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MATS CENTRE FOR OPEN & DISTANCE EDUCATION

Literary Criticism

**Master of Arts (English)
Semester - 2**



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL



MATS UNIVERSITY

OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

Literary Criticism

M.A English Semester II

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Literary Criticism

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Literary Criticism

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MODULE -I

NATURE AND TYPES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

CONTENTS

1. Objectives
2. Brief introduction
3. Definition of criticism
4. Function of criticism
5. Types of criticism
6. Points to remember
7. Questions
8. Book references

OBJECTIVES

To understand the nature and scope of literary criticism

To familiarize students the general and basic definition of literary criticism

To understand the various types of criticism



Notes

Literary Criticism

UNIT 1

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF CRITICISM

Man has always been creative to express the ideas or emotions in various forms of arts. Literature is one of them. It is the art of creating text to express ideas of universal appeal or of personal interest. It is the human expression in the form of written work. From time to time umpteen works of literature are produced which hold a very high standard of work as an art. It is said to be a successful piece of art when it carries something called merit. In order to find out whether the literary work bears the high standards or not, certain parameters are set by various critics. While literature is a creative work and received by the readers but it is not simple as it appears to be. Studying literature requires an understanding of contexts and texts, including the historical, political, philosophical, economic, and cultural background. Literature has both literal and super-literal meanings, with criticism aiming to reveal the latter, which includes ideological implications. Thus the scope of literary criticism or evaluating the work of body of literature arises.

Criticism does not simply mean to find fault with the work of literature. It is an idea, an opinion supported by evidence. When a work of literature is analyzed or interested for its merits, it is termed as literary criticism. Thus Literary Criticism is an interpretation or analysis of poem, story, play or short fiction.

Etymology

The word “criticism” is taken from a Greek word which means “judgment.” Therefore criticism involves making judgments. Literary criticism is an exercise of judging and evaluating works of literature which can include novels, short stories, essays, plays and poetry.

It is the play of mind to analyze the work of literature and its role is to judge the merits and defects on the grounds of certain standards brought about by the evaluator or the critic.

Definition

Literary Criticism is defined as the interpreting or examining a work of literature on the basis of its merit and defects.



Notes

Matthew Arnold defines literary criticism as “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world

Literary criticism is “the study of literature as a means of understanding the complexities of human experience, culture, and society” (Peter Barry)

Literary criticism is “the “critical examination and interpretation of literary texts, focusing on their language, form, and meaning” (Terry Eagleton)

Criticism is the “commentation and exposition of works of art by means of written words” (T.S.Eliot)

Criticism is the art of estimating the quality and character of a work of art, and the function or work of a critic. (New English Dictionary)



Notes

Literary Criticism

UNIT 2

Functions of Criticism

Literary criticism is the practice of asking and answering the rational questions about literature for the better understanding and evaluating its worth. Literary criticism is not just being negative or shunning the work but it is the forming of opinion with the support of strong evidence. A typical structure for literary criticism begins with a summary of the text, examines its arguments, and ends with an evaluation. A good criticism on literature leaves the reader with a deeper understanding of the text and fills them with pleasure and enjoyment. The study of criticism makes reader broadens their view to understand and adds new parameters to unfold the various meanings hidden in the text.

The main function of literary criticism is to work as an aid to understand the given piece of literature. It evaluates the merits and demerits of a work of literary work to appraise its value. The evaluation or the analysis is done through the use of certain rules or principles set by a literary critic. Literary criticism provides the fresh stuff and unfolds various perspectives of beauty, power, mystery and depth of significance hidden in the work. - Criticism is shaped by the critic's personal likes, dislikes, and biases, which are, in turn, influenced by the socio-political context in which they exist.

Thus the literary criticism includes following parameters to help the readers understand a literary text:

Interpretation: Explaining the meaning and significance of a literary work.

Evaluation: Assessing the literary merit, value, and impact of a work.

Analysis: Breaking down the components of a work to understand its structure, themes and literary devices.

Comparison: Comparing works to identify similarities, differences, and influences.

Theorization: Applying theoretical frameworks to understand literary works and their cultural significance.

Appreciation: Enhancing readers' understanding and appreciation of literary works



Notes

Education: Teaching critical thinking, analytical skills, and literary knowledge.

Cultural commentary: Providing insights into the cultural, social, and political contexts of literary works.

Influence: Shaping literary tastes, trends, and the canon of great works. Ø Challenging assumptions: Questioning dominant interpretations and cultural norms.

Evaluation, interpretation and analysis are the core parts of literary criticism. It involves examining and interpreting texts to understand their meanings, themes, structures, and cultural or historical contexts. Literary critics analyze various elements of a work—such as its language, characters, plot, and style—to offer insights into how it communicates ideas, emotions, and values.



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Literary Criticism

UNIT 3

TYPES OF CRITICISM

- a) Practical criticism: This study of literature encourages readers to examine the text without regarding any of the outside context—like the author, the date and place of writing, or any other contextual information that may enlighten the reader.
- b) Traditional Criticism evaluates an author's biographical information: their culture, background, and history. Critics who look through a traditional critical lens believe that by understanding an author's biography and the period in which the work was written, they can truly evaluate a work
- c) Cultural Studies - In direct opposition to practical criticism, cultural theory examines a text within the context of its socio-cultural environment. Cultural critics believe a text should be read entirely through the lens of the text's cultural context. Culture is the cumulative product of language, morality, beliefs, laws, and customs acquired and practiced by human beings. Therefore, literary theory inevitably involves cultural studies. Culturalism argues that literature and what constitutes literature is not static and is subject to inevitable change with time, place, and readers. culturalism offers a broader reading of literary works, involving psychology, politics, and sociology.
- d) Sociological Criticism evaluates a text based on its relation to a particular society and its larger social context. Viewing a text through this critical lens includes studying an author's place within a society and how an audience receives a work. The focus is on society as a whole, and critics assess the social factors at work in a poem, which may be everything from the attitudes a writer inherits from his social background to the markets supporting his literary efforts.
- e) Legislative Criticism— There are different kinds of analysis that have thrived every once in a while. The earliest in time was the legislative criticism. The Criticism sought to teach writers how to write and laid down canons, rules, formulae of literary composition. Such legislative criticism claims to teach the poet how to write, or how to write better. It is the kind, of criticism practised by the Elizabethans, and for half a century after, Sidney apart, nearly all Elizabethans critics directed their remarks to the poets rather than to readers of poetry. Legislative criticism is a thing



of the past now. It dominated in England in the sixteenth century and died in the seventeenth century with Dryden representing the point of change.

f) Biographical Criticism focuses on the author's life. It tries to gain a better understanding of the literary work by understanding the person who wrote it and includes the approach of asking:

- What aspects of the author's life are relevant to understanding the work?
- How are the author's personal beliefs encoded into the work?
- Does the work reflect the writer's personal experiences and concerns?
How or how not?

A poem may be used to illuminate the writer's psychology, or as biographic data. No less than the correspondence, remembered conversations, choice of reading matter, the poem is analysed for relevance to its author's life.

g) Evaluative Criticism is the criticism which is concerned with the assessment or evaluation of the worth and significance of a work of art. The work is examined with reference to standards which may be aesthetic, moral or purely personal and thus an attempt is made to estimate its place and importance.

Evaluative criticism in literature is the practice of assessing and judging a literary work based on its artistic, intellectual, and emotional merits. Unlike descriptive criticism, which focuses on explaining and analyzing a text without judgment, evaluative criticism aims to determine the value of a piece in terms of literary quality, thematic depth, and overall impact.

One of the key aspects of evaluative criticism is the use of established literary standards to assess a work. Critics often consider elements such as narrative structure, character development, use of language, and thematic relevance when forming an evaluation. For instance, a novel's ability to evoke deep emotions, challenge societal norms, or present a compelling narrative can contribute to its literary significance.

Additionally, evaluative criticism is influenced by the subjective perspectives of the critic. Personal preferences, cultural background, and historical context play a crucial role in how a work is judged. While some may find value in experimental and avant-



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garde literature, others may favor traditional storytelling. This subjectivity means that literary evaluations can vary widely among critics and audiences.

Despite its subjective nature, evaluative criticism is essential in shaping literary discourse. It helps establish a canon of significant works, influences public perception, and guides readers toward meaningful literature. For example, critical acclaim often elevates books to classic status, ensuring their preservation and continued study.

However, evaluative criticism is not without controversy. The imposition of rigid criteria can sometimes marginalize diverse voices and experimental forms of storytelling. In response, modern literary criticism embraces a more inclusive approach, recognizing multiple perspectives and cultural narratives.

In conclusion, evaluative criticism is a vital component of literary analysis. It allows readers and scholars to engage critically with texts, appreciating their strengths while acknowledging their limitations. By fostering thoughtful discussion, it enriches the literary landscape and deepens our understanding of artistic expression.

h) Comparative Criticism is criticism which seeks to evaluate a work by comparing it with other works of a similar nature, either in one's own language or in other languages. This method is foreshadowed in the criticism of Dryden, but Arnold was its first powerful advocate and exponent. He asserted that the critic must know the best that has been thought and said, both in ancient and in modern times, not only in his own languages from which native literature is derived. Arnold suggested the "touchstone method" for measuring the intrinsic excellence of a work of art. Passages, extracts, quotations from different works of art should be compared to know the excellence of the work under consideration.

i) Comparative criticism in literature is a method of analyzing and evaluating literary works by comparing them across different cultures, genres, time periods, or artistic movements. This approach seeks to uncover similarities and differences in themes, styles, narrative structures, and philosophical underpinnings. By juxtaposing works from diverse backgrounds, comparative criticism enhances our understanding of literature's universality and the unique qualities of individual texts.

One of the primary objectives of comparative criticism is to explore how different authors address common human experiences, such as love, conflict, identity, and morality. For example, a comparison between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* reveals how different cultural and historical contexts shape the portrayal of guilt and conscience. Similarly, examining feminist themes in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* highlights the evolving discourse on gender roles and societal expectations.

This method of criticism also facilitates cross-cultural appreciation, encouraging readers to engage with literature beyond their own national or linguistic boundaries. It challenges ethnocentric perspectives and fosters a deeper understanding of global literary traditions. For instance, comparing Western existentialist literature with Eastern philosophical texts may reveal how different traditions grapple with questions of existence and selfhood.

Despite its merits, comparative criticism poses challenges. The risk of imposing one literary framework onto another or overlooking cultural nuances can lead to misinterpretations. Moreover, translations may affect the authenticity of literary comparisons. However, when conducted with sensitivity and scholarly rigor, comparative criticism serves as a powerful tool for expanding literary appreciation and intellectual inquiry.

