SEMESTER-II			
Core	**LITERARY THEORY - I**		
Code: CENC26	**Hrs / Week: 5**	**Hrs / Semester: 75**	**Credits: 4**

UNIT - I – CLASSICISM

Aristotle	:	The Elements of Tragedy (An Extract from Poetics)
Philip Sidney	:	An Apology for Poetrie.
Ben Johnson	:	Extract from Timber or Discoveries

Suggested Reading:

Rita Copeland (Ed), *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 1: 800-1558*, O.U.P. Oxford, 2016.
Michael Hattaway (Ed), *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

UNIT - II –RENAISSANCE, RESTORATION &NEO-CLASSICISM

John Dryden	:	An Essay of Dramatic Poesy
Alexander Pope	:	Essays on Criticism
Samuel Johnson	:	Preface to Milton

Suggested Reading:

Michael Meehan, "Neo-classical Criticism", *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Routledge, 1991.

UNIT - III - ROMANTICISM

William Wordsworth	:	Preface to The Lyrical Ballads
S.T.Coleridge	:	Biographia Literaria (Chapter - XIV&XVII)
Keats	:	Selection from The Letters 1. Letter written to Shelley 2. Letters written to Benjamin Bailey

Suggested Reading:

Paul Hamilton (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, Oxford University Press, 2019.
Donald H. Reiman, "The Romantic Critical Tradition", *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Routledge, 1991.

UNIT - IV – VICTORIAN & MODERN AGE CRITICISM

Matthew Arnold	:	The Study of Poetry
Henry James	:	The Art of Fiction
F.R.Leavis	:	Literary Criticism and Philosophy

Suggested Reading:

Boris Ford, *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain - Romantics to Early Victorians*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Geoffrey Strickland, "Great Traditions: The Logic of the Canon", *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Routledge, 1991.

UNIT - V- NEW CRITICISM

T.S.Eliot	:	Tradition and Individual Talent
I.A.Richards	:	Towards a Theory of Comprehending
William Empson	:	The Seventh Type of Ambiguity

Suggested Reading:

Rick Rylance, "The New Criticism", *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, Routledge, 1991.

References:

Lodge, David. *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, Longman, 1972.
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Ramaswami S &Sethuraman V.S. *The English Critical Tradition: An Anthology of English Literary Criticism, Vol.1 & vol.*2, Trinity Press, 1986.
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Prasad B. *An Introduction to English Criticism.* New Delhi: Trinity Press, 2014.
Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Viva Books, 2010.
Das B. and Mohanty J.M. *Literary Criticism: A Reading.* O.U.P., 2018.
Enright D.J. Chikera, Ernst de. *English Critical Texts.* O.U.P., 1997.
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SEMESTER-II

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

Summary

Aristotle proposes to study poetry by analyzing its constitutive parts and then drawing general conclusions. The portion of the *Poetics* that survives discusses mainly tragedy and epic poetry. We know that Aristotle also wrote a treatise on comedy that has been lost. He defines poetry as the mimetic, or imitative, use of language, rhythm, and harmony, separately or in combination. Poetry is mimetic in that it creates a representation of objects and events in the world, unlike philosophy, for example, which presents ideas. Humans are naturally drawn to imitation, and so poetry has a strong pull on us. It can also be an excellent learning device, since we can coolly observe imitations of things like dead bodies and disgusting animals when the real thing would disturb us.

Aristotle identifies tragedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with lofty matters and comedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with base matters. He traces a brief and speculative history of tragedy as it evolved from dithyrambic hymns in praise of the god Dionysus. Dithyrambs were sung by a large choir, sometimes featuring a narrator. Aeschylus invented tragedy by bringing a second actor into dialogue with the narrator. Sophocles innovated further by introducing a third actor, and gradually tragedy shifted to its contemporary dramatic form.

Aristotle defines tragedy according to seven characteristics: (1) it is mimetic, (2) it is serious, (3) it tells a full story of an appropriate length, (4) it contains rhythm and harmony, (5) rhythm and harmony occur in different combinations in different parts of the tragedy, (6) it is performed rather than narrated, and (7) it arouses feelings of pity and fear and then purges these feelings through catharsis. A tragedy consists of six component parts, which are listed here in order from most important to least important: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle.

A well-formed plot must have a beginning, which is not a necessary consequence of any previous action; a middle, which follows logically from the beginning; and an end, which follows logically from the middle and from which no further action necessarily follows. The plot should be unified, meaning that every element of the plot should tie in to the rest of the plot, leaving no loose ends. This kind of unity allows tragedy to express universal themes powerfully, which makes it superior to history, which can only talk about particular events. Episodic plots are bad because there is no necessity to the sequence of events. The best kind of plot contains surprises, but surprises that, in retrospect, fit logically into the sequence of events. The best kinds of surprises are brought about by *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, and *anagnorisis*, or discovery. A good plot progresses like a knot that is tied up with

increasingly greater complexity until the moment of *peripeteia,* at which point the knot is gradually untied until it reaches a completely unknotted conclusion.

For a tragedy to arouse pity and fear, we must observe a hero who is relatively noble going from happiness to misery as a result of error on the part of the hero. Our pity and fear is aroused most when it is family members who harm one another rather than enemies or strangers. In the best kind of plot, one character narrowly avoids killing a family member unwittingly thanks to an *anagnorisis* that reveals the family connection. The hero must have good qualities appropriate to his or her station and should be portrayed realistically and consistently. Since both the character of the hero and the plot must have logical consistency, Aristotle concludes that the untying of the plot must follow as a necessary consequence of the plot and not from stage artifice, like a *deus ex machina* (a machine used in some plays, in which an actor playing one of the gods was lowered onto the stage at the end).

Aristotle discusses thought and diction and then moves on to address epic poetry. Whereas tragedy consists of actions presented in a dramatic form, epic poetry consists of verse presented in a narrative form. Tragedy and epic poetry have many common qualities, most notably the unity of plot and similar subject matter. However, epic poetry can be longer than tragedy, and because it is not performed, it can deal with more fantastic action with a much wider scope. By contrast, tragedy can be more focused and takes advantage of the devices of music and spectacle. Epic poetry and tragedy are also written in different meters. After defending poetry against charges that it deals with improbable or impossible events, Aristotle concludes by weighing tragedy against epic poetry and determining that tragedy is on the whole superior.

Analysis

Aristotle takes a scientific approach to poetry, which bears as many disadvantages as advantages. He studies poetry as he would a natural phenomenon, observing and analyzing first, and only afterward making tentative hypotheses and recommendations. The scientific approach works best at identifying the objective, lawlike behavior that underlies the phenomena being observed. To this end, Aristotle draws some important general conclusions about the nature of poetry and how it achieves its effects. However, in assuming that there are objective laws underlying poetry, Aristotle fails to appreciate the ways in which art often progresses precisely by overturning the assumed laws of a previous generation. If every play were written in strict accordance with a given set of laws for a long enough time, a revolutionary playwright would be able to achieve powerful effects by consciously violating these laws. In point of fact, Euripides, the last of the three great tragic poets of Ancient Greece, wrote many plays that violated the logical and structured principles of Aristotle's *Poetics* in a conscious effort to depict a world that he saw as neither logical nor structured. Aristotle himself gives mixed reviews to Euripides' troubling plays, but they are still performed two and a half millennia after they were written.

Aristotle's concept of mimesis helps him to explain what is distinctive about our experience of art. Poetry is mimetic, meaning that it invites us to imagine its subject matter as real while acknowledging that it is in fact fictional. When Aristotle contrasts poetry with philosophy, his point is not so much that poetry is mimetic because it portrays what is real while philosophy is nonmimetic because it portrays only ideas. Rather, the point is that the ideas discussed in philosophical texts are as real as any ideas ever are. When we see an actor playing Oedipus, this actor is clearly a substitute through which we can imagine what a real Oedipus might be like. When we read Aristotle's ideas on art, we are in direct contact with the ideas, and there is nothing more real to imagine. Art presents reality at one level of remove, allowing us a certain detachment. We do not call the police when we see Hamlet kill Polonius because we know that we are not seeing a real event but only two actors imitating real-world possibilities. Because we are conscious of the mimesis involved in art, we are detached enough that we can reflect on what we are experiencing and so learn from it. Witnessing a murder in real life is emotionally scarring. Witnessing a murder on stage gives us a chance to reflect on the nature and causes of human violence so that we can lead a more reflective and sensitive life.

Aristotle identifies catharsis as the distinctive experience of art, though it is not clear whether he means that catharsis is the purpose of art or simply an effect. The Greek word *katharsis* originally means purging or purification and refers also to the induction of vomiting by a doctor to rid the body of impurities. Aristotle uses the term metaphorically to refer to the release of the emotions of pity and fear built up in a dramatic performance. Because dramatic performances end, whereas life goes on, we can let go of the tension that builds during a dramatic performance in a way that we often cannot let go of the tension that builds up over the course of our lives. Because we can let go of it, the emotional intensity of art deepens us, whereas emotional intensity in life often just hardens us. However, if this process of catharsis that allows us to experience powerful emotions and then let them go is the ultimate purpose of art, then art becomes the equivalent of therapy. If we define catharsis as the purpose of art, we have failed to define art in a way that explains why it is still necessary in an era of psychiatry. A more generous reading of Aristotle might interpret catharsis as a means to a less easily defined end, which involves a deeper capacity for feeling and compassion, a deeper awareness of what our humanity consists in.

Aristotle insists on the primacy of plot because the plot is ultimately what we can learn from in a piece of art. The word we translate as "plot" is the Greek word muthos, which is the root for myth. Muthos is a more general term than plot, as it can apply to any art form, including music or sculpture. The muthos of a piece of art is its general structure and organization, the form according to which the themes and ideas in the piece of art make themselves apparent. The plot of a story, as the term is used in the Poetics, is not the sequence of events so much as the logical relationships that exist between events. For Aristotle, the tighter the logical relationships between events, the better the plot. Oedipus Rex is a powerful tragedy precisely because we can see the logical inevitability with which the events in the story fall together. The logical relationships between events in a story help

us to perceive logical relationships between the events in our own lives. In essence, tragedy shows us patterns in human experience that we can then use to make sense of our own experience.

Critical Essay Aristotle on Tragedy

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle's famous study of Greek dramatic art, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) compares tragedy to such other metrical forms as comedy and epic. He determines that tragedy, like all poetry, is a kind of imitation (*mimesis*), but adds that it has a serious purpose and uses direct action rather than narrative to achieve its ends. He says that poetic *mimesis* is imitation of things as they could be, not as they are — for example, of universals and ideals — thus poetry is a more philosophical and exalted medium than history, which merely records what has actually happened.

The aim of tragedy, Aristotle writes, is to bring about a "catharsis" of the spectators — to arouse in them sensations of pity and fear, and to purge them of these emotions so that they leave the theater feeling cleansed and uplifted, with a heightened understanding of the ways of gods and men. This catharsis is brought about by witnessing some disastrous and moving change in the fortunes of the drama's protagonist (Aristotle recognized that the change might not be disastrous, but felt this was the kind shown in the best tragedies — *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, was considered a tragedy by the Greeks but does not have an unhappy ending).

According to Aristotle, tragedy has six main elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle (scenic effect), and song (music), of which the first two are primary. Most of the *Poetics* is devoted to analysis of the scope and proper use of these elements, with illustrative examples selected from many tragic dramas, especially those of Sophocles, although Aeschylus, Euripides, and some playwrights whose works no longer survive are also cited.

Several of Aristotle's main points are of great value for an understanding of Greek tragic drama. Particularly significant is his statement that the plot is the most important element of tragedy:

Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. And life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is their action that makes them happy or wretched. The purpose of action in the tragedy, therefore, is not the representation of character: character comes in as contributing to the action. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of the tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be one without character. . . . The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place.

Aristotle goes on to discuss the structure of the ideal tragic plot and spends several chapters on its requirements. He says that the plot must be a complete whole — with a definite beginning, middle, and end — and its length should be such that the spectators can comprehend without difficulty both its separate parts and its overall unity. Moreover, the plot requires a single central theme in which all the elements are logically related to demonstrate the change in the protagonist's fortunes, with emphasis on the dramatic causation and probability of the events.

Aristotle has relatively less to say about the tragic hero because the incidents of tragedy are often beyond the hero's control or not closely related to his personality. The plot is intended to illustrate matters of cosmic rather than individual significance, and the protagonist is viewed primarily as the character who experiences the changes that take place. This stress placed by the Greek tragedians on the development of plot and action at the expense of character, and their general lack of interest in exploring psychological motivation, is one of the major differences between ancient and modern drama.

Since the aim of a tragedy is to arouse pity and fear through an alteration in the status of the central character, he must be a figure with whom the audience can identify and whose fate can trigger these emotions. Aristotle says that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." He surveys various possible types of characters on the basis of these premises, then defines the ideal protagonist as

. . . a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty; a personage like Oedipus.

In addition, the hero should not offend the moral sensibilities of the spectators, and as a character he must be true to type, true to life, and consistent.

The hero's error or frailty (*harmartia*) is often misleadingly explained as his "tragic flaw," in the sense of that personal quality which inevitably causes his downfall or subjects him to retribution. However, overemphasis on a search for the decisive flaw in the protagonist as the key factor for understanding the tragedy can lead to superficial or false interpretations. It gives more attention to personality than the dramatists intended and ignores the broader philosophical implications of the typical plot's denouement. It is true that the hero frequently takes a step that initiates the events of the tragedy and, owing to his own ignorance or poor judgment, acts in such a way as to bring about his own downfall. In a more sophisticated philosophical sense though, the hero's fate, despite its immediate cause in his finite act, comes about because of the nature of the cosmic moral order and the role played by chance or destiny in human affairs. Unless the conclusions of most tragedies are interpreted on this level, the reader is forced to credit the Greeks with the most primitive of moral systems.

It is worth noting that some scholars believe the "flaw" was intended by Aristotle as a necessary corollary of his requirement that the hero should not be a completely admirable man. *Harmartia* would thus be the factor that delimits the protagonist's imperfection and keeps him on a human plane, making it possible for the audience to sympathize with him. This view tends to give the "flaw" an ethical definition but relates it only to the spectators' reactions to the hero and does not increase its importance for interpreting the tragedies.

The remainder of the *Poetics* is given over to examination of the other elements of tragedy and to discussion of various techniques, devices, and stylistic principles. Aristotle mentions two features of the plot, both of which are related to the concept of *harmartia,* as crucial components of any well-made tragedy. These are "reversal" (*peripeteia*), where the opposite of what was planned or hoped for by the protagonist takes place, as when Oedipus' investigation of the murder of Laius leads to a catastrophic and unexpected conclusion; and "recognition" (*anagnorisis*), the point when the protagonist recognizes the truth of a situation, discovers another character's identity, or comes to a realization about himself. This sudden acquisition of knowledge or insight by the hero arouses the desired intense emotional reaction in the spectators, as when Oedipus finds out his true parentage and realizes what crimes he has been responsible for.

Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* nearly a century after the greatest Greek tragedians had already died, in a period when there had been radical transformations in nearly all aspects of Athenian society and culture. The tragic drama of his day was not the same as that of the fifth century, and to a certain extent his work must be construed as a historical study of a genre that no longer existed rather than as a description of a living art form.

In the *Poetics,* Aristotle used the same analytical methods that he had successfully applied in studies of politics, ethics, and the natural sciences in order to determine tragedy's fundamental principles of composition and content. This approach is not completely suited to a literary study and is sometimes too artificial or formula-prone in its conclusions.

Nonetheless, the *Poetics* is the only critical study of Greek drama to have been made by a near-contemporary. It contains much valuable information about the origins, methods, and purposes of tragedy, and to a degree shows us how the Greeks themselves reacted to their theater. In addition, Aristotle's work had an overwhelming influence on the development of drama long after it was compiled. The ideas and principles of the *Poetics* are reflected in the drama of the Roman Empire and dominated the composition of tragedy in western Europe during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

After discussing the definition of tragedy, Aristotle explores various important parts of tragedy. He asserts that any tragedy can be divided into six constituent parts.

They are: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Song and Spectacle. The Plot is the most important part of a tragedy. The plot means ‘the arrangement of the incidents’. Normally the

plot is divided into five acts, and each Act is further divided into several scenes. The dramatist's main skill lies in dividing the plot into Acts and Scenes in such a way that they may produce the maximum scenic effect in a natural development. Characters are men and women who act. The hero and the heroine are two important figures among the characters. Thought means what the characters think or feel during their career in the development of the plot. The thought is expressed through their speeches and dialogues. Diction is the medium of language or expression through which the characters reveal their thoughts and feelings. The diction should be 'embellished with each kind of artistic element'. The song is one of these embellishments. The decoration of the stage is the major part of the spectacle. The Spectacle is theatrical effect presented on the stage. But spectacle also includes scenes of physical torture, loud lamentations, dances, colourful garments of the main characters, and the beggarly or jocular appearance of the subordinate characters or of the fool on the stage. These are the six constituent parts of tragedy.

Aristotle argues that, among the six formative elements, the plot is the most important element. He writes in The Poetics. The plot is the underlying principle of tragedy'. By plot Aristotle means the arrangement of incidents. Incidents mean action, and tragedy is an imitation of actions, both internal and external. That is to say that it also imitates the mental processes of the dramatic personae. In answering a question once he said that a tragedy could be written without a character but not without a plot. Though his overstatement on plot, he accepts that without action there cannot be a tragedy. The plot contains a beginning, a middle and an end, where the beginning is what is "not posterior to another thing," while the middle needs to have something happened before, and something to happen after it, but after the end "there is nothing else."

The characters serve to advance the action of the story, not vice verse. The ends we pursue in life, our happiness and our misery, all take the form of action. Tragedy is written not merely to imitate man but to imitate man in action. That is, according to Aristotle, happiness consists in a certain kind of activity rather than in a certain quality of character. As David Daiches says: 'the way in which the action works itself out, the whole casual chain which leads to the final outcome.' Diction and Thought are also less significant than plot: a series of well-written speeches has nothing like the force of a well-structured tragedy. Lastly, Aristotle notes that forming a solid plot is far more difficult than creating good characters or diction. Having asserted that the plot is the most important of the six parts of tragedy, he ranks the remainder as follows, from most important to least: Character, Thought, Diction, Melody, and Spectacle. Character reveals the individual motivations of the characters in the play, what they want or don't want, and how they react to certain situations, and this is more important to Aristotle than thought, which deals on a more universal level with reasoning and general truths. Diction, Melody/ Songs and Spectacle are all pleasurable accessories, but the melody is more important in tragedy than spectacle.

The ideal tragic hero, according to Aristotle, should be, in the first place, a man of eminence. The actions of an eminent man would be 'serious, complete and of a certain

magnitude', as required by Aristotle. Further, the hero should not only be eminent but also basically a good man, though not absolutely virtuous. The sufferings, fall and death of an absolutely virtuous man would generate feelings of disgust rather than those of 'terror and compassion' which a tragic play must produce. The hero should neither be a villain nor a wicked person for his fall, otherwise his death would please and satisfy our moral sense without generation the feelings of pity, compassion and fear. Therefore, the ideal tragic hero should be basically a good man with a minor flaw or tragic trait in his character. The entire tragedy should issue from this minor flaw or error of judgment. The fall and sufferings and death of such a hero would certainly generate feelings of pity and fear. So, Aristotle says: "For our pity is excited by misfortunes undeservedly suffered, and our terror by some resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves." Finally, Aristotle says: "There remains for our choice a person neither eminently virtuous nor just, nor yet involved in misfortune by deliberate vice or villainy, but by some error or human frailty; and this person should also be someone of high-fame and flourishing prosperity." Such a man would make an ideal tragic hero.

The characteristics of Tragic Hero

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

True to the self

True to type

True to life

Probable and yet more beautiful than life.

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

A good man – coming to bad end. (Its shocking and disturbs faith)

A bad man – coming to good end. (neither moving, nor moral)

A bad man – coming to bad end. (moral, but not moving)

A rather good man – coming to bad end. (an ideal situation)

Aristotle disqualifies two types of characters – purely virtuous and thoroughly bad. There remains but one kind of character, who can best satisfy this requirement – 'A man who is not eminently good and just yet whose misfortune is not brought by vice or depravity but by some error of frailty'. Thus the ideal Tragic Hero must be an intermediate kind of a person- neither too virtuous nor too wicked. His misfortune excites pity because it is out of all proportion to his error of judgement, and his over all goodness excites fear for his doom. Thus, he is a man with the following attributes: He should be a man of mixed character, neither blameless nor absolutely depraved. His misfortune should follow from some error or flaw of character; short of moral taint. He must fall from height of prosperity and glory. The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so that his change of fortune can be from good to bad. The fall of such a man of eminence affects entire state/nation. This change occurs not as the result of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character. Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience. The ideal tragic hero should be an intermediate kind of a person, a man not preeminently virtuous and just yet whose misfortune is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgement. Let us discuss this error of judgement in following point.

The meaning of Hamartia

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

https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/agamemnon-the-choephori-and-the-eumenides/critical-essay/aristotle-on-tragedy

https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/aristotle/section11/

https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/home/the-tragic-hero

An Apology for Poetry by Sir Philip Sidney

In "An Apology for Poetry," Sir Philip Sidney sets out to restore poetry to its rightful place among the arts. Poetry has gotten a bad name in Elizabethan England, disrespected by many of Sidney's contemporaries. But, Sidney contends, critics of poetry do not understand what poetry really is: they have been misled by modern poetry, which is frequently bad. If one understands the true nature of poetry, one will see, as Sidney shows in his essay, that poetry is in fact the "monarch" of the arts. Sidney does so by articulating a theory of poetry, largely drawn from classical sources, as a tool for teaching virtue and the poet as a semi-divine

figure capable of imagining a more perfect version of nature. Armed with this definition, Sidney proceeds to address the major criticisms made of the art of poetry and of the poets who practice it, refuting them with brilliant rhetorical skill.

Following the seven-part structure of a classical oration, Sidney begins with an exordium, or introduction. He tells an anecdote about horse-riding, noting that, like his riding instructor Giovanni Pietro Pugliano, he will not dwell so much on the writing of poetry as the contemplation and appreciation of it. Since he has become a poet, he feels obliged to say something to restore the reputation of his unelected vocation.

Sidney begins his defense of poetry by noting that poetry was the first of the arts, coming before philosophy and history. Indeed, many of the famous classical philosophers and historians wrote in poetry, and even those who wrote in prose, like Plato and Herodotus, wrote poetically—that is, they used poetic style to come up with philosophical allegories, in the case of Plato, or to supply vivid historical details, in the case of Herodotus. Indeed, without borrowing from poetry, historians and philosophers would never have become popular, Sidney claims. One can get some indication of the respect in which poets were held in the ancient world by examining the names they were given in Latin and Greek, vates and poietes. Vates means "seer" or "prophet," and in the classical world, poetry was considered to convey important knowledge about the future. Poietes means maker, and this title reflects the fact that poets, like God, create new and more perfect realities using their imaginations.

Sidney then moves to the proposition, where offers a definition of poetry as an art of imitation that teaches its audience through "delight," or pleasure. In its ability to embody ideas in compelling images, poetry is like "a speaking picture." Sidney then specifies that the kind of poetry he is interested in is not religious or philosophical, but rather that which is written by "right poets." This ideal form of poetry is not limited in its subject matter by what exists in nature, but instead creates perfect examples of virtue that, while maybe not real, is well-suited to teaching readers about what it means to be good. Poetry is a more effective teacher of virtue than history or philosophy because, instead of being limited to the realm of abstract ideas, like philosophy, or to the realm of what has actually happened, like history, poetry can present perfect examples of virtue in a way best suited to instruct its readers. The poet can embody the philosopher's "wordish descriptions" of virtue in compelling characters or stories, which are more pleasurable to read and easier to understand and remember, like Aesop's Fables. The poet should therefore be considered the "right popular philosopher," since with perfect and pleasurable examples of virtue, like Aeneas from Virgil's Aeneid, poetry can "move" readers to act virtuously. Reading poetry about virtue, Sidney writes, is like taking a "medicine of cherries."

Following the classical structure from this examination to the refutation, Sidney rebuts the criticisms made of poetry by "poet-haters." Sidney outlines the four most serious charges against poetry: that poetry is a waste of time, that the poet is a liar, that poetry corrupts our morals, and that Plato banished poets from his ideal city in the Republic. He highlights that

all of these objections rest on the power of poetry to move its audience, which means that they are actually reasons to praise poetry. For if poetry is written well, it has enormous power to move its audience to virtue.

Following a short peroration, or conclusion, in which he summarizes the arguments he has made, Sidney devotes the final portion of his essay to a digression on modern English poetry. There is relatively little modern English poetry of any quality, Sidney admits. However, is not because there is anything wrong with English or with poetry, but rather with the absurd way in which poets write poems and playwrights write plays. Poets must be educated to write more elegantly, borrowing from classical sources without apishly imitating them, as so many poets, orators, and scholars did in Sidney's time. For English is an expressive language with all the apparatus for good literature, and it is simply waiting for skillful writers to use it. Sidney brings "An Apology for Poetry" to a close on this hopeful note—but not before warning readers that, just as poetry has the power to immortalize people in verse, so too does it have the power to condemn others to be forgotten by ignoring them altogether. The critics of poetry should therefore take Sidney's arguments seriously.

Summary

Sidney tells the reader that he and Edward Wotton once studied horseback riding with Giovanni Pietro Pugliano at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. Pugliano did not simply teach them about the art of riding horses (how to do it) but invited them to reflect on the activity in a philosophical manner (why one should do it).

Pugliano argued that soldiers are the most noble of noblemen, and that "no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince" as skill on horseback. He also praised the nobility of the horse, and spoke so persuasively that Sidney admits that if he was not a "logician," he might have wished that he could have been a horse. Sidney concludes from this that "self love is better than any gilding."

Sidney turns to poetry as another example of this phenomenon: how "strong examples and weak arguments" can nonetheless be convincing. He says that he has "slipped into the title of the poet" and so has been provoked to defend his "unelected vocation" because poetry has fallen from its privileged position among the arts to be the "laughing-stock of children." He jokes that there is danger of "civil war among the Muses."

Sidney argues that the critics of poetry are ungrateful. In most cultures, poetry is the means by which the young are educated, the "first nurse" who introduces children to learning.

The earliest Greek writers (Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod) were poets, and helped to "draw with their charming sweetness the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge." Archaic poets, like Livius and Ennius in the Latin tradition, inspired people to become more civilized. The same could be said of Dante, Boccace (Boccaccio), and Petrarch, in Italian,

and Gower and Chaucer in English, who "encouraged and delighted" later poets "to beautify our mother tongue."

In the ancient world, Sidney explains, there was no real distinction between poetry and the other arts: poetry was the language of all learning. The earliest Greek scientists, like Thales, Empedocles, and Parmenides, "sang their philosophy in verses." The same could be said for moral philosophy (Pythagoras, Phocylides), the art of war (Tyrtaeus), and politics (Solon). Even Plato, who was famous for his critiques of poetry, wrote in a poetic manner: his dialogues are fictions, complete "poetical describing" of circumstance and named symbols (Gyges's ring, for example). The great historians, such as Herodotus, "either stole or usurped" from poetry their description of human emotions, the details of historical events that they never could have seen themselves, and the orations they never could have heard.

These great writers would never have become popular, Sidney suggests, if they hadn't written poetically. As is clear across world cultures (Sidney cites Turkey, Ireland, and Wales), poets are widely respected by the people, however uneducated the general populace may be. Even where there have been attempts to eradicate learning, such as in the conquests of Wales, poetry survives.

Because most of the examples considered thus far have been Greek and Roman, Sidney now considers what names these ancient cultures gave "this now scorned skill." At Rome, a poet was referred to by the Latin noun vates, which means a seer or prophet. Sidney takes this as evidence of a great respect for the activity of the poet. He mentions the various cultural practices that linked poetry and prophecy, such as the sortes Virgilianae, whereby one turned to a random line in Virgil and read it as a kind of prophetic statement about one's life, such as the ancient English king Albinus did. Sidney notes, too, that the English word charm derives from the Latin word carmen, which means "poem" or "song," and that the prophecies of the oracle at Delphi and the Sibyl were delivered in verse.

It wasn't just the Romans who thought of the poet as prophet, Sidney claims. For the prophet David wrote the Psalms—"a divine poem," Sidney writes—in verse. Sidney notes that not only the form but also the style of the Psalms is poetic, with its metaphors and similes. Although Sidney says that he runs the risk of "profan[ing]" the Psalms by referring to them with the modern word poetry, he suggests that the comparison points to the fact that, if the name be "rightly applied," it's clear that poetry "deserveth not to be scourged out of the church of God."

Turning to the Greeks, Sidney notes that in Greek a poet is called poietes, which literally means "maker." (The English word derives from the Greek.) Sidney feels that this is a very good name, because, while all other arts have to do with "the works 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.

The poet also creates perfect people with perfect virtue, creating a paradigmatic lover as The agenes (in Heliodorus's ancient novel), an exemplary friend in Pylades (in Euripides's Orestes), an extraordinary hero in Orlando (in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso), a perfect prince in Cyrus (in Xenophon's Anabasis), and a most generally excellent man in Aeneas (in Virgil's Aeneid).

The virtue of every "artificer," Sidney writes, consists not in the actual creation of a work of art, but in the "idea, or fore-conceit of the work." This means that the genius of the poet resides in coming up with the idea of the perfect Cyrus or Aeneas. It is in this capacity of imagination that the poet most resembles God, "the heavenly Maker of that maker," whose elevation of humankind is nowhere more visible than in humankind's ability to perfect God's nature through poetry.

But in order to make the truth of the matter more "palpable," Sidney now will depart from etymology and go for a precise description of poetry. Sidney's definition is simple: poetry is "an art of imitation," or, as Aristotle called it, mimesis. This is a representation or "counterfeiting" of reality. Sidney uses the metaphor of a "speaking picture," the end of which is "to teach and delight."

Sidney subdivides the definition he has just offered, claiming that there are three major categories of poetry. The central kind, "CHIEF, both in antiquity and excellency," is poetry that imitates "the inconceivable excellencies of God." Namely, David's poetry in the Psalms, Solomon's in the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, Moses and Deborah and Job, and so on. Although they were not Christians, pagan poets like Orpheus and Amphion (both mythical) and Homer did the same.

The second kind of poetry is philosophical. This includes poetry about moral philosophy, such as the work of Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, and Cato, or about natural philosophy, such as Lucretius's On the Nature of Things, or Virgil's Georgics. This can also be about astronomy, as in Manilius and Pontanus, or about history, as in Lucan. Those who don't enjoy these poets, Sidney writes, can only blame themselves for not savoring "the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge." This poetry is in some way limited by its subject. The third and final category of poetry does not have any such limitation. This is the poetry written by "right poets." If philosophical poets are like painters who paint the people in front of them, "right poets" are like painters who use their imagination to paint in colors "fittest for the eye to see." Hence a good painter does not paint the Roman heroine Lucretia, whom the painter never saw, but rather uses Lucretia as the "outward beauty" of the virtue she represents. These "right poets," like the best painters, create in order to "teach and delight." They are not limited by what is or has been in the world, as the historian or philosopher might be, but rather enter into "divine consideration of what may be, and

should be." These "right poets" deserve the title of vates, and teach their readers to be virtuous.

Sidney notes further subdivisions of poetry, naming heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satirical, iambic, elegiac, and pastoral poetry. Although these differ in form and content, most are written in verse. But Sidney makes the important point that verse is merely one way in which poetry can appear, and is not the "cause" of poetry. Indeed, some of the best poets never wrote in verse, such as Xenophon in his descriptions of Cyrus, or Heliodorus in his narration of the love of Theagenes and Chariclea. Poetrs generally do write in verse, however, because they do not write in a "table-talk fashion" and want to exercise care in writing "according to the dignity of the subject."

Now that he has specified the kind of poet and poetry he is interested in surveying, Sidney enters into an examination of the activity of the poet in order to secure "a more favourable sentence."

The final end of learning, Sidney states, is to make imperfect humans—trapped in "their clay lodgings," or bodies—as good as possible. Some have thought that this tendency toward virtue could best be cultivated through astronomy and natural philosophy, others through music and mathematics, but all of these revealed themselves to be imperfect, since study of these subjects does not compel one to be virtuous. They are mere "serving sciences"—means to the end of some kind of immediate knowledge that only indirectly relates to the ultimate end of "the mistress knowledge," the Greek sophia, which Sidney suggests is ultimately self-knowledge. Hence the saddle-maker makes a saddle in order to facilitate horsemanship; the horseman seeks to ride well in order to participate in some ideal of "soldiery," and so on. The arts that do the most to serve some ultimate, rather than proximate, end deserve to be considered "princes over all the rest." Sidney feels that poetry is such an art.

Among the primary challengers for the title of prince of the arts is moral philosophy. Sidney imagines moral philosophers confronting him "with a sullen gravity," speaking to him "sophistically against subtlety" and in general full of moral paradoxes. Sidney describes how philosophers try to use logic to come up with a way of teaching virtue, and try to master the passions "by showing the generalities that contain it, and the specialities [sic] that are derived from it."

The historian, on the other hand, "laden with old mouse-eaten records," is similarly bound by the discourse of history. He knows more about the past than the present. He claims to know more about virtue than the philosopher because, while the philosopher teaches "by certain abstract considerations," the historian teaches "active" virtue as embodied in historical events such as the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt. According to this schematization, Sidney explains, the philosopher gives the "precept" and the historian gives the example.

But it is poetry, Sidney claims, that deserves to be considered the most elevated of the arts. Sidney compares the poet with the historian and the philosopher—he ignores the lawyer who, though concerned with peoples' manners, is not interested in improving people—and observes that neither philosophy nor history can teach virtue on its own. One gives the moral principle, the other the historical example, but one or the other can not teach virtue independently. The moral principle is too abstract, the historical example not abstract enough.

The poet, however, can give both abstract principles and compelling moral examples. In fact, the poet can give "a perfect picture" of what the philosopher says should be done. The poet makes an image out of what to the philosopher was merely "wordish description," which would otherwise "lie dark before the imaginative and judging power." The "speaking picture of poesy" thus illuminates abstract truths using these compelling examples. Examples from literature, such as Anchises speaking about patriotism as Troy falls, teach readers much more about virtue than the philosopher's description of it. Sidney lists other examples, and notes how in common language the names of characters or mythical figures have become synonymous with certain emotions or types of people (i.e., Oedipus is synonymous with remorse, Medea with bittersweet revenge).

Sidney concludes that the "feigned image" of poetry does more to teach readers about virtue than the "regular instruction" of philosophy. He cites the most famous example of moral teaching in Western culture, Christ's preaching in the Gospels, and notes that, while Christ could have advocated the general importance of charity and goodness, he instead spoke in concrete, "instructing" parables. The philosopher may teach but does so "obscurely," for those who already know enough to understand him or her. The poet, on the other hand, is "the right popular philosopher," teaching virtue in a way that everyone can understand.

But what of history, which should have a monopoly on compelling examples? Here Sidney once again draws on Aristotle, who wrote in the Poetics that poetry is more philosophical and, in Sidney's translation, "ingenious" than history because it deals with the universal (katholou) rather than the particular (kathekaston). Of course, it is good to record what actually happened. But poetry isn't limited by that: the poet can write about what should have happened: of a great hero, such as Cyrus, not as he was, but as he should have been. The "feigned" Cyrus or Aeneas is "more doctrinable" than the true Cyrus or Aeneas, more capable of instructing readers about virtue because he is more clearly an embodiment thereof. Sidney gives other examples before concluding that the historian is limited by "his bare WAS," whereas the poet can create an example to suit precisely what he or she is trying to communicate.

Sidney takes pains to emphasize that a "feigned" example—although technically not historically true, or historical at all—is as useful for teaching as a real example. He cites

examples from Herodotus, Livy, and Xenophon, all of whom tell fictional stories about noblemen trying to deceive kings, and getting punished for it in the end. These stories will surely be as compelling as factual narratives to one who is considering how to deceive in a similar way, Sidney reasons.

The poet, then, is indeed prince of the arts, because he can come up with compelling examples about any subject under the sun. Unlike history, which is "captive to the truth of a foolish world," poetry can present perfect examples in the most compelling and instructive way, eliminating moral ambiguities and contradictions, of which Sidney cites several examples. Indeed, it is possible that, as Caesar said of Sulla, history could do more harm than good to one trying to learn virtue.

Continuing the metaphor of competition among the arts for the title of prince, Sidney concludes the comparison with history and philosophy by remarking that the poet triumphs by "setting forward" examples and "moving to well-doing" through the compelling way in which he or she does so. Not even the greatest lover of philosophy would say that the philosopher moves a listener or reader more effectively than the poet, and moving is the most important part of teaching. Indeed, it is both its cause and effect, for in order to be taught, one must have a desire to be taught, and good teaching moves one to do what is taught.

Sidney again cites Aristotle, who said that the goal of teaching is not knowledge (gnosis) but action (praxis). The philosopher may show someone the way, and describe the end one strives to reach, but in his or her complex analysis may divert one from the path of virtue. Philosophers think that, once one has mastered the passions enough to concentrate and understand what they teach, "the inward light of each mind" will light the way to virtue. But Sidney claims that actually being moved to act virtuously is another problem altogether, and requires more than just understanding abstract philosophical ideas.

If philosophy gives one a clear sense of the complexity of an issue, poetry entices one to learn it by giving a "sweet prospect into the way." It is as if, at the beginning of a journey through a vineyard, the poet gives the reader a cluster of grapes, a taste of the reward at the end. Just as adults teach children to take medicine by hiding it in something sweet, so does poetry hide virtue in the appealing stories of heroes like Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, and Aeneas. If the morals of these tales were told directly to the listener—as philosophy does—they would be rejected. Even things which are inherently repulsive, like suffering or monsters, give readers some kind of pleasure when they read them in a story, as Aristotle noticed. Therefore, poetry is a kind of "medicine of cherries," giving pleasure while also delivering the medicine of virtue.

Sidney illustrates this with two examples, starting with Menenius Agrippa, a Roman politician who reconciled the people of Rome with the Roman senate by telling a moral allegory about mutiny, in which he compared the state to a body that conspires against its

stomach, and ends up starving itself. This story led to the reconciliation of the problem, having "such effect in the people as I never read that only words brought forth." The second example is of Nathan, a prophet from the Hebrew Bible, whom God sent to bring David, the Psalmist, back to the faith after having abandoned religion. Nathan told David an allegory about a man whose lamb was stolen from him, of which Sidney says that "the application [was] most true, but the discourse itself feigned." This caused David to reflect on his actions and return to religion.

From these stories, Sidney says, it's clear that the poet can "draw the mind" more effectively than the other arts. If the arts and the learning they yield are meant to improve readers in some way, then poetry must be the best of the arts and the poet the best of the artists: "in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman."

