Literary Criticism

A Critic is the “One who expresses a reasoned opinion on any matter especially involving a judgment of its value, truth, righteousness, beauty, or technique”.

A Literary Critic is “The evaluative or interpretive work written by professional interpreters of texts. It is "criticism" not because it is negative or corrective, but rather because those who write criticism ask hard, analytical, crucial, or "critical" questions about the works they read”.

A critic is one who likes or dislikes a book, a movie, a dinner. A critic does evaluate but only on the basis of personal preference. A literary critic is usually a professor of literature. Literary criticism is the act of interpreting literature and must be published in an academic publication such as a journal.

I. Introduction

Literary Criticism is discussion of literature, including description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works. Like literature, criticism is hard to define. One of the critic’s tasks is to challenge definitions of literature and criticism that seem too general, too narrow, or unworkable for any other reason. Whatever it is, literary criticism deals with different dimensions of literature as a collection of texts through which authors evoke more or less fictitious worlds for the imagination of readers.

We can look at any work of literature by paying special attention to one of several aspects: its language and structure; its intended purpose; the information and worldview it conveys; or its effect on an audience. Most good critics steer clear of exclusive interest in a single element. In studying a text’s formal characteristics, for example, critics usually recognize the variability of performances of dramatic works and the variability of readers’ mental interpretations of texts. In studying an author’s purpose, critics acknowledge that forces beyond a writer’s conscious intentions can affect what the writer actually communicates. In studying what a literary work is about, critics often explore the complex relationship between truth and fiction in various types of storytelling. In studying literature’s impact on its audience, critics have been increasingly aware of how cultural expectations shape experience.

Because works of literature can be studied long after their first publication, awareness of historical and theoretical context contributes to our understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of them. Historical research relates a work to the life and times of its author. Attention to the nature, functions, and categories of literature provides a theoretical framework joining a past text to the experience of present readers. The tradition of literary criticism surveyed here combines observations by creative writers, philosophers, and, more recently, trained specialists in literary, historical, and cultural studies.

II. Classical Antiquity

The Western tradition’s earliest extended instance of literary criticism occurs in The Frogs (405 BC), a comedy by Athenian playwright Aristophar
contrasting styles of Greek dramatists Aeschylus and Euripides. In the play the two dead masters of Greek tragedy compete for supremacy in Hades (the underworld), debating a fundamental dilemma of all subsequent criticism: Is the writer’s first commitment to uphold and promote morality or to represent reality? Is the task of drama and other forms of literature primarily to improve or primarily to inform the audience?

Greek philosopher Plato found virtually all creative writers deficient on both counts in his dialogue The Republic (about 380 BC). Plato felt that stories about misbehaving gods and death-fearing heroes were apt to steer immature people toward frivolous and unpatriotic conduct. Besides, he argued, poetry tended to arouse the emotions rather than promote such virtues as temperance and endurance. But even at their moral best, Plato viewed writers—like painters and sculptors—as mere imitators of actual human beings, who are themselves very imperfect "copies" or imitations of the eternal idea of Human Being in the divine mind.

Greek philosopher Aristotle produced a strong philosophical defense against such criticism. His Poetics (about 330 BC) presents artistic representation (mimesis) not as mere copying but as creative re-presentation with universal significance. For example, the epic poet and the playwright evoke human beings in action without having to report actual events. Because the poetic approach to human action is more philosophical in nature than a purely historical approach, literature can show the most probable action of a person of a specific type, rather than what an actual person said or did on a particular occasion. Even the portrayal of great suffering and death may thus give pleasure to an audience—the pleasure of learning something essential about reality.

Aristotle justified the poetic arousal of passions by borrowing the concept of catharsis (purification through purging) from contemporary medicine. He suggested that tragedy cures us of the harmful effects of excessive pity, fear, and similar emotions by first inducing such emotions in us, and then pleasurably purging them in the controlled therapeutic setting of theatrical experience. The precise meaning of Aristotle’s concept of catharsis has been debated for many centuries, but most critics of literature and of other arts, such as opera and cinema, find useful his isolation and analysis of six interacting aspects of performed drama: plot, character, thought or theme, diction, music, and spectacle.

Roman poet Horace offered practical advice in Ars Poetica (The Art of Poetry, about 20 BC), a witty letter written in verse to two aspiring authors. His most influential suggestion was to combine the useful (utile) and the sweet (dulce) so as to satisfy a varied audience. Some readers seek benefit, others seek pleasure, he explained, but both kinds of readers will purchase writings that instruct and delight at the same time.

A weightier treatment of poetry appears in a 1st-century AD treatise, On the Sublime, long attributed to a 3rd-century philosopher named Longinus. The unknown author of this Greek text cites passages from Greek poets Homer and Sappho—as well as from orators, historians, philosophers, and the first chapter of Genesis—to prove the superiority of discourse that does not merely persuade or gratify its audience but also transports it into a state of enthusiastic ecstasy. The author analyzes the rhetorical
devices needed to achieve sublime effects but insists that ultimately, “sublimity is the echo of a great soul.”

III. Middle Ages and Renaissance

In medieval Europe, where Latin served as the common language of educated people, much scholarly interest focused on Roman authors and their Greek models. To reconcile non-Christian writings with the official doctrine of the Christian church, critics interpreted them allegorically. Greek and Roman divinities, for example, might be viewed as personifications of certain virtues and vices. Scholars applied similar interpretive methods to Hebrew scriptures to show, for instance, how the biblical story of Jonah surviving in the belly of a big fish foreshadowed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even the parables and metaphors of the Christian Gospels were felt to require allegorical, moral, and spiritual interpretation to achieve a deeper understanding of their meaning. By the 14th century, Italian writers Dante Alighieri and Giovanni Boccaccio suggested that works of nonreligious literature could likewise reward multiple readings beyond the literal level.

Italian translators and commentators of the late 15th and 16th centuries were in the forefront of the Renaissance rediscovery of Aristotle’s Poetics, aided by the commentaries on Aristotle written by Averroës, a 12th-century Arab scholar living in Spain. Ever since the Renaissance, critics influenced by Aristotle focus on artistic representation rather than on an author’s rhetorical and persuasive skills. But the view that persuasion is a major goal of literature, based on the writings of Roman statesman Cicero and Roman educator Quintilian about oratory, helped to shape literary studies well into the 18th century. Even today some critics view all poetry, fiction, and drama as more or less concealed forms of rhetoric that are designed to please or move readers and theatergoers, chiefly as a means of teaching or otherwise persuading them.

English poet Sir Philip Sidney defended the poetic imagination against attacks from English Puritans in his Defence of Poesie (written 1583; published 1595). Unlike historians or philosophers, argued Sidney, a poet affirms nothing and therefore never lies, because a poet’s works are “not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written.” Far from imitating imperfect nature, the poet creates an ideal world of the imagination where virtuous heroes invite admiring readers to imitate them. According to Sidney, philosophers outshine poets when it comes to abstract teaching, but the power to move (or, in today’s language, to motivate) makes the poet ultimately superior because, for teaching to be effective, we need first “to be moved with desire to know” and then “to be moved to do that which we know.”

IV. The 17th and 18th Centuries

The climate of criticism changed with the arrival on the literary scene of such giants as Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Pedro Calderón in Spain; William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and John Milton in England; and Pierre Corneille, Jean Baptiste Racine, and Molière in France. Most of these writers specialized or excelled in drama, and consequently the so-called battle of the ancients and moderns—the critical comparison of Greek and Roman authors with more recent ones—was fought out...
In his Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), English poet and playwright John Dryden presented the conflicting claims of the two sides as a debate among four friends, only one of whom favors the ancient over the modern theater. One modernist prefers the dignified “decorum” of French drama to the confusing “tumult” of actions and emotions on the English stage. By contrast, Dryden’s spokesman prefers the lifelike drama of English theater to French tragedy, which he considers beautiful but lifeless. All agree, however, that “a play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humors, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.”

An Essay on Criticism (1711), by English poet Alexander Pope, put together in verse both ancient and modern opinions. Pope considered nature, including human nature, to be universal, and he saw no contradiction between the modern writer’s task of addressing a contemporary audience and the insistence by traditional critics that certain rules derived from the practice of the ancients be followed: “Those rules of old discovered, not devised, / Are nature still, but nature methodized.”

English writer Samuel Johnson, in the preface to his 1765 edition of Shakespeare’s plays, observed that “nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.” Accordingly, he praised Shakespeare for creating universal characters “who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion.” Yet Johnson could not help objecting to what he saw as the playwright’s “lack of obvious moral purpose” and “gross jests.” In an earlier essay, “On Fiction” (1750), Johnson cautioned against the unselective realism of popular novels written chiefly for “the young, the ignorant, and the idle.” In his view, such people are easily tempted to imitate the novelist’s portrayal of “those parts of nature” which are “discolored by passion, or deformed by wickedness.” Mindful of the impact of literature on the minds of all readers, Johnson demanded that vice, if it must be shown, should appear disgusting, and that virtue should not be represented in an extreme form because people would never emulate what they cannot believe—implausibly virtuous heroes or heroines, for example.

In her pioneering work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), English writer Mary Wollstonecraft addressed the specific situation of women readers. She denounced shallow novelists, who she felt knew little about human nature and wrote “stale tales” in an overly sentimental style. Since most women of her day received little education, Wollstonecraft feared that reading such novels would further hinder women’s “neglected minds” in “the right use of reason.”

In the third quarter of the 18th century, French philosopher, novelist, and outspoken autobiographer Jean Jacques Rousseau offered an alternative to the faith in universal human reason propounded by Pope, Johnson, and other writers. Opponents of excessive rationalism found in Rousseau an advocate of their own growing interest in the expression of emotion, individual freedom, and personal experience. But most 19th-century concepts of literature and criticism were to owe an even greater debt to a number of Germans who concluded or began their intellectual careers between 1770 and 1800: philosophers Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and writer-critics Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann...
von Goethe, Friedrich von Schiller, and the brothers August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Friedrich von Schlegel. All of these thinkers influenced an important 19th-century movement known as romanticism, which emphasized feeling, individual experience, and the divinity of nature.

V. The 19th Century

English poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge gave memorable expression to the romantic mindset developed by their German predecessors and contemporaries. The romantics believed in the primacy of feeling, love, pleasure, and imagination over reason; in the spiritual superiority of nature’s organic forms over mechanical ingenuity; and in the ability of art to restore a lost harmony between the individual and nature, between society and nature, and between the individual and society. In revised versions of the preface to his and Coleridge’s Lyrical Ballads (1798), Wordsworth declared that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and that “the poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure.” The pleasure derived from the writing and reading of poetry was to Wordsworth a loving “acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe” and an indication that the human mind was “the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.” The critical writings of Coleridge in turn stressed the parallel between cosmic creativity and the poet’s godlike creative imagination.

In A Defence of Poetry (written 1821; published 1840), English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley elaborated on similar romantic themes. Shelley also suggested that the utilitarian science and technology of his time enhanced the “inequality of mankind” and that poetry should continue to serve as an antidote to “the principle of the self, of which money is the visible incarnation.” Throughout the Defence, Shelley speaks of poetry in a very broad sense as visionary discourse.

By contrast, two mid-century American poet-critics addressed what they considered to be unique features of poetry. In his essay “The Poet” (written 1842-1843), Ralph Waldo Emerson argued that the poet uses symbols more appropriately than the religious mystic does, because the poet recognizes the multiple meanings of symbols and the ability of language to reflect a continuously changing world, whereas the mystic “nails” symbols to a specific meaning. In a lecture on “The Poetic Principle” (1848), Edgar Allan Poe expressly distinguished pure intellect from taste and moral sense. In Poe’s view, poets need to “tone down in proper subjection to beauty” all “incitements of passion,” precepts of duty,” and “lessons of truth” so that the resulting work may be sensitively judged by our faculty of taste.

In “A Short Essay on Critics”(1840), American author and editor Margaret Fuller described three kinds of literary criticism: subjective indulgence in the critic’s own feelings about a text, apprehensive entry into the author’s world, and comprehensive judging of a work both by its own law and according to universal principles. These categories anticipate the distinctions made by English poet-critic Matthew Arnold between three kinds of critical estimations of the value of a literary work: the personal, the historical, and the real. In his essay on “The Study of Poetry” (1880), Arnold assigned great cultural significance to the unbiased critic’s “real estimates” because, in
an increasingly nonreligious time, “mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.” Yet he believed that critics themselves would have to transcend the narrowness of their own society to perform their role of spiritual guidance. Only by exploring a variety of cultural traditions could they learn and teach “the best” that has been “known and thought in the world,” Arnold cautioned in his essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1865).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arnold’s broadly humanistic views found many disciples. Some of Arnold’s younger contemporaries, however, demanded that writers become more intensely involved with the particular problems of their society. French writer Émile Zola, for example, advocated writing true-to-life works of so-called naturalistic fiction that would reflect the ills of contemporary society with scientific precision, a view Zola advanced in his essay “Le roman expérimental” (1880; translated as “The Experimental Novel,” 1893). At the other extreme, English writer Oscar Wilde favored highly personal literary styles and a critical stance acknowledging that “life imitates art far more than art imitates life,” as he wrote in “The Decay of Lying” (1889). The case for subjective art and criticism was presented most succinctly by French novelist Anatole France in the preface to his La vie littéraire (1888-1893; translated as On Life and Letters, 1910-1924): “The good critic tells the adventures of his soul among masterpieces. There is no more an objective criticism than an objective art.”

VI. 20th-Century Approaches

The social, cultural, and technological developments of the 20th century have vastly expanded the Western critical tradition. Indeed, many critics question just how “Western” this tradition can or should remain. Modern critics in the established cultural centers of Western Europe must heed not only Central Europe and North America but also areas once considered remote, including Russia, Latin America, and, most recently, the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa. At a growing number of universities, professors of literature and related fields pay increasing attention to long-neglected areas of study—for example, works by women and by non-Western writers. The following sketch of various 20th-century approaches names few living critics because it is impossible to predict who among the tens of thousands of writers publishing criticism today will ultimately outshine the others.

A. Formalism, Structuralism, and New Criticism

A text-based critical method known as formalism was developed by Victor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp, and other Russian critics early in the 20th century. It involved detailed inquiry into plot structure, narrative perspective, symbolic imagery, and other literary techniques. But after the mid-1930s, leaders of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its subsequent satellites in Eastern Europe demanded that literature and criticism directly serve their political objectives. Political leaders in those countries suppressed formalist criticism, calling it reactionary. Even such internationally influential opponents of extreme formalism as the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin and the Hungarian Georg Lukács would often find themselves under attack.
The geographical center of formalist orientation started to shift westward in 1926 when scholars of language and literature, most of them Czech, founded the Prague Linguistic Circle, adopting and refining some of the methods of formal analysis developed by their Russian colleagues. Beginning in the late 1940s anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, critic Roland Barthes, and other mid-century thinkers and scholars initiated French structuralism by applying linguistically inspired formal methods to literature and related phenomena. Structuralism attempted to investigate the “structure” of a culture as a whole by “decoding,” or interpreting, its interactive systems of signs. These systems included literary texts and genres as well as other cultural formations, such as advertising, fashion, and taboos on certain forms of behaviour.

The text-centered methods of the formalist critics were also welcomed in the United States because they meshed well with the concerns of so-called New Critics, who focused on the overall structure and verbal texture of literary works. By the 1940s, when Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and Czech literary theorist René Wellek settled at Harvard and Yale universities, respectively, the study of literature in North America had been greatly influenced by the work of Cleanth Brooks and other New Critics. Like his British contemporary Sir William Empson, Brooks applied the skill of close reading chiefly to the analysis of ambiguities, paradoxes, and ironies in individual texts.

Many New Critics looked at metaphor, imagery, and other qualities of literary language apart from both a work’s historical setting and any detailed biographical information that might be available about the author. Other New Critics, however, were more historically or philosophically inclined. New Criticism as a whole was therefore meaningfully supplemented by the work of German-born literary historian Erich Auerbach and of American philosopher Susanne K. Langer, who sought to place individual texts into larger historical and theoretical contexts. Auerbach emphasized historical development in his 1946 book Mimesis, which chronicled changing styles of the literary representation of reality from Greek poet Homer to English author Virginia Woolf. Langer in turn argued that the significant emotions depicted or aroused by literature and other arts are universal human feelings symbolized by the work rather than personal sentiments expressed by a particular writer or artist.

B. Other Critical Methods

In and after the 1920s American-born British poet T. S. Eliot explored how well individual European writers measured up to his aesthetically liberal but politically conservative view of the Western tradition. Canadian critic Northrop Frye, in contrast, opposed any viewpoint narrowed by regionalism or specific ideologies; he attempted to find common elements in the worldwide multiplicity of literary traditions in his book Anatomy of Criticism (1957). Frye and like-minded critics around the globe saw literature and other art forms as manifestations of universal myths and archetypes (largely unconscious image patterns) that cross cultural boundaries. In advocating this view they took cues from British anthropologist Sir James George Frazer and Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung.

In the 1960s and 1970s German philosopher-critic Hans-Georg Gadamer and French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault offered contrary models for addressing literary
and cultural traditions in literary criticism. Gadamer sought to engage past texts in fruitful dialogue with the present by examining different interpretations of literature throughout history; so do German critic Wolfgang Iser and other proponents of Aesthetics of Reception, which examines readers’ responses to literature in a cultural and historical context. In contrast, Foucault wanted to challenge certain basic notions about the Western tradition that most Westerners take for granted. He hoped to discredit Western heritage and its powerful institutions by exposing, or “demystifying,” the repressed origins and oppressive applications of that power. Among literary critics, American Stephen Greenblatt and other so-called New Historicists have similar objectives.

Today’s widespread tendency to interpret texts as hiding rather than revealing what is most significant about themselves has three major sources: the writings of German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche and of Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Influential studies along Marxist lines of the social and economic underpinnings of culture were undertaken by German critic Walter Benjamin before World War II and by Welsh critic Raymond Williams between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. Marxist and Freudian methods of literary criticism were productively combined from the 1920s on by several American writer-critics, including Edmund Wilson and Kenneth Burke. Viewing humans as symbol-using and symbol-misusing animals, Burke approached literary works as often deceptive or self-deceptive symbolic actions that should be critically reenacted, rather than passively contemplated, by their readers.

In a comparably skeptical spirit, current feminist critics in many countries draw attention to literary evidence of ingrained prejudice against women or stereotypic views of women. Their methods often emulate Marxist critiques of oppressive ideologies or Freudian excavations of repressed desires. Contemporary feminist writings are also influenced by the gender-conscious essays of English novelist Virginia Woolf and by The Second Sex (1949), a book-length plea by French thinker and novelist Simone de Beauvoir against the second-class treatment of women. Feminist criticism explores issues relevant to women as authors, as readers, and as fictional characters, and also raises the controversial question of the possible existence of distinctly female writing—recognizably different in the character of its language from discourse shaped by male patterns of thought.

Like feminist, Marxist, and some Freudian critics, nonwhite Western critics and critics emerging in countries newly freed from colonial rule also have challenged many aspects of European and North American culture as socially and psychologically oppressive. Although these so-called multiculturalist critics are united in their opposition to Western domination, they take many different positions on particular issues of race, class, gender, language, and national or ethnic identity.

The frontal attack, initiated by Nietzsche, on any use of language as an instrument of mystification and domination has its most unwavering advocates today in scholars who practice the interpretive technique known as deconstruction. Following French philosopher Jacques Derrida and Belgian-born American critic Paul de Man, deconstructive critics assume that attributing even the most complex single meaning to a text violates the boundless signifying potential of language in a world whei
no facts but only indeterminate meanings and unresolvable conflicts of interpretation. Proponents of deconstruction elaborate on textual ambiguities and paradoxes that earlier interpreters (including the New Critics) attempted to resolve. For deconstructions and other so-called postmodern critics, special difficulties in the interpretation of complex literary works forcefully suggest the general resistance of all texts to definitive meanings.

Recent non-traditional criticism does not represent a complete break with a critical tradition that has always proven hospitable to challenges to its principles. In fact, so-called Western criticism has already begun absorbing the insights of its best contemporary challengers. Undergoing transformation once again, it prepares to encounter what German writer and critic Johann Wolfgang von Goethe hoped would eventually emerge as Weltliteratur: the diverse but intertwined literatures of the world.
Aristotle’s Poetics

Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) is notorious for attacking art in Book 10 of his Republic. According to Plato’s 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: a painting of a chair is an imitation of a chair which in turn is an imitation of the Form of Chair. Further, Plato argues that art serves to excite the emotions, which can detract from the balanced reasoning that is essential to virtue.

Aristotle’s Poetics can be read as a response to Plato’s attack on art. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) was a student at Plato’s Academy from the time he was seventeen until Plato’s death some twenty years later. He spent the next twelve years engaging in scientific research and serving as tutor to the then teenaged Alexander the Great. He returned to Athens in 335 B.C.E., and founded his own school on the steps of the Lyceum. He remained there until 323 B.C.E., when he was forced to leave as a result of his associations with Alexander. He died a year later of natural causes. The Lyceum remained open until 525 C.E., when it was closed by the emperor Justinian.

None of the works of Aristotle that we have today were actually published by Aristotle. He wrote a number of treatises and dialogues, but these have all been lost. What survives are collections of notes, possibly from lecture courses Aristotle gave at the Lyceum, which are often unclear or incomplete. The Poetics, in true form, was likely a much longer work than the one we have today. Aristotle supposedly wrote a second book on comedy, which is now lost.

The main focus of the Poetics is on Greek tragedy. Though there were thousands of tragedies and scores of playwrights, we only have thirty-three extant tragedies, written by the three great tragedians: Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.E.), Sophocles (496–405 B.C.E.), and Euripides (485–406 B.C.E.). Tragedies were performed in Athens twice annually at festivals in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine and excess. Though the tragedies likely evolved out of religious ceremonies celebrating the cycle of the seasons, they became increasingly secular. The dramatic festivals were immensely important events, and the winning playwrights achieved great fame.

The Poetics also discusses epic poetry, using the example of Homer (eighth century B.C.E.) almost exclusively. Homer wrote two great epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, which deal with the fall of Troy and Odysseus’s subsequent wanderings respectively. These epics are the source of a great number of Greek tragedies and are considered among the earliest great works of world literature.
Though the Poetics is not one of Aristotle's major works, it has exercised a great deal of influence on subsequent literary theory, particularly in the Renaissance. Later interpreters unfortunately turned many of Aristotle's suggestions into strict laws, restricting the flexibility of drama in ways that Aristotle would not have anticipated. The tragedies of Racine and Corneille in particular are formed according to these demands. Even though such great playwrights as Shakespeare often went against these laws, they were held as the model for writing tragedy well into the nineteenth century.

**Important Terms used in Poetics**

**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 peripetia.

**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.

**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 catharsis is a release of built up emotional energy, much like a good cry. After catharsis, we reach a more stable and neutral emotional state.

**Peripetia:** - A reversal, either from good to bad or bad to good. Peripetia often occurs at the climax of a story, often prompted by anagnorisis. Indeed, we might say that the peripetia is the climax of a story: it is the turning point in the action, where things begin to move toward a conclusion.
**Lusis:** - Literally "untying," the lusis is all the action in a tragedy from the climax onward. All the plot threads that have been woven together in the desis are slowly unraveled until we reach the conclusion of the play.

**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 peripetia, or turning point, these plot threads begin to unravel in what is called the lusis, or denouement.

**Analytical Overview**

Aristotle approaches poetry with the same scientific method with which he treats physics and biology. He begins by collecting and categorizing all the data available to him and then he draws certain conclusions and advances certain theses in accordance with his analysis. In the case of tragedy, this means he divides it into six parts, identifies plot as the most important part, and examines the different elements of plot and character that seem to characterize successful tragedies. He tentatively suggests that tragedy ultimately aims at the arousal of pity and fear and at the catharsis of these emotions. Then he begins to lay out certain theories as to what makes a good tragedy: it must focus on a certain type of hero who must follow a certain trajectory within a plot that is tightly unified, etc. Aristotle's conclusions, then, are based less on personal taste and more on an observation of what tends to produce the most powerful effects.

Aristotle's method raises the fundamental question of whether poetry can be studied in the same way as the natural sciences. Though there are some benefits to Aristotle's method, the ultimate answer seems to be "no." The scientific method relies on the assumption that there are certain regularities or laws that govern the behavior of the phenomena being investigated. This method has been particularly successful in the physical sciences: Isaac Newton, for example, managed to reduce all mechanical behavior to three simple laws. However, art does not seem to be governed by unchanging, unquestionable laws in the same way that nature is. Art often thrives and progresses by questioning the assumptions or laws that a previous generation has accepted. While Aristotle insisted on the primacy and unity of plot, Samuel Beckett has achieved fame as one of this century's greatest playwrights by constructing plays that arguably have no plot at all. Closer to Aristotle's time, Euripides often violated the Aristotelian principles of structure and balance in a conscious effort to depict a universe that is neither structured nor balanced. Not surprisingly, Aristotle seems to have preferred Sophocles to Euripides.

These remarks on Sophocles and Euripides bring us to another problem of interpreting Aristotle: we have a very limited stock of Greek tragedies against which to test Aristotle's theories. Aristotle could have been familiar with hundreds, or even thousands, of tragedies. All we have today are thirty-three plays by three tragedians. As a result, it is difficult to say to what extent most tragedies fit Aristotle's observations. Those that we have, however, often grossly violate Aristotle's requirement. The best example we have of an Aristotelian tragedy is Oedipus Rex, so it is no wonder that Aristotle makes such frequent reference to it in his examples.
Three points stand out as probably the most important in the Poetics: (1) the interpretation of poetry as mimesis, (2) the insistence on the primacy and unity of mythos, or plot, and (3) the view that tragedy serves to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and then to effect a catharsis of these emotions. (1) is discussed in the commentary on Chapters 1–3, (2) is discussed in the commentary on Chapter 6 and Chapters 7–9, and (3) is discussed in the commentary on Chapter 6 as well.

**Summary of Poetics**

**Chapters 1–3**

Aristotle proposes to approach poetry from a scientific viewpoint, examining the constituent parts of poetry and drawing conclusions from those observations. First, he lists the different kinds of poetry: epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most flute-playing and lyre-playing. Next, he remarks that all of these kinds of poetry are mimetic, or imitative, but that there are significant differences between them.

The first kind of distinction is the means they employ. Just as a painter employs paint and a sculptor employs stone, the poet employs language, rhythm, and harmony, either singly or in combinations. For instance, flute-playing and lyre-playing employ rhythm and harmony, while dance employs only rhythm. He also addresses the question of non-poetic language, arguing that poetry is essentially mimetic, whether it is in verse or in prose. Thus, Homer is a poet, while Empedocles, a philosopher who wrote in verse, is not. While Empedocles writes in verse, his writing is not mimetic, and so it is not poetry. In tragedy, comedy, and other kinds of poetry, rhythm, language, and harmony are all used. In some cases, as in lyric poetry, all three are used together, while in other cases, as in comedy or tragedy, the different parts come in to play at different times.

The second distinction is the objects that are imitated. All poetry represents actions with agents who are either better than us, worse than us, or quite like us. For instance, tragedy and epic poetry deal with characters who are better than us, while comedy and parody deal with characters who are worse than us.

The final distinction is with the manner of representation: the poet either speaks directly in narrative or assumes the characters of people in the narrative and speaks through them. For instance, many poets tell straight narratives while Homer alternates between narrative and accounts of speeches given by characters in his narrative. In tragedy and comedy, the poet speaks exclusively through assumed characters.

**Chapters 4–5**

Aristotle suggests that it is human nature to write and appreciate poetry. We are by nature imitative creatures that learn and excel by imitating others, and we naturally take delight in works of imitation. As evidence of the claim that we delight in imitation, he points out that we are fascinated by representations of dead bodies or disgusting animals even though the things themselves would repel us. Aristotle suggests that we can also learn by examining representations and imitations of things and that learning...
one of the greatest pleasures there is. Rhythm and harmony also come naturally to us, so that poetry gradually evolved out of our improvisations with these media.

As poetry evolved, a sharp division developed between serious writers who would write about noble characters in lofty hymns and panegyrics, and meaner writers who would write about ignoble characters in demeaning invectives. Tragedy and comedy are later developments that are the grandest representation of their respective traditions: tragedy of the lofty tradition and comedy of the mean tradition.

Aristotle stops short of saying that tragedy has achieved its complete and finished form. He lists four innovations in the development from improvised dithyrambs toward the tragedies of his day. Dithyrambs were sung in honour of Dionysus, god of wine, by a chorus of around fifty men and boys, often accompanied by a narrator. Aeschylus is responsible for the first innovation, reducing the number of the chorus and introducing a second actor on stage, which made dialogue the central focus of the poem. Second, Sophocles added a third actor and also introduced background scenery. Third, tragedy developed an air of seriousness, and the meter changed from a trochaic rhythm, which is more suitable for dancing, to an iambic rhythm, which is closer to the natural rhythms of conversational speech. Fourth, tragedy developed a plurality of episodes, or acts.

Next, Aristotle elaborates on what he means when he says that comedy deals with people worse than us ourselves, saying that comedy deals with the ridiculous. He defines the ridiculous as a kind of ugliness that does no harm to anybody else. Aristotle is able only to give a very sketchy account of the origins of comedy, because it was not generally treated with the same respect as tragedy and so there are fewer records of the innovations that led to its present form.

While both tragedy and epic poetry deal with lofty subjects in a grand style of verse, Aristotle notes three significant differences between the two genres. First, tragedy is told in a dramatic, rather than narrative, form, and employs several different kinds of verse while epic poetry employs only one. Second, the action of a tragedy is usually confined to a single day, and so the tragedy itself is usually much shorter than an epic poem. Third, while tragedy has all the elements that are characteristic of epic poetry, it also has some additional elements that are unique to it alone.

Chapter 6

Aristotle now narrows his focus to examine tragedy exclusively. In order to do so, he provides a definition of tragedy that we can break up into seven parts: (1) it involves mimesis; (2) it is serious; (3) the action is complete and with magnitude; (4) it is made up of language with the "pleasurable accessories" of rhythm and harmony; (5) these "pleasurable accessories" are not used uniformly throughout, but are introduced in separate parts of the work, so that, for instance, some bits are spoken in verse and other bits are sung; (6) it is performed rather than narrated; and (7) it arouses the emotions of pity and fear and accomplishes a catharsis (purification or purgation) of these emotions.
Next, Aristotle asserts that any tragedy can be divided into six component parts, and that every tragedy is made up of these six parts with nothing else besides. There is (a) the spectacle, which is the overall visual appearance of the stage and the actors. The means of imitation (language, rhythm, and harmony) can be divided into (b) melody, and (c) diction, which has to do with the composition of the verses. The agents of the action can be understood in terms of (d) character and (e) thought. Thought seems to denote the intellectual qualities of an agent while character seems to denote the moral qualities of an agent. Finally, there is (f) the plot, or mythos, which is the combination of incidents and actions in the story.

Aristotle argues that, among these six, the plot is the most important. The characters serve to advance the action of the story, not vice versa. The ends we pursue in life, our happiness and our misery, all take the form of action. That is, according to Aristotle, happiness consists in a certain kind of activity rather than in a certain quality of character. Diction and thought are also less significant than plot: a series of well-written speeches have nothing like the force of a well-structured tragedy. Further, Aristotle suggests, the most powerful elements in a tragedy, the peripetia and the anagnorisis, are elements of the plot. Lastly, Aristotle notes that forming a solid plot is far more difficult than creating good characters or diction.

Having asserted that the plot is the most important of the six parts of tragedy, he ranks the remainder as follows, from most important to least: character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. Character reveals the individual motivations of the characters in the play, what they want or don't want, and how they react to certain situations, and this is more important to Aristotle than thought, which deals on a more universal level with reasoning and general truths. Melody and spectacle are simply pleasurable accessories, but melody is more important to the tragedy than spectacle: a pretty spectacle can be arranged without a play, and usually matters of set and costume aren't the occupation of the poet anyway.

**Chapters 7–9**

Aristotle elaborates on what he means when he says that the action of a tragedy is complete in itself and with magnitude. For a plot to be a complete whole, it must have a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is a point that does not necessarily follow from anything else, which naturally has consequences following from it. The end is a point that naturally follows from preceding events but does not have any necessary consequences following it. The middle is a point that is naturally connected both to events before and after it.

