POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

M.A. in ENGLISH

SEMESTER - III

COR – 309

LITERARY CRITICISM UP TO THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Self-Learning Material

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI

KALYANI-741235, WEST BENGAL

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Director's Message

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani, a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani. Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2021 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal. Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome. During the production process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Amalendu Bhuniya, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We, gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance. Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PG-BOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to the faculty members of the DODL, subject-experts serving at the University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level at the DODL, University of Kalyani. Their persistent and coordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through the Distance Mode.

Director

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning

University of Kalyani

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Total Credits – 4
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BLOCK – I

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ARS POETICA

BY

HORACE

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO HORACE – LIFE AND WORKS

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 BC – 8 BC), commonly known in the English-speaking world as Horace, was an outstanding lyrical poet**,** satirist, critic, and the leading literary figure during the time of Augustus (also known as Octavian). Horace was known in his own time primarily for his *Odes,* a series of poems written in imitation of ancient Greek classics. The *Odes* display Horace's mastery of ancient verse forms and in particular showcases his unique ability to create beautiful poetry in Latin, using difficult forms that were designed for the language of the ancient Greeks. Horace's *Odes* are considered some of the most beautiful works ever written in Latin, and his mastery of the language and the almost musical beauty of his lines have made him one of the most frequently studied and imitated Latin writers of all time. The most frequent themes of his *Odes* and verse *Epistles* are love, friendship, philosophy, and the art of poetry. Unfortunately, however, the lyrical beauty and technical mastery of Horace's *Odes* have proven incredibly difficult to

translate and, following the decline of Latin as a scholarly language, the *Odes* have fallen further and further into desuetude (no longer used). During his lifetime, Horace rose to become one of the great Roman poets.

Born at Venosa or Venusia, as it was called in his day, a small town in the border region between Apulia and Lucania, Horace was the son of a former slave, but he was born free. Horace describes his father as a freedman, meaning that he was once enslaved and later set free. The circumstances of his slavery are unknown, but he was certainly free by the time of Horace's birth enabling his son to become a full Roman citizen. Horace does not mention his mother, which perhaps implies that she died during his infancy. Once freed, his father worked as a *coactor,* a kind of middleman at auctions who would pay the purchase price to the seller and collect it later from the buyer and receive one percent of the purchase price from each of them for his services. Although Horace portrays him as a poor, honest farmer ("macro pauper agello," *Satires* 1.6.71), his father's business was actually one of the ways for former slaves to amass wealth. Not surprisingly, the elder Horace was able to spend considerable money on his son's education, accompanying him first to Rome for his primary education, and then sending him to Athens to study Greek and philosophy. He sent Horace to the finest school in Rome—the *grammaticus* Orbilius. He then studied literature and philosophy in Athens. Horace expresses heartfelt gratitude toward his father a number of times in his poems. His father was a constant presence in his life, including during his schooling in Rome, until he died sometime around 45 BCE. In the years that followed, Horace traveled to Athens where he studied literature and philosophy to complete his education.

It was while Horace was in Athens that he joined the army of Caesar's assassin Marcus Junius Brutus as a *tribunus militum* or military commander (a post normally held by a member of the equestrian class) against the heir apparent Octavian (the future Augustus). He fought in the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, where Marc Antony and Octavian (later Augustus) defeated the forces of Brutus and this defeat left the impressionable Horace and many others with a bitter taste for warfare. Alluding to famous literary models, he later claimed that he saved himself by throwing away his shield and fleeing the battlefield. Unfortunately, his support of Brutus cost him his family's property. Augustus offered amnesty to the defeated soldiers, and Horace moved to Rome where he worked as a clerk in the Treasury. Horace returned to Italy, only to find his estate

confiscated and his father dead. Horace claims that he was reduced to poverty. He nevertheless had the means to purchase a profitable life-time appointment as an official of the treasury, which allowed him to get by comfortably and practice his poetic art. It is unclear whether he wrote poems before this time, but he turned now to writing with the hope of receiving recognition and patronage.