Sidney now turns from the "works" of poetry—what it can do—to the "parts" of poetry, or its various different kinds. Even if readers find poetry on the whole to be virtuous, Sidney wants to be sure that all of its component parts are examined so as to find anything objectionable. Sidney acknowledges that some kinds of poetry are mixtures of genres (e.g., tragicomic) or of forms (e.g., Boethius's mixture of poetry and prose), and will not be able to address them all, but if the component genres are found to be good, these mixtures must be good, too.

Sidney goes through a number of minor genres of poetry that are "misliked" by critics. The first is the pastoral, which some find trivial or petty, but which can actually communicate profound lessons in what seem to be simple fables. The second is the "lamenting elegiac," which expresses woe or critiques the human tendency to strong feeling. The third is the "bitter, but wholesome iambic," which openly decries moral corruption. The third is satire, which mocks folly in all sorts of people, including the reader.

Moving to major genres, Sidney argues that people criticize comedy because bad actors and directors have "made [it] odious." But Sidney says in response to critics that comedy reflects life as it actually is, and people as they actually are, and—just as in geometry we must see the curved as well as the straight lines, and in mathematics we must count the odd as well as the even numbers—so we must examine the "filthiness" of life as a "foil" for virtue. By seeing imperfect characters on stage, we learn to identify them in life. We don't learn to behave badly by watching such characters, but rather learn to identify our own faults, which might otherwise remain invisible to us.

In a similar way, tragedy, through evoking "admiration and commiseration" with its suffering characters, teaches us about the uncertainty in life. It scares the powerful, warning kings about the dangers of tyranny, and is therefore clearly a useful genre.

Next Sidney turns to lyric poetry, which praises virtue, offers moral precepts, and is often used to praise God. Sidney states that he is frequently moved by lyric, even in the rustic

forms he might hear in rural England. He believes that it can give courage, citing the poetry he heard in Hungary, and the historical example of the Lacedaemonians (Spartans) who sang lyrics about valor at home as well as on the battlefield. Pindar, the great Greek lyric poet, may sometimes praise seemingly small athletic victories, but that can be blamed on a broader Greek tendency to put too high a value on athletic competition, rather than on poetry itself.

The final genre Sidney addresses is heroic verse, whose very name should "daunt all backbiters." How could anyone criticize poetry that tells of Achilles, Cyrus, and Aeneas, among other great heroes? This kind of poetry teaches the highest and best kind of virtue, and is therefore the best kind of poetry, since it makes the reader most eager to be virtuous. It also gives one the best examples to imitate in life, such as Aeneas, who gives a good model for all aspects of behavior.

Sidney concludes this tour of the poetic genres, which has shown all of them to be good in some way, by comparing the "poet-whippers" to "some good women" who always feel ill, but don't know why exactly: these critics don't like poetry in general, but, if they like virtue, they must like what poetry does to its readers.

Sidney summarizes his arguments thus far: poetry is the oldest form of human learning, found in every culture and given much respect by the Greeks and the Romans. The poet does not "learn a conceit out a matter," the way a philosopher does, but "maketh matter for a conceit," creating a concrete thing in which to express an idea. Furthermore, poetry cannot be evil because it teaches goodness. In this way, the philosopher is a better teacher than the historian, who can never speak of moral absolutes, and surpasses the philosopher in his ability to move his audience. Even the Bible uses poetry in the Psalms, and Christ himself employed parables, which are fictional narratives of a kind.

Sidney now turns to refuting critiques made of poetry. He begins with the superficial ones. First of all, Sidney notes that "poet-haters" (he uses the Greek term misomousaioi) like to criticize poetry because it gets them attention. Critics of this kind don't deserve a substantial response, just ridicule. Some writers, like Erasmus in the Praise of Folly, make absurd claims to attract the reader's attention to an important or non-intuitive argument. But generally critics of poetry are merely fools.

What many of the poet-haters object to is verse. Sidney has already explained that verse is not an essential quality of poetry. But even if verse was an essential part of poetry, to speak carefully and beautifully must be a good thing. What is more, verse is very useful for memory, which is an important part of learning. Indeed, all of the other arts use verse as a tool for memorization. If verse is the best tool for memory, "the only handle of knowledge," a reasonable person can't object to it.

Now Sidney moves on to address four more substantial critiques of poetry, critiques that cannot be so easily dismissed. The first is that poetry is a waste of time. Sidney objects that this critique "begs the question": it relies on the principle which is under discussion, namely the value of poetry. If one believes that poetry moves to virtue and is therefore a good thing, then it cannot be a waste of time.

The second major criticism, deriving ultimately from Plato's critique of poetry in the Republic, is that poetry is the "mother of lies," and the poet is a great liar. Sidney responds by claiming that the poet is actually the "least liar" of all writers, since it is in fact impossible for a poet to lie. An astronomer or geometer or physician—natural scientists talking about the real world—inevitably get things wrong. But the poet does not claim to talk about reality, so he or she cannot, by definition, lie: "he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth."

Poetry may contain things that are not true, but these are not lies; they are fictions, and whoever doesn't understand this is being willfully perverse. Whoever thinks that Aesop records true histories should be "chronicled among the beasts he writeth of." For even a child seeing a play understands that the setting is not real. The narration of a poem or a play is not meant to reflect reality as it really was, but rather "an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention." Even when a poet uses names that belonged to real people, it is not to make claims about those actual people but rather to signal that the character in question is like those people (for instance, a king, if he is called Cyrus).

The third major criticism is that poetry corrupts the morals of its audience, inciting lust. Sidney grants that much poetry has to do with love and lust. However, this is not the fault of poetry itself, but rather of the people who write it, and one should not blame poetry for the way certain authors have abused it. Indeed, the power of its "sweet charming force" is actually proof of its power to move its readers—the same power that can move to virtue. Medicine can be similarly abused, as can the law, and religious texts, without discrediting those branches of knowledge. If someone uses a sword to kill another person, one does not blame the sword, but the person who used it. Similarly, in claiming that poetry corrupts the sexual morality of its audience, critics are actually endorsing poetry's power, which in the right hands promotes virtue.

In the same vein, critics say that poetry saps the courage and warlike spirit of a nation, and that the general moral state of England was better before poetry was popular. Sidney rejects the idea that there was ever a time when poetry was not popular in England, and cites several examples of poetry being used to promote courage and military spirit. Sidney cites the example of Alexander the Great, who rejected the teaching of Aristotle in favor of the poetry of Homer. Sidney cites a similar example from Roman history, of the Roman general Fulvius's love for the archaic Latin poet Ennius.

The fourth and final criticism that Sidney rebuts is the claim that poetry must be bad because Plato banished it from his ideal city in the Republic. Sidney claims that Plato was in fact the most poetic of the philosophers. He suggests that one of the reasons Plato might have turned against poetry was that philosophers, after having learned much from poetry, tried to discredit it to establish their own dominance.

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Philosophers grew to hate poets because philosophy could not please so well as poetry, and could not capture the affection of the people in the same way, and were even expelled from some communities. It is said that the lyric poets Simonides and Pindar had a positive effect on the tyrant Hiero the First, and helped turn him into a just king, while Plato was made into a slave. Indeed, he invites readers to examine Plato's ideal city: women were shared among men, in what seems to the modern reader like an immoral social practice.

Plato doesn't object to the sexual immortality of poetry, which is what bothers Sidney's contemporaries, but rather to poetry's promotion of seemingly heretical ideas about the gods. But these only reflected commonly held beliefs in Greece, and had nothing to do with poetry itself. Therefore, Plato meant to banish poets only because they very effectively promoted ideas that he didn't like, which means that he actually believed in the power of poetry and thus indirectly praised it when banning poets from his republic.

Sidney invites his readers to consider that, alongside the criticisms that people have made of poetry, many famous people have also praised it. Aristotle would not have written his Poetics if he thought poetry shouldn't be written, Sidney reasons. Sidney concludes that we should "plant more laurels" to crown poets with, instead of tolerating the "ill-favoured breath" that some critics want to blow upon the "clear springs of poesy."

Sidney decides that, since he has gone on so long, he should consider why there is so little good poetry in England, a country in which the other arts flourish. For many other countries have strong traditions of poetry, like Scotland and France and Italy, and there used to be

plenty of good poetry in England, even in times of war. The consequence of this vacuum is that there is a proliferation of bad poetry, giving poetry a bad name. Indeed, most of Sidney's contemporaries don't deserve the title of poet, and he claims that he never sought it.

For poets cannot simply claim the title of poets without the proper skill. A famous old proverb says that poets must be born poets, but Sidney says that even talented young minds must be educated in order to become good poets. The chief instruments of this education are "imitation" of classical authors and "exercise" through practicing different kinds of writing. If students do these activities properly, they will eventually learn to create their own original poetry inspired or influenced by classical authors but not in slavish imitation of them.

Sidney then offers some comments on famous English poets. He praises Chaucer, who "in that misty time could see so clearly." He praises the Earl of Surrey, and makes an indirect praise of Spenser by naming his "Shepherds' Kalendar." But in general what Sidney offers are criticisms: modern poets try to sound old, and write inelegant verse.
Dramatists do not observe the classical unities of space and time, and so present ridiculous plots that take place over many months or years and in different countries, which does not seem at all realistic. Furthermore, dramatists stick too closely to historical details, forgetting that a playwright must adapt history to suit the plot and substance of a tragedy. He suggests that they learn from classical tragedy how to make use of the messenger speech to report action that cannot be represented on stage. Finally, modern playwrights too often tell a story from the beginning, when instead they should start at the place best suited for narration.

In addition to these "gross absurdities," by which modern authors fail to meet the standards established by classical literature, they mix genres, and abuse them. They mix kings with clowns, creating "mongrel tragicomedy." Furthermore, they think that comedies must always be funny and provoke laughter. But Sidney points out that laughter is only one kind of delight that comedy provokes, which comes from "disproportion" to the normal human experience and to nature (i.e., deformed creatures and monsters). Sidney advises that comedy shouldn't just be about matters that provoke laughter, but should also provide the kind of "delightful teaching" that is the end of true poetry. Audiences should not be invited to laugh at things that actually should deserve condemnation, like sins, or pity, like an old beggar. Instead, laughter should be reserved for delightful things, like a ridiculously pedantic schoolmaster. Sidney praises George Buchanan for having matched tone with content in his tragedies.

Sidney then apologies for spending so much time on drama, but says that he does so because there is relatively little poetry of other kinds in England, except lyric. Modern lyric, too, is poorly written, as modern lyric poets are generally too cold. They need to portray the passions with more energia, a Greek term that means "vigor."

Beyond the poor application of particular genres, modern English writers generally confuse fancy-sounding language for eloquence. The problem occurs not just in poetry, but also in the learned discourses of scholars, who "cast sugar and spice upon very dish that is served at the table," instead of tastefully seasoning their language with fewer classical references and big words. Classical authors might have expressed themselves effectively, but when modern writers imitate them too closely, or cite them too often, it falls flat. Writers also come across as ridiculous or sophistical when they try to use very elaborate comparisons, or similitudes. Classical authors actually used such devices very rarely, and Sidney approves of the less fancy speech of "small-learned courtiers" because it sounds more natural, which is the goal of art.

After apologizing for straying from poetry to oratory, Sidney considers the fitness of modern languages, and particularly English, for writing poetry. Sometimes people criticize English for having less grammar than Latin, but Sidney sees this as an advantage, because people do not have to study so much to learn how to express themselves effectively in their mother tongue. English is also capable of achieving both "sweetness" and "majesty" in its meter, unlike Italian, Dutch, or French, and also has more possibilities for rhyme than other modern languages.

Sidney reiterates that poetry has a bad reputation in England because of the bad verse written by "poet-apes," and not because of any intrinsic fault of poetry itself. He invites his readers to respect poets and poetry as teachers of virtue. Sidney warns his readership that poets are also capable of immortalizing people in their verse, so the names of people who respect poetry will "flourish in the printers' shops" and shall "dwell upon superlatives" forever. The critics of poetry, on the other hand, will never succeed in their romantic endeavors because they will get poets to write them sonnets to help woo their beloveds, and will not be remembered after their death for want of a compelling and memorable epitaph.

Poetry vs. History and Philosophy

In response to the disregard for poetry shared by many Elizabethan intellectuals, Sir Philip Sidney insists in "An Apology for Poetry" that the poet and his or her craft should be taken even more seriously than the supposedly more respectable fields of philosophy and history. In "An Apology for Poetry," Sidney mounts a courtroom-style case (i.e., an apologia) for imaginative writing, following a traditional structure according to which, after an introduction, he articulates the qualities that make poetry superior to philosophy and history. Drawing on examples from Greek and Roman classics—which would have given his argument extra authority in the highly traditional world of 16th-century England—Sidney argues that all good writing is poetical, because poetical writing is the most vivid and therefore the most able to teach and delight the reader.

Sidney points out that the 16th-century hierarchy of the arts is a modern (and therefore inferior) invention. In ancient times, there was no real distinction made between philosophy,

history, and poetry, and the best ancient writers wrote poetically. Many ancient philosophers wrote poetry, such as Solon (who wrote an early Athenian constitution) and Plato, whose dialogues are decorated with the "flowers of poetry." The best historians, such as Herodotus, "stole, or usurped, of poetry" their descriptions of human feelings, granular historical detail, and the long speeches they report but never could have heard. The Romans communicated their respect for poetry by calling the poet a vates, a seer or prophet, suggesting that the content of poetry is important "heart-ravishing knowledge," as important as any other kind of information. Sidney, covering all his bases, notes that even the Bible is a kind of poetry: the Psalms are "a divine poem" that makes the reader "see God coming in His majesty," uniting the poet's skill in description with his or her ability as vates to predict the future

In Sidney's view, poetry is superior to philosophy and history because of its ability to present vivid, compelling examples to the reader not simply of what has been or will be, but what should be. The philosopher can only articulate an abstract description of an ethical principle. The poet, however, "giveth a perfect picture of it" because, using his or her imagination "coupleth the general notion with the particular example." The poet concretizes an abstract principle in a perfect example for what the philosopher is only able to give a "wordish description." The historian, on the other hand, does indeed provide many useful examples of human virtue from the past, but these examples are not necessarily more instructive for the reader. Oftentimes, an example from literature is "more doctrinable" (i.e., more instructive) than a true, imperfect historical example—than "his bare WAS." "If the poet do his part aright," Sidney explains, "he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned; in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed; where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal, without he will be poetical, of a perfect pattern." Poetry therefore synthesizes philosophy's ability to articulate moral principles with history's ability to give concrete examples. This makes the poet "the right popular philosopher" since he or she is able to communicate virtue to everyone, not just the learned, through his or her power to embody abstract ideas in concrete examples.

Finally, poetry is a more effective teaching tool than history or philosophy because it compels the reader to learn virtue through its vivid examples. These vivid examples are able to move the reader in a way that abstract language cannot. Sidney explains that "moving"—that is, delighting the reader in some way—is "well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching," for "who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught?" Poetry moves the reader to virtue because it "doth not only show the way [to virtue], but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it." Therefore, poetry "doth draw the mind more effectively than any other art doth." Poetry is thus particularly effective for educating children since it sugarcoats moral learning, like a "medicine of cherries." In other words, if moral lessons are couched in pleasant stories, young readers will be educated almost without knowing. As they read for pleasure, they learn almost against their will.

Sidney asserts that poetry is the "monarch" of the arts because of its ability to unite the best parts of philosophy and history in vivid, pleasing, and memorable examples. These examples teach readers about virtue sometimes without them even knowing. All of the best philosophy and history, and even the Bible, draws on poetry to teach the reader through delighting them, just as Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" makes its compelling case through vivid prose, an effective rhetorical structure, and memorable examples.

Poetry, Creation, and Imagination

As part of the case he makes in "An Apology for Poetry," Sir Philip Sidney provides a theory of what poetry is and how it works. This includes a taxonomy of poetic genres, both ancient and modern. Sidney's influential formulation begins with Aristotle's traditional definition of poetry (and imaginative literature more broadly) as the imitation or mimesis of reality, but goes even further to suggest that poetry is the creation of new, more perfect realities through the imagination. The poet, Sidney argues, has an almost divine power of creation, and is able to perfect nature through his or her imagination, forming a bridge between original, "golden" nature and the fallen state of contemporary humanity.

At the center of Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"—again, as part of the traditional rhetorical structure he is following—is Aristotle's definition of poetry as imitation of reality. Sidney writes: "Poesy […] is an art of imitation; for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimesis; that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth." Sidney explains this using a metaphor from Plato, writing that poetry is "a speaking picture, with this end to teach and delight." Poetry, then, has a broader definition in "An Apology for Poetry" than it does in modern English. It does not have to be in verse, which is "no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified." Poets, though, do tend to speak in an elevated register "according to the dignity of the subject" they are writing about. According to Sidney, Poetry is a term broad enough to encompass not just Homer, but also Plato, Hesiod alongside Herodotus: it is something closer to imaginative literature (rather than merely the relation of fact) with some didactic end. Not only must one conceive of poetry as a broader literary category, but one must also place it in the context of "sciences" like history and philosophy, "skills" that help one achieve "virtuous action."

Again, following the traditional structure of a courtroom speech, Sidney divides poetry into three kinds—divine, philosophical (what is traditionally classified as "didactic"), and poetry written by "right poets." This last category refers to poets who write the kind of poetry that Sidney describes and praises throughout his essay. They "imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be." That is, they are like the vates, for they are not bound by certain knowledge but instead "range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be." Following a classical taxonomy, Sidney further subdivides poetry into "heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral," which he will refer to later in his essay. But these specific

genres and forms should all be merely instances of the essay's expansive conception of poetry, which is defined less by form (i.e., verse) and more by content.

But Sidney goes beyond classical definitions in suggesting that the poet does not just imitate reality, but can perfect it. The poet is the most excellent example of human superiority to the rest of God's creation. Sidney plays on the etymology of the word poet, which in Greek means "maker." The other sciences study nature as God made it, but "Only the poet […] lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature" and makes things "either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew; forms such as never were in nature" like monsters or heroes, or simply morally perfect individuals. Through their imagination, the poet can exceed the "the narrow warrant" of God's creation, not bound by natural laws but rather "freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit." The fallenness or imperfection of this world is both a Christian and classical commonplace. Sidney accords the poet-maker the role of restorer, or perfecter, of this imperfect world. For since nature's "world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" world.

The poet is therefore is not just a special kind of writer or thinker, but a special kind of human being, one who has access to uncorrupted nature. God, "the heavenly Maker of that maker," created people in his likeness. But, Sidney argues, God set the poet "beyond and over all the works" in his creation. This is clear when "with the force of a divine breath he [i.e., the poet] bringeth things forth surpassing her doings." The poet's imagination is an example of "our erected wit" which "maketh us know what perfection is" even if "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it." All the sciences, and poetry in particular, help to "draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." Poetry, then, is something holy, and the poet is not just a writer, but something closer to a priest or even a prophet.

Sidney's vision of poetry and the poet's role is much more expansive than one might initially expect. At its heart is Aristotle's notion of poetry as imitation, the creation of "a speaking picture" that represents reality. But the "picture" is less a photograph and more a painting, or a Hollywood film: an embellishment of the reality that is represented. Combining classical theories of poetry as imitation with a Christian worldview, Sidney's poetry does not just teach virtue, but creates it in the form of the more perfect reality of the poet's imagination. Even though Christian theology dictates that humans can never achieve perfection, the poet, in describing "what may or should be," allows humankind to get a glimpse of it.

Defending Poetry

When Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" was published in 1595, it bore two titles: "The Defence of Poesie" and "An Apologie for Poetrie." These titles alert readers to the fact that "An Apology for Poetry" is in fact a written oration with the explicit goal of defending poetry against the critiques of Elizabethan intellectuals. Upon close inspection, it is clear

that “An Apology for Poetry” has all seven parts of a classical courtroom speech. Throughout, Sidney attacks critics of poetry for being uncharitable readers, or confusing low-quality modern verse for true poetry. But the most substantive rebuttal comes in the second half of the defense, where Sidney refutes four traditional critiques made of poetry. “An Apology for Poetry,” like the speech of a lawyer in court, seeks to persuade its readers and thereby win a case: here, to exonerate poetry from certain accusations made against it, as well as to restore poetry to its proper standing in the world of arts and letters.

Although written to be read, not spoken, Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry” follows the classical seven-part form of a courtroom speech. It has an exordium or introduction (a “hook”), proposition (definition of poetry), division (taxonomy of poetry), examination (in-depth account of each kind), refutation (against four charges), peroration (flashy conclusion), and digression (on modern English poetry). The very structure of the work is meant to be persuasive: “An Apology for Poetry” seeks to change the reader’s mind. Furthermore, the forensic speech was a commonplace of Renaissance humanist education, and thus reflects Sidney’s social standing, as well as the class of his readership. This book was intended for the highly educated, and emerges from the culture of the court. “An Apology for Poetry” opens with an anecdote about learning horsemanship—the quintessential activity of the aristocrat—in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. The instructor taught not only the art of riding, but also “sought to enrich our minds with the contemplation” of the activity. The riding instructor is a figure for Sidney himself, who will not teach the reader to write poetry, but to appreciate its place in the broader scheme of the arts.

If the implied defendant (accused) of “An Apology for Poetry” is poetry itself, and the implied jury is the reader, then the implied plaintiffs (accuser) are Sidney’s fellow Elizabethan intellectuals, who through malice or misunderstanding do not accord poetry the respect it deserves. At the very opening of the essay, Sidney calls those who “professing learning, inveigh against poetry” ungrateful, since they insult “the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge.” In other words, their humanist educations probably consisted largely of reading and analyzing poetry. Later on, Sidney refers to “poet-haters” who simply attack poetry for the sake of getting attention. The arguments of this group are not made in good faith, and so cannot be taken seriously. They also fall apart under logical scrutiny; poet-haters object above all to the form of poetry, but Sidney argues that, “being in itself sweet and orderly, and being best for memory,” verse is “the only handle of knowledge” and as such is unimpeachable. The virtues of poetry are so clear and self-evident, Sidney suggests, he must only summarize them in order to win.

In the refutation section, Sidney neutralizes the four main criticisms that have been made of poetry in some form or another since antiquity. The first criticism is that poetry is a waste of time. This is an instance, Sidney suggests, of begging the question, for if one accepts Sidney’s argument that poetry “teacheth and moveth to virtue” one must necessarily admit

that poetry is not a waste of time. Second, critics claim, poetry "is the mother of lies." In response, Sidney claims that "of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar." This is because the poet does not claim to describe reality, as an astronomer might, but rather invents his or her own realities, and so cannot lie about them. The poet "nothing affirthmeth, and therefore never lieth." The poet therefore does not tell the reader anything true, but also cannot lie. Third, poetry is "the nurse of abuse" and incites the reader to feelings of lust and sinfulness. Sidney grants that poetry can promote questionable values—but "shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?" If someone commits a crime with a sword, one would not blame the sword, but the person who used it. In fact, by arguing for the power of poetry to affect people's values, critics "prove the commendation" that poetry, used correctly, can promote good values. For every example of poetry making people lazy or unwarlike, Sidney offers instances in which poetry has made people more active and manly, such as Alexander the Great's love of Homer. The fourth and final criticism Sidney rebuts is the fact that Plato banished poetry from his ideal city in the Republic. Sidney describes Plato as the most "poetical" of philosophers, and argues that, like some poets, he has been misunderstood. For Plato meant not to ban poetry altogether, but rather "those wrong opinions of the Deity." Plato "banish[ed] the abuse, not the thing", and thereby gave "due honor to it." Readers should therefore think of Plato not as the poet's "adversary," but as his "patron."

In "An Apology for Poetry," Sidney makes several ingenious arguments to defend poetry against the criticisms commonly leveled against it. The essence of Sidney's defense is that poetry, like anything else, can be abused by unskillful or immoral poets, but that the misuse of poetry should be considered the exception and not the rule. If one considers poetry in good faith—and does not simply criticize to get attention, like some of the poet-haters—one sees that the major critiques of poetry are actually commendations, since they rest upon the premise that poetry is a powerful communicator of useful and moving fictions.

Poetry in the Vernacular

Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" was written around 1580 and published in 1595, some nine years after Sidney's death. Sidney therefore wrote one of the most important treatises on poetry in English before many of England's greatest Elizabethan poets came on the scene. He writes of Chaucer, Gower, and his contemporary Spenser, but never would read Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, and the other great poets of the day. It is perhaps not entirely surprising, then, that throughout "An Apology for Poetry," and particularly in its concluding "digression" on literature in vernacular tongues (i.e., modern European rather than ancient languages), Sidney elevates ancient above modern literature. Indeed, while Sidney defends imaginative literature in its ideal forms, he offers a bracing technical critique of the way modern poetry is (mis)written. But in fitting with the emergence of nationalism in the early modern era, he elevates English above other European languages for its expressive potential.

Sidney argues that, in general, ancient poetry has an originality and scope that is lacking from modern literature, and that England in particular suffers from a drought of good poetry. Sidney admires the poetry of Chaucer, Gower, Sackville, and others, but sees his own time as distinctly lacking in English poetry. While England is "mother of excellent minds," the country, Sidney claims, is a "hard step-mother of poets." England has not produced anything to rival the 16th-century literature of Scotland, France, or Italy. This is the result of a vicious cycle: the very disregard for poetry means that less good poetry is being written. Poetry "find[s] in our time a hard welcome in England," and therefore the very earth "decks our soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed." England can only really boast lyric poetry and drama, and according to Sidney, neither is particularly well-written.

Sidney offers concrete criticisms of contemporary English poetry, showing that "An Apology for Poetry" isn't just about praising literature. Indeed, since Sidney has articulated a poetic ideal, he prepares the reader to appreciate the ways in which contemporary vernacular poetry fails to meet it. Though Sidney approves of the tragedies of Buchanan and the pastoral verse of Spenser, few books of poetry "have poetical sinews in them," and dramatists create "gross absurdities" by mixing genres and ignoring the classical unities of time and place. Comic playwrights, furthermore, play into the hand of poetry's critics by "stir[ring] laughter in sinful things" and thereby leading their audiences into immorality. The result is that, "like an unmannerly daughter, showing a bad education," this mediocre and even bad poetry "causeth her mother Poesy's honesty to be called in question." In other words, mediocre modern literature gives poetry in general a bad name.

But, Sidney adds, modern literature does not have to be bad. Modern poets can learn through the creative imitation of ancient poetry: that is, by adapting ancient forms to modern needs, and doing so not in Latin, the language of humanist learning, but rather in the languages they actually speak. In general, poets can be educated to write better. "As the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest flying with have a Daedalus to guide him," Sidney writes, alluding to the ancient Greek inventor. Poets should practice imitating ancient authors, and borrow techniques from ancient literature in order to improve their work. Playwrights, for example, should respect classical guidelines for maintaining unity of time and space, and instead of trying to compress large amounts of action into a play, playwrights should consider employing ancient techniques, such as the messenger speech, to summarize action. Similarly, lyric poets lack the energia ("vividness") of ancient love poetry. There is no reason that modern authors who have been trained to write well can't write poetry as well as the ancients. Sidney asserts that English, "equally with any other tongue in the world," is capable of "uttering sweetly and properly the conceit of the mind." Even though Renaissance literature was multilingual, and Sidney himself drew much inspiration from poetry written in foreign languages (especially Italian), he argues that English, more than other European languages, is a particularly expressive language, particularly well-suited to imaginative writing. Perhaps English could be the Latin of the modern world.

The problem of English poetry, Sidney suggests, points to the problem of English eloquence. Sidney's critique of English poetry therefore feeds into a wider critique of court culture. English poets have a predilection for fancy words. Scholars share this problem, as they "cast sugar and spice upon every dish that is served at the table." Humanist authors, educated to imitate apishly, try hard to sound like Demosthenes and Cicero and end up sounding like "sophisters." Courtiers also speak in ridiculous ways. Hence Sidney prefers the talk of a poorly educated nobleman who speaks in the manner "fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) […] according to art, though not by art." Just as slavish imitation does not lead to good poetry, so does it not lead to good rhetoric. Poetry and oratory are clearly linked, not only because "both have such affinity in the wordish considerations" but also because Sidney's essay is itself an instance in which the two work hand in hand. Sidney, functioning as both a poet and an orator, uses vivid imagery and metaphor to persuade the reader of the value poetry.

"An Apology for Poetry" is not only the defense of an abstract ideal of poetry, but also the critique of the contemporary poetry of Sidney's own time. Just as the Elizabethan critics must learn to think of poetry differently, so too must playwrights and lyric poets learn to write differently. Both groups belong to a court culture plagued by sophistic eloquence. Proper respect for, and practice of, writing, will therefore lead to a renovation of a broader intellectual culture.

BTimber: or, Discoveries by Jonson

Ben Jonson - Biography

Ben Jonson was born in 1572 or 1573, a month or so after his father's death. His father was a minister and his stepfather a bricklayer. Someone financed Jonson's education at Westminster School, where the historian William Camden introduced him to the classics. After a few weeks at Cambridge, Jonson was forced to take up bricklaying. Later he is found soldiering in the Netherlands, fighting a duel with an enemy soldier, killing him, and returning home with heroic tales to enlarge upon.

Swiftly, he married, begot and buried several children, fought and reconciled with his wife, and began a theatrical career. Almost at once he wrote with Thomas Nashe a play entitled *The Isle of Dogs* (1597). Both playwrights were charged with seditious and slanderous matter, but only Jonson was captured and clapped in irons. Upon release, Jonson joined Philip Henslowe's theatrical company. A year later, at the Globe theater, Jonson had his first stage success with *Every Man in His Humour.*

The Latins used the word *humour* to mean moisture or fluid; the tradition of the medical profession used the word regarding four fluids: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile.

Depending on whichever of the four fluids was dominant, the person possessed of the humour was said to be sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, or choleric.

The popularity of this "play of humours" caused Jonson to leave acting for writing. He collaborated on court masques with the famed scene designer Inigo Jones, enjoying much success. But his hot temper found him an argument which precipitated a duel with the actor Gabriel Spencer. He killed his opponent and was jailed for murder (1598). Jonson eventually won his release, pleading benefit of clergy because he could read the Latin Psalter like a clerk, but not without punishment: the letter *T* was branded on his thumb. Later, after two more comedies, he was satirized by another playwright, Thomas Dekker, in *Satiromastix,* which called him puny, pockmarked, conceited pedant, murderer, and bricklayer. Undaunted, Jonson turned out the static and moralistic *Sejanus,* which flopped on the stage but won him the support of Lord Aubigny upon publication.

onson collaborated on *Eastward Ho!,* which insulted the Scots and the king, and placed the authors behind bars. In 1606, *Volpone* put its author at the top on London's comic stage. In 1610, *The Alchemist* appeared, and in 1614, the attack on London Puritans, *Bartholomew Fair.* These plays cemented Jonson's reputation as the great poet of English comedy. He received subsidies from the Crown for his work and continued to write court masques until a quarrel with Jones returned him to full-time work in the commercial theater.

Jonson gathered many young poets and playwrights around him, and they were eventually called the "Tribe of Ben." Among their number could be included James Shirley, Thomas Carew, and Robert Herrick.

Ben Jonson was never a provident man. By 1629, he lived alone, bedridden with paralysis and without funds. After eight years of pain and penury, he died and was buried in Westminster Abbey (1637). Jonson's great critic and editor, C. H. Herford, thought the playwright was powerful but without charm; Jonson seemed impressive, though he was unattractive to posterity. At any rate, Jonson possessed a belligerent and quarrelsome personality, but he was a faithful friend, fearless, and intellectually honest. One of his contemporaries summed up his person for the epitaph on his tomb in Westminster Abbey: "O Rare Ben Jonson."

Ben Jonson (11 June 1572 – August 1637), poet and dramatist, was one of the leading literary figures of his day. He was born and raised in London, the son of a poor church minister. Jonson began a career as a bricklayer, served with English companies in the Low Countries (1591–2), before returning to London to pursue a career in writing (and, at first, acting) for the stage.

About the text

First published posthumously in 1641, some four or five years after Jonson's death, Timber is a collection of meditations and commentaries upon a range of issues, from the nature of fortune, fame, opinion and wisdom to observations on dramatic theory and poetics. The work, a type of commonplace book written late in Jonson's life, is a repository of miscellaneous quotations, translations and opinions. Jonson draws heavily on authorities such as Plutarch, Pliny and Quintilian, but also discusses influential early modern writers such as Vives, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Spenser, Sidney and Heinsius, as well as, most infamously, Shakespeare ('would he had blotted a thousand [lines]'). As the alternative print title discloses, these are 'discoveries made' by Jonson 'upon men and matter' drawn from his extensive reading and experiences. The autobiographical verve of much of Jonson's apparent commentary in Timber can be misleading. Jonson inserts first-person pronouncements in passages that are translated almost entirely from the works of others. Elsewhere in the work, adapting a passage from Quintilian's Institutiones, Jonson proposes that for a man to write well, he needs to read the best authors, observe the best speakers and exercise his own style. Insisting upon the importance of learning from others, Jonson writes that 'the mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things, than our own' (P4r).

The arts of memory

In Conversations (written c. 1619), the Scottish poet William Drummond's gossipy first-hand account of Jonson's opinions upon poetics and contemporary poets, he reveals that Jonson advises him to read the works of Quintilian. Drummond also notes that Jonson was able to readily recite parts of works by Donne (verse of the 'Lost Chaine'), Wotton ('verses of a happie lyfe'), Chapman ('translation of the 13 of the Illiad') and Spenser (Shepherd's Calendar) 'by heart'. In Timber (N2r), Jonson observes Seneca's self-proclaimed mnemonic powers, before lamenting his own fading memory as he ages.

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https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/v/volpone/ben-jonson-biography

An Essay of Dramatic Poesy Summary by John Dryden

Introduction

Criticism flourished in England during the restoration of Stuarts. *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* deals with the views of major critics and the tastes of men and women of the time of Dryden

The work is in the form of semi-drama thus making abstract theories interesting. In the late 17th century, Shakespeare was severely criticised for his careless attitude towards the mixing of genres. It was Dryden who elevated Shakespeare to height for his natural genius.

The narrative of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* has four debaters among whom, Neander is the one who holds the views of Dryden. Unlike other characters, Neander does not diminish the arguments that are on contrary to his views. Though he himself favours modern drama, he does not blame others.

Crites opens the discussion by saying that none of his contemporaries (i.e. moderns) can equal the standards and the rules set by ancient Greeks and Romans. Eugenius restrains him from wasting time on finding demerits. He asks him to find relative merit in Greeks and Moderns.

Views of Crites

Crites favours classical drama i.e. the drama of Aristotle who believed that drama is *"imitation of life"*. Crites holds that drama of such ancients is successful because it depicts life. He says that both classical and neoclassical favour rules and unities (*time, place and action).*

According to Crites, modern dramatists are shadows of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Seneca and Terence. E.g. Elizabethan dramatist Ben Jonson borrowed from Classics and felt proud to call himself modern Horace. The classical is more skilful in language than their successors. At this, he ends up his conversation.

Views of Eugenius

Eugenius favours modern dramatists. However, instead of telling about the virtues of moderns, he criticises the faults of Classical playwrights. According to him, the Classical drama is not divided into acts and also lacks originality.

Their tragedies are based on worn-out myths that are already known to the audience and their comedies are based o overused curiosity of stolen heiresses and miraculous restorations.

There disregard poetic justice. Instead of punishing the vice and rewarding the virtue, they have often shown prosperous wickedness and an unhappy devotion. The classical drama also lacks affection.

The Heroes of Homer were lovers of appetite, food etc, while the modern characters of French drama gave up everything (*sleep, water and food*) for the sake of love.

Views of Lisideius

Lisideius favours French drama of earlier 17th century. French drama led by Pierre Corneille strictly followed unities of time, pace and action. The French dramatists never mix tragedy and comedy.

They strictly adhere to the poetic justice i.e. reward the virtue and punishment the vice. For this, they even alter the original situation.

The French dramatists interweave truth with fiction to make it interesting bringing elements that lead to fate and borrow from history to reward the virtuous which he was earlier deprived of.

They prefer emotions over plots. Violent actions take place off stage and are told by messengers rather than showing them in real

Views of Neander

Neander contradicts Lisideius' arguments favouring the superiority of French drama. He talks about the greatness of Elizabethans. For him, Elizabethans fulfil the drama's requirement i.e. imitation of life.

French drama raises perfection but has no soul or emotions as it primarily focuses on the plot. For Neander, tragicomedy is the best form of drama. Both sadness as well as joy are heightened and are set side by side. Hence it is closest to life.

He believes that subplots enrich the drama. This French drama having a single plot lacks this vividness. Further Samuel Johnson (*who defended Shakespeare's disregard of unities*), he believes that adherence to unities prevents depth.

According to him, deviation from set rules and unities gives diverse themes to drama. Neander rejects the argument that change of place and time diminishes dramatic credibility in drama.

For him, human actions will seem more natural if they get enough time to develop. He also argues that Shakespeare is *"the man who of all the modern and perhaps ancient poets, and largest and most comprehensive soul"*.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletchers' dramas are rich in wit and have smoothness and polish in their language.

Neander says, *"I am apt to believe the English language in them arrived at its highest perfection"*. If Ben Jonson is a genius for correctness, Shakespeare excels him in wit.

His arguments end with the familiar comparison, *"Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare."*

Thus for him, Elizabethans are superior because they have a variety of themes, emotions, deviations, wit. They do not adhere to rules as well. Thus their drama is really an imitation of life.

Views on Rhyme in Drama

At the end of the discussion, there is an argument between Crites and Neander over rhyme in plays. Crites believes that Blank Verse as the poetic form nearest to prose is most suitable for drama.

On the other hand, Neander defends rhyme as it briefly and clearly explains everything. The boat on which they all were riding reaches its destination, the stairs at Somerset House and the discussion ends without any conclusion being made.

https://englishsummary.com/essay-dramatic-poesy-dryden-summary/

Alexander Pope's An Essay on Criticism: Summary & Analysis

Alexander Pope was a renowned writer during the Enlightenment period whose poem An Essay on Criticism remains one of the most quoted pieces in English literature. Explore a summary and analysis of Pope's poem and discover its structure, key points, and underlying messages. Updated: 09/22/2021

Alexander Pope and the Enlightenment

'A little learning is a dang'rous thing,' Alexander Pope famously writes in his poem 'An Essay on Criticism.' The poem is one of the most quoted in the English language and one that offers tremendous insight into Pope's beliefs and into the culture in which Pope was writing.