The magnitude of a story is important, as it is in any art. Paintings are neither infinitesimally small nor monstrously big because they must be of such a size as to be taken in by the eye. Similarly, a tragedy must be of a moderate length so as to be taken in by the memory. Usually, time limits are set by the audience or other outside factors, but Aristotle suggests that the longer the play the greater the magnitude, provided the poet can hold the tragedy together as one coherent statement. As a general rule of thumb, he suggests the action should be long enough to allow the main character to
pass through a number of necessary or probable steps that take him from fortune to misfortune or vice versa.

In insisting upon the unity of plot, Aristotle makes it clear that he does not mean that it is enough to focus the plot on the life of one individual. Our lives consist of all sorts of disconnected episodes, and the story of a man’s life would rarely have the completeness necessary for a unified plot. Rather, the poet must select some series of events from a character’s life—as Homer does in the Odyssey—and craft them into a coherent whole. Any part of a story that could be added or removed without any great effect on the rest of the story is superfluous and takes away from the unity of the piece.

Aristotle distinguishes between poetry and history, saying that while history deals with what has been, poetry deals with what might be: it presents the possible as probable or necessary. Poetry is superior to history because history always deals with particular cases while poetry can express universal and general truths. Tragedy gives a feeling of necessity—or at least probability—to the way certain characters behave in certain situations and thus gives us insight into general principles regarding fate, choice, and so on. The worst kind of plot is the episodic plot, where there is no seeming necessity or probability whatsoever between events.

As a medium that arouses pity and fear, tragedy is most effective when events occur unexpectedly and yet in a logical order. The ideal is to have the audience see the final outcome of a tragedy as the necessary consequence of all the action that preceded it, and yet have that outcome be totally unexpected.

Chapters 10–12

Aristotle introduces the concepts of peripetia (reversal of fortune) and anagnorisis (discovery or recognition) in his discussion of simple and complex plots. All plots lead from beginning to end in a probable or necessary sequence of events, but a simple plot does so without peripetia or anagnorisis while a complex plot may have one or both of these elements. The peripetia or anagnorisis of a complex plot should themselves be necessary or probable consequences of what came before so that they are a part of the plot and not unnecessary add-ons.

Peripetia is the reversal from one state of affairs to its opposite. Some element in the plot effects a reversal, so that the hero who thought he was in good shape suddenly finds that all is lost, or vice versa.

Anagnorisis is a change from ignorance to knowledge. This discovery will bring love and happiness to characters that learn of good fortune, and hatred and misery to those who discover unhappy truths. The best kind of anagnorisis accompanies peripetia. That is, a reversal of fortune effects a discovery or vice versa. For instance, Oedipus' discovery of who his mother is effects a reversal of fortune from proud king to horrible disgrace. Aristotle suggests that anagnorisis is possible by a number of other means as well, but it is most intimately connected to the plot when it accompanies peripetia. The two together will help to arouse pity and fear and will also help to draw the play to its conclusion.
In addition to peripetia and anagnorisis, Aristotle defines a third part of the plot—suffering—as actions of destructive or painful nature, such as murders, torture, and woundings.

In Chapter 12, Aristotle discusses the quantitative elements of tragedy—the different parts of the performance. These are the Prologue, Episode, Exode, and a choral portion consisting of Parode and Stasimon. In addition, some tragedies have songs from the stage and a Commos, a lamentation sung by both actor and chorus. The Parode is the first full statement of the chorus; everything that precedes it is Prologue. The Stasimon is a choral song in a certain meter, while action that takes place between choral songs is Episode. Everything that follows the last choral song is Exode.

**Chapters 13–14**

Aristotle suggests that the best kinds of plot are complex plots that arouse fear and pity. He thus concludes that three kinds of plot should be avoided. First, we should avoid plots that show a good man going from happiness to misery, since such events seem more odious than fearful or pitiable. Second, we should avoid plots that show a bad man going from misery to happiness, since this arouses neither pity nor fear and appeals to none of our emotions. Third, we should avoid plots that show a bad man going from happiness to misery, since it will also not arouse the feelings of pity or fear. We feel pity for undeserved misfortune (and a bad man deserves his misfortune), and we feel fear if the person we pity is something like ourselves.

Aristotle concludes that the best kind of plot involves the misfortune of someone who is neither particularly good nor particularly bad and whose downfall does not result from some unpleasantness or vice, but rather from hamartia—an error in judgment. A good plot, then, consists of the following four elements: (1) It must focus around one single issue; (2) the hero must go from fortune to misfortune, rather than vice versa; (3) the misfortune must result from hamartia; and (4) the hero should be at least of intermediate worth, and if not, he must be better—never worse—than the average person. This explains why tragedies tend to focus around a few families (there are many tragedies about the families of Oedipus and Orestes among others): they must be upstanding families that suffer great misfortune from an error in judgment rather than a vice. Only second-rate plots that pander too much to public taste focus on a double issue where the good fare well and the bad fare poorly.

Pity and fear—which Aristotle calls the "pleasures" of tragedy—are better if they result from the plot itself rather than the spectacle. A story like that of Oedipus should be able to arouse pity and fear even if it is told without any acting at all. The poet who relies on spectacle is relying on outside help, whereas the poet who relies only on his own plot is fully responsible for his creation.

We feel pity most when friends or family harm one another, rather than when unpleasantness takes place between enemies or those who are indifferent to one another. The deed may be done knowingly—as when Medea kills her children—or unknowingly—as when Oedipus kills his father. A third alternative is that one character
plans to kill another, but then discovers the family connection between them in time to refrain from the killing.

Thus, the deed can either be done or not done, and it can take place in either ignorance or knowledge. Aristotle suggests that the best kind of plot is of the third alternative, where anagnorisis allows a harmful deed to be avoided. The second best case is where the deed is done in ignorance. And the third best is the case where the deed is done with full knowledge. Worst is the case where there is full knowledge throughout, and the premeditated deed is only refrained from at the moment of action. This scenario is not tragic because of the absence of suffering, and it is odious besides. Still, Aristotle acknowledges that it has been used to good effect, as with the case of Haemon and Creon in Antigone.

Chapter 15

Aristotle turns his attention toward the character of the tragic hero and lays out four requirements. First, the hero must be good. The character of the hero denotes the hero's moral purpose in the play, and a good character will have a good moral purpose. Second, the good qualities of the hero must be appropriate to the character. For instance, warlike qualities can be good, but they would be inappropriate in a woman. Third, the hero must be realistic. In other words, if he is drawn from myth, he should be a reasonable semblance of the character portrayed in myths. Fourth, the hero must be consistent (by which Aristotle means the hero must be written consistently, not that the hero must behave consistently). He accepts that some characters are inconsistent but that they should be written so as to be consistent in their inconsistency. Like the plot itself, the behavior of the characters should be seen as necessary or probable, in accordance with the internal logic of their personality. Thus, a character may behave inconsistently so long as we can perceive this inconsistency as stemming from a personality that is internally consistent.

From these requirements, Aristotle thinks it clear that the lusis, or denouement, should arise out of the plot and not depend upon stage artifice. Both the characters and the plot ought to follow a probable or necessary sequence, so that the lusis should be a part of this sequence. Improbable events, or the intervention of the gods, should be reserved for events outside the action of the play or events beyond human knowledge. The actual incidents themselves should not rely on miracles but on probability and necessity.

In order to reconcile the first requirement—that the hero be good—with the third requirement—that the hero be realistic—Aristotle recommends that the poet should keep all the distinctive characteristics of the person being portrayed but touch them up a little to make the hero appear better than he is. For instance, in the Iliad, Homer repeatedly describes Achilles' hot temper and yet makes him seem exceedingly good and heroic nonetheless.

Chapters 16–18

Aristotle distinguishes between six different kinds of anagnorisis. First, there is recognition by means of signs or marks, such as when Odysseus's nurse reco
by virtue of a characteristic scar. Aristotle considers this the least artistic kind of anagnorisis, usually reflecting a lack of imagination on the part of the poet. Second, also distasteful to Aristotle, is a recognition contrived by the author. In such a case, the poet is unable to fit the anagnorisis into the logical sequence of the plot, and so it seems extraneous. Third is recognition prompted by memory. A disguised character may be prompted to weep or otherwise betray himself when presented with some memory from the past. Fourth, the second best kind of anagnorisis, is recognition through deductive reasoning, where the anagnorisis is the only reasonable conclusion of an agent's thought. Fifth, there is recognition through faulty reasoning on the part of a disguised character. The disguised character might unmask himself by exhibiting knowledge that only he could know. Sixth, the best kind of anagnorisis, is the kind of recognition that is naturally a part of the logical sequence of events in the play, such as we find in Oedipus Rex.

Aristotle makes seven final remarks about how a poet should go about constructing a plot: (1) The poet should be sure to visualize the action of his drama as vividly as possible. This will help him spot and avoid inconsistencies.

(2) The poet should even try acting out the events as he writes them. If he can himself experience the emotions he is writing about, he will be able to express them more vividly.

(3) The poet should first outline the overall plot of the play and only afterward flesh it out with episodes. These episodes are generally quite brief in tragedy but can be very long in epic poetry. As an example, Aristotle reduces the entire plot of the Odyssey to three sentences, suggesting that everything else in the poem is episode.

(4) Every play consists of desis, or complication, and lusis, or denouement. Desis is everything leading up to the moment of peripetia, and lusis is everything from the peripetia onward.

(5) There are four distinct kinds of tragedy, and the poet should aim at bringing out all the important parts of the kind he chooses. First, there is the complex tragedy, made up of peripetia and anagnorisis; second, the tragedy of suffering; third, the tragedy of character; and fourth, the tragedy of spectacle.

(6) The poet should write about focused incidents, and not about a whole epic story. For instance, a tragedy could not possibly tell the entire story of the Iliad in any kind of satisfying detail, but it can pick out and elaborate upon individual episodes within the Iliad.

(7) The chorus should be treated like an actor, and the choral songs should be an integral part of the story. Too often, Aristotle laments, the choral songs have little to do with the action at all.

**Chapters 19–22**
Having discussed plot and character, Aristotle turns his attention toward thought and then diction (he never specifically addresses melody or spectacle). Aristotle defines thought as everything that is effected by means of language. Thus, when agents try to prove or disprove a point, to arouse emotion, or to inflate or deflate a matter, they are exhibiting thought. Thought is closely linked to rhetoric, and Aristotle points to the more thorough discussion to be found in his writings on that latter subject.

Aristotle divides the subject of diction into eight parts: letter, syllable, conjunction, article, noun, verb, case, and speech. Though many of these terms are identical to our modern uses of them, we should note that Aristotle is concerned less with written language and more with spoken language. As a result, Aristotle treats the letter—the fundamental building block of language—as a unit of sound rather than as a single written character. The concept of case, unfamiliar to English speakers, deals with the different uses of a word. For instance, "with the dog" and "for the dogs" are different cases of "dog," and "walked?" and "walk!" are different cases of "walk." Speech is more like what we would call a clause than a sentence. It does not have to contain a verb, but it must be made up of significant parts.

Chapter 21 is concerned with the structure and uses of the noun, though it is concerned primarily with the uses of metaphor. Aristotle distinguishes four ways metaphor can be used. (1) The genus to species relationship, where a more general term is used instead of a specific term. Aristotle uses the example of "Here stands my ship," where "stand" is a more general way of saying "is anchored." (2) The species to genus relationship, where a more specific term is used in place of a general term. Aristotle’s example is "Truly ten thousand good deeds has Ulysses wrought," where "ten thousand" is a specific term representing the more general "a large number." (3) The species to species relationship, where one specific term replaces another. (4) Metaphor from analogy, which consists of substitutions between "x is to y"-type relationships. For instance, old age is to life as evening is to day, so we can speak metaphorically about the "old age of the day" or the "evening of life."

Aristotle concludes his discussion of diction with a few remarks on style. A poet should aim for a middle ground, expressing himself with clarity but without meanness. Aristotle suggests that the use of ordinary words and ordinary language is mean and prosaic. Poetry can be spiced up by the use of foreign or strange terms, metaphor, or compounded words. However, an overenthusiastic use of such devices will render poetry unintelligible. Too many foreign words will make the poetry barbaric and too much metaphor will turn it into a big riddle. The key is to apply these devices in moderation. Of these different devices, Aristotle most values the metaphor, as it cannot be taught but only grasped intuitively. There is a certain level of genius in being able to identify similarities between dissimilar things.

**Chapters 23–24**

Aristotle turns his attention to epic poetry. While the mimesis of tragedy is in actions told in a dramatic form, the mimesis of epic poetry is in verse told in a narrative form. Aristotle notes that there are a number of similarities between tragedy and epic poetry.
First, epic poetry must maintain the unity of plot. In this it is allied with tragedy against history. History tells us all that happened during a certain time period or to certain people, and as such it is often somewhat disconnected. Epic poetry should focus on one particular story that remains an organic whole. Homer is an excellent example of such an epic poet, as he tells a particular, connected story in the Iliad rather than trying to narrate everything that happened during the Trojan War.

Second, epic poetry must share many of the elements of tragedy. Like tragedy, it should be either simple or complex, and it should deal primarily either with a character or with suffering. Aside from spectacle and melody, the six parts of tragedy are all present in epic poetry, and epic poetry can also feature peripetia and anagnorisis.

There are also two notable dissimilarities between epic poetry and tragedy. The first is the length: an epic poem can reasonably last as long as a whole series of tragedies, provided it can be presented in one hearing. The plot of an epic poem can be far more expansive because it is not limited by the stage. Epic poetry can jump back and forth between events happening at the same time in different places in a way that would be impossible on stage. Second, epic poetry should be narrated in heroic meter, while tragedy is normally spoken in iambic meter.

Aristotle is clearly an admirer of Homer's, as almost all his examples of good epic poetry are drawn from Homer. He praises Homer for reducing his own voice in the narrative and letting the actions and the characters tell the story themselves. He uses Homer to show how epic poetry can recount exaggerated events in a believable manner. A tragedy could never get away with such marvels, since they are less credible when we see them performed. Having said this, he remarks that no plot should ever hinge on improbable events but praises Homer for managing through his art to make this flaw in the Odyssey seem insignificant. He also praises Homer as a master of using paralogisms (conclusions resulting from faulty or illogical arguments) to make lies seem believable.

Aristotle cautions against an overenthusiastic use of elaborate diction. While it is pleasing when there is no action to recount, and no character or thought to reveal, ornate diction can often obscure these more important elements when they are found together.

Chapters 25–26

Aristotle addresses a number of the criticisms that can be levelled against poetry. First among these is the accusation that the events depicted are impossible. This criticism can fall under two categories. Less grave describes the event if the impossibility arises from a lack of technical knowledge on the part of the poet. For instance, he may describe a horse galloping with both front legs thrown forward, not realizing that horses do not move like this. More grave describes the situation if the impossibility arises from the poet's inability to give an accurate description of something he knows quite well.

Aristotle answers that, often, impossible events—such as Homer's description of Achilles' pursuit of Hector in the Iliad—serve to heighten the astonishment and excitement of the story. When the poet can achieve similar effects while sta-
possibility, however, this route should be preferred. Aristotle lays out the general principle that a poet should always aim for a convincing impossibility in favour of an unconvincing possibility.

Further, not all poetry is meant to describe things as they are. Some poets describe things as they ought to be, and others write to accord themselves with popular opinion rather than realism. For instance, Sophocles claimed that while Euripides portrayed people as they are, he portrayed them as they ought to be. Other poets stay true to popular myths rather than realism when depicting the gods.

As for events that are not impossible but merely improbable, the poet must show either that they accord with opinion or that the events are not as improbable as they may seem.

Aristotle also discusses contradictions the poet might make in language, but this discussion is very difficult to follow without knowledge of ancient Greek. Basically, Aristotle suggests that what may at first seem to be a contradiction in language may result from a metaphorical usage or some other poetic device.

While many errors are excusable or explainable, Aristotle asserts that the only excuse for an improbable plot or unattractive characterization is if they are necessary or are put to good use. Otherwise, they should be avoided at all costs.

In Chapter 26, Aristotle addresses the question of which is the higher form, tragedy or epic poetry. The argument in favour of epic poetry is based on the principle that the higher art form is less vulgar and addressed toward a refined audience. Tragedy is performed before large audiences, which results in melodramatic performances or overacting to please the crowds. Epic poetry is more cultivated than tragedy because it does not rely on gesture at all to convey its message.

Aristotle answers this argument by noting that the melodrama and overacting are faults of the performance and not of the tragic poet himself. The recital of epic poetry could similarly be overdone without reflecting poorly on the poet. Further, not all movement is bad—take dance, for instance—but only poorly executed movement. Also, tragedy does not need to be performed; it can be read, just like epic poetry, and all its merits will still be evident.

Further, he advances several reasons for considering tragedy superior. First, it has all the elements of an epic poem and has also music and spectacle, which the epic lacks. Second, simply reading the play without performing it is already very potent. Third, tragedy is shorter, suggesting that it is more compact and will have a more concentrated effect. Fourth, there is more unity in tragedy, as evidenced by the fact that a number of tragedies can be extracted from one epic poem.

**Aristotle’s Theory of Imitation**

Aristotle did not invent the term “imitation”. Plato was the first to use the word in relation with poetry, but Aristotle breathed into it a new definite meaning.
imitation is no longer considered mimicry, but is regarded as an act of imaginative creation by which the poet, drawing his material from the phenomenal world, makes something new out of it.

In Aristotle's view, principle of imitation unites poetry with other fine arts and is the common basis of all the fine arts. It thus differentiates the fine arts from the other category of arts. While Plato equated poetry with painting, Aristotle equates it with music. It is no longer a servile depiction of the appearance of things, but it becomes a representation of the passions and emotions of men which are also imitated by music. Thus Aristotle by his theory enlarged the scope of imitation. The poet imitates not the surface of things but the reality embedded within. In the very first chapter of the Poetic, Aristotle says:

“Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and Dithyrambic poetry, as also the music of the flute and the lyre in most of their forms, are in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ however, from one another in three respects – their medium, the objects and the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct.”

The medium of the poet and the painter are different. One imitates through form and colour, and the other through language, rhythm and harmony. The musician imitates through rhythm and harmony. Thus, poetry is more akin to music. Further, the manner of a poet may be purely narrative, as in the Epic, or depiction through action, as in drama. Even dramatic poetry is differentiated into tragedy and comedy accordingly as it imitates man as better or worse.

Aristotle says that the objects of poetic imitation are “men in action”. The poet represents men as worse than they are. He can represent men better than in real life based on material supplied by history and legend rather than by any living figure. The poet selects and orders his material and recreates reality. He brings order out of Chaos. The irrational or accidental is removed and attention is focused on the lasting and the significant. Thus he gives a truth of an ideal kind. His mind is not tied to reality:

“It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what may happen – according to the laws of probability or necessity.”

History tells us what actually happened; poetry what may happen. Poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. In this way, he exhibits the superiority of poetry over history. The poet freed from the tyranny of facts, takes a larger or general view of things, represents the universal in the particular and so shares the philosopher's quest for ultimate truth. He thus equates poetry with philosophy and shows that both are means to a higher truth. By the word 'universal' Aristotle signifies:

“How a person of a certain nature or type will, on a particular occasion, speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity.”
The poet constantly rises from the particular to the general. He studies the particular and devises principles of general application. He exceeds the limits of life without violating the essential laws of human nature.

Elsewhere Aristotle says, “Art imitates Nature”. By ‘Nature’ he does not mean the outer world of created things but “the creative force, the productive principle of the universe.” Art reproduce mainly an inward process, a physical energy working outwards, deeds, incidents, situation, being included under it so far as these spring from an inward, act of will, or draw some activity of thought or feeling. He renders men, “as they ought to be”.

The poet imitates the creative process of nature, but the objects are “men in action”. Now the ‘action’ may be ‘external’ or ‘internal’. It may be the action within the soul caused by all that befalls a man. Thus, he brings human experiences, emotions and passions within the scope of poetic imitation. According to Aristotle’s theory, moral qualities, characteristics, the permanent temper of the mind, the temporary emotions and feelings, are all action and so objects of poetic imitation.

Poetry may imitate men as better or worse than they are in real life or imitate as they really are. Tragedy and epic represent men on a heroic scale, better than they are, and comedy represents men of a lower type, worse than they are. Aristotle does not discuss the third possibility. It means that poetry does not aim at photographic realism. In this connection R. A. Scott-James points out that:

“\text{Aristotle knew nothing of the “realistic” or “fleshy” school of fiction – the school of Zola or of Gissing.}”

Abercrombie, in contrast, defends Aristotle for not discussing the third variant. He says:

“It is just possible to imagine life exactly as it is, but the exciting thing is to imagine life as it might be, and it is then that imagination becomes an impulse capable of inspiring poetry.“

Aristotle by his theory of imitation answers the charge of Plato that poetry is an imitation of “shadow of shadows”, thrice removed from truth, and that the poet beguiles us with lies. Plato condemned poetry that in the very nature of things poets have no idea of truth. The phenomenal world is not the reality but a copy of the reality in the mind of the Supreme. The poet imitates the objects and phenomena of the world, which are shadowy and unreal. Poetry is, therefore, “the mother of lies”.

Aristotle, on the contrary, tells us that art imitates not the mere shows of things, but the ‘ideal reality’ embodied in very object of the world. The process of nature is a ‘creative process’; everywhere in ‘nature there is a ceaseless and upward progress’ in everything, and the poet imitates this upward movement of nature. Art reproduces the original not as it is, but as it appears to the senses. Art moves in a world of images, and reproduces the external, according to the idea or image in his mind. Thus the poet does not copy the external world, but creates according to his ‘idea’ of it. Thus even an ugly object well-imitated becomes a source of pleasure. We are told in “The Poetics”:
“Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity; such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and dead bodies.”

The real and the ideal from Aristotle’s point of view are not opposites; the ideal is the real, shorn of chance and accident, a purified form of reality. And it is this higher ‘reality’ which is the object of poetic imitation. Idealization is achieved by divesting the real of all that is accidental, transient and particular. Poetry thus imitates the ideal and the universal; it is an “idealized representation of character, emotion, action – under forms manifest in sense.” Poetic truth, therefore, is higher than historical truth. Poetry is more philosophical, more conducive to understanding than Philosophy itself.

Thus Aristotle successfully and finally refuted the charge of Plato and provided a defence of poetry which has ever since been used by lovers of poetry in justification of their Muse. He breathed new life and soul into the concept of poetic imitation and showed that it is, in reality, a creative process.

**Aristotle’s Theory of Tragedy**

**Definition of Tragedy:** “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. . . . Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody.”

The treatise we call the *Poetics* was composed at least 50 years after the death of Sophocles. Aristotle was a great admirer of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, considering it the perfect tragedy, and not surprisingly, his analysis fits that play most perfectly. I shall therefore use this play to illustrate the following major parts of Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy as a literary genre.

**Tragedy is the “imitation of an action” (mimesis) according to “the law of probability or necessity.”** Aristotle indicates that the medium of tragedy is drama, not narrative; tragedy “shows” rather than “tells.” According to Aristotle, tragedy is higher and more philosophical than history because history simply relates what has happened while tragedy dramatizes what may happen, “what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity.” History thus deals with the particular, and tragedy with the universal. Events that have happened may be due to accident or coincidence; they may be particular to a specific situation and not be part of a clear cause-and-effect chain. Therefore they have little relevance for others. Tragedy, however, is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe; it creates a cause-and-effect chain that clearly reveals what may happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates. Tragedy therefore arouses not only pity but also fear, because the audience can envision themselves within this cause-and-effect chain.
Plot is the “first principle,” the most important feature of tragedy. Aristotle defines plot as “the arrangement of the incidents”: i.e., not the story itself but the way the incidents are presented to the audience, the structure of the play. According to Aristotle, tragedies where the outcome depends on a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain of actions are superior to those that depend primarily on the character and personality of the protagonist. Plots that meet this criterion will have the following qualities:

The plot must be “a whole,” with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning, called by modern critics the incentive moment, must start the cause-and-effect chain but not be dependent on anything outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are downplayed but its effects are stressed). The middle, or climax, must be caused by earlier incidents and itself cause the incidents that follow it (i.e., its causes and effects are stressed). The end, or resolution, must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are stressed but its effects downplayed); the end should therefore solve or resolve the problem created during the incentive moment. Aristotle calls the cause-and-effect chain leading from the incentive moment to the climax the “tying up” (desis), in modern terminology the complication. He therefore terms the more rapid cause-and-effect chain from the climax to the resolution the “unravelling” (lusis), in modern terminology the dénouement.

Firstly, 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, no deus ex machina. According to Aristotle, the worst kinds of plots are “episodic,” in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence; the only thing that ties together the events in such a plot is the fact that they happen to the same person. Playwrights should exclude coincidences from their plots; if some coincidence is required, it should “have an air of design,” i.e., seem to have a fated connection to the events of the play. Similarly, the poet should exclude the irrational or at least keep it “outside the scope of the tragedy,” i.e., reported rather than dramatized. While the poet cannot change the myths that are the basis of his plots, he “ought to show invention of his own and skilfully handle the traditional materials” to create unity of action in his plot.

Secondly, the plot must be “of a certain magnitude,” both quantitatively (length, complexity) and qualitatively (“seriousness” and universal significance). Aristotle argues that plots should not be too brief; the more incidents and themes that the playwright can bring together in an organic unity, the greater the artistic value and richness of the play. Also, the more universal and significant the meaning of the play, the more the playwright can catch and hold the emotions of the audience, the better the play will be.

Thirdly, the plot may be either simple or complex, although complex is better. Simple plots have only a “change of fortune” (catastrophe). Complex plots have both “reversal of intention” (peripetia) and “recognition” (anagnorisis) connected with the catastrophe. Both peripetia and anagnorisis turn upon surprise. Aristotle explains that a peripetia occurs when a character produces an effect opposite to thi...
intended to produce, while an anagnorisis “is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined for good or bad fortune.” He argues that the best plots combine these two as part of their cause-and-effect chain (i.e., the peripetia leads directly to the anagnorisis); this in turns creates the catastrophe, leading to the final “scene of suffering”.

**Character has the second place in importance.** In a perfect tragedy, character will support plot, i.e., personal motivations will be intricately connected parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions producing pity and fear in the audience. The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad. This change “should come about as the result, not of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character.” Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience, for “pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.” The term Aristotle uses here, hamartia, often translated “tragic flaw,” has been the subject of much debate. The meaning of the Greek word is closer to “mistake” than to “flaw,” and I believe it is best interpreted in the context of what Aristotle has to say about plot and “the law or probability or necessity.” In the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough. The role of the hamartia in tragedy comes not from its moral status but from the inevitability of its consequences. Hence the peripetia is really one or more self-destructive actions taken in blindness, leading to results diametrically opposed to those that were intended (often termed tragic irony), and the anagnorisis is the gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking. Characters in tragedy should have the following qualities:

**First Quality:** - “Good or fine.” Aristotle relates this quality to moral purpose and says it is relative to class: “Even a woman may be good, and also a slave, though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless.”

**Second Quality:** - “Fitness of character” (true to type); e.g. valour is appropriate for a warrior but not for a woman.

**Third Quality:** -“True to life” (realistic)

**Fourth Quality:** -“Consistency” (true to themselves). Once a character’s personality and motivations are established, these should continue throughout the play.

**Fifth Quality:** - “Necessary or probable.” Characters must be logically constructed according to “the law of probability or necessity” that governs the actions of the play.

**Sixth Quality:** - "True to life and yet more beautiful" (idealized, ennobled).

**Thought is third in importance, and is found "where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated.‖** Aristotle says little about thought, and most of what he has to say is associated with how speeches should reveal character. However, we may assume that this category would also include what we call the themes of a play.
Diction is fourth, and is “the expression of the meaning in words” which are proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy. In this category, Aristotle discusses the stylistic elements of tragedy; he is particularly interested in metaphors: “But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor; . . . it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances”.

Song, or melody, is fifth, and is the musical element of the chorus. Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be “mere interludes,” but should contribute to the unity of the plot.

Spectacle is last, for it is least connected with literature; “the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.” Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of spectacle, he argues that superior poets rely on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fear; those who rely heavily on spectacle “create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous”.

The end of the tragedy is a catharsis (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear. Catharsis is another Aristotelian term that has generated considerable debate. The word means “purging,” and Aristotle seems to be employing a medical metaphor—tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear in order to purge away their excess, to reduce these passions to a healthy, balanced proportion. Aristotle also talks of the “pleasure” that is proper to tragedy, apparently meaning the aesthetic pleasure one gets from contemplating the pity and fear that are aroused through an intricately constructed work of art.

**Aristotle’s Concept of Plot**

**Introduction:** - Aristotle’s Poetics has often been accused of being ‘lopsided’ in its treatment of the subject of poetry, of devoting a major portion of the discussion to ‘Tragedy’ rather than any other form of poetry. This accusation, however, is met by the answer that the work is of a fragmentary nature, and a lost portion might have dealt with other forms. However, within the treatment of tragedy, there is a slight imbalance. Of all the constituent elements of tragedy, plot is given the most attentive and extensive coverage. This is not surprising, considering that Aristotle thought the plot to be the very ‘soul of tragedy’. It should be remembered that Aristotle’s conception of tragedy is ‘biological’ i.e. he compares tragedy to a living organism. Just as the living organism takes on a definite shape because of its skeleton, plot gives to tragedy an important design. Plot is as important to tragedy as the skeleton is to the living organism.

**Development of Thought:** - According to Aristotle tragedy is “the imitation of an action, that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions”.

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So the tragedy is the representation of action and action consists of incidents and events. Plot is the arrangement of these incidents and events. It is better for the poet to choose a traditional story and then proceed to make out of it his own plot. Stories taken from history, mythology or legend are to be preferred, for they are familiar and easy to understand and they serve as guide-lines for characterization. Having chosen his story or having invented it, the artist must subject it to a process of artistic selection and ordering. Only relevant incidents and situation are to be selected and they are to be arranged that they seem to follow each other necessarily and inevitably. Moreover, the incidents chosen must be serious that is to say weighty of some importance, and not trivial, because tragedy is an imitation of a serious action having certain magnitude.

The making of story into plot involves what Humphry House calls “episodizing”, or making into episodes. It is implied that there should be a logical connection between the events, the whole being governed by the law of probability and necessity. So the tragic plot must be a whole, complete in itself; it should have a beginning, a middle and an end. There might be earlier parts of the story the antecedents and that may be communicated by the dramatist in due course. But the beginning must be clear and intelligible even without them. It must not provoke us to ask why and how. A middle is something that is consequent upon a situation that has gone before and which is followed by the catastrophe. The middle is everything between the first incident and the last. The middle is followed by the end. An end is that which is consequent upon a given situation but which is not followed by any further incident or situation. The middle must follow naturally and inevitably upon the beginning and must logically lead to the end or the catastrophe. Thus artistic wholeness implies logical link-up of the various incidents, events and situation that form the plot.

As regards ‘magnitude’ the plot must have a certain length or size. It should be neither too small nor too large. The plot should be long enough to allow the process of change from happiness to misery initiated by the beginning to be properly and completely developed, but not too long for memory to encounter it as a whole. If it is too small, its different parts will not be clearly distinguishable from each other as in the case of living organism. Within these limits, the plot should be as large as possible. O.B. Hardison remarks “The precise rule is that the magnitude should be whatever is required for a change to occur from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad through a series of incidents that are in accordance with probability or necessity”. In other words, magnitude implies that the plot must have order, logic, symmetry and perspicuity.

The plot may have variety but it should have a unity. This unity arises from the fact that every event has a logical connection with the rest of the action and none of them is irrelevant. There might be episodes but the same must be properly integrated with the main action. Otherwise the episodic plots are the worst of all. The unity of plot does not consist in the unity of the hero; it consists in the unity of action. The plot should be an organic whole so that if one of its parts is displaced or removed the whole should be disjointed and disturbed.

A defective plot is that in which the rules of probability or necessity are not observed. The best tragic effect of pity and fear can be produced only if the plot contains elements of surprise and accident. But there should be a sort of ‘inevitabi
The above discussion makes it clear that Aristotle emphasises the Unity of Action but has little to say about the Unity of Time and the Unity of Place. About the Unity of Time he merely says that tragedy should confine itself as far as possible to single revolution of the sun. No law is implied here about the Unity of Place. Aristotle only mentioned once when comparing the epic and the tragedy that epic can narrate a number of action going on simultaneously in different parts while in a drama such simultaneous action cannot be represented for the stage is one part (place) and not several parts or places. In this respect too Aristotle was very much misunderstood by the Renaissance and the French critics who deduced from his statement the rigid unity of place.