Horace was a member of a literary circle that included Virgil and Lucius Varius Rufus; they introduced him to Maecenas, a friend and confidant of Augustus. Maecenas became his patron and close friend, and presented Horace with an estate near Tibur in the Sabine Hills, contemporary Tivoli. Horace first published his *Satires* in two books in 35 BC. Maecenas gave Horace a farm in the Sabine country, near Tivoli, which allowed Horace a modest income and the leisure to write. He enjoyed life on the farm; Suetonius reports that he often lay in bed until 10 a.m. In 29 BC, Horace published the *Epodes*, in 23 BC the first three books of *Odes*, and in 20 BC, his first book of *Epistles*. Augustus asked Horace in 17 BC to write a ceremonial poem celebrating his reign to be read at the Saecular Games. In 14 BC, he published the second book of *Epistles*, which he followed a year later with his fourth book of *Odes*. In the final years of his life, he wrote his *Ars Poetica*. He died in 8 BC. Upon his deathbed, having no heirs, Horace relinquished his farm to his friend and Emperor Augustus, to be used for Imperial needs. His farm is there today and remains a place of pilgrimage for literary-minded tourists.

Horace is best known today for his *Odes*, which often celebrate common events such as proposing a drink or wishing a friend a safe journey. Although he wrote in many different meters and of different themes, the odes often express ordinary thoughts and sentiments with a deceptive finality and simplicity. Alexander Pope wrote of them saying, “what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.” Much of his poetry has a conversational style, which makes his verses accessible and enjoyable to read. Equally pleasing is the humble and likeable personality of the poet which shines through his large body of work. The well-known phrase *carpe diem* originates from Horace (*Ode 1.11*). His poetry is rooted in philosophical reflections on life, love, and simple pleasures. He was a man who was not seduced by wealth and fame, instead his interests lay in how a person might become the best version of themselves.

Today, Horace is primarily known for his instructional poetry, particularly the *Epistles*, which contains what is probably his most influential work, a verse essay on the art of poetry

entitled *Ars Poetica.* In this work he stresses, among other things, his belief that poetry must be "wholesome"— that is, educational—in addition to being beautiful, arguing that a thorough understanding of the technical aspects of poetry is necessary in order to be a truly successful poet. The Classicist movement that would emerge in the Renaissance through Petrarch and Dante and, later, re-emerge in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe would esteem Horace as the greatest poet of all of ancient Rome next to Virgil. Generations of later poets would be inspired by Horace's rectitude, his devotion to tradition and to form, and his overwhelming concern with the importance of moral instruction in poetry. Horace is, undoubtedly, one of the more difficult poets of the ancient world for the modern-day reader to tackle; but, given the effort, he is easily one of the most rewarding poets of his era. His *Ars Poetica*, which was written in the form of a letter to the Pisones, has also had a profound influence on later poetry and criticism. In it, Horace advises poets to read widely, to strive for precision, and to find the best criticism available. Along with Virgil, Horace is the most celebrated of the Augustan poets. His work would deeply influence later writers including Ben Jonson, Pope, W. H. Auden, Robert Frost, and many others.

UNIT 2: HORACE'S LIFE AND THE CONTEMPORARY INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY ATMOSPHERE OF THE ROMAN WORLD

The influence of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, composed toward the end of his life, has been vast, exceeding the influence of Plato, and in many periods, even that of Aristotle. Horace's life intersected poignantly with the turbulent events of Roman history and politics in the first century BC. Born the son of a freedman (a freed slave), he was educated at Rome then Athens. It was during his lifetime that Rome was transformed from an oligarchic republic, ruled by the senate and elected consuls, to an empire ruled by one man, Octavian (later known as Augustus). Initially, Horace's sympathies were with the republicans Brutus and Cassius who had assassinated Julius Caesar, fearing that he had ambitions of becoming emperor. Horace fought with Brutus and Cassius against Caesar's nephew Octavian and Mark Antony at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC. The Republicans were defeated, after which yet another civil war broke out, this time between Octavian and Mark Antony who allied himself with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. Octavian's resounding victory at the battle of Actium left him the sole ruler of the Roman world; he was given

the title Augustus and revered as a god. Horace, however, was fortunate. Granted a pardon for his part in opposing Octavian, he was introduced by the poet Vergil to Gaius Maecenas, an extremely wealthy patron of the arts. Eventually, Horace enjoyed the patronage of the emperor himself. Nonetheless, it is arguable that Horace's loyalties remained somewhat mixed.

