



**TEZPUR  
UNIVERSITY**



**MASTER OF ARTS**

**ENGLISH**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING**

**MEG 203: LITERARY CRITICISM & THEORY I**

**BLOCK I**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

**TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)**

**TEZPUR, ASSAM -784028**

**INDIA**

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# **MEG 203: Literary Criticism & Theory I**



**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

**TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)**

**TEZPUR, ASSAM-784028**

**INDIA**

## MEG 203: LITERARY CRITICISM & THEORY I

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# BLOCK I

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### UNIT 1: THE PHILOSOPHER KING

### UNIT 2: PLATO ON IMITATION: EIDOS, OBJECT AND IMAGE

### UNIT 3: PLATO'S OBJECTIONS TO THE ARTIST

## ARISTOTLE: *POETICS*

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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION**

The aim of **MEG 203: Literary Criticism & Theory I** is to introduce to the students major texts and movements in Literary Criticism and Theory from Plato to the twentieth century. Students are expected to understand how criticism and theory help the reader to interpret literary texts, explain literature and connect art forms to life and society. This course will enable students to see how different critical texts and schools offer different tools and methods of reading and interpretation.

The Course is divided into two blocks. Block I consists of Module I and II. Block II will cover Module III, IV and V.

## **INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK I**

**In Module I Unit 1: *The Philosopher King*** will focus on the Greek classical critic, Plato and his most widely taught, read and discussed text the *Republic*. Apart from giving a general overview of the political and socio-cultural background of ancient Greece, this unit will help in understand Plato's views on democracy and influence of Plato on Western literary criticism

**Unit 2: *Plato On Imitation: Eidos, Object And Image*** will introduced you to his ideas on art and artist as he articulates them in the *Republic*. This unit will primarily focus on the most widely discussed concept of Theory of Forms and familiarize yourself with the concept of Eidos, Object and Image. You will also gain a comprehensive idea of Plato's Myth of the Cave.

**Unit 3: *Plato's Objections to the Artist*** will acquaint you with Plato's most controversial views on the poet and his objections to the artist. In the *Republic*, we find that Plato touches upon the issue of creativity, which coincides with the features of criticism. Plato believed that poetry is close to falsehood. According to him,

philosophers deal with truths, while poets deal with the illusions of those truths. Thus this unit will provide you the major arguments of objection, Aristotle's counter objection to Plato.

**Units 4 and 5** deal exclusively with classical critic and Greek philosopher Aristotle and his epoch making work *Poetics*. **Unit 4: Aristotle on Poetry and Dramatic Imitation** will acquaint you with the life and works of Aristotle and help you to understand the major concepts and specific literary terms discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. This unit will also present a comprehensive idea of Aristotle's views on aesthetics and the differences between his idea of imitation with that of Plato.

**Unit 5: Features of Tragedy** will discuss Aristotle's concept of tragedy, as developed in *Poetics*. This will see the main features of tragedy as defined in *Poetics*, the idea of the tragic rise and fall of characters through Freytag's pyramid and the influence of Aristotle on Western literary criticism. You will also be able to trace the changes of the idea of tragedy that had taken place in the hands of modern playwrights.

**Module II: Longinus and Philip Sidney** has two units in it. **Unit 6: On the Sublime** will introduce you to another classical Greek critic and philosopher, Cassius Longinus. This unit will also familiarize you with the key concepts discussed by Longinus in *On the Sublime* and the later application of Longinus' critical principles by other critics.

**Unit 7: An Apology for Poetry** will be introduced you to a pioneering English critic and a prominent literary figure of the Elizabethan Age, Sir Philip Sidney. This unit aims to focus on the reasoning of Philip Sidney regarding the place of poetry in art and the value of communication inherent in the medium of poetry. After reading this unit you will learn the key concepts in Sidney's literary criticism and the impact he had on latter English criticism

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## MODULE I: PLATO: *THE REPUBLIC* (SELECTIONS)

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## **UNIT 1: THE PHILOSOPHER KING**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Plato: Life and Works
- 1.3 Reading the *Republic*
- 1.4 The Philosopher King
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 Assessment Questions
- 1.7 References and Recommended Readings

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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At about the time when Socrates was born the enormous threat to Greece of the vast Persian Empire had passed away. At the beginning of the century the Ionian cities of Asia Minor, Thales' birthplace among them, had been ruthlessly punished for revolting against the satraps of Darius. The assistance given to the rebels by Athens and Eretria, while powerless to save them, was enough to expose Greece itself to the Persian vengeance. But at Marathon in 490 B.C.E, at Salamis ten years later, and again at Plataea in 479 B.C.E, the Greeks had triumphed against the huge armies and navies of Darius and his successor Xerxes and in doing so had established not only their own independence but a heroic legend that worked as an inspiration to the magnificent achievements of the following years. But by the time Plato was born, Athens was again at war. From about 435 B.C.E., she had come into conflict perhaps inevitably with the Sparta, her powerful rival and the Lacedaemonian Confederacy and in 431 B.C.E began the Peloponnesian War. The effects of this conflict were in many ways proved disastrous for Greece. In the course of struggle, people had become familiar with the new ruthlessness, and a new anarchic manner of employment of power. The wretched course of

Athenian politics in his early years culminating in the execution of Socrates, affected Plato profoundly. He had lost all faith in the system of democracy and seems to have regarded it simply as grossly inefficient, as calculated merely to endow with authority and power those who happened to gain the ear of the ignorant populace. His ideal was an authoritarian rule of the philosopher king. The lifetime of Plato and Aristotle cover a span of over 100 years (from 428 to 322 B.C.E) in which the history of Greece makes depressing reading. The Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E) stripped Greece of all its former pride. It is keeping in mind these wars and conflicts and a deteriorating political situation that we have to judge the literary criticism of Plato and Aristotle. When Plato, for example, accuses the poets for inflaming the baser instincts of men, we must realize that it was not a mere accusation. Men thus roused could and indeed did go on riots causing extensive damage.

### **1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This is the first unit of the first course in literary criticism. This will focus on the Greek classical critic, Plato and his most widely taught, read and discussed text the *Republic*. After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Have a general overview of the political and socio-cultural background of ancient Greece
- Acquaint yourself with the life and works of Plato
- Understand the idea of philosopher king as outlined in the *Republic*
- Appreciate the influence of Plato on Western literary criticism
- Understand Plato's views on democracy.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1.1. How did the Peloponnesian War affect Greece?

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### ***1.2 PLATO: HIS LIFE AND WORKS***

In this part of the unit, you will be acquainted with the life and works of Plato. Born circa 428 B.C.E., ancient Greek philosopher Plato was a student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. His writings explored justice, beauty and equality and also contained discussions on aesthetics, political philosophy, theology, cosmology, epistemology and the philosophy of language. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, one of the first institutions of higher learning in the Western world. He died in Athens circa 348 B.C.E. Due to lack of adequate primary sources from the time period; much of Plato's life has been constructed by scholars through his writings and the writings of contemporaries and classical historians. Traditional history estimates Plato's birth was around 428 B.C.E., but more modern scholars, tracing later events in his life, believe he was born between 424 and 423 B.C.E. Both of his parents came from the Greek aristocracy, Plato's father Ariston, descended from the kings of Athens and Messenia. His mother, Perictione, is said to be related to the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Greek statesman Solon.

## LET US STOP AND READ



Plato is just a nickname and his actual name is Aristocles. The nickname Plato (which means “broad” or “wide” in Greek) was given to him in reference to his broad shoulders.

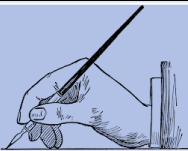
Some scholars believed that Plato was named for his grandfather Aristocles, following the tradition of the naming of the eldest son after the grandfather.

As a young man, Plato experienced two major events that set his course in life. One was meeting the Greek philosopher Socrates (470-399 B.C.E.). Socrates’ methods of dialogue and debate impressed Plato so much that he soon became a close associate and dedicated his life to the question of virtue and the formation of noble character. The other significant event was the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens, in which Plato served for a brief time between 409 and 404 B.C.E. The defeat of Athens ended its democracy, which the Spartans replaced with an oligarchy. After oligarchy was overthrown and democracy was restored, Plato briefly considered a career in politics but the execution of Socrates in 399 BC soured him on this idea and he turned to a life of study and philosophy. After Socrates’ death, Plato travelled for 12 years throughout the Mediterranean region, studying mathematics with the Pythagoreans in Italy, and geometry, geology, astronomy and religion in Egypt. During this time, he began his extensive writing. According to scholars, these writings fall under three distinct periods. The first and early period occurs during Plato’s travels. The *Apology of Socrates* seems to have written shortly after Socrates’ death. Other texts in this time period include *Protagoras*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major and Minor* and *Ion*. In the second period Plato writes in his own voice on the central ideas of justice, courage, wisdom and moderation of the individual and society. The *Republic* was written during this time. In the third period, Socrates is relegated to a minor position and Plato takes a closer look at his own early metaphysical ideas.

## LET US STOP AND READ



In 388 B.C.E, Plato established his school, the Academy, which is now considered the first European university. Above the entrance to his Academy was written “Let none who has not learned Geometry enter here.”



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the two major events that changed the course of Plato’s life?

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2. Discuss the three periods of Plato’s writing career.

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### 1.3 READING THE REPUBLIC

In this section an attempt has been made to familiarize you with the text of *Republic*. Plato’s *Republic* is one of the foundational works connecting politics with philosophy. He was one of the greatest geniuses of the ancient world who brought about a new trend in the study of logic, ethics, metaphysics and psychology. The *Republic* can be considered as possibly the first articulation of the ideas of statecraft and political theory in an organized manner.



The *Republic* has been generally divided into five sections and ten 'Books'. However, it should be remembered that these divisions are carried out at a later stage after the death of Plato. These divisions are meant to provide the reader a better means of understanding the text. As such the divisions are not uniform and vary from translation to translation. A general division which is widely accepted of the *Republic* goes like this-- The First Section consists of Book-I and the first half of Book-II in which Plato puts forward his counter arguments challenging the accepted concepts of justice but does not provide any concluding remark. This section ends with a statement on the nature of justice according to the common opinion. The Second Section constitutes of the second half of the Book-II, Book-III and IV. This section deals with Plato's ideas on State and Education. The Third Section consists of Book-V, VI and VII in which Plato explains his ideas on women's position in society and their role at the time of war. In the second part of Book-V till the middle of Book-VI Plato discusses the idea of philosopher king and true and false philosophy. These two books also take as subject the difference between knowledge and opinion and the inquisitive nature of philosophy. In these two books of the *Republic* Plato discusses his idea of the state being ruled by a philosopher king. In the next section, that is, the Fourth (Book-VIII and IX) Plato discusses his ideas on individual freedom and concept of pleasure, and the principle of tyranny. The Fifth Section (Book-X) is the concluding part of the *Republic* where Plato analyses the relation between philosophy and poetry and he also offers a vision of happiness of the citizens of the state.

Since the mid nineteenth century the *Republic* has been Plato's most famous and widely read dialogue. As in most other Platonic dialogues, the main character is Socrates. In Plato's early dialogues, Socrates refutes the accounts of his interlocutors and the discussions end with no satisfactory answer to the matter investigated. In the *Republic*, however, we encounter Socrates

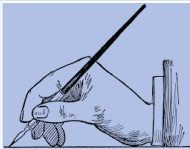
developing a position on justice and its relation to happiness. He provides a long and complicated, but unified argument, in defence to the just life and its necessary connection to the happy life.

The major intent of the debate in the *Republic* is to determine the extended definition of what constitutes Justice in a given state, whether or not a concept of Justice may be determined by citizens in a given state at the time that Plato is writing, and how Justice may be accomplished in a given state. Thus it is that the conversation in the *Republic* proceeds from a question of *meaning* (What is Justice?), augmented by questions of *fact* (are there examples of Justice in action or of just men?), to a question of *policy* (what laws may be affected to ensure the carriage of Justice?).

The dialogue explores two central questions: the first question is “what is justice?” Socrates addresses this question both in terms of political communities and in terms of the individual person or soul. He does this to address the second and driving question of the dialogue: “is the just person happier than the unjust?” or “what is the relation of justice to happiness?” Given the two central questions of the discussion, Plato’s philosophical concerns in the dialogue are ethical and political. In order to address these two questions, Socrates and his interlocutors construct a just city in speech, the *Kallipolis*. They do so in order to explain what justice is and then they proceed to illustrate justice by analogy in the human soul. On the way to defending the just life, Socrates considers a tremendous variety of subjects such as several rival theories of justice, competing views of human happiness, education, the nature and importance of philosophy and philosophers, knowledge, the structure of reality, the Forms, the virtues and vices, good and bad souls, good and bad political regimes, the family, the role of women in society, the role of art in society, and even the afterlife.

The principal characters in the *Republic* are Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus.

Cephalus appears in the introduction only, Polemarchus drops at the end of the first argument, and Thrasymachus is reduced to silence at the close of the first book. The main discussion is carried on by Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus. Among the company are Lysias (the orator) and Euthydemus, the sons of Cephalus and brothers of Polemarchus, an unknown Charmantides --these are mute auditors; also there is Cleitophon, who once interrupts, where, as in the Dialogue which bears his name, he appears as the friend and ally of Thrasymachus. In the present discussion on the topic philosopher king Socrates, the Wiseman, Glaucon, the Athenian man of pleasure and Adeimantus participate.



#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What are the two central questions the dialogues in the *Republic* explore?

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2. Who are the principal characters in the *Republic*?

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#### **1.4 THE PHILOSOPHER KING**

In the Book-V of the *Republic* a discussion featuring Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus continues on topics like community life, family life of citizens, position of women in society, role of state in the institution of marriage, upbringing of children, and war. The discussion then turns to the subject of philosopher king. Plato, through Socrates, articulates his views on a king as a philosopher. In course of this discussion he suggests

that to bring an end to the present state of maladministration a reform is necessary in the governing set up. That one change would bring about a lot of improvement to system of governance of the city state. The one and all important change is that rulers must be philosophers or philosopher kings. Socrates illuminating this point says that:

I said: Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils, --nor the human race, as I believe, --and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day. Such was the thought, my dear Glaucon, which I would fain have uttered if it had not seemed too extravagant; for to be convinced that in no other State can there be happiness private or public is indeed a hard thing.

Plato's contends that until philosophers become kings of the state it will never be able to come out of the evil of maladministration. So a state to become an *ideal state* must have as its ruler a person with a philosophical bent of mind. However, he does not provide a brief summary of his ideas in the present extract. He indulges in a debate and often digresses to other opposing topics like justice/injustice, knowledge/opinion, family/state and such other contemporary issues of his time.

Before going into the merits of philosopher King Plato, through the voice of Socrates, articulates the characteristics of a philosopher. According to him an ideal philosopher is truthful, lover of learning, temperate in his disposition, selfless in matters of society, gracious in nature, a friend of justice and courage, liberal in his thoughts and also having good memory power. A person who has these

characteristics in his disposition can only be an ideal philosopher according to Plato. Such a person when takes up the reigns of ruling a state he is expected to be a successful king.