In conclusion, comparative criticism enriches literary studies by fostering dialogue between diverse works and traditions. It allows readers and scholars to explore literature from multiple perspectives, deepening their understanding of artistic expression across cultures and historical periods.

j) Descriptive Criticism is the analysis of existing literary works, of their aims, methods and effect. It is by far the most popular of the critical modes and a large bulk of English criticism is of this type.

Descriptive criticism provides a factual analysis, evaluation or judgement of the quality of a literary or artistic work, musical performance, art exhibit or dramatic production. Conversely, a prescriptive critic describes what is observed and suggests what the artist should have done or may have intended.



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Literary Criticism

Descriptive critics focus on the art work form, describing important aspects of that form in order to improve our understanding of the characters, settings, structures, details or interrelationships present within the work or among the aspects depicted. An untrained person can easily miss things that are observed by a critic when viewing works of art. Good descriptive critics call attention to what might otherwise be missed in an artistic form.

Unlike a reviewer, whose intent is to provide his opinion on a work of art, a descriptive critic analyzes the work in greater detail, targeting an audience of those most knowledgeable in the particular art form being critiqued. While a reviewer can be anyone with an opinion, a critic is expected to have a deeper knowledge of the history, content or design of the work being critiqued. Unlike reviews that are created for public consumption, descriptive critiques are often featured in academic journals and highly regarded artistic publications.

k) **Impressionistic Criticism** – Impressionistic criticism is defined as a subjective critique that focuses on individual perceptions and experiences of literature. It emphasizes personal interpretations and impressions over objective evaluations, allowing critics to express their unique emotional responses to literary works. This critical approach highlights the importance of personal connection to literature, making it a distinctive perspective within the realm of literary analysis.

It is the criticism which seeks to present words the felt qualities of a particular passage or work and to express the responses or the “impression” of the work which directly evokes from the critic. As William Hazlitt put it in his essay “On Genius and Common Sense” (1824): “You decide from feeling, and not from reason; that, from the impression of a number of things on mind... though you may not be able to analyze or account for it in the several particulars.”

William Hazlitt, in his essay “On Genius and Common Sense” (1824), emphasized that impressionistic criticism is rooted in feeling rather than reason. He argued that the critic’s judgment is based on the impression created by a variety of elements in the work, even if the critic cannot explicitly analyze or explain each individual aspect.

Walter Pater further developed the notion of impressionistic criticism, suggesting that the critic’s first step toward understanding the object of analysis is to discern

and clarify their own distinct impression. Pater believed that by recognizing and articulating their personal response, the critic gains deeper insights into the work. He posed the essential question, "What does this song or picture mean to me?" as a way of uncovering the individual's subjective experience with the artwork (as expressed in the preface to "Studies in the History of the Renaissance," 1873). Impressionistic criticism aims to convey personal impressions and immediate responses to a work, emphasizing the subjective experience and emotional impact. Judicial criticism, on the other hand, seeks to analyze and explain the effects of a work through objective analysis and evaluation, often relying on specific criteria of literary excellence. While these modes of criticism may intersect, they offer different perspectives and approaches to understanding and evaluating literature.

l) Archetypal Criticism Texts rely on archaic patterns for their meaning. The word archetype derives from Greek, with arche meaning "first" and typos meaning "form" or "type". According to the Gage dictionary, archetype means "an original model or pattern from which copies are made." •The original narrative models and patterns on which western literary textual conventions depend come from Judeo-Christian scripture and Greco-Roman mythology. Archetypal literary critics identify how and to what effect patterns from these ancient sources are used in folk tales, epics, media texts, comics, and other texts. •Unlike formalists, who view a text as an isolated unit, archetypal critics focus on inter-textual connections. A leading proponent of archetypal criticism is Northrop Frye.

m) Psychological Criticism applies psychological theories, especially Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypal depth psychology, to works of literature to explore the psychological issues embedded in them. It may analyze a story's characters or plot, a poet's use of language and imagery, the author's motivations for writing, or any other aspect of a literary work from a psychological perspective. It can be classified as an author-focused approach because its emphasis is on reading the work as an expression of the author's



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Literary Criticism

unconscious processes, such that one can analyze and interpret the work in the same way a psychoanalyst would do with a patient's dream. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- i. What psychological forces and factors are involved in the words, behaviors, thoughts, and motivations of the characters in a story?
 - ii. Do dreams or psychological disorders play a part in the work?
 - iii. How did the author's life experiences affect his or her intellectual and emotional formation? How is this psychological impact evident in the text and/or the author's act of writing it?
 - iv. What unintended meanings might the author have embedded or encoded in the work?
- n) Marxist Criticism -Marxism emerged in the nineteenth century as a result of the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, concerns itself with the economic struggles for power between the working class and the ruling class. These two men believed in an eventual classless society with communal ownership of all natural and industrial resources. When Marxist theories are applied to literature, they provide a means for assessing the social significance of a text. Marxist criticism believes that literature is one form of cultural production of a complex society and, as such, reflects the forces shaping the society's culture. This is to say that literature is not only a mirror which reflects society. But it is also a dynamic participant in the shaping of a culture. The poem may be assessed on its political correctness on its support for workers against capitalist exploitation but most Marxists praise work that analyses or describes the injustices which Marxist societies aim to overcome.

A Marxist literary critic considers when analyzing a text:

- Literature expresses the ideas, beliefs, and values of a culture.
- Literature of any significance actively engages in controversy or argument.
- Literature reveals power struggles (sexual power, economic power, social power, and so on) and how this operates and with what consequences.



Notes

- Literature reveals how the author, reader, and characters demonstrate an awareness or lack of awareness of their economic and social situations and what oppresses them.
- Literature and authors can manipulate readers into sympathizing with rather than critiquing the dominant (and oppressive) social order.

o) Archetypal Criticism The texts rely on archaic patterns for their meaning. The word archetype comprises of two Greek words 'arche' meaning beginning and 'type' meaning imprint. It also means "first" and typos meaning "form" or "type". According to the Gage dictionary, archetype means "an original model or pattern from which copies are made." The original narrative models and patterns on which western literary textual conventions depend come from Judeo-Christian scripture and Greco-Roman mythology. Archetypal literary critics identify how and to what effect patterns from these ancient sources are used in folk tales, epics, media texts, comics, and other texts. Unlike formalists, who view a text as an isolated unit, archetypal critics focus on inter-textual connections. A leading proponent of archetypal criticism is Northrop Frye.



Notes

Literary Criticism

UNIT 4

WHAT IS LITERARY THEORY

Literary theory is a school of thought or style of literary analysis that gives readers a means to critique the ideas and principles of literature. Another term for literary theory is hermeneutics, which applies to the interpretation of a piece of literature. Literary theory examines a cross section of literature from a specific era, geographic location, or from writers of specific backgrounds or identities to draw conclusions about the similarities and differences in similar kinds of literary works.

There are a variety of schools of literary theory, including feminist theory, post-modernist theory, post-structuralist theory, and more. Literary theory helps readers gain a deeper understanding while reading literature by drawing on a critical theory to gain further insight into literary texts.

Literary theory is one of the most significant tools to comprehend literary works and almost any art form. One of the most important contributors to classical literary theory, Plato's student Aristotle believed that poetry was capable of representing the truth as it mirrors life creatively, not passively. He believed, where history was just a record of accidental events, poetry rises above such accidental incidents and represents and highlights universal truths. Some of the popular theories of the past and present include:

- a) Archetypal Criticism
- b) Feminist Criticism
- c) Marxist Criticism
- d) Reader-Response Criticism
- e) Deconstruction
- f) Formalism
- g) Psychoanalytic Criticism
- h) Postcolonial criticism



- i) New Historicism
- j) Structuralism
- k) Ecocriticism

Difference between literary criticism and literary theory

Literary theory comprises a set of perceptions, concepts and principles that impacts our understanding of literary works. The application of these perceptions and concepts to a text is called literary criticism.

To understand this better, let us consider the concept that women are oppressed and ignored in a male dominating society. This repression and marginalization is extended in all spheres- society, family, politics, literature, etc. This train of thought is not entirely abstract but is substantiated through historical evidence.

The set of concepts that emphasizes discrimination on the ground of gender are included in feminist literary theory. Once we are introduced to feminist theory, we become better equipped to notice and highlight any explicit or subtle repression of women in a literary text. The moment we begin to interpret and critique a literary work using feminist theory, it becomes feminist criticism.

Points to remember

- a) *Literary criticism emerged from the study of poetry going back to Aristotle's Poetics*
- b) Samuel Johnson termed Dryden "the father of English criticism".
- c) Hermeneutics is another term for literary theory which applies to the interpretation of a piece of literature.
- d) Psychoanalytic Criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and the unconscious mind, exploring symbolism and dreams in texts.



Notes

Literary Criticism

Questions

A. Multiple Choice Questions

1. What theory examines literature by considering the author's biography, historical context, and cultural influences?

- a. New Historicism
- b. Post-colonialism
- c. Queer Theory
- d. Ecocriticism

Correct Answer: a. New Historicism

2. Who called John Dryden the father of English Criticism?

- a) Arnold
- b) Dr. Johnson
- c) Coleridge
- d) T S Eliot

Correct Answer: c. Dr. Johnson

3. What term is used in cultural studies to describe the process through which certain cultural practices become accepted as the norm?

- a) a. Cultural Hegemony
- b) b. Cultural Hybridity
- c) c. Cultural Relativism
- d) d. Cultural Imperialism

Correct Answer: a. Cultural Hegemony



Notes

4. Which literary theory explores the ways in which literature reflects and challenges societal norms and expectations related to gender and sexuality?

- a. Queer Theory
- b. Psychoanalysis
- c. Marxism
- d. Feminism

Correct Answer: a. Queer Theory

5. Who is known as the father of English criticism?

- a) Sydney
- b) Dr. Johnson
- c) Pope
- d) Dryden

Correct Answer: d. John Dryden

6. Which literary theory explores the ways in which literature reflects and shapes cultural attitudes towards race and ethnicity?

