) simple and rustic
- v) Eliot objected to the word 'real' used by Wordsworth in his theory.

### **Answers to check your progress – II**

#### **A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives:**

- i) a
- ii) a
- iii) c
- iv) d
- v) c

#### **B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each:**

- i) No, he regards it as merely pleasure superadded

- ii) artificial and unnatural life of the fashionable lords and ladies of the city of London.
- iii) He preferred rustic and humble life because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.
- iv) because he is a man and he has to appeal to the heart and mind of man.
- v) because there, the fundamental passions of the human heart are not expressed freely and forcefully, but they are inhibited by social codes and considerations of public opinions.

### Answers to check your progress – III

#### A) Complete the following sentence by choosing the correct alternatives:

- i) a
- ii) d
- iii) c
- iv) a
- v) d

#### B) Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each:

- i) poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity.
- ii) *The Solitary Reaper*
- iii) observation
- iv) purging of nonessential elements and make his experience communicable to all men.

### 5.6 Exercise / writing Activities:

#### 1. Answer the following questions in about 200-250 words each:

- i) Write a note on Wordsworth's concept of poetic diction.
- ii) What are Wordsworth's views about the subjects/ themes of poetry?
- iii) Discuss in detail Wordsworth's conception of poetry and the process of poetic composition.

**2. Write short notes on the following in about 100-150 words each:**

- i) State the reasons behind using simple language in a poetic composition.
- ii) Why did Wordsworth prefer incidents and situations from humble and rustic life as themes of his poetry?
- iii) Explain Wordsworth's process of poetic composition.
- iv) Explain the term poetic diction.

**5.7 Suggestive Reading**

- Abrams, M. H. (ed). (1972). *Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays*.
- Cuddon, J. A. (1977). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books.
- Gill, Simon. (ed). (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Heffernan, James A. W. (1969). *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Hill, John Spencer. (1977). *The Romantic Imagination, A Selection of Critical Essays*. London: The Macmillan Press Limited.
- Jones, Alun R., Tydeman, William. (eds). (1984). *Wordsworth: Lyrical Ballads*, London: Macmillan Publication.



## **Module VI**

### **Matthew Arnold's Touchstone Method**

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#### **Contents:**

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Presentation of the Subject Matter
  - 6.2.1 Section –I
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- 6.3 Summary
- 6.4 Terms to Remember
- 6.5 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 6.6 Exercises
- 6.7 Further Reading

#### **6.0 Objectives:**

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- 1) Understand poetry as a form of literature.
- 2) Understand different ways of studying poetry.
- 3) Understand the use of touchstone method in order to know the importance and quality of poetry.

## 6.1 Introduction:

In the previous unit you have studied William Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction. In the present unit we are going to study Matthew Arnold's Touchstone Method. In this critical essay Arnold gives out his new theory of touchstone method. Arnold's touchstone method is a comparative method of criticism. According to this method in order to judge a poet's work properly a critic should compare that work to the passages of the great masters of poetry. These passages should be used as touchstones to other poetry. This passage will have only one line or a big quotation also. If the other work impresses us like this passage, then it is a great work of art. If the other work doesn't impress us unlike their passage, then it is not a great work at all.

In short, Arnold here argues that in order to know the high quality of any poetic work we should compare it with the poetry of the highest quality.

## 6.2 Presentation of subject matter:

Matthew Arnold is a Victorian poet and critic. He wrote the critical essay. *The Study of Poetry*. This essay is one of the best essays in English criticism. The central idea of this essay is that a high work of art can be judged by keeping it beside the other highest works of art.

For the judgment of any literary art at first Arnold discusses the theory of personal estimate and historical method. But he thinks that both these methods are not ideal methods. They have faults and limitations. Next to these methods, he suggests the touchstone method.

The Touchstone method helps readers to understand the difference between good and poor literary work. In this method, a reader has to judge the quality of the piece of literature by comparing it to the piece of literature of great writers. We should take few lines from the works of these great writers. We should compare those lines with the work of other writer. It will help us to understand which work of art is good and which work of art is bad.

Arnold further says that touchstone method is very important because it helps the reader not to judge the work of art with the help of the two wrong methods or fallacies: historical method and personal estimate method. According to Arnold these two methods have their own drawbacks in deciding the quality of the work of art. In

this regard he proposes the application (uses) of touchstone method. He supports this method by saying that only this method is really helpful for understanding the best works of art. In order to understand the quality of works of art. Arnold quotes the examples of the work of classical writers or great writers like Homer and Sophocles He also gives the examples of John Milton, Emile Dante William Shakespeare , William Wordsworth and their great works. He suggests to compare these works with the works of other new writers and decide the quality of their works in the light of the masterpieces of these great writers.

**The Text:**

### **6.2.1 Section I**

“The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.”

Let me be permitted to quote these words of my own [from *The Hundred Greatest Men*—ed.], as uttering the thought which should, in my opinion, go with us and govern us in all our study of poetry. In the present work [*The English Poets*—ed.] it is the course of one great contributory stream to the world-river of poetry that we are invited to follow. We are here invited to trace the stream of English poetry. But whether we set ourselves, as here, to follow only one of the several streams that make the mighty river of poetry, or whether we seek to know them all, our governing thought should be the same. We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without

it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry “the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science”; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge”; our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize “the breath and finer spirit of knowledge” offered to us by poetry.

But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: “Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there not charlatanism?”—“Yes” answers Sainte-Beuve, “in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man’s being” [*Les Cahiers*—ed.]. It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as in criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than

inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

Yes; constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in

obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry. The French have become diligent students of their own early poetry, which they long neglected; the study makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, the court-tragedy of the seventeenth century, a poetry which Pellisson long ago reproached with its want of the true poetic stamp, with its *politesse stérile et rampante* [sterile and bombastic politeness—ed.], but which nevertheless has reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry indeed. The dissatisfaction is natural; yet a lively and accomplished critic, M. Charles d'Héricault, the editor of Clément Marot, goes too far when he says that “the cloud of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history.” “It hinders,” he goes on, “it hinders us from seeing more than one single point, the culminating and exceptional point; the summary, fictitious and arbitrary, of a thought and of a work. It substitutes a halo for a physiognomy, it puts a statue where there was once a man, and hiding from us all trace of the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures, it claims not study but veneration; it does not show us how the thing is done, it imposes upon us a model. Above all, for the historian this creation of classic personages is inadmissible; for it withdraws the poet from his time, from his proper life, it breaks historical relationships, it blinds criticism by conventional admiration, and renders the investigation of literary origins unacceptable. It gives us a human personage no longer but a God seated immovable amidst His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus; and hardly will it be possible for the young student to whom such work is exhibited at such a distance from him, to believe that it did not issue ready—made from that divine head.”

All this is brilliantly and tellingly said, but we must plead for a distinction. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry.

Everything which interferes with it, which hinders it, is injurious. True, we must read our classic with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstition; we must perceive when his work comes short, when it drops out of the class of the very best, and we must rate it, in such cases, at its proper value. But the use of this negative criticism is not in itself, it is entirely in its enabling us to have a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent. To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint oneself with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end. It may be said that the more we know about a classic the better we shall enjoy him; and, if we lived as long as Methuselah and had all of us heads of perfect clearness and wills of perfect steadfastness, this might be true in fact as it is plausible in theory. But the case here is much the same as the case with the Greek and Latin studies of our schoolboys. The elaborate philological groundwork which we require them to lay is in theory an admirable preparation for appreciating the Greek and Latin authors worthily. The more thoroughly we lay the groundwork, the better we shall be able, it may be said, to enjoy the authors. True, if time were not so short, and schoolboys wits not so soon tired and their power of attention exhausted; only, as it is, the elaborate philological preparation goes on, but the authors are little known and less enjoyed. So with the investigator of "historic origins" in poetry. He ought to enjoy the true classic all the better for his investigations; he often is distracted from the enjoyment of the best, and with the less good he over busies himself, and is prone to over-rate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him.

The idea of tracing historic origins and historical relationships cannot be absent from a compilation like the present. And naturally the poets to be exhibited in it will be assigned to those persons for exhibition who are known to prize them highly, rather than to those who have no special inclination towards them. Moreover, the very occupation with an author, and the business of exhibiting him, disposes us to affirm and amplify his importance. In the present work, therefore, we are sure of frequent temptation to adopt the historic estimate, or the personal estimate, and to forget the real estimate; which latter, nevertheless, we must employ if we are to make poetry yield us its full benefit. So high is that benefit, the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry, that we do well, I say, to set it fixedly before our minds as our object in studying poets and

poetry, and to make the desire of attaining it the one principle to which, as the *Imitation* says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. *Cum multa legeris et cognoveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium* [“When you have read and learned many things, you should always return to the one principle.” Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*—ed.].

The historic estimate is likely in especial to affect our judgment and our language when we are dealing with ancient poets; the personal estimate when we are dealing with poets our contemporaries, or at any rate modern. The exaggerations due to the historic estimate are not in themselves, perhaps, of very much gravity. Their report hardly enters the general ear; probably they do not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language. So we hear Cædmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for “historic origins.” Another eminent French critic, M. Vitet, comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chanson de Roland*. It is indeed a most interesting document. The jocolator or jongleur Taillefer, who was with William the Conqueror’s army at Hastings, marched before the Norman troops, so said the tradition, singing “of Charlemagne and of Roland and of Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux”, and it is suggested that in the *Chanson de Roland* by one Tuoldus or Théroulde, a poem preserved in a manuscript of the twelfth century in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, we have certainly the matter, perhaps even some of the words, of the chant which Taillefer sang. The poem has vigour and freshness; it is not without pathos. But M. Vitet is not satisfied with seeing in it a document of some poetic value, and of very high historic and linguistic value; he sees in it a grand and beautiful work, a monument of epic genius. In its general design he finds the grandiose conception, in its details he finds the constant union of simplicity with greatness, which are the marks, he truly says, of the genuine epic, and distinguish it from the artificial epic of literary ages. One thinks of Homer; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer, and justly given. Higher praise there cannot well be, and it is the praise due to epic poetry of the highest order only, and to no other. Let us try, then, the *Chanson de Roland* at its best. Roland, mortally wounded, lay himself down under a pine-tree, with his face turned towards Spain and the enemy—

De plusurs choses à remembrer li prist,  
De tantes teres cume li bers cunquist,

De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,  
De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'nurrit."

[“Then began he to call many things to remembrance,—all the lands which his valour conquered, and pleasant France, and the men of his lineage, and Charlemagne, his liege lord who nourished him”—*Chanson de Roland*, iii, 939–42. Arnold’s note.]

That is primitive work, I repeat, with an undeniable poetic quality of its own. It deserves such praise, and such praise is sufficient for it. But now turn to Homer—

Hös phato tous d’eide katechen physizoos aia  
en Lakedaimoni auphi philei en patridi gaiei

[“So said she; they long since in Earth’s soft arms were reposing, / There, in their own dear land, their fatherland, Lacedaemon”—*Iliad*, iii, 243, 244 (translated by Dr. Hawtry). Arnold’s note.]

### Check your progress-I

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question.**

- 1) Matthew Arnold is a ..... critic.  
a) romantic                      b) Victorian                      c) Elizabethan                      d) modern
- 2) Arnold gives high importance to -----  
a) novel                      b) drama                      c) poetry                      d) none of these
- 3) In Arnold’s opinion personal estimate is wrong because it includes ----- factors  
a) social                      b) religions                      c) personal                      d) intellectual
- 4) In Arnold’s opinion historical estimate is faulty because it shows the work ----  
----- than it really is.  
a) higher                      c) lower                      c) more equal                      d) none of these
- 5) Arnold defines poetry as a ----- of life.  
a) painting                      c) creation                      c) criticism                      d) copy

## 6.2.2 Section II

We are here in another world, another order of poetry altogether; here is rightly due such supreme praise as that which M. Vitet gives to the *Chanson de Roland*. If our words are to have any meaning, if our judgments are to have any solidity, we must not heap that supreme praise upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior.