Pope lived from 1688 to 1744 and was one of the most popular and influential writers of his time. He was writing during what we now call the Enlightenment era, which lasted from about 1660 to around 1800. Enlightenment thinkers emphasized the importance of science and reason and claimed that the world is knowable and testable. It was during the Enlightenment that modern science and many of the assumptions that govern our contemporary system of reason were developed. This context and the excitement that surrounded the changes brought to culture through the Enlightenment are central to 'An Essay on Criticism

Overview of the Poem

Pope's 'Essay on Criticism' is broken into three different parts. The first part opens by describing the ways literary critics can actually cause harm. Pope argues that critics must be both careful and humble when critiquing a piece of literature, for the writing of bad criticism actually hurts poetry more than the writing of bad poetry does. Pope points out that

each critic has his or her own opinion, and, if applied incorrectly, a critic can actually censure a talented writer. However, Pope argues that if a critic is honest, doesn't fall prey to envy and listens to the seeds of understanding that are naturally a part of him or herself, one can become a wise critic. The Greeks came to understand poetry through following the rules of nature, argues Pope, and contemporary critics must do the same.

In the second part, Pope describes some of the ways that critics develop bad judgment, the chief of which is pride. The key to avoiding this is to know your own faults and limitations. Moreover, critics must study well and focus on conventions passed down from the masters of poetry. Pope warns, however, that critics must be careful of becoming slaves to the rules and convention that others have developed and to not let the popularity of an author misguide a critic's appreciation of an author's work. One of the products of adhering too closely to conventions is that critics become fascinated with extremes and forget the essential truth that beauty and good poetry are made up of the combination of all of their parts, rather than each part by itself.

In the third part of the poem, Pope offers some wisdom that critics should follow. Once again, Pope emphasizes the importance of humility and studying deeply, particularly studying those poets and critics who truly understand poetry and follow nature. Pope then reflects on the ups and downs of literature and literary critics since Greek culture, explaining how the understanding produced by the Greeks and Romans was lost and is only beginning to be appreciated again.

An Essay on Criticism | Context

The Augustan Age of English Literature

Alexander Pope was one of the most prominent English poets of the 1700s. He reflected the artistic values of the Augustan Age of English literature. The original Augustan Age refers to the era of the Roman Empire during which Augustus is emperor. The Augustan Age is known as the golden age of Latin literature, when poets like Horace, Ovid, and Virgil wrote their works. England's Augustan writers emulated these classical poets. Pope and his peers felt that ancient works followed strict rules yet featured deep meaning, eloquent language, and the individual and unique voice of the poet.

The Augustan Age of English literature is considered an example of neoclassicism, a term that refers to emulation of certain aspects of classical civilizations, namely ancient Greece and Rome. Neoclassicism emphasizes balance, rules, and a conservative spirit of keeping things the way they are in society. Pope's focus on rules and propriety is representative of this conservative view. Neoclassical authors consider the balance, symmetry, and form of ancient works and try to apply the rules and greatness of epic poets like Homer and Virgil to modern English poetry.

Pope's poetry contains many explicit connections to the classics. He emulates the form of their work but updates it for modern English audiences. His poem "The Rape of the Lock," published partly in 1712 and fully in 1714, portrays a contemporary social squabble over a lock of hair stolen from a young woman in the form of a heroic, classical epic poem. Pope also works directly with classics, publishing a translation of Homer's foundational works the "Odyssey" and the "Iliad." This six-volume translation in poetic form, published in 1725 and 1726, is the culmination of decades of studying, appreciating, and emulating classical civilization.

Pope and Literary Critics

Pope understood that critics could make or break literary careers and legacies. "An Essay on Criticism" is closely connected to Pope's own experiences with critics. Pope was a Catholic in a time when Catholics were not allowed to practice their religion, hold office, attend public schools, or live within 10 miles of London. He was known for engaging in public arguments with critics throughout his career. Restrictions on Catholic participation in society were due to the decision by King Henry VIII (1491–1547) to break away from the Catholic Church in order to annul his first marriage. Pope's religious outsider status, physical disabilities, and lack of formal education combined to make him a favorite target of critics. Pope's quick rise to fame was accompanied by many battles with critics.

Pope responds in a variety of ways to negative criticism that is unrelated to the content of his work. "An Essay on Criticism" is one such response. Pope's advice to critics centers on their tendency to ignore the quality and content of the work and focus on other, surface concerns. He calls out critics who "judge of authors' names, not works, and then / Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men." Pope expresses that his combative personality, diminished appearance, and other personal aspects should not be the basis of criticism of his poetry. Pope wrote "The Dunciad," a series of books in which he maligns many critics and literary figures of the time. In "The Dunciad" Pope declares that the literary world is full of "dunces" who had no taste or talent. By continually engaging with critics, Pope keeps his name in the press and on people's minds.

Even after Pope's death, critics and readers continue to debate and evaluate the quality of his work. Romantic poetry, which focuses on emotional truth and individual experience over form, supplanted neoclassical poetry. The Romantic era saw a decline in respect for neoclassical poetry's emphasis on form, rhyme, meter, and other strict poetic rules. He has been variously considered as a philosopher and as a poet. Today he is considered one of the most significant literary voices of the 18th century.

Epigrams in Poetry

Epigrams, or brief witty quips meant to teach a moral, began as quotes on tombstones. Ancient Roman authors developed the epigram as a poetic form. British authors of the 17th

and 18th centuries imitated and emulated the ancient Roman epigrams. Today an epigram can be part of any written work. The term refers generally to a sentence that strikes the reader with concise and meaningful content in the form of a generalization. Part of an epigram's appeal is timelessness. The thoughts contained in epigrams communicate thoughts and observations held in common by humanity. Epigrams are witty verbal constructions designed to entertain and educate the reader.

Pope's epigrams are known for their irony and brilliance. "An Essay on Criticism" is full of epigrams, many of which found their way into the English language to the extent that they are still widely used today. "A little learning is a dang'rous thing" refers to people's tendency to learn minimally about something and then act as if they know everything about it. "To err is human; to forgive, divine" refers to the fact that everyone makes mistakes, and that people must keep this in mind and be generous with their understanding toward others. Such epigrams demonstrate Pope's ability to summarize common aspects of the plight of human existence in entertaining and lasting ways.

An Essay on Criticism | Summary

Summary

"An Essay on Criticism" is a three-part poem in which Alexander Pope shares his thoughts on the proper rules and etiquette for critics. Critics assail Pope's work, his background, his religion, and his physical appearance throughout his career. Pope has a lot to say to critics about their common mistakes and how they could do their job in such a way that intelligently supports the literary process.

Part 1

Pope explains that both critics and writers should understand the rules for poetry set forth by ancient Greece and Rome. These rules were based on the laws of nature such as balance, symmetry, and beauty without ornamentation. To truly "First follow NATURE," writers and their critics must have good judgment and wit. While it is important for writers to stick to the rules, critics should also understand that sometimes new approaches are needed for newly developing truths. Exceptions to the rules are only made for particularly intelligent, witty, and accomplished authors.

Part 2

Part 2 focuses on critics and lists the many ways that their criticism is ineffective and inappropriate. Some of the common mistakes include: considering the part and not the whole of the work; paying attention only to rules and not to content; judging because of metaphor, imagery, style, or other less relevant qualities of poems; praising works simply because they are new, extreme, foreign, or espouse certain points of view.

Part 3

The last part of "An Essay on Criticism" comes from a more positive and encouraging perspective. Pope explores what makes a great critic. The ideal qualities a critic should possess include integrity, humility, and courage. The poem closes with an extended tribute to the ancient Greek and Roman writers, as well as English writers who Pope feels best emulate the ancients. The best critics are balanced and reflective, considering their words carefully, knowing that they make and break authors' careers.

Analysis

"An Essay on Criticism" is Alexander Pope's argument in poetic form about the qualities of writers and critics, both as they are in his times and as he believes they should ideally be. Pope's satirical work is assailed by critics at every step of his writing career and "An Essay on Criticism" is an elaborate response to such critics. Pope's epigrams, or clever literary sayings with a moral about the common mistakes critics make, remain in wide use today.

Style

Pope's influences are wide-ranging and include many ancient Greek and Roman texts as well as contemporary texts about poetry and criticism. "An Essay on Criticism" contains many well-known epigrams that are based on classical authors' work. Pope writes in heroic couplets, which are two sentences using iambic pentameter whose last syllables rhyme and together express a distinct idea. Iambic pentameter is the most common meter or pattern of syllables in English poetry. Pope uses this format to write various kinds of literature that are not commonly dealt with in a poetic form. "An Essay on Criticism" can be understood as a nonfiction persuasive essay that rhymes. Other poems such as "The Rape of the Lock" function as rhyming short stories. Pope's English translation of Homer's works is revolutionary in its use of rhyming verse to recreate the experience of hearing them as poetry as the ancient Greeks had.

Some conventions in the poem reflect widely used conventions of the time in which Pope wrote. He often uses contractions for words ending in "ed," such as "devis'd" and "methodiz'd." Pope also practices the use of capital letters to emphasize important ideas. These capital letters do not follow a consistent grammatical rule. Instead they serve as marks of personal style and voice.

Advice for Writers

Pope details what he thinks are the most important rules to follow for writers. His advice is to "first follow NATURE" which is full of life and truth yet symmetrical and orderly: "Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd / Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd." Ancient Greeks and Romans are the best example of following the laws of nature in writing.

The English writers of Pope's time, he argues, should study the ancients, learn from their brilliance, and apply what they learn to their own work. Writers should model their writing on the "rules of old" but great writers can be more flexible. Great writers will at times have to break rules in order to express modern ideas and the ambiguities of human life. However, even the best writers must study and understand the reasons for the rules of poetry established by the ancients. In order to become great, a writer must first know their own limitations.

Throughout "An Essay on Criticism" Pope develops his notions of the kind of poetry that fits the requirements set forth by classical texts. Language should be used both to convey meaning and as a means to express ideas eloquently. Both are important and one should not be sacrificed to the other. Pope refers to the importance of the use of rhyme and meter, which are required in the poetry of his day. He expresses his admiration for the works of Homer, whose work he later translated, and the development of voice that characterized classic Greek and Roman texts. Pope emphasizes staying true to one's own expressive voice as a writer while generally limiting oneself to the established rules of poetry.

Advice for Critics

Pope has much more advice for critics than for writers. Critics play a large role in the literary world by influencing people's access to and thoughts about writers' work. Pope sees his satirical work face acclaim from many readers but harsh disrespect from some critics. Pope warns critics that they often think they know more than they actually do: "A little learning is a dang'rous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the *Pierian* spring." The Pierian Spring is a reference to an ancient Roman fountain that represented the Muses, or goddesses who inspired writers, artists, and musicians to create. With this epigram, or witty saying that teaches a lesson, Pope expresses that critics without in-depth learning do not have access to the beauty or meaning of poetry. Thus their critiques are not to be taken seriously. Such critics may fall into habits such as judging poetry based on its imagery, its beautiful use of language, or other surface details.

"An Essay on Criticism" lists many of Pope's issues with critics. He explores the ways that critics are often attracted to trivial qualities in poetry. He feels that critics' greatest stumbling block is pride and encourages them to adopt a humble attitude when writing about writers' work. A common folly of critics is that they often focus on parts of a work of literature rather than try to understand the whole: "Most critics, fond of some subservient art, / Still make the whole depend upon a part." Pope also notes that critics should not rely on prejudice toward the author for reasons such as the author's religious background, national background, or wealth. Pope may be referencing his own experience as a Catholic, a religious outsider due to King Henry VIII (1491–1547) splitting England from the Catholic Church. Pope also may have his work unfairly maligned because of his lack of educational background and his physical disabilities. Similarly, critics should not misunderstand work as high quality just because it is new or "extreme." When critics disagree with an author's arguments they often wrongly disparage the quality of the entire

piece of literature. Pope advises critics to be generous to writers and avoid being harsh about their inevitable missteps: "To err is human; to forgive, divine."

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Lives of the Poets – Dr. Samuel Johnson

Background

A canonical work that lifted the genre of critical engagement and analysis to nearly the same level as works of pure creativity, Samuel Johnson's *The Lives of the Poets* was t one time known as *The Lives of the English Poets* and originally carried the title *Prefaces Biographical and Critical to the Works of the English Poets*. Mercifully, for printer and reader alike, the vogue in titling works of criticism strove to situate its own creativity sometime after these volumes original rolled of presses between 1779 and 1791.

The volumes of criticism were commissioned from Johnson at the behest of London booksellers primarily as a technique for introducing new prefatory story for existing works that would shed light on the author's own biography. Ultimately, Johnson would take off from this rather limited starting point to provide not just biographical material on the 52 poets whose work is represented, but critical commentary for the purpose of providing additional reasons for reader to buy the actual literary works to which Johnson casts a critical eye.

As often happens in cases such as this, irony wound up ruling much of the day. The irony exist on two levels. In the first place, though commenced as a biographical endeavor, it is the criticism that has helped *The Lives of the Poets* remain essential resource material for two-and-half centuries. Part of this legacy may be due to other element of irony associated with this enterprise: much of the biographical information for which Johnson was extended the invitation to contribute has since been dismissed as unreliable at best and downright wrong in many worst-case scenarios.

John Milton

Milton was a 17th century English poet. His privileged and prestigious classical education gave him a wealth of information to draw upon for his writing. In his background, Milton learned to master several languages as well as the arts of speech and debate. During his career, Milton became engaged politically against royalist sympathies with tracts like *Araeopagitica* which defended free speech as a function of English, the language of the people. His most noteworthy work, however, is his epic poem *Paradise Lost* to which

Johnson devotes some length. Unfortunately Milton fell out of favor in the public eye at the close of the English Civil War.

Abraham Cowley

Another 17th century British poet, Cowley was a royalist. He grew up attending Trinity College, Cambridge, where he began his poetry career, writing about professors, fellow students, and life events. Although his teachers recognized his poetic prowess, they were more concerned about Crowley's biblical treatments. Perhaps his greatest critical achievement is his epic about King David in the Bible. Alternatively, his most noteworthy work was published in 1638, *Love's Riddle.*

John Dryden

Dryden participated alongside his English contemporaries, not only in poetry but also in literary criticism, translation, and theater. During the Restoration after the Civil War, Dryden enjoyed his glory days. He received the first Poet Laureate designation in 1668. He also attended Trinity College where he began writing poetry. His later life was devoted to playwriting, but Dryden is most commonly known for his poetry. During his lifetime he made many political enemies but always managed to retain popularity with the people.

Edmund Spenser

Preceding the above poets, Spenser was an established author of the 16th century. Under Queen Elizabeth I, he received great patronage from royalty and aristocracy alike. Thanks to his father, Spenser had strong ties to Ireland, making his political leanings somewhat questionable to more English sensibilities. In fact he established a castle for himself in Ireland but was forced to leave during the Nine Years War. Writing mainly epic poetry, Spenser was a fan of the fantastic. His most renowned work is *The Faerie Queene.*

Life Of Milton (1608—1674)

From 'Lives Of The Poets' by Samuel Johnson

Milton has the reputation of having been in his youth eminently beautiful, so as to have been called the Lady of his college. His hair, which was of a light brown, parted at the foretop, and hung down upon his shoulders, according to the picture which he has given of Adam. He was, however, not of the heroick stature, but rather below the middle size, according to Mr. Richardson, who mentions him as having narrowly escaped from being short and thick He was vigorous and active, and delighted in the exercise of the sword, in which he is related to have been eminently skilful. His weapon was, I believe, not the rapier, but the backsword, of which he recommends the use in his book on Education.

His eyes are said never to have been bright; but, if he was a dexterous fencer, they must have been once quick.

His domestick habits, so far as they are known, were those of a severe student. He drank little strong drink of any kind, and fed without excess in quantity, and in his earlier years without delicacy of choice. In his youth he studied late at night; but afterwards changed his hours, and rested in bed from nine to four in the summer, and five in winter. The course of his day was best known after he was blind. When he first rose, he heard a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and then studied till twelve; then took some exercise for an hour; then dined; then played on the organ, and sung, or heard another sing; then studied to six; then entertained his visitors till eight; then supped, and, after a pipe of tobacco and a glass of water, went to bed.

So is his life described; but this even tenour appears attainable only in Colleges. He that lives in the world will sometimes have the succession of his practice broken and confused. Visitors, of whom Milton is represented to have had great numbers, will come and stay unseasonably; business, of which every man has some, must be done when others will do it.

When he did not care to rise early, he had something read to him by his bedside; perhaps at this time his daughters were employed. He composed much in the morning, and dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm.

Fortune appears not to have had much of his care. In the civil wars he lent his personal estate to the parliament; but when, after the contest was decided, he solicited repayment, he met not only with neglect, but sharp rebuke ; and, having tired both himself and his friends, was given up to poverty and hopeless indignation, till he shewed how able he was to do greater service. He was then made Latin secretary, with two hundred pounds a year; and had a thousand pounds for his Defence of the People . His widow, who, after his death, retired to Namptwich in Cheshire, and died about 1729, is said to have reported that he lost two thousand pounds by entrusting it to a scrivener; and that, in the general depredation upon the Church, he had grasped an estate of about sixty pounds a year belonging to Westminster-Abbey, which, like other sharers of the plunder of rebellion, he was afterwards obliged to return. Two thousand pounds, which he had placed in the Excise-office, were also lost. There is yet no reason to believe that he was ever reduced to indigence. His wants, being few were competently supplied. He sold his library before his death, and left his family fifteen hundred pounds, on which his widow laid hold, and only gave one hundred to each of his daughters.

His literature was unquestionably great. He read all the languages which are considered either as learned or polite: Hebrew, with its two dialects, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish. In Latin his skill was such as places him in the first rank of writers and criticks; and he appears to have cultivated Italian with uncommon diligence. The books in which his daughter, who used to read to him, represented him as most delighting, after Homer, which

he could almost repeat, were Ovid's Metamorphoses and Euripides. His Euripides is, by Mr. Cradock's kindness, now in my hands: the margin is sometimes noted; but I have found nothing remarkable.

Of the English poets he set most value upon Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley. Spenser was apparently his favourite: Shakespeare he may easily be supposed to like, with every other skilful reader; but I should not have expected that Cowley, whose ideas of excellence were different from his own, would have had much of his approbation. His character of Dryden, who sometimes visited him, was, that he was a good rhymist, but no poet.

His theological opinions are said to have been first Calvinistical; and afterwards, perhaps when he began to hate the Presbyterians, to have tended towards Arminianism. In the mixed questions of theology and government, he never thinks that he can recede far enough from popery, or prelacy; but what Baudius says of Erasmus seems applicable to him, magis habuit quod fugeret, quam quod sequeretur . He had determined rather what to condemn, than what to approve. He has not associated himself with any denomination of Protestants: we know rather what he was not, than what he was. He was not of the church of Rome; he was not of the church of England.

To be of no church, is dangerous. Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by Faith and Hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and reimpressed by external ordinances, by stated calls to worship, and the salutary influence of example. Milton, who appears to have nad full conviction of the truth of Christianity, and to have regarded the Holy Scriptures with the profoundest veneration, to have been untainted by an heretical peculiarity of opinion, and to have lived in a confirmed belief of the immediate and occasional agency of Providence, yet grew old without any visible worship. In the distribution of his hours, there was JIO hour of prayer, either solitary, or with his household; omitting publick prayers, he omitted all.

Of this omission the reason has been sought, upon a supposition which ought never to be made, that men live with their own approbation, and justify their conduct to themselves. Prayer certainly was not thought superfluous by him, who represents our first parents as praying acceptably in the state of innocence, and efficaciously after their fall. That he lived without prayer can hardly be affirmed; his studies and meditations were an habitual prayer. The neglect of it in his family was probably a fault for which he condemned himself, and which he intended to correct, but that death, as too often happens, intercepted his reformation.

His political notions were those of an acrimonious and surly republican, for which it is not known that he gave any better reason than that

> a popular government was the most frugal; for the trappings of a monarchy would set up an ordinary commonwealth — John Toland, Life of Milton, p. i 39.

It is surely very shallow policy, that supposes money to be the chief good; and even this, without considering that the support and expence of a Court is, for the most part, only a particular kind of traffick, by which money is circulated, without any national impoverishment.

Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of controul, and pride disdainful of superiority. He hated monarchs in the state, and prelates in the church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected, that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority.

It has been observed, that they who most loudly clamour for liberty do not most liberally grant it. What we know of Milton's character, in domestick relations, is, that he was severe and arbitrary. His family consisted of women; and there appears in his books something like a Turkish contempt of females, as subordinate and inferior beings. That his own daughters might not break the ranks, he suffered them to be depressed by a mean and penurious education. He thought woman made only for obedience, and man only for rebellion. . . .

* * *

One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is Lycidas; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is, we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions anil obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough satyrs and fauns with cloven heel. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply, are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours, and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines!

> We drove a field, and both together heard
>
> What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
>
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote, that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found.

Among the flocks, and copses, and flowers, appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a College easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what is become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour.

This poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverend combinations. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful; but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.

Such is the power of reputation justly acquired that its blaze drives away the eye from nice examination. Surely no man could have fancied that he read Lycidas with pleasure, had he not known its author.

Of the two pieces, L'Allegro and II Penseroso , I believe opinion is uniform; every man that reads them, reads them with pleasure. The author's design is not, what Theobald has remarked, merely to shew how objects derive their colours from the mind, by representing the operation of the same things upon the gay and the melancholy temper, or upon the same man as he is differently disposed; but rather how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified.

The chearful man hears the lark in the morning; the pensive man hears the nightingale in the evening. The chearful man sees the cock strut, and hears the horn and hounds echo in the wood; then walks not unseen to observe, the glory of the rising sun, or listen to the singing milk-maid, and view the labours of the plowman and the mower; then casts his eyes about him over scenes of smiling plenty, and looks up to the distant tower, the residence of some fair inhabitant; thus he pursues rural gaiety through a day of labour or of play, and delights himself at night with the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance.

The pensive man, at one time, walks unseen to muse at midnight, and at another hears the sullen curfew. If the weather drives him home, he sits in a room lighted only by glowing embers ; or by a lonely lamp outwatches the North Star, to discover the habitation of separate souls, and varies the shades of meditation, by contemplating the magnificent or pathetick scenes of tragick and epick poetry. When the morning comes, a morning gloomy

with rain and wind, he walks into the dark trackless woods, falls asleep by some murmuring water, and with melancholy enthusiasm expects some dream of prognostication, or some musick played by aerial performers.

Both Mirth and Melancholy are solitary, silent inhabitants of the breast that neither receive nor transmit communication; no mention is therefore made of a philosophical friend, or a pleasant companion. The seriousness does not arise from any participation of calamity, nor the gaiety from the pleasures of the bottle.

The man of chearfulness , having exhausted the country, tries what towered cities will afford, and mingles with scenes of splendor, gay assemblies, and nuptial festivities; but he mingles a mere spectator, as, when the learned comedies of Jonson, or the wild dramas of Shakspeare, are exhibited, he attends the theatre.

The pensive man never loses himself in crowds, but walks the cloister, or frequents the cathedral. Milton probably had not yet forsaken the Church.

Both his characters delight in musick; but he seems to think that chearful notes would have obtained from Pluto a compleat dismission of Eurydicc, of whom solemn sounds only procured a conditional release.

For the old age of Chearfulness he makes no provision; but Melancholy he conducts with great dignity to the close of life. His Chearfulness is without levitv, and his Pensiveness without asperity.

Through these two poems the images are properly selected, and nicely distinguished; but the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated. I know not whether the characters are kept sufficiently apart. No mirth can, indeed, be found in his melancholy; but I am afraid that I always meet some melancholy in his mirth. They are two noble efforts of imagination. . . .

Those little pieces may be dispatched without much anxiety; a greater work calls for greater care. I am now to examine Paradise Lost; a poem, which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second, among the productions of the human mind.

By the general consent of criticks, the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epick poem, as it requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for other compositions. Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason. Epick poetry undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts, and therefore relates some great event in the most affecting manner. History must supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatick energy, and diversify by retrospection and

anticipation; morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue; from policy, and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. To put these materials to poetical use, is required an imagination capable of painting nature, and realizing fiction. Nor is he yet a poet till he has attained the whole extension of his language, distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the varieties of metrical modulation.

Bossu is of opinion that the poet's first work is to find a moral, which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish. This seems to have been the process only of Milton; the moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrinsick. His purpose was the most useful and the most arduous; to vindicate the ways of God to man ; to shew the reasonableness of religion, and the necessity of obedience to the Divine Law.

To convey this moral, there must be a fable, a narration artfully constructed, so as to excite curiosity, and surprise expectation. In this part of his work, Milton must be confessed to have equalled every other poet. He has involved in his account of the Fall of Man the events which preceded, and those that were to follow it: he has interwoven the whole system of theology with such propriety, that every part appears to be necessary; and scarcely any recital is wished shorter for the sake of quickening the progress of the main action.

The subject of an epick poem is naturally an event of great importance. That of Milton is not the destruction of a city, the conduct of a colony, or the foundation of an empire. His subject is the fate of worlds, the revolutions of heaven and of earth; rebellion against the Supreme King, raised by the highest order of created beings; the overthrow of their host, and the punishment of their crime; the creation of a new race of reasonable creatures; their original happiness and innocence, their forfeiture of immortality, and their restoration to hope and peace.

Great events can be hastened or retarded only bv persons of elevated dignity. Before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem, all other greatness shrinks away. The weakest of his agents are the highest and noblest of human beings, the original parents of mankind; with whose actions the elements consented; on whose rectitude, or deviation of will, depended the state of terrestrial nature, and the condition of all the future inhabitants of the globe.

Of the other agents in the poem, the chief are such as it is irreverence to name on slight occasions. The rest were lower powers; —of which the least could wield Those elements, and arm him with the force Of all their regions;—Paradise Lost, VI 221.

In the examination of epick poems much speculation is commonly employed upon the characters . The characters in the Paradise Lost which admit of examination, are those of angels and of man; of angels good and evil; of man in his innocent and sinful state.

Among the angels, the virtue of Raphael is mild and placid, of easy condescension and free communication; that of Michael is regal and lofty, and, as may seem, attentive to the dignity of his own nature. Abdiel and Gabriel appear occasionally, and act as every incident requires; the solitary fidelity of Abdiel is very amiably painted.

Of the evil angels the characters are more diversified. To Satan, as Addison observes, such sentiments are given as suit "the most exalted and most depraved, being" — Spectator No. 303

Milton has been censured, by Clarke, for the impiety which sometimes breaks from Satan's mouth. For there are thoughts, as he justly remarks, which no observation of character can justify, because no good man would willingly permit them to pass, however transiently, through his own mind.(4) To make Satan speak as a rebel, without any such expressions as might taint the reader's imagination, was indeed one of the great difficulties in Milton's undertaking, and I cannot but think that he has extricated himself with great happiness. There is in Satan's speeches little that can give pain to a pious ear. The language of rebellion cannot be the same with that of obedience. The malignity of Satan foams in haughtiness and obstinacy; but his expressions are commonly general, and no otherwise offensive than as they are wicked.

The other chiefs of the celestial rebellion are very judiciously discriminated in the first and second books; and the ferocious character of Moloch appears, both in the battle and the council, with exact consistency.

To Adam and to Eve are given, during their innocence, such sentiments as innocence can generate and utter. Their love is pure benevolence and mutual veneration; their repasts are without luxury, and their diligence without toil. Their addresses to their Maker have little more than the voice of admiration and gratitude. Fruition left them nothing to ask, and Innocence left them nothing to fear.

But with guilt enter distrust and discord, mutual accusation, and stubborn self-defence; they regard each other with alienated minds, and dread their Creator as the avenger of their transgression. At last they seek shelter in his mercy, soften to repentance, and melt in supplication. Both before and after the Fall, the superiority of Adam is diligently sustained.

Of the probable and the marvellous, two parts of a vulgar epick poem which immerge the critick in deep consideration, the Paradise Lost requires little to be said. It contains the history of a miracle, of Creation and Redemption; it displays the power and the mercy of the Supreme Being; the probable therefore is marvellous, and the marvellous is probable. The

substance of the narrative is truth; and as truth allows no choice, it is, like necessity, superior to rule. To the accidental or adventitious parts, as to every thing human, some slight exceptions may be made. But the main fabrick is immovably supported.

It is justly remarked by Addison that this poem has, by the nature of its subject, the advantage above all others, that it is universally and perpetually interesting. All mankind will, through all ages, bear the same relation to Adam and to Eve, and must partake of that good and evil which extend to themselves.

Of the machinery, so called from Aristotle by which is meant the occasional interposition of supernatural power, another fertile topic of critical remarks, here is no room to speak, because every thing is done under the immediate and visible direction of Heaven; but the rule is so far observed, that no part of the action could have been accomplished by any other means.

Of episodes , I think there are only two, contained in Raphael's relation of the war in heaven, and Michael's prophetick account of the changes to happen in this world (7). Both are closely connected with the great action; one was necessary to Adam as a warning, the other as a consolation.

To the compleatness or integrity of the design nothing can be objected; it has distinctly and clearly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is perhaps no poem, of the same length, from which so little can be taken without apparent mutilation. Here are no funeral games, nor is there any long description of a shield. The short digressions at the beginning of the third, seventh, and ninth books, might doubtless be spared; but superfluities so beautiful, who would take away? or who does not wish that the author of the Iliad had gratified succeeding ages with a little knowledge of himself? Perhaps no passages are more frequently or more attentively read than those extrinsick paragraphs; and, since the end of poetry is pleasure, that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased.

The questions, whether the action of the poem be strictly one , whether the poem can be properly termed heroick , and who is the hero, are raised by such readers as draw their principles of judgement rather from books than from reason. Milton, though he intituled Paradise Lost only a poem , yet calls it himself heroick song. Dryden, petulantly and indecently, denies the heroism of Adam, because he was overcome; but there is no reason why the hero should not be unfortunate, except established practice, since success and virtue do not go necessarily together. Cato is the hero of Lucan, but Lucan's authority will not be suffered by Quintilian to decide. However, if success be necessary, Adam's deceiver was at last crushed; Adam was restored to his Maker's favour, and therefore may securely resume his human rank. After the scheme and fabrick of the poem, must be considered its component parts, the sentiments and the diction.

The sentiments , as expressive of manners, or appropriated to characters, are, for the greater part, unexceptionably just.

Splendid passages, containing lessons of morality, or precepts of prudence, occur seldom. Such is the original formation of this poem, that as it admits no human manners till the Fall, it can give little assistance to human conduct. Its end is to raise the thoughts above sublunary cares or pleasures. Yet the praise of that fortitude, with which Abdiel maintained his singularity of virtue against the scorn of multitudes, may be accommodated to all times; and Raphael's reproof of Adam's curiosity after the planetary motions, with the answer returned by Adam, may be confidently opposed to any rule of life which any poet has delivered. (9) The thoughts which are occasionally called forth in the progress, are such as could only be produced by an imagination in the highest degree fervid and active, to which materials were supplied by incessant study and unlimited curiosity. The heat of Milton's mind might be said to sublimate his learning, to throw off into his work the spirit of science, unmingled with its grosser parts. (10)

He had considered creation in its whole extent, and his descriptions are therefore learned. He had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions therefore were extensive. The characteristick quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantick loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish.

He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others; the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful: he therefore chose a subject on which too much could not be said, on which he might tire his fancy without the censure of extravagance.

The appearances of nature, and the occurrences of life, did not satiate his appetite of greatness. To paint things as they are, requires a minute attention, and employs the memory rather than the fancy. Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his faculties out upon discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings, to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.

But he could not be always in other worlds: he must sometimes revisit earth, and tell of things visible and known. When he cannot raise wonder by the sublimity of his mind, he gives delight by its fertility.

Whatever be his subject, he never fails to fill the imagination. But his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from

original form, nor to have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation. He saw Nature, as Dryden expresses it, and on most occasions calls learning to his assistance. The garden of Eden brings to his mind the vale of Enna, where Proserpine was gathering flowers. Satan makes his way through fighting elements, like Argo between the Cyanean rocks, or Ulysses between the two Sicilian whirlpools, when he shunned Charybdis on the larboard. The mythological allusions have been justly censured, as not being always used with notice of their vanity; but they contribute variety to the narration, and produce an alternate exercise of the memory and the fancy.

His similies are less numerous, and more various, than those of his predecessors. But he does not confine himself within the limits of rigorous comparison: his great excellence is amplitude, and he expands the adventitious image beyond the dimensions which the occasion required. Thus, comparing the shield of Satan to the orb of the Moon, he crouds the imagination with the discovery of the telescope, and all the wonders which the telescope discovers.

Of his moral sentiments it is hardly praise to affirm that they excel those of all other poets; for this superiority he was indebted to his acquaintance with the sacred writings. The ancient epick poets wanting the light of Revelation, were very unskilful teachers of virtue: their principal characters may be great, but they are not aimiable. The reader may rise from their works with a greater degree of active or passive fortitude, and sometimes of prudence; but he will be able to carry away few precepts of justice, and none of mercy.

From the Italian writers it appears, that the advantages of even Christian knowledge may be possessed [1783:supposed]in vain. Ariosto's pravity is generally known; and though the Deliverance of Jerusalem may be considered as a sacred subject, the poet [Torquato Tasso] has been very sparing of moral instruction.

In Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought, and purity of manners, except when the train of the narration requires the introduction of the rebellious spirits; and even they are compelled to acknowledge their subjection to God, in such a manner as excites reverence, and confirms piety.

1 Of human beings there are but two; but those two are the parents of mankind, venerable before their fall for dignity and innocence, and amiable after it for repentance and submission. In their first state their affection is tender without weakness, and their piety sublime without presumption. When they have sinned, they shew how discord begins in mutual frailty, and how it ought to cease in mutual forbearance; how confidence of the divine favour is forfeited by sin, and how hope of pardon may be obtained by penitence and prayer. A state of innocence we can only conceive, if indeed, in our present misery, it be possible to conceive it; but the sentiments and worship proper to a fallen and offending being, we have all to learn, as we have all to practise.

The poet, whatever be done, is always great. Our progenitors, in their first state, conversed with angels; even when folly and sin had degraded them, they had not in their humiliation and they rise again to reverential regard, when we find that their prayers were heard.

As human passions did not enter the world before the Fall, there is in the Paradise Lost little opportunity for the pathetick; but what little there is has not been lost. That passion which is peculiar to rational nature, the anguish arising from the consciousness of transgression, and the horrours attending the sense of the Divine Displeasure, are very justly described and forcibly impressed. But the passions are moved only on one occasion; sublimity is the general and prevailing quality in this poem; sublimity variously modified, sometimes descriptive, sometimes argumentative.

The defects and faults of Paradise Lost, for faults and defects every work of man must have, it is the business of impartial criticism to discover. As, in displaying the excellence of Milton, I have not made long quotations, because of selecting beauties there had been no end, I shall in the same general manner mention that which seems to deserve censure; for what Englishman can take delight in transcribing passages, which, if they lessen the reputation of Milton, diminish in some degree the honour of our country?

The generality of my scheme does not admit the frequent notice of verbal inaccuracies; which Bentley, perhaps better skilled in grammar than in poetry, has often found, though he sometimes made them, and which he imputed to the obtrusions of a reviser whom the author's blindness obliged him to employ. A supposition rash and groundless, if he thought it true; and vile and pernicious, if, as is said, he in private allowed it to be false.

The plan of Paradise Lost has this inconvenience, that it comprises neither human actions nor human manners. The man and woman who act and suffer, are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know. The reader finds no transaction in which he can be engaged; beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity or sympathy.

We all, indeed, feel the effects of Adam's disobedience; we all sin like Adam, and like him must all bewail our offences; we have restless and insidious enemies in the fallen angels, and in the blessed spirits we have guardians and friends; in the Redemption of mankind we hope to be included: in the description of heaven and hell we are surely interested, as we are all to reside hereafter either in the regions of horrour or of bliss.

But these truths are too important to be new: they have been taught to our infancy; they have mingled with our solitary thoughts and familiar conversation, and are habitually interwoven with the whole texture of life. Being therefore not new, they raise no unaccustomed emotion in the mind; what we knew before, we cannot learn; what is not unexpected, cannot surprise.

Of the ideas suggested by these awful scenes, from some we recede with reverence, except when stated hours require their association; and from others we shrink with horrour, or admit them onlv as salutary inflictions, as counterpoises to our interests and passions. Such images rather obstruct the career of fancy than incite it.

Pleasure and terrour are indeed the genuine sources of poetry; but poetical pleasure must be such as human imagination can at least conceive, and poetical terrour such as human strength and fortitude may combat. The good and evil of Eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit; the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness, content with calm belief and humble adoration.

Known truths, however, may take a different appearance, and be conveyed to the mind by a new train of intermediate images. This Milton has undertaken, and performed with pregnancy and vigour of mind peculiar to himself. Whoever considers the few radical positions which the Scriptures afforded him will wonder by what energetick operation he expanded them to such extent, and ramified them to so much variety, restrained as he was by religious reverence from licentiousness of fiction.

Here is a full display of the united force of study and genius; of a great accumulation of materials, with judgement to digest, and fancy to combine them: Milton was able to select from nature, or from story, from ancient fable, or from modern science, whatever could illustrate or adorn his thoughts. An accumulation of knowledge impregnated his mind, fermented by study, and exalted by imagination.

It has been therefore said, without an indecent hyperbole, by one of his encomiasts, that in reading Paradise Lost we read a book of universal knowledge.

But original deficience cannot be supplied. The want of human interest is always felt. Paradise Lost is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions.

Another inconvenience of Milton's design is, that it requires the description of what cannot be described, the agency of spirits. He saw that immateriality supplied no images, and that he could not show angels acting but by instruments of action; he therefore invested them with form and matter. This, being necessary, was therefore defensible; and he should have secured the consistency of his system, by keeping immateriality out of sight, and enticing his reader to drop it from his thoughts. But he has unhappily perplexed his poetry with his philosophy. His infernal and celestial powers are sometimes pure spirit, and sometimes animated body. When Satan walks with his lance upon the burning marle , he has a body; when in his passage between hell and the new world, he is in danger of sinking in the vacuity, and is supported by a gust of rising vapours, he has a body; when he animates the

toad, he seems to be mere spirit, that can penetrate matter at pleasure; when he starts up in his own shape, he has at least a determined form; and when he is brought before Gabriel, he has a spear and a shield, which he had the power of hiding in the toad, though the arms of the contending angels are evidently material. (12)

The vulgar inhabitants of Pandamronium, being incorporeal spirits, are at large, though without number, in a limited space; yet in the battle, when they were overwhelmed by mountains, their armour hurt them, crushed in upon their substance, now grown gross by sinning. This likewise happened to the uncorrupted angels, who were overthrown the sooner for their arms, for unarmed they light easily as spirits have evaded by contraction or remove. Even is spirits they are hardly spiritual; for contraction and remove are images of matter; but if they could have escaped without their armour, they might have escaped from it, and left only the empty cover to be battered. Uriel, when he rides on a sunbeam, is material' Satan is material when he is afraid of the prowess of Adam. (13)

The confusion of spirit and matter which pervades the whole narration of the war of heaven fills it with incongruity; and the book, in which it is related, is, I believe, the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased.