- a. Cultural Studies
- b. Postcolonialism
- c. Eco-criticism
- d. Queer Theory

Correct Answer: a. Cultural Studies



Notes

Literary Criticism

B. Question-answers

1. Explain any four types of Literary Criticism.

Criticism as M. H. Abrams defines it, is an overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating works of literature. It is a set of terms, distinctions, and categories to be applied to identifying and analyzing works of literature. There are various types of criticism that have flourished from time to time which are as follows:

- a) Practical criticism or applied criticism – It concerns itself with the discussion of particular works and writers; in an applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the mode of analysis, interpretation and evaluation.
- b) Descriptive Criticism is the analysis of existing literary works, of their aims, methods and effect. It is by far the most popular of the critical modes and a large bulk of English criticism is of this type.
- c) Evaluative Criticism is the criticism which is concerned with the assessment or evaluation of the worth and significance of a work of art. The work is examined with reference to standards which may be aesthetic, moral or purely personal and thus an attempt is made to estimate its place and importance.
- d) Comparative Criticism is criticism which seeks to evaluate a work by comparing it with other works of a similar nature, either in one's own language or in other languages. This method is foreshadowed in the criticism of Dryden, but Arnold was its first powerful advocate and exponent. He asserted that the critic must know the best that has been thought and said, both in ancient and in modern times, not only in his own languages from which native literature is derived. Arnold suggested the "touchstone method" for measuring the intrinsic excellence of a work of art. Passages, extracts, quotations from different works of art should be compared to know the excellence of the work under consideration.

2. Why is literary criticism so important?

A literary criticism examines a piece of literature, such as a novel, poem, play, or short story. The purpose of a literary analysis is to analyze the literary elements,



themes, and devices used by the author to convey their message and meaning. This type of analysis involves examining the structure, language, characters, symbols, and other literary techniques used in the work. The goal of a literary criticism is to gain a deeper understanding of the work and its significance, as well as to provide insights and interpretations that can help readers appreciate the work more fully.

The literary criticism encourages critical thinking. Critical thinking is important because it encourages students to connect ideas, examine for inconsistencies in reasoning, solve problems, and reflect on their own beliefs. Literary analysis demands that students strengthen their critical thinking muscles.

3. What is the difference between literary criticism and literary theory?

Literary theory comprises a set of perceptions, concepts and principles that impacts our understanding of literary works. The application of these perceptions and concepts to a text is called literary criticism.

To understand this better, let us consider the concept that women are oppressed and ignored in a male dominating society. This repression and marginalization is extended in all spheres- society, family, politics, literature, etc. This train of thought is not entirely abstract but is substantiated through historical evidence.

The set of concepts that emphasizes discrimination on the ground of gender are included in feminist literary theory. Once we are introduced to feminist theory, we become better equipped to notice and highlight any explicit or subtle repression of women in a literary text. The moment we begin to interpret and critique a literary work using feminist theory, it becomes feminist criticism.

4. What kind of literary criticism is required to know about the author's life and times? Explain it.

Biographical Criticism focuses on the author's life. It tries to gain a better understanding of the literary work by understanding the person who wrote it and includes the approach of asking:

- What aspects of the author's life are relevant to understanding the work?
- How are the author's personal beliefs encoded into the work?



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Literary Criticism

· Does the work reflect the writer's personal experiences and concerns?
How or how not?

A poem may be used to illuminate the writer's psychology, or as biographic data. No less than the correspondence, remembered conversations, choice of reading matter, the poem is analysed for relevance to its author's life.

5. What are the chief functions of literary criticism?

Literary criticism serves several key functions, helping readers, scholars, and writers engage deeply with texts. The main functions include:

- a) Interpretation – Literary criticism helps readers understand and explain the meaning of a text by analyzing its themes, symbols, and structure.
- b) Evaluation – Critics assess the artistic quality, originality, and significance of a work, determining its value within a literary tradition.
- c) Analysis – By examining elements like character, plot, style, and historical context, critics break down how a text achieves its effects.
- d) Historical and Cultural Contextualization – Criticism places literature within its broader social, historical, and political contexts, exploring how a work reflects or challenges its time.
- e) Theoretical Application – Different schools of criticism (e.g., Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic) apply specific theoretical lenses to interpret texts in unique ways.

Book References

- a) Daiches, David *Critical Approaches to Literature* (1981). London. 1956.
- b) Guth, Hans P. and Gabriele L. Rico. *Discovering Literature: Compact Edition*. Prentice, 2000.



MODULE –II

AN *APOLOGY FOR POETRY*- PHILIP SIDNEY

Contents

Objectives

Text title

Brief introduction

Author Introduction

Analysis of the essay *An Apology for Poetry*

Points to remember

Questions

Book reference

1. Objectives

- To study and appreciate Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595)
- To comprehend by analyzing the text *An Apology for Poetry*
- To study how Sidney advocated Stephen Gosson's charges laid against poetry.

2. Text title *An Apology for Poetry*- Philip Sidney



UNIT 5

INTRODUCTION

After years of English civil war, the Tudors brought relative peace and central authority. Under monarchs like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, England grew into a powerful, centralized state. The monarch's court became a hub of culture, where literature and art were often shaped by political dynamics and the need for royal favor. The split from the Catholic Church and the rise of Protestantism profoundly impacted social and cultural life. The need for a proper understanding of the nature and function of literature was widely felt.

Literature became a vehicle for exploring religious identity, morality, and human purpose. The Renaissance brought a revival of classical learning, emphasizing individual potential and the study of ancient texts. Poets like Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare refined the English sonnet, blending Petrarchan influence with distinctly English concerns about love, politics, and mortality.

However, in Elizabeth I's reign, society was strictly patriarchal. Women were largely excluded from literary production, though figures like Mary Sidney and Queen Elizabeth herself broke barriers by writing poetry and translations. Fortunately, there was a re-discovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Italy, which gave way to new discussions not only in Italy and France but in England as well. The hostility of the Puritans posed a challenge to the status and value of Poetry and the result was replies and counter-replies. The best in the Puritan attacks is represented by Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*, (1579) and the best of the rejoinders is Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* (1595).

4. Author Introduction

Philip Sidney is one of the prominent figures of English Renaissance and Elizabethan age. It would not be exaggerated to say that Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) the first work of 'literary criticism' in English. He was an English poet, courtier, scholar, and soldier, born to aristocratic parents on 30 November 1554 and passed away on 17 October 1586 at Arnhem, Netherlands. His father, Sir Henry Sidney, was the lord president of Wales, and his uncle, Robert Dudley, was



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the Earl of Leicester and Queen Elizabeth's friend and advisor. His mother was a personal at the court of Elizabeth I.

At age ten, in 1564, Sidney had his early education at Shrewsbury School, where he had classmate and best friend Fulke Greville, who would later become his biographer. For further studies he entered Christ Church, Oxford and studied there from 1568 to 1571 but he never obtained a degree as he had left the university due to plague in the spring. He set off for the tour prominently Europe and visited France, Germany, Austria, Hungary Poland, and Italy to gain knowledge in music, astronomy, geography and foreign languages. During his travels Sidney met a number of Protestant leaders and met new friends including Richard Carew and Richard Hakluyt.

All his works which include lyric poetry, prose fiction and literary theory, were published posthumously. It left a great and immediate impact on his contemporaries, including Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Sidney was widely as the embodiment of the ideals of the Elizabethan era. Sir Philip Sidney was a remarkable writer and influential figure in Elizabethan England. His contributions to literature and society continue to resonate today, making him a timeless figure in the world of art and culture.



Literary Criticism

UNIT 6

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The period from mid sixteenth century to the seventeenth saw a good amount of growth and revival in England in cultural, literary and political aspects. Philip Sidney wrote his

An Apology for Poetry in response to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* written in 1579 during the reign of Queen Elizabethan I. *An Apology for Poetry* is an essay which discusses both the main concept of the charges made by Gosson and entails the literary criticism starting from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Although Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* is not the first major reply on poetry by an English writer but *An Apology for Poetry* is definitely a work of standard and quality and soon it became a classic piece of work. He became the pioneer of the English literary criticism and set a model of writing on criticism on literary works.

Philip Sidney completed his writing *An Apology for Poetry* in 1580 but was not published at least until four years after his death. In fact "The Defence of Poesy" was originally published under two different titles, *The Defence of Poesie* and *An Apology for Poetrie*.

Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* compelled Sidney to counter-reply on the attacks on the poetry. His purpose in the Apology was to defend poetry against the charges of mysomousoi, or poet-haters, as Sidney terms them.

Sidney admired the beauty of the poetry and set the poetry at its rightful place in the arena of human arts unlike as disrespected by some writers of Elizabethan age.

a) Structure of *An Apology for Poetry*

The essay is divided into seven major parts in the form of court-room speech.

1) *exordium* or introduction

- 2) proposition or definition of poetry
- 3) division or taxonomy of poetry
- 4) examination or in-depth account of each kind
- 5) *refutation* or refutation⁴ (against four charges)
- 6) *peroration* or conclusion of the argument
- 7) *digression* on modern English poetry

b) Summary of the text

Sir Philip Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetry* or *The Defence of Poesy* in response to Puritan critics, like Stephen Gosson, who condemned poetry and drama as morally corrupting and useless. Sidney defends poetry as not only valuable but essential, arguing that it serves a higher purpose: to teach virtue and inspire delight.

Sidney starts by saying he wants to defend poetry from people who speak ill of it, without realizing its true nature and worth. They consider the poetry immoral, useless but Sidney believes that poetry is highly valuable and didactic

He opens his defense by stating that poetry is the earliest and most foundational of human arts: “Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet.” This shows that poets were once regarded as inspired figures who could reveal deep truths about human nature and morality.

Definition and Purpose of Poetry

Sidney defines poetry as an art of imitation, echoing Aristotle’s concept of *mimesis*. He explains:

“Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth — to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture — with this end, to teach and delight.” He calls poetry a “speaking picture,” which represents poetry’s ability to imitate reality in



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language. It means that poetry is an art of *mimesis*. Mimesis is a Greek term from Aristotle that means imitation. Art imitates life, nature, and human experience.

Sidney elaborates on mimesis by describing it as representation, shows reality, creating a likeness of reality, not reality itself, symbolically or imaginatively shaping reality.

It suggests that poetry is like a painting made of words. Just as a painting visually captures a scene, poetry captures vivid images, emotions, and truths through language. The purpose of poetry, according to Sidney, is both educational and pleasurable. It teaches moral and philosophical truths while also providing enjoyment through its beauty and artistry. Sidney argues that poetry is a powerful form of imitation that uses language to create vivid, meaningful representations of life, aiming to instruct and inspire while bringing aesthetic pleasure.

Sidney defines poetry as more than just rhyming words — it's the art of creating stories and images with words. Poetry combines imagination and wisdom to teach people while entertaining them

For Sidney, poetry is not just decoration or entertainment; it's a powerful tool for moral instruction. By creating vivid representations of life, poetry captures human experiences and helps readers understand virtue and vice more deeply. He argues that poetry achieves what neither history nor philosophy can fully accomplish.

For Sidney, poetry's unique power lies in its ability to blend moral instruction with pleasure: "It doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it." Poetry draws people toward virtue by making it beautiful and desirable.