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently. Take the two lines which I have just quoted from Homer, the poet's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers;—or take his

A deilo, ti sphoi, domen Pelei anakti  
Thneta; hymeis d' eston agero t' athanato' te.  
ei hina dystenoisi met' andrasin alge' echeton

["Ah, unhappy pair, why gave we you to King Peleus, to a mortal? but ye are without old age, and immortal. Was it that with men born to misery ye might have sorrow?"—*Iliad*, xvii. 443–45.]

the address of Zeus to the horses of Peleus;—or take finally his

Kai se, geron, to prin men akouomen olbion einai

["Nay, and thou too, old man, in former days wast, as we hear, happy."—*Iliad*, xxiv. 543.]

the words of Achilles to Priam, a suppliant before him. Take that incomparable line and a half of Dante, Ugolino's tremendous words—

Io no piangeva; sì dentro impietrai.  
Piangevan elli ...

["I wailed not, so of stone grew I within; / they wailed.—*Inferno*, xxxiii. 39–40.]

take the lovely words of Beatrice to Virgil—

Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale,  
Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,  
Nè fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale . . .

[“Of such sort hath God, thanked be His mercy, made me, / That your misery toucheth me not, / Neither doth the flame of this fire strike me.”—*Inferno*, ii. 91–93.]

take the simple, but perfect, single line—

In la sua volontade è nostra pace

[“In His will is our peace.”—*Paradiso*, iii. 85.]

Take of Shakespeare a line or two of Henry the Fourth's expostulation with sleep—

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge . . .

and take, as well, Hamlet's dying request to Horatio—

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story . . .

Take of Milton that Miltonic passage—

Darken'd so, yet shone  
Above them all the archangel; but his face  
Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek . . .

add two such lines as—

And courage never to submit or yield  
And what is else not to be overcome . . .

and finish with the exquisite close to the loss of Proserpine, the loss

. . . which cost Ceres all that pain  
To seek her through the world.”

These few lines, if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate.

The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this: the possession of the very highest poetical quality. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there. Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples;—to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed there. They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic. Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness (*philosophoteron kai spoudaioteron* [*Poetics*, ix—ed.]). Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substances and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents, of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance

of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other. So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner. In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter.

So stated, these are but dry generalities; their whole force lies in their application. And I could wish every student of poetry to make the application of them for himself. Made by himself, the application would impress itself upon his mind far more deeply than made by me. Neither will my limits allow me to make any full application of the generalities above propounded; but in the hope of bringing out, at any rate, some significance in them, and of establishing an important principle more firmly by their means, I will, in the space which remains to me, follow rapidly from the commencement the course of our English poetry with them in my view.

Once more I return to the early poetry of France, with which our own poetry, in its origins, is indissolubly connected. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that seedtime of all modern language and literature, the poetry of France had a clear predominance in Europe. Of the two divisions of that poetry, its productions in the *langue d'oïl* and its productions in the *langue d'oc*, the poetry of the *langue d'oc*, of southern France, of the troubadours, is of importance because of its effect on Italian literature;—the first literature of modern Europe to strike the true and grand note, and to bring forth, as in Dante and Petrarch it brought forth, classics. But the predominance of French poetry in Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is due to its poetry of the *langue d'oïl*, the poetry of northern France and of the tongue which is now the French language. In the twelfth century the bloom of this romance-poetry was earlier and stronger in England, at the court of our Anglo-Norman kings, than in France itself. But it was a bloom of French poetry; and as our native poetry formed itself, it formed itself out of this. The romance-poems which took possession of the heart and imagination of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are French; “they are,” as Southey justly says, “the pride of French literature, nor have we anything which can be placed in competition with them.” Themes were supplied from all quarters; but the romance-setting which was common

to them all, and which gained the ear of Europe, was French. This constituted for the French poetry, literature, and language, at the height of the Middle Age, an unchallenged predominance. The Italian Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his *Treasure* in French because, he says, “*la parleure en est plus delitable et plus commune a toutes gens*” [the language is more agreeable and more widely known—ed.]. In the same century, the thirteenth, the French romance-writer, Christian of Troyes, formulates the claims, in chivalry and letters, of France, his native country, as follows:—

Or vous ert par ce livre apris,  
Que Gresse ot de chevalerie  
Le premier los et de clergie;  
Puis vint chevalerie à Rome,  
Et de la clergie la some,  
Qui ore est en France venue.  
Diex doinst qu’ele i soit retenue,  
Et que li lius li abelisse  
Tant que de France n’isse  
L’onor qui s’i est arestée!

“Now by this book you will learn that first Greece had the renown for chivalry and letters: then chivalry and the primacy in letters passed to Rome, and now it is come to France. God grant it may be kept there; and that the place may please it so well, that the honour which has come to make stay in France may never depart thence!”

Yet it is now all gone, this French romance-poetry of which the weight of substance and the power of style are not unfairly represented by this extract from Christian of Troyes. Only by means of the historic estimate can we persuade ourselves not to think that any of it is of poetical importance.

### **Check your progress-II**

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each.**

- 1) Arnold’s touchstone method is a ----- method of criticism.  
a) comparative      b) historical      c) personal      d) none of these



substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life,—so unlike the total want, in the romance-poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The right comment upon it is Dryden's: "It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty." And again: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance.

Of his style and manner, if we think first of the romance-poetry and then of Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement, it is difficult to speak temperately. They are irresistible, and justify all the rapture with which his successors speak of his "gold dew-drops of speech." Johnson misses the point entirely when he finds fault with Dryden for ascribing to Chaucer the first refinement of our numbers, and says that Gower also can show smooth numbers and easy rhymes. The refinement of our numbers means something far more than this. A nation may have versifiers with smooth numbers and easy rhymes, and yet may have no real poetry at all. Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poetry; he is our "well of English undefiled," because by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction, the fluid movement of Chaucer; at one time it is his liquid diction of which in these poets we feel the virtue, and at another time it is his fluid movement. And the virtue is irresistible.

Bounded as is my space, I must yet find room for an example of Chaucer's virtue, as I have given examples to show the virtue of the great classics. I feel disposed to say that a single line is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse; that merely one line like this—

O martyr soulded in virginitee!

[“The French *soudé*; soldered, fixed fast.” Arnold's note.]

has a virtue of manner and movement such as we shall not find in all the verse of romance—poetry;—but this is saying nothing. The virtue is such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside the poets whom I have named as the special

inheritors of Chaucer's tradition. A single line, however, is too little if we have not the strain of Chaucer's verse well in our memory; let us take a stanza. It is from The Prioress' Tale, the story of the Christian child murdered in a Jewry—

My throte is cut unto my nekke-bone  
Saidè this child, and as by way of kinde  
I should have deyd, yea, longè time agone;  
But Jesus Christ, as ye in bookès finde,  
Will that his glory last and be in minde,  
And for the worship of his mother dere  
Yet may I sing O Alma loud and clere.”

Wordsworth has modernised this Tale, and to feel how delicate and evanescent is the charm of verse, we have only to read Wordsworth's first three lines of this stanza after Chaucer's—

My throat is cut unto the bone, I trow,  
Said this young child, and by the law of kind  
I should have died, yea, many hours ago.

The charm is departed. It is often said that the power of liquidness and fluidity in Chaucer's verse was dependent upon a free, a licentious dealing with language, such as is now impossible; upon a liberty, such as Burns too enjoyed, of making words like neck, bird, into a disyllable by adding to them, and words like cause, rhyme, into a disyllable by sounding the e mute. It is true that Chaucer's fluidity is conjoined with this liberty, and is admirably served by it; but we ought not to say that it was dependent upon it. It was dependent upon his talent. Other poets with a like liberty do not attain to the fluidity of Chaucer; Burns himself does not attain to it. Poets, again, who have a talent akin to Chaucer's, such as Shakespeare or Keats, have known how to attain his fluidity without the like liberty.

And yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics. His poetry transcends and effaces, easily and without effort, all the romance-poetry of Catholic Christendom; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it, it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great classics. He has not their accent. What is wanting to him is suggested by the mere mention of the name of the

first great classic of Christendom, the immortal poet who died eighty years before Chaucer,—Dante. The accent of such verse as

In la sua volontade è nostra pace . . .

is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach; we praise him, but we feel that this accent is out of the question for him. It may be said that it was necessarily out of the reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth. Possibly; but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry. However we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt what that something is. It is the *spoudaiotes*, the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry. The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon; and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed. A voice from the slums of Paris, fifty or sixty years after Chaucer, the voice of poor Villon out of his life of riot and crime, has at its happy moments (as, for instance, in the last stanza of *La Belle Heaulmière*) ["The name Heaulmière is said to be derived from a head-dress (helm) worn as a mark by courtesans. In Villon's ballad, a poor old creature of this class laments her days of youth and beauty . . . ."—Arnold's note.] more of this important poetic virtue of seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer. But its apparition in Villon, and in men like Villon, is fitful; the greatness of the great poets, the power of their criticism of life, is that their virtue is sustained.

To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue. Still, the main fact for us to bear in mind about Chaucer is his sterling value according to that real estimate which we firmly adopt for all poets. He has poetic truth of substance, though he has not high poetic seriousness, and corresponding to his truth of substance he has an exquisite virtue of style and manner. With him is born our real poetry.

For my present purpose I need not dwell on our Elizabethan poetry, or on the continuation and close of this poetry in Milton. We all of us profess to be agreed in the estimate of this poetry; we all of us recognise it as great poetry, our greatest, and Shakespeare and Milton as our poetical classics. The real estimate, here, has universal currency. With the next age of our poetry divergency and difficulty begin. An historic estimate of that poetry has established itself; and the question is, whether it will be found to coincide with the real estimate.

The age of Dryden, together with our whole eighteenth century which followed it, sincerely believed itself to have produced poetical classics of its own, and even to have made advance, in poetry, beyond all its predecessors. Dryden regards as not seriously disputable the opinion “that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers.” Cowley could see nothing at all in Chaucer’s poetry. Dryden heartily admired it, and, as we have seen, praised its matter admirably; but of its exquisite manner and movement all he can find to say is that “there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect.” Addison, wishing to praise Chaucer’s numbers, compares them with Dryden’s own. And all through the eighteenth century, and down even into our own times, the stereotyped phrase of approbation for good verse found in our early poetry has been, that it even approached the verse of Dryden, Addison, Pope, and Johnson.

Are Dryden and Pope poetical classics? Is the historic estimate, which represents them as such, and which has been so long established that it cannot easily give way, the real estimate? Wordsworth and Coleridge; as is well known, denied it; but the authority of Wordsworth and Coleridge does not weigh much with the young generation, and there are many signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgments are coming into favour again. Are the favourite poets of the eighteenth century classics?

It is impossible within my present limits to discuss the question fully. And what man of letters would not shrink from seeming to dispose dictatorially of the claims of two men who are, at any rate, such masters in letters as Dryden and Pope; two men of such admirable talent, both of them, and one of them, Dryden, a man, on all sides, of such energetic and genial power? And yet, if we are to gain the full benefit from poetry, we must have the real estimate of it. I cast about for some mode of arriving,

in the present case, at such an estimate without offence. And perhaps the best way is to begin, as it is easy to begin, with cordial praise.