The major concern of justice enables the philosopher Plato to consider his ideal republic as a place which can be best governed by a philosopher. The philosopher ruler or the philosopher king has all the attributes necessary for good governance. The country requires a knowledgeable ruler (instead of a powerful ruler) and the philosopher fits in. Plato uses the following analogy to describe the kind of ruler necessary for the country:

...don't understand that a true captain must pay attention to the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds, and all that pertains to his craft, if he's really to be the ruler of a ship. And they don't believe that there is any craft that would enable him to determine how he should steer the ship, whether the others want him to or not, or any possibility of mastering this alleged craft or of practicing it at the same time as the craft of navigation. Don't you think that the true captain will be called a real stargazer, a babbler, and a good-for-nothing by those who sail in ships governed in that way?

Thus the ruler requires being a skilled person. The philosopher must be able to distinguish between the good and bad, friend and foe, profit and loss in order to make the required amendments in the country. He should have the capacity to grasp the eternal and the immutable. He writes that, "The philosopher whose dealings are with divine order himself acquires the characteristics of order and divinity. "This common people cannot. According to Plato, the common people are devoid of the true knowledge of reality; they cannot reach at a standard of perfection.

#### ***1.4.1 Knowledge and Opinion***

After the discussion on the concept of philosopher king, Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus start a discussion on the binary of knowledge and opinion.

According to Plato knowledge is the most powerful faculty in man. Knowledge, according to Plato, is the power to comprehend the absolute and the eternal truth and it is essentially different from having an opinion. Knowledge and opinion are distinctly different from each other. Plato, through Socrates, articulates that there are two distinct worlds, one is the world of ideas and the other is the world of senses. Knowledge is associated with the world of ideas and opinion is associated with the world of senses. Being, which he refers to as form or beauty is the subject matter of knowledge. Elucidating his idea of being he says:

“Being is the subject matter of knowledge, and knowledge is to know the nature of being.”

Opinion, on the other hand, is the intermediary between pure knowledge and ignorance. Plato suggests that knowledge is associated with the world of ideas and hence permanent whereas opinion is associated with the world of senses and hence subjective. Opinion is based on mere sense perception derived from the observation of the appearance and hence inferior to knowledge. According to him opinion is that which “lie in the interval between pure being and absolute not-being; and that the corresponding faculty is neither knowledge nor ignorance, but will be found in the interval between them.”

The discussion heads towards a conclusion with the resolution that people who see the absolute, eternal and the unchanging in everything are considered to have knowledge but do not have an opinion. But the people who believe in having opinions do not accept anything as absolute and immutable beauty.

#### ***1.4.2 Philosopher as king***

The primary arguments of Plato, regarding why philosophers must be rulers are:

- Three souls and three classes- Every human soul has three qualities- rational (follows reason, truth), spirit (which loves honour and victory), and appetite (which desires food, drink, and sex). Plato explains that individuals who have the *rational faculty* would constitute the ruling class. Only they have the complete idea of the good. Philosophers with wisdom constitute this category. The spirited category includes auxiliaries like the soldiers. They have the attribute of courage. Artisans have the appetite. Their virtue is temperance.
- Myth of metals- According to this myth, all human beings were born of earth. This means that they were born with some metallic component in their bodies. The philosophers were born with gold, the spirited soldiers with silver, and the artisans with bronze. This myth in the ideal state was, according to Plato, a way to specify the place of the people. This shall lead to acceptance, and gradually unification.
- Idea of justice- A philosopher will promote just action. Even though the benefit is not immediate he will spread the idea of justice amongst the people. He will avoid a tyrannical rule.

Some arguments laid down by Plato, in this regard are pointed below:

- The philosophers are potential kings
- They shall be selected according to their merits
- Plato recommended Eugenics (related to the production of good and healthy children); breeding on the basis of intellectual quality, in order to improve the overall thinking/ruler capability of human beings.
- Plato disapproved (through the voice of Socrates, in Book VI) of the popular view that philosophers are perpetual adolescents and vague about their views. He is of the view that philosophers are falsely blamed of uselessness.

- Philosophers are morally qualified to rule because of their love for truth and knowledge. They will not misuse powers
- Ruling is a specialized art
- Philosophers have access to the ideal ideas. They do not simply follow representations of the forms of the ideas.
- The philosophers are like the captain of a ship
- He is not restrained by any institution
- They are courageous and yet moderate
- They are quick learners
- They have a good memory
- A good philosopher becomes good through proper education. Otherwise he gets corrupted
- They should be educated about the Form of the Good. He uses the example of the sun to clarify it. Just like the sun illuminates the knowable objects, a specialised and purposeful education can illuminate knowledge for human souls.
- Plato uses the image of the divided line, to explain the idea of the form of the good. He divides a line into two unequal sections. Then he divides it into two unequal sections again. The lowest two parts represent the visible realm. The top two parts the intelligible realm. In the first of the four sections of the line, Socrates places images and shadows. In the second section he places visible objects. In the third section truths arrived through hypotheses. In the last section the Forms themselves. Corresponding to each of these, there is a capacity of the human soul: imagination, belief, thought, and understanding. The line also represents degrees of clarity and opacity. The lowest sections are more opaque, while the higher sections are clearer.

### ***1.4.3 Plato's Captain of Ship Analogy***

In an argument between Socrates and Adeimantus, they bring in the analogy between a ship and the state. To make political decisions the ruler needs to be an expert and specialize in the skill



of decision making. Emphasising this fact Socrates brings in the analogy of the captain of ship with the king.

There is the ship-owner, larger and stronger than everyone on the ship, but somewhat deaf and rather short-sighted, with a knowledge of sailing to match his eyesight. The sailors are quarrelling among themselves over captaincy of the ship, each one thinking that he ought to be captain, though he has never learnt that skill... On top of which they say it can't be taught. In fact, they're prepared to cut to pieces anyone who says it can... They beg him [the ship-owner] and do everything they can to make him hand over the tiller to them. Sometimes, if other people can persuade him and they can't, they kill those others or throw them overboard. Then they immobilize their worthy ship-owner with drugs or drinks or by some other means, and take control of the ship, helping themselves to what it is carrying. Drinking and feasting they sail in the way you expect people like that to sail... If someone is good at finding them ways of persuading or compelling the ship-owner to let them take control, they call him a real seaman, a real captain, and say he really knows about ships.

The philosopher's role in a democracy is like being the captain of one. Here the ship is the city-state; the ship owner is the citizen (in a unified way). The citizen is not skilled about navigation. Through the analogy, Plato opposes direct democracy. He hints in the previous passage that:

- Democracy creates chaos
- The common people lack political skills; hence they are unfit to rule
- The common people tend to be over-confident; they can also be murderous during chaotic situations
- The lower classes have a propensity of revolution.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the Captain of Ship analogy of Plato?

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2. Why did Plato oppose direct Democracy?

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### 1.5 SUMMING UP

By now you must have realised the importance of the concepts laid out by Plato in his political treatise *Republic*. His idea of a utopian state is in the crux of the *Republic*. The role of the philosopher king as the ruler of the ideal state is inevitable, according to Plato. He marks out the reasons why the philosopher is capable to rule as the king. Plato asserts that a philosopher king can most effectively implement his idea of justice. He also enunciates his idea of knowledge and opinion in this part of the *Republic*. He also marks out the inabilities of the common people; which are debatable in the modern views of a democratic nation. In the subsequent units you will learn some more concepts and issues raised by Plato. The most important of them is his idea of form, the poet and art itself.



### 1.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. According to Plato, what makes the philosopher-king the best possible ruler? Do you agree with his analysis?

2. What is Plato's theory about education in the *Republic*?
3. How progressive is the *Republic* with regards to the treatment of women?
4. Summarize the allegory of the ship of state.
5. Why is justice an immediate pleasure?
6. Is Plato against democracy? Discuss.
7. What is Plato's idea of three souls and three classes?
8. Elucidate the idea of knowledge and opinion in the *Republic*.
9. Discuss the idea of justice as articulated in the *Republic*.
10. Discuss the characteristics of an ideal philosopher as envisaged in the *Republic*.



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## **UNIT 2: PLATO ON IMITATION: EIDOS, OBJECT AND IMAGE**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Plato's Theory of Forms
  - 2.2.1 Plato's Myth of the Cave
- 2.3 Eidos, Object and Image
- 2.4 Plato as a Literary Critic
- 2.5 Summing Up
- 2.6 Assessment Questions
- 2.7 References and Recommended Readings

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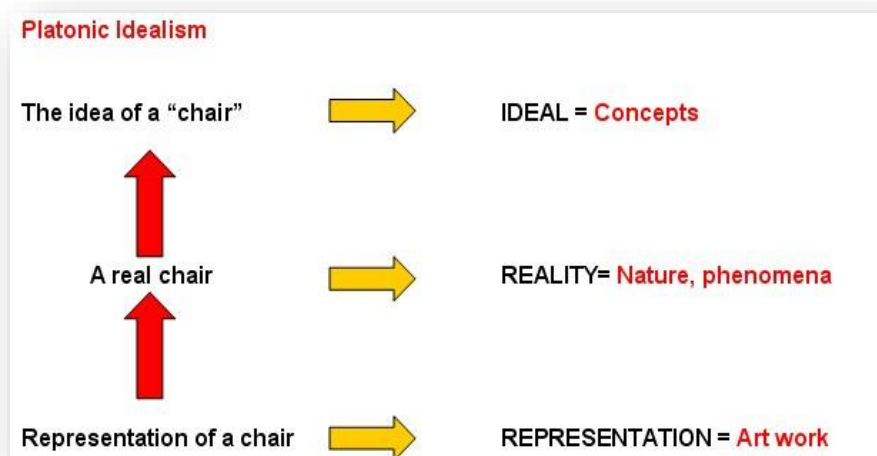
### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

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In the Unit-I of this module you have studied Plato's political idea of the State and his concept of the philosopher king. In this Unit you will be introduced to his ideas on art and artist as he articulates them in the *Republic*. Plato discusses his idea of reality and its imitation in art in this part of the *Republic*. He is of the view that art can never represent reality completely. Art is merely imitative in nature. Plato, through Socrates, argues that the material world of objects is an ever changing, or a transient one, that is, physical objects of the world keep on changing their external shape thus they are unreliable. However, there is a world of ideas (Eidos) or 'forms' which is permanent and unchanging. However, he states that medicine and agriculture are arts which are useful. But poetry and drama specifically are copies of copies. The objects before are imitation of a perfect reality. Imitation is called "mimesis" in Greek. In this perfect reality, there are Forms and Ideas which are the original patterns; the origin point. What we see in the world we live in are mere copies of that ideal. And what the

artist creates in poetry and drama are imitations of imitations. They are removed from the perfect reality. According to Plato-

- All arts are imitative.
- Art is the imitation of life.
- Art is an imitation of Ideas.
- Art is related to sensual pleasure.
- Poetry is twice removed from reality because it is a copy of representative world.
- Plato's idea of mimeses or imitation is mimicry. It has a negative meaning to it.
- Aristotle later argues against Plato, saying art is a creative form in itself; it is not merely imitative and degrading in nature.
- Art does not give true knowledge. It is corruptive because it deals with sensitive emotions.
- He uses the example of a bed to clarify this point of imitation. (This is discussed in the later part of this unit.)
- Plato also uses the imagery of a chair to clarify his idea of imitation. It is illustrated below:



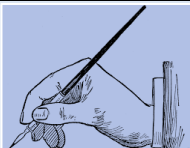
In this image we see that “Art work” is twice removed from the Ideal (Concepts). There is a gradual movement from what we see around us to the metaphysical world. In the world of appearance

we find art work created by painters or poets. They copy from the pattern of the real chair, created by a carpenter, for instance. This pattern is natural. But it is also copied from a more perfect pattern, that exists in a different plane altogether. The higher plane is the idea of the chair, the ideal concept of the chair. This higher world is abstract in nature. So, the artist is never in actual touch with the natural set-pattern, or the ideal pattern. This makes Plato doubtful about the role of the artist in his utopian country. He doubts their mode of representation.

## **2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit will focus on the Greek classical critic, Plato and his most widely discussed concept of Theory of Forms. It includes the Eidos, Object and Image. Here, we will talk about the idea of imitation, as conceived in The Republic. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate Plato as a literary critic.
- understand his idea of imitation and Theory of Forms.
- familiarize yourself with the concept of Eidos, Object and Image are.
- comprehend the idea of Plato's Myth of the Cave.
- acquaint yourself with Plato's views on art and the artist.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Write at least two issues of Plato's idea of mimesis.

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2. Why does Plato say that poetry is twice removed from reality?

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## ***2.2 PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS***

Most of Plato's philosophical treatises are composed in the dialogue form, dealing with aspects ranging from epistemology (the study of the nature of knowledge) to politics, morality to literature. However, the heterogeneity of Plato's philosophical output is underscored by a unitary element i.e. his Theory of Form. According to this theory, the physical world and the objects we perceive are not self-sufficient and independent in themselves. The physical world, according to Plato, does not stand for reality; rather it is only an appearance. To Plato, the realm of Forms or Ideas constitutes the reality and the physical world is a partial or imperfect manifestation of the Forms. It is only through rational thinking, not by means of emotion, that we can come to terms with the world of Forms. The objects of the physical or perceivable world derive their qualities from the world of Forms. For instance, a beautiful object in the physical world partakes the essence of beauty from the Idea or Form of Beauty. Hence, the realm of Ideas or Forms constitutes reality and the physical world is an imperfect copy of the world of Forms. In this context, Plato explains his celebrated triad: the Form or Idea of a 'bed' is created by God and it stands for reality, but when a carpenter makes a bed he simply imitates the Idea and in extension when Poet composes a literary piece out of that carpenter's bed (physical bed) it becomes an 'imitation of an imitation'. Therefore, poetry is categorised as twice removed from reality.



This theory expounds that the world of Form or Idea is real and it is characterised by universality, uniformity and permanence, whereas the physical world is conditioned by flux, multiplicity and particularity. The significance of a Form or an Idea lies in that it works as category to classify multiple objects sharing the same essence. For instance, an object having four legs and an even surface can be either a bed or a table. In physical world both bed and table are two different objects but in terms of Form or Idea they belong to the same category as they manifest the same essence. Therefore, it can be rightly observed that the leitmotif of the theory of Form is to bring uniformity in heterogeneous objects of the physical world and thereby rationalizing human experience. This Theory of Form constitutes the foundation of Plato's charges against poetry as something deviant and much inferior to philosophy.



#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Discuss at least three key features of Plato's Theory of Forms.