After the operation of immaterial agents, which cannot be explained, may be considered that of allegorical persons, which have no real existence. To exalt causes into agents, to invest abstract ideas with form, and animate them with activity, has always been the right of poetry. But such airy beings are, for the most part, suffered only to do their natural office, and retire. Thus Fame tells a tale, and Victory hovers over a general, or perches on a standard; but Fame and Victory can do no more. To give them any real employment, or ascribe to them any material agency, is to make them allegorical no longer, but to shock the mind by ascribing effects to non-entity. In the Prometheus of Æschylus, we see Violence and Strength, and in the Alcestis of Euripides, we see Death, brought upon the stage, all as active persons of the drama; but no precedents can justify absurdity.

Milton's allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken. That Sin and Death should have shewn the way to hell, might have been allowed; but they cannot facilitate the passage by building a bridge, because the difficulty of Satan's passage is described as real and sensible, and the bridge ought to be only figurative. The hell assigned to the rebellious spirits is described as not less local than the residence of man. It is placed in some distant part of space, separated from the regions of harmony and order by a chaotick waste and an unoccupied vacuity; but Sin and Death worked up a mole of aggregated [1783:aggravated] soil, cemented with asphaltus; a work too bulky for ideal architects.

This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem; and to this there was no temptation, but the author's opinion of its beauty.

To the conduct of the narrative some objections may be made. Satan is with great expectation brought before Gabriel in Paradise, and is suffered to go away unmolested. The creation of man is represented as the consequence of the vacuity left in heaven by the expulsion of the rebels; yet Satan mentions it as a report "rife in heaven" before his departure. (15)

To find sentiments for the state of innocence, was very difficult; and something of anticipation perhaps is now and then discovered. Adam's discourse of dreams seems not to be the speculation of a new-created being. I know not whether his answer to the angel's reproof for curiosity does not want something of propriety: it is the speech of a man acquainted with many other men. Some philosophical notions, especially when the philosophy is false, might have been better omitted. The angel, in a comparison, speaks of timorous deer, before deer were yet timorous, and before Adam could understand the comparison. (16)

Dryden remarks, that Milton has some flats among his elevations(17). This is only to say, that all the parts are not equal. In every work, one part must be for the sake of others; a palace must have passages; a poem must have transitions. It is no more to be required that wit should always be blazing, than that the sun should always stand at noon. In a great work there is a vicissitude of luminous and opaque parts, as there is in the world a succession of day and night. Milton, when he has expatiated in the sky, may be allowed sometimes to revisit earth; for what other author ever soared so high, or sustained his flight so long?

Milton, being well versed in the Italian poets, appears to have borrowed often from them; and, as every man catches something from his companions, his desire of imitating Ariosto's levity has disgraced his work with the Paradise of Fools; a fiction not in itself ill-imagined, but too ludicrous for its place. (18)

His play on words, in which he delights too often; his equivocations, which Bentley endeavours to defend by the example of the ancients; his unnecessary and ungraceful use of terms of art; it is not necessary to mention, because they are easily remarked, and generally censured, and at last bear so little proportion to the whole, that they scarcely deserve the attention of a critick.

Such are the faults of that wonderful performance Paradise Lost; which he who can put in balance with its beauties must be considered not as nice but as dull, as less to be censured for want of candour, than pitied for want of sensibility. . . .

Rhyme, he says, and says truly, is no necessary adunct of true poetry (19) But perhaps, of poetry as a mental operation, metre or musick is no necessary adjunct: it is however by the

musick of metre that poetry has been discriminated in all languages; and in languages melodiously constructed with a due proportion of long and short syllables, metre is sufficient. But one language cannot communicate its rules to another: where metre is scanty and imperfect, some help is necessary. The musick of the English heroick line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together: this co-operation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another, as a distinct system of sounds; and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme. The variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse, changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer; and there are only a few skilful and happy readers of Milton, who enable their audience to perceive where the lines end or begin. Blank verse, said an ingenious critick, seems to be verse only to the eye. (20)

Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be safely spared but where the subject is able to support itself. Blank verse makes some approach to that which is called the lapidary style; has neither the easiness of prose, nor the melody of numbers, and therefore tires by long continuance. Of the Italian writers without rhyme, whom Milton alleges as precedents, not one is popular; what reason could urge in its defence, has been confuted by the ear.

But, whatever be the advantage of rhyme, I cannot prevail on myself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer; for I cannot wish his work to be other than it iS; vet, like other heroes, he is to be admired rather than imitated. He that thinks himself capable of astonishing, may write blank verse; but those that hope only to please, must condescend to rhyme.

The highest praise of genius is original invention. Milton cannot be said to have contrived the structure of an epick poem, and therefore owes reverence to that vigour and amplitude of mind to which all generations must be indebted for the art of poetical narration, for the texture of the fable, the variation of incidents, the interposition of dialogue, and all the stratagems that surprise and enchain attention. But, of all the borrowers from Homer, Milton is perhaps the least indebted. He was naturally a thinker for himself, confident of his own abilities, and disdainful of help or hindrance: he did not refuse admission to the thoughts or images of his predecessors, but he did not seek them. From his contemporaries he neither courted nor received support; there is in his writings nothing bv which the pride of other authors might be gratified, or favour gained; no exchange of praise, nor solicitation of support. His great works were performed under discountenance, and in blindness, but difficulties vanished at his touch; he was born for whatever is arduous; and his work is not the greatest of heroick poems, onlv because it is not the first

Preface to the Lyrical Ballads

William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth, a poet and one of the foremost founders of English Romanticism, is the author and narrator of the essay "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads." Through the essay, Wordsworth criticizes the literature of Neoclassical writers and declares the principles and aims of the Romantic movement. Wordsworth disdains both the early to mid-Neoclassical writers' emphasis on decorum, as well as the late-Neoclassical writers' penchant for sensationalism, which, he argues, leads to artificiality and dulling of the mind. For Wordsworth, the remedy for these trends lies in returning to nature and the "rustic" life and language of the peasantry, as well as getting in touch with one's emotions as an aesthetic experience. Born and brought up in a poor part of the English Lake District, Wordsworth admired the working class and disdained hierarchical social order. He believed that the purity and sincerity of a simpler life helps humans stay human; thus, he wrote ballads that allowed readers to vicariously experience this invigorating simplicity. Furthermore, though Wordsworth believed poetry to be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," he is also known for his emphasis on "recollecting emotions in tranquility," so as to prevent the poet from writing in a state of emotional excess. As a young man, he had enthusiastically witnessed the upheavals of the French Revolution, only to have been bitterly disappointed by its effects. This experience led him to perceive a need for balancing the passionate emotions with calm contemplation. Consequently, readers can perceive that Wordsworth's poetry is filled with not only deep feeling but also profound thought.

Summary

Wordsworth explains that the first edition of Lyrical Ballads was published as a sort of experiment to test the public reception of poems that use "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation." The experiment was successful, better than Wordsworth was expecting, and many were pleased with the poems.

Wordsworth acknowledges that his friend (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) supplied several poems in the collection, including Rime of the Ancient Mariner. He then relates that he and his friends wish to start a new type of poetry, poetry of the sort seen in Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth notes that he was initially unwilling to write the preface as some sort of systemic defense of this new genre, because he doesn't want to reason anyone into liking these poems. He also says the motives behind starting this new genre of poetry are too complex to fully articulate in so few words. Still, he has decided to furnish a preface: his poems are so different from the poems of his age that they require at least a brief explanation as to their conception.

Wordsworth claims that just as authors have a right to use certain ideas and techniques, they also have a right to exclude other ideas and techniques. In every age, different styles of

poetry arise, and people expect different things from poetry. He goes on to cite many great yet different poets of old, from Catullus Terence to Alexander Pope. Wordsworth wants to use the preface to explain why he writes poetry the way he does, so that people don't see his nonconformity as laziness.

Wordsworth relates that his principal goal in writing the poems in the Lyrical Ballads was to portray common life in an interesting and honest way, and to appeal to readers' emotions by generating "a state of excitement." He chose to depict common life because in that situation, people are generally more self-aware and more honest. The feelings that arise in that condition are simpler, more understandable, and more durable. Furthermore, the language of the peasantry is pure, as common people are in constant communication with nature and far away from "social vanity."

The language of the peasantry carries a certain permanence, unlike the lofty language of the late-Neoclassical writers. The late-Neoclassical poets believe that the lofty poetry they write bring them as well as poetry itself honor. However, Wordsworth perceives many things to be wrong with these poets and their lofty language: "they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation." To Wordsworth, these poets are utterly unrelatable for the general literate masses.

On the other hand, Wordsworth states that triviality and lack of profound thought is a larger problem than lofty language among his contemporary poets. He prides himself in the fact that his poems actually have "a worthy purpose." His poetry—like all good poetry—"is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Of course, it is also necessary that the poet "thought long and deeply" prior to writing the poem. Wordsworth believes that if someone continuously observes and contemplates their feelings, they will be enlightened, develop better taste, and have their "affections ameliorated"; someone who processes their feelings will become a better person. This process of observance and profound thought is necessary, as the poet must have their "taste exalted". The poet is, in a sense, elevated from their peers. Wordsworth believes that poetry ought to be serious and profound—poems need to have a purpose and cannot be intended purely for shallow entertainment. Emotions are, for Wordsworth, a very serious and profound subject. At the same time, emotions cannot be separated from thoughts, as the two are inextricably tied together. Thus, readers can infer that good poetry should seriously deal with both emotions and thoughts. This sort of poetry will help people become better people.

Wordsworth then declares the purpose of his poems: "to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated under a state of excitement," or, more specifically, "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature." The purpose of his poems is to depict the thoughts and feelings present during certain emotional experiences. Wordsworth then cites a few of his ballads and relays how those particular poems follow this purpose. He declares that "the feeling [developed in his poems] gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to

the feeling." He claims that readers will understand his statement better after reading two of his ballads, "Poor Susan" and "Childless Father."

Wordsworth strongly believes that "the human mind is capable of excitement without the application of gross and violent stimulants." It is the writer's job "to produce or enlarge this capability," especially during Wordsworth's present day, as there are many modern forces and "great national events" dulling human minds. Modernity leads humans to crave sensationalism and instant gratification. This manifests in literary trends: people of Wordsworth's era crave the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" of the late-Neoclassical writers rather than the invaluable works of writers like Shakespeare and Milton. Wordsworth is disgusted with these trends and their mind-dulling force, but still believes that given "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind" and the power of nature, there is hope for revival.

Wordsworth turns to the subject of style. He notes that in the Lyrical Ballads, he avoids personifying abstract ideas because he wants to use the language of the common man and "keep [his] Reader in the company of flesh and blood." Wordsworth also avoids what he calls "poetic diction" in order to keep the language in his poetry as simple and as honest as possible—he sees this as "good sense." This avoidance prevents him from using from phrases and figures of speech that are considered to be "the common inheritance of Poets," but it also prevents him from using phrases that have become vulgar from overuse by bad poets.

Wordsworth uses common language because it's realistic, and, thus, relatable. He finds abstract ideas to be distancing—it gives readers the sense that what they are reading about is intangible and does not apply to real life. Wordsworth also expresses frustration that many poetic phrases have become hackneyed from overuse and have lost their original meaning.

Wordsworth observes that there are many critics who disapprove of poems in which the language, "according to the strict laws of metre, does not differ from that of prose." However, Wordsworth approves of these "prosaisms," as they can be found in many great poems, including those by the great poet Milton. He cites a sonnet by John Gray, "On the Death of Richard West," as an example of a poem whose most effective lines are written in a prosaic style.

Wordsworth reiterates that there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose. People often personify poetry and painting as sisters, but Wordsworth thinks poetry and prose are even closer: "they both speak by and to the same organs […] their affections are kindred and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree." He explains that poetry and prose are both altogether human: "Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears." realizes that some people may

think rhyme and meter distinguish poetry from prose, but he thinks that this sort of "regular and uniform" distinction is different from that between common language and poetic diction. In the latter case, the reader "is utterly at the mercy of the Poet respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion"; in the former case, both poet and reader submit to a certain form and there is no interference. Why, then, has Wordsworth chosen to write poetry instead of prose? Simply because he finds metrical language more charming. Furthermore, if meter restricts him, Wordsworth has "the entire world of nature" to write about. To those who criticize Wordsworth for using rhyme and meter but not poetic diction, he replies that readers have read with pleasure poems with simpler language than the language in his ballads.

Wordsworth chooses to submit to the rules of meter because both poet and reader have to adhere. In the case of common language versus poetic diction, the poet and reader would be on level ground when it comes to the former, but the reader would be utterly subject to the whims of the poet in the case of the latter. This is unfair to the reader and can make it difficult for the reader to truly understand what the poet is trying to say. Also, Wordsworth simply finds meter charming for aesthetic reasons. Even the simplest of things, when conveyed in meter, carry a certain charm. Furthermore, he is so free in terms of choosing his subject that the small restraint of meter appears to be nothing in comparison.
Active Themes

Wordsworth also sees a great benefit in using rhyme and meter: poems can excite painful emotions, and the presence of something "regular" may help soften and restrain those painful emotions "by an intertexture of ordinary feeling." This is why people feel they can reread the tragic parts of Shakespeare, but not of Clarissa Harlowe or of James Shirley: Shakespeare tempers his work with rhyme and meter, so that in the end, his works still gives more pleasure than pain. Furthermore, readers generally associate certain types of meter with certain emotions. The poet can use these associations to his or her advantage and affect certain emotions, especially if the poet's diction is insufficiently evocative.
Wordsworth remarks that if the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" were a sort of systemic defense for his poetic theory, then he would need to go through all the ways that metrical language can lead to pleasure. As the preface is not intended to be such a thorough defense, he will simply say that one of the chief pleasures of metrical language is "the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude." Wordsworth briefly elaborates, saying that "this principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder," before claiming that the limits of the preface prohibits him from speaking more on the subject, and "[he] must content [himself] with a general summary."

Wordsworth's occasional nonsensicality—as exemplified by his vague statement addressing "the perception of similitude in dissimilitude"—marks one of the major flaws that critics find with the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads." Some traditions of literary criticism hold that Wordsworth's critical writings are mostly nonsensical, and where they do make sense is

where Coleridge helped him. In general, Wordsworth seems to dismiss any nonsensical declaration with the claim that it is too long to explain, as seen here

Wordsworth proceeds to explain the process of poetic creation. The poet must first recall their emotions in "tranquility" and contemplate those emotions in peace until they dissolve away and a new, kindred emotion comes into place. Then the poet can begin the composition process, and the poet will feel pleasure. The poet must always be careful that readers of their poem will feel more pleasure than the deeper passions that the poem addresses. People tend to read poetry, and not prose, over and over again because of this pleasure. Wordsworth cites Alexander Pope as an example of a poet who produces pleasurable poems from "the plainest common sense." Poetry can be a vehicle to convey truth in a pleasurable way.

Wordsworth addresses possible faults of his ballads: he may have written on an unworthy subject, and he may have made arbitrary connections between things that no one would understand except himself. He is not sure yet which of his expressions are faulty; thus, he refrains from correcting anything. Wordsworth believes that a poet who corrects his own work too often could easily lose his or her confidence. Furthermore, the imperfect reader may also perceive certain poems as faulty when they are actually fine.

Wordsworth's uneasiness with regards to the reception of his ballads manifests once again. He admits that some of his ballads may have faults, but at the same time, he makes it impossible for the reader to accuse his poetry of many faults by saying that the reader, too, has faults.

There is one fault that Wordsworth assures readers they will never find in his poetry: the fault of writing about a trivializing poetry. Samuel Johnson's poem "I put my hat upon my head," lampooning the basic ballad meter, exemplifies this fault. Wordsworth terms this lampoon "a mode of false criticism": ballad meter is intended to be simple, but that doesn't mean it cannot be a medium for serious subjects. Wordsworth then cites a stanza from another poem by Johnson, "The Babes in the Wood," to show an example of simple meter communicating a worthy subject. Through quoting and analyzing these two poems by Johnson, Wordsworth shows that it is the subject, not the meter, of a poem that decides whether it is trivial.
Overall, Wordsworth takes poetry, as well as prefaces to poetic works, very seriously—poetry must be written after a serious emotional experience, after serious contemplation, and in a serious manner. Even poetry written in simple ballad meter ought not to be lampooned, or satirized. Wordsworth considers this sort of satire a wrongful way to engage in criticism. If one is to criticize poetry, one must do so in a serious, thoughtful manner.

Wordsworth asks readers to form their own feelings and opinions, and not go by what others think, when judging his poetry. Wordsworth also tells readers that if they thought one

poem was good and others were bad, they should go back and review those they thought were bad. Reading and judging poetry is an acquired talent, and a review would only be just to the poet. Wordsworth doesn't want readers to make quick judgments about his poetry, as such judgments are often wrong.

Wordsworth declares that there is nothing more he can do but let the reader read his ballads and experience the pleasure they offer firsthand. He realizes that asking readers to try his experimental ballads means that they must "give up much of what [they] ordinarily enjoy" in poetry. Wordsworth wants to show that his poetry is better and offers pleasure "of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature." It is not his intention to denounce other forms of poetry; rather, Wordsworth wishes to promote a new genre of poetry that he feels will help keep humans human. He awaits to hear from readers whether they think he has achieved his purpose, and whether that purpose was worth achieving

Preface to the Lyrical Ballads - Themes

Romanticism vs. Neoclassicism

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Wordsworth sees great harm in the poetry of the Age of Johnson. The poets of this age have attempted to break from Neoclassicism, but their poetry displays an unforgivable insensitivity and sensationalism. Wordsworth notes that there appears to be "a craving for extraordinary incident" among the general public for his time, and "the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves" to this taste: "The invaluable works of our elder writers […] are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." Writers from the Age of Johnson have attempted to incorporate certain characteristics of Romanticism but have created works that are overwrought and lacking in insight. From Wordsworth's critique of these writers, readers of the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" can

infer that Wordsworth believes writers should be sensitive to emotions but should not dramatize these emotions so that they become artificial.

Nevertheless, the decline of literature has not led Wordsworth to be hopeless. The poet declares, “I should be oppressed with no dishonorable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible.” In other words, Wordsworth believes that the decline from the Age of Johnson can be counteracted by “certain powers” that can revive the human mind—namely, the powers of Romanticism. Wordsworth wishes to guide his readers to the “fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature,” to guide his readers back to their natural sensitivity.

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Neoclassicism, in its dedication to intellectualism and other lofty ideas, seems heartless to Wordsworth. Poets in the Age of Johnson who attempted to diverge from earlier classes of Neoclassicism failed to produce better literature and instead fell into the trap of sensationalism. Romanticism is something wholly revolutionary, and, according to Wordsworth, has the potential to revive the public back to sensitivity.

Ordinary Life and Everyday Language

Throughout his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth emphasizes the importance of depicting ordinary life using everyday language in a poem. According to Wordsworth, using ordinary life as subject matter allows the poet to better explore human nature and reveal truth. This simple, prose-like language not only corresponds well with ordinary life—it's closer to the way that normal, everyday people speak—but also is more universally intelligible: its simplicity and honesty create a sense of permanence, making it accessible for readers across time and place.

In order to show why his method of tackling ordinary subjects through ordinary language is so important and impactful, Wordsworth reveals the pitfalls of not using that approach. He suggests that poets who don't rely on ordinary language "separate themselves from the sympathies of men." To Wordsworth, a poet must be close to their reader and pull that reader in—a poet who tries to fluff up his or her poem with jargon or lofty language alienates the reader and has trouble connecting to their lived experience. In addition, veering away from ordinary life and plain language means that poems may be less enduring. Wordsworth argues that many poets "indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation." While poems centering around everyday life and expressed through simple language will live on, poems that don't do those things will essentially only have fifteen minutes of fame. Wordsworth also points out that he's "abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower." Here, Wordsworth is explaining how certain words and phrases, though they may sound beautiful, can grow stale and trite over the years—so much so, that even the best poet can't "overpower" the sour, spoiled flavor those words and phrases have taken on.

Wordsworth argues that what makes common scenes from ordinary life so impactful in poetry is that they speak clearly to human nature and are also enduring. Wordsworth makes it clear that his "principal object" is "to choose incidents and situations from common life […] and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination […] and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them […] the primary laws of our nature." Wordsworth wishes to depict ordinary things—albeit in an interesting way through using his imagination—so that his readers may better understand human nature. Along these lines, Wordsworth claims that "low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." Wordsworth believes that there is a certain degree of universality to rural life: things are "more easily comprehended" because they are "more durable." In other words, rural life is the most easily relatable and timeless.

Wordsworth also emphasizes that he wants to use "a selection of language really used by men"—that is, language that mirrors the way everyday people (the peasantry) talk as they go about their lives—because of its purity and universality. For Wordsworth, society has corrupted language. Instead of buying into the lofty language and rigid poetic forms that society deems proper, Wordsworth chooses to use the stripped-down, ordinary language of a commoner. He explains that common people speak more truthfully because they aren't swayed by "social vanity," and it is this unadorned truth—the "simple and unelaborated expressions" of everyday people—that Wordsworth is after. Furthermore, Wordsworth claims that "such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets." Not only is everyday language truer, it's also more enduring. To Wordsworth, everyday language means that it's stripped bare of the poetic devices that many believe to be part and parcel to poetry. He writes: "Except in a very few instances the Reader will find no personifications of abstract ideas." Although personification has its place in certain poems, Wordsworth doesn't rely on the device because his goal is "to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men, and I do not find that such personifications make any regular or natural part of that language." Along the same lines, Wordsworth also avoids excessively poetic diction. He explains, "I have taken as much pains to avoid it as others ordinarily take to produce it; this I have done […] to bring my language near to the language of men." That Wordsworth has tried just as hard to filter out that which other poets try so hard to infuse into their poems emphasizes just how serious Wordsworth is about reflecting everyday life with the language to match.

Towards the middle of his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth writes, "I wish to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him." While Wordsworth means that readers won't find many instances of personification or lofty, abstract ideas floating around in the ensuing ballads, his statement here also speaks to his overarching goal: to write in plain, unadorned language about everyday people and things—"flesh and blood"—in order to convey the human experience in a way that is true and enduring.

Poetry and Emotions

Emotions are of utmost importance to Wordsworth when it comes to poetry. "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," he writes in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads." However, Wordsworth is careful to point out that depicting emotion requires prior thought and acquired skill on the part of the poet. The poet should be able to successfully observe and depict the thoughts and feelings that people have when they are in "a state of excitement," meaning the stimulation people experience in a given situation. In this way, when a poet successfully composes a poem, that poem should have a noticeable effect on its reader, as it is relatable. In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth argues that in order to compose a successful and impactful poem, the poet must immerse themselves in a sort of process for poetic creation, which includes observing the subject

matter, recollecting his or her emotions, contemplating those emotions, reviving those emotions in a composition, and, finally, enjoying the pleasure that his or her poetry creates.

For Wordsworth, a worthy poet must be able to convey his or her own emotional sensibility to the reader. Wordsworth claims that emotions and thoughts are strongly intertwined: “For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feeling.” The poet must be able to understand this connection, as someone who often thinks of the relationship between thoughts and feelings will become more emotionally sensitive and aware. Then, when one such sensitive person communicates his or her thoughts, the listener, “if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.” In other words, when a poet successfully communicates their emotions, readers will be vicariously enlightened. Because the poet is tasked with successfully conveying that “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” to his or her readers, the poet must engage in a process that allows him or her to find the right words to express himself or herself. But first, the poet must be uncommonly aware of emotions: the poet needs to have “a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind.” Such a sensibility allows the poet to “slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with [those of the people he describes].” In this way, a poet must be a sharp observer and must be able to contemplate and process the emotions that came with his or her observations.

The Wordsworthian poet ought to recollect their emotions “in tranquility" so that what he or she composes will not be momentary, but timeless. Wordsworth claims that “the poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner.” The purpose of this is so that the poet can better communicate their thoughts and feelings to others: “in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves.” The Wordsworthian process for poetic creation involves not just contemplating emotions “in tranquility,” but contemplating those emotions until “by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.” In other words, the poet should calmly process the emotions he or she initially experienced without distraction, until he or she feels in touch with those emotions again. Then, the poet may begin composing. This process allows the poet to create a distance between the initial emotion and the reader, in a way that tempers “the painful feeling which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions,” and thus leads to greater pleasure. The process for poetic creation has so refined the poet’s composition, Wordsworth adds, that it will carry an enduring rather than momentary pleasure for its readers.

For Wordsworth, the essence of poetry comes in the form of a profound rendering of emotions, which helps the reader understand themselves better. As Wordsworth writes in

his “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,” the important thing is “that the feeling therein developed [in a poem] gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling”—poetry, in Wordsworth’s eyes, hinges on emotion even more so than the actual event or situation it’s describing.

Poetry, Nature, and Humanity

At the beginning of the 19th century, when Wordsworth was writing, England was moving towards industry and urbanity. Wordsworth believed that this sort of fast-paced, crowded lifestyle caused people’s minds to grow numb. Wordsworth wrote not for himself, but for the sake of his contemporaries, whose minds he believed were dull. He felt the need to use the subject of nature in his poetry in order to keep his readers emotionally alive and morally sensitive. He saw nature as the solution to the harms of urban life, and, thus, chose to center his Lyrical Ballads around experiences in nature. In his “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,” Wordsworth highlights that his nature-centered poems have a “worthy purpose” in their potential to reverse the effects of urban life and revive dull minds: his poetry allows people to vicariously experience the profound joys of nature and be revived. In response to urbanization, he felt the need to create poetry that would be “well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations”—in other words, Wordsworth argues that his poetry can help keep humans human by bringing them back to nature.

In his “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,” Wordsworth highlights how his nature-centered poetry has the power to turn people away from urbanity and industrialization, which he believes dull people’s minds. At the time of Wordsworth’s writing, the Industrial Revolution had recently transformed Britain: people migrated to the city and factories began to appear. Furthermore, Europe was in political upheaval and people were falling for propagandic messages. Wordsworth was bitterly disappointed by the result of the French Revolution and did not want England to follow after France. In general, Wordsworth disliked this trend towards urbanity, industry, mass media, and mass culture: the numbing of the mind arises as the result of “great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of information hourly gratifies.” In Wordsworth’s eyes, these aspects of society have led people to develop bad taste—they craved the instant gratification and revolution rather than profound joy and peace. This bad taste can be seen in his disdainful reference to contemporary Gothic novels and German melodramas: “The invaluable works of our elder writers […] are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.” Wordsworth is eager to show that “the

human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants" by creating a new class of more profound, natural literary enjoyment.

Wordsworth's solution to mind-dulling urbanization is to bring people back to nature through poetry: nature-centered poetry allows people to vicariously experience the simple, unadulterated joys of the countryside. In his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth explains that the time is ripe for his ballads, which will orient readers toward nature. He writes: "It has therefore appeared to me that to endeavor to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day." In other words, Wordsworth thinks that the curative powers of nature-centered poetry are timeless and applicable to any generation but are especially potent for his age. The Lyrical Ballads represents a "species of poetry […] which is genuine poetry," that "give[s] other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature." For Wordsworth, nature-centered literature can be the antidote for depravity because such literature allows people who live in depraved societies to vicariously travel to a place of nature and tranquility and experience the purity of the "rustic" human experience. The "purer, more lasting, and more exquisite" joy that his nature-centered poetry brings forms a stark contrast to the "gross and violent" stimulation that urban life and sensational literature bring. Indeed, Wordsworth views nature to be the one of the most important subjects with which a poet can engage. He writes that "there is still left open to me what confessedly constitutes the most valuable object of all writing whether in prose or verse, […] the entire world of nature." For the poet, nature "[supplies] endless combinations of form and imagery"—nature is both a valuable topic and a source of abundant inspiration. The pleasure of urban life and sensational literature is temporary and quickly depleted, leading people to seek stimulants that are still more "gross and violent"; the joy of nature, by contrast, is lasting and bountiful.

For Wordsworth, urban life and sensational literature has brought on the moral decline of humanity, and the best way to counter this is to bring people back to nature using Romantic poetry. In his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth preps his reader to vicariously experience a stroll through the countryside, a quiet moment perched atop a cliff, or a sunset by the sea, all by reading one of Wordsworth's ballads in the pages ahead. These nature-centered poems, Wordsworth argues, will not only revive readers and refresh their tired minds, but will also serve as a lasting source of joy.

Romanticism vs. Neoclassicism

The "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" is, at its core, a manifesto of the Romantic movement. Wordsworth uses this essay to declare the tenets of Romantic poetry, which has distinctly different preoccupations from the Neoclassical poetry of the preceding period. The Neoclassical poets emphasized intellectualism over emotion, society, didacticism, formality,

and stylistic rigidity. The last stage of Neoclassicism, before the onset of Romanticism, is known as the Age of Johnson. In this last stage, writers attempted to break from the classical tradition through gestures like incorporating nature and melancholy, but were, in Wordsworth's eyes, unsuccessful. Wordsworth proposes something more revolutionary in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads": emotion and imagination over intellectualism, nature over society, simple forms of expression, and the stylistic liberty of the poet. Through his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth argues that it's time for a new kind of poetry—one that can revive humankind to be emotionally alive and morally sensitive—which he hopes to catalyze with his own ballads.

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Preface to the Lyrical Ballads Characters

William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth, a poet and one of the foremost founders of English Romanticism, is the author and narrator of the essay "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads." Through the essay, Wordsworth criticizes the literature of Neoclassical writers and declares the principles and aims of the Romantic movement. Wordsworth disdains both the early to mid-Neoclassical writers' emphasis on decorum, as well as the late-Neoclassical writers' penchant for sensationalism, which, he argues, leads to artificiality and dulling of the mind. For Wordsworth, the remedy for these trends lies in returning to nature and the "rustic" life and language of the peasantry, as well as getting in touch with one's emotions as an aesthetic experience. Born and brought up in a poor part of the English Lake District, Wordsworth admired the working class and disdained hierarchical social order. He believed that the purity and sincerity of a simpler life helps humans stay human; thus, he wrote ballads that allowed readers to vicariously experience this invigorating simplicity. Furthermore, though Wordsworth believed poetry to be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," he is also known for his emphasis on "recollecting emotions in tranquility," so as to prevent the poet from writing in a state of emotional excess. As a young man, he had enthusiastically witnessed the upheavals of the French Revolution, only to have been bitterly disappointed by its effects. This experience led him to perceive a need for balancing the passionate emotions with calm contemplation. Consequently, readers can perceive that Wordsworth's poetry is filled with not only deep feeling but also profound thought.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Wordsworth introduces Samuel Taylor Coleridge as "a Friend" who contributed several poems—The Ancient Mariner, "The Foster Mother's Tale," "The Nightingale," "The Dungeon," and "Love"—to Lyrical Ballads, and who shares the same Romantic tendency: their "opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide." Coleridge helped Wordsworth launch the Romantic era in English literature; indeed, the two poets' names are often linked together, along with Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. The companionship of Coleridge was a major source of encouragement and inspiration for Wordsworth in terms of writing the Lyrical Ballads and its accompanying preface.

Late-Neoclassical Writers

According to Wordsworth, these writers diverted public interest from the "invaluable works" of writers like Shakespeare and Milton to their own "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." The late-Neoclassical writers relied on sensationalism, artifice, and stylistic excess to hold readers' interest. Wordsworth believes that the works of these writers have dulled the minds of many readers.

The Peasantry

Wordsworth considered the thoughts, feelings, and language of the peasantry to be ideal for poetry. In the Lyrical Ballads, he depicts "low and rustic life" because he believes the thoughts of the peasantry are less restrained, more communicative, more easily comprehended, and more durable "because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." In other words, the thoughts of these working-class peasants are more sincere and pure because they are in daily contact with nature. Furthermore, their language, consisting of "simple and unelaborated expressions," is also ideal for poetry as "a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language" than the artificial language of the late-Neoclassical poets. Wordsworth uses working-class language because it is more in tune with reality and "the sympathies of men."

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In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth personifies poetry and speaks of her tears and blood, using them to represent the idea that poetry should be written in the language of the common people. He writes: "Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both." Poetry's tears and blood represent the essence of poetic language—according to Wordsworth, poetic language is merely the language of the common people, and not the lofty thing that the late-Neoclassical writers have made it out to be. Instead of "celestial Ichor"—the blood-like substance thought to run through the gods' veins—poetry bleeds real, human blood. This ties into Wordsworth's aim in the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" to "keep [his] Reader in the company of flesh and blood"—to use stripped-down, common, prose-like language and write about real life ("Low and rustic life") as the masses experience it. Through this metaphor with the tears of poetry, Wordsworth demystified poetry, demonstrating that it is human and not sublime; consequently, poetic language ought to be down-to-earth instead of lofty.

https://www.litcharts.com/lit/preface-to-the-yrical-ballads/summary-and-analysis

Biographia Literaria by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (born October 21, 1772, Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England—died July 25, 1834, Highgate, near London), English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher. His *Lyrical Ballads*, written with William Wordsworth, heralded the English Romantic movement, and his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is the most significant work of general literary criticism produced in the English Romantic period.

Early life and works

Coleridge's father was vicar of Ottery and headmaster of the local grammar school. As a child Coleridge was already a prodigious reader, and he immersed himself to the point of morbid fascination in romances and Eastern tales such as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments.* In 1781 his father died suddenly, and in the following year Coleridge entered Christ's Hospital in London, where he completed his secondary education. In 1791 he entered Jesus College, Cambridge. At both school and university he continued to read voraciously, particularly in works of imagination and visionary philosophy, and he was remembered by his schoolmates for his eloquence and prodigious memory. In his third year at Cambridge, oppressed by financial difficulties, he went to London and enlisted as a dragoon under the assumed name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbache. Despite his unfitness for

the life, he remained until discovered by his friends; he was then bought out by his brothers and restored to Cambridge.

On his return, he was restless. The intellectual and political turmoil surrounding the French Revolution had set in motion intense and urgent discussion concerning the nature of society. Coleridge now conceived the design of circumventing the disastrous violence that had destroyed the idealism of the French Revolution by establishing a small society that should organize itself and educate its children according to better principles than those obtaining in the society around them. A chance meeting with the poet Robert Southey led the two men to plan such a "pantisocracy" and to set up a community by the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. To this end Coleridge left Cambridge for good and set up with Southey as a public lecturer in Bristol. In October 1795 he married Sara Fricker, daughter of a local schoolmistress, swayed partly by Southey's suggestion that he was under an obligation to her since she had been refusing the advances of other men.

Shortly afterward, Southey defected from the pantisocratic scheme, leaving Coleridge married to a woman whom he did not really love. In a sense his career never fully recovered from this blow: if there is a makeshift quality about many of its later events, one explanation can be found in his constant need to reconcile his intellectual aspirations with the financial needs of his family. During this period, however, Coleridge's intellect flowered in an extraordinary manner, as he embarked on an investigation of the nature of the human mind, joined by William Wordsworth, with whom he had become acquainted in 1795. Together they entered upon one of the most influential creative periods of English literature. Coleridge's intellectual ebullience and his belief in the existence of a powerful "life consciousness" in all individuals rescued Wordsworth from the depression into which recent events had cast him and made possible the new approach to nature that characterized his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* (which was to be published in 1798).

Coleridge, meanwhile, was developing a new, informal mode of poetry in which he could use a conversational tone and rhythm to give unity to a poem. Of these poems, the most successful is "Frost at Midnight," which begins with the description of a silent frosty night in Somerset and proceeds through a meditation on the relationship between the quiet work of frost and the quiet breathing of the sleeping baby at the poet's side, to conclude in a resolve that his child shall be brought up as a "child of nature," so that the sympathies that the poet has come to detect may be reinforced throughout the child's education.

At the climax of the poem, he touches another theme, which lies at the root of his philosophical attitude:

…so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God

Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.

Coleridge's attempts to learn this "language" and trace it through the ancient traditions of mankind also led him during this period to return to the visionary interests of his schooldays: as he ransacked works of comparative religion and mythology, he was exploring the possibility that all religions and mythical traditions, with their general agreement on the unity of God and the immortality of the soul, sprang from a universal life consciousness, which was expressed particularly through the phenomena of human genius.

While these speculations were at their most intense, he retired to a lonely farmhouse near Culbone, Somersetshire, and, according to his own account, composed under the influence of laudanum the mysterious poetic fragment known as "Kubla Khan." The exotic imagery and rhythmic chant of this poem have led many critics to conclude that it should be read as a "meaningless reverie" and enjoyed merely for its vivid and sensuous qualities. An examination of the poem in the light of Coleridge's psychological and mythological interests, however, suggests that it has, after all, a complex structure of meaning and is basically a poem about the nature of human genius. The first two stanzas show the two sides of what Coleridge elsewhere calls "commanding genius": its creative aspirations in time of peace as symbolized in the projected pleasure dome and gardens of the first stanza; and its destructive power in time of turbulence as symbolized in the wailing woman, the destructive fountain, and the voices prophesying war of the second stanza. In the final stanza the poet writes of a state of "absolute genius" in which, if inspired by a visionary "Abyssinian maid," he would become endowed with the creative, divine power of a sun god—an Apollo or Osiris subduing all around him to harmony by the fascination of his spell.

Coleridge was enabled to explore the same range of themes less egotistically in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," composed during the autumn and winter of 1797–98. For this, his most famous poem, he drew upon the ballad form. The main narrative tells how a sailor who has committed a crime against the life principle by slaying an albatross suffers from torments, physical and mental, in which the nature of his crime is made known to him. The underlying life power against which he has transgressed is envisaged as a power corresponding to the influx of the sun's energy into all living creatures, thereby binding them together in a joyful communion. By killing the bird that hovered near the ship, the mariner has destroyed one of the links in this process. His own consciousness is consequently affected: the sun, previously glorious, is seen as a bloody sun, and the energies of the deep are seen as corrupt.

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.
. . . . . .

The very deep did rot; O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.
Only at night do these energies display a sinister beauty.
About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

After the death of his shipmates, alone and becalmed, devoid of a sense of movement or even of time passing, the mariner is in a hell created by the absence of any link with life. Eventually, however, a chance sight of water snakes flashing like golden fire in the darkness, answered by an outpouring of love from his heart, reinitiates the creative process: he is given a brief vision of the inner unity of the universe, in which all living things hymn their source in an interchange of harmonies. Restored to his native land, he remains haunted by what he has experienced but is at least delivered from nightmare, able to see the ordinary processes of human life with a new sense of their wonder and mercifulness. These last qualities are reflected in the poem's attractive combination of vividness and sensitivity. The placing of it at the beginning of *Lyrical Ballads* was evidently intended to provide a context for the sense of wonder in common life that marks many of Wordsworth's contributions. While this volume was going through the press, Coleridge began a complementary poem, a Gothic ballad entitled "Christabel," in which he aimed to show how naked energy might be redeemed through contact with a spirit of innocent love.