When we find Chapman, the Elizabethan translator of Homer, expressing himself in this preface thus: "Though truth in her very nakedness sits in so deep a pit, that from Gades to Aurora and Ganges few eyes can sound her, I hope yet those few here will so discover and confirm that, the date being out of her darkness in this morning of our poet, he shall now gird his temples with the sun,"—we pronounce that such a prose is intolerable. When we find Milton writing: "And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem,"—we pronounce that such a prose has its own grandeur, but that it is obsolete and inconvenient. But when we find Dryden telling us: "What Virgil wrote in the vigour of his age, in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate in my declining years; struggling with wants, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable to be misconstrued in all I write,"—then we exclaim that here at last we have the true English prose, a prose such as we would all gladly use if we only knew how. Yet Dryden was Milton's contemporary.

But after the Restoration the time had come when our nation felt the imperious need of a fit prose. So, too, the time had likewise come when our nation felt the imperious need of freeing itself from the absorbing preoccupation which religion in the Puritan age had exercised. It was impossible that this freedom should be brought about without some negative excess, without some neglect and impairment of the religious life of the soul; and the spiritual history of the eighteenth century shows us that the freedom was not achieved without them. Still, the freedom was achieved; the preoccupation, an undoubtedly baneful and retarding one if it had continued, was got rid of. And as with religion amongst us at that period, so it was also with letters. A fit prose was a necessity; but it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul. The needful qualities for a fit prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. The men of letters, whose destiny it may be to bring their nation to the attainment of a fit prose, must of necessity, whether they work in prose or in verse, give a predominating, an almost exclusive attention to the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. But an almost exclusive attention to these qualities involves some repression and silencing of poetry.

We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. For the purposes of their mission and destiny their poetry, like their prose, is admirable. Do you ask me whether Dryden's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged,  
Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged.

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the inaugurator of an age of prose and reason. Do you ask me whether Pope's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

To Hounslow Heath I point, and Banstead Down  
Thence comes your mutton, and these chicks my own.

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the high priest of an age of prose and reason. But do you ask me whether such verse proceeds from men with an adequate poetic criticism of life, from men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness, or even, without that high seriousness, has poetic largeness, freedom, insight, benignity? Do you ask me whether the application of ideas to life in the verse of these men, often a powerful application, no doubt, is a powerful poetic application? Do you ask me whether the poetry of these men has either the matter or the inseparable manner of such an adequate poetic criticism; whether it has the accent of

Absent thee from felicity awhile . . .

or of

And what is else not to be overcome . . .

or of

O martyr soulded in virginitee!

I answer: It has not and cannot have them; it is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.

Gray is our poetical classic of that literature and age; the position of Gray is singular, and demands a word of notice here. He has not the volume or the power of

poets who, coming in times more favourable, have attained to an independent criticism of life. But he lived with the great poets, he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner. The point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him, he caught them of others; and he had not the free and abundant use of them. But, whereas Addison and Pope never had the use of them, Gray had the use of them at times. He is the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic.

And now, after Gray, we are met, as we draw towards the end of the eighteenth century, we are met by the great name of Burns. We enter now on times where the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife, and where the real estimate of them is not reached without difficulty. But in spite of the disturbing pressures of personal partiality, of national partiality, let us try to reach a real estimate of the poetry of Burns.

By his English poetry Burns in general belongs to the eighteenth century, and has little importance for us.

Mark ruffian Violence, distain'd with crimes,  
Rousing elate in these degenerate times;  
View unsuspecting Innocence a prey,  
As guileful Fraud points out the erring way;  
While subtle Litigation's pliant tongue  
The life-blood equal sucks of Right and Wrong!

Evidently this is not the real Burns, or his name and fame would have disappeared long ago. Nor is Clarinda's love-poet, Sylvander, the real Burns either. But he tells us himself: "These English songs gravel me to death. I have not the command of the language that I have of my native tongue. In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch. I have been at Duncan Gray to dress it in English, but all I can do is desperately stupid." We English turn naturally, in Burns, to the poems in our own language, because we can read them easily; but in those poems we have not the real Burns.

The real Burns is of course in this Scotch poems. Let us boldly say that of much of this poetry, a poetry dealing perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, a Scotchman's estimate is apt to be personal. A Scotchman is used

to this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners; he has a tenderness for it; he meets its poet halfway. In this tender mood he reads pieces like the *Holy Fair* or *Halloween*. But this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners is against a poet, not for him, when it is not a partial countryman who reads him; for in itself it is not a beautiful world, and no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world. Burns world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, is often a harsh, a sordid, a repulsive world: even the world of his *Cotter's Saturday Night* is not a beautiful world. No doubt a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over its world and delights us. Burns may triumph over his world, often he does triumph over his world, but let us observe how and where. Burns is the first case we have had where the bias of the personal estimate tends to mislead; let us look at him closely, he can bear it.

Many of his admirers will tell us that we have Burns, convivial, genuine, delightful, here—

Leeze me on drink! it gies us mair  
Than either school or college;  
It kindles wit, it waukens lair,  
It pangs us fou o' knowledge.  
Be't whisky gill or penny wheep  
Or only stronger potion,  
It never fails, on drinking deep,  
To kittle up our notion  
By night or day.

There is a great deal of that sort of thing in Burns, and it is unsatisfactory, not because it is bacchanalian poetry, but because it has not that accent of sincerity which bacchanalian poetry, to do it justice, very often has. There is something in it of bravado, something which makes us feel that we have not the man speaking to us with his real voice; something, therefore, poetically unsound.

With still more confidence will his admirers tell us that we have the genuine Burns, the great poet, when his strain asserts the independence, equality, dignity, of men, as in the famous song "For A' That, and A' That"—

A prince can mak' a belted knight,  
A marquis, duke, and a' that;  
But an honest man's aboon his might,  
Guid faith he mauna fa' that!  
For a' that, and a' that,  
Their dignities, and a' that,  
The pith o' sense, a pride o' worth,  
Are higher rank than a' that.

Here they find his grand, genuine touches; and still more, when this puissant genius,  
who so often set morality at defiance, falls moralising—

The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love  
Luxuriantly indulge it;  
But never tempt th' illicit rove,  
Tho' naething should divulge it.  
I waive the quantum o' the sin,  
The hazard o' concealing,  
But och! it hardens a' within,  
And petrifies the feeling

Or on a higher strain—

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us;  
He knows each chord, its various tone;  
Each spring, its various bias.  
Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We never can adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted.

Or in a better strain yet, a strain, his admirers will say, unsurpassable—

To make a happy fireside clime  
To weans and wife,  
That's the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life.

There is criticism of life for you, the admirers of Burns will say to us; there is the application of ideas to life! There is, undoubtedly. The doctrine of the last-quoted lines coincides almost exactly with what was the aim and end, Xenophon tells us, of all the teaching of Socrates. And the application is a powerful one; made by a man of vigorous understanding, and (need I say?) a master of language.

But for supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Those laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness;— the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness, born of absolute sincerity, is what gives to such verse as

In la sua volontade e nostra pace . . .

to such criticism of life as Dante's, its power. Is this accent felt in the passages which I have been quoting from Burns? Surely not; surely, if our sense is quick, we must perceive that we have not in those passages a voice from the very inmost soul of the genuine Burns; he is not speaking to us from these depths, he is more or less preaching. And the compensation for admiring such passages less, from missing the perfect poetic accent in them, will be that we shall admire more the poetry where that accent is found.

No; Burns, like Chaucer, comes sort of the high seriousness of the great classics, and the virtue of matter and manner which goes with that high seriousness is wanting to his work. At moments he touches it in a profound and passionate melancholy, as in those four immortal lines taken by Byron as a motto for *The Bride of Abydos*, but which have in them a depth of poetic quality such as resides in no verse of Byron's own—

Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met, or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

But a whole poem of that quality Burns cannot make; the rest, in the *Farewell to Nancy*, is verbiage.

We arrive best at the real estimate of Burns, I think, by conceiving his work as having truth of matter and truth of manner, but not the accent or the poetic virtue of the highest masters. His genuine criticism of life, when the sheer poet in him speaks, is ironic; it is not—

Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme  
These woes of mine fulfil,  
Here firm I rest, they must be best  
Because they are Thy will!

It is far rather: *Whistle owre the lave o't!* Yet we may say of him as of Chaucer, that of life and the world, as they come before him, his view is large, free, shrewd, benignant,—truly poetic therefore; and his manner of rendering what he sees is to match. But we must note, at the same time, his great difference from Chaucer. The freedom of Chaucer is heightened, in Burns, by a fiery, reckless energy; the benignity of Chaucer deepens, in Burns, into an over-whelming sense of the pathos of things;—of the pathos of human nature, the pathos, also, of non-human nature. Instead of the fluidity of Chaucer's manner, the manner of Burns has spring, boundless swiftness. Burns is by far the greater force, though he has perhaps less charm. The world of Chaucer is fairer, richer, more significant than that of Burns; but when the largeness and freedom of Burns get full sweep, as in *Tam o' Shanter*, or still more in that puissant and splendid production, *The Jolly Beggars*, his world may be what it will, his poetic genius triumphs over it. In the world of *The Jolly Beggars* there is more than hideousness and squalor, there is bestiality; yet the piece is a superb poetic success. It has a breadth, truth, and power which make the famous scene in Auerbach's Cellar, of Goethe's *Faust*, seem artificial and tame beside it, and which are only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophanes.

Here, where his largeness and freedom serve him so admirably, and also in those poems and songs where to shrewdness he adds infinite archness and wit, and to benignity infinite pathos, where his manner is flawless, and a perfect poetic whole is the result,—in things like the address to the mouse whose home he had ruined, in things like “Duncan Gray,” “Tam Glen,” “Whistle and I'll Come To You, My Lad,” “Auld Lang Syne” (this list might be made much longer),—here we have the genuine Burns, of whom the real estimate must be high indeed. Not a classic, nor with the excellent *spoudaiotes* [high seriousness—ed.] of the great classics, nor with a verse rising to a criticism of life and a virtue like theirs; but a poet with thorough truth of

substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core. We all of us have a leaning towards the pathetic, and may be inclined perhaps to prize Burns most for his touches of piercing, sometimes almost intolerable, pathos; for verse like—

We twa hae paidl't i' the burn  
From mornin' sun till dine;  
But seas between us braid hae roar'd  
Sin auld lang syne . . .

where he is as lovely as he is sound. But perhaps it is by the perfection of soundness of his lighter and archer masterpieces that he is poetically most wholesome for us. For the votary misled by a personal estimate of Shelley, as so many of us have been, are, and will be,—of that beautiful spirit building his many-coloured haze of words and images.

Pinnacled dim in the intense inane—

no contact can be wholesomer than the contact with Burns at his archest and soundest. Side by side with the

On the brink of the night and the morning  
My coursers are wont to respire,  
But the Earth has just whispered a warning  
That their flight must be swifter than fire . . .

of *Prometheus Unbound*, how salutary, how very salutary, to place this from *Tam Glen*—

My minnie does constantly deave me  
And bids me beware o' young men;  
They flatter, she says, to deceive me;  
But wha can think sae o' Tam Glen?

But we enter on burning ground as we approach the poetry of times so near to us—poetry like that of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth—of which the estimates are so often not only personal, but personal with passion. For my purpose, it is enough to have taken the single case of Burns, the first poet we come to of whose work the estimate formed is evidently apt to be personal, and to have suggested how we may proceed, using the poetry of the great classics as a sort of touchstone, to correct this

estimate, as we had previously corrected by the same means the historic estimate where we met with it. A collection like the present, with its succession of celebrated names and celebrated poems, offers a good opportunity to us for resolutely endeavouring to make our estimates of poetry real. I have sought to point out a method which will help us in making them so, and to exhibit it in use so far as to put any one who likes in a way of applying it for himself.