Aristotle classifies plots into three kinds: - Simple Plot, Complex Plot and Plots based on scenes of suffering.

The word Simple and Complex, here have technical terms. A simple plot is one which does not have any Peripety and Anagnorisis, but the action moves forward uniformly without any violent or sudden change. A complex plot implies reversal of intention or situation and recognition. Reversal of situation is change by which the action veers round to its opposite. Recognition is a change from ignorance to knowledge. Both these parts of the plot turn upon surprise. Aristotle, however, prefers the complex plot. The ideal tragedy is one which results from human error, error on the part of friends and relatives, error on the part of the hero himself. The ideal tragedy is a story in which the calamity is due to a false move blindly made by a friend or kinsman or by the hero himself. Atkins says "It is a tragedy brought about, not by the deliberate purpose of some evil agent, nor yet by mere chance, but by human error". F.R. Lucas agrees with Atkins and remarks "there is nothing more brilliant in 'the Poetics' than this recognition by Aristotle of the Tragedy of Error, of the Peripetia, as the deepest of all".
In Aristotle’s conception, “Hamartia, Peripetia and Anagnorisis all hang together in the ideal schematisation of the tragic plot”. Hamartia is the tragic error and it is related to the character of the hero but in a successful plot it is so closely worked into the plot as to be inseparable from it. The miscalculation of the hero causes a chain of incidents which result in the change from good fortune to bad which the tragic plot depicts. Both Peripetia and Anagnorisis are incidents, and parts of the plot.

The Peripetia is the fatal working of the plot to result the opposite of that intended. For example events do not turn up according to the intentions of expectation of the hero. They move in an opposite direction to his intention.

The Anagnorisis is the recognition of truth; it is the change from ignorance to knowledge. For example, Oedipus’s knowledge of his parents that motivates him to some action and determines the direction of the action in the story Recognition and reversal can be caused by separate them.

Besides the complex and simple plots there are also spectacular plots. This type of plot depends on incidents of suffering, Aristotle rates it very low. It is the plot which drives its effect from the depiction of torture, murder, maiming, violence, death etc. According to Aristotle, the tragic effect must be created naturally and not with artificial and theatrical aids. Such spectacular plots indicate a deficiency in the plot.

The unravelling of the plot should be done naturally and logically and not by the use of arbitrary devices like chance, supernatural intervention etc. Atkin is of the view that “Gods should intervene only where it becomes necessary to explain the past, or announce future events external to the action”. Aristotle does not consider poetic justice as necessary for tragedy. Similarly there is happiness for some of the characters and misery for others. Such a double ending weakens the tragic effect and must be avoided. It is more proper to comedy. Thus, Aristotle is against the mixture of the tragic and the comic of Tragicomedy.

**Conclusion:**

Aristotle’s concept of plot is in keeping with what we have come to call ‘classical’. There is an insistence on order, pattern, and design. The chaotic material of life should be brought under systematic discipline, so that events seem to happen in a logical sequence with no irrelevancies. There has to be a single action consisting of episodes, which are logically connected and causally related. Aristotle considers the ‘fatal’ plot as being more tragic. He prefers that plot which shows a change form good to bad fortune as being more fit for tragedy. Further, the complex plot involving Peripetia or Discovery, or both, is preferable to simple plot. It is true that the modern concept of tragedy has changed a great deal—any living literature naturally involves change and modifications. Yet we find that in some aspects Aristotle’s theory of Plot is still very much valid, for they are universal principles.

**Aristotle’s Concept of Ideal Tragic Hero: Hamartia**

No passage in “The Poetics” with the exception of the Catharsis phrase has attracted so much critical attention as his ideal of the tragic hero.
The function of a tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and Aristotle deduces the qualities of his hero from this function. He should be good, but not perfect, for the fall of a perfect man from happiness into misery, would be unfair and repellant and will not arouse pity. Similarly, an utterly wicked person passing from happiness to misery may satisfy our moral sense, but will lack proper tragic qualities. His fall will be well-deserved and according to 'justice'. It excites neither pity nor fear. Thus entirely good and utterly wicked persons are not suitable to be tragic heroes.

Similarly, according to Aristotelian law, a saint would be unsuitable as a tragic hero. He is on the side of the moral order and hence his fall shocks and repels. Besides, his martyrdom is a spiritual victory which drowns the feeling of pity. Drama, on the other hand, requires for its effectiveness a militant and combative hero. It would be important to remember that Aristotle's conclusions are based on the Greek drama and he is lying down the qualifications of an ideal tragic hero. He is here discussing what is the very best and not what is good. Overall, his views are justified, for it requires the genius of a Shakespeare to arouse sympathy for an utter villain, and saints as successful tragic heroes have been extremely rare.

Having rejected perfection as well as utter depravity and villainy, Aristotle points out that: "The ideal tragic hero ... must be an intermediate kind of person, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment."

The ideal tragic hero is a man who stands midway between the two extremes. He is not eminently good or just, though he inclines to the side of goodness. He is like us, but raised above the ordinary level by a deeper vein of feeling or heightened powers of intellect or will. He is idealized, but still he has so much of common humanity as to enlist our interest and sympathy.

The tragic hero is not evil or vicious, but he is also not perfect and his disaster is brought upon him by his own fault. The Greek word used here is "Hamartia" meaning "missing the mark". He falls not because of the act of outside agency or evil but because of Hamartia or "miscalculation" on his part. Hamartia is not a moral failing and it is unfortunate that it was translated as "tragic flaw" by Bradley. Aristotle himself distinguishes Hamartia from moral failing. He means by it some error or judgment. He writes that the cause of the hero’s fall must lie “not in depravity, but in some error or Hamartia on his part”. He does not assert or deny anything about the connection of Hamartia with hero's moral failings. "It may be accompanied by moral imperfection, but it is not itself a moral imperfection, and in the purest tragic situation the suffering hero is not morally to blame."

Thus Hamartia is an error or miscalculation, but the error may arise from any of the three ways: It may arise from "ignorance of some fact or circumstance", or secondly, it may arise from hasty or careless view of the special case, or thirdly, it may be an error voluntary, but not deliberate, as acts committed in anger. Else and Martian Ostwald interpret Hamartia and say that the hero has a tendency to err created by lack of knowledge and he may commit a series of errors. This tendency to err characterizes the
hero from the beginning and at the crisis of the play it is complemented by the recognition scene, which is a sudden change “from ignorance to knowledge”.

In fact, Hamartia is a word with various shades of meaning and has been interpreted by different critics. Still, all serious modern Aristotelian scholarship agreed that Hamartia is not moral imperfection. It is an error of judgment, whether arising from ignorance of some material circumstance or from rashness of temper or from some passion. It may even be a character, for the hero may have a tendency to commit errors of judgment and may commit series of errors. This last conclusion is borne out by the play Oedipus Tyrannus to which Aristotle refers time and again and which may be taken to be his ideal. In this play, hero’s life is a chain of errors, the most fatal of all being his marriage with his mother. If King Oedipus is Aristotle’s ideal hero, we can say with Butcher that: “His conception of Hamartia includes all the three meanings mentioned above, which in English cannot be covered by a single term.”

Hamartia is an error, or a series of errors, “whether morally culpable or not,” committed by an otherwise noble person, and these errors derive him to his doom. The tragic irony lies in the fact that hero may err mistakenly without any evil intention, yet he is doomed no less than immorals who sin consciously. He has Hamartia and as a result his very virtues hurry him to his ruin. Says Butcher: “Othello in the modern drama, Oedipus in the ancient, are the two most conspicuous examples of ruin wrought by character, noble indeed, but not without defects, acting in the dark and, as it seemed, for the best.”

Aristotle lays down another qualification for the tragic hero. He must be, “of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity.” He must be a well-reputed individual occupying a position of lofty eminence in society. This is so because Greed tragedy, with which alone Aristotle was familiar, was written about a few distinguished royal families. Aristotle considers eminence as essential for the tragic hero. But Modern drama demonstrates that the meanest individual can also serve as a tragic hero, and that tragedies of Sophoclean grandeur can be enacted even in remote country solitudes.

However, Aristotle’s dictum is quite justified on the principle that, “higher the state, the greater the fall that follows,” or because heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes, while the death of a beggar passes unnoticed. But it should be remembered that Aristotle nowhere says that the hero should be a king or at least royally descended. They were the Renaissance critics who distorted Aristotle and made the qualification more rigid and narrow.

**Aristotle's Concept of Catharsis**

Aristotle writes that the function of tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear, and to affect the Catharsis of these emotions. Aristotle has used the term Catharsis only once, but no phrase has been handled so frequently by critics, and poets. Aristotle has not explained what exactly he meant by the word, nor do we get any help from the Poetics. For this reason, help and guidance has to be taken from his other works. Further, Catharsis has three meaning. It means ‘purgation’, ‘purification’, and ‘clarification’, and each critic has used the word in one or the o
Tragedy arouses fear and pity, but there are sharp differences as to the process, the way by which the rousing of these emotions gives pleasure.

Catharsis has been taken as a medical metaphor, ‘purgation’, denoting a pathological effect on the soul similar to the effect of medicine on the body. This view is borne out by a passage in the Politics where Aristotle refers to religious frenzy being cured by certain tunes which excite religious frenzy. In Tragedy: “…pity and fear, artificially stirred the latent pity and fear which we bring with us from real life.”

In the Neo-Classical era, Catharsis was taken to be an allopathic treatment with the unlike curing unlike. The arousing of pity and fear was supposed to bring about the purgation or ‘evacuation’ of other emotions, like anger, pride etc. As Thomas Taylor holds: “We learn from the terrible fates of evil men to avoid the vices they manifest.” F. L. Lucas rejects the idea that Catharsis is a medical metaphor, and says that: “The theatre is not a hospital.”

Both Lucas and Herbert Reed regard it as a kind of safety valve. Pity and fear are aroused; we give free play to these emotions which is followed by emotional relief. I. A. Richards’ approach to the process is also psychological. Fear is the impulse to withdraw and pity is the impulse to approach. Both these impulses are harmonized and blended in tragedy and this balance brings relief and repose.

The ethical interpretation is that the tragic process is a kind of lustration of the soul, an inner illumination resulting in a more balanced attitude to life and its suffering. Thus John Gassner says that a clear understanding of what was involved in the struggle, of cause and effect, a judgment on what we have witnessed, can result in a state of mental equilibrium and rest, and can ensure complete aesthetic pleasure. Tragedy makes us realize that divine law operates in the universe, shaping everything for the best.

During the Renaissance, another set of critics suggested that Tragedy helped to harden or ‘temper’ the emotions. Spectators are hardened to the pitiable and fearful events of life by witnessing them in tragedies.

Humphrey House rejects the idea of ‘purgation’ and forcefully advocates the ‘purification’ theory which involves moral instruction and learning. It is a kind of ‘moral conditioning’. He points out that, ‘purification means cleansing’.

According to ‘the purification’ theory, Catharsis implies that our emotions are purified of excess and defect, are reduced to intermediate state, trained and directed towards the right objects at the right time. The spectator learns the proper use of pity, fear and similar emotions by witnessing tragedy. Butcher writes: “The tragic Catharsis involves not only the idea of emotional relief, but the further idea of purifying the emotions so relieved.”

The basic defect of ‘purgation’ theory and ‘purification’ theory is that they are too much occupied with the psychology of the audience. Aristotle was writing a treatise not on psychology but on the art of poetry. He relates ‘Catharsis’ not to the emotions of the...
spectators but to the incidents which form the plot of the tragedy. And the result is the “clarification” theory.

The paradox of pleasure being aroused by the ugly and the repellent is also the paradox involved in tragedy. Tragic incidents are pitiable and fearful.

They include horrible events as a man blinding himself, a wife murdering her husband or a mother slaying her children and instead of repelling us produce pleasure. Aristotle clearly tells us that we should not seek for every pleasure from tragedy, “but only the pleasure proper to it”. ‘Catharsis’ refers to the tragic variety of pleasure. The Catharsis clause is thus a definition of the function of tragedy, and not of its emotional effects on the audience.

Imitation does not produce pleasure in general, but only the pleasure that comes from learning, and so also the peculiar pleasure of tragedy. Learning comes from discovering the relation between the action and the universal elements embodied in it. The poet might take his material from history or tradition, but he selects and orders it in terms of probability and necessity, and represents what, “might be”. He rises from the particular to the general and so is more universal and more philosophical. The events are presented free of chance and accidents which obscure their real meaning. Tragedy enhances understanding and leaves the spectator ‘face to face with the universal law’.

Thus according to this interpretation, ‘Catharsis’ means clarification of the essential and universal significance of the incidents depicted, leading to an enhanced understanding of the universal law which governs human life and destiny, and such an understating leads to pleasure of tragedy. In this view, Catharsis is neither a medical, nor a religious or moral term, but an intellectual term. The term refers to the incidents depicted in the tragedy and the way in which the poet reveals their universal significance.

The clarification theory has many merits. Firstly, it is a technique of the tragedy and not to the psychology of the audience. Secondly, the theory is based on what Aristotle says in the Poetics, and needs no help and support of what Aristotle has said in Politics and Ethics. Thirdly, it relates Catharsis both to the theory of imitation and to the discussion of probability and necessity. Fourthly, the theory is perfectly in accord with current aesthetic theories.

According to Aristotle the basic tragic emotions are pity and fear and are painful. If tragedy is to give pleasure, the pity and fear must somehow be eliminated. Fear is aroused when we see someone suffering and think that similar fate might befall us. Pity is a feeling of pain caused by the sight of underserved suffering of others. The spectator sees that it is the tragic error or Hamartia of the hero which results in suffering and so he learns something about the universal relation between character and destiny.

To conclude, Aristotle's conception of Catharsis is mainly intellectual. It is neither didactic nor theoretical, though it may have a residual theological element. Aristotle's Catharsis is not a moral doctrine requiring the tragic poet to show that bad men come to bad ends, nor a kind of theological relief arising from discovery that God’s laws operate invisibly to make all things work out for the best.
Aristotle’s Comparison of Epic and Tragedy

According to Aristotle, epic and tragedy have the same forms. Epic can be full of complexity. Epic of recognition can emphasize character or suffering. Because epic is in the other manner of imitation. Epic lack one form found in the tragedy- the tragedy of spectacle. Although thought and diction don not produce forms of tragedy or epic, both are important to epic as they are tragedy. Aristotle gives the example of one of the greatest poet of Greek Epic, Homer. He has cited the prime example of Epic artistry. If we talk about Iliad, we find Iliad to be simple and full of suffering. The plot of Iliad is very simple and doesn’t need much explanation. Its argument is 'The wrater of Achilles'. Having bed aroused by the death of his friend Patroclus, Achilles sets out consciously to ruin hector. He succeeds in destroying hector by the end of the poem. Although some of the episodes are just added for the variation, which are 'Outside the Plot'. Aristotle describes Iliad as an 'Epic' of suffering. From the starting point, the emphasis is on the 'tragic deed' that is the end of the plot- the murdering of hector- and this deed is a episode of suffering. 'The Odyssey', on the other hand, is an epic of recognition and of character. But it can be said that odyssey is not both these forms simultaneously, one can see that the plot of odyssey is complex one. It evolved several recognition of Ulysses by Telemachuns, the neat herd, the nurse, and eventually the suitors. In this sense there is, as Aristotle remarks, "Recognition Throughout the parts of odyssey emphasizing character, however, are 'outside the plot! The most important such 'part' is tale of is wanderings. This tale has an episode plot that is simple in form and furthermore in its movement the type of plot that Aristotle seems to have in mind for the 'tragedy of character"". Having classified that Homer outstrips all other in diction and thought.

Difference between Epic and Tragedy: - The first and foremost difference between epic and tragedy arise from means and manner s of imitation. Epic uses 'Words alone' and a single meter throughout one, the other hand tragedy and harmony and employs a variety of meters in the choral sections. Again if we see, we can know that epic also uses the 'mixed' narrative manner of Homer, whereas tragedy uses the 'Dramatic' manner.

Another difference is more related to the size and contents of epic and tragedy. Though both imitation the same object is noble action. It is fact that they do so using different means and manners affect the way in ethic they present their material. Tragedy is intended for stage presentation is manner and has parts which cannot be found in epic i.e. means.

Aristotle's comment on the length of tragedy gave rise during the neo-classic period to the doctrine of unity of time. According to this doctrine, which became literally a critical dogma in seventeenth century France and in the restoration England, when Aristotle asserts that 'tragedy attempts, as far as possible, to remain, within one circuit of sun here, he refers to the time covered by the dramatic action of the play. This interpretation accords with the rationalist bias of neo-classic critics. Spectators, they argued would not believe in the reality of an action that compressed several days or, in the case of Shakespearean plays for several years into a three hour drama. One has to agree that if the spectators did not believe in the reality of an action, the tragedy would not have its
proper effect. This same idea was carried to absurd extremes in England Shakespeare and his other Elizabethan contemporaries.

On the other side the twentieth century critic has rejected the idea that Aristotle formally advocated unit of time in his work 'Poetics'. In this matter, we would better probe into the Greek tragedies. Greek tragedies confine their action to a 'Single circuit of the sun' in this sense. The 'Agamemnon' and 'Eumenddes' are well-known examples of plays that cover several days. In the second place, neo-classic verisimilitude is a demonstrably false doctrine and one that is not consistent with Aristotle's explicit rejection of the theory that poetic imitation is an imitation or copying of history.

The above concept can be seen with Aristotle's view—he lived before hundreds of years. In those days, he became and even today he is known as father of criticism. He might have written the criticism as the need of his society and demand of his time. Even Greek tragedies or epics not follow him perfectly.

Else, says that both manner and means affect the ways the epic and tragedy present action. The most obvious influence is manner. Here, our great Sanskrit plays can be kept in mind while considering the Greek. The epic is recited in the mixed manner whereas tragedy is presented by many agents i.e. performed on stage. If we consider Ramayana and Mahabharata they have no time range. They cover generations. In practice, dramas especially Greek dramas were much shorter taking an average of perhaps two hours. Epic on the other hand, has no theoretical limit. In this respect the epic is line novel. Homer's 'Iliad', Virgil's Aeneid and Milton's Paradise Lost cannot be completed in one sitting while plays can be watched in one sitting or they can be read in one sitting.

Aristotle observes that at first the poets proceeded in tragedy in the same way as they did in epic. Aristotle does not mention any writers before Aeschylus. He felt that Aeschylus led the way in incorporating Homeric techniques into tragedy. The only unified trilogy that has survived is the Oresteia of Aeschylus. It is probably important as it continuous the Iliad by telling of the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, the slaying of Clytemnestr, the spying of Clytemnstr by her son orates and the cleansing of orates by the Athenian tribunal. The Oresteia is Homeric in size and content. As tragic poets assimilated the Homeric influence more fully, the trilogy lost popularity.

The last contrast between the epic and the tragedy is that there are six 'Parts' or constituent elements in tragedy. Three derived from object of imitation, two from means and one from manner Epic has only four 'parts'. Tragedy uses song also. Tragedy reader can judge all the parts but for an epic reader it's just impossible to judge all the essential parts of an epic. So he considers tragedy before an epic inspire of the fact that epic preceded tragedy in history. Tragedy includes epic. Most of the important concepts related to epic can be brought up on connection with tragedy. Epic is longer but may give less benefit as Aristotle says.

**Aristotle's Preference for Tragedy:** After considering various differences between epic and tragedy question arises of superiority. Is 'Epic' better or 'Tragedy'? In 'Poetics' Aristotle discussed this question at length. He see it his own words,' if the more refined art is higher and the more refined in every case is that which
of audiences. The art which imitates anything and everything is manifestly most unrefined. Tragic art stands to epic in the same relation as the younger to the older actors. So we are told the epic poetry is addressed to a cultivated audience, who do not need gesture; tragedy to an inferior public, being then unrefined, it is evidently lower of the two. Tragedy like epic poetry produced its effect even without Acton; it reveals its power by me reading. Then in all other respects tragedy is superior if this fault is not inherent in it.

According to Aristotle tragedy is superior to epic because besides having all the elements of epic, it also has same additional elements. Tragedy has better unit whole where as many incidences are scattered in epic. There are many stories in stories in epic. Tragedy ends more perfectly then epic and so it is better than epic. Tragedy keeps your concentration as it is of fewer hours while epic gives freedom to your imagination to render while reading.

**Probability and Necessity:** The poet brings out the probable and necessary link up of various events both in the development of plot and also in the internal working of the character. Butcher brightly emphasis that the rule of probability and necessity refers to the cohesion of the parts. Tragic heroes like Othello, Hamlet and Oedipus Rex process a grandeur a magnificent of thought will and action which is much above the level of the average humanity. Indian actions they are true to their nature, their actions are probable and necessary outcome of their respective character and after their environment in which they are placed. Aristotle examines in detail the Plato’s charge that poetry is all lies. He faces the fundamental objection that poetry present not facts but fiction. It criticizes as an untruth and unreal. Aristotle's reply is that poetry is not reality but a higher reality. Poetry transcend facts and the idea of reality is in the poets mind. It gives us the ideal reality in the poets mind.

Aristotle points out the sources of tragic pleasure:

(i) Pleasure is derived from air, natural sense of harmony and rhythm.

(ii) It is also derived from the instinct of imitation. A successful tragedy gives pleasure because it satisfies our basic instinct of imitation.

(iii) Poetry is imitation of an imitation of something which we are not familiar increases our knowledge and gives us pleasure.

(iv) The pleasure of tragedy is caused by the purgation.

(v) Tragedy imitates action and life, its pain and misery. There is emotional identification of the spectator with the person or persons who suffer on the stage. Perpetuity and Anagnorisis helped to create and heighten interest as well as emotions. All are sense, emotions and thoughts are involved. In this way we smile through our tears.

(vi) Tragedy gives aesthetic pleasure because it increases our understanding of life and its problems. The spectator gets a kind of inner illumination.
(vii) The unity of the plot diction. Spectator etc. also contributes to the sources of the pleasure in tragedy.

These are the main features of Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, it must be remembered that Aristotle was writing his theory based on green drama. It is not meant for universal application. He does provide a foundation for all discussion about tragedy and his contribution is valuable.

**Conclusion:** - Aristotle solved most of the problems raised by Plato his mentor and also beautifies the beauty of tragedy and epic efficiently. He emphasizes the shaping part of the imagination which empowers the poet to go beyond philosophy and history.

### The Nature of Poetic Truth in Aristotle’s Poetics

**Introduction:** - Several critics are of the view that Aristotle’s Poetics was primarily written as an answer to Plato’s charge against poetry. Whether this is acceptable or not, Aristotle’s concept of poetry certainly involves a ‘defence’ of poetry against the charge that poetry is a pack of lies, a copy of a copy, a shadow of shadows and twice removed from reality. We see how Aristotle takes the very concept of ‘imitation’ from Plato but modifies it to hold greater dimensions.

**The Concept of ‘Imitation’:** - Plato considered poetry as imitation. But to him, the imitation was of a lower order. Poets, according to him, imitated the world of appearances, which was a shadow or image of the ideal conception. Thus poetry imitated a shadow; it copied’ a copy of reality, and hence, was twice removed from reality.

Aristotle took the term ‘imitation’ from Plato. He gave to it a much wider significance and greater dimensions. He turns the table on Plato by saying that poetry is an imitation, but imitation of a special type. The imitation in poetry is not a slavish ‘copying* of the external appearances of things. It is a recreative imitation. It is a creative reproduction of objects; it involves the effort of the imagination and the intellect. It thus presents a higher truth, the truth of imagination. It universalises the particular. The poet sifts1 his material, selects the most relevant portions, imposes order and design on the chaotic material of life and universalises the particular. Thus Aristotle contends2, the truth involved in poetry is higher than that embodied in history.

**Poetry and History : Universal versus Particular:** - The poet does not deal with things as they had happened in the past. To do so would be the work of the historian. The function of the poet is to relate what may happen—what is possible according to the laws of probability and necessity:

The poet and historian differ not by writing in prose or in verse. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen.

The poet could take for his material, things as they are, as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. He uses creative vision to make something ‘new’ out of the material of life. But what are these materials of life? Are they the external happenings and events which took place historically? No.
the basic elements in human nature, and the permanent possibilities of human nature. History, on the other hand, deals with the concrete particulars of existence. The historian is restricted to the particular happenings, or the existent facts. The poet’s view is larger, deeper, more generalised. He presents the universal through the particular.

Poetry has this in common with philosophy: there is a search for Truth—universal truth. The historical facts appear in a chronological order. I, them, there is not a logical sequence or causal chain. But in poetry, there is the governing appearance of design imposed on the confused material taken from We.

**The Government of Probability and Necessity:** - The poet, as has been already remarked, imposes order on the confused tangle of life. The poet eliminates the irrelevant matter, the nonessential, or the merely incidental. The law of probability and necessity refers to the internal structure of the poem. It brings about the close cohesion of the parts. There has got to be a ‘necessity’ about the events following one another. There has to be a ‘necessary’ relationship between the events, and between the characters and events. There is a probably causal relationship between the incidents.

One might argue that this kind of order and design is far removed from real life, in which things often happen without apparent cause. Things often happen in a haphazard manner, with no proper causal relationship in life. Why, then, should we say that poetry’s truth depends upon the law of probability and necessity, or order and the establishment of proper relationship between cause and effect? The very fact that the poet selects his material and imposes order on it, and produces an effect of ‘inevitability’ about the sequence of events, embodies the essence of poetic truth. It is through this process of ordering the material into a cohesive1 whole that a poet achieves the idealisation of appearances. The poet takes the haphazard material of the life as we see it. He imagines a cohesive while composed out of this material. He creates this cohesive whole out of the chaotic material. Thus the truth embodied in poetry is of a higher order than that of history.

**Imaginative Truth:** - The men and women we meet in poetry are not ‘real’ in the usual sense of term. They are always slightly different, either better or lower than average. Their thoughts and words are not thoughts and words of ordinary men and women. The probable laws of their behaviour cannot be measured against the standards of average humanity. The rules of ordinary experience do not govern the higher creations of- poetry. Poetry imitates the ‘essence’ and not the appearances. It reveals the ideal possibilities inherent in human life. All that the truth of poetry demands is that the actions of the character in the poem be logical. The events presented by the poet should have a relationship not only with one another, but also with the character placed in the midst of these events. Aristotle agrees that poetry presents not facts, but fiction. But this does not make poetry ‘unreal’ or ‘untrue’. The truth of poetry is a “higher reality*, because poetry rises above facts. In this it becomes ‘ideal’; it presents something as it might have been, or ought to be, according to the idea of the poet. It is the imaginative power which makes poetic truth different from historical truth. And it is this that makes poetry ‘universal’ and permanent in its truth.
**Likely Impossibility is Preferable to Unlikely Possibility:** - Aristotle makes a valid statement in connection with poetic truth. He remarks that in poetry the 'likely impossibility is preferable to the 'unlikely possibility'. The poet, Aristotle is quite willing to admit, tells lies; the poet is not concerned with actualities. But what matters, tells lies; the poet is not concerned with actualities. But what matters, is the way of telling these lies. It is of the utmost importance that these ‘lies’ be convincing, credible, probable. The most impossible occurrence, incident, or character becomes credible through the poet’s vivid handling. Indeed, we find that we are quite willing to believe the ‘fantastic’ in actual life even if it seems quite unlikely. But the same thing would appear incredible in art, if it is not presented in a ‘realistic’ manner. Poetic illusion has to be created with a master-touch, otherwise the required ‘suspension of disbelief will not be produced. It is’ the poet’s artistic capabilities which can create this poetic illusion, by ordering the events in a causal sequence. It would then appear as if the events could have happened under a particular set of circumstances. Through the poet’s art, “the impossible not only becomes possible, but natural and even inevitable.”

**Kinds of Improbabilities and Irrationalities:** - The probable is that which appears rational, and hence gains our credibility. Anything improbable is irrational. The impossible is that which is not possible physically. But the impossible can be made to look ‘probable’ if it is given a logical inevitability through art. The improbable does not really have a place in art. But there are some types of improbabilities which can be overcome in their presentation.

Material improbability, with regards to material facts, can be overcome. It can be made to look logically inevitable by artistic skill. Improbabilities are admitted in poetry as they are conducive to the heightening of the poetic effects of wonder and admiration. Homer, says Aristotle, could handle ‘lies’ very well.

The ‘irrational’ is much more difficult to handle if it is the introduction of the marvellous. But the supernatural elements are easily believed, if it is in accordance with the general beliefs and received opinion. The supernatural elements are easily admissable in epic poetry, but less so in tragedy which is presented on stage. On stage, irrationalities appear less credible.

In dramatic poetry, the events presented must be the logical and natural outcome of the preceding events. Each event has to lead naturally to the next. There is a complex interrelationship between character and event in drama. Cause and effect have to be logically presented. Hence, the place for the irrational, the supernatural, and the marvellous is highly restricted in drama. Nor is there much place for ‘chance’ or ‘accident’. Chance events do not have rationality while drama requires its events to be governed by the law of probability and necessity. Chance is allowed only if the poet’s great skill can overcome its apparent irrationality.

**Moral Improbability:** - The one kind of improbability which cannot be overcome through the skill of any poet is ‘moral improbability’. This is the improbability arising out of the violation of the basic laws of human behaviour. These violate the very principles of human nature, and do not have a place in poetry at all. They cannot be glossed1 over by any skilful technique, for they are absolutely untrue, conceptually and really.
truth depends on the basic truths of human nature—the eternal emotions, thoughts, feeling, and actions of human beings. If it violates these very objects of imitation, it cannot have any credibility. Logical and moral necessities are at all times to be adhered to.

Conclusion:

Poetry then, is ‘imitation’, but not a photographic presentation of the world of appearances and all its mundane trivialities. Poetry’s truth is based on the basic elements of human nature, the everlasting, universal aspects of human life. Poetry ignores the nonessentials, removes irrelevances, and concentrates on the essentials. It presents the ‘universal’, while history deals with particular events. Poetry takes the particular and makes it into the universal. But the process of imitation is in keeping with the law of logicality, probability and necessity. Poetic truth is higher than that of history. The particular object taken by the poet is transfigured, "so that the higher truth, the idea of the universal, shines thought it". Aristotle defends poetry against the charge that it is full of lies.

Aristotle enunciates a doctrine which holds good for all ages—the presence of a universal element in all great poetry, accounting for its permanent appeal, while at the same time he showed how a reconciliation might be effected between poetry and philosophy. "Plato had indeed shown that an element of intuition was common to the processes of philosopher and poet alike; but it remained for Aristotle to complete the vindication of poetry, and to recommend the claims of philosophy and poetry by showing that both were avenues to the higher truth."

Aristotle on Characterization

According to Aristotle, “Tragedy idealises—imitates men as better (or higher)—and Comedy caricatures, i.e. shows men as worse (lower) than they actually are.” The characters in a tragedy should be life-like, convincing, acceptable, consistent, reasonable, and impressive. They should be people of better sort.

The four essentials of characterization as mentioned by Aristotle in Chapter XV of the Poetics are as follows:—

1. The Characters must be good.
2. The Characters must be appropriate.
3. They must be true to life.
4. The characters must be consistent.

A character is good, if his words and actions reveal that his purpose is good. Entirely wicked characters, even when assigned minor roles, are unfit for tragedy. Wickedness may be introduced only when required by the necessities of the plot. Wanton or wilful introduction of wickedness must be avoided; and when introduced even wicked characters must be made good in some respects. Wickedness must be mixed up with some good as in actual life.
The characters must be appropriate, that is, must be true to type or status. For example, a woman must be shown as womanly and not manly, a slave must be given a character appropriate to his status, and the king to his kingly status. Manliness would not be appropriate in a woman, and vice versa. If the characters are taken from some known myth or story, they must be true to tradition.

The characters must be true to life. They must have the virtues and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds, likes and dislikes, of average humanity. It is essential to arouse to feeling of pity and fear in the spectators. If they are not true to life, they would not be able to arouse fear and pity. The characters must be of an intermediate sort, mixtures of good and evil, virtues and weaknesses, like us.

Fourthly, the characters must be consistent. They must be true to their own natures, and their actions must be rational, not rash. There should be no sudden changes in character. If the dramatist has to represent an inconsistent person, then he must be, ‘consistently inconsistent.’

And lastly, “The ideal there must be an intermediate kind of person, a man not primarily virtuous or just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity, but by an error of judgement.” Furthermore, he must be a man of” reputation and prosperity”.