Troubled years of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Early in 1798 Coleridge had again found himself preoccupied with political issues. The French Revolutionary government had suppressed the states of the Swiss Confederation, and Coleridge expressed his bitterness at this betrayal of the principles of the Revolution in a poem entitled "France: An Ode."

At this time the brothers Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood, who were impressed by Coleridge's intelligence and promise, offered him in 1798 an annuity of £150 as a means of subsistence while he pursued his intellectual concerns. He used his new independence to visit Germany with Wordsworth and Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy. While there Coleridge attended lectures on physiology and biblical criticism at Göttingen. He thus became aware of developments in German scholarship that were little-known in England until many years later.

On his return to England, the tensions of his marriage were exacerbated when he fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's future wife, at the end of 1799. His devotion to the Wordsworths in general did little to help matters, and for some years

afterward Coleridge was troubled by domestic strife, accompanied by the worsening of his health and by his increasing dependence on opium. His main literary achievements during the period included another section of "Christabel." In 1802 Coleridge's domestic unhappiness gave rise to "Dejection: An Ode," originally a longer verse letter sent to Sara Hutchinson in which he lamented the corrosive effect of his intellectual activities when undertaken as a refuge from the lovelessness of his family life. The poem employs the technique of his conversational poems; the sensitive rhythms and phrasing that he had learned to use in them are here masterfully deployed to represent his own depressed state of mind.

Although Coleridge hoped to combine a platonic love for Sara with fidelity to his wife and children and to draw sustenance from the Wordsworth household, his hopes were not realized, and his health deteriorated further. He therefore resolved to spend some time in a warmer climate and, late in 1804, accepted a post in Malta as secretary to the acting governor. Later he spent a long time journeying across Italy, but, despite his hopes, his health did not improve during his time abroad. The time spent in Malta had been a time of personal reappraisal, however. Brought into direct contact with men accustomed to handling affairs of state, he had found himself lacking an equal forcefulness and felt that in consequence he often forfeited the respect of others. On his return to England he resolved to become more manly and decisive. Within a few months he had finally decided to separate from his wife and to live for the time being with the Wordsworths. Southey atoned for his disastrous youthful advice by exercising a general oversight of Coleridge's family for the rest of his days.

Coleridge published a periodical, *The Friend,* from June 1809 to March 1810 and ceased only when Sara Hutchinson, who had been acting as amanuensis, found the strain of the relationship too much for her and retired to her brother's farm in Wales. Coleridge, resentful that Wordsworth should apparently have encouraged his sister-in-law's withdrawal, resolved shortly afterward to terminate his working relationship with William and Dorothy Wordsworth and to settle in London again.

The period immediately following was the darkest of his life. His disappointment with Wordsworth was followed by anguish when a wounding remark of Wordsworth's was carelessly reported to him. For some time he remained in London, nursing his grievances and producing little. Opium retained its powerful hold on him, and the writings that survive from this period are redolent of unhappiness, with self-dramatization veering toward self-pity.

In spite of this, however, there also appear signs of a slow revival, principally because for the first time Coleridge knew what it was to be a fashionable figure. A course of lectures he delivered during the winter of 1811–12 attracted a large audience; for many years Coleridge had been fascinated by William Shakespeare's achievement, and his psychological interpretations of the chief characters were new and exciting to his contemporaries. During

this period, Coleridge's play *Osorio,* written many years before, was produced at Drury Lane with the title *Remorse* in January 1813.

Late life and works

In the end, consolation came from an unexpected source. In dejection, unable to produce extended work or break the opium habit, he spent a long period with friends in Wiltshire, where he was introduced to Archbishop Robert Leighton's commentary on the First Letter of Peter. In the writings of this 17th-century divine, he found a combination of tenderness and sanctity that appealed deeply to him and seemed to offer an attitude to life that he himself could fall back on. The discovery marks an important shift of balance in his intellectual attitudes. Christianity, hitherto one point of reference for him, now became his "official" creed. By aligning himself with the Anglican church of the 17th century at its best, he hoped to find a firm point of reference that would both keep him in communication with orthodox Christians of his time (thus giving him the social approval he always needed, even if only from a small group of friends) and enable him to pursue his former intellectual explorations in the hope of reaching a Christian synthesis that might help to revitalize the English church both intellectually and emotionally.

One effect of the adoption of this basis for his intellectual and emotional life was a sense of liberation and an ability to produce large works again. He drew together a collection of his poems (published in 1817 as *Sibylline Leaves*) and wrote *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a rambling and discursive but highly stimulating and influential work in which he outlined the evolution of his thought and developed an extended critique of Wordsworth's poems.

For the general reader *Biographia Literaria* is a misleading volume, since it moves bewilderingly between autobiography, abstruse philosophical discussion, and literary criticism. It has, however, an internal coherence of its own. The book's individual components—first an entertaining account of Coleridge's early life, then an account of the ways in which he became dissatisfied with the associationist theories of David Hartley and other 18th-century philosophers, then a reasoned critique of Wordsworth's poems—are fascinating. Over the whole work hovers Coleridge's veneration for the power of imagination: once this key is grasped, the unity of the work becomes evident.

A new dramatic piece, *Zapolya,* was also published in 1817. In the same year, Coleridge became associated for a time with the new *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana,* for which he planned a novel system of organization, outlined in his *Prospectus.* These were more settled years for Coleridge. Since 1816 he had lived in the house of James Gillman, a surgeon at Highgate, north of London. His election as a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1824 brought him an annuity of £105 and a sense of recognition. In 1830 he joined the controversy that had arisen around the issue of Catholic Emancipation by writing his last prose work, *On the Constitution of the Church and State.* The third edition of Coleridge's *Poetical Works* appeared in time for him to see it before his final illness and death in 1834.

Evaluation

Coleridge's achievement has been given more widely varying assessments than that of any other English literary artist, though there is broad agreement that his enormous potential was never fully realized in his works. His stature as a poet has never been in doubt; in "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" he wrote two of the greatest poems in English literature and perfected a mode of sensuous lyricism that is often echoed by later poets. But he also has a reputation as one of the most important of all English literary critics, largely on the basis of his *Biographia Literaria.* In Coleridge's view, the essential element of literature was a union of emotion and thought that he described as imagination. He especially stressed poetry's capacity for integrating the universal and the particular, the objective and the subjective, the generic and the individual. The function of criticism for Coleridge was to discern these elements and to lift them into conscious awareness, rather than merely to prescribe or to describe rules or forms.

In all his roles, as poet, social critic, literary critic, theologian, and psychologist, Coleridge expressed a profound concern with elucidating an underlying creative principle that is fundamental to both human beings and the universe as a whole. To Coleridge, imagination is the archetype of this unifying force because it represents the means by which the twin human capacities for intuitive, non-rational understanding and for organizing and discriminating thought concerning the material world are reconciled. It was by means of this sort of reconciliation of opposites that Coleridge attempted, with considerable success, to combine a sense of the universal and ideal with an acute observation of the particular and sensory in his own poetry and in his criticism.

Overview

The Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge published *Biographia Literaria*, his semiautobiographical work on aesthetic theory, in 1817. Charting the history of his literary career and melding amusing autobiographical anecdotes with what Coleridge calls "transcendental philosophy" (91), the text is an influential work of literary criticism. Capturing Coleridge's political ideas about the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence, the work is also an important historical document. In its pages, Coleridge uses 19th-century philosophical ideas to contest the precepts of his close friend, Britain's then poet laureate William Wordsworth, and place poetry at the center of reality.

Biographia Literaria opens with the recollection of Coleridge's education at Christ's Hospital grammar school and the influence of contemporary writers on developing minds. Coleridge remarks on the temperament of men of genius and the state of contemporary criticism. This leads him to address the critiques made of the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems on which he and Wordsworth collaborated. Coleridge submits a

balanced appraisal of Wordsworth's poetic talent before taking up the topic of discrimination in aesthetic matters and mental associations in general.

In Chapters 5 to 7 Coleridge critiques David Hartley's ideas about associational psychology. Coleridge argues that rather than merely receiving ideas and impressions from the world, mind has agency in perceiving reality. In Chapter 8 Coleridge entertains but interrogates Cartesian dualism. Influenced by Immanuel Kant, Coleridge develops his own theory of Imagination, which he defines as the "esemplastic power" (31). The human soul's capacity to perceive a unified reality is distinguished from Hartleyan mental "associations," which Coleridge calls "Fancy" (31). After a digression during which Coleridge recounts the trials and successes of his early literary career, he returns to discussing the nature of reality.

In Chapter 12 Coleridge sets out 10 theses, the core tenets of his "transcendental philosophy" (91). Elaborating on his definition of Imagination, he returns to a discussion of Wordsworth, and in particular the critical reception of Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In Chapter 14 Coleridge defines both "poem" and "poetry" as a means of differentiating his own aesthetic theory from Wordsworth's. To illustrate his theories, Coleridge examines exemplary poems by Shakespeare and contrasts 16th-century and contemporary literature.

In Chapter 17 Coleridge resumes his critique of Wordsworth's literary theory, particularly Wordsworth's investment in "rustic language" (117). Coleridge argues that poetry is inevitably artificial and that it is consciousness, not commonness, that defines poetic genius. Despite his criticisms of Wordsworthian theory, Coleridge lauds his friend as the greatest poet of his era. The superlative quality of Wordsworth's poetry is due to Wordsworth's ability to synthesize naturalistic imagery and spiritual profundity. Coleridge inverts Wordsworth's aesthetic theory of the natural to form his own, which emphasizes the supernatural, accessed via the Imagination.

While Wordsworth seeks to unite prose and poetry, Coleridge distinguishes between prose and poetry, which is a metrical composition. He gives examples of failures in Wordsworth but proclaims that Wordsworth is capable of writing "the first genuine philosophic poem" (176). Coleridge recounts his tour of Germany in epistolary form in a chapter entitled "Satyrane's Letters." He describes sailing up the Elbe and his experiences of the German literati. The penultimate chapter is an entertaining review of foreign drama before Coleridge summarizes his theories in the conclusion. Commending his readers to God, Coleridge announces, "with this my personal as well as my literary life might conclude!" (226).

Biographia Literaria by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the world's most significant treatises on the nature of poetry and the poet. Coleridge gave the Romantic movement its philosophy in his greatest prose work, The Biographia Literaria. This book, which is a combination of autobiography, literary criticism and philosophy, contains some basic ideas on the superiority of the imagination to mere logic. It also contains an extended criticism of

Wordsworth's poetry, its short-comings, its too frequent prosiness. Biographia Literaria includes some valuable considerations of the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Schelling as well.

The most important of Coleridge's contributions lies in his theory of the Imagination. He dismisses Fancy as the mere shuffling of sense data and memory by talent. He distinguishes between primary imagination and secondary imagination. The secondary imagination is the creative gift possessed by poetic genius. From the Greek, Coleridge coins the word 'esemplastic' to refer to this imagination which can balance or reconcile the apparent opposites in experience.

The Biographia Literaria produces a critical basis for the Romantic imagination. The first sixteen chapters of the book are devoted to philosophising. Then he discusses the merits and defects of Wordsworths theory of poetry particularly his idea of subjects of poetry and the language of poetry. He criticised Wordsworth's view that metre is superseded to poetry. According to him, metre is integral to poetry. Coleridge was concerned with theoretical criticism of poetry. A poem, Coleridge thinks, is not created by a poet it grows within him as a tree grows from the seed.

General estimate of ch:14 Biographia Literaria: Coleridge

OF CH:14 BIOGHRAPHIA LITERARIA: COLERIDGE

* Introduction:-

The written monuments of Coleridge's critical work is contained in 24 chapter of Biographic Literaria (1815-17).In this critical disquision, Coleridge consents himself not only with the practice of criticism, but also, with its theory. In his practical approach to criticism, we get the glimpse of Coleridge the poet; whereas in theoretical discussion, Coleridge the Philosopher came to the center stage.

In chapter XIV (14) of Biographic Literaria, Coleridge's view on nature and function of poetry in discussed in philosophical terms .The poet within Coleridge discusses the difference between poetry and prose, and the immediate function of poetry, whereas the philosopher discusses the difference between poetry and poem. He was the first English writer to insist that every work of art is, by its very nature, an organic whole. At the first step he rules out the assumption, which, from Horace onwards, had wrought such havoc in critism, that the object of poetry is to instruct; or, as a less extreme from of the heresy had asserted, to make men morally better.

*** Explanation of Coleridge's view in ch.14 of Biographic Literaria:-**

Coleridge begins this chapter with his views on two cardinal points of poetry.

- Two cardinal points of poetry :

1 The power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of Nature, and……..

2 The power of giving the interest of novelty by modifying with the colors of imagination.

According to him, it was decided that words worth would write poetry dealing with the theme of first cardinal point and the other was to be dealt by him.

- For the first type of poetry, the treatment and subject matter should be, to quote Coleridge,

"The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combing both." These are the poetry of Nature

In such poems, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.

In the second type of poetry, the incidents and agents were to be Supernatural. In this sort of poetry, to quote Coleridge, "The excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situation, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being at any time believed himself under Supernatural agency." Thus with the help of imagination the natural will be dealt supernaturally by the poet and the reader will comprehend it with "willing Suspension of disbelief."

The Lyrical Ballads consists of poems dealing with these two cardinal points. Wherein, the Endeavour of Coleridge was to deal with "Persons and characters Supernatural", and that of words worth "was to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing in to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.

* In defense of words worth's poetic Creed:-

Coleridge, even though he did not agree with words worth's views on poetic diction, vindicated his poetic creed in chapter: 14 of Biographic Literary. Coleridge writers in defense to the violent assailant to the, "Language of real Life" adopted by words worth in the lyrical Ballads.

There had been strong criticism against words worth's view expressed in preface also Coleridge writes in his defense: "Had Mr. Words worth's poems been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time describe as being; had they been really

distinguished from the composition of other poets merely by manners of language and inamity of thought, had they indeed contended nothing more than what is found in the parodies and pretended initatial of them; euust have sunk at once, a dead weight into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them."

Thus, Coleridge gives full credit to the genius of words worth.

It does not dean that he agreed with words worth on all points.

" With many parts of this preface in the sense attributed to them and which the words undoubtedly seem to authorize, I never concurred; but on the contrary objected to them as erroneous in principle, and as contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves. Mr. Words worth in his recent collection has, I find, degraded this prefatory disquisition to the end of his second volume, to be read or not at the reader's choice."

* **Distinguish between prose and poem**:-

- The poem contains the same elements as a prose the elements as a prose composition.
- But the difference is between the combination of those elements and objects aimed at in both the composition.
- If the object of the poet may simply be to facilitate the memory to recollect certain fact, he would make use of certain artificial arrangement of words with the help of meter.
- As a result composition will be a poem, early because it is distinguished from composition in prose by meteor by rhyme. In this, the lowest sense one might attribute the name of a poem to well known enumeration of the days in the several month;

Thirty days hath September,

April, June, and November, & C.

Thus, to Coleridge, mere super addition of meter or rhyme does not make a poem.

He further elucidates his view point by various prose writings and its immediate purpose and ultimate and. In scientific and Historical composition, the immediate purpose is to convey the truth. In the prose works of other kinds, to give pleasure in the immediate purpose and the ultimate and may be to give truth.Thus, the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work note metrically composed.

- Now the question is "would then the mere super addition of meter, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poem?"

· To the Coleridge replies that if meter is super added the other part of the composition also must harmonies with it. In order to deserve the name poem each part of the composition, including meter, rhyme, diction and theme must harmony with the wholeness of the composition.

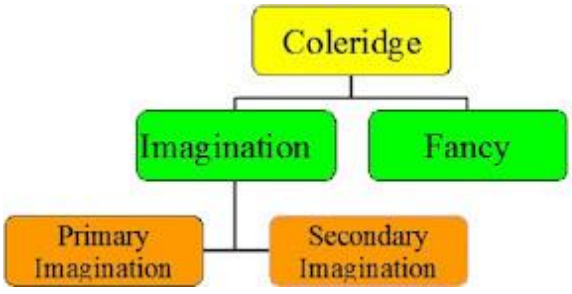
· Meter should not be added to provide merely a superficial decorative charm. nothing can permently please, which does not contain it self the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If meter is super added, all other, parts must be made constant with it. They all must harmony with each other.

· A poem, there for, may be defined as, that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species it is discriminated by proposing to it self such delight from the whole, as it compatible with and distinct gratification from each component part.

Thus, according to Coleridge, the poem is distinguished from prose compositions by its immediate object. The immediate object of prose is e to give truth and that of poem is to please. He again distinguishes those prose compositions from poem whose object is similar to poem i.e. to please. He calls this poem a legitimate poem and defines it as, "it must be one, the part of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the

Should be carried forward, note nearly or chiply by the mechanical impulse of curiosity or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attraction of the journey itself." Coleridge puts an end to the age old controversy whether the end of poem is instruction or delight.

* Coleridge views on 'Imagination' & 'Fancy':-



In chapter XIV of biographia literaria, Coleridge writes "The Imagination then he consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination he holds to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite he was. The secondary Coleridge consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the

kind of 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, event as all objects are essentially fixed and dead"

- **Fancy:-**

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definite. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the other order of time and space; and blended with, and modified that empirical phenomenon of the will which he expresses by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

- **Imagination:-**

In chapter XIV of the book he calls imagination, a magical and synthetic power, and add, "this power, first put in action by the will and understanding and retained under their remissive, though binding gentle and unnoticed, control, reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general. With the concrete; the idea, with the , image the individual, with the representative, the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar object; a more then usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature: the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry."

1. **Primary Imagination:-**

It is the power of perceiving the object of sense, both in their parts and as awhole.It is an involuntary act of the mind: the human mind receives impressions and sensations from the out side world, unconsciously and involuntarily, it imposes some sort of order on those impressions, reduces them to shape and size, so that the mind is able to form a clear image of the out side world. It is in this way that clear and coherent perception becomes possible.

2. **Secondary Imagination:-**

Secondary imagination which makes artistic creation possible. It is more active and conscious in its working. It requires an effort of the will, volition and conscious afford. It works upon what is perceived by the primary imagination, its raw material is the sensations and impression supplied to it by the primary imagination. By and effort of the will and the intellect, the secondary imagination selects and orders the row material, and reshapes and remodels it into objects of beauty. The external world and steeps then with a glory and dream that never was on sea and land. It is an active agent which, "Dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates, in order to create."

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

'The identity' which the post discovers in man and nature results from the synthesizing activity of the secondary imagination.

Coleridge explains the point by quoting two passages from Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis. The following lines from this poem serve to illustrate Fancy:

Full gently now she takes him by the hand

Ivory in an lily poisoned in a goal of snow

"Doubtless," as sir John Davies observes of the soul (and his words may with slight alteration be applied, and even more appropriately to the poetic Imagination)

Doubtless this could not be, but that she turns

Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange…..

Finally, Good SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is every where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

* Originality of Coleridge's views – comparison with words worth:-

· Coleridge owed his interest in the study of imagination to Wordsworth.

· Wordsworth was interested only in the practice of poetry and he considered only the impact of imagination on poetry.

· Coleridge is the first critic to study the nature of imagination and examine its role in creative activity.

· Secondly, while words worth uses fancy and Imagination almost as synonyms, Coleridge is the first critic to distinguish between then and define their respective roles. Thirdly, Wordsworth does not distinguish between primary and secondary imagination.

· Coleridge's treatment of the subject is, on the whole, characterized by greater depth, penetration and philosophical subtlety.

· It is his unique contribution to literacy theory.

*** Conclusion:-**

To conclude, we may say in his own words, he endeavored 'to establish the principles of writing rather than to furnish runes about how to pass judgment on what had been written by others.'

Thus, Coleridge is the first English critic who based his literary criticism on philosophical principles. While critics before him had been content to turn a poem inside out and to discourse on its, merits and demerits, Coleridge busied himself with the basic question of "how it came to be there at all." He was more interested in the creative process that made it, what it was, then in the finished product.

Chapter – 17

Biographia Literaria Chapters 14 & 17

To the second edition he added a preface of considerable length; in which, notwithstanding some passages of apparently a contrary import, he was understood to contend for the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds, and to reject as vicious and indefensible all phrases and forms of speech that were not included in what he (unfortunately, I think, adopting an equivocal expression) called the language of real life. From this preface, prefixed to poems in which it was impossible to deny the presence of original genius, however mistaken its direction might be deemed, arose the whole long-continued controversy. For from the conjunction of perceived power with supposed heresy I explain the inveteracy and in some instances, I grieve to say, the acrimonious passions, with which the controversy has been conducted by the assailants.

Had Mr. Wordsworth's poems been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time described as being had they been really distinguished from the compositions of other poets merely by meanness of language and inanity of thought; had they indeed contained nothing more than what is found in the parodies and pretended imitations of them; they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them. But year after year increased the number of Mr. Wordsworth's admirers. They were found too not in the lower classes of the reading public, but chiefly among young men of strong sensibility and meditative minds; and their admiration (inflamed perhaps in some degree by opposition) was distinguished by its intensity, I might almost say, by its religious fervour. These facts, and the intellectual energy of the author, which was more or less consciously felt, where it was outwardly and even boisterously denied, meeting with sentiments of aversion to his opinions, and of alarm at their consequences, produced an eddy of criticism, which would of itself have borne up the poems by the violence with which it whirled them round and round. With many parts of this preface in the sense attributed to them and which the words undoubtedly seem to authorize, I never concurred; but on the contrary objected to them as erroneous in

principle, and as contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater part of the poems themselves.

Mr. Wordsworth in his recent collection has, I find, degraded this prefatory disquisition to the end of his second volume, to be read or not at the reader's choice. But he has not, as far as I can discover, announced any change in his poetic creed. At all events, considering it as the source of a controversy, in which I have been honoured more than I deserve by the frequent conjunction of my name with his, I think it expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with the opinions supported in that preface, and in what points I altogether differ. But in order to render myself intelligible I must previously, in as few words as possible, explain my views, first, of a Poem; and secondly, of Poetry itself, in kind, and in essence.

The office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction; while it is the privilege of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy. But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the result of philosophy. A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object being proposed. According to the difference of the object will be the difference of the combination. It is possible, that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement; and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished from prose by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly. In this, the lowest sense, a man might attribute the name of a poem to the well-known enumeration of the days in the several months; "Thirty days hath September,April, June, and November," etc.and others of the same class and purpose. And as a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities, all compositions that have this charm super-added, whatever be their contents, may be entitled poems.

So much for the superficial form. A difference of object and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction. The immediate purpose may be the communication of truths; either of truth absolute and demonstrable, as in works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and most permanent kind, may result from the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs. Blest indeed is that state of society, in which the immediate purpose would be baffled by the perversion of the proper ultimate end; in which no charm of diction or imagery could exempt the BATHYLLUS even of an Anacreon, or the ALEXIS of Virgil, from disgust and aversion!

But the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances. Would then the mere superaddition of metre, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it. They must be such, as to
justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part, which an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound are calculated to excite. The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded.

A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species—(having this object in common with it)—it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.

Controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word; and in few instances has this been more striking, than in disputes concerning the present subject. If a man chooses to call every composition a poem, which is rhyme, or measure, or both, I must leave his opinion uncontroverted. The distinction is at least competent to characterize the writer's intention.
If it were subjoined, that the whole is likewise entertaining or affecting, as a tale, or as a series of interesting reflections; I of course admit this as another fit ingredient of a poem, and an additional merit. But if the definition sought for be that of a legitimate poem, I answer, it must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement.

The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgment of all countries, in equally denying the praises of a just poem, on the one hand, to a series of striking lines or distiches, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, becomes disjoined from its context, and forms a separate whole, instead of a harmonizing part; and on the other hand, to an unsustained composition, from which the reader collects rapidly the general result unattracted by the component parts. The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasureable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air;—at every step he pauses and half recedes; and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. Praecipitandus est liber spiritus, says Petronius most happily. The epithet, liber, here balances the preceding verb; and it is not easy to conceive more meaning condensed in fewer words.

But if this should be admitted as a satisfactory character of a poem, we have still to seek for a definition of poetry. The writings of Plato, and Jeremy Taylor, and Burnet's Theory of the Earth, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of Isaiah—(indeed a very large portion of the whole book)—is poetry in the most emphatic sense; yet it would be not less irrational than strange to assert, that pleasure, and not truth was the immediate object of the prophet. In short, whatever specific import we attach to the word, Poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry. Yet if an harmonious whole is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with the poetry; and this can be no otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement, as will partake of one, though not a peculiar property of poetry. And this again can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.

My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the Fancy and Imagination in the early part of this work. What is poetry?—is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet?—that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity,that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, laxis effertur habenis, reveals "itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant" qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. Doubtless, as Sir John Davies observes of the soul—(and his words may with slight alteration be applied, and even more appropriately, to the poetic Imagination)—

Doubtless this could not be, but that she turns
Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange,
As fire converts to fire the things it burns,
As we our food into our nature change.
From their gross matter she abstracts their forms,
And draws a kind of quintessence from things;

Which to her proper nature she transforms
To bear them light on her celestial wings.
Thus does she, when from individual states
She doth abstract the universal kinds;
Which then re-clothed in divers names and fates
Steal access through the senses to our minds.
Finally, Good Sense is the Body of poetic genius, Fancy its Drapery, Motion its Life, and Imagination the Soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent
whole.

CHAPTER XVII Examination of the tenets peculiar to Mr. Wordsworth—Rustic life (above all, low and rustic life) especially unfavourable to the formation of a human diction—The best parts of language the product of philosophers, not of clowns or shepherds—Poetry essentially ideal and generic—The language of Milton as much the language of real life, yea, incomparably more so than that of the cottager.

As far then as Mr. Wordsworth in his preface contended, and most ably contended, for a reformation in our poetic diction, as far as he has evinced the truth of passion, and the dramatic propriety of those figures and metaphors in the original poets, which, stripped of their justifying reasons, and converted into mere artifices of connection or ornament, constitute the characteristic falsity in the poetic style of the moderns; and as far as he has, with equal acuteness and clearness, pointed out the process by which this change was effected, and the resemblances between that state into which the reader's mind is thrown by the pleasurable confusion of thought from an unaccustomed train of words and images; and that state which is induced by the natural language of impassioned feeling; he undertook a useful task, and deserves all praise, both for the attempt and for the execution.

The provocations to this remonstrance in behalf of truth and nature were still of perpetual recurrence before and after the publication of this preface. I cannot likewise but add, that the comparison of such poems of merit, as have been given to the public within the last ten or twelve years, with the majority of those produced previously to the appearance of that preface, leave no doubt on my mind, that Mr. Wordsworth is fully justified in believing his efforts to have been by no means ineffectual. Not only in the verses of those who have professed their admiration of his genius, but even of those who have distinguished themselves by hostility to his theory, and depreciation of his writings, are the impressions of his principles plainly visible. It is possible, that with these principles others may have been blended, which are not equally evident; and some which are unsteady and subvertible from the narrowness or imperfection of their basis. But it is more than possible, that these errors of defect or exaggeration, by kindling and feeding the controversy, may have conduced not only to the wider propagation of the accompanying truths, but that, by their frequent presentation to the mind in an excited state, they may have won for them a more permanent

and practical result. A man will borrow a part from his opponent the more easily, if he feels himself justified in continuing to reject a part.

While there remain important points in which he can still feel himself in the right, in which he still finds firm footing for continued resistance, he will gradually adopt those opinions, which were the least remote from his own convictions, as not less congruous with his own theory than with that which he reprobates. In like manner with a kind of instinctive prudence, he will abandon by little and little his weakest posts, till at length he seems to forget that they had ever belonged to him, or affects to consider them at most as accidental and "petty annexments," the removal of which leaves the citadel unhurt and unendangered.

My own differences from certain supposed parts of Mr. Wordsworth's theory ground themselves on the assumption, that his words had been rightly interpreted, as purporting that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouths of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings. My objection is, first, that in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry; secondly, that even to these classes it is not applicable, except in such a sense, as hath never
by any one (as far as I know or have read,) been denied or doubted; and lastly, that as far as, and in that degree in which it is practicable, it is yet as a rule useless, if not injurious, and therefore either need not, or ought not to be practised.

The poet informs his reader, that he had generally chosen low and rustic life; but not as low and rustic, or in order to repeat that pleasure of doubtful moral effect, which persons of elevated rank and of superior refinement oftentimes derive from a happy imitation of the rude unpolished manners and discourse of their inferiors. For the pleasure so derived may be traced to three exciting causes. The first is the naturalness, in fact, of the things represented. The second is the apparent naturalness of the representation, as raised and qualified by an imperceptible infusion of the author's own knowledge and talent, which infusion does, indeed, constitute it an imitation as distinguished from a mere copy. The third cause may be found in the reader's conscious feeling of his superiority awakened by the contrast presented to him; even as for the same purpose the kings and great barons of yore retained, sometimes actual clowns and fools, but more frequently shrewd and witty fellows in that character.

These, however, were not Mr. Wordsworth's objects. He chose low and rustic life, "because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil, in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended, and

are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Now it is clear to me, that in the most interesting of the poems, in which the author is more or less dramatic, as THE BROTHERS, MICHAEL, RUTH, THE MAD MOTHER, and others, the persons introduced are by no means taken from low or rustic life in the common acceptation of those words! and it is not less clear, that the sentiments and language, as far as they can be conceived to have been really transferred from the minds and conversation of such persons, are attributable to causes and circumstances not necessarily connected with "their occupations and abode." The thoughts, feelings, language, and manners of the shepherd- farmers in the vales of Cumberland and Westmoreland, as far as they are actually adopted in those poems, may be accounted for from causes, which will and do produce the same results in every state of life, whether in town or country. As the two principal I rank that independence, which raises a man above servitude, or daily toil for the profit of others, yet not above the necessity of industry and a frugal simplicity of domestic life; and the accompanying unambitious, but solid and religious, education, which has rendered few books familiar, but the Bible, and the Liturgy or Hymn book. To this latter cause, indeed, which is so far accidental, that it is the blessing of particular countries and a particular age, not the product of particular places or employments, the poet owes the show of probability, that his personages might really feel, think, and talk with any tolerable resemblance to his representation. It is an excellent remark of Dr. Henry More's, that "a man of confined education, but of good parts, by constant reading of the Bible will naturally form a more winning and commanding rhetoric than those that are learned: the intermixture of tongues and of artificial phrases debasing their style."

It is, moreover, to be considered that to the formation of healthy feelings, and a reflecting mind, negations involve impediments not less formidable than sophistication and vicious intermixture. I am convinced, that for the human soul to prosper in rustic life a certain vantage-ground is prerequisite. It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labours.

Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant. And where these are not sufficient, the mind contracts and hardens by want of stimulants: and the man becomes selfish, sensual, gross, and hard- hearted. Let the management of the Poor Laws in Liverpool, Manchester, or Bristol be compared with the ordinary dispensation of the poor rates in agricultural villages, where the farmers are the overseers and guardians of the poor. If my own experience have not been particularly unfortunate, as well as that of the many respectable country clergymen with whom I have conversed on the subject, the result would engender more than scepticism concerning the desirable influences of low and rustic life in and for itself.

Whatever may be concluded on the other side, from the stronger local attachments and enterprising spirit of the Swiss, and other mountaineers, applies to a particular mode of pastoral life, under forms of property that permit and beget manners truly republican, not to rustic life in general, or to the absence of artificial cultivation. On the contrary the mountaineers, whose manners have been so often eulogized, are in general better educated and greater readers than men of equal rank elsewhere. But where this is not the case, as among the peasantry of North Wales, the ancient mountains, with all their terrors and all their glories, are pictures to the blind, and music to the deaf.

I should not have entered so much into detail upon this passage, but here seems to be the point, to which all the lines of difference converge as to their source and centre;—I mean, as far as, and in whatever respect, my poetic creed does differ from the doctrines promulgated in this preface. I adopt with full faith, the principle of Aristotle, that poetry, as poetry, is essentially ideal, that it avoids and excludes all accident; that its apparent individualities of rank, character, or occupation must be representative of a class; and that the persons of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes, with the common attributes of the class: not with such as one gifted individual might possibly possess, but such as from his situation it is most probable before-hand that he would possess. If my premises
are right and my deductions legitimate, it follows that there can be no poetic medium between the swains of Theocritus and those of an imaginary golden age.

The characters of the vicar and the shepherd-mariner in the poem of THE BROTHERS, and that of the shepherd of Green-head Ghyll in the MICHAEL, have all the verisimilitude and representative quality, that the purposes of poetry can require. They are persons of a known and abiding class, and their manners and sentiments the natural product of circumstances common to the class. Take Michael for instance:

An old man stout of heart, and strong of limb.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence he had learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes
When others heeded not, He heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
The Shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
Bethought him, and he to himself would say,
`The winds are now devising work for me!'
And truly, at all times, the storm, that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him

Up to the mountains: he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him and left him on the heights.
So lived he, until his eightieth year was past.
And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air; the hills, which he so oft
Had climbed with vigorous steps; which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts,

So grateful in themselves, the certainty
Of honourable gain; these fields, these hills
Which were his living Being, even more
Than his own blood—what could they less? had laid
Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself.

On the other hand, in the poems which are pitched in a lower key, as the HARRY GILL, and THE IDIOT BOY, the feelings are those of human nature in general; though the poet has judiciously laid the scene in the country, in order to place himself in the vicinity of interesting images, without the necessity of ascribing a sentimental perception of their beauty to the persons of his drama. In THE IDIOT BOY, indeed, the mother's character is not so much the real and native product of a "situation where the essential passions of the heart find a better soil, in which they can attain their maturity and speak a plainer and more emphatic language," as it is an impersonation of an instinct abandoned by judgment. Hence the two following charges seem to me not wholly groundless: at least, they are the only plausible objections, which I have heard to that fine poem. The one is, that the author has not, in the poem itself, taken sufficient care to preclude from the reader's fancy the disgusting images of ordinary morbid idiocy, which yet it was by no means his intention to represent. He was even by the "burr, burr, burr," uncounteracted by any preceding description of the boy's beauty, assisted in recalling them. The other is, that the idiocy of the boy is so evenly balanced by the folly of the mother, as to present to the general reader rather a laughable burlesque on the blindness of anile dotage, than an analytic display of maternal affection in its ordinary workings.

In THE THORN, the poet himself acknowledges in a note the necessity of an introductory

poem, in which he should have portrayed the character of the person from whom the words of the poem are supposed to proceed: a superstitious man moderately imaginative, of slow faculties and deep feelings, "a captain of a small trading vessel, for example, who, being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity, or small independent income, to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. Such men having nothing to do become credulous and talkative from indolence."

But in a poem, still more in a lyric poem—and the Nurse in ROMEO AND JULIET alone prevents me from extending the remark even to dramatic poetry, if indeed even the Nurse can be deemed altogether a case in point—it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity. However this may be, I dare assert, that the parts—(and these form the far larger portion of the whole)—which might as well or still better have proceeded from the poet's own imagination, and have been spoken in his own character, are those which have given, and which will continue to give, universal delight; and that the passages exclusively appropriate to the supposed narrator, such as the last couplet of the third stanza [64]; the seven last lines of the tenth [65]; and the five following stanzas, with the exception of the four admirable lines at the commencement of the fourteenth, are felt by many unprejudiced and unsophisticated hearts, as sudden and unpleasant sinkings from the height to which the poet had previously lifted them, and to which he again re-elevates both himself and his reader.

If then I am compelled to doubt the theory, by which the choice of characters was to be directed, not only a priori, from grounds of reason, but both from the few instances in which the poet himself need be supposed to have been governed by it, and from the comparative inferiority of those instances; still more must I hesitate in my assent to the sentence which immediately follows the former citation; and which I can neither admit as particular fact, nor as general rule. "The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions." To this I reply; that a rustic's language, purified from all provincialism and grossness, and so far reconstructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar—(which are in essence no other than the laws of universal logic, applied to psychological materials)—will not differ from the language of any other man of common sense, however learned or refined he may be, except as far as the notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate.

This will become still clearer, if we add the consideration—(equally important though less obvious)—that the rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from

the lower state of their cultivation, aims almost solely to convey insulated facts, either those of his scanty experience or his traditional belief; while the educated man chiefly seeks to discover and express those connections of things, or those relative bearings of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deducible. For facts are valuable to a wise man, chiefly as they lead to the discovery of the indwelling law, which is the true being of things, the sole solution of their modes of existence, and in the knowledge of which consists our dignity and our power.

As little can I agree with the assertion,that from the objects with which the rustic hourly communicates the best part of language is formed. For first, if to communicate with an object implies such an acquaintance with it, as renders it capable of being discriminately reflected on, the distinct knowledge of an uneducated rustic would furnish a very scanty vocabulary. The few things and modes of action requisite for his bodily conveniences would alone be individualized; while all the rest of nature would be expressed by a small number of confused general terms. Secondly, I deny that the words and combinations of words derived from the objects, with which the rustic is familiar, whether with distinct or confused knowledge, can be justly said to form the best part of language. It is more than probable, that many classes of the brute creation possess discriminating sounds, by which they can convey to each other notices of such objects as concern their food, shelter, or safety. Yet we hesitate to call the aggregate of such sounds a language, otherwise than metaphorically.

The best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man; though in civilized society, by imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors, the most uneducated share in the harvest which they neither sowed, nor reaped.
If the history of the phrases in hourly currency among our peasants were traced, a person not previously aware of the fact would be surprised at finding so large a number, which three or four centuries ago were the exclusive property of the universities and the schools; and, at the commencement of the Reformation, had been transferred from the school to the pulpit, and thus gradually passed into common life. The extreme difficulty, and often the impossibility, of finding words for the simplest moral and intellectual processes of the languages of uncivilized tribes has proved perhaps the weightiest obstacle to the progress of our most zealous and adroit missionaries.

Yet these tribes are surrounded by the same nature as our peasants are; but in still more impressive forms; and they are, moreover, obliged to particularize many more of them. When, therefore, Mr. Wordsworth adds, "accordingly, such a language"—(meaning, as before, the language of rustic life purified from provincialism)—"arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more

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Keats- Selections from the letters

John Keats, (born October 31, 1795, London, England—died February 23, 1821, Rome, Papal States [Italy]), English Romantic lyric poet who devoted his short life to the perfection of a poetry marked by vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal, and an attempt to express a philosophy through classical legend.