At any rate the end to which the method and the estimate are designed to lead, and from leading to which, if they do lead to it, they get their whole value,—the benefit of being able clearly to feel and deeply to enjoy the best, the truly classic, in poetry,—is an end, let me say it once more at parting, of supreme importance. We are often told that an era is opening in which we are to see multitudes of a common sort of readers, and masses of a common sort of literature; that such readers do not want and could not relish anything better than such literature, and that to provide it is becoming a vast and profitable industry. Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it by oneself. But it never will lose currency with the world, in spite of monetary appearances; it never will lose supremacy. Currency and supremacy are insured to it, not indeed by the world's deliberate and conscious choice, but by something far deeper,—by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.

### Check your progress-III

**A) Answer the following by choosing the correct alternative given below each question.**

- 1) In Arnold's opinion ----- is not one of the great classics.  
a) Dante                      b) Homer                      c) Chaucer                      d) Milton
- 2) Arnold says that ----- is a poetical classic in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
a) Thomas Gray              b) Dryden                      c) Pope                      d) None of these
- 3) In touchstone method poetry is judged by its-----  
a) total impression      b) fragments              c) none of these
- 4) Touchstone is a hard stone used to determine whether the gold metal is ---

- a) impure                      b) pure                      c) heavy                      d) light
- 5) Poetry is bound up by the laws of poetic truth and poetic-----.
- a) charm                      b) attraction                      c) beauty                      d) none of these

### **6.3 Summary:**

#### **1) The essay *The Study of Poetry*:**

Matthew Arnold is a 19th century Victorian poet and critic. The critical essay 'The Study of Poetry' is regarded as one of the best essays of Arnold in English literary criticism. In this essay Arnold analyses the touchstone method and its application for judging the value and quality of the other works of art.

#### **2) Arnolds view of poetry;**

Matthew Arnold defines poetry as a criticism of life. He looks upon poetry as an interpretation of life. He says that the function of poetry is to interpret life. High seriousness is the basic requirement of any good poetry. The true success of poetry lies in its high seriousness. High seriousness is the product of poetic truth and poetic beauty. He further says that poetry has a high position in society and even it is a substitute for religion.

#### **3) The concept of touchstone:**

Touch stone is a hard stone used to test whether the metal is pure gold and if not then to what degree it contains an alloy ( a mixed metal of lower quality.. Matthew Arnold used the word ' touchstone' in the essay ' the Study of Poetry' (1860).

#### **4) What is the touchstone method of Arnold?**

Arnold's touchstone method is a comparative method of criticism. Arnold expresses his view that in order to judge a poet's work properly, it is necessary to compare that work to the passages taken from works of a great masters of poetry. Those passages should be used for understanding the quality of the work of art of other poets. We have to apply lines or passage of the works of great writers as touchstones to the other works and find out whether they are good or bad works of art.

In fact Matthew Arnold insisted on the application of touchstone method because he found that the earlier two methods; the personal and historical estimates

of a poem had proved to be faulty and useless. Regarding these estimates Arnold comments that both of them are useless. Because we cannot forget the personal and subjective factors while judging a work of art. Secondly, Historical importance always makes the work of art higher than it is in real life. It means that for the real estimate of the work of art it is but essential to have the ability to distinguish the real classic.. As a part on this Arnold here discusses his theory of ‘Touchstone Method. ‘The famous classical works of great writers can serve as the touchstone with the help of which the quality and status of the work of other writer can be tested. This is the central idea of Arnold’s touchstone method.

### **5) Works of great writers as a touch stone;**

Mathew Arnold was a classical critic and he always showed his deep respect for classical works of great writers. In this regard he always recalls the great works of Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare and even William Wordsworth as the touchstones. He says that we can use the lines of passages of these poets for determining the quality of the work of art of other writers with the help of comparative method. However, this does not mean that the subject matter of the touchstone piece and the other work can be one and same. But the poetic diction and high seriousness would be the same. Here, critics have admired Arnold’s choice of the remarkable quotations .If we see the features of the great works of great writers in the works of other new writers then we can take for granted the new writers and their new writing as works of great value. If we don’t find any shadow or image in the writing of new writers then we have to consider that work as worthless.

### **6) Examples of significant lines and passages as touch stones:**

For judging the quality of poetry Arnold recommends the following lines and passages as touchstones for comparing them with the work of art of other writers.

Arnold quotes the two lines of Homer as a touch stone; the poet’s comments on Helen’s mention of her brothers:

“So said she, they long since in Earth’s soft arms were reposing

There in their own dear land, their fatherland, Lacedemon”. (Iliad)

“Ah, unhappy pair, why gave we you to king Peleus, to a mortal?

but you are without old age, and immortal”.

“Was it that with men then born to misery ye might have sorrow?” (Iliad)

Arnold further quotes the following lines from Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’.  
Hamlet’s dying request to Horatio:

“If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile”.

Even the lines from Shakespeare’s play ‘Henry IV’ regarding his expostulation with sleep are worth remembering here as a touchstone:

“Will thou upon the high and giddy mast  
SeaL up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge”

Next to this he also quotes the following lines from Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ ( Book  
I)

“Darken’d so, yet shone  
Above them all the arch angel, but his face  
Deep scars of thunder had entrench’d, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek----”

### **7) The touchstone method : Its limitations**

However, this method has some drawbacks. Critics say that every piece of poem has its own different identity and position as compared to other pieces of poem. Every poem has its own features in case of style, rhythm, end rhyme, diction etc. So it is too difficult to judge one poem by comparing it to the lines of other poems because those two poems are different from each other. Secondly, Arnold himself says that a poem can be judged by its total impression and not by parts. But here on the contrary through the use of touchstone method he advises to use a part or some lines of a poem. Thirdly, Arnold says that Geoffrey Chaucer is not a great classic because his poetry lacks ‘high seriousness,

### **6.4 Terms to Remember:**

**Creed** - set of principles or religious beliefs

**Accredited dogma** - officially approved principle/s

**Conceive** - To form an idea, a plan

**Charlatan** - A person who claims to have knowledge that he doesn't have at all.

**Sustaining** - keeping something healthy

**Estimate** - roughly calculate the value of

**Exaggerated** - shown larger than what it is

**affinities** - closeness, attachment

**conspicuous** - easy to see

**obscure** - unclear

**culminating** - reaching to the highest point

**fictitious** - imaginary

**arbitrary** - action not based on reason

**physiognomy** - the shape and features of a person's face

**veneration** - respect

**investigation** - careful search

**dilettant** - a person who studies something but is not serious about

**philological** - about the scientific study of language

**amplify** - to increase volume or to add

**manuscript** - a document written by hand

**vigour** - energy, physical strength

**grandiose** - impressive in style or appearance

**solidity** - the quality of being firm or strong

**diction** - the choice and use of words

**troubadour/s** - poet who writes music or verse

**chivalry** - bravery, heroism

**primacy** - being most important

**perpetual** - continuing repeatedly  
**rapture** - a feeling of intense joy or pleasure  
**temperately** - not extreme  
**versifier** - song or poem composer  
**epoch** - age, era  
**evanescent** - lasting for a short time  
**transcend** - to go beyond the limits of  
**efface** - remove something  
**shrewdness** - maturity  
**classic** - the work of highest quality  
**divergence** - the process of going to different direction  
**predecessor** - the earlier person or thing followed by something or someone  
**approbation** - approval  
**imperious** - expecting people to obey you and treating them as unimportant  
**baneful and retarding** - harmful  
**accent** - a way of pronouncing word  
**destiny** - fate, luck  
**scantiest and frailest** - short  
**gravel** - small particles of sand or rock  
**barren** - infertile  
**bacchanalian** - characterised by drunken revelry  
**bravado** - a pretence of bravery  
**puissant** - powerful, strong  
**benignant** - kindly and benevolent  
**resolutely** - with strong determination  
**multitude** - a crowd of people

**6.5 Answers to check your progress :**

**Answers to Check Your Progress-I**

(1) b      (2) c      (3) c      (4) a      (5) c

**Answers to Check Your Progress-II**

(1) a      (2) a      (3) b      (4) a      (5) a

**Answers to Check Your Progress-III**

(1) c      (2) a      (3) b      (4) b      (5) c

**6.6 Exercise:**

**a) Write the answers of the following question.**

- 1) Discuss Arnold's definition of poetry.
- 2) What is the importance of poetry according to Arnold?
- 3) What is Arnold's the Touch Stone Method?
- 4) What are the limitations of Arnold's Touch stone Method?

**b) Write a full note on the following.**

- 1) Arnold's views of poetry
- 2) The importance of Touch Stone Method
- 3) The various examples of Touch Stone Method



## Module VII

### Modern Criticism: T.S. Eliot's Tradition and Individual Talent (1919)

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#### 7.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- explain the salient features of Modern Criticism.
- understand T. S. Eliot's views on the concept of tradition.
- comprehend T. S. Eliot's theory of impersonal poetry
- recognize tradition and the impersonality of poetry are complimentary things

## 7.1 Introduction :

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is the most influential English poet of the Twentieth Century who represents the spirit of 'MODERNISM ' in literature. His work, as not only as a poet but also as a critic, is equally significant. His essay *TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT* is a representative critical piece. It's, undoubtedly, his unofficial manifesto of his critical credo.

In 1922 T. S. Eliot founded *The Criterion*, a cultural quarterly, and *The Waste Land* was published in the inaugural issue. In 1924 he published *Homage to John Dryden*, which contained studies of Dryden and the metaphysical poets. This was followed by *For Lancelot Andrews: Essays on Style and Order* (1928) in which he announced himself to be “classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion.” His major books of criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1949) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

His first book, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920), containing seminal essays like *Tradition and the Individual Talent* and *Hamlet*, is central to his achievement as a critic. It is this early work which influenced the New Critics.

**TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT:** *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) clearly expresses Eliot's concepts about poetry and the importance of tradition. Eliot emphasizes the need for critical thinking –“criticism is as inevitable as breathing”. The essay has been one of his extraordinarily influential critical works. It was first published in “The Egoist, a London literary review, in September and December 1919”. This essay is a major “contributor” to the rise of modernism. It is considered as a milestone in the field of literary criticism in the twentieth century. 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

In the first part of the essay T.S. Eliot gives a definition of tradition and looks at the connection of any poem by any poet to other poetry written by other writers that

constitute “a literary tradition”. In section two of the essay, Eliot examines the link between the poem and the poet. In the end, Eliot specifies the shortcomings and changes his emphasis from the author to the written work. He concluded the essay with a gist that “the poet’s sense of tradition and the impersonality of poetry are complimentary things.”

## **7.2 Presentation of the Subject Matter**

### **7.2.1 Section –I Historical Sense and Tradition:**

In first part Eliot speaks about tradition, He says: “Seldom, perhaps, does the word (tradition) appear except in a phrase of censure”. Eliot begins his essay by observing that in English literature in general, and particularly in English literary criticism, the word “Tradition” is not considered in positive way. Neither in evaluating the writers of the past not appreciating their contemporaries, English critics have given due weight and consideration to tradition.

He says about Englishmen’s attitude towards French Literature. Englishmen are proud of their creativity and he comments for their being ‘less’ criticality. In French there is a mass of critical writing. Eliot examines English and French. He says that French have habit of critical approach and English have practice of ‘conclusion’. Eliot strives to dispel this fallacy by emphasizing the importance of criticism, which according to him, is an indispensable to creative activity as breathing is to life. He says,

***“...we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are more critical than we; and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were less spontaneous”.***

Eliot seems quite in favor of such ‘criticality’. He thinks ***“criticism is as inevitable as breathing”.***

Criticism expresses our responses to a particular work of art. It expresses the feelings and emotions and intellectual reactions of a reader in relation to the book he reads.

Then he talks about tradition. He questions the habit of English people to praise a poet for the subjective elements in his work. Eliot differentiates him from them. The Englishmen, while evaluating the poet, appreciate those features which are different from the poet’s antecedents. Means, they want to get ‘newness’ and

‘uniqueness’ from every poet to praise them. They always find isolation of the poet from his (mainly) immediate predecessors. Then Eliot says, if we ignore such influence; we can realize the poet’s distinctiveness, which we are finding, is very much associated with his predecessors.