Relative Importance of Plot and Character in Poetics

Aristotle’s Controversial Statement on Plot: - Aristotle lists six formative elements of tragedy. Of these he gives the primary place of importance to the plot. Indeed, he devotes a major portion of his discussion of tragedy to Plot. Plot he says is the very soul of tragedy; it is the principle of tragedy. He then makes the famous statement which led to such a great deal of controversy. He declares: “A tragedy is impossible without plot, but there may be one without character.” The statement has led to plenty of hostile criticism, especially from the modern critics, who consider that Aristotle is depressing the value of character to that of plot. Some critics have misread Aristotle’s statement, and have accused him of being absurd. How, they ask, can there be tragedy without ‘character’ as used by Aristotle, before we go into the relative importance of plot and character in a tragedy.

The Necessity of Plot: - Aristotle defines tragedy as in imitation of an action. What is action? It is a process of change, and in tragedy, a process of change from happiness to misery. The action is made up of a number of logically connected incidents. One can say that the plot is the arrangement of the incidents. However, it is important to note that Aristotle did not consider the term ‘action’ as clearly and wholly external. It involves inward activity also. To him, plot did not mean an abstract pattern of action largely independent of the specific character, or agent.

In drama characters are not described; they act. They reveal themselves through their speech and action. Without action in this sense, there can be no drama at all. The plot contains the kernel of the action. It is through the plot that the change from happiness to misery is shown. Aristotle defines tragedy thus : Tragedy is
but of an action of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now Character determines men’s qualities, but it is by their action that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character; character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and plot are the end of tragedy, and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character.

We see that the two elements of plot and character seem to be set against one another in sharp and impossible opposition. It is also obvious that one cannot take the last sentence of the above quotation in a literal sense. The confusion in the discussion of this question arises from the ambiguity in the use of the words ‘plot’ and ‘character’. In the popular sense, the antithesis, between the two terms is based on the fact that the term ‘character’ is not seen in its full dramatic value. It is made to stand for the abstract impression of character, rather than signifying “characters producing action,” as it should in the dramatic sense.

The ‘plot’ in the full sense of term is the ‘action’, and includes not only the circumstances and incidents which form the main part of ‘plot’ as popularly thought, but also ‘character’ in the full dramatic sense of ‘characters producing action’. Thus we find that an antithesis between ‘plot’ and ‘character’ is not possible.

**Ethos and Dionoia - Two Aspects of ‘Character’**: In one sense, ‘character’ can be taken to mean the dramatic personages. If used in this sense, the antithesis between plot and character at once becomes absurd, for how can there be a plot without the agent? It is apparent that Aristotle did not use the term to mean dramatic personage.

In the second sense, ‘character’ is that bent or tendency or habit of mind, which is revealed only through the speech and action of a dramatic personage. It is in this sense that Aristotle uses the term ‘character’, when he says that tragedy is possible without character. He means that tragedy is possible even if character delineation is not too strong, i.e., even if the characters are mere types, or marked only by class characteristics, or lacking in those distinctive qualities out of which dramatic action grows.

Aristotle uses two words for the elements in the character of a person—ethos and dionoia. Both these elements determine the cause of action, as well as the quality of action. Ethos is the moral element, while dionoia is the intellectual element. It is through character, consisting of both these elements that the moral self of a person finds “outward expression.” Both these elements reveal themselves in the speech and action of the personage. If a person has a tendency to do good, he is called virtuous. As Humphry House says, this tendency to do good or bad is not realised if it is merely inherent; it is realised only through actions, and it is only through the past actions that one forms an idea of the character’s ‘character’.

**Character is Formed Through Action**: We have certain qualities or abilities inherent in us, such as the ability to see, hear, etc. Our moral self is acquired by our actions in the past. We learn to become good or bad by acting well or ill, just as a builder learns to build building by building. "By repeated acts of a certain kind, w
habit or a certain bent of character. In this way, qualities of characters are legacies of past acts,” says Humphry House.

Character is formal through action, and is revealed through actions. When Aristotle talks of tragedy without character, he means that the dramatic personages do not reveal their character, their moral bent which makes them act in a particular manner. This moral bent is revealed in the purpose of an action, as well as in the means adopted to bring about that end. In some plays the moral bent need not be revealed because there is no situation which demands the person to make a choice. There may not be a situation in which the person has to decide on a course of action. As such, in the absence of the need to make a choice, a moral choice involving intellectual reasoning, the ‘character’ of the person is not required to be revealed. In such a tragedy all that matters, is the plot. Thus tragedy is possible without ‘character’, but it is not possible without plot.

It will be noted that the necessity of making a choice, which requires deliberation and thought about the means, is conducive to the ‘individualised’ characters. Aristotle’s theory thus allows for ‘individualised’ characters. Each situation would demand a choice from such characters; each choice would require, deliberation and thought, which would be expressed in their speech. Such speeches would be in the nature of presentation of an action, for they reflect an inward mental activity; an inward activity which would soon be manifested externally. They would reflect the inward ‘movement towards the choice’ ultimately made by the dramatic character.

In Prometheus, there is no outward movement: the main situation at the end is what it was at the beginning. There is a conflict of two superhuman wills, neither of which can surrender to the other. Yet the dialogue is not mere conversation. Each of Prometheus’ speech is a step forward in the action. His words are equivalent to deeds. This is action, though not consisting of outward doing. Thus we find that some of the Greek plays were not only devoid of intricate plots, but presented an unchanging situation. Similarly, in Milton’s Samson Agonistes, the speeches of Samson form an integral part of the action.

**Character is Realised through Action and thus Subordinate to Plot:** It has to be realised that dramatic characters exist through what they say or do. The character is ‘actualised’ through the action. It is the action of the person that leads to either happiness or misery. The plot is the ground work, or the design through the medium of which ethos derives its meaning and dramatic value. “The most beautiful colours”, says Aristotle, “laid on confusedly, will not give as much pleasure as the chalk outline of a portrait” Ethos, divorced from plot is like a daub of colour, beautiful in itself, but, which apart from form gives little pleasure. A play is like a living organism. Its animating principle is the plot, according to Aristotle. Without it the play could not exist. It is the plot which gives to the play its inner meaning and reality, as the soul does to the body. The true significance of the tragedy lies in the plot. It is through the plot that the end, or the intention, of tragedy is realised. It is the sequence of events which produce, the emotional effect special to tragedy. In the plot there are the reversal of situations and Discoveries, which most powerfully evoke the tragic feeling. Thus plot is supreme and character is subordinate to it, says Aristotle.
**Aristotle’s Doctrine: Disputed by Modern Critics:** - Modern critics have assailed the doctrine of the primary, importance of plot as propounded by Aristotle. They argue that plot is a mere external framework, a piece of mechanism devised to illustrate the working of character. The ‘Character’ of a person lies in thought prior to action, and is implied in it. Events have no meaning or interest, except in so far as they are supposed to proceed from will. A man’s character defines, expresses and interprets action. But the issue has been confused by such questions. The actual question is not whether one element can be shown ultimately to contain the other. The question is, which of the two is the more fundamental as regards the artistic conception and dramatic structure of a play.

Action is the first necessity to a play. But mere action is not enough. Action, to be dramatic, must stand in relation to certain mental states. We like to see the feelings out of which it grows, the motivating force of will which carries it out to the end. Drama is will or emotion in action. But in real life all mental activity does not manifest itself in outward activity. However, the action of drama cannot consist in an inward activity that does not go beyond the sphere of thought and emotion. Even where the main interest is centred in the internal conflict, this conflict must manifest itself in individual acts, and in concrete relations with the world outside. The action and reaction within the mind itself become dramatic, only when they are brought out into a plot which gives them significance. In this connection Butcher observes that only certain characters are capable of dramatic treatment. Passive characters are not fit for drama. Plot is not, as some critics say, a mere external, or an accident of inner life. In the action of drama, character is revealed and defined. Plot does not overpower characters, it is the very medium through which character is discerned.

**The Trend in Modern Drama:** - Modern drama shows a marked tendency to lay greater stress on the delineation of individual character. Greek dramatists of the ancient age were, to some extent, impeded in the development of character, because of the ready material they had to work with. They were more or less confined to a group of legends whose main outlines were already fixed. The freedom of the Greek poet in delineating character was restricted by the choice of subject-matter.

Modern drama brings us to another world. A richer and more varied inner life is opened up. The sense of personality is developed. Characters become more complex. Actions tend more and more to take place within the human mind itself. The frontier between action and passion threatens to fade away.

In Shakespeare, character assumes infinite variety; contradictory elements are brought together—contradictions which do not yield to psychological analysis. Loves, honour, ambition, jealously are the prevailing motives of modern tragedy. But Shakespeare, while deepening the subjective personality of man, does not lose sight of the “objective ends of life and corresponding phases of character.” He maintains a balance between these two sides of human experience. He does not permit the dramatic action to become subservient to the portrayal of individual character.

Hamlet, as F.L. Lucas says, could be said to be the first modern man, who realised that, “Action is transitory—a step, a blow, The motion of a muscle-this way or that...”
and in-the after vacancy We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed: "Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark, and shares the nature of infinity."

In Hamlet, it is true that character becomes `dramatic by an intellectual and masterly inactivity which offers resistance to the 1. recognized; made out clearly that prompt ordinary men to action. Events seem to be brought about by acts of arrested volition2, and not by the energy of free will. We find that the inaction is indeed an active force making Hamlet desist from doing anything. Just as some men are compelled to act. Hamlet has this energetic resisting force which stops him from acting. Thus the non-acting itself becomes a form of action.

There is the increased tendency to exhibit character in growth, in successive stages of its development. A Greek tragedy takes a few significant scenes out of a hero's life; these are bound together by a causal relationship, and made to constitute a single concentrated action. The modern would not have such a concentrated action. They would include much more than the Greek dramatists. In modern drama, the dramatic theme often encompasses the whole process, beginning at the moment when a deed is dormant3 in the mind until it has developed into action and brought about its consequences. The period encompassed by the action is enlarged. It is only natural that the characters should also expand in new and complex directions. The ancient stage gives us no such example of character development as we have, for instance, in Macbeth.

The mystery of the human personality becomes of supreme interest in modern drama starting with Ibsen. He fastens on the contrast between what man dreams of and what he really is, .and works towards the culminating moment of disillusionment. Strindberg dramatizes obsessive egotism. And Chekov celebrates the frustrated and inarticulate4 hero. There is an impulse towards self-discovery, which splits up the human psyche into abstractions (the theatre of the soul). Modern drama has indeed brought the delineation of character into new and stronger relief.

**Character and Plot should be harmoniously blended in an Ideal Tragedy:**

Modern dramatists have explored the deep recesses6 of human mind. They have represented the abnormal and strange impulses of man. But too much of this can hamper dramatic art. Too much of subjectivism and psychological interest can lead to dramatic lyrics but not to successful drama. Goethe, for example, with all his poetic genius did not surmount this pitfall. His reflective, emotional characters, who view life through the medium of individual feeling, seldom have the requisite energy to carry out a tragic action, as S.H. Butcher comments. Drama demands a balance between plot and character. Drama is a representation of a complete and typical action, whose lines converge on a determined end, which evolves out of human will in such a manner that action and character are each in turn the outcome of the other. Drama requires a fusion of the two elements, plot and character.

**Conclusion:**

When Aristotle says that a tragedy can be possible without character, but not without plot, it is to be noted that he is not saying that a tragedy without character is the ideal type. Indeed, he says that a poet should utilise all the formative elements of tragedy to produce an ideal tragedy.
possibility of drama with, or without, one or the other element. The characters cannot act without reference to the situation in which they are placed. Thus the situation influences their very feelings, the very motives that spring them to action. In this sense plot becomes fundamental to drama. A passive character will produce no action and as such, has no place in drama.

It is unfortunate that Aristotle has not discussed an essential aspect of drama—namely conflict. The tragic action is in essence the outcome of conflict. And to be tragic, the conflict must be both inside and outside man. It is out of this conflict that plot and character both develop. Ultimately, however, plot is the first necessity of drama, artistically speaking.
Sir Philip Sidney

Sir Philip Sidney, for three centuries the type of the English gentleman, was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, lord deputy of Ireland under Queen Elizabeth, and Lady Mary Dudley, daughter of the Duke of Northumberland. He was born at Penshurst, Kent, November 30, 1554, and was named after his godfather, Philip II of Spain, then consort of Queen Mary. He was sent to Oxford at fourteen, where he was noted as a good student; and on leaving the university he obtained the Queen's leave to travel on the Continent. He went to Paris in the train of the ambassador to France, saw much of court society there, and was in the city at the time of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Proceeding to Germany he met, at Frankfort, the Protestant scholar Hubert Languet, with whom, though Languet was thrice his age, he formed an intimate and profitable friendship. He went on to Vienna, Hungary, Italy, and back by the Low Countries, returning to England at the age of twenty, an accomplished and courtly gentleman, with some experience of practical diplomacy, and a first-hand knowledge of the politics of the Continent.

Sidney's introduction to the court of Elizabeth took place in 1575, and within two years he was sent back to the Continent on a number of diplomatic commissions, when he used every opportunity for the furthering of the interests of Protestantism. He seems everywhere to have made the most favorable impression by both his character and his abilities. During the years between 1578 and 1585 he was chiefly at court and in Parliament, and to this period belong most of his writings. In 1585 he left England to assume the office of Governor of Flushing, and in the next year he was mortally wounded at the battle of Zutphen, dying on October 17, 1586. All England went into mourning, and the impression left by his brilliant and fascinating personality has never passed away.

Sidney's literary work was all published after his death, some of it against his express desire. The "Arcadia," an elaborate pastoral romance written in a highly ornate prose mingled with verse, was composed for the entertainment of his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. The collection of sonnets, "Astrophel and Stella," was called forth by Sidney's relation to Penelope Devereux, daughter of the Earl of Essex. While they were both little more than children, there had been some talk of a marriage between them; but evidence of any warmth of feeling appears chiefly after Penelope's unhappy marriage to Lord Rich. There has been much controversy over the question of the sincerity of these remarkable poems, and over the precise nature of Sidney's sentiments toward the lady who inspired them, some regarding them as undisguised outpourings of a genuine passion, others as mere conventional literary exercises. The more recent opinion is that they express a platonic devotion such as was common in the courtly society of the day, and which was allowed by contemporary opinion to be compatible with the marriage of both parties.

In 1579 Stephen Gosson published a violent attack on the arts, called "The School of Abuse," and dedicated it without permission to Sidney. It w.
Sidney composed his “Defense of Poesy,” an eloquent apology for imaginative literature, not unmingled with humor. The esthetic theories it contains are largely borrowed from Italian sources, but it is thoroughly infused with Sidney’s own personality; and it may be regarded as the beginning of literary criticism in England.

**Sir Philip Sidney’s Apology for Poetry**

Philip Sidney in his "Apology for Poetry" reacts against the attacks made on poetry by the puritan, Stephen Gosson. To, Sidney, poetry is an art of imitation for specific purpose, it is imitated to teach and delight. According to him, poetry is simply a superior means of communication and its value depends on what is communicated. So, even history when it is described in a lively and passionate expression becomes poetic. He prefers imaginative literature that teaches better than history and philosophy. Literature has the power to reproduce an ideal golden world not just the brazen world.

**Charges of Stephen Gosson**

(a) Poetry is the waste of time.

(b) Poetry is mother of lies.

(c) It is nurse of abuse.

(d) Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal world.

**Sidney’s Reply to the Charges**

Poetry is the source of knowledge and a civilizing force, for Sidney. Gossoon attacks on poetry saying that it corrupts the people and it is the waste of time, but Sidney says that no learning is so good as that which teaches and moves to virtue and that nothing can both teach and amuse so much as poetry does. In essay societies, poetry was the main source of education. He remembers ancient Greek society that respected poets. The poets are always to be looked up. So, poetry is not wasted of time.

To the second charge, Sidney answers that poet does not lie because he never affirms that his fiction is true and can never lie. The poetic truths are ideal and universal. Therefore, poetry cannot be a mother of lies.

Sidney rejects that poetry is the source of abuses. To him, it is people who abuses poetry, not the vice-versa. Abuses are more nursed by philosophy and history than by poetry, by describing battles, bloodshed, violence etc. On the contrary, poetry helps to maintain morality and peace by avoiding such violence and bloodshed. Moreover it brings light to knowledge.

Sidney views that Plato in his Republic wanted to banish the abuse of poetry not the poets. He himself was not free from poeticality, which we can find in his dialogues.
never says that all poets should be banished. He called for banishing only those poets who are inferior and unable to instruct the children.

For Sidney, art is the imitation of nature but it is not slavish imitation as Plato views. Rather it is creative imitation. Nature is dull, incomplete and ugly. It is artists who turn dull nature into golden colour. He employs his creative faculty, imagination and style of presentation to decorate the raw materials of nature. For Sidney, art is a speaking picture having spatiotemporal dimension. For Aristotle human action is more important but for Sidney nature is important.

Artists are to create arts considering the level of readers. The only purpose of art is to teach and delight like the whole tendency of Renaissance. Sidney favours poetic justice that is possible in poet's world where good are rewarded and wicked people are punished.

Plato's philosophy on 'virtue' is worthless at the battlefield but poet teaches men how to behave under all circumstances. Moral philosophy teaches virtues through abstract examples and history teaches virtues through concrete examples but both are defective. Poetry teaches virtue by example as well as by percept (blend of abstract + concrete). The poet creates his own world where he gives only the inspiring things and thus poetry holds its superior position to that of philosophy and history.

In the poet's golden world, heroes are ideally presented and evils are corrupt. Didactic effect of a poem depends on the poet's power to move. It depends on the affective quality of poetry. Among the different forms of poetry like lyric, elegy, satire, comedy etc. epic is the best form as it portrays heroic deeds and inspires heroic deeds and inspires people to become courageous and patriotic.

In this way, Sidney defines all the charges against poetry and stands for the sake of universal and timeless quality of poetry making us know why the poets are universal genius.

Main Ideas in 'An Apology for Poetry' and its Significance

An Apologie for Poetrie may for purposes of convenience be divided into sixteen sections.

1. The Prologue

Before launching a defence of poetry, Sidney justified his stand by referring in a half-humorous manner to a treatise on horsemanship by Pietro Pugliano. If the art of horsemanship can deserve such an eloquent eulogy and vindication, surely poetry has better claims for eulogy and vindication. There is a just cause to plead a case for poetry since it has fallen from the highest estimation of learning to be 'the laughing stock of children.'

2. Some Special Arguments in Favour of Poetry
Poetry has been held in high esteem since the earliest times. It has been ‘the first light-giver to ignorance.’ The earlier Greek philosophers and historians were, in fact, poets. Even among the uncivilized nations, in Turkey, among the American Indians, and in Wales, poetry enjoys an undiminishing popularity. To attack poetry is, therefore, to cut at the roots of culture and intelligence.

3. The Prophetic Character of Poetry

The ancient Romans paid high reverence to the poet by calling him Vates, which means a Diviner, a Prophet, or a Foreseer. The etymological origin of Greek word ‘poet’ is Poiein, and this means ‘to make’. Hence the Greeks honour the poet as a maker or creator. This suggests the divine nature of poetry.

4. The Nature and Function of Poetry

Poetry is an art of ‘imitation’ and its chief function is to teach and delight. Imitation does not mean mere copying or a reproduction of facts. It means a representing or transmuting of the real and actual, and sometimes creating something entirely new. The poet, so 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."

Commenting on the creative powers of the poet, Sidney further states: "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden."

5. The Three Kinds of Poetry

The three kinds of poetry, according to Sidney, are: (a) Religious poetry, (b) Philosophical poetry, and (c) Poetry as an imaginative treatment of life and nature. He calls special attention to the third class of poets, for ‘these be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed vates.’ They ‘most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, has been, or shall be, but range, only with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be.’

6. Various Sub-divisions of the Third Kind of Poetry

Poetry proper may further be divided into various species—the heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral and others. Poets generally make use of verse to apparel their poetical inventions. But verse is ‘an ornament and no cause to poetry since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets.’

7. Superiority of Poetry to Philosophy and History
In the promotion of virtue, both philosophy and history play their parts. Philosophy deals with its theoretical aspects and teaches virtue by precept. History teaches practical virtue by drawing concrete examples from life. But poetry gives both precepts and practical examples. Philosophy, being based on abstractions, is ‘hard of utterance and mystery to be conceived.’ It cannot be a proper guide for youth. On the other hand, the historian is tied to empirical facts that his example drags no necessary consequence. Poetry gives perfect pictures of virtue which are far more effective than the mere definitions of philosophy. It also gives imaginary examples which are more instructive than the real examples of history. The reward of virtue and the punishment of vice is more clearly shown in Poetry than in History. Poetry is superior to Philosophy in the sense that it has the power to move and to give incentive for virtuous action. It presents moral lessons in a very attractive form. Things which in themselves are horrible as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made delightful in poetic imitation. Poet is, therefore, the monarch of all sciences. ‘For he doth not only show the way but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it.’ The poet does not begin with obscure definitions which load the memory with doubtfulness, ‘but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.

8. Various Species of Poetry

The pastoral poetry treats of the beauty of the simple life, and sometimes, of the miseries of the people under hard Lords. Why should it be disliked? Elegiac poetry deals with the weakness of mankind and wretchedness of the world. It should evoke pity rather than blame. Satiric poetry laughs at folly, and iambic poetry tries to unmask villainy. These also do not deserve to be condemned.

Nobody should blame the right use of comedy. Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life presented in a ridiculous manner. It helps men keeping away from such errors. Tragedy, which opens the greatest wounds in our hearts, teaches the uncertainty of this world. Nobody can resist the ‘sweet violence’ of a tragedy.

The lyric which gives moral precepts and soars to the heavens in singing the praises of the Almighty, cannot be displeasing. Nor can the epic or heroic poetry be disliked because it inculcates virtue to the highest degree by portraying heroic and moral goodness in the most effective manner. Sidney asserts that the heroical is ‘not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry.’

9. Main Objections Brought Against Poetry by its Enemies

A common complaint against poetry is that it is bound up with ‘rhyming and versing’. But verse is not essential for poetry. ‘One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry’ Verse is used for convenience. It produces verbal harmony and lends itself easily to memorizing. It is the only fit speech for music. It adds to words a sensuous and emotional quality.
10. **Four Chief Objections to Poetry**

There are some more serious objections to poetry, namely:

(a) That there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this;

(b) That it is the mother of lies:

(c) That it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires; and,

(d) That Plato had banished poets from his ideal republic.

11. ** Replies to These Objections**

Sidney dismisses the first charge by saying that he has already established that ‘no learning is so good as that which reacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry.’

His answer to the second objection that poets are liars is that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar. The Astronomer, the Geometrician, the historian, and others, all make false statements. But the poet ‘nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth,’ his aim being ‘to tell not what is or is not, but what should or should not be.’ So what he presents is not fact but fiction embodying truth of an ideal kind.

The third charge against poetry is that its entire species are infected with love themes and amorous conceits, which have a demoralising effect on readers. To this charge Sidney replies that poetry does not abuse man’s wit, it is man’s wit that abuseth poetry. All arts and sciences misused bad evil effects, but that did not mean that they were less valuable when rightly employed. Shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious? Certainly not.

Sidney is rather perplexed at the last charge, namely Plato’s rejection of poetry. He wonders why Plato found fault with poetry. In fact, Plato warned men not against poetry but against its abuse by his contemporary poets who filled the world with wrong opinions about the gods. So Plato’s objection was directed against the theological concepts. In Ion, Plato gives high and rightly divine commendation to poetry. His description of the poet as ‘a light winged and sacred thing’ in that dialogue reveals his attitude to poetry. In fact by attributing unto poetry a very inspiring of a divine force, Plato was making a claim for poetry which he for his part could not endorse. Not only Plato but, Sidney tells us, all great men have honoured poetry.

12. **Why is Poetry not honoured in England as it is elsewhere?**

Why has England grown so hard a step-mother to Poets? Asks Sidney. He thinks that it is so because poetry has come to be represented by ‘base men with servile wits’ or to men who, however studious, are not born poets. He says that ‘a poet no industry can make, if his own genius be not carried unto it’. Another cause is the want of serious
cultivation of the Poetic Art. Three things necessary for producing good poetry are Art, Imitation, and Exercise which are lacking in the present generation of poets.

13. A Brief Review of the State of Poetry in England from Chaucer to Sidney’s own Time

Sidney says that few good poems have been produced in England since Chaucer. Chaucer did marvellously well in Troilus and Cresseida. The Mirrour of Magistrates also contains some beautiful passages. Earl of Surrey’s Lyrics also deserve praise. Spenser’s The Shepherds Calender is worth reading. English lyric poetry is scanty and poor. Love lyrics and sonnets lack genuine fire and passion. They make use of artificial diction and swelling phrases.

14. Condition of Drama

The state of drama is also degraded. The only redeeming tragedy is Gorboduc which itself is a faulty work. A tragedy should be tied to the laws of poetry and not of history. A dramatist should have liberty to frame the history to his own tragical convenience. Again many things should be told which cannot be shown on the stage. The dramatists should know the difference between reporting and representing. They should straightway plunge into the principal point of action which they want to represent in their play. There should be no mingling of tragedies and comedies; English comedy is based on a false hypothesis. It aims at laughter, not delight. The proper aim of comedy is to afford delightful teaching, not mere coarse amusement. Comedy should not only amuse but morally instruct.

15. Advantages of the English Language

The English language has some definite advantages. It is appreciable for its adaptability to ancient and modern systems of versification. It admits both the unrhymed quantitative system of the ancient poetry and the rhyme peculiar to modern language.

16. Summary

Poetry is full of virtue-breeding delightfulfulness. It is void of no gift that ought to be in the noble name of learning. All the charges laid against it are false and baseless. The poets were the ancient treasurers of the Grecian divinity; they were the first bringers of all civility. There are many mysteries contained poetry. A poet can immortalize people in his verses.

Significance of “An Apology for Poetry”

An Apology for Poetry is the most important contribution to Renaissance literary theory. Sidney advocates a place for poetry within the framework of an aristocratic state, while showing concern for both literary and national identity (Griffiths). Sidney responds in Apology to an emerging antipathy to poetry as expressed in Stephen Gosson’s The Schoole of Abuse (1579). Gosson offers what is in essence a puritan attack on imaginative literature (Griffiths). What is at stake in Sidney’s
poetry’s nobility. The significance of the nobility of poetry is its power to move readers to virtuous action (Robertson). True poets must teach and delight – a view that dates back to Horace.

In an era of antipathy to poetry and puritanical belief in the corruption engendered by literature, Sidney’s defense was a significant contribution to the genre of literary criticism. It was England’s first philosophical defense in which he describes poetry’s ancient and indispensable place in society, its mimetic nature, and its ethical function (Harvey). Among Sidney’s gifts to his contemporaries were his respect for tradition and willingness to experiment (Robertson). An example of the latter is his approach to Plato. He reconfigures Plato’s argument against poets by saying poets are “the least liar” (Leitch). Poets never claim to know the truth, nor “make circles around your imagination,” nor rely on authority (Letich). As an expression of a cultural attitude descending from Aristotle, Sidney, when stating that the poet “never affirmeth,” makes the claim that all statements in literature are hypothetical or pseudo-statements (Frye). Sidney, as a traditionalist, however, gives attention to drama in contradistinction to poetry. Drama, writes Sidney, is “observing neither rules of honest civility nor of skillful poetry” and thus cannot do justice to this genre (Leitch).

In Sidney's day anti-theatricality, an aesthetic and ideological concern, flourished among Sidney’s circle at court (Acheson). Theatre became a contentious issue in part because of the culmination of a growing contempt for the values of the emergent consumer culture. An expanding money economy encouraged social mobility. Europe, at this time, had its first encounter with inflation (Davies). London's theatres at that time grew in popularity so much that by 1605, despite the introduction of charges, London commercial theatres could accommodate up to eight thousand men and women (Hale). Sidney had his own views on drama. In Apology, he shows opposition to the current of his day that pays little attention to unity of place in drama (Bear), but more specifically, his concern is with the "manner" that the "matter" is conveyed (Leitch Sidney). He explains that tragedy is not bound to history or the narrative but to "laws of poesy," having "liberty, either to feign a quite new matter, or to frame the history to the most tragical conveniency".

Sidney employs a number of strategies to assert the proper place of poetry. For instance, he argues against the way in which poetry was misaligned with youth, the effeminate and the timorous. He does so by introducing the idea that “poetry is the companion of camps” and by invoking the heroes of ages past (Leitch). Sidney’s reverence for the poet as soldier is significant because he himself was a soldier at one time. Poetry, in Apology, becomes an art that requires the noble stirring of courage (Pask).

Sidney writes An Apology for Poetry in the form of a judicial oration for the defense, and thus it is like a trial in structure. Crucial to his defense is the descriptive discourse and the idea that poetry creates a separate reality (Harvey). Sidney employs forensic rhetoric as a tool to make the argument that poetry not only conveys a separate reality, but that it has a long and venerable history, and it does not lie. It is defensible in its own right as a means to move readers to virtuous action.
Sydney’s Definition of Poetry and its superiority over Philosophy & History

Philip Sidney defends poetry in his essay “Apology for Poetry” from the accusations made by Stephen Gosson in his “School of Abuse” dedicated to him. There, Gosson makes some objections against poetry. Sidney replies to the objections made by Gosson very emphatically, defending poetry in his essay. Sidney does this in a very logical and scholarly way.

The major objections against poetry are:

(a) “that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them then in this”;

(b) that it is the mother of lies;

(c) that it is the nurse of abuse; infecting us with many pestilent desires; and

(d) that Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal republic.

Sidney’s replies to these objections:

(a) Defending poetry against the first charge, he says that man can’t employ his time more usefully than in poetry. He says that “no learning is so good as that teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach virtue, and thereto as much as poetry”.

(b) His answer to the second objection that poets are liers is that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least lier. The poet creates something by emotion or imagination against which no charge of lying can be brought. The astronomer, the geometrician, the historian and others, all make false statements. But poet “nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth”, his end being “to tell not what is or what is not, but what should or should not be”. The question of truth or falsehood would arise only when a person insists on telling a fact. The poet does not present fact but fiction embodying truth of an ideal kind.

(c) The third objection against poetry that it is the nurse of abuse, “infecting us with many pestilent desires or wits” may be partly justified, but for this a particular poet may be blamed but not poetry. To this charge, Sidney replies that poetry does not abuse man’s wit but it is man’s wit that abuses poetry. All arts and sciences misused had evil effects, but that did not mean that they were less valuable when rightly employed. Abuse of poetry, according to Sidney, is not the problem of poetry but of the poet.

(d) The fourth objection that Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal republic is also not tenable because Plato sought to banish the amoral poets of his time, and not poetry itself. Plato himself believed that poetry is divinely inspired. In “Ion”, Plato gives high and rightly divine commendation to poetry. His description of the poet as “a light-winged and sacred thing” reveals his attitude to poetry. Sidney concludes, “So as Plato banishing the abuse, not the ‘Thing’, not banishing it, but giving due honour unto it, shall be our patron and not adversary”.

Prepared by Atta Ur Rahman Jadoon 03335499069
In this way, Sidney very strongly defends poetry against the accusations made by Stephen Gosson on poetry.

**Superiority of poetry over history and philosophy:**

In the promotion of virtue, both philosophy and history play their parts. Philosophy deals with its theoretical aspects and teaches virtue by precepts. History teaches practical virtue by drawing concrete examples from life. But poetry gives both practical and precepts examples. Philosophy, being based on abstractions, is “heard of utterance and mystery to be conceived.” It cannot be a proper guide for youth. On the other hand, the historian is tied to empirical facts that his example drags no necessary consequence. Poetry gives perfect pictures of virtue which are far more effective than the mere definitions of philosophy. It also gives imaginary examples which are more instructive than the real examples of history. The reward of virtue and the punishment of vice is more clearly shown in poetry than in history. Poetry is superior to philosophy in the sense that it has the power to move and to give incentive for virtuous action. It presents moral lessons in a very attractive manner. Things which in themselves are horrible as cruel battles, monsters are made delightful in poetic imitation. Poet is therefore the monarch of all knowledge. “For he doth(does) not only show the way but giveth(gives) so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it.”

The poet does not begin with obscure definitions which load the memory with doubtfulness, “but he cometh(comes) to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music and with a tale for suit he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth(holds) children from play and old man from the chimney corner. And pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.”