In assessing the temper of Horace's work and worldview, we need to know something about the prevailing intellectual and literary attitudes in the Roman world of his day. The most pervasive philosophical perspective was that of Stoicism, whose emphasis on duty, discipline, political and civic involvement, as well as an acceptance of one's place in the cosmic scheme, seemed peculiarly well adapted to the needs of the Romans, absorbed as they were in military conquest, political administration, and legal reform. Indeed, Roman Stoicism was imbued with a more practical orientation than its Hellenistic forebears, though it still preached that inner contentment based on acceptance of the universal order should be the primary goal of human beings. Stoic philosophy had some impact on Horace's worldview as expressed in his *Odes*, though the major Roman Stoic philosophers, such as Seneca (4 BC–AD 65), Epictetus (ca. AD 60–120), and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180) all wrote after Horace's death. Other philosophical attitudes alive in Horace's day included Epicureanism and Skepticism; elements of both philosophies, especially the former, profoundly inform his poems and his literary criticism. While Horace's attitudes cannot be described as hedonistic, he acknowledges the fulfillment afforded by private pleasures and a quiet withdrawal from public cares; his work betrays an ironic skepticism concerning the ideals of empire and conventional religion.

Indeed, Horace's philosophical and poetic vision is thrown into sharper relief when placed alongside the work of his contemporaries. The greatest poet of his age was Vergil (70–19 bc), whose epic poem the *Aeneid* is founded on Stoic ideals such as *pietas*, duty, self-discipline, and sacrifice of individual interests for the sake of a larger cause. All of these qualities are expressed in its hero Aeneas, who must undergo severe hardships, who must forego his personal happiness and the love of Queen Dido, for the larger purpose of the founding of Rome. The *Aeneid* as a whole is intended to glorify and celebrate the Roman Empire and in particular the reign of Augustus. Against this overtly political poetic enterprise, the political ambivalence of Horace's poetry and literary criticism emerges in a clearer light. Our view of Horace is sharpened even further when

we consider the writings of the other major poet of this era, Ovid (ca. 43 BC –17 AD), whose works such as the *Ars amoris* led to his banishment by Augustus. Ovid, evidently influenced by the Cynics and Skeptics, expressed the decadent and seamy – even steamy – side of Roman life, grounded in individualism and self-interest rather than public duty or piety. His *Metamorphoses* – depicting, for example, Zeus as rapacious, deceitful, and embroiled in petty quarrels with his wife Hera – appears to be the very antithesis of Vergil's *Aeneid*, perhaps an anti-epic revealing the true motivation of empire as rapacious, ephemeral, and founded on subjective self-interest rather than noble ideals and historical destiny. Horace's work lies somewhere between these two poles of outright affiliation with, and undisguised cynicism toward, the entire political and religious register of imperial ideals.

Scholars such as Doreen C. Innes have remarked a pervasive general feature of both Greek and Latin literature: poets had a highly self-conscious attitude toward their place in the literary tradition. After the period of the great Alexandrian scholars and poets, the Greek canon of writers was rigidly established. As such, writers tended to imitate previous authors and to achieve originality within this traditional framework. Hence, poets such as Vergil, Ovid, and Horace accepted the Greek theory of imitation while striving for originality in a Roman context (*CHLC*, V.I, 246–247). For example, Vergil's *Aeneid* echoes many of the devices and strategies used in the Homeric epics while infusing new themes such as historical destiny and new ideals such as duty. The aesthetic framework of the Augustan poets was inherited from Alexandrian writers such as Callimachus who justified a movement away from the writing of epic and the magniloquent praising of famous deeds toward smaller genres and a focus on technical polish. This legacy also included a debate between genius (*ingenium*) and technique (*ars*) as the proper basis of poetry. The ideal of "art for art's sake" had been espoused by some Alexandrian writers such as Zenodotus, Eratosthenes, and Aristarchus (*CHLC*, V.I, 205, 248–252). This also was a question among the Augustans: should poetry primarily give pleasure or should this pleasure subserve a social, moral, and educational function?