Youth

The son of a livery-stable manager, John Keats received relatively little formal education. His father died in 1804, and his mother remarried almost immediately. Throughout his life Keats had close emotional ties to his sister, Fanny, and his two brothers, George and Tom. After the breakup of their mother's second marriage, the Keats children lived with their widowed grandmother at Edmonton, Middlesex. John attended a school at Enfield, two miles away, that was run by John Clarke, whose son Charles Cowden Clarke did much to encourage Keats's literary aspirations. At school Keats was noted as a pugnacious lad and was decidedly "not literary," but in 1809 he began to read voraciously. After the death of the Keats children's mother in 1810, their grandmother put the children's affairs into the hands of a guardian, Richard Abbey. At Abbey's instigation John Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon at Edmonton in 1811. He broke off his apprenticeship in 1814 and went to live in London, where he worked as a dresser, or junior house surgeon, at Guy's and St. Thomas' hospitals. His literary interests had crystallized by this time, and after 1817 he devoted himself entirely to poetry. From then until his early death, the story of his life is largely the story of the poetry he wrote.

Early works

Charles Cowden Clarke had introduced the young Keats to the poetry of Edmund Spenser and the Elizabethans, and these were his earliest models. His first mature poem is the sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816), which was inspired by his excited reading of George Chapman's classic 17th-century translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Clarke also introduced Keats to the journalist and contemporary poet Leigh Hunt, and Keats made friends in Hunt's circle with the young poet John Hamilton Reynolds and with the painter Benjamin Haydon. Keats's first book, Poems, was published in March 1817 and was written largely under "Huntian" influence. This is evident in the relaxed and rambling sentiments evinced and in Keats's use of a loose form of the heroic couplet and light

rhymes. The most interesting poem in this volume is “Sleep and Poetry,” the middle section of which contains a prophetic view of Keats’s own poetical progress. He sees himself as, at present, plunged in the delighted contemplation of sensuous natural beauty but realizes that he must leave this for an understanding of “the agony and strife of human hearts.” Otherwise the volume is remarkable only for some delicate natural observation and some obvious Spenserian influences.

In 1817 Keats left London briefly for a trip to the Isle of Wight and Canterbury and began work on Endymion, his first long poem. On his return to London he moved into lodgings in Hampstead with his brothers. Endymion appeared in 1818. This work is divided into four 1,000-line sections, and its verse is composed in loose rhymed couplets. The poem narrates a version of the Greek legend of the love of the moon goddess (variously Diana, Selene, and Artemis; also identified as Cynthia by Keats) for Endymion, a mortal shepherd, but Keats puts the emphasis on Endymion’s love for the goddess rather than on hers for him. Keats transformed the tale to express the widespread Romantic theme of the attempt to find in actuality an ideal love that has been glimpsed heretofore only in imaginative longings. This theme is realized through fantastic and discursive adventures and through sensuous and luxuriant description. In his wanderings, Endymion is guilty of an apparent infidelity to his visionary moon goddess and falls in love with an earthly maiden to whom he is attracted by human sympathy. But in the end the goddess and the earthly maiden turn out to be one and the same. The poem equates Endymion’s original romantic ardour with a more universal quest for a self-destroying transcendence in which he might achieve a blissful personal unity with all creation. Keats, however, was dissatisfied with the poem as soon as it was finished.

Personal crisis

In the summer of 1818 Keats went on a walking tour in the Lake District (of northern England) and Scotland with his friend Charles Brown, and his exposure and overexertions on that trip brought on the first symptoms of the tuberculosis of which he was to die. On his return to London a brutal criticism of his early poems appeared in Blackwood’s Magazine, followed by a similar attack on Endymion in the Quarterly Review. Contrary to later assertions, Keats met these reviews with a calm assertion of his own talents, and he went on steadily writing poetry. But there were family troubles. Keats’s brother Tom had been suffering from tuberculosis for some time, and in the autumn of 1818 the poet nursed him through his last illness. About the same time, he met Fanny Brawne, a near neighbour in Hampstead, with whom he soon fell hopelessly and tragically in love. The relation with Fanny had a decisive effect on Keats’s development. She seems to have been an unexceptional young woman, of firm and generous character, and kindly disposed toward Keats. But he expected more, perhaps more than anyone could give, as is evident from his overwrought letters. Both his uncertain material situation and his failing health in any case made it impossible for their relationship to run a normal course. After Tom’s death (George had already gone to America), Keats moved into Wentworth Place with Brown, and in April

1819 Brawne and her mother became his next-door neighbours. About October 1819 Keats became engaged to Fanny.

The year 1819

Keats had written “Isabella,” an adaptation of the story of the Pot of Basil in Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron, in 1817–18, soon after the completion of Endymion, and again he was dissatisfied with his work. It was during the year 1819 that all his greatest poetry was written—“Lamia,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” the great odes (“On Indolence,” “On a Grecian Urn,” “To Psyche,” “To a Nightingale,” “On Melancholy,” and “To Autumn”), and the two versions of Hyperion. This poetry was composed under the strain of illness and his growing love for Brawne, and it is an astonishing body of work, marked by careful and considered development, technical, emotional, and intellectual. “Isabella,” which Keats himself called “a weak-sided poem,” contains some of the emotional weaknesses of Endymion, but “The Eve of St. Agnes” may be considered the perfect culmination of Keats’s earlier poetic style. Written in the first flush of his meeting with Brawne, it conveys an atmosphere of passion and excitement in its description of the elopement of a pair of youthful lovers. Written in Spenserian stanzas, the poem presents its theme with unrivaled delicacy but displays no marked intellectual advance over Keats’s earlier efforts. “Lamia” is another narrative poem and is a deliberate attempt to reform some of the technical weaknesses of Endymion. Keats makes use in this poem of a far tighter and more disciplined couplet, a firmer tone, and more controlled description.

The odes are Keats’s most distinctive poetic achievement. They are essentially lyrical meditations on some object or quality that prompts the poet to confront the conflicting impulses of his inner being and to reflect upon his own longings and their relations to the wider world around him. All the odes were composed between March and June 1819 except “To Autumn,” which is from September. The internal debates in the odes centre on the dichotomy of eternal, transcendent ideals and the transience and change of the physical world. This subject was forced upon Keats by the painful death of his brother and his own failing health, and the odes highlight his struggle for self-awareness and certainty through the liberating powers of his imagination. In the “Ode to a Nightingale” a visionary happiness in communing with the nightingale and its song is contrasted with the dead weight of human grief and sickness, and the transience of youth and beauty—strongly brought home to Keats in recent months by his brother’s death. The song of the nightingale is seen as a symbol of art that outlasts the individual’s mortal life. This theme is taken up more distinctly in the “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” The figures of the lovers depicted on the Greek urn become for him the symbol of an enduring but unconsummated passion that subtly belies the poem’s celebrated conclusion, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” The “Ode on Melancholy” recognizes that sadness is the inevitable concomitant of human passion and happiness and that the transience of joy and desire is an inevitable aspect of the natural process. But the rich, slow movement of this and the other odes suggests an enjoyment of such intensity and depth that it makes the

moment eternal. “To Autumn” is essentially the record of such an experience. Autumn is seen not as a time of decay but as a season of complete ripeness and fulfillment, a pause in time when everything has reached fruition, and the question of transience is hardly raised. These poems, with their rich and exquisitely sensuous detail and their meditative depth, are among the greatest achievements of Romantic poetry. With them should be mentioned the ballad “La Belle Dame sans merci,” of about the same time, which reveals the obverse and destructive side of the idyllic love seen in “The Eve of St. Agnes.”

Keats’s fragmentary poetic epic, Hyperion, exists in two versions, the second being a revision of the first with the addition of a long prologue in a new style, which makes it into a different poem. Hyperion was begun in the autumn of 1818, and all that there is of the first version was finished by April 1819. In September Keats wrote to Reynolds that he had given up Hyperion, but he appears to have continued working on the revised edition, The Fall of Hyperion, during the autumn of 1819. The two versions of Hyperion cover the period of Keats’s most intense experience, both poetical and personal. The poem is his last attempt, in the face of increasing illness and frustrated love, to come to terms with the conflict between absolute value and mortal decay that appears in other forms in his earlier poetry. The epic’s subject is the supersession of the earlier Greek gods, the Titans, by the later Olympian gods. Keats’s desire to write something unlike the luxuriant wandering of Endymion is clear, and he thus consciously attempts to emulate the epic loftiness of John Milton’s Paradise Lost. The poem opens with the Titans already fallen, like Milton’s fallen angels, and Hyperion, the sun god, is their one hope of further resistance, like Milton’s Satan. There are numerous Miltonisms of style, but these are subdued in the revised version, as Keats felt unhappy with them, and the basis of the writing is revealed after all as a more austere and disciplined version of Keats’s own manner. There is not enough of the narrative to make its ultimate direction clear, but it seems that the poem’s hero was to be the young Apollo, the god of poetry. So, as Endymion was an allegory of the fate of the lover of beauty in the world, Hyperion was perhaps to be an allegory of the poet as creator. Certainly this theme is taken up explicitly in the new prologue to the second version.

The second version of Hyperion is one of the most remarkable pieces of writing in Keats’s work; the blank verse has a new energy and rapidity, and the vision is presented with a spare grandeur, rising to its height in the epiphany of the goddess Moneta, who reveals to the dreamer the function of the poet in the world. It is his duty to separate himself from the mere dreamer and to share in the sufferings of humankind. The theme is not new to Keats—it appears in his earliest poetry—but it is here realized far more intensely. Yet with the threat of approaching death upon him, Keats could not advance any further in the direction that he foresaw as the right one, and the poem remains a fragment.

Last years

There is no more to record of Keats’s poetic career. The poems “Isabella,” “Lamia,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” and Hyperion and the odes were all published in the famous 1820

volume, the one that gives the true measure of his powers. It appeared in July, by which time Keats was evidently doomed. He had been increasingly ill throughout 1819, and by the beginning of 1820 the evidence of tuberculosis was clear. He realized that it was his death warrant, and from that time sustained work became impossible. His friends Brown, the Hunts, and Brawne and her mother nursed him assiduously through the year. Percy Bysshe Shelley, hearing of his condition, wrote offering him hospitality in Pisa, but Keats did not accept. When Keats was ordered south for the winter, Joseph Severn undertook to accompany him to Rome. They sailed in September 1820, and from Naples they went to Rome, where in early December Keats had a relapse. Faithfully tended by Severn to the last, he died in Rome.

Letters

The prime authority both for Keats's life and for his poetical development is to be found in his letters . This correspondence with his brothers and sister, with his close friends, and with Fanny Brawne gives the most intimate picture of the admirable integrity of Keats's personal character and enables the reader to follow closely the development of his thought about poetry—his own and that of others.

His letters evince a profound thoughtfulness combined with a quick, sensitive, undidactic critical response. Spontaneous, informal, deeply thought, and deeply felt, these are among the best letters written by any English poet. Apart from their interest as a commentary on his work, they have the right to independent literary status.

Reputation

It is impossible to say how much has been lost by Keats's early death. His reputation grew steadily throughout the 19th century, though as late as the 1840s the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt could refer to him as "this little-known poet." His influence is found everywhere in the decorative Romantic verse of the Victorian Age, from the early work of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, onward. His general emotional temper and the minute delicacy of his natural observation were greatly admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, who both echoed his poetry in their own and illustrated it in their paintings. Keats's 19th-century followers on the whole valued the more superficial aspects of his work, and it was largely left for the 20th century to realize the full range of his technical and intellectual achievement.

KEATS' LETTER TO P. B. SHELLEY, AUGUST 16, 1820

Keats' Ietters, in a sense, help more than his poems towards giving a clue to the secret of his art. No doubt, it can hardly need be said that we must be sure to go straight to the works of the poet so as to find a clue to an understanding of his art, but we must not neglect to make use of available side lights.

The letter gives us much side light and leads us to a right starting point. My attempt in this essay is to give as close an examination as possible to what the starting point leads to. Before pursuing the study, we must take account of the conditions under which the Jetter was addressed (more exactly, answered) to P. B. Shelley. On July 27, 1820, Shelley sent a letter to Keats from Pisa. It is quite necessary to read the letter through passage by passage. This way of reading requires considerable space, but we cannot help it, for the way shows us various aspects of the climate in which Keats lived then. Let us start from the beginning, dividing the letterl into four passages:

My dear Keats
I hear with great pain the dangerous accident that you have undergone, and Mr. Gisborne who gives me the account of it, adds, that you continue to wear a consumptive appearance. This consumption is a disease particularly fond of people who write such good verse as you have done, and with the assistance of an English winter it can often indulge its selection; I do not think that young and amiable poets are at all bound to gratify its taste; they have entered into no bond with the Muses to that effect.
These first sentences indicate the physical conditions in which Keats was placed. 'The dangerous accident' must point to the 'fresh attack of blood-spitting' which has happened to him on June 22. (His fatal illness had begun on February 3). And from the time of the event onwards his very poor physical conditions" - a consumptive appearance' - are to continue to the last and to weaken both his body and his creative imagination. It is a remarkable fact that from about that time, his poetic activities come to decline and even his genius seems to have disappeared.

It is quite necessary to read the other sentences with much care, for there can be found vanous aspects explaining the relation between Shelley and Keats. When Shelley writes,. "This consumption is a disease particularly fond of people who write such good verse as-you have done " here there is felt a rather humorous strain, which a condescending kind of attitude underlies. Let it be remembered now that from start to finish Shelley adopted a leading, though friendly, attitude towards Keats. But, on the contrary, Keats did not hold Shelley as the artist in high estimation, and this feeling is to be echoed in the' letter to Shelley which is the object of this essay.

Once he refused to visit Shelley that he might have his 'own unfettered scope', and this episode is often mentioned as showing his poetic independence, As Edmund Blunden says, Keats was 'ever a fighter'. In the next place, we must call special attention to the phrase 'such good verse as you have done'. It is a very perplexing thing to understand in what sense these words are written. Did Shelley write them in a laudatory or in a depreciatory sense? And must we be aware of his sincerity or 'his arrogance? To my feeling, the best way of grasping the meaning must be to be eclectic, though the way may appear to be a little too convenient.

Accordingly, we may summarize rightly by saying that we must be sensible of both sincerity and arrogance. I will tell the reason at some length in the later part. As for the remaining passage, Iittle need be said except that a humorous strain pervades, but we are vividly aware that the' condescending way of saying shows itself again in the last two sentences. So much for the first division, and we will go to the second.

But seriously (for I am joking on what I am very anxious about) I think you would:
do well to pass the winter after so tremendous an accident in Italy, and (if you think ir
as necessary as I do) so long as you could find Pisa or its neighbourhood agreeable to.
you, Mrs. Shelley unites with myself in urging the request, that you would take up your
You might come by sea to Leghorn, (France is not worth seeing,.residence with us.
and the sea air is particularly good for weak lungs) which is within a few miles of us.-
You ought at all events to see Italy, and your health which I suggest as a motive.

I spare declamation about statues and paintings and themight be an excuse to you. about the mountains the stream~and what is a greater piece of forbearanceruins and the fields, the colours of the sky, and the sky itself. These parts are written in a sincere way, which betokens the generosity of Shelley. It is common knowledge that of the later Romantics, Shelley is said to be most generous and to be always ready to hold out a supporting hand to any poetic friends, if need be. In the ‘passage above quoted, the genuine friendly feeling is perceptible and his disagreeable side' disappears. A disinterested literary mind appeals to us with much intensity, suppressing his self-conceited inclination. It may be a superfiuous thing, but only the fact is to be added' that at that time, Italy was the very climate where consumptives can take care of themselves.

And in the words "You ought at all events to see Italy,' we must remind ourselves that we can perceive the worship of Italy which reigned in the literary circle of Europe. And again it may be not going too far to say in addition that the last sentence tells the strong sense of beauty, artistic as well as natural, which the ,two most romantic poets have in common The following passage must be dealt with with as much caution:

> I have lately read your Endymion again and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will.

In May 1818, E,idy,nion, which has been called a sheer failure by critics, was published. It need not be added that almost all of criticisms of the poem were inclined towards blame, which Keats himself, an acute self-critic, had expected to incur. But the expectation could Inot make him indifferent to criticisms, some of which were given not from a literary point of view but from a political. Though it was a common phenomenon of the time that onesided arguments prevailed among the literary circle without so much as doubt, a Lew

could give criticism at once just and conscientious. Shelley was among the few. In the passage above quoted, Shelley, an eminent critic of poems figures. And his judgement on Endymion holds true without any revision up to this day. No doubt exists that he thought that in the poem Keats' imagination could not be said to fire to a creative glow, which could produce the masterpieces to come, but his critical attitude was not partial. In that passage, he gave frank criticism without taking into consideration any feeling of Keats' : 'I have lately read your Endymion again and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured fo,-th with i,idistinct profusion' (My italics). No more exact criticism could not be found, and especially, the italicized parts cut the work to the quick. Before passing ,on, we must return to the starting-point and think over Shelley's criticism at more length.

Why could Shelley read 'with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains'? It was because 'in particular, the Hymn to Pan in the first Book "afforded the surest promise of of ultimate excellence."'s To put in conclusive terms, Shelley must have been acutely sensible of Keats' paganism in the new shape, which was created by a poet richly gifted in eye and ear. When Shelley says about the quality of Endymion, "..,though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion," his words can become a standard of criticism of the work.

Recognizing its long-winded rambling, he remarked elsewhere that "it was full of some of the highest and finest gleams of poetry." 6 On May 14th, 1820, thinking again of Endymion, he summarizes his opinion about the genius of the younger poet by writing that "Keats, I hope, is going to show himself of a great poet: Iike the sun, to burst through the clouds, which, though dyed in the finest colours of the air, obscured his rising." This summary opinion accords with the last sentence: " I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will." As Shelley says, Keats at that period was full of poetic possibility, though he did not get his feet on the ground yet. In spite of such sympathetic recognition, the fact still remains that, contrary to our expectation, Keats himself did not express so deep a feeling of appreciation, and we are tempted to trace the cause of ingratitude but this is not the place for that. For the time being, we must be content to be left in an inconclusive state and hasten to examine the last passage.

I always tell Oliver to send you copies of my books *Prometheus Unbound*. I imagine you will receive nearly at the same time with this letter. *The Cenci*, I hope you have already received. It was seriously composed in a different style “below the *good* how far! But far above the *great*.” In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism: I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan.

Whether you remain in England or journey to Italy, I believe that you carry with you my anxious wishes for your health, happiness and success, wherever you are or whatever you undertake and that I am.

Yours Sincerely,
P. B. Shelley

The first half tells only that Shelley sends his words to Keats and we need not concern ourselves with it for the present. The only part which deserves our attention is the following sentence as it introduces the most important passage: "-it (*Cenci*) was seriously composed in a different style "below the *good* how far! But far above the *great*."

In the *Cenci*, Shelley confesses that he has attempted a poetic experiment in a different style. He explains the experiment in his own terms in the follwing:

> "In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism: I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan."

What Shelley has made an attempt in poetry is to make a poem in a different way, from the traditional one – to avoid the system amd mannerism. It is true that the attempt to avoid system and mannerism is indeed very difficult, and Keats might also, be aware of the difficulty.

The next sentence is full of signifcance, for we can be sensible of the difficulty of grasping the real intention of Shelley. Without doubt, Shelley wrote words "those who excel me in genius" countig Keats among them. But did Shellley truely considers Keats as one those excel in genius. I doubt because Shelley's Exhortive way of saying, - "I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan" – can do nothing but drive one away from desired purpose. As we have noticed, when Shelley touches upon poetry, he becomes full of confidence not to get beyond the limits of arrogance. But in the realm of other affairs, a generous Shelley presents hirnself. The remaining parts of the letter strike us as an example of genuine friendship.

On coming across thern, we feel like being relieved. But whether Keats might not accept them as showing hearty cordiality is another question. 'Though I have devoted a fairly much space to reading of Shelley's letter to Keats and I seem to have got outside my field by stepping aside, I can tell only something of the background against which Keats replied to Shelley's letter. Thus, I am ready to get nearer to my prime concern, and to face one of the letters most hard to treat.

About twenty days after Keats received Shelley's letter, he wrote back. This is Keats' only known letter to Shelley. We cannot find available evidence enough to decide whether Keats sent any other letters, but, though he was a good correspondent, it will not be denied that he did not keep up frequent correspondence with Shelley. Considering such a circumstance, the letter to be dealt with should be said to be written in an outspoken manner. As I have done before, it is convenient to give the letter as close an examination as possible, dividing into several parts.

My dear Shelley, 'I am very much gratified that, you in a foreign country, and with a mind almost overoccupied, should write to me in the strain of the Letter beside me. If I do not

take advantage of your invitation it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy. There is no doubt that an english [sic] winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering hateful manner, therefore I must either voyage or journey to.Italy as a soldier marches up to a battery. My nerves at present are the worst part of me, yet they feel soothed when I think that come what extreme may, I shall not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bed-posts.

Though Keats expresses his gratitude, as Leigh Hunt wrote to Shelley, on the 23rd August: 'Keats, who is better, is sensible of your kindness,'8 is it a prejudiced feeling to say that Keats ' words do not sound very hearty? The following sentence: 'If I do not take advantage of your invitation it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy,' is very painful to read, for, at that time, his 'Chest is in so nervous a State, that any thing extra such as speaking to an unaccustomed Person or writing a note half suffocates me' and he seemed to be very aware of the death which was approaching 'a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy.' On account of the stealthily obvious fact that the English winter will put an end to him in a lingering hateful manner, he reluctantly makes up his mind to travel across the Straits of Dover for Italy. When he wrote: 'therefore I must either voyage or journey to Italy as a soldier marches up to a battery,' what he means would be ambiguous but for the fact that he wrote another letter, using a similar phrase in it:

> This Journey to Italy wakes me at daylight every morning and haunts me horribly. I shail endeavour to go though it be with the sensation of marching up against a Battery.

Accordingly, in the Italian journey which haunts him horribly, he can only find the least consolation that he will not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bed-posts. The passage quoted above does not concern itself with my central theme. It only'provides a brief explanation about the background of the letter. As the passage that follows offers a most impor~ant clue for the understanding of Keats' art, we must turn the critical scrutiny upon it, devoting unproportionately much space to-it.

Let me be allowed to take a lingering step towards the mysterious gate of Keats' art, for the opening of which I am not sure that I am very much qualified. And in order to reach a deeper stratum of mystery, we must examine the passage in all its varieties and from various points of view. I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor Poem; which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as I have done about Reputation. I received a copy of the Cenci, as from yourself from Hunt. There is one part of it I am judge of; the Poetry, and dramatic effect, which by many spirits now a day is considered the mammon. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God an artrst must serve Mammon he must have "self concentratron" selfishness perhaps.

In the passage, 'my poor Poem' must mean Endymion, as editors of Keats' Ietters have

pointed out. It would not a very gross mistake to take the epithet 'poor' as what it means. It may be that Keats himself did not use it in a modest manner. Therefore, the following passage may be interpreted as both a frank confession of failure and a result of self-criticism. It may be certain that he must have felt glad at a sympathetic praise of Shelley's, which we have touched on already, but the joy is to be suppressed soon after. By what? It is by the self-criticisms given upon himself in the Preface to the poem and in a letter of his, written five months after it was published and criticized by critics having neither authority nor responsibility.

For the time being, it is quite unnecessary to step aside to refer to the unresponsible topic. Suflice it to say that at that time, Iiterary criticism was in the habit of being put under the control of politics. From the present viewpoint, it will be laughed off as a sheer nonsense, but it was a great pity for the poet of genius that his poem, though it might be a failure from a literary viewpoint, was trampled down under the feet of critics who were not appreciative of literature, especially poetry. So much for the criticisms given from without. To return to the self-criticism, we must go first to the Preface added to
Endymion. Anyone who reads through the Preface does not fail to perceive that it is also a fine piece of criticism about poetry. In the Preface, we could find an aspect of Keats' view of poetry, if we want.

Knowing within myself the manner in which this Poem has been produced, it is without a feeling of regret that I make it public. What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The two first books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press; nor should they if I thought a year's castigation would do them any good; it will not: the foundations are too sandy.

It is more touching than masculine for the man who takes the production of poems as his special province to make such a kind of self-confession as this. And nothing does touch our heart more than the following lines:

> It is just that this youngster should die away: a sad thought for me, if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live.

'It is just that this youngster should die away.' Who but an acute self-critic has charged his production with 'the failure in a great object'? And the only thing that he desires by adding the Preface is 'to conciliate men who are competent to look, and who do look with a zealous eye, to the honour of English literature.' And in summing up the Preface, he tries to promise himself to exclude 'mawkishness ' and 'all the thousand bitters' from his own realm of art. We can find no parallel to Keats in healthiness of attitude among the contemporary poets. Probably we cannot pick up any other poet who continued to afflict himself all his life. And his strenuous effort which resembles even a kind of masochism will never cease to leave its substantial mark on our mind.

In the next place, we must turn our eyes to the letter just referred to. As has been noted before, the letter including his own criticisms upon himself was written five months after Endymion saw the light. As this letter has been often quoted as showing his self-criticism, it will do well to extract the essential parts adding only a brief note to it.
1 cannot but feel indebted to those Gentlemen who have taken my part As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract (My italics) makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the Quarterly could possibly inflict, and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary reperception and rattfication of what is fine (My italics). What is to be noticed here is that as five months passed since the time of publishing, Keats came to have a stability of mind which enabled him to look upon his own work with fair objectivity and this composure began to suggest even a kind of confidence in his own poetic stature.

And, more than anything else, this confidence shows that he is well on the way to forming his own aesthetics, based on 'love of beauty in the abstract' and his 'own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine'. Keats proceeds to criticize his own work.

I will write independently - I have written independently *without judgement* – I may write independently, and *with judgement* hereafter. In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quick sands and the rocks, that if stayed upon that great shore, and piped a silly pipe and took tea and comfortable advice.

He who collided with ‘the rocks’ determines on adhering fast to his own ‘unfettered scope’ without giving ear to any comfortable advice. When we read the concluding remarks: “I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than and not be among the greatest,” we feel relieved that a valuable genius was not nipped in the bud. The joy, thus suppressed seems to have remained a bitter experience until wrote the letter used as the title of the essay. In the letter written about two years after the one dealt with just above, when he says about two failures of the past. ‘I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, the joy which changed into a bitter experience may have been felt with increased intensity. To be sure, that may be the reflective Keats speaking, but in the following, suddenly he changes into a severe critic upon art, refusing to follow the lead of a contemporary poet of his. When we become aware of the sudden refusal, the acute remarks he makes upon a copy of the Cenci are worth considering with serious attention.

There is only one part of it I am judge of; the Poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits now-a-days considered a mammon. But we cannotseperate the word ‘Poetry’ from ‘dramatic effect’; and it is proper to take, ‘the poetry’ as having an immediate connection with ‘dramatic effect’. Another question to be considered is the word ‘mammon’. In general

we think of it in the Biblical sense, but in the short passage, Keats seems to use it in a more literary one. What it seems to present is a striking similarity to what is found in Spenser and Milton. The illustrations are as follows:

> God of the world and worldings I me call,
> Great Mammon, greatest god below the skye,
> That of my plenty poure out vnto all,
> And vnto none my graces do enuye. (Spencer: *Faerie Queene*, II. Vii.8)

> Mammon led them on –
> Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
> From Heaven: (Milton: *Paradise Lost*, I. 678-9)

If we interpret the word 'Mammon' in a biblical sense we must stand in the midst of a labyrinth and we cannot find any way out inspite of much groping in the dark. To say the least of it, almost half of the critical force included in the passage would be lost. But that is not all : in another letter he says what is nearly equivalent to the passage.
The little drarnatic skill I may as yet have however badly it might show in a Drama would I think be sufficient for a Poem, Here, for the moment, our probing must cease, but we cannot be prepared to pass further before we call so much attention to the passage. At any rate, there is no doubt that Keats was thinking of the dramatic skill or the dramatic effect in close connection with a poem. What the dramatic effect takes the concrete shape of with most success is a group of perfect odes which always rank as masterpieces.

In this sense, it can be said with certainty that he lived up to his aesthetic principles.
The passage which follows is concerned with a more important and central question, and the interpretation of it is the more difficult. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God an artist must serve Mammon he must have "self-concentration" selfishness perhaps. For convenience, we will deal with the passage, sentence by sentence. Our start must be from the first sentence. The first difficulty arises over the question of what 'the God' means. Judging from the definite article added to 'God' and the capital letter of the word, it may be said without almost any reservations that 'the God' means 'Mammon' which soon appears in the following sentence. If so, how should we properly interpret the sentence: 'A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God'? Where should we seek for a modern work which has a purpose, i.e. the God? We are still left in doubt about which answer is in the right, but, for instance, if we think of Paradise Lost as identical to the work which Keats considers to be modern, are we a long way from a right conjecture? To our thinking, our answer will not be a mere guess. If we assume that Keats thought about a modern work having a purpose with Milton's masterpiece in mind, must we be accused of sentimentalizing our judgment into a false appraisal of Keats' critical capability? The reason why we attempt to hazard such a conjecture is that it is an undeniable fact that Milton, the poet of Paradise Lost, continued to haunt Keats all his life.

The sentence which follows: 'an artist must serve Mammon' must be our next concern.

What deserves much heed here is the word 'artist'. As I have already discussed about its meaning, I must avoid the repetition of the question. But we must remind ourselves that what the word stands for is nearly equivalent to the French word 'artiste' or 'artisan'. (We shall face the same word in the passage which is to be dealt with very soon.) So far as the sentence is concerned, we need not add any more explanation to it, if we are allowed to amplify the meaning. The amplification is that the poet being an artist must try hard to produce a modern work in the fullest sense of the term. Summarizing the foregoing two sentences, Keats says: He (=an artist) must have "self-concentration " selfishness perhaps.

As for the punctuation, it must be correct grammatically that a comma is placed before the word ' selfishness ', but the lack of comma sounds natural, for the omission, whether it is conscious or unconscious, gives us a kind of tense emotion. The only subject on 1"hich we are compelled to focus our attention is the word 'self-concentration' or 'selfishness '. As for the poetic style, Keats says the same thing elsewhere with a slight differencel6 'the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime.' Though, in that case, he makes the remarks with a contemptuous feeling, what they really mean is nothing other than what the 'self-concentration ' or 'selfishness' does. At least, we can discover some points of similarity between the former expression and the latter. In order for us to understand what the latter signifies, it is necessary to add a brief comment.

As the truest expression in verse of the whole personality of a poet is worth a poem in the full sense of the word, the concentration of the poet's self, which can be ' selfishness', put in another way, is one of the requisites for the production of a poem. When we take the 'self-concentration' as signifying the concentration of the poet's self, what is it that the poet's self or whole person is concentrated on? Considered in close connection with Keats' own notion that, first of all, a poet should be an artist, opinion will not differ about the question the poet's self must be concentrated on 'the effect of the single line and phrase.' And this artistic attitude will be soon concerned with the next main subject in the later passage. As I have just suggested, the next main concern presents itself in the shape of a baffling matter of controversy. You I am sure will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and ‘every rift' of your subject with ore.

The words 'you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist' I will speak for themselves, as we have already dealt with the question of 'an artist,' and the significance of 'your magnanimity' will need no comment. The essential part which baffles us is the last sentence '(you might) "load every rift" of your subject with ore.' As critics have pointed out several times, the part comes straight out of Spenser:

> Embost with massy gold of glorious gift,
> And with rich metall loaded every rift,
>
> *Faerie Queene*, II, vii. 28, 11. 4-5.

The question of when the lines of Spenser impressed themselves forcibly upon Keats' mind has not been touched upon by any critics yet, but an expression not unlike that quoted can be discovered m another letter. Concerning the attempt at Endymion, he says,

..I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry (My italics),.1B

On one occasion or another, this expression might be replaced by the words of Spenser. At any rate, we must avoid here to expand beyond the limits of conjecture. Now, what becomes a central concern to us is the full implication of the "ore". As for the implication, a great diversity of comments or opinions are possible. Let us begin with listening to as many critical voices as we can. One critic explains about the words 'to load every rift with ore' that they must be taken as 'making every phrase a concrete image.'19 Considered along the line, the explanatory comments which follow emerge as a natural result: Keats 'was undoubtedly thinking chiefly of sensuous imagery in poetry.' If we pass on further along the two lines, we will find ourselves driven in an unexpected direction.

When the 'ore' is interpreted mainly as signifying 'image' or 'imagery', Keats begins to incline towards being a kind of imagist. In point of fact, such a critic as T. E. Hulme, for example, accepts Keats as one of his allies, i.e. imagists. It is not to be denied that T. E. Hulme's opinion should be respectable as telling something peculiar to Keats. But, at this point, we must take a cautious step so as to press the argument with effect. If we spare any pains to take the trouble, the most important question of the highest artistic creativity in Keats will slip through our hands. In order that we may not get into this danger, it is necessary to look at the words from a more general and artistic angle and to put some other interpretation.

If we agree with the opinion that the words should be taken as 'filling every line of poetry with richness and beauty,' we can get a little nearer to our desired object, which is to make much effort to do justice to them. Here there is a critic who returns to Keats' own letter and wants the poet himself to make accurate remarks. Miss Bernice Slote's way of grasping the meaning may look very commonplace, but perhaps she is the first to venture to apply the simple method with fine success. Her interpretation is that the 'ore' means 'poetry, dramatic effect', which has been just used by the poet himself in the preceding lines. To be sure, that is like taking us by surprise, but her way should be said to be very much to the point. But we must go to another critic for a subtler perception. He allows the ' ore' to admit of a variety of interpretations: the 'ore' can be taken as 'full poetry' or 'organic texture', and, to use more explanatory terms, as 'richness, complexity and depth' or 'a matter of life's texture.' To these interpretations not more need be added, and we must hasten to give a summary.

What Keats wants to attain by this artistic method of his own making is the 'intensity' in art. It is on this ground that Keats' poetry is criticized as 'dense'. And the 'intensity' becomes one of the most important questions, when we start a discussion about Keats' view of art, but as it does not come within the ambit of the present essay, we must wait another opportunity. By the artistic method of attaining intensity, Keats could avoid the tragedy that he was also a 'beautiful and ineffectual angel,' or 'an inspired child crying for the moon.' This advice 0L Keats' which is full of much confidence shows the poet who has assumed a

stature worthy of the artist and is sharply conscious of the artistic sincerity. Now, one word needs to be added, for the question of when this confident attitude came to be assumed towards Shelley still remains. This attitude not without a contemptuous feeling to Shelley was already perceptible at the period when he was not yet grown to maturity as a poet. Accordingly, his critical attitude towards Shelley must be said to strike its roots deeper than we infer:

> Does Shelley go on telling strange Stories of the Death of Kings? Shelley's poem is out and there are words about its being objected too, as much as Queen Mab was. Poor Shelley I think he has Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!!

This attitude must be taken into consideration as telling something of the background. (We have been so much on the side of Keats that we will be accused of denying Shelly ample justice. Though it seems that Shelley's work stands at the opposite pole from Keats', among his poems we can point out some of which every rift is loaded with ore for example, The Vetch of Atlas. About this piece, we have heard nothing from Keats. But be it always remembered that Keats' severe and uncompromising attitude towards his own realm, perhaps surpassing all the contemporary poets within their own province, has prevented himself from enjoying a vogue with the general public.)

Now we must turn away our eyes to the remaining part. It involves a few points of relative importance. For the sake of convenience again. Let us begin with making a twofold division. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl'd for six Months together. And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of Endymion! whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards I am pick'd up and sorted to a pip. My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk
you must explain my metapes to yourself.

Keats continues to write in a confident tone without changing his attitude. There you have the Keats who has put into practice 'the thought of discipline.' 'The thought of discipline' is asserted to be essential to the poet as an artist. Undoubtedly, these words indicate that Keats has recognized fully the lack of discipline on the part of Shel]ey and has sensed the danger that the lack will not fail to make Shelley long survive his genius. The introduction of 'the thought of discipline' into the production of a poem is to be said very peculiar. Keats' ' metaphysrcs'29 supported by the notion of discipline and artist is worth occupying a new place in the history of English poetry and will always awaken us to a renewed interest in his art. But, with all his confidence, again, the Keats of Endymion begins to reflect on himself. And again, if the metaphor may, with apologies, be allowed, the waves of confidence swash against the reflective poet: 'I am pick'd up and sorted to a pip.' My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk you must explain my metapes to yourself.

Before passing to the examination of the passage quoted above, we must here pause to pay a little heed to the word written in a curious hand 'metapes'. M. B. Forman does not give any

note to the word, but H. E. Rollins adopts a new style of writing: 'metapcs ' and he reads it for 'metaphysics'.30 The question of how the word should be properly read is beyond our power, and for the present, we will do well humbly to obey H. E. Rollins. To revert to our prime concern: 'My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk'. These words ring with something like a revolutionary tone, for the conviction that the poet must devote himself to nothing but imagination leads to a new attitude representative of the Romantic Revival. Keats seems to maintain that the artist who gives up himself to unremitting discipline, regarding imagination as the only weapon to rely upon, is worthy of being called a poet in the real sense of the word. He seems to make self-assertion to Shelley 'you must explain my metapes to yourself.'

To the last remaining passage, we have almost nothing to add except a brief comment about a fact. I am in expectation of Prometheus every day. Could I have my own wish for its interest effected you would have it still in manuscript or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath I am returning advice on your hands. Most of the Poems in the volume I send you have been written above two years, and would never have been published but from a hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now. I must express once more my deep sense of your Kindness, adding my sincere thanks and respects for Mrs. Shelley. In the hope of soon seeing you I remain most sincerely yours,

John Keats

What is concerned with the main line of our subject is the passage which is found in the former part: 'I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath I am returning advice on your hands,' and we may as well ignore the rest. It is very doubtful whether we should accept the words of Keats as he says them, for the fact is made clear that 'Shelley gave this advice in 1817 but "helped him print his volume after advising against it"'. As the fact had taken place only a few years before the letter of Keats was written, we cannot avoid wondering very much why Keats said such an ungrateful thing. As for the question, we have not yet got decisive remarks from any critics. Is his ingratitude due to the fact that he held a too strong prejudice against Shelley or to the fact that he knew actually nothing about the kindness? For the moment, we cannot think of any other means than to leave the question in suspense,

A Study of Poetry by Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold, the great poet-critic, was born at Laleham in Middlesex’s country on 24th December 1822. Arnold was the eldest son of his father, Dr. Arnold, the legendary schoolmaster and curator of the modern type of Public School. His mother, Mary Penrose, his mother, was also an intellectual person and a remarkable character lady.