The Poet as a Creator

Sidney tells that in Greek a poet is called *poietae*, which literally means "maker" and thus English word is derived from the Greek. Sidney feels that this is a very good name, because, while all other arts have to do with "the work of nature"—that is, what has been made by God—the poet alone, "disdaining to be tied by any subjection," uses his "invention" to create a new nature, better than the one in which we live. He is not subject to nature, but rather "goeth hand in hand" with nature, free to invent fictional characters and events. The poet creates a perfect, "golden" world.



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Sidney elevates the poet's status, arguing that poets are creators who can imagine ideal worlds. He declares: "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done... her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden." According to him, their "golden" world of possibility is superior to the "brazen" world of historians who must be content with the mere truth of happenstance. He defines what he believes to be the essential formal characteristics of the various genres of poetry, and defends poetry against the charge that it is composed of lies and leads one to sin.

The historians are bound by facts, and philosophers deal in dry abstractions, but poets present virtue in its most perfect form. Poetry, then, is not falsehood but a higher kind of truth, one that shows how life ought to be rather than how it is.

Sidney illustrates this with the example of the epic poet: "The poet... with his delightful teaching... doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it." In other words, the poet not only points toward virtue but makes the pursuit of goodness feel rewarding and inspiring.



REFUTING OBJECTIONS TO POETRY

Sidney systematically addresses the main criticisms of poetry and dismantles them with precision and passion. The best in the Puritan attacks is represented by Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*, and the best of the rejoinders is Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

Stephen Gosson denounced poetry and classed the poets with 'pipes and jesters' counts.

In the *refutatio*, Sidney deals with all the standard attacks.

Poetry is useless and so is a waste of time. "There are other more fruitful knowledges, a man may better spend his time in them than in poetry." To this charge, Sidney replies that poetry is conducive to virtuous action, and he has amply demonstrated this in the foregoing part of his Defence. Sidney takes Boccaccio's stand that art is neither true nor false, hence poetry cannot be a lie and he further points out that we cannot devalue all poetry just because there has been a lot of bad poetry.

Some critics argued poetry distracts from serious study. Sidney responds that poetry combines the instructiveness of philosophy with the engaging vividness of history: "No learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry."

Poetry is the mother of lies. To this Sidney replies: "The poet nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth". The poets are not liars for they claim to state literal truths but rather craft imaginative representations to reveal deeper moral realities. The poets never affirm that they are telling the truth. The historians can lie for it affirms facts but not the facts, but not the poet for he does not deal with what should be or should not be. He offers not fact but fiction, yet fiction embodying truths of an ideal kind. Additionally unlike the historians, the poets' truths are ideal and universal in nature. The poet uses veracity or falsehood to arrive at a higher truth for a meaningful understanding.



Poetry is nurse of abuse: Critics argued that poetry corrupts audiences with immoral stories. Sidney counters that poetry itself is not corrupting; rather, bad readers misinterpret it. Good poetry, he insists, naturally inclines people toward virtue:

“Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act?”

Sidney concedes that in much of modern poetry there was a “a vicious treatment of love” but love itself is not bad, for it shows an appreciation of beauty. The fault lies not with poetry, but with the contemporary abuse of poetry. The abuse of poetry should not lead to a condemnation of poetry itself.

Plato’s condemnation of poetry: In response to this charge, Sir Philip Sidney said that Plato wanted to banish the abuse of poetry not the poets. He himself was not free from poeticality, which we can find in his dialogues. Plato never says that all poets should be banished. He called for banishing only those poets who are inferior and who were incapable of teaching the people. Plato banished the abuse of poetry from his ideal state, not of poets but of poetry itself. He banished those poets who were of inferior quality and who were incapable of teaching the people. Sidney points out that Plato held poets in high esteem and regarded him as “a light and winged and scared thing”

The Moral and Cultural Value of Poetry

Sidney argues that poetry is not just personally enriching but socially valuable. It has the power to shape national identity, preserve cultural memory, and inspire collective virtue. He praises poetry as the art that brings humanity closest to divine creation:

“With a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you; with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner.”



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In other words, poetry speaks to people of all ages and conditions, touching something universal in the human soul. It refines emotions, sharpens intellect, and cultivates moral sensitivity.



UNIT 8

CONCLUSION

In his final remarks, Sidney delivers a fiery call to honor poetry, condemning those who scorn it as people devoid of taste and moral imagination. He declares that poetry, far from being trivial or corrupting, is one of the noblest human endeavors. “I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet.”

For Sidney, poetry has the power to stir the human spirit, to awaken noble impulses, and to guide people toward virtue and wisdom. He ends with a passionate plea. “If poetry be, as indeed it is, to all high and excellent virtue a breeder, a raiser, and a feeder, then... let this disgraceful opinion of the abasement of poetry be wiped out forever.”

In *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney doesn’t just defend poetry — he exalts it as a divine gift, capable of transforming both individuals and societies through its unique fusion of beauty and truth.

6. Points to remember

- a) *An Apology for Poetry* is structured in the form of judicial oration and its nature of the discourse is descriptive.
- b) In *An Apology for Poetry* Sidney notes that the English word ‘charm’ is derived from the Latin word *carmen*, which means song
- c) England’s first critical text during Renaissance, *An Apology for Poetry* is also called The Defense of Poetry
- d) Sidney’s usage of metaphoric language in *An Apology for Poetry* is identified in modern days as semiotics
- e) *An Apology for Poetry* is structured in the form of judicial oration and its nature of the discourse is descriptive.



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Questions

I. Multiple choice questions

1. Sir Philip Sidney says, "Poetry is an art of imitation." He gets this idea from _____

A:) Horace

B:) Longinus

C:) Aristotle

D:) Plato

Correct option: C

2. Sidney in his work *An Apology for Poetry* uses the Greek term 'misomousaioi' to mean _____

A:) "poet-lovers"

B:) "poet-haters"

C:) "philosophers"

D:) "historians"

Correct option: B

3. Sidney's the England's first critical text during Renaissance, *An Apology for Poetry* is also called

A:) The Defense of Poetry

B:) The Defense for Poetry

C:) A Defense of Poetry

D:) None of the above

Correct option: A



4. Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetry* as a reply to Stephen Gosson's

A:) The School Of Abuse

B:) A School Of Abuse

C:) The School for Abuse

D:) None of the above

Correct option: A

5. *The School of Abuse* a treatise against poetry was published in

A:) 1559

B:) 1579

C:) 1568

D:) 1576

Correct option: B

II. Question-answers

1. What are the three types of poetry according to Philip Sidney?

Sidney believed that poetry's ultimate purpose is to teach and delight, making it superior to both history which tells what happened and philosophy which teaches abstract truths. Sir Philip Sidney in his *An Apology for Poetry* says that poetry can be classified into three types based on its function and purpose:

1. Religious Poetry— This type of poetry is inspired by divine or religious themes. It often includes sacred texts, hymns, and works that praise God or moral virtues. Sidney cites the Psalms of David as an example.

2. Philosophical Poetry— This poetry aims to teach moral or philosophical lessons. It includes works that impart wisdom, ethical teachings, and reflections on life.



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Examples include fables, allegories, and philosophical verse like those of Hesiod and Virgil.

3. Heroic Poetry – This is the highest form of poetry for Sidney, as it combines imaginative storytelling with moral instruction. It includes epic poetry, tragedy, and other grand literary works that inspire virtue and heroism, such as Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*.

2. Give the analysis of Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*.

Sidney's *A Defence of Poetry* is, in part, a response to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*. Gosson was a Puritan, and his *School of Abuse* was a polemical pamphlet claiming that poets lead people astray and preach immorality. *An Apology for Poetry* is about the role of the poet in society. Sidney takes pains to demonstrate that all the great civilizations of the world have valued poetry and the work of the poet. For Sidney, poetry is not merely part of civilisation: it *is* civilisation. Poetry is a civilised, and civilising, art form.

Sidney explains that if God is our 'Maker', the poet is a kind of maker, too and, tells that the word 'poet' has its roots in the ancient Greek meaning 'to make'. For Sidney, poetry 'is an art of imitation': Poetry involves metaphor, and metaphor is a form of imitation, comparing one thing to another. Poetry is, then, 'a speaking picture' whose aim is 'to teach and delight'.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.

Sidney believes the poet is valuable precisely *because* he makes things up and *only* makes things up. And poetry, through its world of fancy and idealism, can impart valuable lessons to the entire humanity.

3. What were the allegations against poetry and how did Philip Sidney defend it in *An Apology for Poetry*?

Stephen Gosson denounced poetry and classed the poets with ‘pipes and jesters’ counts. In the *refutatio*, Sidney deals with all the standard attacks.

Poetry is useless and so is a waste of time. “There are other more fruitful knowledges, a man may better spend his time in them than in poetry.” To this charge, Sidney replies that poetry is conducive to virtuous action, and he has amply demonstrated this in the foregoing part of his Defence. Sidney takes Boccaccio’s stand that art is neither true nor false, hence poetry cannot be a lie and he further points out that we cannot devalue all poetry just because there has been a lot of bad poetry.

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4. Sidney treats the poet as a creator. Discuss the idea with reference to *Defence of Poesie*.



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Sidney tells that in Greek a poet is called *poietae*, which literally means “maker” and thus English word is derived from the Greek. Sidney feels that this is a very good name, because, while all other arts have to do with “the work of nature”—that is, what has been made by God—the poet alone, “disdaining to be tied by any subjection,” uses his “invention” to create a new nature, better than the one in which we live. He is not subject to nature, but rather “goeth hand in hand” with nature, free to invent fictional characters and events. The poet creates a perfect, “golden” world.

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5. Write a Sidney’s contribution in literary criticism through his work *An Apology for Poetry*.

Philip Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* (also known as *The Defence of Poesy*, 1595) is one of the most significant works of literary criticism in the English Renaissance. His work remains a cornerstone of literary theory, reinforcing the idea that literature has both aesthetic and ethical significance. It played a crucial role in legitimizing poetry as a serious art form, influencing future literary critics and writers.

Sidney argues that poetry is the highest form of knowledge because it both teaches and delights, making moral instruction enjoyable. He refutes the common Renaissance criticisms of poetry, such as its alleged falsehood or uselessness, by asserting that poetry is superior to both history which tells what happened and philosophy which teaches abstract ideas. Sidney categorizes poetry into three types- divine, philosophical, and right poetical poetry, each serving a unique role in educating and inspiring people.

Sidney champions English literature, particularly arguing for the artistic legitimacy of English drama and poetry, which were often criticized as immoral or inferior to classical



works. *An Apology for Poetry* is one of the first major English literary criticisms, laying the foundation for later discussions on the function and nature of literature.