Horace's apparently desultory treatment of these and other issues might be organized under certain broad headings: (1) the relation of a writer to his work, his knowledge of tradition, and his own ability; (2) characteristics of the *Ars poetica* as a verbal structure, such as unity, propriety,

and arrangement; (3) the moral and social functions of poetry, such as establishing a repository of conventional wisdom, providing moral examples through characterization, and promoting civic virtue and sensibility, as well as affording pleasure; (4) the contribution of an audience to the composition of poetry, viewed both as an art and as a commodity; (5) an awareness of literary history and historical change in language and genre. These are the largely conventional themes that preoccupy Horace's text, to appreciate which we must consider his poetry as well as key elements of his political circumstances.

Although the letter was an acknowledged Roman literary genre, the highly personalized form of Horace's text disclaims any intention of writing a "technical" treatise in the sense of Aristotle. Some of Horace's richest insights take the form of asides and almost accidental digressions, and the entire piece is casual in tone. Horace's "principles" are drawn from experience, not theory.

UNIT 3: DETAILED ANALYSIS OF *ARS POETICA*

Rome in Horace's day was a vast metropolis of three quarters of a million people; it was also a center of artistic patronage, crawling with poets. Horace closes his letter with an image of the mad poet as a leech that sucks the blood out of its audience: "if he once catches you, he holds tight and kills you with his recitation, a leech that will not release the skin till gorged with blood."1 Horace's immediate point here is that the poet should rely on learning and art rather than on untutored inspiration, which is indistinguishable from madness. But this ending is also an index of Horace's skepticism toward would-be poets. Such an ending impels us to go back and read the text again, on another level.

These levels of interpretation effectively destabilize each other. In book X of the *Republic*, Plato had viewed poetry not as a self-subsistent entity but as an imitation of reality: indeed, it was to be judged by its distance from reality. Aristotle had considered poetry worthy to be studied as a sphere in its own right but had introduced subjective elements of the audience's response into his definition of tragedy, which was thereby partly "affective" (producing certain effects). But this

was merely a pseudo-subjectivity: it assumed that members of an (hypothetical) audience would respond in a uniform way. With Horace, however, the definition of art contains a genuine subjective element, in terms of both author and audience. To begin with, the writer's materials are not pre-given but must be selected according to his capacity: "When you are writing, choose a subject that matches your powers, and test again and again what weight your shoulders will take and what they won't take" (*AP*, 38–40). In a striking image of reciprocity, Horace views the reader's response as part of the existence of the poem: "As you find the human face breaks into a smile when others smile, so it weeps when others weep: if you wish me to weep, you must first express suffering yourself" (*AP*, 102–103). Talking of drama, Horace reinforces his point: "Here is what the public and I are both looking for" (*AP*, 153). Not only, then, is the audience the ultimate criterion of genuine artistry, but also literature is intrinsically dialogic: the presumed response of a particular audience guides its "creation." The audience that Horace has in mind is no abstract entity. He is keenly aware of its changing moods and historical shifts of taste. Interestingly, Horace embeds this changeability firmly within the substratum of language. He considers it to be perfectly in order for a poet to "render a known word novel" and even to "mint" words: "when words advance in age, they pass away, and others born but lately, like the young, flourish and thrive" (*AP*, 48, 60–62). In talking of both changes in the composition of audiences and the need for growth in language, Horace displays historical self-consciousness and awareness of literary history as integral elements in literary criticism.

A prominent and influential principle expressed in Horace's text is the then standard rhetorical principle of "decorum," which calls for a "proper" relationship between form and content, expression and thought, style and subject matter, diction and character. Like many modern theorists, Horace's notion of "form" encompasses language itself, and he seems to think that there is an intrinsic or internal connection between form and content; in other words, the content cannot somehow be prior to or independent of the form as implied in Pope's view of language as the external "dress of thought." Neither can the content and thought be prior to language. This is why Horace can talk of the old order of words passing away, as well as of words acquiring a new meaning. When he speaks of "minting" words, this seems to entail language being extended through increasing recognition of its inadequacy.