According to Eliot the most individual part of any work is the part in which the dead poets are mirrored vigorously. And such likeness is mostly seen in the period of maturity of the poet, not in the period of his adolescence. So, by this he stresses that tradition and individuality go together.

Then Eliot talks about tradition and ‘historical sense’. He says that if the form of tradition remained only in blind adherence of dead people or ancestors, then it would be lost or such tradition should be destroyed. But, he says that tradition is not in following pre-generation only. This word carries much wider meaning. According to Eliot, in every tradition also there is a bit of novelty. He says,

***“Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves in the first place, the historical sense.”***

By the term ‘Tradition’, he comes up with something ‘of much wider significance’. By ‘Tradition’, he does not speak of a legacy of writers which can be passed on from a generation to another generation. It is not related with the idea of inheritance; rather it regrets efforts. Additionally he argues, “It involves... The historical sense... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past but its presence; ... This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.” By this statement, Eliot highlights that the writer or the poet must cultivate a sense of the pastness of the past and always searches for examining the poem or the work in its relation to the works of the dead writers or the poets. The historical sense is thus a perception of not only the pastness of the past but of the presentness of the past. To substantiate his point of view, Eliot says,

**“No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and the artists.”**

A creative artist, though he lives in a particular milieu, does not work merely with his own generation in view. Here Eliot desires to show that nothing can be

individual in totality. Every poet or artist, knowingly or unknowingly, keeps some bits of past. Eliot states about 'conformity between the old and the new'. With creation of new works, the whole time is created with it. It makes enormous changes in the world of literature. Thus a new work of art automatically connect with its past. A writer thus learn to value tradition through acquiring a proper historical sense: this sense enables the writer to feel vividly the times he belongs to and at the same time not to lose sight of that timelessness that belongs to the creative art as a whole. The writer thus learns to value both the temporal and the timeless, and this makes him traditional.

Eliot then proceeds to demonstrate the close relationship and interdependence of the past and the present in literature. He breaks the conviction that 'past is unchangeable'. He states that for an artist, the relationship between the past and the present is reciprocal. Eliot says,

**“...the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities”.**

No evaluation of an artist or a work of art is possible if he or it viewed as an isolated, self-sufficient entity, unrelated with the whole current literature. It is only in context of tradition of the past artist and the works of art, that the excellences and limitations of an artist can be determined. He is “inevitably be judged by the standards of the past”. Eliot says about *“a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past”*. A poet cannot use the past as a shapeless mass, or he cannot fit himself in one or two private admirations, and also he cannot fit himself in one preferred period. Eliot feels that the knowledge possessed by the present generation modifies the past, and thus the past is modified by the present. The poet must know that 'art never improves, but the substance of the art is changing'.

What Eliot means is that a poet should continually develop his consciousness of the past for it is awareness of tradition that sharpens the sensibility which has a vital part to play in the process of poetic creation. Eliot puts one anonymous quote here,

***“The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did.”***

The poet cannot take the past as something remote from him, static and fixed. The poet has always to keep in mind that main stream of literature. He talks about

necessary of knowledge for poets. He rejects that conviction that a poet needs a enormous quantity of learning. He considers that “much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility.”

T.S. Eliot lays stress on the artist knowing "the mind of Europe -- the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind". Eliot states “Some can absorb knowledge; the more tardy New Criticism must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum.” What Eliot means is that a poet should continually develop his consciousness of the past, for it is awareness of tradition that sharpens the sensibility which has a vital part to play in the process of poetic creation.

In Eliot's criticism, the sense of tradition plays a significant role. Eliot uses this to counter-act the modern raze of expressing ‘personality’ in literature. Tradition, to Eliot, is a living continuity, and “the most individual parts of a poet’s work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” Eliot gently arrives to the point of ‘depersonalization’. At the end of the first part he starts making structure for second part. So, at the end he says,

***“The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”***

### **Check Your Progress-I**

**Choose the correct option and complete the sentence.**

1. In which of the following years Eliot’s essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* was published
  - a. 1919
  - b. 1920
  - c. 1921
  - d. 1922
2. Which of the following central idea/s is/are discussed in the essay?
  - a. Tradition involves historical sense
  - b. The relation between tradition and individual talent are interdependent
  - c. Impersonal Theory of poetry
  - d. All of the above
3. T. S. Eliot got Nobel Prize for literature in .....

- a. 1947                      b. 1922                      c. 1948                      d. 1920
4. *Tradition and Individual Talent* was first published in .....
- a. The Sacred Wood                      b. The Egoist
- c. Selected Prose                      d. Selected Essays
5. The essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* is divided into.....parts.
- a. 2                      b. 3                      c. 4                      d. 5

### 7.2.2 Section –II The Theory of Impersonal Poetry:

In this second part Eliot tries to define the process of poetic creation. The reason behind Eliot’s insistence on awareness of the past is perfectly in keeping with his theory of impersonality in art. By opposing the Romantic theory of poetry as self-expression, Eliot gave a new direction to literary criticism. The poetic process, to Eliot, is a process of depersonalization. It is not a process aiming at the expression of self, but as one involving the surrender of the self, losing the identity of the self in the work itself losing the personal emotion in the poetic emotion. The progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. The subjective view of poetry stressed by the Romantics is thus replaced by the impersonality in art. Further, Eliot remarks 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.” Eliot elaborates his impersonal theory of poetry by bringing into focus two important points –

1. As all poetry, whether written in the past or being written in the present, is a living whole, no poem is to be, or can be, viewed in isolation, as an unrelated identity. Each poem is modified by the poems ever written and in turn modifies them all. The relation in which a poem stands to other poems by other poet is therefore the proper object upon which criticism and appreciation is to be directed. Eliot says, ***“Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.”***
2. Another field to be explored by the critical activity is the relation of a poem to the poet himself. To illustrate this point, Eliot gives a suggestive analogy from science- the analogy of a catalyst. When oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in a chamber having a piece of finely filiated platinum, they form sulphuric acid. It is only

when the piece of platinum is present that the combination of oxygen and sulphur dioxide from the sulphuric acid. However, neither the piece of platinum is in any way affected by this nor does the sulphuric acid, thus, formed contains any trace of platinum. Thus, the piece of platinum acts as catalyst, remaining neutral and unchanged. The mind of the poet also acts as catalyst. It operates upon the experience of the poet himself. But the experiences or passions are only the material of poetry. The poetic mind transmutes them into new artistic wholes, thus surrendering personal emotion to the emotion of art. What distinguishes the mind of a mature poet from others is that it acts as a refined medium which forms new combination out of variegated diverse experiences.

Poet's feelings and emotions are the elements acting as catalyst in process of poetic creation. It is also possible that poetry may be composed of feelings alone without using any emotion. Thus, "the poet's mind is a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images which remain there until all the particles which can be unite to form a new compound are present together". Eliot neither denies to emotion a place in poetry nor does he subordinate it to thought and feeling. But he values "significant emotion"- an emotion in which the private suffering and agonies of the poet have been transmuted into something impersonal, and universal. The "significant emotion" is thus the emotion of art.

Eliot, by giving illustrations from Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Shakespeare's *Othello* Eliot tries to establish the metaphysical theory of organic unity. Eliot also attacks Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility" To him, the poetic process implies a concentration, which is not achieved consciously or unconsciously or deliberately. For Eliot, poetry is not recollection of feeling, "it is a new thing resulting from the concentration of a very great number of experiences . . . it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation." Eliot believes 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." For him, the emotion of art is impersonal, and the artist can achieve this impersonality only by cultivating the historical sense, by being conscious of the tradition. He continues developing his concept of tradition until the time he wrote *Notes towards a Definition on Culture*. Eliot insists on viewing the whole of literature as a continuity where each work of the present modifies the past works and is in turn modified by them. His theory of impersonality of art as "a continual extinction of personality"

and his insistence on the presentness of the past, on the value of tradition for an artist constitute some significant critical theories of Eliot. What imparts an abiding interest to Eliot's criticism is the power of development displayed by it.

### Check Your Progress –II

Choose the correct option and complete the sentences.

1. "Poetry is not a turning loose of....., but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality."  
a. emotion                      b. feelings                      c. thoughts                      d. spontaneous
2. Which scientific experiment is mentioned in the essay?  
a. HCL                              b. H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>                              c. CO<sub>2</sub>                              d. H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>
3. Eliot's attention shifts in the second section from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Tradition, individual talent                      b. The author, the text  
c. Individual talent, tradition                      d. The text, author
4. According to Eliot the emotion of art is \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. impersonal                      b. personal                      c. inaccurate                      d. spontaneous
5. Eliot has not completed his notion of tradition in this essay; he develops it further in .....  
a. *Notes Towards a Definition on Culture.*  
b. *Hamlet and His Problems*  
c. *A Note on Twentieth Century Literature*  
d. None of the Above
6. "Honest Criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry". Can be elucidate as -----  
a) only the poets can make honest criticism and sensitive appreciation of his own poetry.  
b) sincere criticism has to focus on the poet's personality which would in turn lead him to neglect his poetic contribution.  
c) the focus of literary criticism has to shift from author to the text.

- d) None of the above
7. T. S. Eliot defines poetry as .....
- a) “The spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility”.
- b) “Not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.”
- c) “A metrical composition which is a blissful blend of emotions and intellect.”
- d) None of the above

### 7.2.3 Section—III Tradition and The Impersonality of Poetry are Complimentary ?

In concluding section of the essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* Eliot points out the significant clues of his theory of poetic process. He says that his conclusions “can be applied by the responsible person, who really interested in poetry”, without plunging into metaphysical considerations. It is very difficult to show curiosity in poetry and to put a poet aside. Eliot says,

***“There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet.”***

And a poet must know that to reach at the level of impersonality, he first has to scarify himself and has to surrender himself totally to that work. Thus the last lines of the essay draw readers’ attention to three significant points of Eliot’s theory of poetic process—

1. poetry is the expression of a significant emotion
2. the emotion of art is impersonal and
3. a poet needs a constant awareness of the living past, a sense of tradition

According to Eliot, poetry is not the expression of the personal emotions of the poet, and as such the biography of the poet is not to be taken as a key to his poetry.



a poem depends not on the intensity of the emotions, but on the intensity of the artistic process: the pressure under which the fusion takes place. The function of the literary critic is to understand this without confusing it with any other thing.

T.S.Eliot's *Tradition and Individual Talent* is one of the critical essays in which Eliot has described with concept of tradition, individual talent, emotion and poetry as well as his concept of depersonalized art. The essay underlines the importance of 'tradition' and examines the correlation between 'tradition' and 'individual talent' and finally, he shifts the focus from the author to the text. T. S. Eliot's concept of tradition is dynamic, unconventional and visionary. It is remarkable that Eliot himself practiced whatever critical principles of 'Tradition' he formulated. It is of far-reaching implications for forthcoming generations of critics and writers.

#### **7.4 Terms to Remember :**

**autotelic** : Bacon: catalyst: having or being a purpose in itself, not dependent on other things for its intention or usefulness.

**Francis Bacon** (1561-1626), Elizabethan man of letters. His *Essays* and *The Advancement of Learning* are good examples of early English prose.

**catalyst** : in chemistry, a substance that without itself undergoing any change, starts a reaction or increases the rate of a reaction; metaphorically, a person or thing that causes change.

**epigrammatic** : having the quality of an epigram, a short witty poem, proverb or expression.

**Hobbes** : Thomas Hobbes (1588- 1679), author of *Leviathan*, one of the earliest books of political economy.

**iconoclast** : literally, a person who breaks religious images used in worship. Now the word is more commonly used for its metaphorical meaning, a person who cherished beliefs or established reputations.