**An Apology for Poetry : An epitome of Renaissance Criticism**

Sidney’s Apologie for Poetrie (1580-81) was intended as a reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abus (1579) Gosson had inducted poetry on four counts: that a man could employ his time more usefully than in poetry that it is the mother of lies, that it is the nurse of abuseramt that, Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal state. Sidney in his Apology replies to each of these charges, drawing copiously, in the absence of critical authorities in England, on the ancient classics and the Italian writers of the Renaissance: in particular, on Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch, among the Greeks, Virgil, Horace and Ovid, among the Romans; and Minturno, Scaliger, and Castelvetro, among the Italians. Yet it is an original document.

Sidney’s Apology is not only a reply to Gosson but much more. 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 comm
life, the tragedy by its moving demonstration of 'the uncertainty of this world, and upon
how weak foundations guilden 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 on it
by its detractors.

Hence Sidney says that a man might better spend his time in poetry. The poet is not a
liar; the poet uses veracity or falsehood to arrive at a higher truth. It is not poetry that
abuses man’s wit but man’s wit that abuses poetry. Plato found fault not with poetry,
which he considered divinely inspired, but with the poets of his time who abused it to
misrepresent the gods.

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 work is comprehensive enough to incorporate all the existing forms of poetry in
his age. He gives his views on the nature and function of poetry, on the three unities, on
tragedy and comedy, and on diction and metre. It is the pioneer in dramatic criticism. As
a French critic has observed. Sidney’s Defence of Poetry “gives us an almost complete
theory of neo-classical tragedy, a hundred years before the ‘Art Poetique’ of Boileau. “

Sidney's Apologie for Poetrie has rightly been valued as “one of the outstanding
performances in English criticism and one which inaugurated a new phase in critical
history. “ Outmoded though some of the critical opinions contained in it now are, yet it
provides a singularly lofty and noble introduction to the long line of English treatises on
the art of poetry. Its significance lies in the fact that it comes at a time when most of the
gentlemen shunned the name of being called a ‘poet.’ Sidney’s vindication of poetry and
his serious treatment of the poetic art enthused a new confidence in them and poetry
came to be looked upon as a noble and worthy pursuit, no more a ‘laughing stock of
children.’ Sidney boldly faced the traditional objections to poetry and he tried to dispel
the mists of prejudice that had gathered around it. His approach was not only negative
but he positively tried to bring out the value of poetry in the social and intellectual life of
society. He presented his arguments in the lost lucid and persuasive manner. He was
treating poetry as a poet with ‘illuminating insight’ and ‘inspiring enthusiasm.’ Professor
Atkins says:

"Nowhere else do we find the same happy mingling of the ideal and the
practical, the same blend of dignity and humour; of
controlled enthusiasm and racy colloquialism; or again, that unstudied simplicity and grace which everywhere pervade the work."

What was precisely the influence of this treatise on Sidney’s contemporaries is only a matter of conjecture. It was circulated in manuscript among his friends and other literary circles during his life and was soon quoted in the best critical places—in Puttenham’s Arte of 1589, in Harington’s Apologie of 1598. Its influence on Ben Jonson, Shakespeare and other dramatists is quite obvious. It gives incentive to creative writing. When this treatise was written, English literature stood at the lowest ebb. In less than twenty-five years after its publication, it became one of the glories of the world. Apart from its influence on the creative writers of the Elizabethan age. Sidney’s treatise showed the direction of later criticism, the neo-classical as well as the romantic. The neo-classical critics made a fetish of his views on the observance of the unities, and the romantic critics like Shelley drew inspiration from its fountain for supporting their theory of creative imagination. Even to the modern readers it continues to charm with its idealism, its sanity, its humour, and its grace. (Atkins).

The Apologie is a kind of formal beginning of literary theorizing in England, and a brilliant enough one. The essay reflects and telescopes not only the continental criticism of the century but a certain amount of classical Greek and Roman as well. Sidney was well-acquainted with the classical Greek and Roman critics. "But it all matters little. Sidney wrote, not a pedant’s encyclopaedia, but a gentleman’s essay.

Points to Remember

1. Written in 1680-81 as a reply to Gosson’s School of Abuse, Sidney’s Apology is an epitome of Renaissance criticism, the foundation on which the castle of the future criticism of Sidney’s age rests.

2. A spirited defence of poetry on the whole; poetry’s oldest branch of knowledge, superior to philosophy, history and science.

3. Shows Sidney’s good sense and sound scholarship; a great contribution towards the appreciation of literature; gives an almost complete theory of neo-classical tragedy.

4. A blend of the ideal and the practical, of dignity and humour; of sincerity and irony, of controlled enthusiasm and racy colloquialism. (Atkins)

5. Its deep influence and circulation. Influence on Ben Jonson and Shakespeare and Shelley quite apparent.

6. "The essay reflects and telescopes not only the continental criticism of the country but a certain amount of classical Greek and Roman as well."

Sidney Contributions to English Criticism

Sidney’s Apology is an important Renaissance document. It is a synthesis of the critical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Scaliger, Minturno, and a host of other
critics. It brings together romanticism and classicism. It is the first attempt in English to deal with the poetic art, practically and not theoretically.

On the nature and function of poetry, on the three unities, on tragedy and comedy, and on diction and metre, Sidney represents contemporary trends. Everywhere his work reflects the influence of Aristotle and Plato and other classical writers. But his originality lies in the skill with which he has drawn upon, selected, arranged and adapted earlier ideas and then has put forth his own ideas, independently arrived at. He makes use of 1. Italian critics, 2. Classical critics, Plato and Aristotle 3. Roman critics, Horace and Plutarch. 4. He also shows the influence of the medieval concept of tragedy, and 5. His didactic approach to poetry is typically Renaissance approach. However, his manner of presentation, his freshness and vigour, and his logical faculty are characteristically his own. His style has dignity, simplicity, concreteness, and a racy humour and irony. It is an illuminating piece of literary criticism as well as a fine piece of creative literature.

Sidney approached poetry not as a pedantic critic, but as a responsive reader. While most of his contemporaries were busy framing rules of rhetoric and prosody, he was paving the way for creative literature. He was preparing an audience who could 'feel' the emotional impact of literature and appreciate it. Sidney felt that literature was a great dynamic force and it had the power 'to move', 'to uplift' and to satisfy emotionally and aesthetically. J. W.H. Atkins has pointed out that "to him poetry was a natural human activity enabling men to sing to beauty and truth, and to satisfy their longings for a world transformed, thus nurturing in them what was good and noble. Moreover, so far from being merely an instrument of moral teaching, it was a concrete and inspiring revelation of human deals, and thus, in a sense, a criticism of life. This, then with its element of permanent truth, was the substance of Sidney's message to an age perplexed and even hostile."

No doubt Sidney has freely drawn on earlier critics, yet he has tried to arrive at his own conception of poetry. The basic question he meets is: why is poetry valuable. The second section of his essay deals with the nature and value of poetry. This is followed by an examination of the objection to poetry. The fourth section presents a critique of the contemporary literary poetry and of morality.

His definitions of poetry, two in number, speak of his greatness as a critic. The first is :"Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight." The second is :"it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet. ...but it is that feigning notable images of virtue or vice, or -what else, with that delightful teaching; which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. "

His defence of poetry is unique. It logically refutes the contemporary charges of the puritans against poetry. Poetry is universal; the first light-giver to ignorance and the first nurse. The earliest recorded or preserved utterance of any nation is a form of poetic expression alone. The ancients delivered wisdom only through poetry. The first philosophers and scientists came before the people in the garb of poets. The poet is a creator, like God. The world created by the poet is a better world than ours. Only in the poetic world do we come across true lovers, constant friends, \"
and excellent men. These characters are perfect. The bad men in this world have unmixed badness, and such villains are not allowed to go unpunished. Poetry is superior to history and philosophy. The poet has both the general and the particular example. But the philosopher is only theoretical, for he has examples. The historian has examples, but no precepts. The historian speaks of what has been, not of what ought to be. The philosopher is vague and speaks of what should be.

The poet speaks of both what is and what should be of what is universal and what is particular. Poetry has liveliness and passion which are lacking in history and philosophy.

Sidney's remarks on tragedy, tragi-comedy and comedy speak of his knowledge of the contemporary trends of literature and his wide readings. In the field of drama his observations were true not only in his age but are also true and valid even today. His observations on satire and various forms of poetry are of great significance so are his views on diction, metre and verse. Surprisingly enough Sidney offers the best defence of metre. Praising English, he says that only in English can rhyme be observed "very precisely."

The essay reflects and telescopes not only the continental criticism of the century but a certain amount of classical Greek and Roman as well. Further, Dramatic criticism in England began with Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney was 'the president of chivalry and nobleness.' He was, as Hakluyt called him the finest flower of the garden of wit and art. He saw that Poetry in his own days had fallen from high estimation to be the laughing stock of children. Gosson in his 'School of Abuse' has condemned poetry and had called it the mother of lies and the nurse of abuse. He had pointed out that there were better professions and vocations than that of a poet and that the suggestion of Plato should be followed in turning out the poets from the state. Sidney who was himself a poet could not relish the idea and sharply and violently reacted against the views of Gosson and the Puritans. He wrote a pitiful defence of Poetry and based the claims for poetry on its divine origin, its prophetic nature, its cultural value, its universal appeal, its elevating power and its alluring methods. He said that poetry was the most ancient and 'full of virtue breeding delightfulness.' He replied to all the charges made by the critics of his days and put back poetry to its own pedestal. He made it popular and freed it from the bondage and slavery of the Puritans. He revitalised it and gave it new life and vigour. It was to his attempts that Poetry was again read with interest and poets like Shakespeare and Spenser and others made England 'nest of singing birds.'

**Points to Remember**

1. **Apologie**—an important Renaissance document—a synthesis of the critical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Scaliger, Mintumo and a few other Italian critics—a union of romanticism and classicism, first important English document in criticism.

2. Sidney represents contemporary trends on the nature and function of poetry, on the three dramatic unities, on tragedy and comedy.

3. His originality lies in the selection, arrangement and adaptation of earlier ideas. Also original in his style, presentation, etc.
4. Approached poetry not as a pedantic critic but as a responsive reader. He has his own conception of poetry. His defence of poetry is sound, logical and convincing. His view that "it is not riming and versing that maketh a poet" has proved to be a universal utterance.

5. He has rightly upheld the superiority of poetry over history, philosophy and science.

6. He regards the poet as God, the creator.

7. Sidney's remarks on tragedy, tragi-comedy and comedy speak of the contemporary trends of literature and his wide ranging interests.


9. Sidney, "the president of chivalry and nobleness," "the finest flower of the garden of wit and art."

10. Sidney revitalised poetry and gave it new life.

**Literature and Virtue in Sidney's "Apology for Poetry"**

In "An Apology for Poetry" Sir Philip Sidney attempts to reassert the fundamental importance of literature to society in general as well as to other creative and intellectual endeavours. Though Sidney's work does provide a synthesis (and in some cases an aberration) of much Greek and Roman literary theory, his argument aspires to go beyond an esoteric academic debate. Literature can "teach and delight" in a manner which other methods of communication do not possess (138). The moral/ethical impact any literary text has upon a reader is of paramount importance to Sidney. The argument Sidney presents and develops is built around the assumption that literature has the capacity to teach most effectively and to demonstrate virtue. Perhaps in better understanding how Sidney specifically supports this claim, we can better assess its strength or validity.

Sidney places literature in a hierarchical relationship with all other forms of learning; literature inhabits the highest and most influential tier. Literature is "the first light-giver to ignorance", and from it all other sources of knowledge have been nurtured (135). As the first use of language beyond the completely utilitarian, literature stretches and expands language to accommodate broader and more conceptual inquiries. Though an ardent admirer of Platonic philosophy, Sydney, in order to serve his intellectual exercise, rewrites or rehabilitates Plato's harsh stance on the worthlessness of literature. Unlike Plato's poet who perpetuates images far removed from the Truth, Sidney's poet can dip into the world of Forms, the Ideal, and provide us with knowledge of virtue. While the tangible world of appearances "is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (137).

Against the established disciplines of history and philosophy, Sidney also uses a revision of Aristotle's Poetics to help demonstrate how literature mediates the interests of both forms of knowledge in order to teach virtue. Where philosophy...
universal, history is consumed with the particular. Literature is able to deal with the same abstract moral/ethical (universal) concepts with which philosophy grapples by providing examples rooted in concrete, albeit fictionalized, details. History is too concerned with the accurate recording of facts to make any conjectures on such broad, less substantiated concepts. Literature exists between and above history and philosophy because the knowledge it conveys (knowledge of the good) is the best and most useful knowledge that exists. As Sidney states, "no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry" (149).

Sidney attempts to provide an utterly rational foundation for his claims, however. He develops a systematic analysis of the mechanisms employed by literature to teach virtue. He sorts literature according to its works and its parts. The works of a literary text can be seen in four specific ethical effects which it should seek to elicit in a reader. Sidney defines these four as: the purifying of wit, enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit (139).

In order to purify the wit, literature must engage the intellect in new and different ways. By allowing the reader to view a particular idea, character, or situation from a new or novel vantage point, literature is able to provide a vicarious, condensed education available through no other medium. Memories gathered from these fictional experiences provide a common frame of reference between otherwise disparate individuals. Fictional examples become touchstones which can be understood and experienced more easily by others. Literary memories point toward a more universal experience and invite the reader to find new and possibly profound meaning(s) in personal experiences as well. Sidney implies that a life without such memories would surely be impoverished. Building upon the first two works, literature also provides a reader with ample and necessary practise in making moral/ethical judgments. A literary text provides a safe outlet for such judgments to be made, discussed, and re-examined. Personal and societal codes of behaviour are shaped, both strengthened and challenged, by this practise. Literature engages the reader actively with virtue as a part of this decision making process. To enlarge the conceit, literature also expands a reader's knowledge and understanding of language (in terms of style, structure, form) as well. This, in turn, opens new modes of expression, new metaphors, to a reader. The ability to create new and different texts is stamped into the very nature of literature. The ability to articulate and teach virtue effectively is constantly in flux from generation to generation. Literature is constantly in demand of new metaphors in order to remain resilient and relevant. Each narrative, housing the potential to fundamentally redefine and re-evaluate itself, represents a metaphor for the world. Thus it is vital that literature possess this self-perpetuating but continually evolving quality.

To discuss literature in its various parts, Sidney develops a series of stylistic, structural, and thematic categories: pastoral, elegiac, iambic, satiric, comic, tragic, lyric, and heroic. Each category (part) of literature also attempts to elicit a specific ethical response from the reader. The parts themselves are arranged hierarchically as well, with the heroic being placed at the top. Though an interesting (if historically outdated) method of division, Sidney's categories seem to elaborate more than advance his general
argument, however. He places more emphasis on the ethical questions posed by the works of a literary text, rather than its parts.

Sidney concludes his comprehensive defense of literature by attempting to answer various challenges to its merit and continued support. The most serious of these allegations, that literature is "the nurse of abuse, infecting us with pestilent desires", Sidney is forced to acknowledge as true to a greater or lesser extent. This might seem, at first glance, to refute or undermine the argument he has laboured so long to create. Sidney, however, has qualified his praise of literature from the onset. Literature can contribute to learning virtue but does not ensure virtuous action. Because he is aware of the fact that literature can and is abused by some, Sidney describes literature as a tool with the greatest potential for good, but not an inherently virtuous invention in and of itself. The destructive qualities evoked by literature are products of the fallible fragile human beings who created it, rather than an indictment of the evil nature of all literature in general. Do not, as Sidney states, "say that poetry abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth poetry" (150).

Sidney's responses have become the mainstay of the supporters of a liberal arts education. Unfortunately, literature has become sanctified to the extent that knowledge of literature has become practically synonymous with virtuous action. Such modern interpretations of Sidney's defense of literature seem to strike against the very heart of his argument. Sidney seems to understand all too well that human beings house both virtuous and vicious impulses; it is within our power to infuse our creations with both the sinister and the sublime. Because this is true of any human invention, Sidney counsels that the potential of literature for good or ill should not be easily discounted or dismissed.

**Sir Philip Sidney: The Saviour of Poetry**

"Who's your Parent?" asked God. "Poets are my parent" replied Sidney. We cannot thank Sidney enough for his hard work to save dignity of poetry. Back in Sidney's time a lot of people began to question poetry and its value. Puritans were distasteful towards poetry and Stephen Gosson took the lead and stained fabric of poetry with variety of accusations. He wrote School of Abuse and aimed at Sir Philip Sidney. In response to the School of abuse Sidney invoked his muse and wrote An Apology for Poetry. This document An Apology for poetry is like the flowing river which surfaces poetry's Antiquity, Universality, its long journey from the evolution of human learning till date. Also, poetry's nature and purpose is highlighted which states its nucleus purpose that is to "teach and delight". Penetrating into poetry Sidney has also described its kinds, which includes religious, philosophical and poetic. However, defense wouldn't have been a good defense until the attack is refuted. Stephens's charges on poetry are taken up one by one, dismantled and refuted. Charges such as poets, piper and jesters are the caterpillar of commonwealth, corrupter and plague-spots of society and so he goes on. Throughout Sidney in his case has been referring to big bang names like Aristotle, David, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Plato and many others. This helps in making his defense not only strong but much more authentic.
Sidney begins to ennoble poetry by discussing its nature and usefulness. Poetry is the mother of all learning and the first light giver to ignorance. Prestigious names have been given to poets in all parts of the world such as, vales – the prophet by Romans, maker by Greeks. Further Sidney says that all imagination literature comes from the poet and in saying this he brings Plato into the fold of poets and his dialogues in poetry. Poetry is not all rhyming and versifying. Poetry from Plato’s divine madness has become divine gift. Descending from Plato we hear Aristotle saying that poetry is an art of imitation and its end has to teach and delight. A poet beautifies nature, and poetry adds colours to life. Great genuine role models are created by poets that of a bravery, heroism and worthy man. Many characters larger than life characters were created. And to do all this poets are certainly not dependent on nature. Poets don’t have this limitation to which rest of the arts are chained. Astronomer, historian and physician have to rely on the nature for their work and research unlike poets who create their own new or better world.

Poetry has numerous kinds and Sidney presenting the case on poetry has talked about its kinds. The three major kinds are religious poetry, philosophical poetry and poetic. Religious poetry included biblical poets such as David, Solomon, Moses and other. The Holy Books are written in rhyme and verses. In the Holy Scriptures in which there is no evil Jesus himself uses poetical language. Hence, we can believe that when these Holy men were the messengers of God so God gave us His words in poetry. The second kind is philosophical poetry includes Tyrtaeus, Lucan and others. Philosophy if stands on its own cannot teach because it is a poor guidance for youth and appeals only to those who are already learned. And the last but real form of poetry is the imaginative and creative one. It inspires in men the desire of well-being thus, it is no less than history or philosophy. This poetic is even superior to science for the reason that it not only show the right way but makes the entrance attractive enough for the man to enter. Even the repulsive things of life seems comforting if comes from the mouth of a poet. Irresistible aesthetic charm lies in the poetic.

The last form is then further divided into variety of poetry type. Pastoral, displays the beauty of nature and misery of a man. Through pastoral poetry the question of right and wrong is raised. Elegiac, stimulate our pity on the weaknesses of mankind and wretchedness of the world. Satiric, ridicules man’s follies and he feels ashamed to laugh at him. Morality is the key which is through and through achieved with the help of these various kinds of poetry. The Lyric, out of all the other types majorly lyric is mishandled and was not being used at Sidney’s time in its true essence. Comic serves as warning men of their common errors and kind heartedly correcting them without even letting them know it. Tragedy opens bitter wounds and endow with catharsis. Despite horrifying audience it teaches the uncertainties of life. Last but not the least, Heroic type has given us character larger than life. The goodness at its peak both instructs and delights. Achilles was born of this mother.

Without testing Stephen’s patience, the charges on poetry shall be listed first and later answered. The charges were, poetry is useless and waste of time. It is the mother of lies and collection of falsehood. Invoked evil fancies thus having degrading and enfeebling influence. Importantly Stephen took the liberty of using Plato’s dialogue Republic to say that Plato who is most looked upon had banished poets from his ideal state. How now can we allow poets to breath in ours?
Straight-forward defense method is used by Sidney. The first allegation that poetry is useless is refuted by Sidney in the first portion of his document in which he says, no learning is a good learning until it teach and delight and no art can do it but poetry. Also, there cannot be any profitable use of ink and paper, which at the time of Sidney was quite expensive. The second charge is that poetry is mere a lie and the answer of Sidney is simple and amusing. Poetry never made an attempt to say that it is the truth rather other arts like history, physiology and astronomy does claim to be truthful and most of the times they fell on their face. Poetry is all fiction. And to find truth in fiction is lack of common sense. Poetry’s job is not to teach or tell what to do or what not to do rather it tells what should be and what should not be. Poetry arouses evil desires is not wholly correct. There is kind of poetry which is little contaminated with love. If we see deep within even the love isn’t so evil and bad it is natural and innate in us. To praise a beauty and go mad behind it is one form of passion. Stephen seems to have a problem with love but then he should restrict his charge to only one part of poetry not blames poetry as a whole. All art are misused and if poetry fell on corrupt hands doesn’t mean the genre is corrupt. Plato is used by Stephen to prove his stance against poetry. Plato in Sidney’s opinion is poetic himself. He says his dialogues flow like flowers in a stream. Plato was only against poets who portray gods in false manner and he asked to banish the abuse of poetry not poetry wholly. Plato in Sidney’s eyes is a patron of Poetry not an enemy.

Lastly, if Plato was against poets and all kinds of poetry, does it matter when his successor Aristotle was in favour of poets and thought of them as an essential part of society. Plato or no Plato poetry survives even now. Since the evolution of this world the poetry exists and it continues to move zillions of hearts every second.

**Euphemisms in "An Apology for Poetry"**

Euphemisms are agreeable terms substituted for offensive ones; a garbage collector becomes a sanitation engineer. Sir Philip Sidney, in his "An Apology for Poetry," also known as "A Defense of Poesy," not only had to make his subject matter agreeable to a skeptical aristocracy, but also had to defend it against a growing Puritan movement that saw poetry as evil. He uses three euphemisms to do so: horses, Scripture and war.

**Poetry as Horsemanship**

At the time of the essay's writing, 1579, poetry had fallen into the realm of disrepute predicted by Shakespeare in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" when king Theseus compares poets to madmen, their subject matter "airy nothing." Sidney euphemizes poetry as comparable to the royal sport of horsemanship; he parallels the truth behind poetic phrases with that of the natural compliments that good horses evoke. A horse may "have a good seat"; a lady may "be fair of face." Sidney insists that both the utilitarian horsemans's phrase and that of the poet ring true as compliments to beauty, answering the Puritan charge that poetry is "the mother of lies."

**Poetry as Scripture**
Sidney moves from the euphemism of poetry as sport to a second euphemism addressed to the Puritan members of his audience, who regarded poetry as ungodly. In his most daring passage, Sidney points out that Holy Scripture is poetry by noting that the "psalms of David are a divine poem . . . fully written in metre"; he ends by labelling the Psalms a "heavenly poesy." Poetry takes on the name of prophecy itself, as Sidney brazenly comments that it should not be "scourged out of the church of God." By destroying poetry, one destroys Scripture, he asserts.

**Poetry as Warrior**

Having addressed both aristocrats and zealots, he devotes the remainder of the essay to euphemizing poetry both for the wise and the working man. He aligns poetry with ancient Greek philosophers and attests that "of all sciences . . . poetry is the Monarch." He also scorns its sordid reputation as the plaything of theatrical mummers by saying that "poetry is the companion of the camps." In personifying poetry as a warrior rather than a mere player, he brings it into the fellowship of English commoners embarked on wars.

**Poetry Defended Thrice**

In a masterstroke, Sidney uses personification, metaphor and analogy as defenses to poetry's critics. He insists that the art "imitate[s] to teach and delight," thus personifying it as a true actor of good repute; it is "reined with good discretion," metaphorically comparing a poet to an admirable horseman; it borrows "nothing of what it is, hath been or ever shall be," a daring rewrite of Ecclesiastes 1:9 that puts poetry squarely back into the realm of Scripture. Thus he apologizes for, and defends, the poetic muse by cloaking her in figurative language, poetically rendered euphemisms.

**Apology for Poetry : A General Estimate**

An "Apology for Poetry" is a compelling essay refuting the attack on poetry by Puritan and fundamentalist Stephen Gosson. This complex article written by Sir Phillip Sidney represents the decisive rebuttal defending poetry. His strong emotive passages defend the un congenial comments of poetry from Gosson. Although, his justification for the rebuttal is alluded to Gosson’s durable attacks on poetry; it is known Gosson’s remarks prompt Sidney’s attitude to defend not only against Gosson but as well as Plato. Stephen Gosson’s Puritan credentials, disregards him as the primary source for submitting the essay.

Sidney addresses the poetic contributions and principles demonstrated by Aristotle, Plato, and other European scholars. Plato’s Republic implements most of the poetic knowledge Sidney reinforces in his defense. The abundance of sciences portrays significant purposes in life; Sidney concedes poetry as a superior subject. Sidney conveys several rational ideologies to sustain the defense of poetic theory. Poetics is subjected through the emphasis of imitation, generates purposes of learning, objects history and philosophy, and educates observers on knowledge, virtue and practical conceptions of poetry.
The influence of Plato and Aristotle on Sir Philip Sidney's concise essay reinforces a substantial argument defending poetry. His advocacy on poetry is primarily constituted on the theories of Aristotle's poetics, as well as the acceptance on Plato's poetic contribution. The function and form of poetry according to the theories of Platonism is defended and reconciled by Sidney. Further words and sanctions from Aristotle provide ammunition in support of the defense. Plato's considerable concern had been with the education of men achieving moral excellence; however, Socrates un-deniable favor of poetry banished the poetics from the Republic because of Plato's questioning moral effects (Samuel 383). Sidney agrees with Plato's doctrine that educational instruction is moral excellence and a capacity of universal knowledge which equips a mature virtuous man. To further the protection of poetry, he interprets Aristotle's quote concerning the form of poetry as, "all virtues, vices and passions so in their own natural state laid out to the view that we seem not to hear of them but clearly to see through them (An Apology for Poetry 140). Nature provides its own natural resources for man to achieve universal knowledge; if man allows the aesthetics of nature to implement his mind, all virtues are achieved. Sidney acknowledges and makes frequent references of the essence to Plato's "the beauty of virtue" (Samuel 387). Throughout the essay, Sidney validates Plato's conception, "Like the painter who portrays not Lucretia, whom he never saw, but the outward beauty of such a virtue, the form of goodness—which seen, they cannot but love” (Samuel 387). Plato's profound theory on aesthetics is a significant pathway to poetry, because poetry is beautiful and man cannot help but to love moral excellence.

Sidney upholds the truth and defense against the Socratic charges opposing poetry, "the poet, nothing affirmth, he therefore never lieth". He delivers the expression that poetry is the truer ideal then other earthly being. "The defense of poetry as a mimetic art has already been made in the assertion that poetry imitates universal ideas, and clothes them in human form, yet does not mar their superhuman beauty". Plato apprehended high standards for men to attain knowledge and wit, so they no longer continue foolish thoughts. Sidney gravitates to the Platonism theory on ones worth, "It is a good reason, that whatsoever, being abused, doth must harm, being rightly used—and upon the right use each thing receiveth his title —doth most good". Sidney recognizes Plato as a poetic writer, “And truly even Plato whosoever well considereth , shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most of the poetry”. Aesthetics is the primary inspiration for Plato's poetry; he defines literature is that which is inspired. Poetic material can only evolve through inspiration, an inspiration that distinguishes art from gift, and poetry is a gift. Sidney's constant focal point within the Defense reflects the Platonism analogy of inspiration. The beauty proposition Plato theorized is the secret to the poet's power in elevating men to virtue.

An Apology for Poetry indicates the conception of defense against poetry, and also the supports Platonism theories. Although it is uncertain of Plato’s true emotive intentions regarding poetry, Sidney appears to have an understanding of depicting the bases of Plato's poetic contraction. The decisive attitude Plato portrays on poetry speaks volumes from the influence Socrates input about poetry.

In the essay, Sidney administers two dissimilar definitions of poetry. The first most persistently used definition, “ Poesy therefore is an art of i
termeth it in his word Mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfetting, or figure forth: to speake metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight” (Dowlin 573). Sidney utilizes this definition as the primary focal point of defending what he perceives as durable and probable knowledge. This particular statement generates a broader perception and division of various types of poetry:

Religious, which imitates “the inconceivable [but nonetheless real] excellencies of God”; philosophical, which deals with moral, natural, astronomical, and historical matter, and which merely copies rather than invents or feigns; and the work of the “right poets”, who “to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range with only learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be” (Dowlin 574).

The second definition is more complex and definite, “But it [poetry] is that faying notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a Poet by” (Dowlin 574). Both definitions are of great importance, but the second defines the ideals of forming images or patterns of perfection, that reject verse or any other accessory that distinguishes characters of poetry. All these contributions numerously appear as important techniques constituting poetry.

Sidney’s second definition provides a considerable association with the Republic’s tenth book; he sought after certain passages from Plato, transpiring the words into memorable phrases, discussing images, and explaining the virtues and vices poetry instructs. Even though Sidney acknowledges Plato within his writings, he opposes several analogies Plato insists. In Sidney’s Two Definitions of Poetry, the author suggests Sidney purposely neglects Plato’s “images of virtues and vices” but adds, “or what else”, a probable notion that Sidney’s phrase “or what else” was replaced by Plato’s “all things divine”. The expression “or what else”, is perceived as a remark that accepts or opposes divine inspiration. These minor replacements add a perplexing point of purpose to Sidney’s true intentions in defending poetry.

The reading of An Apology of Poetry is detailed with Sidney’s anti-historical and anti-philosophic dispositions. He constitutes an argument defend poetry as the superior option over history and philosophy. Prior to Sidney’s revelation of poetry, he read and was instructed on the concepts of history. Sidney is no stranger to history and philosophy, but his overachieving knowledge of learning, gravitates his thoughts on the conceptual framework of poetry. According to History in Sidney’s Apology, the author Elizabeth Donno suggests, “Sidney had a theoretical distrust of any over-insistence on the value of history”. There is a falsehood of Sidney’s anti-historical or anti-philosophic dispositions; there was no rejection of the subjects, but he sought after profound ways to express history and philosophic ideologies by using poetry. “the Historian proper makes himself a discoursor exhibiting the capacity for reflection and reason for profit and an Orator, yea a Poet sometimes for ornament” (Donne 284). Sidney shows himself as an orator “making excellent orations”; he considers himself to be a poet, in painting forth what has already been created, “the effects, the motions, the whisperings of the people”. The historian often reflects a divine inspirer, or allocation opinions:
“in telling his opinion and reasons in religion, sometimes the lawyer in shrewing the cases and benefits of laws, sometime a natural philosopher in setting down the cases of strange thing which the history compels him to speak of, but most commonly a moral philosopher either in the thick part when he sets forth virtues or vices and the natures of passion or in the politic (as he often does) with matters of the estate” (Donne 286).

Historians do not profess one specific art, they deal with all arts according to which ever art instructs their lives.

Sidney acknowledges the pleasure from reading ancient, medieval and modern historians. In regards to Sidney’s essay, establishes poetry as the chief and most efficient of several arts. Sidney insists that philosophy, law, history and divinity, are considered the only devices that deal with a man’s internal manners. Other subjects such as astronomy, music, mathematics, and supernatural philosophy are only practical matters dealing with the external self. In Sidney’s view, philosophy and history are merely rejected as strategic ploy. Historians instruct on facts and not the possible. Philosophers educate in an abstract manner, delivering vague ideas. He declares history and philosophy make use of poetry, he names Plato as a sophisticated philosopher, “of all the philosophers I have ever esteemed most worthy of reverence, and with great reason: since of all philosophers he is the most poetical” (Donne 288). A successful philosopher borrows and quotes phrases from Plato. Historians are “bound to tell things as they were” (Donne 289), and he is consequently engaging when his thoughts pattern poetry.

Poets are teachers, and their instruction is advocating the virtues and vices that indicate moral excellence. There is a poetic license that validates the truth, and deliberates a theory of what is possible and probable. A poet is the least the least liar, but poetry does not reflect affirmation. Historians and philosophers’ value fiction, opinionate reason, and often fabricate the truth. The function of poetry is to teach and to delight, but poetry also delivers knowledge, moving one to act off inspiration and emotions. Entertainment is circled around the works of poets. The most important subject is centered through the act of praxis (practice), a subject that is not practiced is considered a durable element.