This brings us to the other side of Horace's ambivalence as regards the "objective" status of literature. Having insisted on the *ontological* contribution of the reader or audience to what is termed "literature," he describes recent changes in the make-up of the audience itself. Once, he says, the audience for a play was "a public . . . easily counted, not too large, sparing in their ways, pure in their habits, modest in their attitude." But as Rome began to expand her territories and cities encompassed a greater variety of populace, "more and more freedoms were granted in meter and music" (*AP*, 205–207, 211). This enlargement and "corruption" of the audience dictate directly what is permissible and desirable on stage. But if the audience now lacks "taste," where does this leave Horace's characterizations of *good* literature? Horace frankly admits that often a "play that is . . . properly characterized, though lacking charm and without profundity or art, draws the public more strongly and holds its attention better than verses deficient in substance and tuneful trivialities" (*AP*, 319–322). Horace here effectively reverses Aristotle's priority of plot over characterization; for Horace, who rejects the Alexandrian attitude of "art for art's sake," and insists on the moral function of literature, the depiction of good character is indispensable. Indeed, this function should be affected in drama partly by the chorus which, says Horace, "should favor the good, give friendly advice, restrain the enraged, approve those who scruple to do wrong; it should praise the delights of a modest table, the bracing influence of justice and laws and the leisure afforded by peace; it should . . . offer supplication and prayer to the gods that fortune return to the unhappy and leave the proud" (*AP*, 196–201). Horace here states a comprehensive moral vision, embracing many aspects of life, from the formation of character by restraining negative emotions, through appreciation of social and political achievements to religious sentiment. And yet this vision is so commonplace that, coming from Horace's pen, it could be ironic. If a poet is to convey character with propriety, he must learn "the duties owed to country and friends, the affection fit for parent, brother, and guest, the proper business of senator and judge, the part to be played by a general sent to war" (*AP*, 312–315). As against Plato, who had regarded the poet as necessarily distorting reality by offering a mere imitation of it, Horace insists that the "principal fountainhead of writing correctly is wisdom" (*AP*, 309) and he sees poetry as a repository of social and religious wisdom (*AP*, 396–407). In the depiction of character, the poet must be aware of the various characteristics of men from childhood, youth, manhood to old age (this repertoire of the ages of man is taken from rhetoric) (*AP*, 158–174). Hence, the poet's work must be based on knowledge; not bookish knowledge but a detailed empirical knowledge derived from acute observation of

numerous situations in actual life. In other words, Horace demands a high degree of realism from the poet, as expressed in this statement: "My instruction would be to examine the model of human life and manners as an informed copyist and to elicit from it a speech that lives" (*AP*, 317–318). This appears to be a relatively modern sentiment, urging (as Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot were to do much later) that the poet use a language that "lives" as opposed to language derived from the stockpiles of rhetoric and previous poetic usage. Horace insists that poets invent on the basis of the "common resource" of "what is known" so that others can relate (*AP*, 240–243). Here again, the response of the listener or audience is integral to the very process of composition.

It is symptomatic of Horace's pragmatic approach to poetry that he repeatedly alludes to the "role" of wealth in the production of literature. On the one hand he can say that like "a crier gathering a crowd to buy goods, a poet, who is rich in property, rich in money put out at interest, is inviting people to come and flatter him for gain" (*AP*, 419–421). And, echoing Plato, he derides a situation where poetry alone of all the professions can be practiced without knowledge and with impunity: "a person who has no idea how to compose verses nevertheless dares to. Why shouldn't he? He is free and well-born" (*AP*, 382–383). Yet, this derision goes hand in hand with Horace's sincere advice on how to succeed in the midst of this sorry state of affairs:

> "a poet has matched every demand if he mingles the useful with the pleasant [*miscuit utile dulci*], by charming and, not less, advising the reader; that is a book that earns money for the Sosii [publishers]; a book that crosses the sea and, making its writer known, forecasts a long life for him."
> (*AP*, 342–346)

This matching "every demand" carries the thrust of Horace's approach to literature, which views aesthetics as a practical combination. It's not just that literature is written well or badly and subsequently sells better or worse. The recipe for its financial success is already inscribed in its aesthetic function (in which is inscribed its moral function), literature being a commodity in both aesthetic and monetary respects. Horace's call for literature to be socially useful as well as pleasing was vastly influential; as was his insistence that a poem not only charms the reader but also offers moral advice.