Though one cannot say that Arnold as a poet was extraordinary or outstanding, he was a good representative of the age to which he belonged. His poems were mainly published between 1849 to 1867. His most anthologized poems are Sohrab and Rustom, Scholar Gipsy, Thyrsis, and Dover Beach.

While studying his works, one cannot miss his fastidiousness as a propagator of culture and missionary, paving the way for a more orderly society. His Culture and Anarchy and Friendship's Garland reveal the tone of high intellectual sowing, the seeds for a new social culture. He was described as 'Mr. Kid Glove Cocksure' by Robert Bridges and Levis called him "Elegant Jeremiah."

Arnold has a place of pride. He has a knack for making even the most controversial statements sound axiomatic. He chooses apt quotations, and his criticism is marked with flexibility and sanity. Criticism was a tool for promoting and conserving culture in the Victorian world. He saw that as a critic, he had to popularize and propagate noble ideas. However, his uniqueness in his critical works like culture and work was his "Preface to poems".

A Study of Poetry | Matthew Arnold | Summary and Analysis

'A Study of Poetry' is a critical essay by Matthew Arnold. In this essay Arnold criticizes the art of poetry as well as the art of criticism. Arnold believes that the art of poetry is capable of high destinies. It is the art in which the idea itself is the fact. He says that we should understand the worth of poetry as it is poetry that shows us a mirror of life. Science, according to Arnold, is incomplete without poetry, and, religion and philosophy will give way to poetry. Arnold terms poetry as a criticism of life thereby refuting the accusation of Plato and says that as time goes on man will continue to find comfort and solace in poetry.

Arnold says that when one reads poetry he tends to estimate whether it is of the best form or not. It happens in three ways- the real estimate, the historic estimate, and the personal estimate. The real estimate is an unbiased viewpoint that takes into account both the historical context and the creative faculty to judge the worth of poetry. But the real estimate is often surpassed by the historic and personal estimate. The historic estimate places the historical context above the value of the art itself. The personal estimate on the other hand depends on the personal taste, the likes and dislikes of the reader which affects his judgment of poetry. Arnold says that both these estimates tend to be fallacious.

The historic and personal estimate often overshadows the real estimate. But Arnold also says that it is natural. The study of the historical background of poetry and its development often leads to the critic skipping over the shortcomings because of its historical significance. Historic estimate raises poetry to a high pedestal and thus hinders one from noticing its weaknesses. It is the historic estimate that leads to the creation of classics and raises the poet to a nearly God like standard. Arnold says that if a poet is truly a classic his poetry will

give the reader real pleasure and enable him to compare and contrast other poetry which are not of the same high standard. This according to Arnold is the real estimate of poetry. Thus Arnold appeals to his readers to read classics with an open eye and not be blind to its faults. This will enable one to rate poetry with its proper value.

Arnold here speaks about the idea of imitation. He says that whatever one reads or knows keeps on coming back to him. Thus if a poet wants to reach the high standards of the classics he might consciously or unconsciously imitate them. This is also true for critics who tend to revert to the historic and personal estimate instead of an unbiased real estimate. The historic estimate affects the study of ancient poets while the personal estimate affects the study of modern or contemporary poets.

Arnold proposes the 'touchstone' method of analyzing poetry in order to determine whether it is of a high standard or not. He borrows this method from Longinus who said in his idea of the sublime that if a certain example of sublimity can please anyone regardless of habits, tastes or age and can please at all times then it can be considered as a true example of the sublime. This method was first suggested in England by Addison who said that he would have a man read classical works which have stood the test of time and place and also those modern works which find high praise among contemporaries. If the man fails to find any delight in them then he would conclude that it is not the author who lacks quality but the reader who is incapable of discovering them. Arnold applies the touchstone method by taking examples from the time tested classics and comparing them with other poetry to determine whether they possess the high poetic standard of the classics. He says that the poems need not resemble or possess any similarity to the touchstones. Once the critic has lodged the touchstones in his mind in order to detect the possession of high poetic quality he will have the tact of finding it in other poetry that he compares to the touchstones. Arnold quotes Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton in an attempt to exemplify touchstone poetry. He says that the examples he has quoted are very dissimilar to one another but they all possess a high poetic quality. He says that a critic need not labour in vain trying to explain the greatness of poetry. He can do so by merely pointing at some specimens of the highest poetic quality. Arnold says that the high quality of poetry lies in its matter and its manner. He then goes by Aristotle's observation and says that the best form of poetry possesses high truth and seriousness that makes up its subject matter along with superior diction that marks its manner. However, Arnold mentions that the true force of this method lies in its application. He therefore urges critics to apply the touchstone method to analyse and rate poetry.

Arnold then speaks about French poetry which had a tremendous influence on the poetry of England. He differentiates between the poetry of northern France and the poetry of southern France. The poetry of southern France influenced Italian literature. But it is the poetry of northern France that was dominant in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth century. This poetry came to England with the Anglo- Normans and had a tremendous impact on English poetry. It was the romance- poems of France that was popular during that time. But Arnold

says that it did not have any special characteristics and lacked the high truth, seriousness and diction of classic poetry and remain significant only from the historical point of view.

Next Arnold speaks about Chaucer who was much influenced by French and Italian poetry. Arnold says that Chaucer's poetic importance is a result of the real estimate and not the historic estimate. The superiority of Chaucer's verse lies both in his subject matter and his style. He writes about human life and nature as he sees it. Arnold speaks highly of Chaucer's diction and calls it 'liquid diction' to emphasise the fluidity in the manner of Chaucer's writing which he considers to be an irresistible virtue. Arnold however says that Chaucer is not a classic. He compares Chaucer to Dante and points out that Chaucer lacks the high seriousness of the classics thereby depriving him of the high honour.

Next Arnold mentions Milton and Shakespeare and credits them as classics and moves on to speak about Dryden and Pope. According to the historic estimate Dryden and Pope are no doubt great poets of the eighteenth century. Arnold observes that Dryden and Pope were better prose writers than poets. The restoration period faced the necessity of a fit prose with proper imaginative quality and this is what Dryden and Pope provided. Arnold therefore concludes that they are classics not of poetry but of prose.

After Dryden and Pope Arnold speaks about Gray. Gray did not write much but what he wrote has high poetic value. Arnold therefore considers Gray to be a classic.

Arnold now speaks about Robert Burns in the late eighteenth century and says that this is the period from which the personal estimate begins to affect the real estimate. Burns, according to Arnold, is a better poet in Scottish than in English. Like Chaucer Arnold does not consider Burns to be a classic. He says that Burns too lacks the high seriousness desired of poetry. He compares Burns to Chaucer and finds that Burns' manner of presentation is deeper than that of Chaucer. According to the real estimate Burns lacks the high seriousness of the classics but his poetry nevertheless has truthful substance and style.

Then Arnold moves on to speak about Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth but does not pass any judgement on their poetry. Arnold believes that his estimate of these poets will be influenced by his personal passion as they are closer to his age than the classics and also because their writings are of a more personal nature. Finally Arnold speaks about the self-preservation of the classics. Any amount of good literature will not be able to surpass the supremacy of the classics as they have already stood the test of time and people will continue to enjoy them for the ages to come. Arnold says that this is the result of the self preserving nature of humanity. Human nature will remain the same throughout the ages and those parts of the classics dealing with the subject will remain relevant at all times thus preserving themselves from being lost in time.

Overview of Arnold's Essay "The Study of Poetry"

The Study of Poetry is a central critical text of the Post-Victorian era. It was published nearly twenty-five years after Arnold's famous Preface to his poems. Perhaps the most acceptable writing method for the essay is, to begin with, the beginning of his famous essay.

"The future of poetry is immense because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find and even surer. No creed is not shaken, nor an accredited dogma that is not shown to be questionable, nor a received tradition that does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself; in the supposed fact, it has attached its emotions to the fact, and now the fact is as it is. But for poetry, the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is a fact."

The short paragraph's tone refers to Arnold's creed of liberalism and his stand-in literary criticism, and the importance of poetry itself. The "strongest part of our religion is its unconscious poetry." Many critics have called this essay Arnold's manifesto for his poetry and all that he did as a writer and critic. The first part of the essay deals with the importance of poetry and the significance he wants his readers to accord to poetry. The second part deals with a sort of a typically Arnoldian survey of British poetry Chaucer to Burns.

Arnold has immense faith in the feature of poetry. In a world where philosophy has become abstract dry and religion too materialistic, humankind's only hope is an according to Arnold's in poetry. Poetry says Arnold contains the most vital part of our faith, and our religion's kernel is in its "unconscious poetry." No more elaboration is needed for his definition of poetry to illustrate which; Arnold borrows Wordsworth's statements. For Wordsworth, poetry is "The impassioned expression in the countenance of all science," and Arnold approvingly recalls Wordsworth, who calls poetry the breath and more delicate spirit of all knowledge. In an age where faith in creeds was rudely shattered, Arnold had to accept poetry as the last refuge.

The next significant idea in this essay is his definition of poetry as "criticism of life" Arnold says,

> "And the criticism of life will be powerful in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true than untrue or half-true."

Some critics disagree with others who call this Arnold's definition of poetry. They insist on calling it his indication of the function that poetry can and ought to discharge. The other related idea is his call for high standards of excellence in judging poetry.

Arnold warns his readers not to be victimized by personal estimates or historical estimates to arrive at critical conclusions. He warns critics against falling prey to tendencies where the role played by a writer in the history of the development of language and poetry of a nation weighs a great deal in rating the quality of his poetry. If one ignores the historical estimate, one can overcome the fallacy of glorifying one work or under-rating it for non-literary and non-critical reasons. Then Arnold says that a "dubious classic" must be 'sifted,' or 'exploded' and a genuine classic must be appreciated for its high character based on what he calls the "real estimate." Arnold says,"….if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the very best class, then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever. We can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character." To arrive at the actual estimate, Arnold suggests comparison as a tool of criticism. The best and the most delicate lines of a classic are used as a touchstone to see whether they work in front of a critical measure or not. That is, "to take specimens of the poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say; the characters of high-quality poetry are what is expressed there." and to look them in the work of an author before passing our judgment.

In the second part, we find Arnold's survey of English poetry in which he begins with his praise of Chaucer's excellence in poetry. "Chaucer's poetry has the truth of substance, and it is a high criticism of life because in it we get a sizeable free sound representation of things." But, says Arnold, his poetry "lacks high seriousness of the great classics." Then Arnold gives him credit for style and manner and states.

"With him was born our real poetry." Writing about the Elizabethan age and Milton, he says that opinion is unanimous regarding Shakespeare and Milton's high quality of poetry. He declares, "The real estimate, here has universal currency." Later in the age of Augustans, in an extended discussion of Dryden and Pope, Arnold concludes that they are admirable for purposes of "inaugurators of our age." Asserts that neither Pope's verse nor Dryden's has high seriousness, and they are classics of English prose.

Here again, he stumbles with his criteria for evaluation when he elevates Gray and accords him a place of honor and calls his poetry 'classic' though he qualifies his statement. "He is the scantiest and faintest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic." Writing about Burns, he laments that though in Burn's poetry, there is an application "of ideas of life." His poetry still falls short of the high seriousness of classics. Coming to the poetry of Major romantic poets, he says that contemporaries are bound to come up with personal estimates "with passion." After an extraordinary claim for the touchstone method as a decisive parameter for evaluating poetry and applying it, on some British poets from Chaucer to Burns, he concludes, hoping that this method will go a long way in evaluating works' appreciation.

http://learningliteratureoverhere.blogspot.com/2016/08/a-study-of-poetry-matthew-arnold.html

https://literaturetimes.com/analysis-of-the-study-of-poetry-by-matthew-arnold/

The Art of Fiction

Henry James

Henry James, (born April 15, 1843, New York, New York, U.S.—died February 28, 1916, London, England), American novelist and, as a naturalized English citizen from 1915, a great figure in the transatlantic culture. His fundamental theme was the innocence and exuberance of the New World in clash with the corruption and wisdom of the Old, as illustrated in such works as Daisy Miller (1879), The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Bostonians (1886), and The Ambassadors (1903).

Early life and works

Henry James was named for his father, a prominent social theorist and lecturer, and was the younger brother of the pragmatist philosopher William James. The young Henry was a shy, book-addicted boy who assumed the role of quiet observer beside his active elder brother. They were taken abroad as infants, were schooled by tutors and governesses, and spent their preadolescent years in Manhattan. Returned to Geneva, Paris, and London during their teens, the James children acquired languages and an awareness of Europe vouchsafed to few Americans in their times. On the eve of the American Civil War, the James family settled at Newport, Rhode Island, and there, and later in Boston, Henry came to know New England intimately. When he was 19 years of age, he enrolled at the Harvard Law School, but he devoted his study time to reading Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Honoré de Balzac, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. His first story appeared anonymously two years later in the New York Continental Monthly and his first book reviews in the North American Review. When William Dean Howells became editor of The Atlantic Monthly, James found in him a friend and mentor who published him regularly. Between them, James and Howells inaugurated the era of American “realism.”

By his mid-20s James was regarded as one of the most skillful writers of short stories in America. Critics, however, deplored his tendency to write of the life of the mind, rather than of action. The stories of these early years show the leisurely existence of the well-to-do at Newport and Saratoga. James’s apprenticeship was thorough. He wrote stories, reviews, and articles for almost a decade before he attempted a full-length novel. There had to be also the traditional “grand tour,” and James went abroad for his first adult encounter with Europe in 1869. His year’s wandering in England, France, and Italy set the stage for a lifetime of travel in those countries. James never married. By nature he was friendly and even gregarious, but, while he was an active observer and participant in society, he tended, until

late middle age, to be “distant” in his relations with people and was careful to avoid “involvement.”

Career—first phase

Recognizing the appeal of Europe, given his cosmopolitan upbringing, James made a deliberate effort to discover whether he could live and work in the United States. Two years in Boston, two years in Europe, mainly in Rome, and a winter of unremitting hackwork in New York City convinced him that he could write better and live more cheaply abroad. Thus began his long expatriation—heralded by publication in 1875 of the novel Roderick Hudson, the story of an American sculptor’s struggle by the banks of the Tiber between his art and his passions; Transatlantic Sketches, his first collection of travel writings; and a collection of tales. With these three substantial books, he inaugurated a career that saw about 100 volumes through the press during the next 40 years.

During 1875–76 James lived in Paris, writing literary and topical letters for the New York Tribune and working on his novel The American (1877), the story of a self-made American millionaire whose guileless and forthright character contrasts with that of the arrogant and cunning family of French aristocrats whose daughter he unsuccessfully attempts to marry. In Paris James sought out the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, whose work appealed to him, and through Turgenev was brought into Gustave Flaubert’s coterie, where he got to know Edmond de Goncourt, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and Guy de Maupassant. From Turgenev he received confirmation of his own view that a novelist need not worry about “story” and that, in focusing on character, he would arrive at the life experience of his protagonist.

Much as he liked France, James felt that he would be an eternal outsider there, and late in 1876 he crossed to London. There, in small rooms in Bolton Street off Piccadilly, he wrote the major fiction of his middle years. In 1878 he achieved international renown with his story of an American flirt in Rome, Daisy Miller, and further advanced his reputation with The Europeans that same year. In England he was promptly taken up by the leading Victorians and became a regular at Lord Houghton’s breakfasts, where he consorted with Alfred Tennyson, William Gladstone, Robert Browning, and others. A great social lion, James dined out 140 times during 1878 and 1879 and visited in many of the great Victorian houses and country seats. He was elected to London clubs, published his stories simultaneously in English and American periodicals, and mingled with George Meredith, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edmund Gosse, and other writers, thus establishing himself as a significant figure in Anglo-American literary and artistic relations.

James’s reputation was founded on his versatile studies of “the American girl.” In a series of witty tales, he pictured the “self-made” young woman, the bold and brash American innocent who insists upon American standards in European society. James ended this first phase of his career by producing his masterpiece, The Portrait of a Lady (1881), a study of a

young woman from Albany who brings to Europe her narrow provincialism and pretensions but also her sense of her own sovereignty, her “free spirit,” her refusal to be treated, in the Victorian world, merely as a marriageable object. As a picture of Americans moving in the expatriate society of England and of Italy, this novel has no equal in the history of modern fiction. It is a remarkable study of a band of egotists while at the same time offering a shrewd appraisal of the American character. James’s understanding of power in personal relations was profound, as evinced in Washington Square (1881), the story of a young American heroine whose hopes for love and marriage are thwarted by her father’s callous rejection of a somewhat opportunistic suitor.

Career—middle phase

In the 1880s James wrote two novels dealing with social reformers and revolutionaries, The Bostonians (1886) and The Princess Casamassima (1886). In the novel of Boston life, James analyzed the struggle between conservative masculinity embodied in a Southerner living in the North and an embittered man-hating suffragist. The Bostonians remains the fullest and most-rounded American social novel of its time in its study of cranks, faddists, and “do-gooders.” In The Princess Casamassima James exploited the anarchist violence of the decade and depicted the struggle of a man who toys with revolution and is destroyed by it. These novels were followed by The Tragic Muse (1890), in which James projected a study of the London and Paris art studios and the stage, the conflict between art and “the world.”

The latter novel raised the curtain on his own “dramatic years,” 1890–95, during which he tried to win success writing for the stage. His dramatization of The American in 1891 was a modest success, but an original play, Guy Domville, produced in 1895, was a failure, and James was booed at the end of the first performance. Crushed and feeling that he had lost his public, he spent several years seeking to adapt his dramatic experience to his fiction. The result was a complete change in his storytelling methods. In The Spoils of Poynton (1897), What Maisie Knew (1897), The Turn of the Screw and In the Cage (1898), and The Awkward Age (1899), James began to use the methods of alternating “picture” and dramatic scene, close adherence to a given angle of vision, a withholding of information from the reader, making available to him only that which the characters see. The subjects of this period are the developing consciousness and moral education of children—in reality James’s old international theme of innocence in a corrupting world, transferred to the English setting.

Career—final phase

The experiments of this “transition” phase led James to the writing of three grandiose novels at the beginning of the new century, which represent his final—his “major”—phase, as it has been called. In these novels James pointed the way for the 20th-century novel. He had begun as a realist who describes minutely his crowded stage. He ended by leaving his stage comparatively bare, and showing a small group of characters in a tense situation, with

a retrospective working out, through multiple angles of vision, of their drama. In addition to these technical devices he resorted to an increasingly allusive prose style, which became dense and charged with symbolic imagery. His late “manner” derived in part from his dictating directly to a typist and in part from his unremitting search for ways of projecting subjective experience in a flexible prose.

The first of the three novels was The Ambassadors (1903). This is a high comedy of manners, of a middle-aged American who goes to Paris to bring back to a Massachusetts industrial town a wealthy young man who, in the view of his affluent family, has lingered too long abroad. The “ambassador” in the end is captivated by civilized Parisian life. The novel is a study in the growth of perception and awareness in the elderly hero, and it balances the relaxed moral standards of the European continent against the parochial rigidities of New England. The second of this series of novels was The Wings of the Dove, published in 1902, before The Ambassadors, although written after it. This novel, dealing with a melodramatic subject of great pathos, that of an heiress doomed by illness to die, avoids its cliche subject by focusing upon the characters surrounding the unfortunate young woman. They intrigue to inherit her millions. Told in this way, and set in London and Venice, it becomes a powerful study of well-intentioned humans who, with dignity and reason, are at the same time also birds of prey. In its shifting points of view and avoidance of scenes that would end in melodrama, The Wings of the Dove demonstrated the mastery with which James could take a tawdry subject and invest it with grandeur. His final novel was The Golden Bowl (1904), a study of adultery, with four principal characters. The first part of the story is seen through the eyes of the aristocratic husband and the second through the developing awareness of the wife.

While many of James’s short stories were potboilers written for the current magazines, he achieved high mastery in the ghostly form, notably in The Turn of the Screw (1898), and in such remarkable narratives as “The Aspern Papers” (1888) and “The Beast in the Jungle” (1903)—his prophetic picture of dissociated 20th-century man lost in an urban agglomeration. As a critic, James tended to explore the character and personality of writers as revealed in their creations; his essays are a brilliant series of studies, moral portraits, of the most famous novelists of his century, from Balzac to the Edwardian realists. His travel writings, English Hours (1905), Italian Hours (1909), and A Little Tour in France (1884), portray the backgrounds James used for his fictions.

In his later years, James lived in retirement in an 18th-century house at Rye in Sussex, though on completion of The Golden Bowl he revisited the United States in 1904–05. James had lived abroad for 20 years, and in the interval America had become a great industrial and political power. His observation of the land and its people led him to write, on his return to England, a poetic volume of rediscovery and discovery, The American Scene (1907), prophetic in its vision of urban doom, spoliation, and pollution of resources and filled with misgivings over the anomalies of a “melting pot” civilization. The materialism of American life deeply troubled James, and on his return to England he set to work to shore up his own

writings, and his own career, against this ephemeral world. He devoted three years to rewriting and revising his principal novels and tales for the highly selective “New York Edition,” published in 24 volumes. For this edition James wrote 18 significant prefaces, which contain both reminiscence and exposition of his theories of fiction.

Throwing his moral weight into Britain’s struggle in World War I, James became a British subject in 1915 and received the Order of Merit (O.M.) from King George V.

Legacy of Henry James

Henry James’s career was one of the longest and most productive—and most influential—in American letters. A master of prose fiction from the first, he practiced it as a fertile innovator, enlarged the form, and placed upon it the stamp of a highly individual method and style. He wrote for 51 years—20 novels, 112 tales, 12 plays, several volumes of travel and criticism, and a great deal of literary journalism. He recognized and helped to fashion the myth of the American abroad and incorporated this myth in the “international novel,” of which he was the acknowledged master. His fundamental theme was that of an innocent, exuberant, and democratic America confronting the worldly wisdom and corruption of Europe’s older, aristocratic culture. In both his light comedies and his tragedies, James’s sense of the human scene was sure and vivid, and, in spite of the mannerisms of his later style, he was one of the great prose writers and stylists of his century.

James’s public remained limited during his lifetime, but, after a revival of interest in his work during the 1940s and ’50s, he reached an ever-widening audience. His works were translated in many countries, and he was recognized in the late 20th century as one of the subtlest craftsmen who ever practiced the art of the novel. His rendering of the inner life of his characters made him a forerunner of the “stream-of-consciousness” movement in the 20th century.

> "The Art of Fiction" is Henry James's attempt to rebuke the claims made in Sir Walter Besant's lecture "Fiction as One of the Fine Arts."

Besant argued that fiction required both talent and the following of certain rules that govern the creation of an appropriate piece. It's the second point that James disagrees with, as he sets out to prove in his essay.

James begins with stating the points he plans to make throughout the essay:

"Fiction is an Art in every way worthy to be called the sister and the equal of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Music, and Poetry"

In other words, James plans to show that fiction, like all other arts, is limitless.

> "That it is an Art which, like them, is governed and directed by general laws; and that these laws may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion."

Here, James directly rebuts Besant's claim that rules are necessary, or even possible, to guide any form of art.

> "Fiction is so far removed from the mere mechanical arts, that no laws or rules whatever can teach it to those who have not already been endowed with the natural and necessary gifts."

James's final point is that natural talent is required to excel in writing fiction and that rules are fine to guide but cannot replace natural talent if it doesn't exist.

James goes on to explore this thesis by analyzing the stages of creating a work of fiction and how they fail or succeed depending on certain qualities in a writer. James agrees with Besant in general ways.

Besant tries to limit what an author can experience by dictating that one must write from experience. James argues that while it's true that writers should write what they know, this does not pigeonhole them into only writing about what they themselves have done from their own perspective. Instead, writers are a collection of their own experiences, varied and complicated, and so their works can hold many facets of the world and still be true to the authors' own experiences.

Besant dictates that characters should be clearly illustrated, and he goes on to create a list of rules that designate clear illustration. James agrees that characters must be understandable and relatable, but instead of suggesting that this requires a description of a character's facial hair, he argues that there are myriad ways to describe a character that will make them believable to an audience.

The story, Besant argues, must have a moral principle. James, on the other hand, feels that a story must be interesting and that a set of rules dictating what constitutes a moral storyline remove the art from the story. A true artist will not be able to create an interesting story without imbibing morals into it.

James closes the essay by encouraging writers to stay true to themselves and their vision and to worry less about following rules and more about creating art. He suggests they do what feels, looks, and sounds real rather than what feels, looks, or sounds right.

Summary

Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" remains one of the most influential statements on the theory of the novel. The essay concisely assesses the condition of the genre up to his own time and accurately anticipates the direction of its future development. Much as Edgar Allan Poe did for the short story a generation earlier, James establishes the novel as a serious artistic genre, identifies its unique characteristics, and lays out the fundamental principles for its critical analysis. Prior to that time, the novel was treated as an inferior literary form, considered at best as light entertainment and at worst as pandering to escapism and immorality; in either case, it was generally regarded as unworthy of serious critical analysis.

The catalyst for James's essay was a lecture by novelist-historian Walter Besant, "Fiction as One of the Fine Arts," delivered in 1884. James came across the essay when it was published later that same year as "The Art of Fiction," and he adopted the same title for his response, published in Longman's Magazine in September, 1884. The essay created enough of a stir to draw out additional comments on the discussion (including one from Robert Louis Stevenson, which led to a strong friendship between Stevenson and James). The following year, Besant's and James's articles were published together as a book.

Besant's original essay presents three main arguments. First, narrative fiction is a fine art in its own right and should be valued with the arts of painting, sculpture, music, and poetry. Second, the novel is governed and directed by general laws, which may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion that guide the other fine arts. Third, mastering these rules is necessary, but not sufficient, for success: The novelist also must have powerful artistic talent. James agrees with Besant about the importance and aesthetic interest of the novel and about the high degree of artistic ability demanded by the form, but doubts the existence of general rules or laws that could govern its composition or evaluation. He gathers his various objections together under one main criticism of Besant's approach: Besant is mistaken in his attempt to develop precise criteria for what makes a good novel. In James's view, the only purpose of the novel is to represent life; other than this, the "only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel . . . is that it be interesting."

James diplomatically concedes that most of Besant's principles are on the surface impossible to disagree with. These principles include the following: the novelist must write from experience, characters should be clearly outlined, the story is the most important element, and a novel should have a conscious moral purpose. However, James then argues that the vagueness of these principles also makes them impossible to positively agree with. Besant's notion of writing from experience, for example, includes such injunctions as advising a lower middle-class writer to avoid introducing scenes among the upper classes. James argues that experience is much more complicated than membership in a socioeconomic class; he conceives of experience as the product of an acute and always highly individual artistic sensibility. The consciousness of the gifted novelist is compared to

a huge spider web of fine silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, catching every airborne impression in its tissue.

For James, true experience consists fundamentally of mental impressions, and it is the intensity and directness with which the novelist registers, and then represents, these myriad impressions of life that matter, not simply the quantity of material at hand. For the sensitive and receptive mind "upon whom nothing is lost," accidents of residence or social scale are trivial; what matters is the imaginative power to take hints and fleeting observations and to guess the unseen from the seen, to infer the complete pattern from a fragment. Only exact truth to detail can provide the air of reality, the "solidity of specification" in representing lived experience that is the supreme virtue of the novel, but no one can tell the writer exactly how to achieve it through the mysterious process of selection, synthesis, and arrangement that constitutes the novelist's treatment of that material.

James agrees with Besant that characters should be rendered clearly, but asks if that task is best accomplished by description, through dialogue, or by means of incidents. In James's organic view of form, these categories are artificial and inseparable in practice, as incidents and dialogue function to illustrate character, and the characters dictate our reaction to the incidents and dialogue. He extends his questioning of categories to such traditional distinctions as that made between the romance and the novel, distinctions he finds similarly unhelpful.

James's critique of the importance of the story follows the same pattern of deconstructing implicit oppositions. He concedes that a novel must consist of adventures, but then stipulates that these may be adventures of consciousness, internal and psychological rather than external and purely physical. As to the conscious moral purpose of a novel, he again shifts the ground by pointing up the vagueness of Besant's terms and emphasizing the practical difficulty of setting out to paint a moral picture. James extends his argument by returning to his initial premise: Good novels are works of fine art and, thus, should be evaluated by their formal execution, not their morals. Morality will take care of itself unconsciously, in James's view, precisely because of the high artistic challenges posed by the novel. [T]he deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. . . . No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground.

James's conclusion, expressed as advice to young novelists, is to be true to their own artistic vision, to reject public opinion and critical dogma because the essential condition of the genre is its inclusiveness and freedom. James's insistence that there could be no limits on subject matter, and that stylistic technique and the representation of consciousness must be central concerns of critical discussion and evaluation, seems visionary in hindsight, blazing the trail for the narrative innovations to come from such modernist writers as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner.

“The Art of Fiction” does not present a complete overview of James’s thinking about the novel, which, taken as a whole, constitutes the invention of the discipline of narrative theory. A notable omission in the essay is any discussion of point of view, one of his most original and important contributions to narrative analysis. His ideas on point of view developed later in the prefaces written for the New York editions of his novels.

In a letter to Stevenson, James characterized “The Art of Fiction” as “simply a plea for liberty.” The essay stands as the most concise and durable general statement of James’s philosophy of literature.

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-James-American-writer/Legacy

https://www.enotes.com/topics/art-fiction

Literary criticism and Philosophy

F. R. Leavis

Dr. F. R. Leavis, a Professor and an academic critic, is regarded as one outstanding figures of New Criticism in England. Sometimes his criticism is called 'Philosophical Criticism' as it is the reviver of the Philosophical criticism whose great exponents were Sidney, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Arnold. It enshrines poetry on the highest altar of Truth, and teaches to appreciate poetry as an abstract quality. But Literary Criticism to Leavis is not Philosophy. Making a distinction between the two he says in his essay 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy' :

The critic—the reader of poetry—is indeed concerned with evaluation, but to figure him as measuring with a norm which he brings up to the object and appliesfrom the outside is to misrepresent the process. The critic's aim is, first, to realize as sensitively and completely as possible this or that which claims his attention; and a certain valuing is implicitly in the realizing. As he matures in experience of the new thing he asks, explicitly and implicitly 'Where does this come? How does it stand in relation to How relatively important does it seem?' And the organization into which it settles as a constituent in becoming 'placed' is an organization of similarly 'placed' things, things that have found their bearings with regard to one another, and not a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations.

The business of the literary critic is to attain a peculiar completeness of response and to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response into commentary; he must be on his guard against abstracting improperly from what is in front of him and against any premature or irrelevant generalizing—of it or from it. His first concern is to enter into possession of the given poem (let us say) in its concrete fulness, and his concern is never to lose his completeness of possession, but rather to increase it. In making value-judgments (and judgments as to significance), implicitly or explicitly, he does so out of that

completeness of passion and with that fulness of response. He doesn't ask, 'How does this accord with these specifications of goodness in poetry?'; he aims to make fully conscious and articulate the immediate sense of value that 'places' the poem

F. R. Leavis and 'Cultural Criticism'

F. R. Leavis is also studied as a leader of'Cultural' criticism advocated and practised by such authentic and respectable critics as Matthew Arnold, Lionel Trilling, F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams. The basic contention of the critics of this persuasion, according to Prof. Naresh Chandra, is that literature is the best medium for preserving and the best vehicle for the transmission of culture from generation to generation, this forming an perpetuating a tradition in culture. The function of criticism, therefore, to so interpret literature that the cultural values embalmed in it may not only become evident, but also attractive to the mind of man. This function of criticism has become all the more important in our time when cultural values are in the danger of being denigrated by hostile forces like industrialism, political factionalism and fanaticism, political and capitalistic exploitation, scientific and technological materialism, threat of war, and general deterioration in human relations. Naresh Chandra, NewCriticism (1979).

Now-a-days Cultural criticism is attempted by critics like Raymond Williams (see his Culture and Society), Edmund Burke and George Orwell who have made culture their main concern. F. R. Leavis's English Literature and the University puts forward a strong case for the place of English literature in University studies, mainly on the ground that no other subject presents cultural values in a more forceful, persuasive and beautiful manner.

The major shortcomings of Cultural criticism are its breeziness; the concern of the critics of this school is much more with the culture as embedded in Anglo-Saxon tradition. The critic is committed to a certain concept of culture and has no values of his own, and thus this type of criticism reduces the universal to the condition of accidents. Poetry and literature are concerned with universal and abiding entities, but culture cannot claim any such attributes. It cannot be accepted as pure literary criticism as it has a tilt towards propaganda.

F. R. Leavis and the Valuation School of Criticism

Another trend in modern Criticism is what might be called 'the correction of opinion.' The professional art critic's function, says Mr. R. H. Wilenski. "is solely the assessment of values." (The Study of Art (1934), p. 167). Thus Dr. F-. R. Leavis entitles one of his published collections of literary essays, Revaluations. Sir Herbert Read is also of the opinion that te 'science' of literary criticism is 'valuation by some standard, of the worth of literature' (The Nature of Criticism). One of the most distasteful examples of this type of criticism is Ernest Boyd's book Literary Blasphemies, which aims at revisiting downward the traditional estimates of a number of authors from Shakespeare to Hardy. The major writer of evaluative criticism is Yvor Winters.

F. R. Leavis and the Cambridge School of Criticism Or Leavis as a New Critic

This valuation school owes much inspiration and influence to I. A. Richards and has come to be recognized as the Cambridge School of Criticism, the chief exponents of which are I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, L. C. Knights and William Empson. They have offered the most ambitious and of criticism—criticism as theory and method and have raised undamental questions about the values of life. They lack wit, ease and charm of the Bloomsbury group (Viriginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Sir Desmond, Mac Carthy, Raymond Mortiner and others). They have also given up pleasant, vivid and cultivatedconversation of the Bloomsbury Group.

Dr. F. R. Leavis is the outstanding critic of the Cambridge school of criticism. He is one of the most distinguished and most influential figures among them. He writes in a quite peculiarly awkward and contorted prose, and has a manner, in rebuking other critics, of disagreeable acerbity. As a matter of fact, he too like William Empson, is the follower of I. A. Richards. He was the editor of the distinguished critical journal,Scrutiny to which a number of budding literary critics have made vital contribution. Leavis's main works are New Bearings in English Poetry (1932), Revaluations (1947),in which he vigorously pleaded for the rehabilitation of the literary reputation of Marvell, Pope and Emile Bronte. His other notable works are The Great Tradition (1948) in which he set out the excellence of George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad, and The Common Pursuit (1952) which is a nice collection of the articles published from time to time in Scrutiny.

Dr. Leavis is a man of very strong tastes. He loves clarity, solidity and hardness. He does not like the romantic vagueness in criticism or creation. He is an analytical critic and does not believe in making sweeping generalisations. Except T. S. Eliot, he is the greatest contemporary critic. He is a man who would not yield since he is so sure of his being right. He has done as much to rehabilitate Pope and Marvell as any other critic. The strength of his convictions can be seen in his evaluation of Milton and Shelley. He criticises both these poets severely. You may disagree with Dr. Leavis but you cannot possibly afford to ignore him. He has done to literary criticism what Eliot has done to English poetry. Dr. Leavis wants matter of fact, precise and concrete criticism. He does not love mere jugglery of words. The criticism that indulges in such devices is likely to receive a severe blow from him. He considers Eliot to be a great critic, but he was not afraid of taking him to task when Eliot revised his opinion about Milton.

Among his followers may be named Prof. L. C. Knights and Dr. David Daiches. G. S. Fraser has admirably summed up the critical significance of Scrutiny as well as the limitations and achievement of the Canbridge group of critics in the following words:—

> "The Scrutiny to-day represents an influential but isolated point of view; modernist in relation to the older academician : conservative in relation to most manifestations of' modernity' over the past twenty years, scrutiny exacts, however, respect even

> from those who disagree with it by its admirable refusal to set on three principles which are, perhaps, pretty widely diffused throughout the rest of literary journalism : the 'group' principle, the 'personal' principle, and the 'deference' principle. The 'group' principles consists, for instance, of taking Mr. Eliot's work very seriously, knowing that Mr. Eliot takes the work of the late Charles Williams work very seriously, too. The 'personal' principle derives from the fact that most metropolitan authors and reviewers know each other reasonably well, like to keep on good terms with each other and therefore in reviewing each other's work are tempted to pull their punches. The 'deference' principle is that, when on the whole one admires a particular author's work very much, one should treat a book of his which is under notice, even if one feels that it does not represent his highest achievement, with a certain tender forbearance. Dr. Leavis's great admiration for the earlier poems of pound and for very much of Mr. Eliot's work does not, however, prevent him from being severe about the Cantos or about The Cocktail Party and much of Mr. Eliot's later prose; the more one respects a writer, he feels, the less degerential one should be, and on the contrary the more unsparing when he feels short of his highest level. What matters is the standards of literature, not the feelings of writers." (G. S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World, pp. 306—7).

Dr. Leavis who was a university teacher, yet his review, Scrutiny (1932-53), though originally intended to revalue people and things in a freelance spirit, exercised for twenty years a veritable academic dictatorship.

Analysis

The essay literary criticism and philosophy was first publish in " Strutting " in the year 1937.It was a res-pons to well-ex suggestion that Leavis should spell out the theoretical basis of his criticism.

After reviewing " revaluation " the eminent critic and literary History wee-lex wrote allow me to sketch your idea of poetry, your norn with which you major every poet your poetry must be in serious relution to actually. It must have a firm on actual, it must be in relation to life it must not be cut of from direct vulgar living . It should be normally human, testifying to spiritual health. It should not be personal in the sense of indulging in personal dreams and fantasies, there should be no c motion for it's sake in it . But a sharp conceal realization a sen-soul particularity. The language of poetry should not be cut of from speech should not flatter, should not be malicious . I would ask give to defend this position more abstractly.

According to Leavis criticism is a distinct and septate discipline which is quite different from philosophy and it's abstract speculation.

The reading demanded by Poetry is of a different kind then demanded by philosophy.The critic is concerted with evaluation but Judgement is not a question of plying and an external

norm.The crities in should be to realist as completely and as sensitively as possibly. The experience, that is given words.According to Leavis " The business of a literary critic is to all-end peculiar completeness of response a critic should always be against premature generalization of concepts"

"Leavis" depends this practice by painting out that his critical assumptions are implicit in his work , " If i have avoided such generalization it was because they seemed to be plumping to be of any use " . He feels that the best way of presenting theoretical criticism through principle is to show at work in practical criticism. He believes in working in terms of conflict judgement and particular analysis, Leavis thinks of criticism as a co-operative a full in terms of discussing the text with fellow critics. According to the method that he talks about is " This doesn't it ? Was such a relation to that this kind of theme , don't you find it so was better than that etc.....

To reduce his principle's to abstract statement would be to take away the heart of his argument and make it clumping as wall as in quatrain.