According to Allusive Coherence in Sidney’s Apology for Poetry by John Hunt, states “the critical consensus that the Apology is a fundamentally Aristotlelian work has been tested by recognition of its many Platonic elements and its extensive use of Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Christian ideas”. An Apology for Poetry, shows how often Sidney alluded to several concepts from other authors. He maintains the concept to all knowledge is religious: “to restore the soul as much of its lost perfection as is possible”, a condition of enlightenment that aspires the soul into a state of felicity. The soul is lifted up from the boundaries of moral consciousness:

Learning, under what name so ever it come forth, or to what immediate end so ever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high and heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to Astronomy... (An Apology for Poetry ).
Sidney’s final recommendation to end education is soul searching, finding the inner happiness that leads to perfection.

**Sidney's Dramatic Criticism**

(a) Tragedy and Tragi-Comedy

Sidney’s remarks on tragedy and comedy are equally illuminating and interesting. Says Spingarn in this connection, "Dramatic criticism in England began with Sir Philip Sidney. Cultural references to the drama can be found in critical writings anterior to the Defence of Poesy; but to Sidney belongs the credit of having first formulated, in a more or less systematic manner, the general principles of dramatic art." These principles, it need hardly be said, are those which, for half a century or more, had been undergoing discussion and modification in Italy and France, and of which the ultimate source was the Poetics of Aristotle. "Dramatic criticism in England was thus, from its very birth, both Aristotelian and classical, and it remained so for two centuries."

The Senecan drama and the Aristotelian precepts were the sources of Sidney's theory of tragedy. The oratorical and sententious tragedies of Seneca had influenced dramatic theory and practice throughout Europe from the very outset of the Renaissance. Ascham, indeed, preferred Sophocles and Euripides to Seneca; but he is an exception, and in direct opposition to the usual opinion of contemporary critics. Sidney, in his account of the English drama, could find but one tragedy modeled, as it should be, on the Senecan drama. The tragedy of Gorboduc, however, has one defect that provokes Sidney's censure,—it does not observe the unities of time and place. In all other respects, it is an ideal model for English playwrights to imitate. Its stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, approach almost to the height of Seneca’s style; and in teaching most delight fully notable morality, it attains the very end of poetry.

The ideal tragedy—and in this Sidney closely follows Aristotle and the Italians—is an imitation of a noble action, in the representation of which it stirs, "admiration and teaches commiseration", and teaches the uncertainty of the world and the weak foundations upon which golden roofs are built. "It makes kings fear to be tyrant, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours." Sidney's censure of the contemporary tragedy is that it outrages the grave and weighty character of tragedy, its elevated style, and the dignity of the personages represented, by mingling kings and clowns, and introducing the most inappropriate buffoonery. Never did the ancients, like the English, "match hornpipes with funerals". The English dramas are neither true comedies nor true tragedies and they disregard both the rules of poetry and honest civility. Tragedy is not tied to the laws of history, and may arrange and modify events as it pleases; but it is certainly bound by the rules of poetry. It is evident, therefore, that the Defence of Poesy, as a French writer has observed, "gives us an almost complete theory of neo-classic tragedy, a hundred years before 'Art Poetique' of Boileau; the severe separation of poetic forms, the sustained dignity of language, the unities, nothing is lacking."

(b) Comedy
Sidney's theory of comedy is based on the body of rules and observations, which the Italian critics, aided by a few hints from Aristotle, had deduced from the practice of the Greek dramatists. Sidney defines comedy, "as an imitation of the common errors of life, which are represented in the most ridiculous and scornful manner, so that the spectator is anxious to avoid such errors himself." Comedy, therefore, shows the "filthiness of evil", but only in, "our private and domestically matters". It should aim at being wholly delightful, just as tragedy, should be maintained by a well-raised admiration. Delight is thus the first requirement of comedy; but the English comic writers err in thinking that delight cannot be obtained without laughter, whereas laughter is neither an essential effect of delight nor is necessary for it. Sidney thus distinguishes delight from laughter. The great fault of English comedy is that it stirs laughter concerning things that are sinful, i.e. wicked rather than merely ridiculous— forbidden plainly, according to Sidney, by Aristotle himself—and concerning things that are miserable, rather to be pitied than scorned. Not only should comedy produce delightful laughter, but also it should mix with it that delightful teaching which is the end of all poetry. Human follies or errors, rather than human vice and wickedness, or the poverty of men, are the proper themes of comedy. Sidney's distinction between delight and laughter is psychological and the most original part of his treatise. It should also be noted that the aim of comedy is to expose and ridicule human folly such as affectation, hypocrisy, so that such follies may be corrected. Thus, he makes comedy a weapon of social reform. Comedy is not merely to provide delight; it must also correct and improve. As vice cannot be corrected merely by being laughed at, it is excluded from the domain of comedy. Similarly, a poor man is not to be laughed at for lie is not at fault for his poverty.

(c) The Unities:

The unities of time and place were first formulated in Italy and France about the middle of the 15th century. The first mention of the unities in England is to be found, more than a dozen years later, in this Defence of Poesy, and it cannot be doubted that Sidney derived them directly from the Italian critic Castelvetro. Sidney in discussing the tragedy of Gorboduc, finds it, "faulty in time and place, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions; for where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's percept and common reason, but one day, there (i.e. in Gorboduc) is both many days and many placer, inartistically imagined." He also objects to the absurdities of the English stage, where on one side Africa and on the other Asia may be represented, and where in an hour a youth may grow from boyhood to old age. How absurd this is, commonsense, art, and ancient examples ought to teach the English playwright; and at this day, says Sidney, even the ordinary player in Italy will not err in it. If, indeed, it be objected that one or two of the comedies of Plautus and Terence do not observe the unity of time, let us not follow them when they err, but when, they are right; it is no excuse for us to do wrong because Plautus, on one occasion, has done likewise.

The rule of the three unities did not receive such, rigid application in England, as is given by Sidney, until the introduction of the French influence nearly three quarters of a century later. Ben Jonson is considerably less stringent in this respect than Sidney.
Definition of Poetry:

But before proceeding to defend an art so ancient and universal, it is necessary to define it; and the definition which Sidney gives agrees substantially with what might be designated Renaissance Aristotelianism. "Poetry", says Sidney, "is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight." Poetry is, accordingly, an art of imitation and not merely the art of "versifying"; for although most poets have seen fit to apparel their poetic inventions in verse, verse is but the raiment and ornament of poetry, and not one of its causes or essentials. Rhyming and versing do not make one a poet. "One may be a poet without versing", says Sidney, "and do versifier without poetry." Speech and reason are the distinguishing features between man and brute; and whatever helps to perfect and polish "speech deserves high commendation. Besides this, verse is the most fitting raiment of poetry, because it is the most dignified and compact, not colloquial and slipshod. It is also an aid to memory, for one word in it is fitted with another that by remembering the one you recall the other. But with all its merits, it is not an essential part of poetry, of which the true test is this—feigning notable images of vices and virtues, and teaching delightfully.

Function of Poetry:

In regard to the object, or function of poetry, Sidney is at one with Scaliger. The aim of poetry is accomplished by teaching most delightfully a notable morality; or, in a word, by delightful instruction. Not instruction alone, or delight alone, as Horace had said, but instruction made delightful; and it is this dual function which serves not only as the end but as the very test of poetry. The object of all arts and sciences is to lift human life to the highest altitudes of perfection; and in this respect they are all servants of the sovereign or poetry, whose end is well-doing and not well-knowing only. Virtuous action is, therefore, the end of all learning; and Sidney sets out to prove that the poet, more than anyone else, fulfils this end.

Then Sidney proceeds to examine the objections that have been brought against poetry, and refutes them one by one. But, first, he demonstrates the superiority of poetry over history and philosophy. The ancient controversy—ancient even in Plato’s days—between poetry and philosophy is once more reopened. The gist of Sidney’s argument is that while the philosopher teaches by precept alone, and the historian by example alone, the poet conduces most of virtue because he employs both precept and example. The philosopher teaches virtue by showing what virtue is and what vice is, by setting down, in abstract argument, and without clarity or beauty of style, the bare principles of morality. The historian teaches virtue by showing the experience of past ages; but, being tied down to what actually happened, that is, to the particular truth of things and not to general possibilities, the example he depicts draws no necessary consequence. The poet alone accomplishes this dual task. What the philosopher says should be done is, by the poet, pictured most perfectly in some one by whom it has been done, thus coupling the general notion with the particular instance. The philosopher, moreover, teaches the learned only; but the poet teaches all, and so is, in Plutarch’s phrase, "the right popular philosopher". He seems only to promise delight, and moves men to virtue unaware. But even if the philosopher excels the poet in teaching, he cannot move his
virtuous action as the poet can, and this is of higher importance than teaching, for what is the use of teaching virtue, if the pupil is not moved to act and accomplish what he is taught? On the other hand, the historian deals with particular instances, with vices and virtues so mingled together in the same personage that the reader can find no pattern to imitate. The poet improves, upon history; he gives perfect examples of vices and virtues for human imitation; he makes virtue succeed and vice fail, and this history can but seldom do. Poetry does not imitate nature; it is the reader who imitates the example of perfection presented to him by the poet. He is thus made virtuous. Poetry, therefore, conduces to virtue, the end of all learning better than any other art or science, and so deserves the palm as the highest and the noblest form of human wisdom.

**Poetic Imitation: Creative Process**

The basis of Sidney's distinction between the poet and the historian is the famous passage in which Aristotle explains why poetry is more philosophic and of more serious value than history. The poet deals, not with the particular, but with the universal — with what might or should be, not with what is or has been. But Sidney, in the assertion of this principle, follows Minturno and Scaliger, and goes farther than Aristotle would probably have gone. All arts have the works of nature as their principal object of imitation, and follow nature as actors follow the lines of their play. Only the poet is not tied to such subjects, but creates another nature better than nature herself. For, going hand in hand with nature, and being enclosed not within her limits, but only by, “the zodiac of his own imagination”, he creates a golden world in place of nature’s brazen; and in this sense he may be compared as a creator with God. Where shall you find in life, asks, Sidney, such a friend as Plyades, such a hero as Orlando, such an excellent man as Æneas?

**Puritan Objections to Poetry: Sidney’s Defence of it**

Sidney then proceeds to answer the various objections that have been made against poetry. These objections, partly following Gosson and Cornelins Agrippa, and partly his own inclinations, he reduces to four. In the first place, it is objected that a man might spend his time more profitably than by reading the figments of poets. Poetry is a mere waste of time. But since teaching virtue is the real him of all learning, and since poetry has been shown to accomplish this better than all other arts or sciences, this objection is easily answered. The study of poetry is most profitably for it imparts delightful instruction and so moves man to virtuous action. In the second place, poetry has been called the mother of lies; but Sidney shows that it is less likely to tell a lie than other sciences, for the poet does not assert the figments of his imagination as facts, and, since he affirms nothing, he cannot ever be said to lie. The poet never affirms and so he never lies for to lie is to affirm that to be true which is not true in reality. A poet’s truths are ideal and universal. Thirdly poetry has been called, "the nurse of abuse", that is to say, poetry misuses and debases the mind of man by turning it to wantonness and by making it unmartial and effeminate. But Sidney argues that it is man’s wit that abuses poetry, and not poetry that abuses man’s wit; and as to making men effeminate, this charge applies to all other sciences more than to poetry, which in its description of battles and praises of valiant men, stirs courage and enthusiasm. That is why in ancient times great warriors carried the words of poets with them. Lastly, it is poin
poetry that Plate, one of the greatest philosophers, banished poets from his ideal commonwealth. But Plato's Dialogues are in reality themselves a form of poetry; and it shows ingratitude in the most poetical of philosophers, that he should defile the fountain which was his source. "Yet, though Sidney perceives how fundamental are Plato's objections to poetry, he is inclined to believe that it was rather against the abuse of poetry by the contemporary Greek poets that Plato was chiefly cavailling; for poets are praised in the Ion, and the greatest men of every age have been patrons and lovers of poetry".— (Spingarn). It should be remembered that in the Ion Plato has called poets "light and winged things", moved by divine frenzy.
Raymond Williams (1921-1988)

Raymond Williams was one of Britain’s greatest post-war cultural historians, theorists and polemicists. He was a distinguished literary and social thinker and was concerned to understand literature and related cultural forms not as the outcome of an isolated aesthetic adventure, but as the manifestation of a deeply social process that involved a series of complex relationships between authorial ideology, institutional process, and generic/aesthetic form. He was the author of many works; most notable among them is “Modern Tragedy”.

Raymond Williams was born into a working-class family in Pandy, a village on 31 August 1921, in the parish of Llanfihangel, in Monmouthshire, Wales, and was educated at Abergavenny Grammar School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He became a member of the Communist Party in his first year as an undergraduate and collaborated with Eric Hobsbawm—an undergraduate contemporary—in writing a pamphlet in defence of the Russian invasion of Finland. Two undergraduate years at Cambridge were followed by conscription into the British Army in 1941, active service as a tank officer during the Allied invasion of Europe, and a further undergraduate year at Cambridge when the war was over. After a short period spent editing small-circulation magazines in London, he settled first in Sussex and later in Oxford as a salaried lecturer for the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy (Oxford’s organization for adult education), expounding for the benefit of (putatively) working-class audiences that trust in culture and mistrust of capitalism, and that belief in D. H. Lawrence which some Marxists and ex-Marxists shared with the followers of F. R. Leavis.

On joining the army, Williams seems to have lost touch with the Communist Party. Later he became a supporter of the Labour Party, but appears for a long time to have been interested less in the political than in the cultural objections to capitalism. After the Labour victory at the general election of 1966, he resigned from the Labour Party in protest against the elitist cynicism or ruling-class character of Mr. Harold Wilson’s leadership. In spite of resuming support for Labour later, he then became one of the half dozen or so freestanding Marxists who fostered the analytical outrage with which the English New Left and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament have embarrassed the Labour leaders, eased Mrs. Thatcher’s way electorally, and made the Labour Party as unelectable as like-minded Democrats have made successive Democratic presidential candidates in the United States.

From an early stage, Williams wanted to be a writer rather than a don and a novelist as well as a critic and from his first period in Cambridge was a journalist and public speaker. Public speaking and small-circulation journalism remained with him for the rest of his life, along with an interest in film and television, while Border Country (1960)—his first and only tolerable novel—gave confusing insights into what he was trying to say morally and politically.
Border Country gave a low-keyed account of relations between a father and a son. Though it dealt with politics, it was dominated not by politics but by gratitude, nostalgia, and death, and by its account of the idyllic solidarity of a rural Welsh village. The novel resisted the idea that the meritocratic son or the entrepreneurial trade unionist was better than the dying railway man, and there was an anti-intellectual implication that a natural, unreconstructed, conservative way of life was more real than the academic way of life, which the son had adopted.

Border Country, though published later, was written at the same time as Kingsley Amis’s Lucky Jim, which dealt with the academic problem from the academic end. But Amis had no experience he was willing to disclose in order to match the experience that Williams disclosed in Border Country, no yardstick except a satiric yardstick with which to compare a farcical university with the University of Oxford, and no more interest in explaining what he had learned from his mandarin education in Oxford than Williams had, as a novelist, in explaining what he had learned from his mandarin education in Cambridge.

In 1961 Williams returned to Cambridge for a third time, now as a lecturer (later a professor) in the Faculty of English. At the same time he became a fellow of Jesus College, to which he was brought by M. I. Finley, the American Marxist historian.

**Raymond Williams : Modern Tragedy**

**Introduction**

Like Culture and Society, Modern Tragedy discussed texts—the main tragic texts and texts about tragic theory that had been written in Europe and the United States since Ibsen—and extracted from them a political message about the inadequacy of individuation and about the desirability of revolution. Modern Tragedy was written in a dense, coded prose. Decoded, it manifests the confusion between the cultural elite and the people which was a feature of Williams’s doctrine throughout his work and which became particularly troublesome in this book, where dramatic and fictional tragedy were presented as realizations of the “shape and set” of modern “culture,” and the dramatists and novelists who had produced it were assumed to represent “our” minds and experience.

This thesis was both elitist and anti-elitist, naïve about the prospect of bridging the gap between the cultural elite and the people but emphasizing the affiliations that kept Williams, as a member of the former, in conscious empathy with the latter. The effect was nevertheless odd, implying that Strindberg, Brecht, and Arthur Miller, for example, were not arcane, and amalgamating the “we” who went to their plays or listened to Williams’s lectures in Cambridge with the “we” who had been described appreciatively in Border Country. However deep Williams’s desire was to make “critical discrimination” relevant to the people among whom he had grown up, moreover, it neglected the consideration that critical discrimination was in fact a minority activity which spoke meaningfully only to those who had already heard Leavis’s voice.
In Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (1952) Williams had criticized the English theatre as a manifestation of literary decline and for failing to achieve either “the communication” of an “experience” and a “radical reading of life,” or that “total performance” which reflected “changes in the structure of feeling as a whole.” In Modern Tragedy the central contentions were that “liberal” tragedy, while being liberal because it emphasized the “surpassing individual,” and tragic because it recorded his defeat by society or the universe, reflected the inability of the money-oriented privacy of the bourgeois ethic to provide a “positive” conception of society. It was the “individual fight against the lie” embodied in “false relationships, a false society and a false conception of man” that Ibsen had made central, but it was the liberal martyrs’ discovery of the lie in themselves and their failure to relate themselves to a “social” consciousness that heralded the “breakdown of liberalism” and the need to replace its belief in the primacy of “individualist” desire and aspiration by a socialist perception of the primacy of “common” desire and aspiration.

Williams wished to give tragic theory a social function. He pointed out that “significant suffering” was not confined to persons of “rank,” and that personal belief, faults in the soul, “God,” “death,” and the “individual will” had been central to the tragic experience of the present. It was the “human agency” and “ethical control” manifested in revolution and the “deep social crisis through which we had all been living” that were the proper subjects of “modern” tragedy, and it was human agency and ethical control that tragic theory needed to accommodate. The first point that had to be explained was the Burkean point that revolution caused suffering. The second point was the anti-Burkean point that revolution was not the only cause of suffering, that suffering was “in the whole action” of which “revolution” was only “the crisis,” and that it was suffering as an aspect of the “wholeness” of the action that needed to be considered. And this, of course, disclosed the real agenda in Modern Tragedy—the use of tragic texts to formulate a socialist theory of tragedy in which revolution would receive a literary justification and society would become more important than the individual.

In all this Williams was moving out from the defensiveness of Culture and Society and making a central feature of the argument that, when the revolutionary process was complete, “revolution” would become “epic,” suffering would be “justified,” and pre-revolutionary institutions, so far from being the “settled … innocent order” that they had claimed to be, would be seen to have been rooted in “violence and disorder.” This was the route by which tragedy and tragic theory could remove cynicism and despair, could give revolution the “tragic” perspective that Marx had given it, and could show what tragedy had hitherto failed to show, that “degeneration, brutalization, fear, hatred and envy” were endemic in existing society’s “tragic” failure to “incorporate … all its people as whole human beings.” It was also the route by which tragedy and tragic theory could incorporate the fact that further “degeneration, brutalization, fear, hatred and envy” would be integral to the “whole action”—not just to the “crisis” and the revolutionary energy released by it or the “new kinds of alienation” which the revolution against alienation would have to “overcome … if it was to remain revolutionary,” but also, and supremely, to the connection between “terror” and “liberation.”

Williams’s rhetoric was ruthless, and yet in retrospect looks faintly silly. Nor were the tasks that he attributed to tragic theory plausible. It remain:
Modern Tragedy, while reiterating the formal denial that revolution was to be identified with the violent capture of power and identifying it rather as a “change ... in the deepest structure of relationships and feelings,” implied, more than any other of Williams’s works, a circuitous but indubitably evil attempt to encourage the young to think of violence as morally reputable. In evaluating Williams, one wishes to be just. He should not be dismissed merely because his followers have helped to keep their party out of office, since many of them, and perhaps he also, regarded party politics as merely a convenient way of inserting their moral messages into the public mind. Like the theorists of the student revolution of the Sixties, Williams was “against liberalism,” but those who are against liberalism for conservative reasons do not need his sort of support. They should not be misled by the “organicism” of Culture and Society, which ignored the moral solidarity of twentieth-century English society and used the language of solidarity in order to subvert such solidarity as monarchy and two world wars had created by denying that it existed. The most general fault in critical works is not avoided by even Williams.

Most of the critical books are written with and on the general assumption of some creative work by others. To write or give views on others is certainly not objectionable. What seems objectionable is the way of giving views or opinions without quoting the original creative work. What most of the critics do is very non-critical in a sense. They give first their own understanding of the work and then their views or opinions against or for this said work. What they do in this way is the critical analysis of their own understanding. It seems having nothing to do with the understanding of the writer’s work or others’ views about it. While going through a book of criticism one should keep in mind the original work the criticism is about.

**Modern Tragedy : Chapter wise Summary**

**Tragedy and Tradition**

William’s writings in the post-war period had a kind of existentialist motif of blocked individual liberation. This essay is a discussion on the common and the traditional interpretations of tragedy. He has used his power of perception and has come with a strong thesis on the evolution of tragedy in the essay. In the previous essay, he tells the basics of tragedy in these words: we come to tragedy by many roads. It is an immediate experience, a body of literature, conflict of theory, an academic problem.

He believes that tragedy is not the death of kings; it is more personal and general. Tragedy is not simply death and suffering and it is certainly not accident. Nor is it simply a response to death and suffering. It is a particular kind of event and particular kind of response which are genuinely tragic and which the long tradition embodies. His basic thesis in this article is: the meaning of tragedy, the relationship of tradition to tragedy and the kinds of experience which we mistakenly call tragic.

We usually try to make a contrast between the traditional and the modern and try to compress and unify the various thinking of the past into a single tradition. About tradition Williams explains: it is a question, rather of realizing that a tradition is not the past; but an interpretation of the past – a selection and evaluation of ance.
than a neutral record and the present serves as a link between the traditional and the modern. When the unique Greek culture changed, the chorus which was the crucial element of dramatic form was discarded and the unique meaning of tragedy was lost. People think that the medieval period produced no tragedy, but Monk’s Tale is the example in which we see protagonist falling from prosperity to adversity. Later tragedy became more secularized in the Renaissance and Neoclassical age. Now a change was visible. The moving force of tragedy was now quite clearly a matter of behaviour, rather than either a metaphysical condition or metaphysical fault.

Lessing (1729-81) was a noted German critic and dramatic poet. His major contribution to idea of tragedy is (a) a theoretical rejection of neoclassicism (b) a defence of Shakespeare (c) and an advocacy and writing of bourgeois tragedy. He said the Neoclassicism was a false classicism and the real inherit of the Greeks was Shakespeare and the real inherit of Shakespeare was the new national bourgeois tragedy. RW doesn’t agree with Lessing he holds that Shakespeare was not the real inherit of the Greeks; rather he was a major instance of a new kind of tragedy. The character of Elizabethan tragedy is determined by a very complicated relationship between elements of an inherited order and elements of a new humanism. If the historical idea of the development is to be fully understood, we must understand the complicated process of secularization. In a sense, all drama after Renaissance is secular and the only fully religious tragedy we have is Greek because Elizabethan drama was totally secular. There was a concept of good and evil and poetic justice.

Hegel (1770-1831) was a famous German Philosopher did not reject the moral scheme of poetic justice but he described it as a triumph of ordinary morality and the work that embodied it as a social drama rather than tragedy. What is important for Hegel is not the suffering ‘mere suffering’ but its causes. Mere pity and fear are not tragic. Tragedy recognizes suffering as ‘suspended over active characters entirely as the consequence of their own act’. It does not consider the external contingency beyond the control of the individual i.e. illness, loss of property, death or the like. For genuine tragedy, there must be individual freedom and independence. This conscious individuality is the only condition of tragedy.

Williams points two differences between modern and ancient tragedies. First, in ancient tragedy, the characters clearly represent the substantive ethical ends; in modern tragedy, ends are wholly personal. Secondly, in ancient tragedy, there is not only the downfall of conflicting persons and ends in the achievement of eternal justice. An individual may surrender his partial and under a higher command; in modern tragedy, the whole question of resolution is more abstract and colder. Reconciliation, when it comes, will often be within the character and will be more complicated. Hegel’s interpretation of tragedy is part of a general philosophy rather than a historical criticism.

Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) are two German philosophers whose views also contributed to the development of tragedy. Before Schopenhauer, tragedy was associated with (a) ethical crises (b) human growth and (c) history. He secularized the idea of fate when he said, ‘the true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight, that is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e. the crime of existence itself’. Tragedy, according to Nietzsche
which it resolves in a higher unity. There the hero, the highest manifestation of the will, is destroyed, but the eternal life of the will remains unaffected. According to him, the action of tragedy is not moral, not purgative, but aesthetic.

**Tragedy and Contemporary Ideas**

Tragedy and Contemporary Ideas presents the discussion on tragedy in relation to the contemporary ideas. The writer has discussed the four things:

(a) Order and accident.

(b) The destruction of the hero.

(c) The irreparable action and its connections with death.

(d) The emphasis of evil.

It is generally said that there is no significant meaning in ‘everyday tragedies’ because the event itself is not tragic; only becomes so with a through a shaped response. Williams does not agree to this view. He cannot see how it is possible to distinguish between an event and response to an event, in any absolute way.

In the case of ordinary death and suffering, when we see mourning and lament, when we see people breaking under their actual loss, we have entered tragedy. Other responses are also possible such as indifference, justification, and rejoicing. But where we feel the suffering, we are within the dimensions of tragedy. But a burnt family or a mining disaster which leaves people without feeling are called Accidents. The events not seen as tragic are deep in the pattern of our own culture: war, famine, work, traffic, and politics.

To feel no tragic meaning in them is a sort of our bankruptcy. Rank was the dividing line because the death of some people mattered more than others. Our middle class culture rejects this. The tragic of a citizen could be as real as the tragedy of a prince. The emerging middle class rejected rank in tragedy. The individual was not a state; but the entity in himself.

Order in tragedy is the result of the action. In tragedy, the creation of order is related to the fact of disorder, through which the action moves. It may be the pride of man set against the nature of things. In different cultures, disorder and order both vary, for there are parts of varying general interpretations of life. We should see this variation as an indication of the major cultural importance of tragedy as form of art.

The most common interpretation of tragedy is that it is an action in which the hero is destroyed. The fact is seen irreparable. In most tragedies, the story does not end with the destruction of the hero; it follows on. It is not the job of the artist to provide answers and solutions; but simply describe experience and raise questions. Modern tragedy is not what happens to the hero; but what happens through him. When we concentrate on the hero, we are unconsciously confining our attention to the individual.
The tragic experience lies in the fact that life does not come back, that its meanings are reaffirmed and restored after so much suffering and after so important a death. Death gives importance and meaning to life. The death of an individual brings along the whole community in the form of rituals and condolence as in Adam Bede; so tragedy is social and collective and not individual and personal. Death is absolute and all our living simply relative. Death is necessary and all other human ends are contingent (social collectivity). Death is universal so a man tied to it quickly claims university.

Man dies alone is an interpretation and not a fact; because man dies in many different conditions i.e. among machines, due to bombs, in the arms, with or without family, in their presence and absence. When he dies, he affects others. He alters the lives of other characters. To insist on a single meaning is not reasonable. Our most common received interpretations of life put the highest value and significance on the individual and his development; but it is indeed inescapable that the individual dies. Tragedy dramatizes evil in many particular forms: not only Christian evil but also cultural, political and ideological. Good and evil are not absolute. We are good or bad in particular ways and in particular situations; defined by pressures we at one received and can alter and can create again.

**Rejection of Tragedy**

This essay is a study of the rejection of tragedy in modern age with special reference to Bertolt Brechet who founded epic theatre as compared to the emotional theory of Aristotle. He rejected the conventional idea of tragedy and made tragedy more experiential and rational. He also said, ‘the sufferings of this man appeal me because they are unnecessary’. He made people think above the situation presented in the tragedy and not within. Aristotelian drama enforced thinking from within and Brechet’s theatre from without. He used distancing affects to turn people like who sit in the chair, smoke and observe. He showed that the audience wanted to see. Williams has discussed six plays: The Three Penny Opera, Saint Joan of the Stockyard, Die Massnahme, The Good Woman of Sezuen, Mother Courage and Her Children and the Life of Galileo. In the last play mentioned, the hero is offered two choices one between accepting the terms or the other being destroyed. Nevertheless, the hero recants. Tragedy in one of the older terms has been rejected by Brechet.

He then discusses Brecht’s theatre and tells us why he rejected the classical tragedy and introduced rational theatre.

Theatre or theatre is the branch of the performing arts concerned with acting out stories in front of an audience using combinations of speech, gesture, mime, music, dance, sound and spectacle — indeed any one or more elements.

What he wanted theatre to be, Brecht believed that the theatre’s broadest function was to educate. "It is the noblest function that we have found for 'theatre'". Brecht wanted the answer to Lenin’s question ‘Wie und was soll man lernen?’ (‘How and what should one learn?’). He created an influential theory of theatre, the epic theatre, wherein a play should not cause the spectator to emotionally identify with the action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critic
the stage. He believed that the experience of a climactic catharsis of emotion left an
audience complacent. Instead, he wanted his audiences to use this critical perspective to
identify social ills at work in the world and be moved to go forth from the theatre and
effect change.

Hans Eisler has noted that these plays resemble political seminars. Brecht described
them as "a collective political meeting" in which the audience is to participate actively.
One sees in this model a rejection of the concept of the bureaucratic elite party where
the politicians are to issue directives and control the behaviour of the masses. For this
purpose, Brecht employed the use of techniques that remind the spectator that the play
is a representation of reality and not reality itself, which he called the
Verfremdungseffekt (translated as distancing effect, estrangement effect, or alienation
effect). Such techniques included the direct address by actors to the audience,
transposition of text to third person or past tense, speaking the stage direction out loud,
exaggerated, unnatural stage lighting, the use of song, and explanatory placards. By
highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Brecht hoped to communicate
that the audience's reality was, in fact a construction and, as such, was changeable.

Another technique that Brecht employed to achieve his Verfremdungseffekt was the
principle of historicisation. The principle of 'historicization' is a fundamental part of the
Marxist aesthetics developed by the Germany Modernism theatre practitioner Bertolt
Brecht. The content of many of his plays dealt with fictional tellings of historical figures
or events. His idea was that if one were to tell a story from a time that is contemporary
to an audience, they may not be able to maintain the critical perspective he hoped to
achieve. Instead, he focused on historical stories that had parallel themes to the social
ills he was hoping to illuminate in his own time. He hoped that, in viewing these
historical stories from a critical perspective, the contemporary issues Brecht was
addressing would be illuminated to the audience.

In one of his first productions, Brecht famously put up signs that said "Glotzt nicht so
romantisch!" ("Don't stare so romantically!"). His manner of stagecraft has proven both
fruitful and confusing to those who try to produce his works or works in his style. His
theory of theatre has heavily influenced modern theatre. Some of his innovations have
become so common that they've entered the theatrical canon.

Although Brecht's work and his ideas about theatre are generally considered as belong to
modernism. Modernism is a trend of thought which affirms the power of human beings to
make, improve and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge,
technology and practical experimentation, there is recent thought that he is the
forerunner of contemporary postmodern theatre practice. This is particularly so because
he questioned and dissolved many of the accepted practices of the theatre of his time
and created a political theatre. Political theatre is drama or performing art which
emphasizes a political issue or issues in its theme or plot that involved the audience in
understanding its meaning. Moreover, he was one of the first theatre practitioners to
incorporate multimedia into the semiotics. Semiotics, or semiology, is the study of sign,
both individually and grouped in sign systems of theatre.