**Plutarch** : The Greek historian Plutarch (c. 46-117 A.D.) wrote about important Greeks and Romans in his *Parallel Lives*. He started with contemporary historical figures like Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony, and went back to mythical figures like Theseus, in ancient Athens, and Romulus, founder of Rome. Shakespeare's *Roman*

plays were inspired by his reading of Plutarch's Lives, translated into English by North.

**valorized** : to valorize is to increase the value of something, to invest it with special significance

## 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress:

### Check Your Progress-I

1. a;    2. d;    3. c;    4. b;    5. b

### Check Your Progress-II

1. a;    2. d;    3. b;    4. a;    5. a;  
6. c;    7. b.

### Check Your Progress-III

1. c;    2. b;    3. a;    4. c;    5. b

## 7.4 Exercises :

### A) Write answer of the following questions in about 250 to 300 words.

1. How does Eliot assimilate individual talent of a poet with tradition?
2. Examine T.S Eliot's theory of 'Tradition' and 'the Individual Talent'?
3. What is historical sense? How is it important according to Eliot?
4. How far do you agree with Eliot's view 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."?
5. According to T. S. Eliot, what is the role of individual talent in the creative process of a poet as in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"?
6. What is the relationship between "tradition" and "the individual talent," according to the poet T. S. Eliot?
7. How would you like to explain Eliot's theory of Depersonalization? You can explain with the help of chemical reaction in presence of catalyst agent, Platinum.

8. Write two points on which one can write critique on T. S. Eliot as a Critic
9. Explain “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”
10. Explain “Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.”

**B. Write short notes on:**

1. Eliot’s Concept of Tradition
2. The Impersonal Theory of Poetry
3. Eliot’s Notion of Individual Talent
4. Eliot’s views on Honest Criticism and Sensitive Appreciation
5. Eliot’s Conception of Poetry

### **7.7 Reference for Further Study**

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## **Module VIII**

### **Practical Criticism**

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## 8.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able :

- To understand the concept of Practical Criticism.
- To understand the process of critical appreciation.
- To understand the various terms in appreciation of a poem.
- To be able to write a critical appreciation of a poem.

## 8.1 Introduction:

Practical Criticism, as the words suggest deals with the practical component of literary criticism. You have already studied the theoretical part of literary criticism in your previous modules. In this module we are concerned with the application of the theoretical part. Readers enjoy poetry when they understand it. Practical Criticism helps us to enjoy a poem by understanding the points that make it enjoyable and hence, beautiful.

Practical Criticism is also termed as Descriptive Criticism or Applied Criticism. I. A. Richards initiated an academic procedure in the 1920s through a series of experiments wherein poems were given to students without any historical, biographical context or authorship, date or circumstances of composition etc. His reflection on an attempt to solve the problems faced by the students in interpreting an unknown poem led him to devise a method of analysis which he discussed in his book *Practical Criticism* (1929). Practical Criticism is an ancillary skill. It is often a part of examination in literature to test students' knowledge of verse forms, responsiveness to poetry and ability to describe its effect on them. Though there is no necessary connection with any theoretical approach in such an exercise, it does help in enhancing the knowledge of various verse forms and the sources yielding pleasure in a given poem.

## 8.2 Presentation of Subject matter:

### 8.2.1 Practical Criticism: Concept

Practical Criticism deals with the practical component of literary criticism. Practical criticism as a pedagogical discipline begins with I. A. Richards. In 1929 he published *Practical Criticism* which is a result of his reflection in order to solve the

problems faced by students in interpreting an unknown poem. The students faced difficulties in making out the meaning, the role of imagery in poetry, the tendency to read the poet's point of view in the poem, use of stock responses etc. Hence, to address these problems I. A. Richards devised a method of analysis.

To start with let us see some of the definitions of Practical Criticism.

Criticism is the art of interpreting art. It serves as an intermediary between the author and the reader by explaining the one to the other. By his special aptitude and training, the critic feels the virtue of a masterpiece, disengages it, and sets it forth.

- **Walter Pater**

Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deeper import.

- **Thomas Carlyle**

An analytical approach to literary criticism first developed by I. A. Richards, in which literary texts are viewed as autonomous and, isolated from any literary, historical or biographical context, subjected to close reading.

- **Oxford Dictionary on Lexicon.com**

An attempt to explicate particular poems or passages of prose bringing out what is implied in the choice and arrangement of words, images etc., describing precisely what one feels about them and "placing" them.

-***Practical Criticism* (V. S. Sethuraman, C. T. Indra and T. Sriraman)**

Practical Criticism, at its best, ensures that instead of repeating the opinions of his teachers, a student will have to make personal judgments of poems he has never seen before. He will have to look closely at the actual words being used, and describe precisely the effects of the poem. It promotes literary sensitivity.

**(Cox and Dyson as quoted by Prof. B.D. Sattigiri)**

M. H. Abrams in the opening chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp* makes a useful and effective distinction between different kinds of criticism which gives a clear picture of the nature and function of literary criticism.

The four kinds of criticism referred to by Abrams are –

- 1) **Mimetic Criticism:** It is derived from Plato and Aristotle. It considers a work of art as an imitation (mimesis) or representation of the external world or reality. This is also referred to as Classical Criticism.
- 2) **Pragmatic Criticism:** In this type the emphasis is shifted to the reader. Consideration is given to how far and how successful certain desired effects are produced in the reader by the devices employed by the poet. It also considers whether the devices help the reader in becoming more moral or perfect.
- 3) **Expressive Criticism:** In this type of criticism emphasis is placed on the writer or author and the work of art is seen as an expression or overflow of the powerful feelings of the author. This basically applies to Romantic Criticism and modern psychological or psycho analytical criticism.
- 4) **Objective Criticism:** This type of criticism cuts the poem off from its creator and the world. A work of art is considered to be an autonomous entity sufficient unto itself – which can be understood and interpreted in terms of its own laws of organization, its intrinsic qualities such as coherence, inter-relationship of parts etc. Formalism developed from objective criticism.

Sethuraman and others have added another form of literary criticism. This form is the Linguistic approach to poetry.

Linguistic approach to poetry: In this type emphasis is laid on close and systematic study of the elements of language and the principles governing their combination and organization that go to constitute any literary work.

The exercise of critical appreciation that you are going to study in this unit considers these approaches in their applied form which mark the development of literary criticism.

### **Check your Progress-I**

#### **A. Complete the following choosing the correct alternative:**

- i. Practical Criticism as a pedagogical discipline started with \_\_\_\_\_  
a) T. S. Eliot    b) Aristotle    c) I. A. Richards    d) Alexander Pope
- ii. I. A. Richards published *Practical Criticism* in \_\_\_\_\_

- a) 1928                      b) 1929                      c) 1920                      d) 1930
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_ criticism considers art as an imitation of the external world.  
a) Expressive    b) Objective    c) Pragmatic    d) Mimetic
- iv. Expressive criticism gives importance to \_\_\_\_\_ of the author.  
a) emotions    b) thoughts    c) life    d) whims
- v. \_\_\_\_\_ Criticism considers a work of art as an autonomous entity.  
a) Mimetic    b) Pragmatic    c) Objective    d) Expressive

**B. Answer the following in one word, phrase or sentence each:**

1. What prompted I. A. Richards to write *Practical Criticism*?
2. On what does emphasis in Pragmatic Criticism lie?
3. Which school of criticism developed from Objective Criticism?
4. What does the Linguistic approach to poetry study?
5. What is the basic principle of Mimetic Criticism?

**8.2.2 The process of Critical Appreciation of a poem:**

As students, you are expected to attempt a critical appreciation of an unseen poem given in your examination paper. Usually there are four to five questions given below it. You are expected to write a critical appreciation of the given poem in continuous prose and not in the form of answers to the questions given below the poem. The questions are only meant to give you hints, a helping hand, in writing the critical appreciation.

For writing a critical appreciation you need to first understand the meaning of the poem. You often find it quite difficult. The reason for it is quite obvious. A poem does not usually use complete, grammatical sentences; it is in the form of lines which could be incomplete sentences, often breaking the rules of grammar or sentence construction. This is poetic license or special freedom enjoyed by the poet to create a desired effect. Moreover, a poem, especially a lyric is very short and avoids any detailed explanation. So, one needs to search for the meaning. Further, there could be multiple interpretations of the poem and each one is valid if it is supported with

justification. In attempting a critical appreciation, merely giving a paraphrase or the meaning of the poem is not enough. You need to read between the lines too, that is, try to understand those things which are not explicitly conveyed. You need to register your response to the poem and justify your impression, judgment with reasons. You do not have any biographical details of the poet or even the circumstances of composition for guidance. A poem is to be studied as an independent identity. There is difference of opinion on the point of giving biographical details, circumstances of composition etc. In such circumstances it is profitable on the part of the reader to be acquainted with literature. It helps in understanding the meaning of a poem, becoming aware of the various ways in which poets think about a particular subject.

You need to begin the process by reading the poem at least twice. It will help you in reaching the topic or the theme of the poem. The process of analysis begins thereafter. You may organize your critical appreciation in three parts for convenience.

1<sup>st</sup> part – ‘What’

2<sup>nd</sup> part – ‘How’

3<sup>rd</sup> part - Personal Impression or Comments or Summing up

1. Subject or theme
2. Content or paraphrase – general meaning
3. Structure
4. Tone
5. Imagery
6. Verbal felicity
7. Metre, rhyme
8. Figures of speech.
9. Your Impression or comments
10. Summing up

It is suggested that you organize the analysis of a poem on the basis of the above points in the three parts.

The first part of our appreciation should be in the form of answers to all ‘what’ questions. For instance the answers to following questions may be incorporated in the first part.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. What is the general meaning of the poem?
3. What is the hidden meaning, if any, of the poem?
4. Does the poem have more than one meaning? What are they?
5. What is the mood of the poem?
6. What type of poem is it? (narrative, descriptive or reflective or a combination of some of these)
7. Does the poem subscribe to any particular lyrical type? (Sonnet or Ode or Elegy or Ballad or Song or Dramatic Monologue or Idyll etc.)
8. Can you classify the poem on the basis of its school or literary Age? (Elizabethan, Metaphysical, Neo-classical, Romantic, Victorian, Modern etc.)
9. Can you classify it as belonging to Indian, British, African, Canadian, Australian, etc.?

Ask yourself these questions after reading the poem and their answers will give you the contents of the first part.

In appreciating or analyzing a poem, we must learn to recognize the special features, devices used in the poem. It is not enough to identify them or point out their location in the poem but to justify their use by the poet in communicating his point or intention.

The second part is the most important one in a critical appreciation as it answers all the ‘how’ questions or rather answers how the ‘what’ part has been presented by the poet. As the poet has limited space to communicate his thoughts or feelings to the readers, he makes use of many devices to achieve this desired effect. These devices are divided into structural devices, sense devices and sound devices for the sake of convenience.