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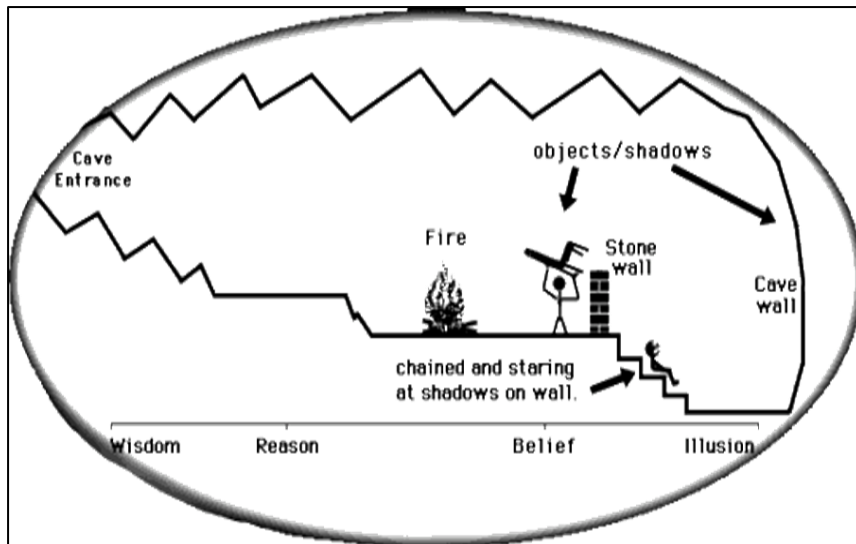
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#### **2.2.1 *Plato's Myth of the Cave***

In Book VII of Republic Plato elaborates the Myth of the Cave which can be considered as a further explanation of his Theory of Form with help of a mythical story:



Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads. Picture further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built . . . See also . . . men carrying past the wall implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent.

As per the myth a group of men are imprisoned inside a cave facing the wall from their childhood onwards. They are chained in such a way that they cannot move their heads sideways. They can only listen to the echoes of different sounds and see shadows of different objects and living beings on the wall which are caused by the fire behind them. In this predicament sounds and shadows constitute reality for the prisoners. One day a particular prisoner is freed from the prison and when he comes out of the cave he cannot face the sunlight. Though initially blinded by the sunlight the prisoner later on observes objects and beings outside are real and

the shadows and sounds that they experienced inside the cave are the imperfect manifestation of the reality. In this context the sunlight metaphorically stands for the transformation from ignorance to knowledge. At this moment the prisoner will realize that they are dwelling in ignorance inside the cave presuming the shadows as real. Plato through this myth suggestively conveys that the physical world resembles the ambience of the cave which is divorced from reality— a mere imperfect projection of the world of Forms. Similarly in the domain of poetry truth or reality is convoluted with imagination, passion and irrationality. Therefore, Plato alleged poetry of letting loose amoral emotions among the youth of his ideal Republic. It can be safely asserted that Plato uses his Theory of Form as the vantage point to interrogate on the efficacy and utility of poetry.

The theory is presented in the following dialogues of Plato:

□ *Meno, Cratylus, Symposium, Phaedo*

□ *Republic:*

- Book III: Education the pursuit of the Forms.
- Book V: Philosophy the love of the Forms. The philosopher-king must rule.
- Books VI–VII: Philosopher-guardians as students of the Beautiful and Just implement archetypical order; Metaphor of the Sun: The sun is to sight as Good is to understanding; Allegory of the Cave: The struggle to understand forms like men in cave guessing at shadows in firelight.
- Books IX–X: The ideal state and its citizens. Extensive treatise covering citizenship, government and society with suggestions for laws imitating the Good, the True, the Just, etc.


□ *Phaedrus*

□ *Parmenides*


□ *Theaetetus*

- ☐ *Sophist*
- ☐ *Timaeus*
- ☐ *Philebus*
- ☐ *Seventh Letter*

### LET US STOP AND THINK



During his education, Plato was probably taught about doctrines of Parmenides, Pythagoras and Cratylus. These doctrines possibly moulded Plato and laid down the foundations for his study of epistemology (which is actually ‘study of knowledge’) and metaphysics (‘study of nature’).



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the concept of Plato’s Myth of the Cave?

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2. Find relation of Myth of the Cave with his concept of Mimesis.

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### 2.3 EIDOS, OBJECT AND IMAGE

The term “Eidos” had different implications over time. Homer called it outward appearance, or beautiful outward appearance to be more precise. While in natural philosophy concerning Empedocles and Democritus, it meant images.

Parmenides called it the essence or visible truth. Plato's Eidos is the idea. Forms are also known as "Ideas". Ideas are images in the mind. They can also have an independent existence, an extra-mental existence. They are innate in nature. They are pre-installed in human souls. There is a form for every object or quality in reality: forms of dogs, human beings, mountains, streams and virtues. Concepts are generalised ideas. Plato called Forms as Eidos, the ideal concepts. They exist in a plane outside time and space. While, "objects" refer to those which exist in a plane of time and space. It is not in the transcendent world of being, like Eidos. According to Plato, there are two forms- a) the higher form (that does not manifest physically) b) the lower form, (that manifests physically). We enjoy only a decaying copy of an ideal form in real life. We live in a world surrounded by objects.

The characteristics of the ideal form/ the higher form/ the Eidos are-

- independent in nature;
- unchangeable, eternal;
- divine;
- objective
- intelligible, not perceptible;
- archetypal
- incorporeal
- perfect

Eidos's purpose is to solve various philosophical problems like:

- Epistemological: To understand- what is knowledge? How can we differentiate knowledge from mere opinions?
- Metaphysical: Is there permanence beyond what is visible/tangible? What things are real? Is there a mind-independent reality?

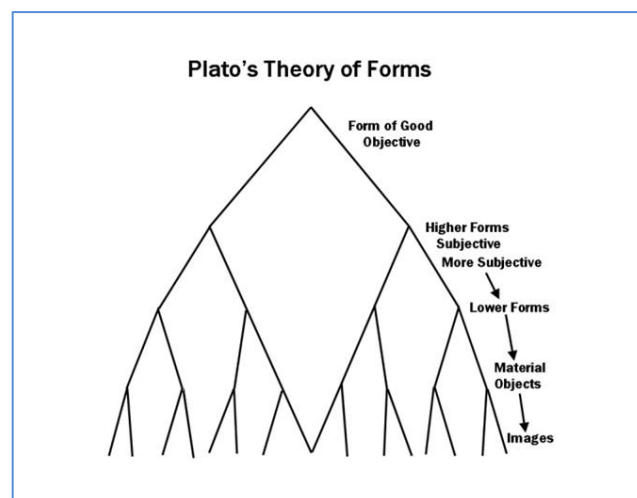
- Moral: Is moral knowledge possible? Where do we find morality? Are there objective moral truths?
- Semantical: How can we interpret the meaning of general terms? What is the source of the meanings?

The characteristics of objects, which surround the sensitive world we live in, are:

- subjective
- spatiotemporal
- sensible
- copied
- changeable
- imperfect

Images are the mere copies made by artists. Plato disregarded it. But Aristotle and later literary critic argued against this view. They opined that images are based on sense experiences and hence they cannot be misrepresentation or unnecessary copies. They involve creative work in their production.

The following illustration shall clarify the distinction between Eidos, object and Image in Plato's theory:



Aristotle later had objection regarding Plato's theory of forms. His main objections in Plato's theory were-

- The causal relation between Forms and the things we encounter.
- The possibility of absolute goodness or morality.
- The body and soul dualism. This is because Aristotle was a materialist. He believed that the forms have no independent existence from their sensible objects. For Aristotle, a soul is just the form of a primary substance. It is the essence of that substance that is essential to it.
- True knowledge can be found in the realm of reality.
- Plato's concept of God as the Demiurge. Aristotle called God the Prime Mover.
- He rejected Plato's Third Man argument. It appears in Plato's dialogue Parmenides.

#### ***2.4 PLATO AS LITERARY CRITIC***

It is universally acknowledged that Plato's theoretical stance on art laid the foundation of Western literary theory and criticism. Plato's rejection of poetry might exasperate a modern day scholar but a contextual analysis of his major works will bring to the fore how Plato, for the first time in the intellectual history of Europe, initiates the circulation of some of the significant markers and components of theory and criticism.

A valid response to Plato's views on poetry necessarily requires an apt analysis on the cultural and intellectual context on that era. Western literary criticism emerged in the classical period, starting at 500 BC, which witnessed the great tragedies of Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, and the comedies of Aristophanes. The same era also marked the ushering of Western philosophy in the

works of Socrates and Plato. Therefore, it should be taken into account that Western literary criticism and philosophy go hand in hand which, in fact, leads to potential overlapping domains where both schools correspond to one another. Here it is important to note that different intellectual currents constitute the philosophical background of Plato's work. Among them — sophistic and rhetoric are the notable ones which used to train students and budding politicians in public speaking and debate. Both the currents were so well connected to one another that sophists were the first teachers of rhetoric. Plato, however, was a staunch disbeliever of both sophistic and rhetoric in that sophists' worldview was essentially relativistic, secular and humanistic which was against the authority of religion and morality. On the other hand, rhetoric, according to Plato, falsifies and dilutes truth as it resorts to persuasion while manipulating public opinion. To Plato both sophistic and rhetoric are divorced from truth as they considered reality as construct. However, Plato is of the opinion that truth is not subject to change. It is absolute essence which should govern human mind and perception. It can be rightly asserted that Plato's philosophy sought to reinforce order on chaos by means of a timeless and universal scheme of permanence based on religion, morality and politics which are independent of change and temporality. In this regard Plato's view was highly influenced by a number of pre-Socratic philosophers and thinkers who considered the physical world as mere 'appearance' of an underlying form or reality. For instance, Heraclitus observes that all the physical entities in the universe are in a state of flux. This philosophical preoccupation propelled Plato to view poetry in the line of sophistic and rhetoric as the manifestations of senses rather than reason. Here, it can be rightly observed that Western philosophy begins with the application of rational thinking which indeed influenced Plato to draw distinction between philosophy and poetry. Plato's distinction between philosophy and poetry



foregrounds the domain of literary theory for the subsequent developments.

### LET US STOP AND THINK



In 388 B.C. Plato founded his school, the Academy, which is considered the first European university.

Plato and his most esteemed student, Aristotle, both appear in the painting “The School of Athens” by Renaissance master Raphael

## 2.5 SUMMING UP

Platonic criticism is being accepted as an important foundation of literary criticism. It was developed by the critic and philosopher in his major works, namely, *Phaedrus*, *Ion*, and the *Republic*. It touched upon the moral, ethical and historical aspects of a work of art. In the *Republic* he deals with the distinction of the three souls; and questions like- “Why should I be just?”, “What will happen if I am not just?” Also, the division of three classes in a utopian, well-functioning state is made by the critic. Here, he develops the Theory of Form, which interprets the worldview of ideas, concepts, object and art. Plato’s established arguments have been critiqued over time. He is both famous and infamous for this theory. But it is important to note that he is still one of the founding fathers when it comes to literary criticism.

In this unit, we have talked about the Theory of Forms. It takes us to the controversial discussion on poetry and the poet, in the *Republic*. The banishment of poets from his ideal state instigated opinions and oppositions in the works of later critics. We will talk about it in the next unit. In the units yet to come, you will be able to relate Plato with Aristotle and critics like Philip Sidney (who wrote *An Apology for Poetry*, arguing in opposition of Plato’s

banishment of poets and his idea of the utopian ideal form, which seemed impossible to Sidney). This will make your views on aesthetics clear. The meanings and purposes assigned to poetry as a genre becomes well defined too. From classical critics, we will move to the modern critics. But first, let us make our ground of classical literary theory clear. It is from here that we can understand the theories of later critics.



## 2.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What did Plato mean by Eidos?
2. Discuss Plato's views on art as imitation. Discuss in relation to the carpenter and the painter/poet.
3. Discuss the myth of the cave.
4. Elaborate the chair example in Plato's discussion of the Eidos.
5. How is the artist twice removed from reality? Discuss.
6. What are the major purposes of Eidos?
7. What are the characteristics of Eidos?
8. What are the characteristics of object?
9. What is an image?
10. Discuss Aristotle's objection to Plato's Theory of Forms.



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### ***UNIT 3: PLATO'S OBJECTIONS TO THE ARTIST.***

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#### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Plato's Objection to Poetry
  - 3.2.1 Three major grounds
  - 3.2.2 Ion and Charges against Poetry
  - 3.2.3 Justice, Ideal Republic and Predicament of Poetry
- 3.3 Aristotle's objection to Plato
- 3.4 Summing Up
- 3.5 Assessment Questions
- 3.6 References and Recommended Readings

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#### ***3.0 INTRODUCTION***

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The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* describes Plato as "...one of the most dazzling writers in the Western literary tradition and one of the most penetrating, wide-ranging, and influential authors in the history of philosophy ... He was not the first thinker or writer to whom the word "philosopher" should be applied. But he was so self-conscious about how philosophy should be conceived, and what its scope and ambitions properly are, and he so transformed the intellectual currents with which he grappled, that the subject of philosophy, as it is often conceived—a rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues, armed with a distinctive method—can be called his invention. Few other authors in the history of Western philosophy approximate him in depth and range: perhaps only Aristotle (who studied with him), Aquinas and Kant would be generally agreed to be of the same rank." This indeed gives us an overall idea of Plato's contribution to literary theory.

As we have read earlier, Plato is of the opinion that art is mimetic in nature. By mimesis he indicates that art is mimicry, an

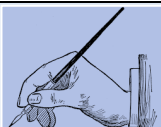
imperfect imitation of some perfect pattern in an ideal world. This includes drama, fiction and representational painting as well. He uses the example of a carpenter and a chair to elaborate his main point. He also places philosophy as the means to reach the perfect ideal pattern. He chooses the philosopher as the potential ruler in his ideal republic. Plato embedded aesthetics inside morals. And it is in this point that Aristotle argues against his teacher Plato.

Plato believed that poetry is close to falsehood. According to him, philosophers deal with truths, while poets deal with the illusions of those truths. Moreover, pleasure is involved in poetry. And this pleasure is misleading in nature. While, the truth proposed by philosophers are more stable.

### 3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on the Greek classical critic Plato and his most controversial views on the poet and his objections to the artist. In the *Republic*, we find that Plato touches upon the issue of creativity, which coincides with the features of criticism. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate Plato as a literary critic
- objectively analyse Plato's objections
- comprehend his major arguments of objection
- acquaint with Aristotle's objection to Plato
- understand Plato's dialogic and poetic nature of writing

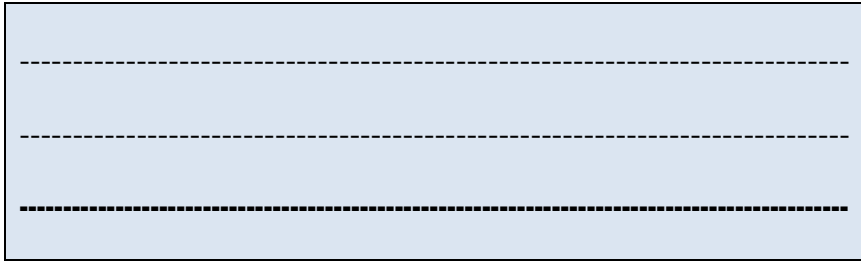


#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why does Plato believe that poetry is close to falsehood? Give at least two reasons

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### **3.2 PLATO'S OBJECTIONS TO THE ARTIST**

#### **3.2.1 *Three Major grounds***

Plato's *Republic* concerns with the viewpoint that poetry never produces reliable knowledge, unlike philosophy and sciences. Plato objected to poetry on **three major grounds** in Book II and X of his *Republic*. They are:

##### **1. Plato's objection to Poetry from the point of view of Education:**

Plato condemns poetry for fostering vices, especially in children. This makes poetry inappropriate from the point of view of education. Plato remarks, pointing out the flaws in Homer's epics, "if we mean our future guardians to regard the habit of quarrelling among themselves as of all things the basest, no word should be said to them of the wars in the heaven, or of the plots and fighting of the gods against one another, for they are not true.... If they would only believe as we would tell them that quarrelling is unholy, and that never up to this time has there been any quarrelling between citizens..... these tales (of epics) must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have allegorical meaning or not." This also adds to his belief that, "the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators; he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth." The imitator poet is charged of misleading the young minds. Instead of cultivating good thoughts it instils bad thoughts. Therefore poetry is inferior to other practical arts. It is not pragmatic in nature.