**Raymond Williams’ Concept of ‘Tragedy and Tradition’**

Prepared by Atta Ur Rahman Jadoon 03335499069
William’s writings in the post-war period had a kind of existentialist motif of blocked individual liberation. The essay ‘Tragedy and Tradition’ is a discussion on the common and the traditional interpretations of tragedy. He has used his power of perception and has come with a strong thesis on the evolution of tragedy in the essay. Raymond Williams takes the subject of tragedy as a form of art and tragedy as an experience. He retracts the tradition of tragedy as he believes in the continuity of tradition. He doesn’t want to reject the present by the past or vice versa; but he thinks that concept of tradition is important to understand modern tragedy. In the previous essay, he tells the basics of tragedy in these words: we come to tragedy by many roads. "It is an immediate experience, a body of literature, conflict of theory, an academic problem"

He believes that tragedy is not the death of kings; it is more personal and general. Tragedy is not simply death and suffering and it is certainly not accident. Nor is it simply a response to death and suffering. It is a particular kind of event and particular kind of response which are genuinely tragic and which the long tradition embodies. His basic thesis in this article is: "The meaning of tragedy, the relationship of tradition to tragedy and the kinds of experience which we mistakenly call tragic"

Discussing the historical development of tragedy, Williams says that when the unique Greek culture changed, the chorus which was the crucial element of dramatic form was discarded and the unique meaning of tragedy was lost. He says that things change and concepts change. On the basis of our concepts we tend to seek permanent meanings in art, which, according to Williams, is a serious mistake. People think that the medieval period produced no tragedy, but ‘Monk’s Tale’ is the example in which we see protagonist falling from prosperity to adversity. Thus again, according to him, is the result of the fixation to an absolute meaning of tragedy. He says: “It is not that we lack the evidence. But we fail to use it because it doesn’t fit our idea of tragedy”

Later tragedy became more secularized in the Renaissance and Neoclassical age. During Renaissance, there is a precise emphasis on the fall of famous men, as ‘Rank’ was still important because the fate of ruling class was the fate of the city. But with the dissolution of feudal world, the practice of tragedy made new connections. The stories were transformed. During the neoclassical period emphasis on dignity and nobility of the hero continued. But the moving force of the tragedy was now a matter of behaviour rather than a metaphysical condition. The real question of tragedy now was moral than metaphysical. The tragic error was moral, a weakness in an otherwise good man who could still be pitied. After Williams has discussed the idea of tragedy, he gives his reading of 18th and 19th century tragic theories.

Lessing was a noted German critic and dramatic poet. He said the Neoclassicism was a false classicism and the real inheritor of the Greeks was Shakespeare and the real inherit of Shakespeare was the new national bourgeois tragedy. Raymond Williams doesn’t agree with Lessing. He holds that Shakespeare was not the real inheritor of the Greeks; rather he was a major instance of a new kind of tragedy. The character of Elizabethan tragedy is determined by a very complicated relationship between elements of an inherited order and elements of a new humanism. If th
development is to be fully understood, we must understand the complicated process of secularization. The only fully religious tragedy we have is Greek because Elizabethan drama was totally secular. Williams calls it a case of ‘Backward assimilation’ which ignores ‘forward assimilation’. Secular drama was a major step in the historical development in the idea of tragedy. In fact, Elizabethan tragedy anticipates the trends of Humanism and Romanticism. Raymond William says: “In one sense, all drama after Renaissance is secular”

Elizabethan drama was secular in practice but retained a Christian consciousness. Neoclassical is the first stage of substantial secularization. It insisted on relating suffering to moral error. Tragedy, in this view, shows suffering as a consequence of moral error and happiness as a consequence of virtue; meeting the demands of poetic justice. The weakness is that morality is static and moral emphasis is merely dogmatic. Further he discusses Hegel who didn’t reject the moral scheme of poetic justice but he said that emphasis on morality would make a work social drama not tragedy. Tragedy, he said, was a specific kind of spiritual action. What is important for Hegel is not the suffering ‘mere suffering’ but its causes. Mere pity and fear are not tragic. It does not consider the external contingency beyond the control of the individual i.e. illness, loss of property, death or the like. To Hegel, conscious individuality, individual freedom and self-determination are essential for genuine tragic action. Hegel asserts that tragedy recognizes suffering as: “Suspended over active characters entirely as the consequence of their own act.”

The modern tragedy is wholly personal and our interest is directed not to the abstract ethical questions but to the individual and his conditions. As with Karl Marx, Renaissance tragedy has been seen as the result of the conflict between dying feudalism and the new individualism. Individual suffers, not because he is conflict with gods or fate, but with the process of the social transformation. Tragic hero, in Marxist Criticism becomes ‘world historical individual’, in conflict with ‘world-spirit’. Williams reads Schopenhauer who believes that tragedy and sufferings are rooted in human nature and that these above and beyond particular causes. To this tragic sense of life, ethical and historical considerations are irrelevant. Misfortunes and sufferings are not exceptions but normal facts of life. So, the meaning of tragedy is resignation to the nature of life. For Nietzsche, tragedy dramatizes a tension which is resolved in higher order. According to him, the action of tragedy is not moral, not purgative, but aesthetic. Williams argues that we usually try to make a contrast between the traditional and the modern and try to compress and unify the various thinking of the past into a single tradition. About tradition Williams explains:

“It is a question, rather of realizing that a tradition is not the past; but an interpretation of the past – a selection and evaluation of ancestors rather than a neutral record and the present serves as a link between the traditional and the modern”.

**Tragedy in Contemporary Ideas**

This part deals with the contemporary tragic theories and literature. He presents the discussion on tragedy in relation to the contemporary ideas. The writer has discussed the four things: order and accident, the destruction of the hero, the irreparable
its connections with death and the emphasis of evil. The tragic experience of every age is unique. Williams says that modern and its suffering are very complex and it would be a mistake to interpret the tragic experience of the modern man in the light of the traditional concepts. Tragic experience attracts the beliefs and tensions of a period.

It is neither possible nor desirable to have a single permanent theory of tragedy. Such an attempt would be based on the assumption that human nature is permanent and unchanging. Rejecting the universalistic character of tragedy, Williams says: "Tragedy is not a single or permanent fact, but a series of conventions and institutions. The varieties of tragic experience are to be interpreted by reference to the changing conventions and institutions”

It is generally said that there is no significant meaning in 'everyday tragedies' because the event itself is not tragic; only becomes so with a through a shaped response. Williams does not agree to this view. He cannot see how it is possible to distinguish between an event and response to an event, in any absolute way. In the case of ordinary death and suffering, when we see mourning and lament, when we see people breaking under their actual loss, we have entered tragedy. Other responses are also possible such as indifference, justification, and rejoicing. But where we feel the suffering, we are within the dimensions of tragedy. But a burnt family or a mining disaster which leaves people without feeling are called Accidents. The events not seen as tragic are deep in the pattern of our own culture: war, famine, work, traffic, and politics. To feel no tragic meaning in them is a sort of our bankruptcy. Rank was the dividing line because the death of some people mattered more than others. Our middle class culture rejects this. The tragic of a citizen could be as real as the tragedy of a prince. The emerging middle class rejected rank in tragedy. The individual was not a state; but the entity in him. Williams is averse to any kind of theorizing so he declares: "It is necessary to break the theory if we are to value art”

Raymond Williams rejects the argument that event itself is not tragic but becomes so through a shaped response. It is not possible to distinguish between an event and response to an event. We may not response but it doesn’t mean that the event is absent. Suffering is suffering whether we are moved by it or not. In this way, an accident is tragic even if we do not apply to it the concepts of 'ethical claim' or 'human agency'. He also doesn't seem to approve the distinction between accident and tragedy. Famine, war and traffic and political events are all tragic. It is often believed that tragedy was possible in the age of faith and it was impossible now, because we have no faith. Williams, on the contrary, believes that the ages of comparatively stable belief do not produce tragedy of any intensity. Important tragedy seems to occur, neither in periods of real stability not in the periods of open and decisive conflicts. Its most common historical setting is the period preceding the complete breakdown of an important culture. Its condition is the tension between the old and the new order. In such situations, the process of dramatizing and resolving disorder and sufferings is intensified to the level which can be most readily recognized as tragedy. Order in tragedy is the result of the action. In tragedy, the creation of order is related to the fact of disorder, through which the action moves. It may be the pride of man set against the nature of things. In different cultures, disorder and order both vary, for there are parts of varying general interpretations of life. We should see this ve
the major cultural importance of tragedy as form of art. We can see his argument as under: "I do not see how it is finally possible to distinguish between an event and response to an event" and further "behind the façade of the emphasis on order, the substance of tragedy withered"

The most common misinterpretation of the tragedy is that hero is destroyed at the end. Our attention is so concentrated on the hero that we miss other aspects of tragedy. Reading of Hamlet without the Prince Hamlet is nothing but reading it without the State of Denmark would also be meaningless. Destruction of the hero is normally not the end of the action. In most tragedies, the story does not end with the death of the hero; it follows on. It is not the job of the artist to provide answers; but simply describe experience and raise questions. Modern tragedy is not what happens to the hero; but what happens through him. When we concentrate on the hero, we are unconsciously confining our attention to the individual. The tragic experience lies in the fact that life does not come back, that its meanings are reaffirmed and restored after so much suffering and after so important a death. Death gives importance and meaning to life. The death of an individual brings along the whole community in the form of rituals and condolence as in ‘Adam Bede’; so tragedy is social and collective and not individual or personal. Death is absolute and all our living is simply relative. Death is necessary and all other human ends are socially collective. Death is universal so a dead man quickly claims universality. When we confine ourselves to the hero, we are, unconsciously, narrowing the scope of tragedy. By attaching too much attention to the death, we minimize the real tragic sense of life. Man dies alone is an interpretation; not a fact; when he dies, he affects others. He alters the lives of other characters. To insist on a single meaning is not reasonable. The tragic action is about death but it need not end in death. Moreover, what about the other characters who are destroyed? Williams says: “We think of tragedy as what happens to the hero but ordinary tragic action is what happens through the hero”

There is a growing belief that in the modern age, the true nature of man is evil and evil is more potent and attractive. Tragedy shows us that evil is inescapable and irreparable; a sole reminder against the illusions of humanism and optimism. The theory of evil is significant in tragedy but not without limitations. There has always been a great emphasis on evil as a source of tragedy. But there is a tendency to generalize evil. He thinks that most of the great tragedies of the world end not with absolute evil but with evil experienced and lived through. Tragedy dramatizes evil in many particular forms: not only Christian evil but also cultural, political and ideological. Good and evil are not absolute. We are good or bad in particular ways and in particular situations; defined by pressures we at one received and can alter and can create again. Williams rejects that man is naturally evil or good. His dictum will finalize my answer because he declares: “Man is naturally not anything and we are good or bad in particular ways in particular situations”

**Raymond Williams’ views on ‘Rejection of Tragedy’**

Williams’ essay ‘Rejection of Tragedy’ is a study of the rejection of tragedy in modern age with special reference to Bertolt Brechet who founded epic theatre as compared to...
the emotional theory of Aristotle. He rejected the conventional idea of tragedy and made tragedy more experiential and rational.

He made people think above the situation presented in the tragedy and not within. Aristotelian drama enforced thinking from within and Brechét’s theatre from without. He used distancing affects to turn people like spectators who sit in the chair, smoke and observe. He showed what the audience wanted to see. Williams has discussed six plays: The Three Penny Opera, Saint Joan of the Stockyard, Die Massnahme, The Good Woman of Sezuen, Mother Courage and Her Children and the Life of Galileo. In the last play mentioned, the hero is offered two choices one between accepting the terms or the other being destroyed. Nevertheless, the hero recants. Tragedy, says Williams, in some of its older senses is certainly rejected by this ‘complex seeing’. The major achievement of Brechét is recovery of history as a dimension of tragedy. In tragedy we must see continuity and desire for change. Catastrophe should not halt the action or push the contradictions of life into background. Suffering should be avoided because suffering breaks us, Brechét thinks that our will to struggle should not die under the weight of sufferings. Brechét’s own words are the precise expression on this new sense of tragedy: “The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary”

Brechét believes that response to suffering is crucial and weight of suffering is borne by all of us. Even the spectator becomes a participant. As a participant he can condemn or comprehend the sufferings. And for this purpose, he needs some active principle which he finds in the system. But system makes its principles for its defense not for its rejection. Our disgust is directed against morality; not upon the system. Under these circumstances morality serves the cause of the cruel system and religion and spiritualism lose their effectiveness. Morality, religion and spiritualism are used by the exploiting class as a shield against public resentment. Brechét rejected and exposed the validity of the so-called refined sentiments of goodness, love and sacrifice. There are, to him, fake sentiments, romanticized on purpose. Love, he thinks, separates us from humanity. The emphasis on love can look like growth but it is often a simple withdrawal from the human action. Love is defined and capitalized in separation from humanity. Williams declares: “An evil system is protected by a false morality”

Brechét’s narrative style, which he called ‘Epic Theater’, was directed against the illusion created by traditional theater of witnessing a slice of life. Instead, Brechét encouraged spectators to watch events on stage dispassionately and to reach their own conclusions. To prevent spectators from becoming emotionally involved with a play and identifying with its characters, Brechét used a variety of techniques. Notable among them was the alienation or estrangement effect, which was achieved through such devices as choosing (for German audiences) unfamiliar settings, interrupting the action with songs, and announcing the contents of each scene through posters.

Brechét first attracted attention in the Berlin as the author of provocative plays that challenged the tenets of traditional theatre. In ‘St. Joan’ a modern-day Joan of Arc advocates the use of force in the fight against exploitation of workers. In his play, ‘Mother Courage and her Children’ Brechét invites us to see what happens to a good person in a bad society. Through Sheen Lee, he seeks to show how goodness is exploited by gods and men and how good person is alienated. The anti-
and Her Children’ shows an indomitable mother figure who misguidedly seeks to profit from war but loses her children instead. Brecht’s play ‘Good Woman of Sezuin’ presents a kind-hearted prostitute. She is good but she is alienated. Brecht called this a parable play, the kind-hearted prostitute is forced to disguise herself as her ruthless male cousin and exploit others in order to survive. According to Brecht the most alienated are the best. He collects life from all corners of the world when he says: "Today when human character must be understood as the totality of all social conditions, the epic theatre is the only one that can comprehend all the processes which could serve for a fully representative picture of the world."

He rejected the idea that suffering can ennoble us. Bad societies, he thinks, needs heroes and it is bad life that needs sacrifices. He considers it a sin against life to allow oneself to be destroyed by cruelty. His mature dramas show that it is not possible to label people good or bad. Goodness and badness are the two alternate labels in the same individual. We have a split consciousness and live under this tension. Williams calls it ‘Complex Seeing’ which was rejected by the traditional conception of tragedy. ‘Mother Courage and her Children’ is a dramatization of conflicting instincts in a person who is not conscious of these conflicts. But the case in ‘The Life of Galileo’ is different. Galileo is fully conscious and is free in making a choice. Galileo deals with the responsibility of the intellectual to defend his or her beliefs in the face of opposition from established authorities, in Galileo’s case the Roman Catholic Church. We can admire or despite Galileo but Brecht is not asking us to do this. He is only telling us what happens to consciousness when it caught in a deadlock between individual and social morality. We are so used to tragedy and martyrdom under such circumstances that we are unable to see this experience in a radically different way — complex seeing and accept the complexity of the situation as a fact of life. Facts that are concealed and brought to light as in, ‘The Life of Galileo’ Barberini says: "It is my own mask that permits me certain freedoms today. Dressed like this. I might be heard to murmur. If God did not exist, we should have to invent him."

Williams in this case presents the example of Mother Courage and comments that the history and people come alive on the stage, leaping past the isolated and virtually static action that we have got used to in most modern theatre. The drama, in his opinion, simultaneously occurs and is seen. It is not ‘take the case of this woman’ but ‘see and consider what happens to these people’. The point is not what we feel about her hard lively opportunism; it is what we see, in the action, of its results. By enacting a genuine consequence, in Williams’ view, Brecht raises his central question to a new level, both dramatically and intellectually. The question is then no longer ‘are they good people?’ Nor is it, really, ‘what should they have done?’ It is, brilliantly, both ‘what are they doing?’ and ‘what is this doing to them?’ In Williams’ opinion, to detach the work from its human purpose is, Brecht sees, to betray others and so betray life. It is not, in the end, what we think of Galileo as a man, but what we think of this result.

**Raymond Williams: Order, Accident and Experience**

Obviously the possibility of communication to ourselves, we, who are not immediately involved, depends on the capacity to connect the event with some more general body of
facts. This criterion, which is now quite conventional, is indeed very welcome, for it poses the issue in its most urgent form.

It is evidently possible for some people to hear of a mining disaster, a burned-out family, a broken career or a smash on the road without feeling these events as tragic in the full sense. But the starkness of such a position (which I believe to be sincerely held) is of course at once qualified by the description of such events as accidents which, however painful or regrettable, do not connect with any general meanings. The real key, to the modern separation of tragedy from ‘mere suffering’, is the separation of ethical control and, more critically, human agency, from our understanding of social and political life. The events which are not seen as tragic are deep in the pattern of our own culture: war, famine, work, traffic, and politics. To see no ethical content or human agency in such events, or to say that we cannot connect them with general meanings, and especially with permanent and universal meanings, is to admit a strange and particular bankruptcy, which no rhetoric of tragedy can finally hide.

But to see new relations and new laws is also to change the nature of experience, and the whole complex of attitudes and relationships dependent on it. Its most common historical setting is the period preceding the substantial breakdown and transformation of an important culture. Its condition is the real tension between old and new: between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities. If the received beliefs have widely or wholly collapsed, this tension is obviously absent; to that extent their real presence is necessary. But beliefs can be both active and deeply questioned, not so much by other beliefs as by insistent immediate experience. In such situations, the common process of dramatising and resolving disorder and suffering is intensified to the level which can be most readily recognized as tragedy.

The most common interpretation of tragedy is that it is an action in which the hero is destroyed. This fact is seen as irreparable. At a simple level this is so obviously true that the formula usually gets little further examination. But it is of course still an interpretation, and a partial one. We move away from actual tragedies, and not towards them, when we abstract and generalise the very specific forces that are so variously dramatized. We move away, even more decisively, from a common tragic action, when we interpret tragedy as only the dramatization and recognition of evil. You see, my business is trying to arouse human pity, There are a few things that’ll move people to pity, a few, but the trouble is, when they’ve been used several times, they no longer work. Human beings have the horrid capacity of being able to make themselves heartless at will. So it happens, for instance, that a man who sees another man on the street corner with only a stump for an arm will be so shocked the first time that he’ll give him sixpence. But the second time it’ll be only a three penny bit. And if he sees him a third time, he’ll hand him over cold-bloodedly to the police. It’s the same with these spiritual weapons.
T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot, an American-born scholar, sophisticated eclectic, and poetic genius claimed by both the United States and England, is the twentieth century's touchstone author and critic. His monumental verse, written during a period of emotional turmoil and personal re-evaluation, gave voice to the post-World War I trauma that left a generation in doubt about the future of civilization. His style transcended previous literary movements with a surprising sense of humor. Both frustratingly obtuse and dazzlingly memorable, his masterworks redirect attention from the collapse of Edwardian respectability to the birth of modernism.

It seems inconceivable that so British a poet could be an American Midwesterner. The seventh son of brick maker Henry Ware Eliot and poet and biographer Charlotte Stearns, Tom Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. His distinguished intellectual family derived from immigrants from East Coker, Somersetshire, a setting that Eliot returns to in his poetry. After completing studies at Smith Academy and a year at Milton Academy, he turned his back on America and cultivated the air, grace, and mannerisms of a London dandy.

Heavily influenced by Irving Babbitt at Harvard, Eliot earned a B.A. in literature and an M.A. in philosophy and Sanskrit, all in four years. To increase his fluency in French, he studied for a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, then returned to Harvard for doctoral work in philosophy. Eliot had traveled in Germany and begun a doctoral dissertation at Merton College, Oxford, when he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood. As World War I engulfed Europe, health problems kept him out of the army.

After Eliot's father altered his will to underscore disappointment in his son's marriage, Ezra Pound influenced Eliot to remain in the British Isles and join the Bloomsbury Circle, a powerful intellectual force in England in the 1920s and 1930s. Following brief teaching stints at High Wycombe and Highgate Junior School, from 1919 to 1922, he worked for Lloyds Bank and began submitting verse of subtle brilliance to magazines. His poems departed from the modish romantics to concentrate on the mystic outlook of the metaphysics and the Christian divines.

Forever done with teaching and money handling, Eliot entered the book world for life as director of publisher Faber & Faber. He distinguished himself with a remarkable first collection, Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), followed by Are vos prec (1920) and The Sacred Wood (1922). Immediately, he began composing two controversial works, The Waste Land (1922), winner of The Dial award, and The Hollow Men (1925), a profound verse of postwar malaise and a prime influence on the "lost generation." Among scholarly successes were Three Critical Essays (1920), Andrew Marvell (1922), and The Criterion, a literary quarterly he published and edited from 1923 to 1939. He received British citizenship in 1927 and sought baptism and confirmation in "the Church..."

A period of Anglo-Catholic thought influenced Eliot's The Journey of the Magi (1927), Ash Wednesday (1930), and The Four Quartets (1943), a war commentary begun in 1935. He exercised versatility in a melodrama, Sweeney Agonistes (1932), and two stage works: The Rock (1934), a pageant with choruses, and Murder in the Cathedral (1935). The latter, a poetic drama commemorating a significant act of violence perpetrated by Henry II, was performed on the site of the assassination of Bishop Thomas à Becket at Canterbury Cathedral's Chapter House.

Subsequent works displaying Eliot's piety and religious philosophy include The Family Reunion (1939), The Idea of a Christian Society (1940), and The Cocktail Party (1950), the most successful of his stage dramas. A lighter work, Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats (1940), is the basis for Cats, the longest-running production in stage musical history. Less noteworthy are The Confidential Clerk (1954) and The Elder Statesman (1958), both more suited to reading than to acting. Lauded as English literature's most incisive critic, Eliot surveyed a range of interests with Homage to Dryden (1924), The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), Elizabeth Essays (1934), and On Poetry and Poets (1957).

In 1948, Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature for his erudite treatment of modern sterility. He died in 1965; his ashes were interred in the village church of East Coker, the ancestral home of the Eliot family.

**Tradition and Individual Talent : Summary**

The essay Tradition and Individual Talent is an attack on certain critical views in Romanticism particularly up on the idea that a poem is primarily an expression of the personality of the poet.

Eliot argues that a great poem always asserts and that the poet must develop a sense of the pastness of the past. There is great importance of tradition in the present poem. Tradition should not be inherited but should be obtained by great labour. Past should be altered by present as much as the present is directed by past.

In fact tradition acquires a wider significance in Eliot’s writing. It involves a historical sense that is really essential for any work of art. This historical sense involves a perception, not only of the past ness of past but also its present ness. This sense compels a poet to write not only being near to his generation, but to the whole of literary tradition starting from Homer. Thus to write poetry is to write with a consciousness of the timeless and temporal and of the interrelation between the two. In any work the past should be altered by the present just as the present is directed by the past.

In this way, present affects the past as past effects the present because present poet adopts the tradition of past with hard labour. A good writer or poet identifies his position in present with the comparison to past writers. Therefore, the combination of temporal and timeless is, as whole tradition.
The meaning of the poem is not possible in isolation. Not poet, no any artist has his complete meaning unless we link him/ her to a chain of all poets. Impotence and value of any poet can’t be judged in isolation. So there must be the tradition to compare are with another.

To create a good poem, one should surrender the self. This self-sacrifice of personality gives birth to a good poem. One should negate his mind. In doing so one loses his individuality and his personality. All the personal emotions, feelings and experience should be sacrificed. There should not be the personal image of poet in his poetry. Poetry should be impersonal. But it does not mean that the poet should not write his personal feelings, but there personal feelings should be converted in to art’s feelings. Therefore, we as a critic should not look for personality of poet in his poem because the text is objective. The theory that the poet should surrender his personality is depersonalization. The poet’s personal feelings and emotions should be depersonalized. He must be an impersonal and objective like a scientist.

The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice a continual extinction of personality is the individual talent. To make the concept of depersonalization clear, Eliot brings analogy of creating sulphuric acid.

Sulpher dioxide (Feeling) + oxygen (Emotion) + platinum (Mind of Poet) = Sulphurous Acid (Poem) (No trace of Poet’s Personality)

As the platinum itself remains unaffected, the mind of the poet remains unaffected also. Poet's personality is just an agent or medium to active the relation between emotion and feelings. So, the poet is never a creator, but like catalyst.

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion. Eliot point is more like what Keats uses his term ‘negative capability’.

Eliot stands against Romantic poets who think that poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and personal emotions. Romantic writer says poetry is expression of personality and inspiration. But Eliot says poetry is not so but an escape from personality. Poetry is organization rather than inspiration. So, the critic should be objective while treating the poems. The belief that there is a poet speaking in a poem should be checked.

**Tradition and individual talent : Analysis**

Eliot's essays actually map a highly personal set of preoccupations, responses and ideas about specific authors and works of art, as well as formulate more general theories on the connections between poetry, culture and society. Perhaps his best-known essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” was first published in 1919 and soon after included in The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920). Eliot attempts to do two things in this essay: he first redefines "tradition" by emphasizing the importance of history to writing and understanding poetry, and he then argues that poetry should be essentially “impersonal,” that is separate and distinct from the personality of its writer. Eliot's idea of tradition is complex and unusual, involving something he descr
historical sense” which is a perception of “the pastness of the past” but also of its “presence.” For Eliot, past works of art form an order or “tradition”; however, that order is always being altered by a new work which modifies the “tradition” to make room for itself. This view, in which “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past,” requires that a poet be familiar with almost all literary history - not just the immediate past but the distant past and not just the literature of his or her own country but the whole “mind of Europe.”

Eliot’s second point is one of his most famous and contentious. A poet, Eliot maintains, must “self-sacrifice” to this special awareness of the past; once this awareness is achieved, it will erase any trace of personality from the poetry because the poet has become a mere medium for expression. Using the analogy of a chemical reaction, Eliot explains that a “mature” poet’s mind works by being a passive “receptacle” of images, phrases and feelings which are combined, under immense concentration, into a new “art emotion.” For Eliot, true art has nothing to do with the personal life of the artist but is merely the result of a greater ability to synthesize and combine, an ability which comes from deep study and comprehensive knowledge. Though Eliot’s belief that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” sprang from what he viewed as the excesses of Romanticism, many scholars have noted how continuous Eliot’s thought - and the whole of Modernism - is with that of the Romantics’; his “impersonal poet” even has links with John Keats, who proposed a similar figure in “the chameleon poet.” But Eliot’s belief that critical study should be “diverted” from the poet to the poetry shaped the study of poetry for half a century, and while “Tradition and the Individual Talent” has had many detractors, especially those who question Eliot’s insistence on canonical works as standards of greatness, it is difficult to overemphasize the essay’s influence. It has shaped generations of poets, critics and theorists and is a key text in modern literary criticism.

According to Eliot, "Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind..." (page 47 ). And herein lies the impossible task of defining tradition. All we do is based upon this creative or critical turn of mind, based upon our religions or our morals or our art; and this has been true throughout all of history. And this is - on one side - tradition. But when a nation rises and falls, when a kingdom expands or a city dies in a cloud of flame, tradition is lost. I would add to Eliot's words that every city, every family, every individual has his or her own tradition. Habits, ideas, though process - these are all part of this "turn of mind" that Eliot speaks of in his essay. Thought process is tradition; although Eliot says, "Yet if the only form of tradition...consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us...'tradition' should be positively discouraged," still my claim is this: tradition is in one's own critical and creative turn of mind, within one's self - the masses have no place in this tradition, no place in its creation, its encouragement, or its defining. And so this word, as many others, goes forever undefined; it eludes the human mind as something invisible and impalpable eludes our fingers, as a scent eludes our grasping hands. This is tradition. And beyond this, we can only speculate.
"Criticism is an inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel and emotion about it." (T. S. Eliot Tradition and individual talent, 1920, page 48)

I really never thought about how much we criticize authors and poets. When we read a book we compare it to another author of the same genre or we compare it to another book by that same author. In almost every single one of Literature classes in my secondary school, we compared one writer to another one. Whenever you read a book or a poem there is some kind of criticism going on inside your head. When we criticize a poet, author, or some other writer we always look at their history, we have to find out every part of their background because that may explain why they wrote this or that. I have to ask, why do we do this? I'm sure there are times where the author/poet/whoever is not writing about their life and general experiences but something they are interested in. It is a tradition in schools, that we have to learn not only the poem or a novel, but also we have to know everything about the writer. In my opinion is that, when we getting older and older we realize that we do not need to look after the writer's life to understand his or her work. Without knowing these facts we can enjoy the book and understand it.

**Eliot’s Depersonalization theory**

In "Tradition and Individual Talent", Eliot opposes the Romantic conception by advancing his theory of impersonality in art and opines that the artistic process is a process of depersonalization and that the artist will surrender himself totally to the creative work. Eliot particularly objected to the great Romantics as well as Victorians who exaggerated the need to express human personality and subjective feeling and he says, "The progress of aim artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."

Eliot holds that the poet and the poem are two separate things and "that the feelings or the emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet." Hence, he elucidates his theory of impersonality by examining, first, the relation of the poet to the part and secondly, the relation of the poem to its author. Eliot realizes that the past exists in the present. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His signification, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You can value him alone. You must set him for contrast and comparison among the deads."

Eliot points out the relation of the poem to its author; and says that the poem has no relation to the poet. There is detached or alienation between the poet and his poem. The difference between the mind of a nature poet and that of an immature one is that the mind of a nature poet is "a more finely perfected medium in which special or varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations". According to Eliot, the art emotion is different from personal emotion. A successful artist is he, who can generalize emotion in the reader's one while he himself seemed to be unaffected by any emotion. In the other hand he should be depersonalized in experience he describes in the poem.

Eliot brings the analogy of chemical reaction to explain the process of depersonalization. In this respect he has drawn a scientific analogy. He tells that a poet shoul
sold of platinum which makes sulphurous acid. He says, "When the two gases, previously mentioned (oxygen and Sulphur dioxide) are mixed in the presence of a filament of Platinum. They form Sulphurous acid. The combination takes place only when the Platinum is present; nevertheless, the newly formed acid contains no trace of Platinum, and the Platinum itself is apparently unaffected has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of Platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in his will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates, the one perfectly will be the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."

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

He strongly believes that "the differences between art and the event are always absolute. Eliot illustrate his view by a few examples among which one is of Keats' One to a Nightingale, which contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly perhaps because it's attractive name, and partly because of its reputation served to bring together. He illustrates his theory by a few examples. The artistic emotion evoked by Dante in his treatment of the episode of Paolo and Francesca is different from the actual emotion in the situation. The artistic emotion may approximate to the actual emotion as in Agamemnon the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in Othello to the emotion of the protagonist himself.

Eliot believes that the main concern of the poet is not the expression of personality. He says, "the poet has, not a personality to express but a particular medium which is only a medium and a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways, impressions and experiences which are important for the may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality". Again, there is no need for poet to try to express new human emotions in poetry. The business of the poet. Eliot says, is not to find new emotions, but use of the ordinary ones and, in working them up in poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all". Eliot's final definition of poetry is: "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion: it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."

It is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. He emphasizes the same theory of impersonality in art. The emotion of art is impersonal. It has its life in the poem and not in the history of poets. So, honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. The poet's biography is not to be studied the structure of the poem and its evocative powers are important.
Eliot's theory of depersonalization has been criticized by critics like Ransom and Yvor Winters. Ransom regards Eliot's theory as "very neatly a doctrine of poetic automation".

To Fei Pai Lu, Eliot's theory of depersonalization is completely vague. He says, "in the name of impersonality", Eliot by turns commends and censures poets and artist.

From what we have said, above it follows that there is no connection between the poet's personality and the poem. The feelings of the poetry need not necessarily his own.

**Concept of Tradition and Historical Sense**

In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot spreads his concept of tradition, which reflects his reaction against romantic subjectivism and emotionalism. He also signifies the importance of the tradition. He opines that tradition gives the reader something new, something arresting, something intellectual and something vital for literary conception.

Tradition, according to Eliot, is that part of living culture inherited from the past and functioning in the formation of the present. Eliot maintains that tradition is bound up with historical sense, which is a perception that the past is not something lost and invalid.

According to Eliot tradition is a living culture which is inherited from the past and also has an important function in forming (shaping) the present. To Eliot tradition is bound up with historical sense of a poet or writer. Historical sense is a perception that past is not something that is lost or invalid. Rather it has a function in the present.

It exits with the present. It exerts its influence in our ideas, thoughts and consciousness. This is historical sense. It is an awareness not only of the pastness of the past but the presence of the past. On this sense the past is our contemporary as the present is.

Eliot's view of tradition is not linear but spatial. Eliot does not believe that the past is followed by the presence and succession of a line. On the contrary, the past and the present live side by side in the space. Thus it is spatial.