### **Structural Devices:**

These are the devices used by the poet to give a particular form or structure to the poem. These are again subdivided into three types – Contrast, Illustration and Repetition.

i. **Contrast :** It is the most common of all structural devices. A poet may use contrast by putting two opposite objects or ideas in the poem to highlight the one that he desires and achieve the effect. Sometimes the contrast is evident or explicit and sometimes it is implied or implicit. e.g. in the poem *Tyger* by William Blake, the speaker asks the question to the tiger – “Did He who made the lamb make thee? ”. By contrasting the ferocious tiger with the timid, meek lamb, Blake contrasts the two principles of creation and destruction in the world and the inevitability of the principle of destruction in the cycle of life. This interpretation is reinforced by an earlier line in the poem- “When the stars threw down their spears and water' heaven with their tears...” which is a direct reference to the confrontation between the good and the evil, between creation and destruction, between God and Archangel (Satan) and the result of it.

ii. **Illustration:** A poet often uses an example to convey his point or achieve the desired effect. It takes the form of a clear or vivid picture. Though brevity or economy is considered to be the soul of lyrical poetry, a poet may use many examples to convey his point to the readers. e.g. in Shakespeare’s Sonnet *Full Many a Glorious Morning* the poet has made good use of illustration. Often clouds dim the splendour of the bright sun, the heavenly eye and it is a temporary phase. Similarly, the speaker holds that the emergence of a rival poet and the subsequent disinclination for the speaker by his patron is also a temporary or passing state and so he will not let it affect his love for the patron.

iii. **Repetition:** A poet repeats a point or an idea in the poem to indicate or draw the reader’s attention to a significant point. Here, we need to concentrate on the repetition of a point or an idea. Repetition of line/s or stanzas should be considered under the Sound devices.

Pablo Neruda in the poem *Tonight I Can Write* speaks about the intense suffering caused due to separation from his beloved. Memories of time spent together are enumerated one after the other. Everything is same as before except for the beloved. So through the series of memories that he recalls the thought of separation

from his beloved and the resultant pain is accentuated. Similarly in the poem *Daffodils* Wordsworth uses various expressions to communicate the vast number of the flowers like –

‘a crowd’, ‘a host of golden daffodils’, ‘continuous as the stars that shine and twinkle in the milky way’, ‘they stretched in never-ending line’, ‘ten thousand saw I at a glance’ etc.

An important point to note is that a poet may use any one of the above structural devices or a combination of any or all of the above structural devices in order to create the expected effect. You should therefore, try to find out which of the devices are used by the poet and the effect achieved through these devices.

### **Check the progress II:**

#### **Identify the Structural device/s used in the following examples:**

- i) Old wood inflamed doth yield the bravest fire,  
When younger doth in smoke his virtue spend.
- ii) It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make man better be,  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred years,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald and sere;  
A lily of a day  
Is fairer far in May.
- iii) Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

#### **8.2.3 Sense Devices:**

The sense devices are mostly the various Figures of Speech used by the poet in the poem for the purpose of emphasis and embellishment. These figures of speech have an important role to play in a poem. A poet often compels us to fix our attention

on one object while comparing it with another. A good poet possesses the ability to bring together objects and ideas that are associated or at times even unconcerned. Figure of speech is a word or group of words used to give particular emphasis to an idea or sentiment. It is achieved by conscious deviation from the strict literal sense of the word or from the commonly used form of word order or sentence construction. Figures of speech serve to highlight the relationship between the various ideas or points or objects in a poem in a peculiar way. But a poet uses only those that serve his purpose.

Some of the common figures of speech are Simile, Metaphor and Personification. You need to know some more frequently used figures of speech. They are:

Antithesis, Oxymoron, Paradox, Hyperbole, Epigram, Metonymy, Synecdoche, Pun, Rhetorical Question, etc.

Here are some very commonly used Figures of Speech.

1) **Simile:** It involves comparison by means of words “like” or “as” between the two kinds of ideas or objects.

e.g. My love is like a red, red rose.

that’s newly sprung in June.

2) **Metaphor:** It also involves comparison but in here, a word or phrase denoting one kind of idea or object is used in place of another word or phrase for the purpose of suggesting a likeness between the two.

e.g. This flea is you and I and this

Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;

3) **Personification:** It is representation of inanimate objects or abstract ideas as living beings.

e.g. Night enfolded the town in its ebon wings

4) **Antithesis:** It involves juxtaposition of two words, phrases, clauses, or sentences contrasted or opposed in meaning in such a way as to give emphasis to contrasting ideas.

e.g. But at my back I always hear

Times winged Charriot hurrying near:

And yonder all before us lye

Desarts of vast Eternity.

5) **Oxymoron:** It is a combination of two seemingly contradictory or incongruous words, side by side in a line of a poem. Of these two words the first one is usually in the form of adjective and the second one in the form of a noun.

e.g. Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!

6) **Paradox:** It is a statement or sentiment that appears contradictory to common sense yet is true in fact. It is used to engage a reader to discover an underlying logic in the seemingly self-contradictory statement.

e.g. Cowards die many times before their deaths;

The valiant never taste of death but once.

7) **Hyperbole:** It is a type of bold overstatement or exaggeration according to which a person or thing is depicted as being better or worse, or larger or smaller, than is actually the case. Though the statement is not true, it helps in making it emphatic.

e.g. ... I would

Love you ten years before the Flood:

And you should if you please refuse

Till the Conversion of the Jews.

8) **Epigram:** An epigram is a short but insightful statement, often in verse form, which communicates a thought in a witty, paradoxical, or funny way. Epigrams are more memorable owing to their brevity and are also very effective.

e.g. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

9) **Metonymy:** It is a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated.

e.g. O, for a draught of vintage! That had been

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth

10) **Synechdoche:** It is a figure of speech in which a “part” of something is used to represent its “whole” or a “whole” is used to represent a “part”.

e.g. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

11) **Pun:** This figure of speech consists in a play upon a word and its various meanings. Usually the play on words is meant for fun but sometimes it is also used for serious purposes.

e.g. Give me a **torch**. I am not for this ambling; Being but heavy I will bear the **light**.

12) **Rhetorical Question:** It is a question asked not to gain any information or answer but to emphatically assert the obvious answer.

e.g. You winged blood-drop,  
Can I not overtake you?

13) **Irony:** It is a dryly humorous or lightly sarcastic mode of speech, in which words are used to convey a meaning contrary to their literal sense.

e.g. Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.

14) **Apostrophe:** It is a figure in which the speaker directly addresses some inanimate thing or idea as if it were a living person. It could also be a direct address to a dead or an absent person.

e.g. O Milton! Thou should’ st be living at this hour! England hath need of thee.

15) **Transferred Epithet:** In this figure of speech the epithet or attribute is transferred from a person to a thing.

e.g. Gertrude drank the poisoned cup.

**Imagery:** Another important term in practical criticism is “imagery”. Andrea Clark defines imagery as “a writer’s or speaker’s use of words or figures of speech to create a vivid mental picture or physical sensation...” Imagery is calling to mind, something perceived by the senses. Strong imagery is that which provokes a picture or sensation of sight, touch, taste, sound or odour. Abrams and Harpham define imagery as a term used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literal description, by

allusion, or in the vehicles of its similes and metaphors. Abrams also maintains that critics after 1930s and especially the New Critics contributed greatly in the enhanced importance enjoyed by imagery, especially the similes and metaphors and also acknowledges it to be a major factor in poetic meaning, structure, and effect. The most important reason to analyze a writer's usage of imagery and figurative language is to recognize how it contributes to the point he is trying to make or the effect he is attempting to create. Similes and metaphors awaken and direct emotions and are therefore important in poetry.

Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is replete with images of all the above. Here are some lines which display the rich use of images:

- i. The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound.
- ii. About, about, in reeland rout  
The death-fires danced at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green, and blue and white.
- iii. Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,  
Like restless gossamers?

**Symbolism:** is one more term of importance in Practical Criticism. Symbolism is the idea that things represent other things. There may not actually be any relation between the thing and the symbol, but the poet sees an association, a representation in them in a particular context. The symbols thus become the vehicles for the association of ideas in the mind of the poet. Symbols may have different connotations for different poets. For instance rose is taken as a symbol of beauty. Further a red rose may be seen as a symbol of carnal love. Red is the colour of blood and maybe it has a role in such a symbolic meaning being attached to a red rose. William Blake is known for beautiful use of symbols.

While writing about the sense devices it is not enough to just point out their location in the poem or identify them. What is more important is to discuss their use and their effect. This shows that the reader has actually understood them.

**Check the Progress III:**

**Identify the Figures of Speech used in the following examples:**

1. Half knowledge is a dangerous thing.
2. His horns be as broad as rainbow bent.
3. And the startled little waves that leap  
In fiery ringlets from their sleep.
4. Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.
5. The ploughman homeward plods his weary way.
6. Two heads are better than one.
7. Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honourable man.
8. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
9. O! Solitude where are the charms that sages have seen in thy face?
10. In faith unfaithful stood he falsely true.
11. He checked his cash, cashed in his checks,  
And left his window. Who is next?
12. If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
13. One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.
14. Blood, red blood  
Super-magical

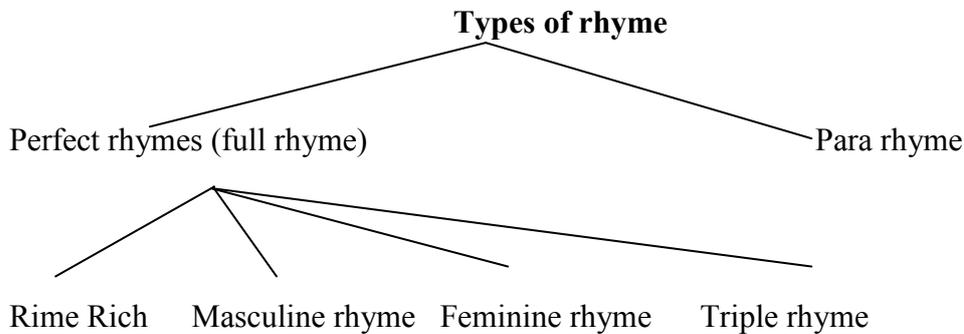
Forbidden liquor.

15. Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike.

#### 8.2.4 Sound Devices:

Sound devices obviously are used to create a sound effect. One of the factors that differentiates poetry from prose is the use of sound devices, for musical or sonorous effects. They include rhythm (metres), rhyme, alliteration, assonance, repetition consonance, Onomatopoeia, refrain etc.

**Rhyme:** It is an obvious way to create pattern among the various lines. It is a device where two words sound the same except for their first consonant. Rhyme is a phenomenon of sound.



**Rime Riche:** It consists of a repetition of a word which has two or more meanings the first appearance has one meaning the second the other.

e.g. Spring is late and I am going blind

In his dark room my neighbour

draws the blind.

**Masculine rhyme:**

This is a simple rhyme where only one last stressed syllable rhymes.

e.g. I listened, motionless and *still*;

And as I mounted up the *hill*,

**Feminine rhyme:**

In this type the final two syllables are rhymed and the final syllable is unstressed. It is also called double rhyme. Feminine rhyme gives a lighter end to a line or a sense of continuation.

e.g. With rue my heart *laden*  
For golden friends I had  
For many a rose-lipt*maiden*  
And many a light foot lad.

**Triple rhyme:** It is the rhyme of three syllables but is quite unusual in English poetry. Generally a triple rhyme is used to create a comic effect.

e.g. Farewell, farewell, you old rhinoceros,  
I'll stare at something less prepoceros.

**Half rhyme or Para rhyme:** The opening and the end consonant sounds rhyme and only the middle vowel sound is different. Such type of rhyme is common in folk songs, children's verse but in more recent times it was consistently and effectively used by Willfred Owen.

e.g. The centuries will burn rich loads  
With which we *groaned*  
Whose warmth shall lull their dreamy lids,  
While songs are crooned.  
But they will not dream of us poor lads,  
Lost in the *ground*.

Further there is also what is called **Eye rhyme / visual rhyme / false rhyme**. In this type of rhyme the words look as if they should rhyme from the spellings but do not actually rhyme as the pronunciation is different. e.g. through / bough, love / prove, prow / bow

Such rhymes are often used as substitutes for perfect rhymes and sometimes deliberately to disturb the perfect harmony of rhyme giving a sense of discord or roughness.