**2. Objection from the Philosophical point of view:**

He objected that poetry never provided true knowledge. Its base is assumption and imagination, which is away from veritable truths. He comments, “The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearance only .... The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior and has inferior offspring.” Poetry never leads to truth. It misleads the citizens away from truths. In this regard, philosophy is better than poetry. Philosophy concerns with reason and justice while poetry does not.

**3. Objection from the Moral point of view:**

Plato believed that poetry promoted undesirable passions. Poetry promotes unnecessary lamentation for sorrows. It numbs the faculty of reason. It only encourages the weaker part of the soul. He remarks, “Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily limited .... And therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered state, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthen the feelings and impairs the reason ... Poetry feeds and waters the passion instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue.” About drama Plato goes on to say that, “excitable character admits of many multicoloured imitations. But a rational and quiet character, which always remains pretty well the same, is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand once imitated, especially by a crowd consisting of all sorts of people gathered together at a theatre festival, for the experience being imitated is alien to them.” This statement shows that he abandoned the pleasure of this aesthetic art on the ground of it being mimetic and inappropriate for audience.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Write three of Plato's objections to poetry.

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### 3.2.2 *Ion and Charges against Poetry*

While discussing theoretical stance on poetry in *Republic* it is quite pertinent to take into account Plato's allegations against poetry in one of his famous treatise, *Ion*. In this dialogue Socrates is the principal speaker who interrogates a rhapsode or singer named Ion on his art of singing and its knowledge base. The entire dialogue between Ion and Socrates brings into focus that poetic creation and act of reading poetry are not based on rational thinking and knowledge; rather both are conditioned and controlled by inspiration. As a reply to Socrates' question Ion observes that he excels in reciting and comprehending the celebrated works of Homer, whereas he is quite indifferent and ignorant to the works of other poets. Socrates furthers his argument by asserting that proper knowledge bears a rational comprehensibility. For instance, if, according to Ion, Homer is a great poet in that he must rationally point out in which aspects of poetic creation Homer excels than rest of the poets. At the same time Socrates also point to the fact that each art possesses its own domain of specialized knowledge. For instance, if Homer writes about charioteering it is the charioteer not the rhapsode who can come to terms with the truth. Even after this argument Ion claims that he can speak on Homer better than anybody else. To Socrates Ion's claim is not based on truth or knowledge of an art; rather he is guided and controlled by divine inspiration. The rhapsode shares the



divine inspiration of Poet with which the poet creates his poetry and subsequently the rhapsode transmits it to his listeners as emotional effect. Socrates explains this process by drawing the analogy of a magnet ring how it transmits its attractive power to a series of iron rings. In this analogy Muse stands for the magnet, the poet is the nearest iron ring to the magnet which draws its power from the Muse, the rhapsode is the next ring to the poet and the spectator is the last ring in the series. In this way the divine inspiration circulates from poet to the spectator. It is in this context Socrates observes that a Poet is not a creator rather an interpreter as he does not speak of him it is the Muse which speaks through the poet's persona. In such a case rhapsodes who mediate the poetry of a poet are just "interpreters of interpreters." Therefore Socrates asserts that a poet is "a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him". Socrates does not dismiss imitative poetry altogether. He concludes that "only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city".

### ***3.2.3 Justice, Ideal Republic and Predicament of Poetry***

The discourse of justice is the axis of Plato's argument against poetry. It is justice which will normalize the ways of life in his ideal Republic. According to Plato justice is a condition in which "each one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature was best adapted". This definition prescribes roles to each individual and constituent part of the society. It is quite apparent in this context that the discourse of justice is antithetical to the role played by poetry. Poetry cannot confine itself within a defined and confined trajectory as poets assume "manifold" roles under the influence of divine inspiration. To Plato in his ideal Republic each individual should confine him to one role and if someone tries to "imitate" too many things at a time that person is a misfit to the state. Since poets and poetry lovers are exposed to multiplicity they are

considered as potential threats to the social structure of justice. Therefore, Plato proposes there is no place for the poets in his ideal Republic: “If a man . . . who was capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool.”

What can be concluded here is that, according to Plato, poetry does not possess a definable function to play in the society. In this context Plato brings to the fore the necessity of censorship of poetry because it tampers morality and falsifies god; at the same time poetry facilitates abundance of emotional outpouring which might lead the youth to the astray; and poetry’s too much indulgence in self-expression might be a catalyst for individualism which is a threat to social order. These are the different theoretical propositions which Plato brought against poetry. His celebrated disciple Aristotle in *Poetics* defends poetry from much of the charges of Plato.

### **3.3 ARISTOTLE’S OBJECTION TO PLATO**

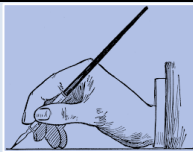
Aristotle’s defence of poetry is a significant contribution to literary criticism. The main points are-

- Aristotle agrees in calling the poet an imitator. The poet imitates things as they are/were, as they are said/ thought and as they ought to be. But he dismisses Plato, by saying that art is not mere imitation and likeness of some ideal pattern. The artist does not simply reflect the real like a mirror reflection. Instead he imagines and recreates the ideal in his own way. This makes the artist creative. He exalts and recreates a new world. He does not

merely imitate reality. Critic, R. A. Scott-James observes in this regard, “But though he (Poet) creates something less than that reality, he also creates something more. He puts an idea into it. He put his perception into it. He gives us his intuition of certain distinctive and essential qualities.”

- Aristotle believed that imitation is an instinct in men. This is not specific to poets or artists only. Even a child learns through imitation. This point goes against the established argument laid by his teacher Plato, who blames only the artists for imitation.
- Aristotle disagrees that the poet is twice removed from the ideal pattern/ideal truth/ reality. He attacks Plato by saying that the capability of poets exceeds the mere illusion of truths.
- Aristotle compares poetry with history. He says that the historian concerns with “what has happened?” and the poet with the ideal question of “what ought to have happened?” History deals with the particulars and poetry with the universal. So, it is of more value than history itself.
- Aristotle further argues that poetry does not make the strong and rational minds weak. By appealing to the emotional needs, it enables “catharsis”. Aristotle believed that catharsis is the venting out of excess emotions in people. This is necessary to maintain the balance.
- Also, Plato is of the opinion that poetry is morally incapable of sustaining good minds. The question here is: Is the artist aimed at aesthetic delight or moral teaching as his/her primary goal? The artist is supposed to represent life in his/her own innovative way. Communication is a major work of the artist/poet. We cannot charge poetry against its philosophical flaws. Poetry is not philosophy. There is a different discourse called philosophy to teach philosophy. So is history and ethics. Aristotle clarifies this demarcation. Critic, R. A. Scott-James observes in this regard that, “Morality teaches. Art does not attempt to teach. It merely

asserts it is thus or thus that life is perceived to be. That is my bit of reality, says the artist. Take it or leave it – draw any lessons you like from it – that is my account of things as they are – if it has any value to you as evidence or teaching, use it, but that is not my business: I have given you my rendering, my account, my vision, my dream, my illusion – call it what you will. If there is any lesson in it, it is yours to draw, not mine to preach.”



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention at least three defences of Aristotle against Plato’s criticism poetry.

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### LET US STOP AND THINK



- Rolfe Arnold Scott-James was a Britishjournalist, editor and literary critic.

- Aristotle’s four causes, regarding explanation of things, of being, can be summarised as follows:

- Material cause – what is something made of?
- Efficient cause – what brings something about?
- Formal cause – what characteristics does an object have?
- Final cause – what is the reason for something’s existence?

### 3.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the controversial argument of Plato regarding the banishment of poets from his ideal republic. Plato says about the poet's banishment as such: if a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything, should arrive in the city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, everyone should bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful, and pleasing. But hitch is that the people should tell him that there is no one like him in the city and that it isn't lawful for there to be. They should pour myrrh on his head, crown him with wreaths, and send him away to another city. This is how, in a dialogic and ironically poetic way he describes the incapacity of the poet and encourages the banishment. Socrates and his interlocutors themselves are engaged in a dramatic presentation to communicate a message. This poetic and mimetic way of narration involved in the *Republic* contradicts the objections of Plato. This brings us to the question, is dialogic presentation not mimesis? However, it is important to note that not all poets were banished from the country. Plato agreed that sculptors and architects had a moral taste and this allowed them to stay back. This further complicates his argument altogether. He was against the representational arts (he particularly devalues tragic drama or dramatic poetry). He concludes that "the imitator has no knowledge worth mentioning of what he imitates". Plato stood against that point that poets offered models of imitative behaviour, they re-created gods and formulated precepts of how one should live.

As a foremost literary critic Plato is widely discussed in various platforms. Despite of his flaws, he initiates multiple theories which form a solid ground for other modern theories. In *Phaedrus*, *Ion* and *Republic*, he critiques the poets for being irrational and lacking rational knowledge. He demands simple didactic function of poetry, which erases the aesthetics part (which is supposed to be the

first aim of poetry). For him, the desirable poet is one who teaches religion, ethics and law. But the question is: Is poetry only restricted to only these discourses? It is at this point that Aristotle and other critics contradicted Plato's viewpoints. In the next Unit we shall elaborately talk about Plato's student Aristotle, and how he stood singularly for his own ideas on aesthetics and literary criticism.



### 3.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. On which three grounds did Plato object to poetry?
2. Why is poetry better than philosophy according to Aristotle?
3. What was Aristotle's argument against Plato's objections?
4. Plato remarks that poetry promoted falsehood. Discuss this idea.
5. Was Plato against all forms of art?
6. What are the four causes given by Aristotle?
7. Do you think Plato's narration in his book the *Republic* is poetic/dramatic in nature? If yes, how?



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## ARISTOTLE: *POETICS*

## **UNIT 4: ARISTOTLE'S POETICS: POETRY AND DRAMATIC IMITATION**

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Aristotle: Life and Works
- 4.3 Reading *Poetics*
- 4.4 Dramatic Imitation
- 4.5 Glossary of Terms in *Poetics*
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 Assessment Questions
- 4.8 References and Recommended Readings

### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

The surviving portion of Aristotle's *Poetics* discusses tragedy and epic poetry at large. He defines poetry as mimetic in nature. He divides human activity into three areas. They are: thought (*theoría*), action (*práxis*) and production (*poíesis*). He includes poetry under the head of imitation (*mimesis*), which is one of the divisions of production. According to him poetry emanates from the human instinct of imitation, and the instinct of harmony and rhythm. Epic poetry, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic (usually a short poem in an inspired wild irregular strain) poetry are varied modes of imitation. But they differ from one another, especially in the manner of their imitation.

### **4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this unit of the course in literary criticism, we will focus on the classical critic and Greek philosopher Aristotle. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the life and works of Aristotle
- understand the major concepts and specific literary terms discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics*



- comprehend Aristotle's views on aesthetics
- distinguish the differences between Plato and Aristotle's idea of imitation

#### **4.2 ARISTOTLE: LIFE AND WORKS**

Aristotle was born in Stagiros, Macedon, in 384 B.C. His father was a court physician to King Amyntas who was the father of Philip of Macedon. Since his young age, Aristotle was the picture of refinement, for he had been brought up in a cultured environment. After his father's death, Aristotle was brought up and educated by a guardian who sent him at the age of seventeen to the centre of intellectual and artistic life, Athens. There he entered Plato's Academy. His arrival at the Academy created stir among the disciples because here was a student, an aristocrat of the aristocrats, soft-spoken, gentle and polite.

When Plato died in 347 B.C, Aristotle was expected to become the successor to the presidency of the Academy but he was disappointed in this expectation. Aristotle's divergence from Plato's teaching was too great to make this possible. The trustees of the Academy passed him over as a foreigner and elected a native Athenian instead. At the invitation of his friend Hermeas, Aristotle left for his court. There he stayed for three years and married Pythias, the niece of the King. At the end of three years, Hermeas was overtaken by Persians and Aristotle was now again without a country. Then, King Philip of Macedon invited him to his palace as a tutor of Alexander. It was an atmosphere of inordinate ambition, barbaric splendour and vulgarity which Aristotle had been commissioned to soothe with the sweetness of wisdom but to no avail. After the assassination of King Philip, Alexander succeeded to the kingship and abandoned the theoretical philosophy of his teacher. Again Aristotle was left to his own resources.

He returned to Athens and found the Platonic school flourishing under Xenocrates. He, thus, set up his own school at the

place called Lyceum (so called because it is situated in a grove dedicated to Apollo Lyceus). His contemporaries have handed down to us a vivid picture of Aristotle as a lecturer. Bald and somewhat pot-bellied, carefully and even ostentatiously dressed, he still talked with the boyhood lisp of his as he guided his audience into the paths of wisdom. When teaching, he had the habit of walking about and thus gained for his Lyceum the nickname of the *Peripatetic* school—the school of ‘Strolling Philosophers’. To this day the Aristotelian philosophy is known as the Peripatetic system. He is said to have given two types of lectures: the more detailed discussions in the morning for an inner circle of advanced students and popular discourses in the evening for the general lovers of knowledge.

### LET US STOP AND THINK



Aristotle's students were largely from middle-class while the aristocrats sent their wards mostly to his rival i.e. Plato's Academy. A rivalry developed between the two schools which continued for several centuries in the works of subsequent thinkers and schools. Plato's Academy placed emphasis on mathematics, metaphysics, and politics, while at the Lyceum natural science predominated, its curriculum including botany, music, mathematics, medicine, and the constitutions of the Greek cities, zoology, and the customs of the so-called barbarians.

(Source: M.A.R. Habib's *A History of Literary Criticism*, 41)

When Alexander died in 323 B.C the pro-Macedonian government was overthrown and Aristotle was threatened with arrest. Mindful of the fate of Socrates he fled to Chalcis so that the Athenians do not “have another opportunity of sinning against philosophy”. Aristotle escaped the judges but could not escape from death. He died only after a year after his departure from Athens.

Aristotle wrote hundreds of works and these covered practically every phase of human knowledge and of human activity. Some of his important works are: *158 Constitutions (including The*

*Constitution of Athens*), *On Monarchy*, *Alexander*, *The Customs of Barbarians*, *Natural History*, *On the Soul*, *Rhetoric*, *Logic*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Politics* and *Poetics*. From the biographical tradition of late antiquity we have inherited three itemized lists of works attributed to Aristotle. Diogenes Laertius (third century CE) credits Aristotle with 143 works; Hesichius (sixth century CE) attributes him 187; and the Ptolemyai-Garib (fourth century CE?) catalogues include 99 works. The above differences arise primarily because of the different ways in which the works are clubbed or appear in the lists. But some scholars go further and say that Aristotle's works are his lecture notes, some more polished than others, which he kept revising over many years.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why did Aristotle's school of philosophy gain the nickname 'School of Strolling Philosophers'?