Then Eliot holds that not only the past influences the present but the present, too, influences the past. To prove this idea, he conceives of all literature as a total, indivisible order. All existing literary works belong to an order like the member of a family. Any new work of literature is like the arrival of a member or a new relative or a new acquaintance. Its arrival and presence brings about a readjustment of the previous relationship of the old members. A new work takes its place in the order. Its arrival and inclusion modifies the order and relationship among all works. The order is then modified. A new work of art influences all the existing- literary work, as a new relative influences the old members of a family. It is this sense that the present modifies the past as the past modifies the present. The past is modified by the present also in the sense that we can look at the past literature always through ever renewing perceptive of the present.
A new work of art cannot be evaluated in isolation without reference to past literature and tradition. Evaluation is always comparative and relative. It calls for a comparison with the past that is with tradition. The value of a work depends on how well it is adjusted into the order of existing literary works. No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone. You must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead.

A work of art has two dimensions- it is at once personal and universal. It is an individual composition, but at the same time, its inclusion into tradition determines its worth and universal appeal. A writer must be aware that he belongs to a larger tradition and there is always an impact of tradition on him. Individual is an element formed by and forming the culture to which he belongs. He should surrender his personality to something larger and more significant.

In his conscious cultivation of historical sense, a writer reduces the magnification of personal self, which leads to depersonalization and impersonal act.

When a writer is aware the historical sense, it does not mean that he is influenced by the past or his own self. Rather the writer should minimize the importance of his personal self, which will lead him to depersonalization and impersonal act.

Tradition is a living stream. It is not a lump or dead mass. But the main current does not always flow through the most noted authoress.

Eliot regrets that tradition in English world of letters is used in prerogative sense. This is one reason of the undeveloped critical sense of the English nation. They are too individualistic on intellectual habits.

Eliot criticizes the English intellectuals. According to Eliot to the English intellectual tradition is something that should be avoided. They give much more importance on individualism and are critical about the historical sense or tradition.

Like Arnold, Eliot views tradition as something living. For both the word “tradition” implies growth. Eliot recalls Edmund Burke what Burke did for political thought, by glorifying the idea of inheritance, Eliot has done for English literary criticism. Burke, famous English politician, gave emphasis on the experience of the past in politics. In the same Eliot also gives emphasis on the past regarding English criticism.

Tradition does not mean uncritical imitation of the past. Nor does it mean only erudition. A writer draws on only the necessary knowledge of tradition. He must use his freedom according to his needs. He cannot be completely detached. Often the most original moments of a work of art echo the mind of earlier writers. Though it sounds paradoxical it is true. It is paradoxical but true that even the most original writings sometimes reflect the thinking of the past or earlier writers. So, there is nothing which is absolutely original.
A partial or complete break with the literary past is a danger. An awareness of what has gone before is necessary to know what is there to be done in the present or future. A balance between the control of tradition and the freedom of an individual is essential to art.

Eliot said elsewhere that by losing tradition we lose our hold on the present. Hence, a writer should be aware of the importance of tradition.

**Idea of Individual Talent in relation to tradition**

Thomas Stearns Eliot, being a classicist, shows, both in his literary criticism and creation, an anti-romantic tendency against individualism and subjectivism. He regards poetry as the expression of the personality of the poet and gave emphasis on inspiration and intuition. Eliot's idea is also different from the neo-classicists who believed that the writer must follow the rules of the ancients and the poetry must be didactic. According to Eliot, an individual talent cannot be expressed without some connection with tradition. Eliot's ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ holds his idea of individual talent and tradition. At first, Eliot brings out the general ‘tendency to insist’ on finding out the individual talent of a poet: “We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors: we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.”

But Eliot’s view is that if we ‘without prejudice,’ approach to a poet’s work of not only “the impressionable period of full maturity”, we will find that the individual talent is influenced by tradition. He assured that “Not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.”

However, he also tells that this ‘tradition’ does not mean “following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its success.” “It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.”

Tradition involves the ‘historical sense’ which again involves ‘a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of it’s presence. That is, a creative artist, though he lives in a particular age or social environment, does not work merely with his own generation in view, but acts with a conviction in general. However, Eliot accepts that “novelty is better than repetition”.

As his ‘principle of aesthetic,’ Eliot says that no individual talent has his complete ‘meaning’ or ‘value’ alone. “His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists”, in contrast and comparison.

According to Eliot, there is a ‘conformity’ between the new works of an individual talent and the old works of tradition. The new work of art modifies the ‘ideal order’ of the existing works which was a complete order before the arrival of the new one. “The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the
the relation, proportion, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted after each of the work of art of an individual talent.

There must be a standard to judge an individual talent. Eliot says that an individual talent “must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past,” “not amputated by them”. This judgment is not for declaring any of them good or bad, but with this, they are measured by each other. However, “we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in: but it’s fitting in is a test of its value-a-in”.

To speak farther about the duty of the individual talent in connection with his relation with the past, Eliot says, “he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he from himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period”.

In order to know the tradition, he must judge critically what are the main trends and what are not. He must also be conscious of the fact that “art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same”. He must be aware of the changing mind which is a development which abandons nothing ‘enroute’. [“But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness itself cannot show.”]

The conscious or (unconscious?) cultivation of the sense of the past or tradition which sharpens the sensibility is very important for an individual talent in the process of his poetic creation. Eliot says,

“What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.”

The progress of an artist or individual talent is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. That is, an individual talent must surrender himself totally to the creative work. Eliot has explained his idea of the ‘depersonalization’ with a suggestive scientific analogy of introducing finely filiated platinum into oxygen and sulphur dioxide. When these two gases are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination happens only when the platinum is present. Yet there is found no trace of platinum in the newly formed acid. Eliot here compares the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum which, being a catalyst, remains unaffected, inert, neutral and unchanged even after sacrificing itself to the gases. Eliot says that the mind of the poet or individual talent “may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself.” But the more perfect the artist is the more completely separate the mind will be. Consequently, “the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material”.

Eliot opposes Wordsworth’s theory, ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’. He says, “The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones [and, in working them up into poetry, to express feel”
actual emotion at all. And emotion which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him.”]

Eliot’s belief is that the main concern of the poet is not the expression of personality. He says that “the poet has, not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.”

From the above discussion, we see that in Eliot’s theory of individual talent, tradition has a great part. Tradition helps the individual talent produce good poetry. Both of them are closely inter-related and inter-dependent. Eliot’s idea of tradition and individual talent cannot be without criticism as well. Sean Lucy admits the necessity of tradition for individual talent, but he opines that a conscious cultivation of the sense of tradition is not necessary for the individual writer in all epochs. He thinks that Eliot might have been impelled to adopt such an attitude by the ‘danger of literary anarchy’ which was present in the extreme individualism of the ‘spirit of revolt’ which infected so much of European art and thought during the 1920s and part of 1930s.

**Concept of comparison and contras with the dead**

By tradition Eliot means all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites to our conventional ways of greeting a stranger, which represent the bloodkinship of the same people living in the same place. Tradition is a need and importance of an outside authority of the poet.

Allegiance to ‘inner voice’ simply means doing what one likes. The poet must allow allegiance to some other authority outside himself. He must learn and practice inner self-control. He must revise and re-revise his artistic work. Mature art is only possible in this way. His concept of tradition is enlightened and dynamic. Tradition is always growing. In Tradition and Individual Talent, Eliot regards the whole of European literature from Homer down to his own day as forming a single literary tradition. Tradition is dead, it lives in the present. When a great work of art is produced, the tradition is enhanced or modified to some extent. A great artist must have a sense of tradition and he must pass this tradition to the next generations; otherwise he will be isolated. Therefore, Eliot rightly says that: “You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead”

Eliot’s conception of tradition is an enlightened and dynamic one. An idea of tradition is essential for it makes us realise our kinship with “the same people living in the same place”. But we must remember that the conditions of life which produced some particular tradition have changed and so the tradition, too, must change. Tradition is not something immovable, it is something constantly growing and becoming different from what it previously was. We must learn to distinguish between the essential and the unessential, the good and the bad, in a particular tradition and only the good and the essential must be followed and revived. While we should justly be proud of our own tradition this should not make us look down on other peoples who are not so lucky in this respect. In short, tradition must be used intelligently, changes in the conditions of life must be taken into consideration, and only the best should be pre
fostered. Eliot’s tradition continues and lives in the present. When a really great work of art is produced, this tradition is modified and a great work of art can be possible only when the artist has a sense of this literary tradition. Great artists modify the existing tradition and pass it on to the future. A sense of tradition is essential for the creation of good poetry, but individual talent, too, is of paramount importance. Indeed, the two, tradition and individual talent, are not opposite concepts. Eliot reconciles the two, and shows that both have an essential role to play in the process of poetic creation. Individual talent is needed to acquire the sense of tradition, and this individual talent also modifies the tradition so acquired. So Eliot propounds: “The poet must develop the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career”

But the question is how should the individual writer have this idea of tradition and how can he invest his individual talent in it? The artist must have the historical sense so that his individual talent may be differentiated. This historical sense is the sense of the timeless and temporal, as well as of the timeless and temporal together. Tradition represents the accumulated wisdom and experience of ages, and so its knowledge is essential for really great and noble achievements. According to this view, tradition is not anything fixed and static, it is constantly changing, growing and becoming different from what it is, and it is the individual talent which so modifies it. A writer in the present must seek guidance from the past, he must confirm to the literary tradition. The past directs the presents and is itself modified and altered by the present. The work of a poet in the present is to be compared and contrasted with works of the past, and judged by the standards of the past. But this judgment does not mean determining good or bad. The comparison is to be made for knowing the facts, all the facts, about the new work of art. The comparison is made for the purposes of analysis, and for forming a better understanding of the new. It is in this way alone that we can form an idea of what is really individual and new. It is by comparison alone that we can sift the tradition from the individual elements in a given work of art. In this way, does Eliot reconcile the concept of tradition with individual talent and stresses their respective roles in the process of poetic creation. What Eliot means in gist is that: “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and it you want it you must obtain it by great labour”

According to Eliot, the impersonal elements, i.e. the ‘tradition’, the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past, which is acquired by the poet to produce a great work of art. It is the duty of every poet to acquire, to the best of his ability, this knowledge of the past, and he must continue to acquire this consciousness throughout his career. Such awareness of tradition, sharpens poetic creation. Thus the individual talent of the artist is set against this tradition, observed, and evaluated. In this way, his art is better perceived, understood, valued and appreciated. Eliot further emphasises that point in the following lines: “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists”

Thus, the idea of tradition for individual talent is unavoidable for a great work of art. The poet must also realize that art never improves, though its material is never the same. The mind of Europe may change, but this change does not m
Shakespeare and Homer have grown outdated and lost their significance. The great works of art never lose their significance, for there is no qualitative improvement in art. There may be refinement, there may be development, but from the point of view of the artist there is no improvement. For example, it will not be correct to say that the art of Shakespeare is better and higher than that of Eliot. Their works are of different kinds, for the material on which they worked was different. His view of tradition requires, as most criticize him, a ridiculous amount of erudition. It will be pointed out that there have been great poets who were not learned, and further that too much learning kills sensibility. However, knowledge does not merely mean bookish knowledge. It is wisdom which can also be learnt from the school of life as Shakespeare, Dickens and many others have done.

**T.S. Eliot as a critic**

Eliot is one of the greatest literary critics of England from the point of view of the bulk and quality of his critical writings. His five hundred and odd essays occasionally published as reviews and articles had a far-reaching influence on literary criticism in the country. His criticism was revolutionary which inverted the critical tradition of the whole English speaking work. John Hayward says: "I cannot think of a critic who has been more widely read and discussed in his own life-time; and not only in English, but in almost every language, except Russian."

As a critic Eliot has his faults. At times he assumes a hanging-judge attitude and his statements savour of a verdict. Often his criticism is marred by personal and religious prejudices blocking an honest and impartial estimate. Moreover, he does not judge all by the same standards. There is didacticism in his later essays and with the passing of time his critical faculties were increasingly exercised on social problems. Critics have also found fault with his style as too full of doubts, reservations and qualifications.

Still, such faults do not detract Eliot’s greatness as a critic. His criticism has revolutionized the great writers of the past three centuries. His recognition of the greatness of the Metaphysical poets of the 17th century resulted in the Metaphysical revival of the 20th century. The credit for the renewal of interest in the Jacobean dramatists goes to Eliot. He has restored Dryden and other Augustan poets to their due place. His essay on Dante aroused curiosity for the latter middle ages. The novelty of his statements, hidden in sharp phrases, startles and arrests attention. According to Eliot, the end of criticism is to bring readjustment between the old and the new. He says: "From time to time it is desirable, that some critic shall appear to review the past of our literature, and set the poets and the poems in a new order."

Such critics are rare, for they must possess, besides ability for judgment, powerful liberty of mind to identify and interpret its own values and category of admiration for their generation. John Hayward says: "Matthew Arnold was such a critic as were Coleridge and Johnson and Dryden before him; and such, in our own day, is Eliot himself."

Eliot’s criticism offers both reassessment and reaction to earlier writers. He called himself “a classicist in literature”. His vital contribution is the reacti
romanticism and humanism which brought a classical revival in art and criticism. He rejected the romantic view of the individual’s perfectibility, stressed the doctrine of the original sin and exposed the futility of the romantic faith in the “Inner Voice”. Instead of following his ‘inner voice’, a critic must follow objective standards and must conform to tradition. A sense of tradition, respect for order and authority is central to Eliot’s classicism. He sought to correct the excesses of “the abstract and intellectual” school of criticism represented by Arnold. He sought to raise criticism to the level of science. In his objectivity and logical attitude, Eliot most closely resembles Aristotle. A. G. George says: “Eliot’s theory of the impersonality of poetry is the greatest theory on the nature of the process after Wordsworth’s romantic conception of poetry.”

Poetry was an expression of the emotions and personality for romantics. Wordsworth said that poetry was an overflow of powerful emotions and its origin is in “Emotions recollected in tranquility”. Eliot rejects this view and says that poetry is not an expression of emotion and personality but an escape from them. The poet is only a catalytic agent that fuses varied emotions into new wholes. He distinguishes between the emotions of the poet and the artistic emotion, and points out that the function of criticism is to turn attention from the poet to his poetry.

Eliot’s views on the nature of poetic process are equally revolutionary. According to him, poetry is not inspiration, it is organization. The poet’s mind is like a vessel in which are stored numerous feelings, emotions and experiences. The poetic process fuses these distinct experiences and emotions into new wholes. In “The Metaphysical Poets”, he writes: “When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, and fragmentary”.

Perfect poetry results when instead of ‘dissociation of sensibility’ there is ‘unification of sensibility’. The emotional and the rational, the creative and the critical, faculties must work in harmony to produce great work of art. Critics stressed that the aim of poetry is to give pleasure or to teach morally. However, for Eliot the greatness of a poem is tested by the order and unity it imposes on the chaotic and disparate experiences of the poet. Wimsatt and Brooks are right in saying: “Hardly since the 17th century had critical writing in English so resolutely transposed poetic theory from the axis of pleasure versus pain to that of unity versus multiplicity.”

Eliot devised numerous critical concepts that gained wide currency and has a broad influence on criticism. ‘Objective co-relative’, ‘Dissociation of sensibility’, ‘Unification of sensibility’ are few of Eliot clichés hotly debated by critics. His dynamic theory of tradition, of impersonality of poetry, his assertion on ‘a highly developed sense of fact’ tended to impart to literary criticism catholicity and rationalism.

To conclude, Eliot’s influence as a critic has been wide, constant, fruitful and inspiring. He has corrected and educated the taste of his readers and brought about a rethinking regarding the function of poetry and the nature of the poet process. He gave a new direction and new tools of criticism. It is in the re-consideration and revival of English poetry of the past. George Watson writes:
“Eliot made English criticism look different, but not in a simple sense. He offered it a new range of rhetorical possibilities, confirmed it in its increasing contempt for historical processes, and yet reshaped its notion of period by a handful of brilliant institutions.”

His comments on the nature of Poetic Drama and the relation between poetry and drama have done much to bring about a revival of Poetic Drama in the modern age. Even if he had written no poetry, he would have made his mark as a distinguished and subtle critic.

**T.S Eliot : The Metaphysical Poets**

**The Essay: Its Significance**

Eliot’s essay on The Metaphysical Poets was first published as a review of J.C. Grierson’s edition of Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the 17th Century. But the essay is much more than a mere review. It is a critical document of much value and significance. It is an important landmark in the history of English literary criticism, it has brought about a revaluation and reassessment of Donne and other Metaphysical poets, and has caused a revival of interest in these poets who had been neglected for a considerable time. It is in this essay that Eliot has used, for the first time, the phrases Dissociation of Sensibility and Unification of Sensibility, phrases which have acquired worldwide currency and which, ever since, have had a far reaching impact on literary criticism.

**Eliot’s Purpose**

Eliot begins the essay by praising Grierson’s scholarly edition of metaphysical lyrics and poems of the 17th century. This book is an admirable piece of criticism in itself, as well as a provocation to criticism. It is a great irritant to thought. It sets Eliot himself thinking, and he proposes to consider the significance of the label ‘Metaphysical’ which has generally been used as a term of abuse to indicate the quaint tastes of these poets, and also to examine whether the so-called ‘metaphysical’ poets constituted a school or movement in themselves, or were they merely a continuation of some older tradition.

**Difficulties in the Way**

Eliot is quite conscious of the difficulties of the task he has undertaken. First, it is difficult to define the term, “metaphysical” and explain the characteristics which differentiate metaphysical poetry from other kinds of poetry. Secondly, it is difficult to decide which poets practised it and which did not, and which of their verses have such characteristics. In the beginning of the 17th century, there are noticeable three different schools of poetry: First, there is Donne, a late Elizabethan, and Marvell and Bishop King who are very close to him. Secondly, there is Ben Jonson and his, courtly school, of poetry, a kind of poetry which expired in the next century in the verses of Prior. Thirdly, there is the religious poetry of Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw. It is difficult to find characteristics which are common to all those poets, and which are dominant enough to mark out these poets as constituting a separate, distinct group.
Metaphysical Poetry: Its Characteristics

Eliot then proceeds to examine one by one with suitable illustrations the characteristics which are generally considered ‘metaphysical’. First, there is the elaboration of a simile to the farthest possible extent to be met with frequently in the poetry of Donne and Cowley. The most striking instance of such elaboration is the famous conceit of a pair of compasses in Donne’s A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning. Secondly, there is the device of the development of an image by rapid association of thought requiring considerable agility on the part of the reader. For example, in Donne’s A Valediction: of Weeping, we get three separate images: the picture of the geographer’s globe, the tears of the poet’s beloved, and the picture of the Great Flood. Though these three pictures are entirely separate, the poet has unified them by stressing the likeness between his lady’s tears and the globe, and further that they are capable of overflowing the earth. Thirdly, on other occasions Donne produces his effects by sudden contrasts. Thus in the line, “A bracelet of bright hair about the bone”, the most powerful effect is produced by sudden contrast of the associations of ‘bright hair’ and ‘bone’. But such telescoping of images and contrast of associations are not a characteristic of the poetry of Donne alone. It also characterises Elizabethan dramatists like Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur and Middleton. This suggests that Donne, Cowley and others belong to the Elizabethan tradition and not to any new school. The dominant characteristics of Donne’s poetry are also the characteristics of the great Elizabethans.

Dr. Johnson’s Definition

Eliot then takes up Dr. Johnson’s famous definition of metaphysical poetry, in which the great doctor has tried to define this poetry by its faults. Dr. Johnson in his Life of Cowley points out that in Metaphysical poetry “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked violence together”. They bringing together of heterogeneous ideas and compelling them into unity by the operation of the poet’s mind is universal in poetry. Countless instances of such fusion of opposite and dissimilar concepts can be cited at random from all poets. Such unity is present even in the poetry of Johnson himself. The force of Dr. Johnson’s remark lies in the fact that in his view the Metaphysical poetry could only Yoke by violence dissimilar ideas. They could unite them or fuse them into a single whole. But this is not a fact. A number of poets of this school have eminently succeeded in uniting heterogeneous ideas. Eliot quotes from Herbert Cowley, Bishop King and other poets in support of his contention. Therefore, he concludes that Metaphysical poetry cannot be differentiated from other poetry by Dr. Johnson’s definition. The fault which the learned doctor points out is not there, and the unity of heterogeneous ideas is common to all poetry.

The Special Virtue of the Metaphysicals

As a matter of fact, it is futile to try to define metaphysical poetry by its faults. Even such a shrewd and sensitive critic as Dr. Johnson failed to do so. Eliot, therefore, purposes to use the opposite method, the positive approach, and point out the characteristic virtue of this school of poetry. He would show that Donne and the other poets of the 17th century, “were the direct and normal development of the precedent age”, and that their characteristic virtue was something valuable. . .
disappeared. Dr. Johnson has rightly pointed out that these poets were ‘analytic’; they were given too much analysis and direction of particular emotional situations. But he has failed to see that they could also unite into new wholes the concepts they had analysed. Eliot would show that their special virtue was the fusion of heterogeneous material into a new unity after its dissociation. In other words, he would show that metaphysical poetry is distinguished from other poetry by unification of sensibility, and that subsequently, dissociation of sensibility, overtook English poetry, and this was unfortunate.

Unification of Sensibility

The great Elizabethans and early Jacobians had a developed unified sensibility which is expressed in their poetry. By ‘sensibility’ Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impressions. He means much more than that. By ‘sensibility’ he means a synthetic faculty which can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse into a single whole the varied and disparate, often opposite and contradictory experiences. The Elizabethans had such a sensibility. They were widely read, they thought on what they read, and their thinking and learning modified their mode of feeling. Thus in the poetry of Chapman and others there is, “a sensuous apprehension of thought”—a unification of thought and feeling—and a recreation of thought into feeling. Their reading and thinking alters theirs feeling, this modified feeling is expressed in their poetry, and hence their unification or synthesis of thought and feeling. Eliot gives concrete illustrations to show that such unification of sensibility, such fusion of thought and feeling, is to be found in the poetry of Donne as well as in much of modern poetry, but it is lacking in the poetry of Tennyson.

Dissociation of Sensibility

The fact is that after Donne and Herbert a change came over the mind of England. The poets lost the capacity of uniting thought and feeling. The ‘unification of sensibility’ was lost, and ‘dissociation of sensibility’ set in. After that the poets can either think or they can feel; there are either intellectual poets who can only think, or there are poets, who can only feel. The poets of the 18th century were intellectuals, they thought but did not feel; the romantics of the 19th century felt but did not think. Tennyson and Browning can merely reflect or ruminate, i.e. mediate poetically on their experience, but cannot express it poetically. Eliot expresses this view in words which have become famous, which are frequently quoted, and which clearly bring out his capacity for ‘trenchant phasing’, his originality and critical insight. He writes: “Tennyson and Browning are poets and they think; but they do not fell their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking, in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.”

Metaphysical Sensibility
In other words, the metaphysical poets had a mechanism of sensibility—a unified sensibility—which enabled them to assimilate and fuse into new wholes most disparate and heterogeneous experiences. They could feel their thoughts as intensely as the odour of a rose, that is to say they could express their thoughts through sensuous imagery. In his poems, Donne express his thoughts and ideas by embodying them in sensuous imagery and it is mainly through the imagery that the unification of sensibility finds its appropriate expression. The operation of the unified sensibility in Donne may be illustrated by the following lines from Dante’s Paradise: Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one mass, the scattered leaves of the universe: substance and accidents and their relations, as though together fused, so that what I speak of is in one simple flame. In the above lines the spiritual experience, which is so very different from the ordinary experience, has been expressed by Dante concretely by a masterly use of the imagery of light. Dante has given expression to his spiritual experience in sensuous terms, in a visual image, the simple flame. This is also frequently the method of Donne.

Milton and Dryden: Their Influence

In this respect, the poets of the 17th century were the successors of the Elizabethan dramatists. Like them, the Metaphysicals, too, could be simple, artificial, difficult or fantastic. Then came Milton and Dryden, and their influence was most unhealthy, because as a result of their influence there set in a ‘dissociation of sensibility’ from which English poetry has recovered only in one modern age. Both Milton and Dryden were great poets and they rendered important service to the cause, of poetry. Under their influence, the English language became more pure and refined. But at the same time, the feeling became more crude. It is for this reason that the feeling expressed in Gray’s Country Churchyard is cruder and less satisfying than the feeling expressed in Marvell’s Coy Mistress.

There was another effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden, an effect which was indirect and which manifested itself at a later date. Early in the 18th century there was a reaction against the intellectual and ratiocinative (given to reasoning and argumentation) poetry of the pseudo-classics. The pendulum swung to the other extreme, and the poets thought and felt by fits and starts. They lacked balance and they reflected. By ‘reflection’ Eliot means that they ‘ruminated’, they ‘mused’, they ‘mediated poetically’, they enjoyed the luxury of dwelling upon some feeling, but could not express that feeling poetically. In some passages of Shelley’s Triumph of Life and in Keats’ second Hyperion, we find a struggle toward a unification of sensibility. But Shelley and Keats died young, and their successors, Tennyson and Browning, could only reflect. They mediated upon their experiences poetically, but failed to turn them into poetry. The Metaphysical poets certainly had their faults. But they had one great virtue. They tried, and often succeeded in expressing their states of mind and feeling in appropriate words and imagery. They had ‘unified sensibility’ and they could find verbal equivalents for it. They were, therefore, more mature and better than later poets.

The Modern Age: Its Metaphysical Temper
Eliot then proceeds to examine the close similarity between the age of Donne and the modern age, and the consequent similarity between the sensibility of the Metaphysicals and the modern poets. The Metaphysicals are difficult and the poet in the modern age is also bound to be difficult. As he puts it, “Our Civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning.” Hence the modern poet also uses concepts and methods very much similar to those of the Metaphysicals who also lived in complex and rapidly changing times. Like them the modern poet also transmutes into sensations, and transforms feelings into thought or states of mind.

In other words, Donne and the other Metaphysicals are in the direct current of English poetry, and the modern poets are their direct descendants. This current flows direct from the Elizabethan age right up to the modern age. Only, and unfortunately, this continuity was broken for some time under the influence of Milton and Dryden who are great masters of language, but not of the soul. The poet must look not only into their hearts and write, but also they must look in to “the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts.” The poet has different faculties and sensibilities, must achieve a unification of his sensibilities, and must express this unified sensibility into his poetry. Only such a poetry would be complete; but it would be complex and difficult. The Metaphysicals, as well as the moderns, have this complexity, and also this completeness and maturity.

The Essay: Its Significance

Eliot’s essay on The Metaphysical Poets is one of the most significant critical documents of the modern age. Eliot has thrown new light on the metaphysical poets, and shown that they are neither quaint nor fantastic, but great and mature poets. They do not represent a digression from the mainstream of English poetry, but rather a continuation of it. His theory of the ‘dissociation of sensibility’, has caused much critical re-valuation and rethinking. In the words of Frank Kermode, the poets henceforth began, “to charge their thinking with passion, to restore to poetry a truth independent of the presumptuous intellect.”

What, according to T. S. Eliot, is 'dissociation of sensibility'? What is his charge against Milton and Dryden in the essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets'?

Eliot's theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' may be said to be an attempt to find some kind of historical explanation to the dissolution of the tradition of unified sensibility which found its perfection in the writings of Dante and Shakespeare. The unified sensibility was a sensibility which was the product of a true synthesis of the individual with the traditional, of feeling with thought and of the temporal with the eternal.

It was not only representative of the mind of Europe but also of the traditions of European thought and culture. But unfortunately, according to Eliot, the...
unified sensibility were suddenly disrupted in the seventeenth century as a result of a split in the creative personality of the artist, for which he formulated his famous theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility.'

For Eliot, as with Coleridge, poetry is a union of opposites but whereas Coleridge explains that this reconciliation of opposites is brought about by the synthetic power of the secondary imagination, Eliot replaces the words 'secondary imagination' by the words 'unified sensibility' to express the operation of the poet's mind. Eliot assigns primacy to the poetic sensibility which for him is the basis for writing poetry.

By 'sensibility' Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impression. He means much more than that. By 'sensibility' he means a synthetic faculty, a faculty which can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse into a single whole the varied and disparate, often opposite and contradictory experiences, the sensuous and the intellectual.

The great Elizabethans and early Jacobeans had developed a unified sensibility. That is why they were widely read, and their thinking and learning modified their mode of feeling. Such a fusion of thought and feeling is to be found in the poetry of Donne as well as in much of modern poetry, but it is lacking in the poetry of Tennyson. The fact is that after Donne and Herbert a change came over the mind of England. The poets lost the capacity of unifying thought and feeling. The 'unification of sensibility' was lost, and a 'dissociation of sensibility' set in. After that the poet can either think or they can feel; there are either intellectual poets who can only think, or there are poets who can only feel. The poets of the 18th century were intellectuals, they thought but did not feel; the romantics of the 19th century felt but did not think. Tennyson and Browning can merely reflect or ruminate but cannot express their experience poetically.

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The Metaphysical poets like the Elizabethans have a unified sensibility. They were the successors of the Elizabethan dramatists. Like them, the Metaphysicals, too, could be simple, artificial, difficult or fantastic. Then came Milton and Dryden and their influence was most unhealthy, because as a result of their influence there set in a 'dissociation of sensibility' from which English poetry has recovered only in the modern age. Both Milton and Dryden were great poets and they rendered important service to the cause of poetry. Under their influence, the English language became more pure and refined. But at the same time, the feeling became more crude. It is for this reason that the feeling expressed in Gray's Country Churchyard is cruder and less satisfying than the feeling expressed in Marvell's Coy Mistress.
There was another effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden, an effect which was indirect and which manifested itself at a later date. Early in the 18th century there was a reaction against the intellectual and ratiocinative (given to reason and argumentation, poetry of the pseudo-classics). The pendulum swung to the other extreme, and the Poets thought and felt by fits and starts. They lacked a balance and they reflected. By ‘reflection’ Eliot means that they 'ruminated', they 'mused', they 'mediated poetically', they enjoyed the luxury of dwelling upon some feeling, but could not express that feeling poetically. In some passages of Shelley’s *Triumph of Life* and Keats' second *Hyperion*, we find a struggle toward a unification of sensibility. But Shelley and Keats died young and their successors, Tennyson and Browning, could only reflect. They meditated upon their experiences poetically, but failed to turn them into poetry. The Metaphysical poets certainly had their faults. But they had one great virtue. They tried, and often succeeded in expressing their states of mind and feeling in appropriate words and imagery. They had 'unified sensibility' and they could find verbal equivalents for it. They were, therefore, more mature and better than later poets.

**A Critique of Theory of the Dissociation of Sensibility**

Although the theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' cannot claim to be an original concept, its importance is beyond question, and its influence has been abiding for it was Eliot who for the first time found a convincing expression and idiom to the widespread belief of a split in the personality not only of the artist but also in modern men and women.

Their doctrine, like all his other critical concepts, has its own limitations and also its proper field of application. Although the theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' is generally applicable to metaphysical poetry, it is not true of all the poems of the metaphysical poets. Mr. Leishman, for example, in *The Monarch of Wit* says that the concept of the 'dissociation of sensibility' cannot be applied to all the poems of John Donne. Eliot himself, as Leishman goes on to explain, discovered 'a fissure of thought and sensibility' in John Donne which means that “in the terminology of 1921, Donne's sensibility was dissociated. Similarly it has been pointed out by a large number of critics that although the doctrine of the 'dissociation of sensibility' can be justified with reference to some of the poems of the metaphysical poets, it has been unduly extended to the Elizabethan dramatists.

The second criticism that is commonly levelled against Eliot's appraisal of the metaphysicals is that although the metaphysical poets received high praise from Eliot, in actual practice his creative and critical work has very little of metaphysical quality. In his poems such as *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Four Quartets*, the metaphysical quality of his earlier verse seems to have almost disappeared. Mr. Duncan in *The Revival of Metaphysical Poets* even doubts the metaphysical quality of his earlier verse.

But in spite of all these criticisms, Eliot's theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' is undoubtedly one of his most significant contributions to critical analysis is and judgment, for it exerted a tremendous influence over the creative and critical talents of his contemporaries so that the poets became conscious of the traditions of the unified sensibility. To
Sum up, in the words of frank Kermode, the poets henceforth began, ‘to charge their thinking with passion, to restore to poetry a truth independent of the presumptuous intellect.’