**Internal rhyme:** It is distinguished by its position. It occurs within a line of poetry instead of at the end of two or more lines. It often cuts a long line into two and the ends of the two parts rhyme.

e.g. In mist or *cloud*, on mast or *shroud*,

It perched for vespers nine;

Purpose of using rhyme:

- It contributes to the poetic structure, gives the poem shape and structure.
- It is musical and hence pleasing.
- A rhymed word is easily noticed, gets prominence and therefore may be used to convey important ideas.
- It affects the pace / speed of the poem.
- It can be used as a guide to the meaning of the poem.

Other elements of repetition of similar or related sounds are considered under **consonance, alliteration, assonance** and **onomatopoeia**.

**Consonance** involves having common consonantal sounds towards the end of the words.

e.g. “Out of this house” – said *rider* to *reader*,

“Yours never will” – said *farer* to *fearer*,

“They’re looking for you” – sad *hearer* to *horror*,

As he left them there, as he left them there.

**Alliteration** is a form of consonance where the consonants at the beginning of words in a line or close together are common.

e.g. The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free;

**Assonance**, also called interior rhyme, has repetition of vowel sounds. Here the sound is to be considered and not the vowel in the spelling.

e.g. Thou still unravished Bride of quietness

Thou foster child of silence and slow Time.

**Onomatopoeia** means “name-making”. In this device the sounds echo the sense of the word and help in strengthening the effect or adding to the meaning.

e.g. The moan of doves in immemorial elms,

And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Alliteration and assonance are useful for bringing words together and for revealing the connection between them. Sometimes repetition of a particular word in the poem helps to reach the meaning of the poem while also adding to the musical effect. Refrain or repetition of entire line helps in giving a pattern, rhythm and sonorous effect to the poem. In *The Lady of Shalott* Tennyson uses “...down to Camelot” and “... Lady of Shalott” as refrains.

#### **Check the Progress IV**

**A.** Identify the types of rhyme used in the following examples:

1. On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye  
That clothe the world and meet the sky.
2. All in the blue unclouded weather  
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,  
The helmet and the helmet-feather  
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
3. Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
4. And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

**B.** Identify the sound devices used in the following examples:

1. The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
2. Full fathom five thy fathers lie.
3. I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host of golden daffodils.

4. The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,

### **8.2.5 Rhythm:**

It is the repetition in time of a recognizable pattern of sounds. Organized, systematized rhythm is called metre. Metrics is all about the rhythmical effect in poetry. Metre has an important role in establishing form as well as the emotional effect in a poem. Knowledge of metre helps in sharpening the focus of the reader. Metre deals with the strong sense of movement through use of rhythmic units. The repetition of a regular rhythmic unit and some variations in between comprise the rhythm. These units are called metre and are composed of syllables. Different types of metre are formed with different combination of syllables.

To understand metre it is necessary to know how to divide a word into syllables. The smallest unit of metrics is syllable. It is any word or part of a word produced with a single puff of breath. It contains one voiced vowel or diphthong, with or without any marginal elements (consonants). So the rule is one voiced vowel or diphthong equals one syllable.

### **Determining the metre:**

The first step in determining the metre is to find the average number of syllables in a line.

e.g. Tell / me / not / in / mourn / ful / num / bers

In the above line there are eight voiced vowel sounds and hence eight syllables. About 60 to 80 percent words in English poetry are monosyllabic. The second step is to divide or mark the syllables into stressed and unstressed ones. A syllable that is emphasized or pronounced more forcefully carries more weight and is termed as stressed and is denoted by ‘/’ whereas an unstressed syllable is denoted by ‘x’. Usually syllables take the stress as per the dictionary or as in regular speech but poets some times vary the stress on monosyllabic words to suit their needs.

Once the stresses are marked the line can then be divided into smaller units with equal number of syllables called feet (singular- foot). A foot consists of two or more stressed or unstressed syllables.

#### Basic Metres in English

- 1) Iambic foot ( x / ) – one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one.
- 2) Trochaic foot ( / x ) – one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable
- 3) Anapaestic foot ( xx / ) – two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable
- 4) Dactylic foot ( / xx ) – one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.

#### Supplementary metres

- 1) Spondee ( / / ) two stressed syllables
- 2) Pyrrhic ( x x ) two unstressed syllables
- 3) Amphibrach ( x / x ) one stressed syllable between two unstressed syllables.

Based on the number of times a foot is repeated in a line the base metre of the line is determined. e.g. iambic dimetre, iambic trimetre, iambic tetrameter, iambic pentametre etc.

Iambic pentametre is the most common metre in English poetry. The supplementary metres are used as modulations (change) in the regular metrical lines.

Metre affects the moods.

e.g. A| bow|-shot| from|her| bo|wer|-eaves,  
He| rode| bet|ween| the| bar|ley|-sheaves,  
The| sun| came| daz|zing| thro'| the| leaves,  
And| flam'd| up|on| the| bra|zen| greaves  
Of| bold| Sir| Lan|ce|lot

In the above example, the first four lines have eight syllables in unstressed-stressed pattern i.e. they are in iambic tetrameter but the fifth line is in iambic

trimetre (six syllables arranged in unstressed-stressed pattern). As the majority lines are in iambic tetrameter it becomes the base metre.

I| looked| up|on| the| ro|tting|sea  
And| drew| my| eyes| a|way;  
I| looked| up|on| the|ro|tting| deck,  
And| there| the| dead| men| lay.

In the above example we find iambic tetrameter and iambic trimetre used alternatively in the four-line stanzas throughout the poem *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge. It is called the ballad metre. However, you shall observe the effect of change in a foot or two on the mood of the poem through the following example from the same poem:

Alone, alone, all all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

In the above stanza Coleridge has made changes in the metre. Instead of the ballad metre we have the first two lines in tetrameter, the third line in pentameter and the fourth line in trimetre. But there is a modulation in the first two lines because three of the four feet are in iambic and one foot is in spondee (two stressed syllables-all, all and wide, wide). The use of spondee has slowed down the speed of the line and also added a serious tone to the lines. When you read this in context of the theme you understand that the spondee has helped in heightening the loneliness and helplessness felt by the mariner. This is how a poet uses metre to indicate the mood.

### **Check the Progress V :**

#### **A. Identify the number of syllables in the following lines:**

1. So long as men can breathe or eyes can see
2. The Lady of Shalott
3. Princes do but play us: compared to this,
4. Why dost thou thus

5. Love all lovely, love divine

**B. Scan the above lines for the feet and identify the metre used therein.**

The third or the final part is a sort of summing up. You may repeat the general remarks about the poem. You may give your opinion or your impression about the poem as part of comments and you may even pass a judgment on the poem. However, you should support your statements with evidence from the poem or give reasons for the same.

After having discussed the concept of Practical Criticism, its components and the process let us attempt an appreciation of a poem.

***The Man He Killed***

- Thomas Hardy

“Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
Right Many a nipperkin!

“But ranged as infantry,  
And staring face to face  
I shot at him as he at me,  
And killed him in his place.

“I shot him dead because ----  
Because he was my foe,  
Just so: my foe of course he was;  
That’s clear enough; although

“He thought he’d ‘list, perhaps,

Off-hand like ----just as I---  
Was out of work --- had sold his traps---  
No other reason why.

“Yes; quaint and curious war is!  
You shoot a fellow down  
You’d treat if met where any bar is,  
Or help to half-a-crown.”

**Appreciation of the poem:**

The given poem is about war and its futility. It is in the form of dramatic monologue uttered by a soldier after killing an enemy soldier. This poem therefore appears to be a war poem and the theme is the brutality and futility of war. The poem describes the feelings and the thoughts of a soldier after killing an enemy soldier. The soldier is disturbed because he has killed his friend only because he is on the opposite side in the battle.

The poet has beautifully described the futility of war by presenting two contrasting pictures. He begins by saying that if they had met at some inn or a bar instead of on battlefield they would have together enjoyed a drink and perhaps even shared their experiences of life or re-lived past memories. But as luck would have it they meet on the battlefield and that too on the opposite sides. There is no place for personal emotions, relationships in a war. Your only duty is to kill the person on the opposite side. Both try to do the same but the speaker succeeds in killing the other person. This proves that in war, you kill a person for no personal enmity, grudge or ill-feeling. This is the brutality of war. The speaker further also gives the reason for enlisting in the infantry. Being jobless, both friends find employment as soldiers. But the irony is they are in the opposite camps. The opening stanza describes the guilt experienced by the soldier on killing an innocent friend of his. The poem narrates the horrifying experience of a soldier. The pauses and repetition in the third stanza tell us that the speaker finds it difficult to justify his act. He did not wish to kill his friend but had to because that was precisely his duty. His guilt is beautifully expressed through the repetition of the word ‘because’ and succeeds in conveying that he

actually does not have any reason and is trying to think of one. He tries to convince himself that the man he had killed is his foe but fails miserably because in the heart of his heart he knows that the truth is otherwise. The fourth stanza deals with the cause of such brutal killing – unemployment! The final stanza comes as a comment on this inhuman face of war and goes a long way in shattering the glorious picture of war as a chance to display the love for one’s country. The use of inversion in the third stanza after giving the same words in correct order – ‘because he was my foe’ and inverting it to ‘my foe of course he was’ speaks volumes for the changed relation from friend to foe for no valid reason. War is not a valid reason for such inverted relation. The repetition of certain words, lines go to highlight the theme of futility of war. The poem begins and ends with the same point that were it not for the war, the two would have enjoyed each other’s company. The poem consists of five stanzas of four lines each. The third line of every stanza is in iambic tetrameter while the remaining three lines in every stanza are in trochaic trimetre. A trochee begins with a stressed syllable and this has worked well in this poem because the statement of the theme becomes much more forceful than it would have been in an iambic metre. The longer third lines of every stanza draw attention to important points in the poem like the sense of regret, the cause for it, the actual act leading to guilt, unsuccessful attempt to justify it, the cause behind the act and again the sense of regret. There is alternate rhyming with the rhyme scheme abab.

The poem is thus, a strong assertion of the futility of war. It shows how war cannot be justified. The poet has also succeed in bringing out the helplessness of unemployed youth who had to enlist as soldiers when they would have loved to enjoy the fruits of youth and happy life.

8.4 Summary

8.5 Terms to Remember

## **8.6 Answers to Check your Progress**

### **Answers to Check your progress-I**

A. i- c, ii-b, iii-d, iv-a, v-c

- B. 1. the problems faced by students in interpreting an unknown poem  
2. on the reader

3. Formalism
4. the elements of language and the principles governing their combination and organization in a literary work
5. It considers a work of art as an imitation or representation of the external world or reality.

#### **Answers to Check your progress-II**

i)–Contrast, ii) – Illustration and repetition, iii)- Repetition

#### **Answers to Check your progress-III**

1- epigram, 2- simile, 3- personification, 4- metonymy, 5- transferred epithet, 6- synecdoche, 7- irony, 8- hyperbole, 9- apostrophe, 10- oxymoron, 11- pun, 12- rhetorical question, 13- paradox, 14- metaphor, 15- antithesis

#### **Answers to Check your progress-IV**

**A.** 1- masculine rhyme, 2- feminine rhyme, 3- internal rhyme, 4- para rhyme

**B.** 1- onomatopoeia, 2- alliteration, 3- assonance, 4- consonance

#### **Answers to Check your progress-V**

**A.** 1- ten, 2- six, 3- ten, 4- four, 5- seven

**B.** 1. iambicpentametre

2. iambic trimetre

3. trochaic pentameter

4. trochaicbimetre

5. trochaic trimetre and one extra stressed syllable at the end

### **8.7 Exercises:**

1. *Death, Be Not Proud*

- John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so;

For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bone, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

2.                    *Richard Cory*

- Edwin Robinson

Whenever Richard Cory went downtown  
We people on the pavement looked at him  
He was a gentleman from soul to crown  
Clean favoured and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed  
And he was human when he walked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
“Good Morning,” and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich, -yes, richer than a king,

And admirably schooled in every grace;  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread,  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

### **8.8 Further Reading:**

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