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2. What did Aristotle do after the death of Alexander?

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3. Name three important works of Aristotle.

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### 4.3 READING 'POETICS'

There is no copy of the original Greek *Poetics* and what we have is a copy translated from Arabic by Ibn Rushd (Averroes). The *Poetics* is usually recognized as the most influential treatise in the history of literary criticism. For a long time, however, the *Poetics* was lost to the Western world and often misrepresented. It was available through the Middle Ages and the early part of the Renaissance only through a Latin translation of an Arabic version written by the philosopher Ibn Rushd, known to the Latin West as Averroës. It was not until the late fifteenth century that the *Poetics* was rediscovered and disseminated through numerous translations and commentaries, beginning with a Latin translation by Giorgio Valla in 1498. The most renowned commentaries were Minturno's *De poeta* (1559), Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poeticeslibriseptem* (1561), and Lodovico Castelvetro's *Poeticad' Aristotelevulgarizzata e sposta*,

Central to all Aristotle's philosophy is the claim that nothing can be understood apart from its end or purpose (*telos*). Not surprisingly the *Poetics* seeks to discover the end or purpose of all poetic arts, and especially of tragic drama. It is Aristotle's attempt to discover or seek the purpose of poetic art, especially of tragic drama. Aristotle defines poetry very broadly, including epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry and even some kinds of music. The main focus of the *poetics* is Greek Tragedy. It also discusses epic poetry, using the example of Homer almost exclusively. *Poetics* has succeeded to exercise great deal of influence on subsequent literary theory, particularly in the Renaissance. Plato attacked art in Book X of his *Republic* saying that Theory of Forms, objects in this world are imitations or approximations of ideal Forms that are the true reality. A chair in this world is just an imitation or instantiation of the Form of Chair. That being the case, art is twice removed from reality as it is just an imitation of an imitation. He illustrated his

point saying that a painting of a chair is just the imitation of a chair which is again an imitation of the Form of Chair. He further says that art excites emotion which in turn can distract man from balanced reasoning and logical thinking. Even though many critics and scholars argue that the term *mimesis* was first used by Plato, the word was used in Athens many years before him. However the meaning of the word differed in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle did not use the word imitation as simply copying or impersonation. Rather he used it as (a) the presence of the universal in the particular, (b) creative imagination, (c) recreation of life (d) the artist's tool equivalent to the hammer with which a carpenter constructs his objects. Aristotle wrote *Poetics* as a response to Plato's idea on art. Aristotle was a student of Plato and studied in his academy from the time the former was seventeen till Plato's death. *Poetics* focuses mainly on Greek tragedy. The portion of *Poetics* that survives discusses mainly tragedy and epic.

The first sentence of *Poetics* gives us a clear statement of the goals of Aristotle's treatise: "Concerning of poetic art itself and its forms, what sort of power each one has, and how one should organise plots if the poetic composition is going to be good and again, of how many and what kinds of parts [it consists], and similarly concerning the other things belonging to the same method of inquiry". Thus, in simple words, Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, considers the poetic art as a whole and discusses the forms, considers the different effects produced by different genres of poetry, examines how plots are best constructed and discusses the parts of tragedy and tragic plot. However, the text that is transmitted to us displays the fact that Aristotle somehow narrows down his focus while illustrating his ideas in the book. While Chapters XXIII and XXIV are devoted to Epic, and Comedy which may have been the subject of a lost second book is given a brief treatment in Chapter V. The heart of the book is focussed on a single genre: Tragedy.

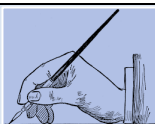
In the first five chapters of the book, Aristotle defines poetry as a mimesis (imitation) of human actions, according to the medium employed, to the objects imitated and to the manner of imitation. He further discusses the origins of mimesis and shows how different forms were developed. He, then, moves on to the next chapter to talk about his main subject-- tragedy together with epic which is viewed as a rudimentary form of tragedy. He further defines tragedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with lofty matters. Poetry originates from human beings' urge to imitate everything they come across in nature. According to Aristotle, tragedy came from the efforts of poets to present men as better than they are in reality and comedy came from poets who tried to represent men as worse than they are in real life. Further, epic poetry originated with the poets efforts to imitate noble men and is narrative in form.

It is clear that the major stimulus behind Aristotle's idea of poetics was Plato's critique of poetry and this fact justifies the assumption that Aristotle developed at any rate the rudiments of his critical position while Plato was still alive. The *Poetics* was produced as a measured résumé of a theory of poetry which could both come to terms with the challenge set by Plato and to conform to the standards of philosophical rigour which Aristotle sought in other areas of his thought. A deeper reason for seeing *Poetics* as a work of theoretical or philosophical criticism is its steady focus on a conception of genres and their intrinsic nature, rather than on the individual poet and his work. Aristotle's discussion on poetry, his response to Plato's ethical, psychological and epistemological criticisms of poetry was to offer a stable theory of poetry's true nature and with a defensible sense of what could and could not be expected of the art.

While following Plato's premise that mimesis is essential to poetry, Aristotle suggests some important specifications which cut across Plato's thinking on the subject. His position has an affinity to Plato's, in that he accepts that all art offers images of possible reality; but at the same time it is remote from it in spirit. The

difference resides in the fact that Aristotle does not conceive of the poet himself as possessing any special imaginative faculty or powers. The philosophical interpretation of mimesis is concerned with the status of mimetic works and stands above all in resistance to the Platonic subjection of poetry to extrinsic and objective standards of truth and goodness.

Aristotle's argument that poetry must be true to fact does have exceptions, but it does not change the inherent concept of truth. For example, Aristotle says that poetry imitates one of three things: things as they are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. The only one of these options that can be possibly true to fact is things as they are, because it is concrete. Things as they are or ought to be gives up space for error, since what is commonly said or thought might not actually be truth; however if a poet accurately imitates what is said or thought, than that is the truth that is in question. Aristotle argues that there are two kinds of errors: error due to ignorance and error: an error due to ignorance and error due to false imitation. By imitating what is said or thought, the poet might be straying from facts, but he does so in ignorance, so the error does not touch "the essential of the poetic art". Finally Aristotle argues that there is one more way in which a poet can manipulate the truth, by describing the impossible. What we can assume Aristotle is describing here is hyperbole. The poet may exaggerate something if it ultimately helps to illustrate his poem more effectively than merely conveying the truth. In this instance, however, the exaggeration is such that the poet is not intending to lead the reader astray.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is central to all Aristotle's theory?

2. How does Aristotle's concept of imitation differ from that of Plato's?

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#### **4.4 DRAMATIC IMITATION**

The question that arises is that how is the theory of imitation different in Plato and Aristotle? Plato considers two different worlds in his argument. They are the world of ideas and the world of senses. The first world has the final, unalterable, perfect patterns in itself. The world of senses is however a copy, an imitation of the world of ideas. The artist creates the second world through his art. He goes on to make copies of copies. Thus Plato disregards poetry as inferior, unethical; and a mere copy of an ideal world. Aristotle however, sees that the excess passion that goes into imitating the ideal world or the fashioning of the ideal world in the world of senses is important. It enables people to vent out their unhealthy feelings. This he calls catharsis. While Plato dwells in the appreciation of an abstract and spiritual world, Aristotle dwells on the sensory admiration of reality. Plato considers imitation as mimicry. Aristotle considers it as a creative energy. Plato calls emotions useless. Aristotle upholds it as a vital source of art. Plato's work gives the impression that he is an idealist, a transcendentalist. While Aristotle remains the realist and deems imitation a natural attribute of human beings.



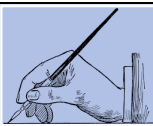
#### 4.5 GREEK TERMS IN THE POETICS

Aristotle uses a number of Greek terms in the *Poetics* that have become a part of our literary lexicon. Let us review the terms below:

- ***Deus ex machina***: The intervention of an unexpected or invented character, device or event to resolve a plot. Aristotle is disdainful of *deus ex machina* as a device to resolve plot situations in tragedy, as a tragedy must unravel because of the inner logic of the piece - not from a sudden intervention of the Gods (or the author).
- ***Mimesis*** - *Mimesis* is the act of creating in someone's mind, through artistic representation, an idea or ideas that the person will associate with past experience. Roughly translatable as "imitation", *mimesis* in poetry is the act of telling stories that are set in the real world. The events in the story need not have taken place, but the telling of the story will help the listener or viewer to imagine the events taking place in the real world.
- ***Hamartia*** - This word translates almost directly as "error," though it is often rendered more elaborately as "tragic flaw". Tragedy, according to Aristotle, involves the downfall of a hero, and this downfall is effected by some error on the part of the hero. This error need not be an overarching moral failing: it could be a simple matter of not knowing something or forgetting something.
- ***Anagnorisis*** - This word translates as "recognition" or "discovery." In tragedy, it describes the moment where the hero, or some other character, passes from ignorance to knowledge. This could be a recognition of a long lost friend or family member, or it could be a sudden recognition of some fact about oneself, as is the case with Oedipus. *Anagnorisis* often occurs at the climax of a tragedy in tandem with *peripeteia*.
- ***Mythos*** - When dealing with tragedy, this word is usually translated as "plot," but unlike "plot", *mythos* can be applied to

all works of art. Not so much a matter of what happens and in what order, *mythos* deals with how the elements of a tragedy (or a painting, sculpture, etc.) come together to form a coherent and unified whole. The overall message or impression that we come away with is what is conveyed to us by the *mythos* of a piece.

- ***Katharsis or Catharsis***- This word was normally used in ancient Greece by doctors to mean “purgation” or by priests to mean “purification.” In the context of tragedy, Aristotle uses it to talk about a purgation or purification of emotions. Presumably, this means that *katharsis* is a release of built up emotional energy, much like a good cry. After *katharsis*, we reach a more stable and neutral emotional state.
- ***Peripeteia*** - A reversal, either from good to bad or bad to good. *Peripeteia* often occurs at the climax of a story, often prompted by *anagnorisis*. Indeed, we might say that the *peripeteia* is the climax of a story: it is the turning point in the action, where things begin to move toward a conclusion.
- ***Desis*** - Literally “tying” the *desis* is all the action in a tragedy leading up to the climax. Plot threads are craftily woven together to form a more and more complex mess. At the *peripeteia*, or turning point, these plot threads begin to unravel in what is called the *lusis*, or denouement.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Explain the Greek literary terms like *hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, *peripeteia*, *catharsis* and *mythos*.

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#### 4.6 SUMMING UP

By now you must have realised the importance of the concepts and arguments regarding poetry and art laid out by Aristotle. In the subsequent unit you will see how the concept of tragedy is elaborately talked about by Aristotle. This will allow you to understand the major components of the modern plays you read or viewed in your everyday life.



#### 4.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Explain Aristotle's concept of mimesis. In what way is poetry imitative?
2. How do *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* contribute to a good tragedy?
3. Do you consider Aristotle's Poetics answers Plato's criticism of art, especially poetry?
4. How can you connect poetry with intellect, apart from being mere imitation?



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## ***UNIT 5: FEATURES OF TRAGEDY***

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- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Tragedy: Definition and Function
- 5.3 Features of Tragedy
- 5.4 Summing Up
- 5.5 Assessment Questions
- 5.6 References and Recommended Readings

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### ***5.0 INTRODUCTION***

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In common usage, the word tragedy refers to an event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe. Tragedy is also a form of drama. It foregrounds the predicaments of human lives. It originated in the theatre of ancient Greece and Rome and flourished during the Renaissance period in British theatres. Sometimes it sourced from human miscalculations or unfair circumstances, sometimes due to the motive of revenge. In the hands of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights tragedy attained great popularity. In Italian opera tradition the elements of tragedy are quite conspicuous too.

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### ***5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

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In this unit we shall discuss Aristotle's concept of tragedy, as developed in his magnum opus *Poetics*, is the primary focus here. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- figure out the main features of tragedy
- have an idea of the tragic rise and fall of characters through Freytag's pyramid
- trace the changes in the idea of tragedy in the hands of modern playwrights

- appreciate the influence of Aristotle on Western literary criticism

## **5.2 TRAGEDY: DEFINITION AND FUNCTION**

Aristotle defines tragedy as:

The imitation of an action that is serious and also having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” (Bywater 35)

From this definition it appears that the genus of tragedy is Imitation. It seeks to imitate life and men. It is concerned with a serious end. Further tragedy is differentiated from epic poetry as being dramatic, not narrative. It excites the emotion of pity and fear and by the act of excitation affords a pleasurable relief. Epics often cannot be presented at a single setting whereas tragedies are usually able to be seen in single viewing. Plato, the teacher of Aristotle, in his attack upon drama had said that the natural hunger after sorrow and weeping, which is kept under control in its own calamities is satisfied and delighted and fed by the poets. Aristotle said that it is not desirable to kill or starve the emotional part of the soul and thus tragedy is the vent for the particular emotions of pity and fear. This outlet of excess pity and fear through a form of drama (tragedy) is known as “catharsis”. This is the main function of tragedy. Catharsis is caused by a specific flaw in a character; or a mistake made by a character. This flaw or mistake is known as “hamartia”.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and the most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear,

of terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. In other words, Tragedy is a form of homoeopathic treatment, curing emotion by means of an emotion like a kind, but not identical.

(Milton, in his *Preface to Samson Agonistes*, Butcher: 247).

Most critics of his time argued that tragedy was inferior to epic. According to them, tragedy was for an inferior class of audience while epic was for a cultivated lot. Aristotle said that tragedy, like epic, can produce its effect without action. He asserted that tragedy is superior to epic because it has all the epic elements as well as spectacle and music to provide an indulgent pleasure to the audience. Aristotle further asserts that tragedy is superior to history because history shows what had happened whereas tragedy tries to reflect upon what might happen in the future. It creates cause and effect chain that vividly reveals what may happen in the future and thus arouses not only pity but also fear because the audience can apprehend and place themselves within that chain. Aristotle defines tragedy according to seven characteristics:

- i) It is mimetic.
- ii) It is serious
- iii) It tells a full story of an appropriate length
- iv) It contains rhythm and harmony
- v) Rhythm and harmony occur in different combinations in different parts of the tragedy
- vi) It is performed rather than narrated
- vii) It arouses feelings of pity and fear and then purges these feelings through catharsis.

There is also a larger dimension to Aristotle's interpretation of the poetic art. By contrast with Plato, who often treated mimesis as a matter of deceptive apparatus, Aristotle was convinced of the natural roots of mimetic activity, and this conviction of reflected in

his explanation of the very existence of poetry. Poetry in general is attributed to two natural causes. The first is a human instinct for mimesis – a universal characteristic of man, illustrated by the place of mimesis. The second is a human capacity to take pleasure in the products of mimesis, which Aristotle interprets with typical economy as due to the enjoyment of learning and understanding. The natural causes of poetic mimesis are used in *Poetics* as the starting point for a diagrammatic sketch development of Greek poetry from its origins. For Aristotle the major lines of evolution in Greek poetry are provided by the discovery of genres, stemming in the first place from a basic and natural dichotomy between serious and humorous poetry, or the poetry of ethically elevated subjects and the poetry of ethically inferior man and actions.