6. Book References

- a) Sidney, Philip. *An Apologie for Poetrie*, The Hungston Library, California. 1595. Web
- b) Saintsbury, George. *A History of English Criticism*, Edinburgh. 1911.
- c) Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. London. 1956.



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MODULE –III

A DEFENCE OF POETRY – P.B.SHELLEY

Contents

Objectives

Brief introduction

Text title

Author introduction

Text analysis

Points to remember

Questions

Book references

Suggested Readings

1. Objectives

- To study and appreciate *A Defence of Poetry* by P.B.Shelley
- To comprehend the text by analyzing *A Defence of Poetry*



UNIT 9

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE WORK AND ITS AUTHOR

The Defence of Poetry is a prose work by the poet P. B. Shelley which was written in 1821 but was not published until 18 years after the poet's death in 1822. The text was published posthumously in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*. Its final sentence expresses Shelley's famous proposition that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." It was the effect of his friend Thomas Love Peacock's attack on poetry in his *Four Ages of Poetry*, published in 1820, that made P. B. Shelley to make a pamphlet as a reply. Peacock called poetry as useless and it was redundant in the age of science and technology. He advised that the intelligent people should give up their literary pursuits and use some other good work instead. To this Shelley wrote his defense as a reply to Peacock's attack. He aimed to assert the nobility, dignity, and usefulness of poetry. Shelley's response was more a rebuttal than a mere reply.

Text title- *The Defence of Poetry* by P. B. Shelley

Author introduction

P.B. Shelley is considered one of the major English Romantic poets of the 19th century. Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on 4 August 1792 as the heir to rich estates and the son of a Member of Parliament. He was an English writer and regarded as one of the finest lyric and philosophical poets in the English language. His style of writing deals with romanticism and would include appreciating beauty of nature, passion, creativity, political sanctity and imagination.

His "Ode to the Wind" (1819) is widely regarded as one of the best classical poems. His other famous works include *Ozymandias* (1818), *To a Skylark* (1820), *Adonais* (1821), the philosophical essay *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811). Unfortunately Shelley did not receive recognition during his life but his fame grew after death. He met an accidental death in Italy as he drowned in a storm while he was attempting to sail. Shelley's reputation as a critic rests mainly on his small treatise, *The Defence of Poetry*, written in 1821 and was published after his death in 1840. It was written as a response to "The Four Ages of Poetry," an essay by his friend Thomas Love Peacock.



STRUCTURE AND ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY *THE DEFENCE OF POETRY*

a) Structure of *The Defence of Poetry*

1) In the first part, poetry is defined and its true nature is studied and elaborated most abstractly and comprehensively.

2) In the second part, the noble nature of poetry and its moral and ethical significance to society is examined and elaborated.

3) In the third part, Shelley defends poetry against the charges that have been brought against it by Peacock.

b) Summary of the text

Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* is a beautifully expressed manifesto of Romantic principles, detailing the supremacy of imagination over reason, and the exalted status of poetry. In its title and occasion and its purpose, and general plan and outline, Shelley's *The Defence of Poetry* is akin to Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*. While Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* is reply to Stephen Gosson's attack on poetry; Shelley's reply is to Thomas Love Peacock's attack. Their aims are same that is to assert and maintain the nobility, dignity and usefulness of poetry.

Definition of Poetry

Shelley writes that there are two faculties of mind. The mind works on reason and imagination. He talks about reason and defines it as the "mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity."

Shelley defines poetry as "the expression of imagination and considers that all are poets who express imagination in life; sculptors, artists, musicians, even law givers and the founders of religions. All the arts are poetry because they render poetry, since language is itself created by the imagination and is a medium in its substance intellectual, which is not true of any other"



Plato's Objection to Poetry: Shelley's Reply; Platonism against Plato

Plato objects to the poet on the ground that he is thrice removed from reality; the actual world is made up of things which are only copies of divine ideas; the painter and the poet copy these copies and are thus thrice removed from reality; similarly they copy images of virtue and the like but do not understand their true nature. Poets are thus the abettors of falseness and encourage men in deceptions.

Shelley accepts Plato's theory that "all things in the world are only copies of divine ideas, but he claims that poetry gets behind the copy and images directly the divine idea; it is the revelation or expression of the idea itself." Shelley says "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. It is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds." This Shelley asserts that it is the secret of the sense of exaltation produced by poetry, since it expresses a deeper reality than that of the world; it transports man to the kingdom of the Absolute and permits him to gaze upon the very features of love, wisdom and virtue in the divine reality. It is better than nature herself for it rectifies that distortion of the divine idea which is occasioned when the idea is embodied in earthly objects and forms. Hence also its universality of appeal since by rendering the idea it contains within itself "the germs of a relation to whatever motives its actions have taken place in the possible varieties of human nature."

Time destroys the beauty and the use of any story of particular facts, but increases that of poetry by forever developing new and wonderful applications of the eternal truths that it contains.



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UNIT 11

MORAL FUNCTION OF POETRY

Shelley believes in the moral efficacy of poetry. He is influenced partly by Aristotle's definition of tragedy, possibly also by reminiscence, conscious or unconscious of Wordsworth's prefaces.

Shelley says "the highest moral effect of poetry lies in its appeal to the imaginative and emotional faculties; in the development it gives to these it enlarges the powers of the mind itself." Imagination always plays an important role in the growth of moral sense. Men have never lacked excellent moral precepts; but they have lacked the understanding to apply that knowledge in day to day life. Want of imagination means want of sympathy and want of sympathy produces callousness and cruelty. Shelley says "A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively... Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature."

Thus the morality of poetry is higher than any that a teacher directly inculcates. To teach morality directly is wrong, because such moral conceptions are limited in time and place. It is for this reason that didactic poetry has always been an inferior kind. Shelley adds that poetry not only extends the imaginative power, but it also exercises an ennobling effect on the quality of the imagination itself. This idea is really to be traced to Aristotle's famous theory of catharsis concerning the purifying power of tragedy, which Shelley conceives that the effect is mainly on the imagination.

Shelley points out "The functions of the poetical faculty are twofold: by one it creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good. the cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then come too unwidely for that which animates it."

UNIT 12

RHYME AND METRE

Shelley believes that there is no essential difference between prose and verse. But he denies the necessity of rhyme and metre; the essential things are dignity and nobility of thought and language suitably harmonious and rhythmical; but rhythm of its own.

“Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence than the words themselves without reference to that peculiar order.”

Here, Shelley argues that rhyme and meter contribute to the musical quality of poetry, helping to shape its emotional and imaginative impact. He sees these elements as more than ornamental, they are almost as essential as the words themselves in conveying poetry’s full power. He points out:

“The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. The distinction between philosophers and poets has been anticipated. Plato was essentially a poet, the truth and splendor of his imagery and the melody of his language are the most intense that it is possible to conceive.”

Although this isn’t directly about rhyme and meter, it shows Shelley’s belief that the poetic qualities like rhythm and melody elevate language beyond ordinary speech, even in philosophical writing.

Shelley’s Views on Plato

Shelley engages deeply with Plato’s philosophy. He considers Plato holding both a thinker and a poet. Shelley doesn’t see poetry and philosophy as opposing forces, instead, he believes Plato’s work embodies the poetic spirit because of its imaginative power and pursuit of truth. Shelley says “Plato was essentially a poet, the truth and splendor of his imagery and the melody of his language are the most intense that it is possible to conceive.”

Shelley argues that Plato’s dialogues, though written in prose, are infused with poetic qualities: vivid imagery, musicality, and a relentless quest for ideal beauty and



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justice. In Shelley's view, poetry isn't just about verse and rhyme. It's about the imagination's ability to reveal deeper truths, which is exactly what Plato does through allegories and myth.

Shelley even suggests that Plato's *Republic* which famously criticizes poets, isn't a wholesale rejection of poetry but rather a critique of the corrupting potential of certain kinds of art. Shelley believes that true poetry, in Plato's sense, aligns with the pursuit of the Good and the Beautiful.

Shelley points out and says that Plato is a poetic philosopher whose work bridges reason and imagination. He admires Plato for using poetic techniques to explore complex ideas and believes this blend of logic and beauty makes Plato a poet in spirit, even if he wrote in prose.

Conclusion

Percy Bysshe Shelley elevates poetry as the highest and most essential form of human expression. He asserts that poetry is not just an artistic craft but a powerful moral and intellectual force that shapes society, elevates human consciousness, and guides humanity toward progress and enlightenment. Shelley's conclusion is a passionate plea for recognizing poetry's transformative power, emphasizing its role in fostering empathy, virtue, and the perpetual evolution of human civilization.

Shelley argues that poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." This striking phrase encapsulates his belief that poets, through their imaginative vision and emotional sensitivity, have an indirect yet profound influence on society. Unlike literal lawmakers, poets legislate through inspiration — their work shapes thought, awakens dormant emotions, and influences collective moral consciousness. By imagining a better world and articulating ideals of justice, love, and beauty, poets help societies evolve toward those ideals.

He suggests that poetry is not confined to verse but encompasses any expression of imagination and creativity that reveals profound truths. For Shelley, the imaginative faculty is what makes humans capable of empathy and moral growth. Poetry enlarges our capacity to understand and feel for others, dissolving barriers of selfishness and uniting individuals through shared emotional experience. It refines the affections and expands the mind, making people more sensitive to injustice and more inclined toward virtue.



Shelley contends that the decline of poetry in a society signals moral and intellectual decay. He believes that periods of poetic flourishing — such as ancient Greece or Renaissance Europe — coincide with eras of great cultural and philosophical advancement. Poetry, for

Shelley, is both a symptom and a cause of human progress: it arises from moments of collective inspiration and, in turn, fuels further innovation and enlightenment. In his view, poets preserve and transmit the best of human thought and feeling across generations. They act as custodians of cultural memory, distilling and immortalizing the essence of human experience. By capturing fleeting moments of beauty and insight, poetry connects the present to the past and the future, reminding humanity of its highest potential.

Shelley's conclusion is ultimately an affirmation of hope. Despite acknowledging the suffering and injustice that pervade human history, he maintains that poetry is a force of regeneration and renewal. It sustains the human spirit through hardship, offering visions of a better world that inspire people to strive for change. Poets, by revealing the divine within the human, remind us that we are capable of transcending our limitations and moving ever closer to truth and beauty.

Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* urges to recognize poetry not as a frivolous luxury but as an essential element of human flourishing. He insists that poetry is the lifeblood of civilization, the source of its most profound insights, its deepest sympathies, and its most enduring aspirations. Through the poetic imagination, humanity can glimpse the infinite, find meaning in suffering, and continue the eternal pursuit of a more just and beautiful world.