Leavis wrote that he believes in demonstrating his critical principles and instating them....." I do not argue in general terms that there should be criticism for it's own sake, no more generous and optional, no luxury in pain or enjoy arrangement and analysis of concrete example by giving those parses of precision of meaning that they couldn't have in any other way"

http://englishgacgnr.blogspot.com/2014/01/fr-leavis-in-literary-criticism.html

http://riddhimaru.blogspot.com/2018/02/literary-criticism-and-philosophy-by.html

Tradition and Individual Talent

T. S. Eliot

T.S. Eliot, in full Thomas Stearns Eliot, (born September 26, 1888, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.—died January 4, 1965, London, England), American-English poet, playwright, literary critic, and editor, a leader of the Modernist movement in poetry in such works as The Waste Land (1922) and Four Quartets (1943). Eliot exercised a strong influence on Anglo-American culture from the 1920s until late in the century. His experiments in diction, style, and versification revitalized English poetry, and in a series of critical essays he shattered old orthodoxies and erected new ones. The publication of Four Quartets led to his recognition as the greatest living English poet and man of letters, and in 1948 he was awarded both the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Early years

Eliot was descended from a distinguished New England family that had relocated to St. Louis, Missouri. His family allowed him the widest education available in his time, with no influence from his father to be “practical” and to go into business. From Smith Academy in St. Louis he went to Milton, in Massachusetts; from Milton he entered Harvard in 1906; he received a B.A. in 1909, after three instead of the usual four years. The men who influenced him at Harvard were George Santayana, the philosopher and poet, and the critic Irving Babbitt. From Babbitt he derived an anti-Romantic attitude that, amplified by his later reading of British philosophers F.H. Bradley and T.E. Hulme, lasted through his life. In the academic year 1909–10 he was an assistant in philosophy at Harvard.

He spent the year 1910–11 in France, attending Henri Bergson’s lectures in philosophy at the Sorbonne and reading poetry with Alain-Fournier. Eliot’s study of the poetry of Dante, of the English writers John Webster and John Donne, and of the French Symbolist Jules Laforgue helped him to find his own style. From 1911 to 1914 he was back at Harvard, reading Indian philosophy and studying Sanskrit. In 1913 he read Bradley’s Appearance and Reality; by 1916 he had finished, in Europe, a dissertation entitled “Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley.” But World War I had intervened, and he never returned to Harvard to take the final oral examination for the Ph.D. degree. In 1914 Eliot met and began a close association with the American poet Ezra Pound.

Early publications

Eliot was to pursue four careers: editor, dramatist, literary critic, and philosophical poet. He was probably the most erudite poet of his time in the English language. His undergraduate poems were “literary” and conventional. His first important publication, and the first masterpiece of Modernism in English, was “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915):

Although Pound had printed privately a small book, A lume spento, as early as 1908, “Prufrock” was the first poem by either of these literary revolutionists to go beyond experiment to achieve perfection. It represented a break with the immediate past as radical as that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth in Lyrical Ballads (1798). From the appearance of Eliot’s first volume, Prufrock and Other Observations, in 1917, one may conveniently date the maturity of the 20th-century poetic revolution. The significance of the revolution is still disputed, but the striking similarity to the Romantic revolution of Coleridge and Wordsworth is obvious: Eliot and Pound, like their 18th-century counterparts, set about reforming poetic diction. Whereas Wordsworth thought he was going back to the “real language of men,” Eliot struggled to create new verse rhythms based on the rhythms of contemporary speech. He sought a poetic diction that might be spoken by an educated person, being “neither pedantic nor vulgar.”

For a year Eliot taught French and Latin at the Highgate School; in 1917 he began his brief career as a bank clerk in Lloyds Bank Ltd. Meanwhile, he was also a prolific reviewer and essayist in both literary criticism and technical philosophy. In 1919 he published Poems,

which contained the poem “Gerontion,” a meditative interior monologue in blank verse; nothing like this poem had appeared in English.

With the publication in 1922 of his poem The Waste Land, Eliot won an international reputation. The Waste Land expresses with great power the disenchantment, disillusionment, and disgust of the period after World War I. In a series of vignettes, loosely linked by the legend of the search for the Grail, it portrays a sterile world of panicky fears and barren lusts, and of human beings waiting for some sign or promise of redemption. The poem’s style is highly complex, erudite, and allusive, and the poet provided notes and references to explain the work’s many quotations and allusions. This scholarly supplement distracted some readers and critics from perceiving the true originality of the poem, which lay rather in its rendering of the universal human predicament of man desiring salvation, and in its manipulation of language, than in its range of literary references. In his earlier poems Eliot had shown himself to be a master of the poetic phrase. The Waste Land showed him to be, in addition, a metrist of great virtuosity, capable of astonishing modulations ranging from the sublime to the conversational.

The Waste Land consists of five sections and proceeds on a principle of “rhetorical discontinuity” that reflects the fragmented experience of the 20th-century sensibility of the great modern cities of the West. Eliot expresses the hopelessness and confusion of purpose of life in the secularized city, the decay of urbs aeterna (the “eternal city”). This is the ultimate theme of The Waste Land, concretized by the poem’s constant rhetorical shifts and its juxtapositions of contrasting styles. But The Waste Land is not a simple contrast of the heroic past with the degraded present; it is, rather, a timeless simultaneous awareness of moral grandeur and moral evil. The poem’s original manuscript of about 800 lines was cut down to 433 at the suggestion of Ezra Pound. The Waste Land is not Eliot’s greatest poem, though it is his most famous.

Eliot said that the poet-critic must write “programmatic criticism”—that is, criticism that expresses the poet’s own interests as a poet, quite different from historical scholarship, which stops at placing the poet in his background. Consciously intended or not, Eliot’s criticism created an atmosphere in which his own poetry could be better understood and appreciated than if it had to appear in a literary milieu dominated by the standards of the preceding age. In the essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” appearing in his first critical volume, The Sacred Wood (1920), Eliot asserts that tradition, as used by the poet, is not a mere repetition of the work of the immediate past (“novelty is better than repetition,” he said); rather, it comprises the whole of European literature, from Homer to the present. The poet writing in English may therefore make his own tradition by using materials from any past period, in any language. This point of view is “programmatic” in the sense that it disposes the reader to accept the revolutionary novelty of Eliot’s polyglot quotations and serious parodies of other poets’ styles in The Waste Land.

Eliot used the phrase “objective correlative” in the context of his own impersonal theory of poetry; it thus had an immense influence toward correcting the vagueness of late Victorian rhetoric by insisting on a correspondence of word and object. Two other essays, first published the year after The Sacred Wood, almost complete the Eliot critical canon: “The Metaphysical Poets” and “Andrew Marvell,” published in Selected Essays, 1917–32 (1932). In these essays he effects a new historical perspective on the hierarchy of English poetry, putting at the top Donne and other Metaphysical poets of the 17th century and lowering poets of the 18th and 19th centuries. Eliot’s second famous phrase appears here—“dissociation of sensibility,” invented to explain the change that came over English poetry after Donne and Andrew Marvell. This change seems to him to consist in a loss of the union of thought and feeling. The phrase has been attacked, yet the historical fact that gave rise to it cannot be denied, and with the poetry of Eliot and Pound it had a strong influence in reviving interest in certain 17th-century poets.

The first, or programmatic, phase of Eliot’s criticism ended with The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933)—his Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard. Shortly before this his interests had broadened into theology and sociology; three short books, or long essays, were the result: Thoughts After Lambeth (1931), The Idea of a Christian Society (1939), and Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1948). These book-essays, along with his Dante (1929), an indubitable masterpiece, broadened the base of literature into theology and philosophy: whether a work is poetry must be decided by literary standards; whether it is great poetry must be decided by standards higher than the literary.

Eliot’s criticism and poetry are so interwoven that it is difficult to discuss them separately. The great essay on Dante appeared two years after Eliot was confirmed in the Church of England (1927); in that year he also became a British subject. The first long poem after his conversion was Ash Wednesday (1930), a religious meditation in a style entirely different from that of any of the earlier poems. Ash Wednesday expresses the pangs and the strain involved in the acceptance of religious belief and religious discipline. This and subsequent poems were written in a more relaxed, musical, and meditative style than his earlier works, in which the dramatic element had been stronger than the lyrical. Ash Wednesday was not well received in an era that held that poetry, though autonomous, is strictly secular in its outlook; it was misinterpreted by some critics as an expression of personal disillusion.

Summary

Tradition and the Individual Talent" by T. S. Eliot is a 1919 critical essay about the relationship between the individual poet or author and the canon of literature that precedes the poet.

Eliot argues that great poets are not simply original but are in conversation with the literary tradition. Eliot also suggests that the poet's role is not to express personal emotion but rather to serve as a medium for the collective emotions of the "mind of Europe."

T. S. Eliot's 1919 critical essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was first published in the London literary magazine The Egoist. It was republished a year later, alongside nineteen of Eliot's other essays, in the 1920 collection The Sacred Wood. Though "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was composed early in Eliot's career, it remains one of his best-known and most influential essays, having contributed heavily to the founding of the New Criticism movement. New Criticism practices close reading and emphasizes the aesthetic and stylistic elements of poetry rather than the ideological or biographical ones. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot advocates for the separation of art from artist and argues that tradition has less to do with imitation and more to do with understanding and expanding upon the intellectual and literary context in which one is writing. The essay is divided into three sections, with the first section outlining Eliot's definition of tradition, the second expanding upon the relationship between poetry and the poet, and the third offering a brief conclusion.

In part 1, Eliot articulates his concept of literary tradition. He argues that often what marks great poetry is the degree to which it is in conversation with the poetry of the past. In his view, to be "traditional" is not to lack originality, but rather to possess an awareness of the "whole of the literature of Europe." Innovation and creativity are important, but truly accomplished poets must understand how their works relate to both the present and the past. Essentially, Eliot claims that poetry does not exist in a vacuum and that the meaning of a poem is never defined solely by its contents. Instead, all art is in conversation with itself, with each new generation's contributions expanding and altering the ways in which the literary canon as a whole is understood. Thus, tradition is a constantly evolving construct, one which accomplished poets must give themselves over to, resulting in a "continual self sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."

In part 2, Eliot expands on his belief that the creation of poetry is an act of depersonalization. He argues that the mature poet writes not because he has "more to say" but because his technique has made it possible for him to more finely articulate emotion. He explains this using an analogy from chemistry: platinum, in the presence of oxygen and sulfur dioxide, acts as a catalyst to create sulfurous acid, but remains itself unchanged. The poet is akin to the platinum in this reaction: through the creation of art, new work is brought into being, but the poet is unchanged.

Building on his concept of the poet as an impersonal medium, Eliot asserts that great art is not an expression of the poet's personal emotions but rather an act of aesthetic distillation. Instead of depicting novel or uniquely potent emotions, the poet must instead collect ordinary "feelings, phrases, [and] images" and synthesize them into a "new compound." This new compound does not achieve greatness from the intensity of its components but rather from the rigors of the "artistic process" that the poet subjects them to. The end result should transcend the more personal experiences of emotion and feeling. Thus the poem arrives at a broader aesthetic sensibility that is self-contained yet converses with the works of the past, present, and future.

Part 3 offers a short conclusion and advocates for shifting critical focus away from poets and onto the poems themselves. Eliot reiterates his argument that "the emotion of art is impersonal." In his view, the work of poets is not to convey their own "sincere emotion," but rather to act as a medium through which the collective thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the living "mind of Europe" are conveyed.

Only rarely in the history of English literature has a critical essay, such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent," so changed the way people understand poetry. Anyone who has any real interest in modern poetry—reader, critic, or poet—has had to confront this essay and decide for himself or herself its strengths and weaknesses.

One of the important ways that the essay has altered literary criticism has to do with the meaning of the title's key words, "tradition" and "individual talent." In the very first paragraph, Eliot indicates that, by "tradition," he does not mean what people usually mean in talking about literature; ordinarily, a "traditional" writer is perhaps an old-fashioned writer, one who uses tried-and-true plots and a steady, understandable style. Rather, Eliot uses "tradition" in a more objective and historical sense: His definition of tradition is paradoxical because he says that the historical sense of tradition is a keen understanding of both what is timeless and what is not. A true poet understands "not only the pastness of the past, but . . . its presence."

This is less confusing than it appears: Eliot simply means that for a poet writing in the tradition—a poet who understands his or her heritage—all the great poetry of the past is alive. When the poet writes a poem, great poems of the past help to enliven the modern work. This dynamic relationship is not finished when the poem is written, however, because the new poem casts a new light on the poems that came before. In the same way that the tradition of great poetry helped shape a new, modern poem, the contemporary poem changes the way one looks at the poems that shaped it.

Another apparent contradiction lies in Eliot's use of "individual" in "individual talent." He says that a poet's true individuality lies in the ways he or she embodies the immortality of poetic "ancestors." In a sense, poets who know what they are doing "plug into" tradition; electrified by the greatness of the past, they achieve a sharper profile, a greater individuality.

It is important to stress that Eliot is not saying that good poets should simply copy the poetry of the past. In fact, he argues just the opposite: Good poets bring something new into the world—"novelty," he writes, "is better than repetition"—that makes an important advance on what has come before. To do this, the poet has to know what is truly new and different; a poet can do this only by having a thorough knowledge of the classic and traditional. To have this kind of knowledge means, in turn, that the poet needs to know not only about the poetry of his or her own language but also about the poetry of other nations and cultures.

In a crucial metaphor about midway in the essay, Eliot compares the poet to a catalyst in chemistry. He describes what happens when two gases are combined in the presence of a piece of platinum: A new compound is formed, but the platinum is unaffected. The platinum is the poet's mind, which uses tradition and personal experience (the two gases) to create a poem. In this kind of literary combustion, the poet remains "impersonal." That is, he or she manages to separate individual facts of life from the work of art that is being created. As Eliot says, "the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium," which is the medium of poetry.

In a third, concluding section of the essay, Eliot draws an important conclusion, one that has been crucial to the way poetry has been studied since the 1920's. The essay shifts the study of a poem from an emphasis on the poet as a person, to the study of the poem isolated from the poet. After reading this essay, critics would increasingly concentrate on the internal structure of poetry—the tropes, figures, and themes of the work. At the same time, critics would banish the life of the writer from the study of his or her writings; the poet's personality, as Eliot seemed to imply, was irrelevant to the artwork produced. The peak of this theory was reached with the New Critics and their successors in Britain and the United States from about 1930 through the 1950's. Later years, however, have seen a waning of the impersonal theory of poetry and a return of the poet to his or her work.

Analysis

Eliot begins his essay by offering several corrections to what he sees as misunderstandings of the notion of literary tradition. He argues that "tradition" is a largely unexamined attribute of poetic practice, often discussed only in negative commentary upon works that are seen as too "traditional." This critique, he suggests, stems from a larger intellectual blind spot: The critical tendencies of any particular culture remain unconscious and unexamined by members of that culture. Included among these untested assumptions is the notion that what is most praiseworthy in a work of poetry is the extent to which it departs from any recognizable predecessors:

> We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.

He disagrees with the idea that what is good in poetry is what is new, though he does see intellectual innovation happening in good poetry. Tradition, he argues, must not be seen as simply a falling back upon previous ideas. Instead, Eliot demands of writers an active engagement with history: "[Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour."

Eliot describes the poet's "historical sense," an awareness of the full scope of literature, from its beginnings to the present moment:

> A sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

Eliot argues that to be timely as a writer—to most fully practice a literature that is not a copy of earlier historical periods—one must, paradoxically, become acutely aware of one's own place in that larger history.

The Poet's Depersonalization

As he transitions from the first to the second section of his essay, Eliot turns his attention to the hypothetical poet's relationship to poetry. Invoking, if indirectly, the Keatsian theory of "negative capability," Eliot describes an artistic process in which the poet removes the self from the writing process:

> What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

To better explain what he means by this "depersonalization," Eliot offers the metaphor of a chemical process in which the poet is not an active ingredient, but a catalyst.

Eliot claims that the "poet's mind is in fact a receptacle," accumulating images, emotions, and experiences in order to recombine them later. Key to his theory is that it is not simply the intensity of the poem's emotional content but also the formal choices that its creator makes which determine the work's power.

In posing this distinction between feelings and the act of their representation, Eliot makes a larger argument that poetry isn't a simple expression of the poet's personality. Rather, the depersonalized writer can deftly wield accumulated experience for artistic effect:

> The poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.

Eliot concludes the second section of his essay with a final statement on emotion and writing:"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality".

Essentially, an understanding of tradition and the possession of an individual talent are interdependent. In Eliot's view, a poet's individual talent is born from her ability to depersonalize her craft and instead serve as a medium through which the literary and intellectual spirit of the past and present can be channelled.

Talent and Effort

In addition to his commentary on the poetic craft itself, Eliot explores how conceptions of "great art" are often dependent on perceptions of the greatness of the artist. Throughout "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot refers to titans of the Western literary canon, including Shakespeare, Homer, and Dante. However, he does not attribute the supposed greatness of their works to any innate genius. Instead, he remarks that "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum." He further explores how Dante and Keats used stylistic and formal elements—such as the placement of a given image or the choice of a given symbol—to enhance the significance of the emotions in their works.

These acknowledgements of craftsmanship and effort undermine the myth of genius and instead reinforce Eliot's argument that "tradition" is more of an intellectual legacy than any specific form or subject. In order to create "great art," a poet must be a student of poetry. Furthermore, if the poet is merely a medium through which the "mind" of society takes shape, then the cultivation of "individual talent" necessarily entails a relinquishment of individual genius in favor of learned tradition, careful craftsmanship, and steady effort.

Eliot's essay stands at the beginning of modernist literary scholarship, addressing the role of the unique writer within a long-standing literary heritage. The tension Eliot discusses centers on an individual writer whose work is read within the culture. Eliot notes that critics tend to praise poets for what they do that is different from others. Yet in order for poets to achieve such originality, they must have a sense of the traditional conventions of their cultural heritage. The English, he suggests, tend to be less alert to these distinctions—to their peril, for emerging modernist works and the prior era of Romantic poetry both contain a high degree of contextualization, despite celebrating the individual creative voice.

To be alert to tradition is to be alert to a larger audience than those who read an original poem:

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

Modernist notions of time and history are complex, but this passage seems to reflect much of Eliot's own poetic purpose. In his own poems "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and

The Waste Land, the speakers' voices are distinctly of the twentieth century—yet they possess a quality that makes them seem to come out of a distant past and endure beyond the immediate moment. They are part of the tradition, past and future, yet they are not imitations of the past so much as a wholly creative and new pastiche. The artist swims in tradition and must certainly include it in any new creation.

Midway through the piece, Eliot takes on the Romantic notion of sublimity, or the experience of the sublime. Romantic literature praises intensity of feeling as a high attribute, yet Eliot argues against that value. It is not the feeling within the artist, he argues, but rather the the feeling accurately conveyed by the artist through the poetic medium that matters. Eliot's own love of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and the metaphysical poets seems to inform his sense that poetry is best when poets remove themselves from their work and instead focus on the artistic process itself:

The poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

Eliot's theory aligns with the modernist desire to make art a more objective endeavor. Another of Eliot's theories, that of the objective correlative, reflects a similar aim. Eliot writes in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" that a poet must find a set of objects, a string of actions, or some other tool by which to convey the characters' emotions precisely and reliably to the reader. Without the necessary textual artifacts to support a character's emotions, readers must rely too heavily on the author's intentions and biography, rendering the work personal rather than poetical.

In Eliot's view, the more personal a work of poetry is, the more remote the ideas being expressed will be from the experiences of readers. The effective poet, then, speaks not for herself but rather for a wide span of past, present, and future readers. In order to do so, the poet must "depersonalize" the artistic process and instead become attuned to the ever-expanding traditions of intellectual and philosophical thought.

https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot

https://www.enotes.com/topics/tradition-individual-talent/analysis#

Towards a Theory of Comprehending

I.A. Richards

I.A. Richards, in full Ivor Armstrong Richards, (born Feb. 26, 1893, Sandbach, Cheshire, Eng.—died Sept. 7, 1979, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire), English critic, poet, and teacher who was highly influential in developing a new way of reading poetry that led to the New Criticism and that also influenced some forms of reader-response criticism.

Richards was educated at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and was a lecturer in English and moral sciences there from 1922 to 1929. In that period he wrote three of his most influential books: The Meaning of Meaning (1923; with C.K. Ogden), a pioneer work on semantics; and Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) and Practical Criticism (1929), companion volumes that he used to develop his critical method. The latter two were based on experimental pedagogy: Richards would give students poems in which the titles and authors' names had been removed and then use their responses for further development of their "close reading" skills. Richards is best known for advancing the close reading of literature and for articulating the theoretical principles upon which these skills lead to "practical criticism," a method of increasing readers' analytic powers.

During the 1930s, Richards spent much of his time developing Basic English, a system originated by Ogden that employed only 850 words; Richards believed a universally intelligible language would help to bring about international understanding. He took Basic English to China as a visiting professor at Tsing Hua University (1929–30) and as director of the Orthological Institute of China (1936–38). In 1942 he published a version of Plato's *Republic* in Basic English. He became professor of English at Harvard University in 1939, working mainly in primary education, and emeritus professor there in 1963. His speculative and theoretical works include *Science and Poetry* (1926; revised as *Poetries and Sciences*, 1970), *Mencius on the Mind* (1932), *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934), *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), *Speculative Instruments* (1955), *Beyond* (1974), *Poetries* (1974), and *Complementarities* (1976). His verse has been collected in *Internal Colloquies* (1971) and *New and Selected Poems* (1978).

A student of psychology and philosophy along with literary forms, Richards concluded that poetry performs a therapeutic function by coordinating a variety of human impulses into an aesthetic whole, helping both the writer and the reader maintain their psychological well-being. He valued a "poetry of inclusion" that was able to contain the widest variety of warring tensions and oppositions.

Introduction

John Crowe Ransom, in The New Criticism (1941) insists on beginning his book with a "discussion of New Criticism with Mr. Richards. The new criticism very nearly began with

him." In terms of the influence Richards exerted on the minds of young critics and writers of the time, it could be inferred that Richards had been the most important theoretician in the first half of the twentieth century. He published three volumes of poetry, but he is remembered primarily as a literary critic and teacher, not as a poet.

Ivor Armstrong Richards was a scholar of semantics, and along with the philosopher, writer and editor Charles K.Ogden formulated Basic English. The Meaning Of Meaning (1923), written in collaboration with Ogden, is an important contribution to linguistics. Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) was followed by Science and Poetry (1926), Practical Criticism (1929) and Coleridge on Imagination (1934). Richards rejected positivist criticism, which considers that human achievements have some bearings on the psychology of an individual, the period in which he lives and the race to which he belongs. Richards is of the view that the literary text should be studied independent of these three factors. He was fascinated by the developments in psychology and wanted to evaluate art in terms of the state of mind induced by it. He promoted a psychological theory of value, which has now become outdated due to later researches in psychology.

The Chapters in Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism

In the Preface to Principles of Literary Criticism, Richards mentions that criticism is the endeavour to "discriminate between experiences and to evaluate them". It would be impossible to distinguish between the experiences and the procedures of evaluation without the knowledge of the nature of experience, the theories of valuation and communication. He mentions that modern day critics believe in exciting the emotions in the mind appropriate to their subject matter. The chapters in this book perform the dual functions of providing an interesting commentary on the state of contemporary culture and acting as a new and powerful instrument in inculcating critical insight. Most of the chapters included in the text provide a psychological background to specific aspects of aesthetic appreciation and communication.

Summary of the arguments presented by Richards in Principles of Literary Criticism

Richards is principally concerned with obtaining value from the arts, the emphasis being given to the art of poetry. The concern for the attainment of value from poetry forms the foundation of his principal critical and artistic pronouncements. Richards begins the book by pointing out that there are several impediments that prevent valid criticism. "Experimental aesthetics', as Richards terms it, is the attempt to render human tastes and actions conducive to laboratory examination. Criticism is so involved in pursuing insignificant aspects of arts that it disregards the value of art. The use of indistinct vocabulary mars proper understanding of critical concepts. He cites the instance where critics talk about objects of art as if they possess certain attributes, whereas what they should point out is that the objects trigger effects in us. To overcome these obstacles, Richard emphasises the need to understand the nature of experience initially, and then formulate a convincing theory of assessment and communication in the arts Richards

proceeds to approach the first topic, which is experience that is analysed within the framework of psychology. Chapter eleven titled “A Sketch for a Psychology,” describes the mind that forms a part of the nervous system where sense impulses are influenced by various stimuli. Human response to the stimuli rests on the needs of the body at the specific moment. This would mean that the basis of aesthetic experience would lie in the impulses that arise in the mind as a result of various stimuli. These stimuli may be both new and independent or associated with earlier experience. Several facets of experience such as memory, emotion, coenesthesia, and attitude are detailed in separate chapters.

Richards delineates another feature of experience, which is the difference between the experiences of the poet and an ordinary man in chapter twelve, “The Poet’s Experience.” He points out that “range, delicacy and freedom” are the three parameters that decide the nature of relationships that can be made from experience. The ability to make available the experience of the artist decides the poet’s ability to remain in a specific state of mind when required. The artist possesses a higher degree of “vigilance”, which is the capacity to organize the impulses satisfactorily and completely.

The poet is better equipped to make use of his experience.
After elucidating the cause, nature and effect of experience, Richards concentrates on the other two aspects, namely value and communication. The arts are the “storehouses” of recorded values. A critic should not be concerned with value and morality. In chapter seven, “A Psychological Theory of Value,” Richards defines value as anything that satiates a desire within an individual. Additional value is achieved when any desire is sacrificed to another. Value, defined in relation to desire, is the exercise of impulses and the fulfillment of their desires.

The artist is more apprehensive about values than anybody else. He constantly engages in recording and disseminating the experiences, which he thinks are more valuable to him. He would be the only person to have valuable experiences to record. He would be better equipped to organise the significant and trivial impulses that are a part of experience. The poet would be able to lay the foundation of morality because morality depends on value from life. This means that Richards denounces the “Art for Art’s sake” theory of poetry, a theory which refutes external values in art. Richards advocates the harmony between real life and the world of poetry, for any severance would result in “imbalance, narrowness, and incompleteness in advocators” of the aesthetic theory.

Values, according to Richards can decide the quality of a poem. In chapter twenty-five, “Badness in Poetry,” Richards asserts that art would be ineffective if communication is defective or if the experience communicated is not valuable. Effective communication is the prerequisite if value in arts is to be perceived by the spectator. In Chapter four, “Communication and the Artist” Art is the “supreme form” of communication, even though communication is not his primary objective. The artist is engaged in making the work suitable for his readers. Richards asserts that individual minds are able to relate to particular

experiences, but the process of relation takes place under specific conditions. There can never be the actual transference of or participation in the shared experiences. Communication is a complicated process that occurs when the mind of an individual acts upon another mind and effects a change similar to it. If art is recognised to be the ultimate form of communication, it follows that the artist is faced with the challenge of transmitting his experiences to the reader effectively.

To achieve this, the artist must remain in a state of normality. No matter the amount of past experience available to the artist, he must be normal enough to communicate it. For effective communication, uniform responses that are initiated by stimuli and handled physically, are required. The artist should be able to organise his responses otherwise it would be disastrous.

After analysing nature of experience, the essence of value, and the importance of communication in the arts, Richards goes on to describe the three credentials of a good critic. First, he must be able to experience the soundness of the mind so that he can criticise a work of art. Second, the critic must be able to differentiate experiences by analyzing their subtle features. Third, he must be an expert at judging values. A critic who is unable to pass sound judgments on poetry in spite of having these qualities, is unsure of what exactly poetry is.

Richards is of the view that one of the reasons for the poor quality of criticism is the critic's inability to decipher what he is evaluating. The critic needs a definition of poetry that is practical. Richards considers poetry to be a group of experiences that differ minutely from standard experiences. This definition is more significant than calling poetry, the artist's experience because it would mean that only artists possess experience. In Richards' view, the reader's involvement is necessary for completion of the poetic experience.

The principal areas under discussion in Principles of Literary Criticism are experience, value, communication, poetry and the critic. The other matters taken for studies are analysis of a poem in chapter sixteen; rhyme and meter in chapter seventeen; allusiveness as a characteristic feature of modern poetry in chapter twenty- eight ; creative imagination in chapter thirty-two; and the two uses of language in chapter thirty-four. The final chapter is on "The Poetry of T. S. Eliot," an appendix which was added to the second edition of the book in 1926. In many parts of the discussion on the poem, poet and imagination, Richards shows his allegiance to the theory of Coleridge. He agrees with Coleridge on the concept of imagination as a power that synthesizes and balances dissimilar qualities. The main principle behind the influence arts rests on this fact.

Principles of Literary Criticism ushered a new dimension of criticism that the literary world had never been exposed to before. Every modern critic, from a traditionalist like Lionel Trilling to a new critic such as Cleanth Brooks, has been influenced by this work because of its penetrating study of experience, value, and communication and its definition of poetry.

Some Important Discussions in Principles of Literary Criticism in Brief

 Richards attempts to establish a theoretical frame work for criticism which would free it from subjectivity and emotionalism.

 He proposes a psychological theory of art. Art is valuable because it helps to order the impulses.

 He dismisses the concept of a special aesthetic taste. Aesthetic experience is similar to ordinary experience. Art experience is complex and unified. Art experiences do not merely have intrinsic value. It is possible to analyse art experience and examine its value in ordinary life.

 Value and communication are the "two pillars" upon which the theory of criticism rests. The arts are the absolute form of the communicative activity.

 Art is concerned with getting the work to embody the artist's experience.

 The mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. It is dangerous to try to analyse the inner workings of the artists mind by the evidence of his artistic work

 Arts can improve the quality of life by communicating valuable experiences.

 It is improper to consider value a transcendental idea. Metaphysical or ethical consideration should be kept out of literary criticism. He proposes a psychological theory of value. According to Richards, anything that satisfies the impulses is valuable. These desires may be conscious or they may operate at the subconscious level.

 The chief function of art is to organize impulses.

Richards' psychological theories have become obsolete with the passage of time. Moreover, it is difficult to accept the role of art in ordering the impulses of the mind. Richards was one of the first to indicate the importance of the response of the audience. But he did not investigate the role of the audience further. The critics of Reception Theory and Reader Response schools like Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich and Stanley Fish have analysed the response of the reader and its value in criticism.

The Views of Coleridge and Richards

Richards is primarily a theoretical critic like Coleridge and he has indulged in literary analysis only as an illustration of a method. Coleridge is a poet who sacrificed every other interest out of obsessive love for poetry. Richards' interest in poetry seems to convey the point that poetry is not an illustration of the aesthetic principles or data to provide experiments towards a theory of communication. Richards' criticism is as abstract as Coleridge's. While Coleridge's critical pronouncements are filled with fervor and zeal, Richards' critical stand is iconoclastic and anti-romantic.

http://cec-ugc.nic.in/webpath/podcast/audios/LITARARY_CRITICISM/m25.pdf
https://www.britannica.com/biography/I-A-Richards

The Seventh Type of Ambiguity
William Empson

William Empson, in full Sir William Empson, (born September 27, 1906, Hawdon, Yorkshire, England—died April 15, 1984, London), English critic and poet known for his immense influence on 20th-century literary criticism and for his rational, metaphysical poetry.

Empson was educated at Winchester College and at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He earned degrees in mathematics and in English literature, which he studied under I.A. Richards. His first poems were published during this time. Several of the verses published in Empson's Poems (1935) also were written while he was an undergraduate and reflect his knowledge of the sciences and technology, which he used as metaphors in his largely pessimistic assessment of the human lot. Much influenced by John Donne, the poems are personal, politically unconcerned (despite the preoccupation with politics in the 1930s), elliptical, and difficult, even though he provided some explanatory notes. Later collections of his poetry included The Gathering Storm (1940) and Collected Poems (1949; rev. ed. 1955).

Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930; rev. ed. 1953), one of the most influential critical works of the first half of the 20th century, was essentially a close examination of poetic texts. Empson's special contribution in this work was his suggestion that uncertainty or the overlap of meanings in the use of a word could be an enrichment of poetry rather than a fault, and his book abounds with examples. The book helped lay the foundation for the influential critical school known as the New Criticism, although Empson never allied himself with the New Critics' attempts to disregard authorial intention. Empson applied his critical method to somewhat longer texts in Some Versions of Pastoral (1935) and further elaborated it in The Structure of Complex Words (1951), where he added attention to social, political, and psychological concerns to his primarily linguistic focus.

From 1931 to 1934 Empson taught English literature at the University of Tokyo, and he subsequently joined the English faculty of Peking National University in China. He was Chinese editor at the British Broadcasting Corporation during World War II and returned to teach at Peking National University from 1947 to 1952. Empson was professor of English literature at Sheffield University from 1953, becoming emeritus in 1971. He was knighted in 1979.

Empson's later criticism includes many uncollected essays and one book, Milton's God (1961), in which his extreme rationalism is directed against a positive valuation of the Christian God. This later body of writing concerns itself with biography and textual criticism as well as with issues of interpretation and literary theory more generally.

The Seventh Type of Ambiguity

Empson is the first analytic critic to apply the principles of I.A. Richards on the nature and function of language consistently and with gusto to particular passages of poetry. The objections raised in his Seven Types of Ambiguity are still valid. James Smith points out that Empson's analyses are interesting only as revelation of the poet's or Empson's ingenious mind. He complains about the vague nature of ambiguity. While it is possible to show that Empson's method often leads to critical irresponsibility as pointed out by Elder Olson in his 'William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction', Empson is one of the sharpest and the most sensitive of modern critics.

Seven Types of Ambiguity presents the different kinds of ambiguity or 'types of logical disorder in the order of increasing distance from simple statement and logical exposition. In the essay, 'The Seventh Type of Ambiguity', Empson takes up the seventh type of ambiguity which, to him, is 'the most ambiguous that can be conceived'. It 'occurs when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity are the two opposite meanings defined by the context so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind'.

Empson provides Hopkins's The Windhover as an example of poetry to convey an indecision and reverberation in the mind. Though I.A. Richards has excellently written about it, Empson's analysis adds to his. Hopkins became a Jesuit and burnt his early poems on entering the order. There may be some reference to this sacrifice in the line : 'Buckle! AND the fire that that breaks from thee then'.

According to Empson, Hopkins conceives the active physical beauty of the bird as the opposite of his patient spiritual renunciation. The statements of the poem appear to insist that his own life is superior, but he cannot decisively judge between them; he holds both with agony in his mind. The phrase 'My heart in hiding' implies that the life of the windhover is more dangerous than the life of renunciation which is the more lovely as evidenced in the last three lines of the poem.

The word 'Buckle' admits of two tenses and two meanings: 'they do buckle here', or 'come, and buckle yourself here, 'buckle' like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action and 'buckle' like a bicycle wheel, 'make useless, distorted and incapable of its natural motion. The word, 'here' in the line : 'Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here' may mean 'in the case of the bird', or 'in the case of the Jesuit'; the word, 'then' in the next line means 'when you have become like the bird' or 'when you have become like the Jesuit'. 'Chevalier' in the third line of the sestet personifies either physical or spiritual activity; Christ riding to Jerusalem or the cavalry men ready for the charge; Pegasus or the windhover. Thus in the first three lines of the sestet, Empson says, we have a clear case of the Freudian use of opposites – where two things that are incompatible are spoken of simultaneously by words applying to both. The last three lines of the sestet convey the conflict more strongly and more beautifully.

After analyzing Hopkins's 'The Windhover', Empson interprets George Herbert's The Sacrifice as a poem having conflicts though the business of this doctrinal poem is to state a generalised solution of them. The speaker in this poem is Jesus Christ. As interpreted by Empson, the speaker is speaking with pathetic simplicity, an innocent surprise that people should treat him so, and a complete failure to understand the case against him:

They did accuse me of great villainy

That I did thrust into the Deitie;

Who never thought that cry robberie;

Was ever grief like mine?

The word 'rased' applies to the two opposite operations. Moreover, the refrain (a quotation from Jeremiah) refers to the wicked city of Jerusalem, abandoned by God for her sins and not to the Saviour. There is a fusion of love of Christ and the vindictive terrors of the sacrificial idea in his advice to his deal friends not to weep for him, for, because he has wept for both, they will need their for themselves. (In his agony, they abandoned him):

Weep not dear friends, since I for both have wept

When all my tears were blood, the while you slept

Your tears for your own fortunes should be kept

Was ever grief like mine?

The stress of the main meaning is on the loving – kindness of Jesus. But the last verse contains as strong and simple a double meaning. As per the evaluation of Empson, in this verse, Christ may wish that his own grief may never be exceeded among the humanity he pities; he may incidentally wish that he may be sure of recognition and of a church that will be a sounding board to his agony. Empson gives this double meaning as just a possibility though it may sound blasphemous. A memory of the revengeful power of Jehova gives resonance to the voice of the merciful power of Jesus:

'Herod in judgement sits, while I do stand

Examines me with a censorious hand'.

'me' is made to ring out with a triumphant and scornful arrogance. It implies that he will be far more furious in his judgement than his judges.

Empson quotes a few more stanzas from George Herbert's doctrinal poem and brings out the conflicts and contradictions in the poem. He quotes specific examples from the poem to prove that the supreme act of sin is combined with the supreme act of virtue in the person of Christ. The final contradiction presented is found in the lines :

'Lo here I hand, charged with a world of sin

The greater world of the two . . .

as the complete Christ; scapegoat and tragic hero;

loved because hated; hated because god like;

freeing from torture because tortured;

and torturing because merciful.

Analysis

William Empson studied under I. A. Richards at Cambridge and became one of the most influential literary critics and important poets of his generation. Empson's ideas in seminal works like Seven Types of Ambiguity and The Structure of Complex Words shaped the course of critical thinking far beyond the 1930's. In Seven Types of Ambiguity William Empson views Texts containing moments in which meaning is not clear, when interpretation is questioned. It was one of the most influential critical conceptions of the 20th century and was a key foundation work in the formation of the New Criticism school. The book is organized around seven types of ambiguity that Empson finds in the poetry he criticizes. Empson reads poetry as an exploration of conflicts within the author.

The first type of ambiguity is the metaphor, that is, when two things are said to be alike which have different properties. This concept is similar to that of metaphysical conceit.

William Empson

Two or more meanings are resolved into one. Empson characterizes this as using two different metaphors at once.

Two ideas that are connected through context can be given in one word simultaneously.

Two or more meanings that do not agree but combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author.

When the author discovers his idea in the act of writing. Empson describes a simile that lies halfway between two statements made by the author.

When a statement says nothing and the readers are forced to invent a statement of their own, most likely in conflict with that of the author.

Two words that within context are opposites that expose a fundamental division in the author's mind.

http://paul-littcritic.blogspot.com/2010/01/seventh-type-of-ambiquity-william.html
https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Empson
https://ardhendude.blogspot.com/2012/02/seven-types-of-ambiguity.html