#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What essential features of tragedy do you find in Aristotle's definition?

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### **5.3 FEATURES OF TRAGEDY**

After giving the definition of tragedy, Aristotle goes on to discuss the different features or parts of tragedy. The six parts of tragedy, according to Aristotle, in their decreasing degree of importance, are:

Plot (*mythos*), Character (*ethos*), Thought (*dianoia*), Speech (*lexis*), Melody (*melo*), and Spectacle (*opsis*).

### **PLOT (mythos):**

Aristotle was a great admirer of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. He considers it to be the perfect example of tragedy and analyses the play throughout his treatise. Of the six elements Aristotle mentions, plot holds the first place. Plot is not just the story but how the incidents are presented to the audience. For tragedy is a *mimesis* not of men but of actions. That is how it is that they do not act in order to present their characters; they embrace their characters for the sake of the actions. And so, the course of events, i.e., the plot, is the most essential part of tragedy and one cannot have a tragedy without action. 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 the middle logically 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.

Plot is "the soul of tragedy", according to Aristotle and it is the structure of the plot that accomplishes the function of tragedy; the arousal of pity and fear and effecting catharsis. He further identifies two kinds of plots: simple and complex. Simple plot, according to Aristotle, is like that of Homer's *Iliad*, which proceeds from good to bad fortune or vice versa without recognition or reversal (a change in direction within the movement of the plot). A simple plot does have just one *pathos*, i.e., a simple and painful event, whereas a complex plot, like that of *Oedipus the King*, has reversal and recognition in addition to *pathos*. Each of these three parts contributes to the arousal of pity and fear. Aristotle defines *pathos* as "a destructive or painful action, for example, death in full view, and great pain, and wounds, and things of this kind." Aristotle further makes it clear that the best tragic *pathos* is destructive and painful event that takes place within family relationships. In



discussing events that arouse pity and fear, Aristotle states that they must necessarily occur (1) between kin, (2) between enemies or between (3) neutrals.

In addition to *pathos*, complex plots have recognition, reversal or both. Aristotle defines reversal (*peripeteia*) as “the change to the opposite of the things done, as was said”. More specifically, in reversal, the action of an agent of a dramatic action is prevented from achieving its intended result. At this point, Aristotle’s example of the play *Oedipus the King* can be cited. A messenger arrives with the intention of bringing *Oedipus* good fortune. As it happens, however, he produces the opposite result, for his revelations lead to Oedipus’ discovery that he had had the supreme bad fortune to commit parricide and incest. Within this scene, the action doubles back upon itself, moving first towards good fortune, and then back again in the direction of bad fortune.

Aristotle defines recognition as a “change from ignorance to knowledge, either to friendship or to enmity, of those defined with respect to good or bad fortune.” Again citing Aristotle’s example of *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus commits parricide and incest in ignorance, and afterwards recognises that Laius and Jocasta are his parents. This recognition leads to Oedipus’s bad fortune. Recognition can also lead to good fortune and the example of it is *Iphigenia in Tauris*, when the sister is about to kill the brother out of ignorance and then recognises him in time and as a result is able to escape with him to Greece. Suffering is a destructive or painful action which is often the result of a reversal or recognition. All these elements blend to create catharsis which is the engenderment of fear and pity in the audience: pity from the tragic hero’s plight and fear that his fate might befall us.

The plot must be a whole with a beginning, middle and end. The beginning must start the cause-and-effect chain, the middle or the climax is caused by earlier incidents. The end must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents outside the compass of the play.

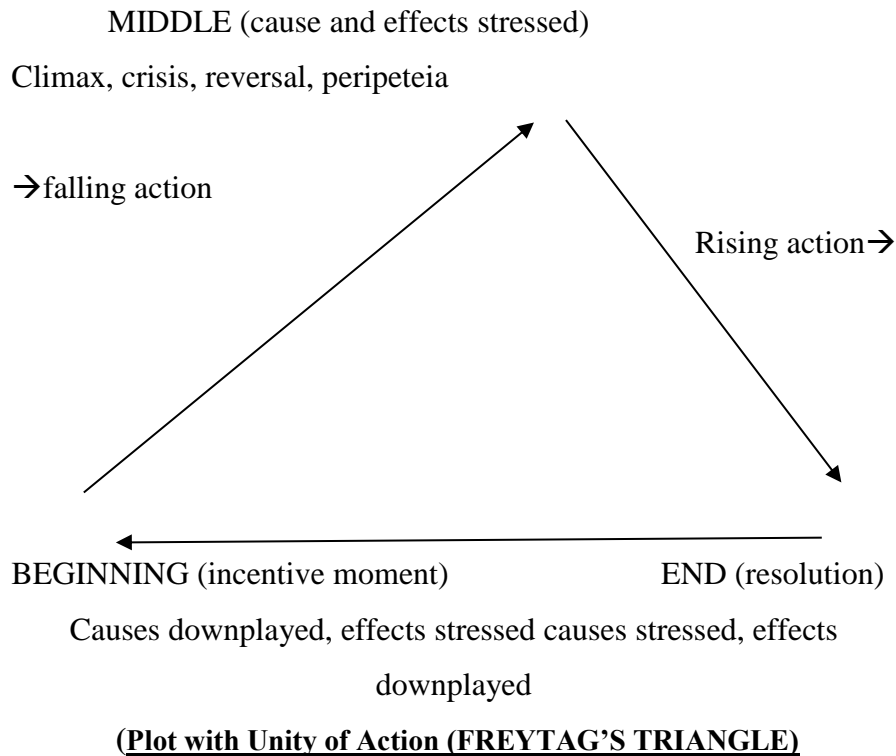
### **The Dramatic Unities:**

The unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero. By means of Unity, the plot becomes individual and also intelligible. The first requirement of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is Unity of Action. The plot must be complete having Unity of Action. By this Aristotle means that the plot must be structurally self-contained with the incidents bound together by internal necessity, each action leading inevitably to the next with no outside intervention. Aristotle further says that since the poet cannot change the myth which moulds the basic structure of his plot, yet he should apply and show inventions of his own to create Unity of Action in his plot.

The doctrine of the Unity of Place rests on one passage in the *Poetics*: “epic poetry and tragedy differ, again, in their length: for tragedy endeavours as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun or but slightly to exceed this limit; whereas the epic action has no limit of time.” The imaginary time of a dramatic action in a tragedy is limited, as far as may be, to the day of twenty four hours. The effort of tragedy was in this direction, though the result could not always be achieved. An example of this concept can be seen in the comparison between the epic *Beowulf* and the tragedy *Macbeth*. The action of *Beowulf* takes place in a span of well over fifty years. When Beowulf is first introduced, he is in the Danelands to help Hrothgar rid Heorot of Grendel, Beowulf rules the Geatlands for over fifty years. *Macbeth*, on the other hand, does not give any specific timeline. Readers know that some time passes, though through inference alone. Readers can correctly assume that it takes time for Malcolm and Donalbain to travel to England and Ireland. This said, given the play does not name any time; it could be seen as one continuous action.

As for Unity of Place, this too was a stage practice, generally observed in Greek drama but sometimes neglected, more especially in comedy: it is nowhere even hinted at in the *Poetics*, and, as a rule of art, has been deduced by the critics from the Unity of Time.

In his book *Technique of the Drama*, (1863) the German critic and playwright Gustav Freytag proposed a method called Freytag's Pyramid to analyse Aristotle's concept of Unity of Action. It is illustrated below:



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why, according to Aristotle, plot is the most important element in tragedy?

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2. What are the types of plot as articulated in the *Poetics*?

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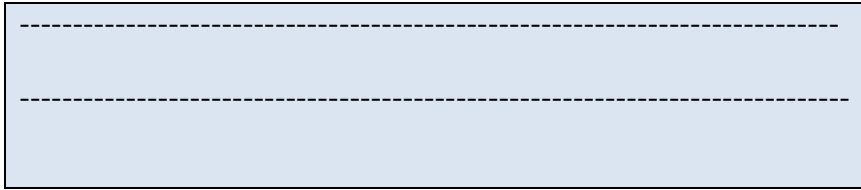


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3. What are the Three Unities?



### **CHARACTER (*ethos*):**

Character holds the second important place of importance. In a perfect tragedy, character will support plot. The protagonist must be a famous and prosperous character, so that his fortune moves from good to bad. The qualities requisite to such character – the tragic hero – are deduced from the primary fact that the function of tragedy is to produce the *catharsis* of pity and fear; pity being felt for a person who, if not wholly innocent meets suffering beyond his deserts; fear being awakened when one sees a person suffering and the person happens to be a man of identical nature like the observer. Here, we come across another term used by Aristotle, *hamartia*, translated into English as “tragic flaw”. This is best interpreted as mistake. Aristotle says that the protagonist mistakenly by an error of judgement brings about his own downfall. The plot must always involve some sort of a tragic deed, which can be left undone, and this deed can be approached either with full knowledge or in ignorance. Moreover, the character should be realistic and “the person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence.” (Butcher, 2007). Alluding back to Aristotle’s example of *Oedipus the King*, we find perfect example of *hamartia*. Oedipus directly causes his downfall not because he is bad or weak, but because he is ignorant or does not know who he is.



#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. According to Aristotle, what are the chief characteristics of the tragic protagonist?


### **THOUGHT (*dianoia*):**

Aristotle accords the third place of importance to thought and under it includes every effect that has to be produced by, by subdivisions, being: proof and refutation; the excitation of the feelings such as pity, fear, anger and the like. When Aristotle discusses thought, he is not discussing events logically succeeding each other, he is discussing philosophy. He says that thought is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent to given circumstances, meaning that thought is commenting upon situations and deriving truths from them rather than simply ordering or presenting them. When people speak, they give physical dimension to thought, they comment on ideas and actions. Politicians discuss war, social issues; philosophers evaluate people's action, comment upon them. As a philosopher, an artist exercises this thought when he generates ideas from his plot. Through his eyes or his characters' eyes, he evaluates and analyses the plot and places his conclusion in the story in either the characters' voices or the narrator's. He speaks very little about thought and most of what he has to say is associated with how speeches should reveal character. The concepts of probability and necessity are conjoined throughout Aristotle's system of thought. These principles enter into the theory of poetry partly because of Aristotle's conviction that poems should be products of rational art whose success depends above all on their formal coherence and partly because of the premise that poetic mimesis is the representation of possible human action, and must be intelligible as such. Probability and necessity are normally invoked

in the *Poetics* in connection with the casual links between the successive stages of a plot structure.

**DICTION (*lexis*):**

Diction is given the fourth place of importance and is defined by Aristotle as “the expression of the meaning in words” which is proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and the end of tragedy.

**MELODY (*melos*):**

The chorus, according to Aristotle, too should be regarded as one of the actors. It is an important factor in the pleasure of the drama. It should be an integral part of the Tragedy.

**SPECTACLE (*opsis*):**

Aristotle refers to visual apparatus of the play, including set, costumes and props. He further says that spectacle is the least artistic and the least connected part with the work of the poet. For example, if the play has good and beautiful costumes and bad acting and story, there is obviously something wrong with the play. As Aristotle says “that beauty might save the play, it is not a nice thing.”

The renaissance of the living spirit that lies hidden in the philosophy of the two Greek thinkers was indeed frequently enough a turn in tradition, at times remote from innate actuality. And it was in the very periods enjoying a lesser knowledge of the original texts that the most impressive contrasting images were formulated in regard to Platonic and Aristotelian thought.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is ‘spectacle’ in a tragedy?

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## 5.4 SUMMING UP

By now you must have realised the importance of the concepts and arguments regarding literature, especially tragedy, laid out by Aristotle. His features of tragedy have been handled in a varied manner by different playwrights over centuries. While Shakespeare and few other Elizabethan dramatists violated the Aristotelian concept of dramatic unities, some modern playwrights like Arthur Miller strictly adhered to some of these classical concepts. In modern drama it has been observed that the concept of the tragic hero has undergone a complete change, a sort of metamorphosis, the tragic protagonist is no longer a man of higher values as has been articulated by Aristotle and followed by the Elizabethans. Now a common man has been accepted as the chief protagonist of the tragic drama. This we find in the tragedies of Arthur Miller, G. B. Shaw and Henrik Ibsen. Tragedy has always been a form of drama which is supposedly more intense and profound than comedy. However, the debate regarding the intensity of this particular literary genre still continues.



## 5.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is *catharsis*? How does it work in the context of tragedy? What is its purpose?
2. Define “unity of time” as defined by Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Illustrate with examples.
3. Define and explain Aristotle’s conception of plot.
4. Explain Freytag’s Pyramid in analysing the Unity of Action.
5. How is reversal different from recognition? Can you have one without the other?
6. What is the “soul of tragedy” according to Aristotle? Explain why he singles out one concept as the essence of the art form.

7. Is tragic hero a paragon of virtue and morality? What qualities must you find in a tragic hero?
8. Do you think Macbeth fits in the category of Aristotelian tragic hero in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*?



### 5.6 FURTHER READINGS

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Prism: Bangalore, 2005. Print.
- Baxter, John and Patrick Atherton. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. Print.
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- Bywater, Ingram. *Poetics: Aristotle*. London: Oxford, 1920. Ebook.
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- Lucas, D.W (ed). *Aristotle: Poetics*. London: Oxford, 1980. Print.

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## **MODULE II: LONGINUS AND PHILIP SIDNEY**

## **UNIT 6: LONGINUS ON THE SUBLIME**

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Longinus: Life and Works
- 6.3 Reading *On the Sublime*
- 6.4 Longinus as a Critic
- 6.5 Summing Up
- 6.6 Assessment Question
- 6.7 References and Recommended Readings

### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit aims to focus on the effect of good writing in the area of criticism. Longinus was a Greek teacher of rhetoric. His treatise *On the Sublime* or *Peri Hypsous* is a canonical work. It elaborates how the reader is elevated to a higher plane through the great quality of a literary work. Precisely speaking, Longinus's major contribution is the idea of "sublime". The dictionary meaning or the direct denotation of "sublime" is that of very great excellence or beauty. The discourse on "sublimity" embodied by certain amount of loftiness and excellence of language in writing takes the readers "out of himself". This results in discovery of a higher level of truth and appreciation of aesthetics.

### **6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In the two previous sections you have studied the two classical Greek critics Plato and Aristotle and their foundational literary texts the *Republic* and the *Poetics* respectively. By now you have formed some fundamental ideas about literary criticism from your study of these two iconic books. In this unit you will be introduced to one

more classical Greek critic and philosopher, Cassius Longinus. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- familiarize yourself with the life and works of Longinus.
- critically analyse Longinus' *On the Sublime*.
- critically analyse the key concepts discussed by Longinus.
- form an idea on the later application of Longinus' critical principles by other critics
- identify the merits and drawbacks in Longinus' literary criticism.