6. Points to remember

- a) Love and liberty are the major themes in the poetry of Shelley.
- b) Shelley wrote “A Defence of Poetry” in 1821 as a rebuttal to Peacock's essay *The Four Ages of Poetry*.
- c) The essay was first published posthumously in 1840 by Mary Shelley in “*Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*”.



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d) Shelley's ideas in the essay are heavily influenced by Plato's philosophy, especially the concept of poets as inspired visionaries.

e) Shelley concludes the essay with this famous declaration: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," highlighting the power of poetry in shaping culture and society

7. Questions

A. 1. Multiple Choice Questions

1. What are the two mental actions according to Shelley?

- a) Logic and fantasy
- b) Reason and imagination
- c) Perception and synthesis
- d) Imagination and creativity

Answer : c

2. How did Shelley die?

- a) Plague
- b) Road accident
- c) Drowning
- d) Fever

Answer : c

3. Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" was published posthumously in ____

- a) 1820
- b) 1840
- c) 1822



d) 1821

Answer : b

4. Shelley wrote “Defence of Poetry” in response to the work *The Four Ages of Poetry* written by his friend ____

- a) Philip Sidney
- b) Thomas Love Peacock
- c) S.T. Coleridge
- d) John Keats

Answer : b

5. Who wrote the *Defence of Poetry* in response to an essay by Thomas Love Peacock?

- a) William Wordsworth
- b) Philip Sidney
- c) Thomas Love Peacock
- d) P B Shelley

Answer : d

B. Short questions:

1. Why was Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry* written?

Shelley wrote *Defence of Poetry* as a reply to his friend Thomas Love Peacock’s attack on poetry in his *Four Ages of Poetry*, published in 1820. Peacock called poetry as useless. He considered the poetry a redundant stuff in the age of science and technology. Peacock advised that the intelligent people should give up their literary pursuits and use some other good work instead. To this Shelley wrote his defense as a reply to Peacock’s attack. He aimed to assert the nobility, dignity, and usefulness of poetry. Shelley’s response was more a rebuttal than a mere reply.



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2. What is the main argument of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*?

Shelley's main argument is that poetry is a powerful moral and intellectual force that elevates human consciousness. He asserts that poetry is not merely a form of entertainment but a vital expression of imagination that shapes society and promotes moral progress. Poetry refines human emotions, fostering empathy and compassion. Shelley contends that poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" because their imaginative insights subtly guide social and cultural evolution. By envisioning ideals of beauty, justice, and truth, poets inspire humanity to strive toward those ideals, making poetry an indispensable agent of change.

3. What is the moral function of poetry according to Shelley?

Shelley believes in the moral efficacy of poetry. He is influenced partly by Aristotle's definition of tragedy, possibly also by reminiscence, conscious or unconscious of Wordsworth's prefaces.

Shelley says "the highest moral effect of poetry lies in its appeal to the imaginative and emotional faculties; in the development it gives to these it enlarges the powers of the mind itself." Imagination always plays an important role in the growth of moral sense. Men have never lacked excellent moral precepts; but they have lacked the understanding to apply that knowledge in day to day life. Want of imagination means want of sympathy and want of sympathy produces callousness and cruelty. Shelley says "A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively... Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature."

4. How does Shelley define poetry in *A Defence of Poetry*?

Shelley defines poetry as the expression of imagination, which he sees as the source of creativity, empathy, and moral insight. For Shelley, poetry is not limited to verse but includes any form of art or thought that reveals profound truths about human experience. He describes poetry as the "record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest



and best minds.” In this sense, poetry captures and preserves humanity’s highest aspirations, connecting individuals to universal truths and fostering a collective moral sensibility.

5. What does Shelley mean by calling poets the “unacknowledged legislators of the world”?

This phrase suggests that poets, through their imaginative vision and emotional depth, influence society’s moral and intellectual direction. Unlike politicians who create explicit laws, poets shape thought and feeling, gradually shifting cultural values and inspiring social change. By presenting ideals of love, justice, and beauty, poets awaken the public conscience and encourage progress. Shelley believes that poets enact a subtler, yet more enduring form of leadership by expanding human understanding and empathy.

6. How does Shelley respond to Plato’s critique of poetry?

Shelley acknowledges Plato’s critique that poetry can be misleading, but he argues that true poetry aligns with philosophical truth. He views Plato himself as a poet because of his use of imagery and myth to explore abstract ideas. Shelley contends that poetry and philosophy are not enemies but allies, with poetry translating intellectual concepts into emotionally resonant experiences. He believes poetry reveals moral and spiritual truths, complementing philosophy’s rational pursuit of knowledge.

7. What is the significance of imagination in Shelley’s Defence of Poetry?

Imagination is central to Shelley’s argument, as he views it as the faculty that allows humans to empathize, create, and transcend their limitations. Poetry, as the highest expression of imagination, reveals hidden connections between individuals and the universe. It dissolves selfishness by helping people feel the joys and sorrows of others as their own. Shelley sees imagination as the key to moral progress, as it enables humanity to envision and pursue a more just and harmonious world. For him, poetry’s imaginative power is what makes it a force of regeneration and hope.

8. How does Shelley contrast reason and imagination?

Shelley distinguishes reason and imagination as complementary faculties. Reason discerns facts and logical relationships, while imagination perceives the underlying



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unity and emotional resonance of experience. Shelley argues that imagination is the source of creativity, empathy, and moral insight — the qualities that make poetry transformative. While reason orders the world, imagination breathes life and meaning into it, making poetry a necessary counterpart to rational thought.

9. What is Shelley's view of the poet's relationship to nature?

Shelley sees nature as a profound source of inspiration and a reflection of the divine. He believes poets are especially attuned to nature's rhythms and beauty, using their art to interpret and express its spiritual significance. By observing and communing with nature, poets access a heightened state of awareness, which allows them to translate nature's mysteries into poetic language that connects human beings to the cosmos.

10. Why does Shelley believe poetry is immortal?

Shelley argues that poetry is immortal because it preserves the essence of human thought and feeling across time. While civilizations may rise and fall, poetry endures, carrying forward humanity's collective memory and aspirations. The truths poetry reveals — love, beauty, justice — are timeless, and the imaginative power of great poetry continues to inspire future generations, ensuring its lasting influence on human consciousness and culture.

8. Book references

- a) Saintsbury, George. *A History of English Criticism*, Edinburgh. 1911.
- b) Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. London. 1956.
- c) <https://pdfcoffee.com/percy-bysshe-shelley-a-defense-of-poetry-pdf-free.html>



MODULE –IV

BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA – S.T.COLERIDGE

Contents

Objectives

Text title

Brief introduction

Author introduction

Text analysis

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Book references

1. Objectives

- To study S.T.Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*
- To understand Coleridge's theory of imagination

2. Text title *Biographia Literaria* – S. T. Coleridge



Notes

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UNIT 13

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE WORK AND AUTHOR

Biographia Literaria is a work by Samuel Taylor Coleridge on literary criticism. It contains 24 chapters and was published in two volumes in 1817. It is one of the most important works of literary criticism of the English Romantic period.

This work of Coleridge's is a blend of autobiography, philosophy, and literary criticism. The first volume details Coleridge's friendships with poets Robert Southey and William Wordsworth and explores the philosophical influences on his development, including figures like Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schelling. It also includes his famous discussion on the distinction between "fancy" and "imagination." The second volume focuses on literary criticism, offering theories on the creative process and the historical sources of poetry. This work was pivotal in the English Romantic period, merging philosophy with literary criticism in an innovative way and leaving a lasting impact on the field.

4. Author introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was not only a great poet, but also a great critic. He is one of the greatest poet-critics that England ever produced. His greatest critical work is the Biographia Literaria. His other notable poems include "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which are celebrated for their imaginative and lyrical qualities.

He was a theoretician of the creative process. He wrote that his primary aim was "to establish the principles of writing rather than to furnish rules on how to pass judgment on what has been written by others."

UNIT 14

TEXT ANALYSIS

S. T. Coleridge is highly acclaimed today both as a philosopher and critic. His greatest work and contribution to literary criticism is *Biographia Literaria* (1817) in which he developed his famous theory of the imagination and made his systematic analysis of the merits and defects of Wordsworth's poetry. He had also begun his extensive studies in early Anglican theology and in German philosophy.

The modern literary critics find his theory of Imagination still relevant. Coleridge identifies two kinds of imagination:

- 1) Primary Imagination and
- 2) Secondary Imagination

The Primary Imagination is the faculty that enables the mind to perceive clearly the objects of sense or sensory data. It is an ordering principle of the mind that is an automatic act and makes perception possible by reducing a mixed mass of matter into a distinct shape and size.

“The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.”

Coleridge's examination of Wordsworth's views on the nature and diction of poetry

Coleridge has given a long and detailed examination of Wordsworth's views in the XIV, XVII and XVIII chapters of his *Biographia Literaria*. It is a well-known fact that Wordsworth was not all happy with Coleridge's examination of his views. But Coleridge was fully within his right. He had full right to express his own views on the subject and also to point out the limits of his agreement. Besides this Coleridge was the most



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competent man of this work. His wide scholarship, keen acumen and personal knowledge of the basic problem made him the most suitable person for this work and he performs it admirably.

UNIT 15

COLERIDGE'S VIEWS ON METRE

Coleridge takes up the question of metre again and analyzes its origin and effect. The origin of metre is traced “to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion.” There are two conditions which the critic expects in every metrical work – “first that as the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement; secondly that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionately discernible. Now these two conditions must be reconciled and co-present.”

In justifying metre as essential for poetry Coleridge refers to “the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment, and thus establishing the principle, that all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts.”



Notes



FANCY AND IMAGINATION

In *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge distinguishes between *fancy* and *imagination* as two distinct faculties of the mind, central to his theory of poetic creation. He views imagination as the higher, more creative faculty, capable of shaping and transforming raw sensory data into something meaningful and profound. Coleridge further divides imagination into the *primary imagination*, which is an unconscious, universal human ability to perceive and make sense of the world, and the *secondary imagination*, which is a conscious, artistic power that dissolves, reshapes, and re-creates reality in the act of poetic creation. In contrast, *fancy* is a lower, more mechanical faculty that merely collects and arranges images without truly transforming them. While imagination is organic and dynamic, fancy is associative and decorative, lacking the deeper, unifying power that characterizes true artistic genius. This distinction highlights Coleridge's belief in poetry as an imaginative art form that transcends mere imitation, elevating the poet to the role of a creative visionary.

According to Coleridge fancy is not a creative power at all. It only combines what it perceives into beautiful shapes but like the imagination it does not fuse and unify. The difference between the two is the same as the difference between the mechanical mixture and a chemical compound. In mechanical mixture a number of ingredients are brought together. They are mixed up, but they do not lose their individual properties. They still exist as separate identities. In a chemical compound on the other hand the different ingredients combine to form something new. The different ingredients no longer exist as separate identities. They lose their respective properties and fuse together to create something new and entirely different. A compound is an act of creation; while a mixture is merely a bringing together of a number of separate elements.

The imagination creates new shapes and forms of beauty by fusing and unifying the different impressions it receives from the external world. *Fancy is not creative*. It is a kind of memory; it arbitrarily brings together images, and even when brought together, they continue to retain their separate and individual properties. Coleridge explains the point by quoting two passages from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. He writes,

Full gently now she takes him by the hand ,

A lily prisoned in a gaol of snow



Or ivory in an alabaster band

So white a friend engirds so white a foe.

Thus reading this forms the images drawn from the memory but these images do not interpenetrate into one another. Fancy is the drapery or dress of poetic genius, and imagination is its very soul, which forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

6. Points to remember

- a) Coleridge defines 'fancy' as 'a mode of memory emancipated from the from the order of time and space.'
- b) The primary imagination differs from the secondary imagination in the method of its operation and in the kind of its agency.
- c) *Biographia Literaria* literally means a Literary Biography.
- d) The full title of *Biographia Literaria* is *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817)
- e) *Biographia Literaria* is available in two volumes of twenty-three chapters.

7. Questions

A. Multiple choice questions:

- 1) What analogy does Coleridge use to explain the difference between fancy and imagination?
 - a) a dream and a reality
 - b) a chemical compound and mixture
 - c) a painter and a sculptor
 - d) a novelist and a poet

answer :b



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- 2) What does Coleridge say about meter in poetry?
- a) Meter is only important in prose
 - b) Meter excites the emotions and causes a more heightened response in the reader than prose
 - d) Meter makes poetry sound like ordinary speech.

answer :b

- 3) What is a key theme discussed in 'Biographia Literaria'?
- a) The history of English literature
 - b) The biography of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
 - c) The evolution of Romanticism
 - d) The nature of poetry and the creative process

answer :d

- 4) What is one of the subjects discussed in Biographia Literaria?
- a) Economics
 - b) Politics
 - c) Imagination
 - d) Technology

answer : c

- 5) Which literary movement is associated with Biographia Literaria?
- a) Romanticism
 - b) Realism



- c) Naturalism
- d) Modernism

answer : a

B. Question-answers

- a) What are primary and secondary imaginations according to Coleridge?

According to Coleridge, Imagination has two forms, primary and secondary. Primary imagination is merely the power of receiving impressions of the external world through the senses. It is the power of perceiving the objects of sense, both in their parts and as a whole. The primary imagination is universal, it is possessed by all.

The secondary imagination, on the other hand, may be possessed by others also but it is the peculiar and distinctive of the artist. It requires an effort of the will, volition and conscious effort. It works upon what is perceived by the primary imagination; its raw material is the sensations and impressions supplied to it by the primary imagination.

- b) What are the functions of secondary imagination?

Secondary imagination is at the root of all poetic activity. It is this power which harmonizes and reconciles opposites and hence Coleridge call it a magical, synthetic power. This unifying power of the imagination, is best seen in the fact that it synthesizes or fuses the various faculties of the soul, perception, intellect, will, emotion and also fuses the internal with the external, the subjective with the objective, the human mind with the external or the spiritual with the physical or material. It is through the paly of this unifying power that nature is colored by the soul of the poet, and the soul of the poet is steeped in nature.

- c) Differentiate between primary and secondary imaginations.

The primary and secondary imagination do not differ much from each other in kind. The difference between them is one degree. The secondary imagination is more active, more a result of volition, more conscious and voluntary, than the primary one. The primary imagination on the other hand is universal while the secondary is a peculiar privilege enjoyed by the artist.



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- d) Differentiate between imagination and fancy according to Coleridge.

Imagination and fancy are two faculties of mind. Fancy is not a creative power at all. It only combines what it perceives into beautiful shapes, but like the imagination it does not fuse and unify. The difference the two is the same as the difference between a mechanical mixture and a chemical compound.

- e) Describe Coleridge's theory of imagination as his contribution to literary criticism.

All previous discussions of imagination look superficial and childish when compared with Coleridge's treatment of the subject. He is the first critic to differentiate between imagination and fancy, the first literary critic to distinguish between primary and secondary imagination. Through his theory of imagination, he revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation. Poetic imitation is neither a servile copy of nature, nor it is the creation of something entirely new and different from nature. Poetry is not imitation, but creation, but it is the creation based on the sensations and impressions received from the external world.

- f) Why is Coleridge known for making union of philosophy and literary criticism

In the field of theoretical inquiry Coleridge was the first to introduce psychology and philosophy into literary criticism. He was interested in the study of the process of poetic creation, the very principles of creative activity and for the purposes freely drew upon philosophy and psychology. He thus brought about a union of philosophy and literary criticism. His literary theories have their bases in philosophy. He philosophied literary criticism and thus brought about a better and truer understanding of the process of creation and the nature and function of poetry.

8. Book references

- a) Bate, W. Jackson. *Biographia Literaria: The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life & Opinions*. Princeton University Press, 1985.

- b) Daiches, David. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. London. 1956.



MODULE – V

PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE – SAMUEL JOHNSON

Contents

1. Objectives
2. Brief introduction
3. Text title
4. Author introduction
5. Text analysis
6. Points to remember
7. Questions
8. Book references

"

· **OBJECTIVES**

Tonalyze Johnson's views on Shakespeare's literary merit, his strengths, and his flaws.

- To discuss Johnson's responses to Shakespeare's critics, particularly regarding the violation of classical unities



BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE WORK AND AUTHOR

Preface to Shakespeare was written in 1765. Dr. Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* is one of the most famous critical essays of the eighteenth century and yet too many students have forgotten that it is precisely a preface to the plays of Shakespeare edited by Dr Johnson himself.

Samuel Johnson was asked to write an introduction for a book about Shakespeare which made him write this work. In his Johnson praises Shakespeare for meeting this requirement fully and most satisfactorily. According to him, Shakespeare is, par excellence, the poet of nature. He holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters have a universal appeal. They act and speak like human beings. They are commonly a species. Johnson has praised Shakespeare's realism. He says that his depiction of the truth of human nature and human psychology is praiseworthy. He portrayed human characters in a realistic manner.

3. Text title *Preface to Shakespeare* by Samuel Johnson

4. Author introduction

Samuel Johnson was the son of Michael, a bookseller. He was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire on 18 September, 1709. He was educated at Lichfield Grammar School. He studied there for a short period and had to leave as he fell short of money.

Dr. Samuel Johnson was one of the most significant figures in eighteenth century English literature. He was a voluminous writer and wrote on various fascinating titles of the time. He created several biographies and critical appreciations of 52 poets of seventeenth and eighteenth century in his work *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81).

His works as a literary critic chiefly rests upon, *Preface to the Dictionary of the English Language*, *Preface to Shakespeare*, *Lives of the Poets* and *Essays and Articles*.

UNIT 18

TEXT ANALYSIS



Notes

Structure of the essay *Preface to Shakespeare*

The essay is divided into three parts

- a) Shakespeare's general nature
- b) Shakespeare's faults
- c) The three unities

Truth to nature –realism

Johnson writes that Shakespeare is great because in his work there is a just representation of general human nature. His characters are the faithful representations of humanity. He deals with passions and principles which are common to humanity. His characters are universal but they are individual also. 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 which they belong. They are also true to type.

Shakespeare's characters

Shakespeare's characters are a just representation of human nature as they deal with passions and principles which are common to humanity. They are also true to the age, sex, profession to which they belong and hence the speech of one cannot be put in the mouth of another. His characters are not exaggerated. Even when the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life.

Shakespeare's use of tragic comedy

Shakespeare has been much criticized for mixing tragedy and comedy, but Johnson defends him in this. Johnson says that in mixing tragedy and comedy, Shakespeare has been true to nature, because even in real life there is a mingling of good and evil, joy and sorrow, tears and smiles etc. this may be against the classical rules, but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. Moreover, tragic-comedy being



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nearer to life combines within itself the pleasure and instruction of both tragedy and comedy.

Shakespeare's use of tragicomedy does not weaken the effect of a tragedy because it does not interrupt the progress of passions. In fact, Shakespeare knew that pleasure consisted in variety. Continued melancholy or grief is often not pleasing. Shakespeare had the power to move, whether to tears or laughter.

Shakespeare's Comic Genius

Johnson says that comedy came natural to Shakespeare. He seems to produce his comic scenes without much labour, and these scenes are durable and hence their popularity has not suffered with the passing of time. The language of his comic scenes is the language of real life which is neither gross nor over refined, and hence it has not grown obsolete.



UNIT 19

UNITIES OF TIME

Shakespeare says that a drama imitates successive actions, and just as they may be represented at successive places, so also they may be represented at different period, separated by several days. The only condition is that the events must be connected with each other.

Johnson further says that drama moves us not because we think it is real, but because it makes us feel that the evils represented may happen to ourselves. Imitations produce pleasure or pain, not because they are mistaken for reality, but because they bring realities to mind. Therefore, unity of Action alone is sufficient, and the other two unities arise from false assumptions. Hence it is good that Shakespeare violates them.

Faults of Shakespeare

Shakespeare writes without moral purpose and is more careful to please than to instruct. There is no poetic justice in his plays. This fault cannot be excused by the barbarity of his age for justice is a virtue independent of time and place.

Next, his plots are loosely formed, and only a little attention would have improved them. He neglects opportunities of instruction that his plots offer, in fact, he very often neglects the later parts of his plays and so his catastrophes often seem forced and improbable.

There are many faults of chronology and many anachronisms in his play.

His jokes are often gross and licentious. In his narration, there is much pomp of diction and circumlocution. Narration in his dramas is often tedious. His set speeches are cold and weak. They are often verbose and too large for thought. Trivial ideas are clothed in sonorous epithets. He is too fond of puns and quibbles which engulf him in



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mire. For a pun, he sacrifices reason, propriety and truth. He often fails at moments of great excellence. Some contemptible conceit spoils the effect of his pathetic and tragic scenes.

Johnson's enumeration of faults in Shakespeare in itself is a classic piece of criticism. These faults he finds are owing to two causes—(a) carelessness, (b) excess of conceit. Shakespeare's obscurities arise from:

- (a) the careless manner of publication;
- (b) the shifting fashions and grammatical license of Elizabethan English;
- (c) the use of colloquial English,
- (d) the use of many allusions, references, etc., to topical events and personalities,
- (e) the rapid flow of ideas which often hurries him to a second thought before the first has been fully explained.