## **6.2 LONGINUS: LIFE AND WORKS**

History does not provide much document in support of Longinus' life and events. The manuscripts of his work, particularly the Paris manuscript of the tenth century mentions the name(s) 'Dionysius or Longinus' and 'Dionysius Longinus' which could be the name of one or three persons. Whatever it may be the fact remains it does not match any known person. R. A. Scott-James believes that Longinus was Cassius Longinus, Minister of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra (a Syrian protectorate of Rome) who wrote *On the Sublime* in the third century A. D (*The Making of Literature*, 80-84). Others like W Rhys Roberts (*Longinus on the Sublime*), W. K. Wimsatt Jr & Cleanth Brooks (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 98) maintain that the book cannot be written later than 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D. Longinus is believed to have been born in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Lanciano, Italia. Not only is the real name of this distinguished critic unknown but his works remain fragmented. At least one-third of it is missing. Even the parts that remain are by and large disconnected.

### **YOU SHOULD KNOW**

- Longinus's idea of aesthetic of literary criticism.
- To judge a work of art on the basis of his power to carry away, transport or move to ecstasy by its grandeur and passion.
- Emphasis on the order and grandeur both in thought and language.

- The role of imagination in literary interpretation.

### 6.3 READING ON THE SUBLIME

The treatise *On the Sublime* was originally written in Greek. It has been translated into English. Translation of Jahn (Bonn, 1867), revised by Vahlen, and republished in 1884, adds to the Preface that Longinus' work is "occasionally running into strange eccentricities of language". However, the treatise is a significant inquiry into the methods by which a certain quality of literary composition may be achieved. Longinus addresses his work as a letter to a friend, probably a Roman pupil, Terentianus. The treatise sources from their reading of the work on sublime by Caecilius. This makes us sure that the concept of sublime existed even before Longinus. But it was him who popularised and gave a new boost to it.

The question which sublimity seeks primarily to answer, thus, is a question which neither Plato nor Aristotle or the "scholastic" rhetoricians of Greece and Rome would have indicated as a principal question even in the study of literature. The question posed by Longinus is, therefore, for Plato, at best an elementary one; for Aristotle, on the other hand, it would have been an impossible one, since Aristotle's method entails a distinction between rhetoric and poetics and involves, even within these, a specialized treatment dependent upon a distinction into kinds. In such a method the question which Longinus poses as the primary question of his art consequently would not have been answerable as a generality; even in specific treatment, on the other hand, it would not have served as the subject matter even of an operculum and in its reduction to the Aristotelian method would have been relegated, perhaps, only to the discussion of appropriate and impressive stylistic in the third book of the Rhetoric. Lastly, for the "scholastic" rhetoricians of Greece and Rome, the question of sublimity is posed never as an end but as

a question relevant to the various means—more specifically, to the different kinds.

The **concept of sublime** refers to—

- Loftiness and excellence of language
- Great passion controlled by reasoning
- It is not innate, it can be acquired by instruction
- Image of the greatness of mind.

*On the Sublime* is divided into **six major parts**, as follows:—

- The Work of Caecilius. Definition of the Sublime. Whether Sublimity falls within the rules of Art.
- Vices of Style opposed to the Sublime: Affectation, Bombast, False Sentiment, Frigid Conceits. The cause of such defects.
- The true Sublime, what it is, and how distinguishable.
- Five Sources of the Sublime (how Sublimity is related to Passion).
- Vices of Style destructive to Sublimity.
- Why this age is so barren of great authors—whether the cause is to be sought in a despotic form of government, or, as Longinus rather thinks, in the prevailing corruption of manners, and in the sordid and paltry views of life which almost universally prevail.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Does Longinus want to keep rhetoric within the domain of practical and concrete?

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2. Do they correspond to the truth?

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3. What are the major parts of *On the Sublime*?

The treatise leads to political speculation about elevating, moving powers of poetry and oratory. It is also combined with practical suggestions about the grammatical constructions and figures of speech that contribute to the effectiveness of great or sublime writing. To quote from the treatise: “The Sublime,” they tell us, “is born in a man, and not to be acquired by instruction; genius is the only master who can teach it. The vigorous products of nature” (such is their view) “are weakened and in every respect debased, when robbed of their flesh and blood by frigid technicalities.”” Longinus proposes that sublimity is innate or inborn. It can only be polished with experience but it cannot be acquired by learning.

The lofty ideas can be observed only through great command over language and thought. The power of language elevates readers’ minds and shows a way to transport it to higher order. It is to be noted that sublimity has a lasting impact. Hence it is not connected with momentary experience. The experience of sublime as conceived by Longinus generates a compact whole extending its scope to the concept of participatory culture.

Longinus conceives a supra-human realm to exist. At the same insistence was also made to the concept that nature is not without method and system. Art can make us realise that there are some elements of expression that depends entirely on natural endowment. Longinus’s criticism aims for the judgement of literary work. To give judgement requires ripe experience. Longinus was concerned with the emotive power of language combined with the great ideas

of emotional impact a literature has on its readers. His work is considered to be an extension of Geological theories of rhetoric.

Greatness in writing emerges from eloquent ideas. According to Longinus there are **five sources** of great writing:

- (a) Vigour of mental conception, a great about which to write. Grand thoughts are the natural outcome of nobility of soul.
- (b) Strong inspired emotion or passion.
- (c) Adequate fashioning of speech and thought. Importance of figure of speech (that includes-Adjuration, Rhetorical Question, Asyndeton, Hyperbaton, Periphrasis).
- (d) Nobility of diction, including the appropriate choice of words and use of artistic language. Dignified expression, ornamentation of style falls within this. He also talks about use of familiar words, metaphors, comparisons and similes, hyperbole. To quote from the treatise: “Human blessings and human ills commonly flow from the same source: and, to apply this principle to literature, those ornaments of style, those sublime and delightful images, which contribute to success, are the foundation and the origin, not only of excellence, but also of failure.”
- (e) Dignified and distinguished word arrangement. It concerns with structure. Example can be-Modulation of Syllables, Composition.

In connection with the idea of sublimity, here is an example of greatness in poetry cited from the original text on the sons of Aloeus:

*Highly they raged  
To piled huge Ossa on the Olympian peak  
And Pelion with all his waving trees  
On Ossa's crest to raise, and climb the sky  
And the yet more tremendous climax  
And now had they accomplished it.*

Now consider how Homer gives dignity to his divine persons—

*As far as lies his airy ken, who sits  
On some tall crag, and scans the wine-dark sea:  
So far extends the heavenly coursers' stride.*

Another example cited by Longinus can be Aeschylus, who is especially bold in forming images, suited to his heroic themes: as when he says of his “Seven against Thebes”—

*Seven mighty men, and valiant captains, slew  
Over an iron-bound shield a bull, then dipped  
Their fingers in the blood, and all invoked  
Ares, Enyo, and death-dealing Flight  
In witness of their oaths...*

Again, Hector in the *Iliad*, says-

*With mighty voice called to the men of Troy  
To storm the ships, and leave the bloody spoils:  
If any I behold with willing foot  
Shunning the ships, and lingering on the plain,  
That hour I will contrive his death.*

With such examples Longinus explains his idea of the sublime, and what he meant by elevation of thoughts and transportation (ekstasis).

#### **6.4 LONGINUS AS A CRITIC**

Longinus insistence on passion, ecstasy, imagination and exaltation inspires Scott James to call him the “first romantic critic”. The aesthetic criticism of Classical Age was foregrounded in the hands of Longinus. He did not judge a critic by set rules. He judged a work more by its essence than by its forms. He advanced his theory of sublimity and insisted that the reader or hearer should be carried away, transported and moved to ecstasy by the grandeur and passion of the work. In Longinus’ criticism classicism was touched with romanticism but not darkened. It was a sane and bright criticism because of the contact with classical criticism. Longinus showed great reverence for ancient Greek models for traditions. He is classical in the balance he maintains between genius and unimpassioned hard work in his sense of the need for fitness. But he also differed in some ways from the classical view of criticism in



that he suggested not more than two metaphors at a time should not be used in a work.

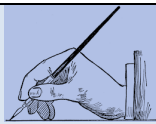
The concept of sublime is the most crucial and often discussed one in the field of literary theory. It is also widely discussed in the discipline of Philosophy. Notwithstanding its application the concept refers to loftiness, height and elevation. What sublimity aims is to judge any piece of writing from the standpoint of ecstasy, astonishment, wonder, admiration. Originally, the very idea of sublime was applied specifically to discourses and experiences attached to religion. The application and meaning of the term are experiencing changing scenario in the hands of the literary critics. The term sublimity can be substituted by 'lofty' and 'profound'.

Longinus sheds light more on the production than the poet. Men are often carried away, as if by intoxication, into displays of emotion which are not caused by the nature of the subject, but are purely personal and wearisome. To know why the author gives more importance to the sublime, it can be explained that, in the opinion of the author, man himself does not have the capacity of causing the astonishment. The production that comes out of the flawed man, poet or not, is what ultimately produces the transcendental effect that is hoped to be elicited in the hearer. The other reason is that the production is meant to be a gift that keeps on giving; it is something metaphysical (beyond the apparently physical) that affects everyone in a different way, bringing up pent up emotions, or inspiring emotions unknown. For, as if instinctively, our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting; as though it had itself produced what it has heard.

To shed light on the poet alone would mean that the poet was filled with joy and the result was the production of a poem. Yet, the metaphysical trait that the author conveys upon the production entails that the production will inspire both the poet and the listener. The production, once out of the mouth of the poet, takes a life of its

own and moves on to astonish the lives of others. That is the basic premise of what "sublime" is according to the essay.

The idea is aptly critical both in aesthetics and rhetoric. It is believed that a consideration of the key theories of sublimity reveals a broad overlap between the aesthetics of Nature and literary criticism that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *On the Sublime*, it is clearly expressed that man is born with a tendency to love greatness. Longinus conceives of skill and techniques as means not as ends. His consideration of the nature of criticism involves some knowledge of philosophy. It helps him to establish a philosophical orientation to his criticism. Longinus has developed his ideal of criticism from the notion that Nature has implanted in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine. He focuses on the nature of sublime and its formative processes concentrating primarily on the significance of originality of thought.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Comment on Longinus' concept of the sublime.

A series of ten horizontal dashed lines for writing the answer to the question.

## 6.5 SUMMING UP

Longinus's contribution to the world of English criticism is perceived in respect of moral and imaginative power to support a writer's work thereby to ascribe greatness in literature through the vigour and grandeur of emotion as well as language. At the heart of Longinus' text is the criticism of artistic performance. Longinus places rhetoric under the standard of pragmatic. To sum up, the prime position of Longinus is derived from the statement "Nature has appointed us men to be no base or ignoble animals; ... she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whether is elevated and more divine than ourselves."

The idea of sublime has been borrowed by critics, poets and writers who followed Longinus. In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Anglo-Irish philosopher Edmund Burke distinguishes that the sublime is infinite and metaphysical while the beautiful is always finite. He blended sublime with terror, distanced pain, observed danger, vastness in dimension and quality. German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant in his work *Critique of Judgement* (1790) defines sublime as "what is absolutely great". Sublime, according to him, is an outrage on the imagination. He divides the sublime into two types- a)the mathematical sublime encompasses the sublime of magnitude, b)the dynamic sublime encompasses the objects whose overwhelming power of nature makes the distant observer helpless. Sublime also exists in the understanding of aesthetics in Gothic literature, the Graveyard School of Poetry, and Romanticism. The concept of sublime has evolved from its origin point. What Longinus meant by sublime in his treatise slightly varies from what Burke meant and how the Romantic poets produced its effect in their poetry.

Consider these lines from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude, Book- XIII*

*Meanwhile, the moon looked down upon this shew  
In single glory, and we stood, the mist  
Touching our very feet; and from the shore  
At distance not the third part of a mile  
Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,  
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.*

It reflects an amalgamation of beauty and terror. It heightens the plane of the reader by a feeling of exaltation. The deification of the gloomy setting and the infinite quality of nature is foregrounded to create the effect. The Romantic poets certainly draw this skill from their predecessors. One of the most significant poets they have borrowed from is Milton. The description of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is another fitting example. However, the sublime originates in Longinus, when it comes to criticism of literature.



## 6.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Elaborate the basic principles of Longinus's criticism.
2. Why does Longinus shed light on the production itself rather than the poet?
3. Write shortly on the concept of sublime.
4. What are the sources of sublimity?
5. What are the six parts of the treatise *On the Sublime*?
6. How did the concept of sublime evolve in the hands of later critics, poets and writers?
7. Prepare an explanatory note on the sources of great writing as articulated by Longinus.



## 6.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

Kapoor, K and Ranga Kapoor, ed. *Canonical Text of English Literary Criticism*. Delhi: Academic Foundation. 1995

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## **UNIT 7: PHILIP SIDNEY:AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Learning Objectives
- 7.2 Philip Sidney: Life and Works
- 7.3 Literary Criticism in the age of Sidney
- 7.4 Reading *An Apology for Poetry*
- 7.5 Sidney as a Critic
- 7.6 Summing Up
- 7.7 Assessment Question
- 7.8 References and Recommended Readings

### **7.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit aims to focus on the reasoning of Philip Sidney regarding the place of poetry in art. The value of communication inherent in the medium of poetry is the major concern of this work. His work *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), also known as *A Defence of Poesie* and *The Defence of Poetry*, was written as a response to the Puritan playwright Stephen Gosson's attack on poetry. Stephen Gosson dedicated his work *The School of Abuse* (1579) which was an attack on English stage to Philip Sidney. It is believed that Gosson's puritanical views degrading poetry and drama motivated Sidney to write *An Apology for Poetry* in about 1580. In this critical treatise Sidney counters Gosson's charges against the genre of poetry and its relevance to the society. In the process he establishes certain principles of poetry writing, its production and outcome. Sidney also critiques Plato's idea of the mad poet, who is to be banished from his ideal republic. His thoughts are revolutionary and it points at the fact that multiple opinions regarding a genre co-exist in literary criticism. Everything works in the structure of thesis (statement or thought) and anti-thesis (counter-statement and counter-thought). The cycle goes on.

## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the earlier units you have studied the three iconic Greek classical critics Plato, Aristotle, and Longinus. In this unit you will be introduced to a pioneering English critic and a prominent literary figure of the Elizabethan Age, Sir Philip Sidney. After reading this unit you are expected to be able to:


- Familiarize yourself with the life and works of Philip Sidney
- Critically analyse Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*
- Comprehend the key concepts in Sidney's literary criticism and the impact he had on latter English criticism
- Identify the merits and drawbacks in Sidney's literary criticism.

## 7.2 PHILIP SIDNEY: LIFE AND WORKS

The study of the connection between logic and poetry flourished in the hands of Philip Sidney. A remarkable name in the Elizabeth Age, Philip Sidney was a prominent poet, prose writer and an essayist. Enriching English literary criticism with the introduction of Aristotle's works, Sidney provided a dimension to the critical. With the revival of classical learning, literary theory and criticism received new emphasis. The change was noticed in the outlook from theoretical to secular. With the re-discovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Italy, new discussions started regarding the true nature of poetry.

Philip Sidney was born on 30 November, 1554 at Penshurst Place, Kent. He was the eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. Remembered as one of the prominent figures of the Elizabethan age, Sidney was a poet, courtier, scholar and soldier. In 1572, he was elected as a Member of Parliament of Shrewsbury. He was first enlisted in diplomatic service, functioning as an envoy to King Charles IX of France. While in Paris, Sidney witnessed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Protestant Huguenots by Catholics. He also met Hubert Languet, a politically influential humanist who became a lifelong friend and adviser, in Europe.