UNIT 20



Notes

CONCLUSION

Johnson's Preface to the plays of Shakespeare, even by modern standards is an exemplary piece of literary criticism although it does have its limitations. Johnson boldly went against the grain of his time in defending Shakespeare for not following the unities of time and place and for mingling tragic and comic elements. He considered the text superior to any rules and his judgement depended on how the text affected him and not on whether it followed the rules or not. Johnson can also be credited with giving critics the comparative and historical basis of criticism. Many of his judgements of Shakespeare are so insightful that modern generations can only repeat his judgments on Shakespeare's universality and in-depth understanding of human nature. Johnson's editorial method though deficient by modern standards was yet way above that of the earlier editors and editors of his own time. The restraint he exercised in making emendations is indeed creditable. Many of Johnson's pronouncements on Shakespeare reflect neo-classical beliefs, with which many today do not agree, especially the insistence on moral rectitude. Johnson has also come under criticism for preferring Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies. However, his achievements outdo his shortcomings and the greatest proof of his greatness is that his age is often called The Age of Johnson.

6. Points to remember

- a) Johnson credits Shakespeare for blurring the line between tragedy and comedy, thereby reflecting the ambiguity of life.
- b) Johnson famously describes Shakespeare as a "poet of nature."
- c) Samuel Johnson defended Shakespeare's use of the tragi-comedy.
- d) Samuel Johnson is best known for compiling his celebrated dictionary.
- e) Samuel Johnson founded his own periodical The Rambler in 1750 known for insightful essays on literature, criticism and morality.



Notes

Literary Criticism

7. Questions

A. Multiple choice questions

1. Who wrote “Preface to Shakespeare”?

- a) Philip Sidney
- b) William Shakespeare
- c) S.T. Coleridge
- d) Samuel Johnson

Answer: d) Samuel Johnson

2. When was “Preface to Shakespeare” written?

- a) 1765
- b) 1755
- c) 1722
- d) 1840

Answer: a) 1765

3. According to Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare’s greatest strength lies in his:

- a) Use of elevated language
- b) Depiction of human nature
- c) Mastery of poetic form
- d) Knowledge of classical literature

Answer: b) Depiction of human nature

4. Johnson praises Shakespeare for his ability to create characters that are:

- a) Idealized and heroic



- b) Unique to his time
- c) True to nature and universally relatable
- d) Based on historical accuracy

Answer: c) True to nature and universally relatable

5. According to Johnson, one of Shakespeare's major faults is his:

- a) Lack of originality in plot construction
- b) Use of overly complex language
- c) Neglect of poetic justice
- d) Preference for comedy over tragedy

Answer: c) Neglect of poetic justice

B. Question-answers

1. How does Samuel Johnson justify Shakespeare's disregard for the classical unities in drama?

Samuel Johnson, in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), addresses Shakespeare's apparent neglect of the classical unities of time, place, and action, which were central to Aristotelian dramatic theory. According to classical rules, a play should take place within one location, in a single day, and focus on a unified plot. However, Shakespeare frequently violates these principles by shifting settings, spanning long periods, and incorporating multiple subplots.

Johnson defends Shakespeare by arguing that strict adherence to the unities is unnecessary for effective drama. He believes that the purpose of drama is to reflect human nature and life rather than conform to arbitrary rules. Johnson asserts that Shakespeare's plays succeed because they present truthful and relatable human experiences, regardless of structural constraints. He emphasizes that audiences willingly suspend disbelief when watching plays, meaning they do not demand absolute realism in setting or time.



Notes

Literary Criticism

Moreover, Johnson points out that Shakespeare's departures from the unities allow for greater complexity and richness in storytelling. By expanding time and space, Shakespeare can explore characters more deeply and depict the gradual unfolding of events in a way that mirrors real life. Johnson argues that realism in human behavior is more important than artificial rules imposed by classical theorists.

Ultimately, Johnson's justification reinforces his belief that Shakespeare's genius lies in his understanding of human nature, rather than his adherence to literary conventions. His defense helped shift the focus of literary criticism away from rigid classical norms and toward a more flexible, realistic appreciation of dramatic art.

2. What does Johnson say about Shakespeare's ability to portray human nature?

One of Samuel Johnson's greatest praises for Shakespeare in the *Preface to Shakespeare* is his unmatched ability to depict human nature. Johnson argues that Shakespeare's characters are not just truths about humanity.

Johnson highlights that Shakespeare does not confine his characters to a particular time, place, or culture. Instead, they possess general human qualities, making them relatable across different generations and societies. This universality ensures that Shakespeare's works remain relevant and engaging, regardless of historical or cultural differences.

He also notes that Shakespeare's characters are not idealized heroes or villains, but rather complex and multi-dimensional individuals with both strengths and weaknesses. Unlike earlier playwrights who often presented exaggerated, moralistic figures, Shakespeare's characters speak and behave naturally, making them more believable and lifelike. For instance, Hamlet's introspection, Othello's jealousy, and Macbeth's ambition are deeply psychological and resonate with human experiences.

Furthermore, Johnson appreciates Shakespeare's skill in portraying the interactions between people in different social settings, whether among nobles, commoners, or even fools. This diversity allows Shakespeare to present a comprehensive picture of society, making his plays more dynamic and realistic.

In Johnson's view, this deep insight into human nature is what makes Shakespeare's work immortal. While language and literary trends may change, human emotions and



relationships remain constant, ensuring that Shakespeare's plays continue to be meaningful for every era.

3. How does Johnson criticize Shakespeare's use of language?

While Samuel Johnson praises Shakespeare's genius in character creation and storytelling, he is also critical of his language use. Johnson points out that Shakespeare sometimes writes in a careless or obscure manner, making it difficult for readers to fully grasp his meaning.

One major criticism Johnson raises is Shakespeare's tendency to use unnecessarily complex or pompous expressions. In some instances, Shakespeare employs dense metaphors, elaborate wordplay, and convoluted syntax, which can obscure rather than clarify meaning. Johnson argues that while Shakespeare's figurative language can be powerful, it is sometimes overdone or out of place, leading to confusion rather than emotional impact.

Additionally, Johnson observes that Shakespeare often mixes formal and informal language inconsistently. In some plays, serious and philosophical discussions are suddenly interrupted by jokes or puns, which Johnson sees as inappropriate or distracting. For example, in *Hamlet*, the grave-digger's scene introduces humor in the middle of a serious meditation on death. While this technique can be effective, Johnson believes Shakespeare occasionally misjudges the balance between tragedy and comedy.

Another flaw Johnson highlights is Shakespeare's frequent use of archaisms and obscure words. Since language evolves over time, Johnson notes that some of Shakespeare's vocabulary had already become outdated by the 18th century. As a result, modern audiences might struggle to understand certain phrases or references without explanation.

Despite these criticisms, Johnson acknowledges that Shakespeare's poetic brilliance and rhetorical power outweigh these flaws. He argues that even when Shakespeare's language is difficult, it remains rich, expressive, and emotionally profound, making his plays enduringly powerful.

4. What does Johnson say about Shakespeare's treatment of poetic justice?



Notes

Literary Criticism

One of the main criticisms Samuel Johnson directs at Shakespeare is his neglect of poetic justice—the idea that literature should reward virtue and punish vice. In traditional classical and moralistic literature, good characters triumph while evil characters suffer consequences. However, Shakespeare often presents a more realistic view, where good and bad outcomes are not always dictated by morality.

Johnson expresses concern that Shakespeare's plays sometimes fail to uphold moral order. He argues that in several tragedies, innocent characters suffer unjustly, while villains occasionally escape punishment or die without remorse. For example, in *King Lear*, the virtuous Cordelia dies alongside her wicked sisters, leaving little sense of moral resolution. Similarly, in *Macbeth*, while Macbeth is ultimately killed, Johnson suggests that his downfall does not feel like a complete moral reckoning.

However, Johnson also acknowledges that Shakespeare's approach is more faithful to real life. In reality, good people do not always succeed, and justice is not always served. While Johnson personally prefers literature that reinforces moral order, he recognizes that Shakespeare's willingness to depict life as it truly is contributes to the emotional power and psychological depth of his plays.

Ultimately, Johnson's critique of Shakespeare's lack of poetic justice reflects his 18th-century moral perspective, but he also appreciates Shakespeare's commitment to authentic human experiences over artificial moral conclusions.

5. Why does Johnson consider Shakespeare's plays timeless?

Samuel Johnson argues that Shakespeare's plays are timeless because they capture universal human experiences rather than being confined to a particular era or culture. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who focused on historical or classical themes, Shakespeare's works explore fundamental emotions—love, jealousy, ambition, betrayal, and power—that remain relevant across centuries.

One of the key reasons for Shakespeare's lasting influence, according to Johnson, is his mastery of character development. Shakespeare does not write about abstract ideals or stereotypes but about realistic individuals with complex personalities. For example, Hamlet's existential struggles, Othello's jealousy, and Lady Macbeth's ambition are dilemmas that still resonate with modern audiences.

Johnson also praises Shakespeare's versatility. His ability to write both comedies and tragedies, with equal skill in portraying humor and deep emotion, ensures that his



works appeal to different tastes and moods. This balance makes Shakespeare's plays enduringly engaging.

Additionally, Johnson highlights that Shakespeare's language, though sometimes difficult, is rich, expressive, and powerful. His use of memorable phrases, profound soliloquies, and poetic imagery has left an indelible mark on English literature.

For Johnson, Shakespeare's genius lies in his ability to transcend time and place, making his works immortal in the world of literature.

6. What are the faults of Shakespeare according to the critic Samuel Johnson?

Shakespeare writes without moral purpose and is more careful to please than to instruct. There is no poetic justice in his plays. This fault cannot be excused by the barbarity of his age for justice is a virtue independent of time and place.

Next, his plots are loosely formed, and only a little attention would have improved them. He neglects opportunities of instruction that his plots offer, in fact, he very often neglects the later parts of his plays and so his catastrophes often seem forced and improbable.

There are many faults of chronology and many anachronisms in his play.

Johnson's enumeration of faults in Shakespeare in itself is a classic piece of criticism. These faults he finds are owing to two causes—(a) carelessness, (b) excess of conceit. Shakespeare's obscurities arise from:

- (a) the careless manner of publication;
- (b) the shifting fashions and grammatical license of Elizabethan English;
- (c) the use of colloquial English,
- (d) the use of many allusions, references, etc., to topical events and personalities,
- (e) the rapid flow of ideas which often hurries him to a second thought before the first has been fully explained.



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