He joined the royal court and soon became popular by virtue of the patronage of his uncle, Earl of Leicester and by his own qualities of head and heart. Sidney was a keenly militant protestant. He joined the Battle of Zutphen. He fought for the Protestant cause against the Spanish. He received a fatal injury and met his end at Arnhem on 17 October, 1586. His major works include *The Lady of May* (one act play), *Astrophel and Stella* (sonnets), *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (long prose work), *An Apology for Poetry* and *The Sidney Psalms*.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>	
	<p>1. Whose charges against poetry Philip Sidney counters in <i>An Apology for Poetry</i>?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>2. Name the book written by Stephen Gosson and dedicated to Philip Sidney.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>	

### **7.3 LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE AGE OF SIDNEY**

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, numerous Greek scholars took refuge in various capitals of Europe. Those places became the centres of humanistic learning. With the other influence in art and literature marked changes were noticed in literary theory and criticism too. Italy was the pioneer in this field and the Italian influence remained predominant through 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century.



As the age enjoyed multifaceted influence on the critical writings it happens to be the literary age with five critical stages to identify the salient features. They can be named as a) Rhetorical Criticism, b) Poetic Forms and Metrical Studies, c) Philosophical and Apologetic Criticism, d) Self Conscious Art, e) Rise of Neo Classicism. Philip Sidney falls under the third stage. It was the result of the attack of the Puritans on the poetry, especially dramatic poetry and the attacks of the classicists on English versification and rhyme. Required by the exigencies of the moment to defend poetry in general, these authors set out to examine the fundamental grounds of the criticism of poetry and to formulate basic principles. In this attempt they, consciously or unconsciously, sought aid from the critics of Italy. Sidney becomes the chief representative of this group. Poetry, and all imaginative literature, continued to be justified allegorically.

The age was so elegant in its treatment of poetry that even the Puritans and moralists who attacked poetry acknowledged its greatness. Sidney took up his writings to defend poetry.

#### **7.4 READING AN APOLOGIE FOR POETRY**

Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy* (1580-81) was written as a reply to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*. Gosson (1554-1624) levelled four charges against poetry. They were:

- (i) A man could employ his time more usefully than reading poetry,
- (ii) It is the 'mother of lies',
- (iii) It is immoral and 'the nurse of abuse' and
- (iv) Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal commonwealth.

Such forceful attack provoked a number of replies. Sidney's *Apology* is not only a reply to Gosson but much more than a mere reply. It is a spirited defence of poetry against all the charges that had been laid at its door since Plato. He says that poetry is the oldest of all branches of learning; it is superior to philosophy by its charm, to history by its universality, to science by its moral end, to law by its encouragement of human rather than civic goodness. Among its

various species the pastoral pleases by its helpful comments on contemporary events and life in general, the elegy by its kindly pity for the weakness of mankind and the wretchedness of the world, the satire by its pleasant ridicule of folly, the comedy by its ridiculous imitation of the common errors of life, the tragedy by its moving demonstration of “the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded,” the lyric by its sweep praise of all that is praiseworthy, and the epic by its representation of the loftiest truths in the loftiest manner. Neither in whole nor in parts, thus, does poetry deserve the abuse hurled at it by its detractors.

Sidney’s *Apology* is a veritable epitome of the literary criticism of Italian Renaissance; and so thoroughly it is imbued with this spirit, that no other work, Italian, French, or English can be said to give so complete and so noble a conception of the temper and the principles of Renaissance criticism. Sidney is the herald of Neo-classicism in England. He is essentially a theorist of the exuberant imagination. He fuses the romantic and the classical tendencies.

His *Defence of Poetry* is the earliest attempt to deal with the poetic art, practically and not theoretically. His judgements are based on contemporary literature and show ample good sense and sound scholarship. It is not merely empty, abstract theorising; apart from the unities, his judgements are not governed to and great extent by rules and theories. His ultimate test is of a practical kind, i.e., the power of poetry to move to virtuous action. He has thus contributed to the appreciation of literature in the concrete.

Sidney’s *Apology* not only defends poetry from Puritan attack but it has thrown valuable light on the nature and function of poetry. The doctrine ambitious and humble at the same time, is not only crucial to an understanding of Sidney’s life and writing, but also indicates how poetry could cease to be regarded as a mere rhetorical art. Here under this doctrine the limitless scope of poetry has been defined more clearly than had ever been done by any Englishman before. Poetry, according to Sidney has a dual function. It teaches and amuses. Therefore, Sidney contends that, poetry cannot be a waste of

time as alleged by the puritans rather the poet instructs and entertains the people at the same time. It is a source of education. In ancient Greek society, for instance, it was a significant part of people's lives.

Against the charge of Gosson and Plato, that poetry breeds lies and falsehood, Philip Sidney responds by saying that the poet never affirms anything as truth and the poetic truths are ideal and universal in nature. Therefore they cannot lie. They play with their imaginations to communicate the metaphysical thoughts.

### LET US STOP AND THINK



Stephen Gosson (1554-1624) was a puritan to the fingertips and turned to be an anti-theatrical writer though at one point of his life he had himself written plays. Launching a scathing attack on the theatrical art he wrote *Schoole of Abuse, containing a pleasant invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and Such like Caterpillars of the Commonwealth* (1579). His intense hatred for poetry can be seen from the following excerpt.

“I may well liken Homer to Mithecus, and poets to cooks, the pleasures of the one win the body from labor and conquereth the sense; the allurements of the other draws the mind from virtue and confoundeth wit.” (Excerpt from *The School of Abuse*)

Countering the charge that poetry is the source of abuse, Sidney responds that if poetry is abused it is abused by none other than the people. History and philosophy breed more abuse than poetry by dealing with matters like battles, violence, bloodshed and killings. In contrast to history and philosophy poetry deals with higher values like peace, morality and knowledge. Sidney writes, “The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself for the most part upon

other histories...” Asserting the superiority of poetry to philosophy and history Sidney says that the philosopher merely presents a precept and the historian presents examples from the past; but the poet deals with virtue and morality. The philosopher comes up with thorny arguments, bare rules, and vague concepts. Thus, it is only people who abuse poetry. Poetry does not nurse abuse.

Gosson in his fourth accusation against poetry had supported Plato’s view that poets should be banished from his ideal republic as they are instrumental in spreading a culture of sloth and falsehood. Responding to this charge Sidney argues that Plato had never said that all poets should be banished from his ideal republic. He had encouraged banishing only those poets who are inferior, especially those poets who are unable to instruct the children. Moreover, Plato himself has explored his poetics in his works like the *Dialogues* and *Republic*. The poet imitates the dull nature and reconstructs it into something creative. This is how poetry works.

Sidney also throws light on tragic-comedy. Sidney's conception of tragedy is somewhat indeterminate composite in character, made up for the most part of ideas reminiscent of medieval tradition together with fragments drawn from Aristotle as interpreted by Italian critics." while basically he adheres to the medieval tradition that tragedy deals with the fall of kings and mighty tyrants and teaches “the uncertainty of this world”, he also echoes the views of Aristotle, Seneca, Horace and some Italian critics such as Scaliger, Minturno, and Lodovico Castelvetro. Aristotle said that the function of tragedy is to arouse the feelings of “admiration and commiseration”. To achieve this end, tragedy must have stately speeches and well sounding phrases. From Castelvetro comes the narrow interpretation of the unities of time and place in tragedy though Sidney refers to “Aristotle’s precept” and “common reason” for supporting his views. From Horace he derives some practical hints for the handling of the tragic plot.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the four charges made against poetry by Stephen Gosson?

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2. How does Sidney counter those charges?

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### *Poetry is superior to philosophy and history*

Sidney contends that poetry enjoys a superior position to philosophy and history. He is of the view that poetry is the first source of knowledge and historians and philosophers were initially poets before they became what they are. Sidney cites the example of Turkish, Irish and Indian (which he terms as a barbarian society) societies to drive his point home that these societies revered poets like a sage. Even in ancient Roman and Greek societies the poet was revered as *Vates* which meant a prophet. Poetry not only delights but also teaches. Sidney argues “Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle terms it in his word *mimēsis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight.”

Sidney asserts the superiority of poetry to history and philosophy by arguing that the philosopher deals with precept and the historian is dependent on the examples from the past whereas the poet uses precept and examples both. Reinforcing his argument he writes:

The philosopher therefore and the historian are they which  
would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by

example; but both not having both, do both halt. For the philosopher, setting down with thorny arguments the bare rule, is so hard of utterance and so misty to be conceived, that one that has no other guide but him shall wade in him till he be old, before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest. For his knowledge stands so upon the abstract and general that happy is that man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. On the other side, the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things, and not to the general reason of things, that his example draws no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.

Sidney explains that the philosopher distinguishes virtue from vice without any clarity and in a very confused manner and puts forward with bare facts the principles of morality. The historian deals with virtue by presenting examples from the past. However, the historian is bound by the facts thereby forced to ignore possibilities and other interpretations. The poet deals with both, the task of the philosopher and the historian and relates the particular with the general. The poet through delight teaches all sections of people unlike the historian and the philosopher who teach only the elite class of the society. The poet through imitation teaches the people about vice and virtue. He presents examples of the triumph of virtue over vice and conveys the moral lesson to people making them more virtuous. The philosopher teaches in an obscure manner whereas the poet teaches in such a lucid way so that all sections of the society can understand his teachings. Sidney falls back on Aristotle's argument that poetry is more valuable and more philosophic than history. The poet deals with the possibilities not with 'what is' but with 'what should be'. According to Sidney art imitates nature, and the poet through his imagination is capable of creating an ideal nature better than the real one.

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#### 7.4 SIDNEY AS A CRITIC

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Sidney's practical and constructive criticism contributed a lot to the better understanding of literary value. Recognised as a herald of Neo-classicism, Sidney was the fusion of Romanticism and classicism. He was greatly influenced by the critical writings of Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Scaliger, Minturno and a host of classical writers. Sidney's originality lies in the concept of following the classical critics in assigning them authority to arrange and adopt ideas that are contemporary. What Sidney did as a critic was to value poetry not only for its delight but for its moral effect and practical utility.

The veritable epitome of Sidney's writing, *Apology for Poetry* and *The Defence of Poesy*, heralded the Neo Classicism in England. In both the texts though the sources were classical, he is essentially a theorist of exuberant imagination. In all his views, on the nature and function of poetry, on the three unities, on tragedy and comedies, on diction and metre, he represents contemporary trends.

Sidney's aim of criticism was a revolutionary one. He distinguishes literature from the other forms of writing on the grounds that literature as its primary aim the giving of pleasure to the reader and any moral and didactic element is necessarily either subordinate to that or at least, unlikely to succeed without it. In a religious age, deeply suspicious of all forms of fiction, poetry and representation and always desiring to denounce them as the work of the devil, this was a very great step to take. Sidney aimed to write about literature in general not about any individual writer. His practical criticism is constructive.

His judgements are based on contemporary literature and show ample of good sense and sound scholarship. It is not merely empty, abstract theorising, apart from the unities, and his dislike to tragic-comedy, his judgements are not governed, to any great extent, by rules and theories. His ultimate taste is of a practical kind i.e. the power of poetry to move to virtuous action. He considered poetry as the oldest

of all branches of learning and establishes its superiority. Poetry, according to Sidney, is superior to philosophy in its charm, to history by its universality, to science by its moral end, to law by its encouragement of human rather than civic goodness.

For Sidney the poet has the ability to move men to more virtuous action. It gives to poetry the role formerly ascribed to scriptures and thus reflects a humanistic world view. Sidney's poetic theory rests on the assumption that man is capable of doing good and is therefore completely dependent on the grace of Good. Sidney believed that through the knowledge of an ideal world men progress and become better people. What they learn in the ideal world through poetry and they take into the real world, thus bettering both themselves and the world. Ultimately for both Plato and Sidney, intimate knowledge of an ideal world leads men to the attainment of right living.

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## 7.6 SUMMING UP

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Sir Philip Sidney advocates the practical idea that poetry does not imitate, rather it creates. Being an amalgamation of classical and romantic Sir Philip Sidney is the first English advocate of the romantic concept of imaginative creation. His ultimate creation proved in the appreciation of the classical and implementing in the contemporary way.

American educator, Joel Elias Spingarn, is of the opinion, "The introduction of Aristotelianism into England was the direct result of the influence of the Italian critics; and the agent in bringing this new influence into English letters was Sir Philips Sidney." His *Defence of Poesy*, "is an authentic example of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance; and so thoroughly is it imbued with this spirit, that no other work, Italian, French, or English, can be said to give so complete



and so noble a conception of the temper and the principles of Renaissance criticism". Furthermore, New Critics, Wimsatt and Brooks, emphasise the note of romance in the *Apology* and write, "The sources of Sidney's 'Defence' were classical, but the spirit was not very sternly classical. Sidney sends up the joyous fireworks of the Italianate Renaissance. His colours are enthusiastic, neo-Platonic, the dual purple and gold. The motion is soaring. He is essentially a theorist of the exuberant imagination."

Sidney is interpreted in multiple ways by the later critics. One thing is for sure, he brings to attention the literary value inherent in poetry. His defence acts like a counter-statement. This work also encourages the art of defence or writing-back. Such satirical works made way for techniques like repartee, counter-argument, parody, etc in the years to come. Sidney's *Apology* calls poetry the cradle of civilization, channel of divine power, light giver to ignorance. Poetry is most fruitful of all knowledge. It is a noble art form. There is no place for corruption there. Instead, it acts as a medium to do away with corruption. Sidney stands against the charge of degradation of poetry. Its aesthetic appeal, according to him, is universal. The ancient Romans paid high reverence to the poets. The *Vates*, as they called him, was a Diviner, a Prophet, or a Foreseer. And poetry is a constructive and creative art form. It does not limit itself to copying or imitation. But it is a reproduction of the imitation into something new. While tackling three types of poetry- religious, philosophical and poetry as an imaginative treatment of life and nature, the poet becomes a creator in himself. The poet, Sidney declares, "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite a new, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like." Poetry is not only about rhymes; it is about harmony of thought and diction. Sidney argues that Gosson's remarks are false and England (the step-mother of Poetry) ought to rise its awareness regarding the value of the poetic form.



### 7.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Summarise Sidney as a romantic poet.
2. Comment on Sidney's humanistic world view.
3. What are the various objections raised by the Puritan playwright Gosson against Poetry?
4. How did Sidney defend the objections raised by the Puritans against Poetry?
5. Consider Philip Sidney as a critic.
6. Discuss Sidney's view on three unities.
7. What is Sidney's opinion about Plato's view of poet and poetry?
8. Is poetry above philosophy and history? Discuss.
9. Discuss the salient features of critical writing during the 16th century.
10. How does Sidney prove that poetry is superior to philosophy and history?



### 7.8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

Gilbert H Allan. *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967

Kapoor, K and Ranga Kapoor, ed. *Canonical Text of English Literary Criticism*. Delhi: Academic Foundation, 1995

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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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