In reminding the would-be poet of his obligations – such as self-knowledge or knowledge of his own abilities – Horace stresses the amount of labor required for composing good poetry. Part of this labor is seeking out valid criticism of his work from sincere and qualified people. Horace admonishes the poet to store his work away for nine years. He warns that, once a poem is published, the words used by the poet will forever become public property, part of a language inescapably social: "it will be permissible to destroy what you have not published: the voice once sent forth cannot return" [nescit vox missa reverti] (AP, 386–390). Horace's imagery here, using vox (voice) instead of, say, liber (book), could be read as implying that the act of publication effects a disembodiment of voice: once personalized, in the form of speech, it now leaves the author forever to become entwined in the huge network of presupposition and openness to alternative meaning known as "writing." Indeed, Horace's argument seems strikingly modern in rejecting an author's intention as the sole determinant or ultimate criterion of a poem's meaning. The poem's meaning is determined by its situation within larger structures of signification which lie beyond the poet's control.

But what has Horace, in this "classic," really told us about art and literature? Effectively, he has merely reiterated the then customary notion of literature as a compromise of pleasing and instructing. Even his deprecation of poetry as a "game" is conventional. And his emphasis on poetry as an act of labor, as effort (ars) rather than innate creativity (ingenium), was hardly original: a controversy had long been raging concerning these.2 Even here, Horace traverses a safe via media: "I do not see of what value is application [studium] without abundant talent or of what value is genius [ingenium] when uncultivated" (AP, 409–410). It's true that Horace made an advance in terms of the persistence with which he insisted on poetry as an act of labor. Moreover, beyond these traditional concerns, Horace advocates a loose concept of poetic unity, whereby the various parts of a poem should be appropriately arranged. Horace, after all, had opened the *Ars poetica* with a grotesque image of what the artist should avoid: a human head attached to a horse's neck, covered with "a variety of feathers on limbs assembled from any and everywhere" (AP, 1–2). Horace also shared in a new concern with literary history, and downplayed the distinctions between genres such as tragedy and comedy (CHLC, V.I, 258, 261– 262). It is arguable that what is original is Horace's blending of conventional and newer attitudes. It may, indeed, be his lack of originality, his ability to give striking poetic and epigrammatic expression to a body of

accumulated wisdom or "common sense," the critic speaking with the authority of a poet that ensured the classic status of his text.

Whatever the case, it is clear that so much recycling of traditional attitudes has a partial basis in Horace's political circumstances. Once a republican, having fought on the side of Brutus against Antony and Octavian, Horace gradually moved toward acceptance of the divine status of the new emperor Octavian, now Augustus. Though till late in life Augustus cherished a liberal stance toward men of letters, poets provided one platform for the propagation of his programs of religious, cultural, and agricultural reform. The complexity of Horace's shifting allegiance is recorded in his poems which, like most Roman literary texts, were highly self-conscious artifacts. We can perhaps read the *Ars poetica* as a distilled form of this poetic self- consciousness, as well as a rationalization of conventional poetic practice. This rationalization is based partly in Horace's vision of poetic and political disharmony.

The same ambiguities and hesitancies which plague the *Ars* pervade the poems to an even more striking extent. And it seems to be precisely this series of hesitancies, *aporiai* if you will, with its modern emphasis on individualized creation and its withdrawal from political or aesthetic commitment, which distinguishes Horace's work from anything written by Aristotle, Vergil, or later writers such as Longinus. It is the indelible writing of himself, his personal background, into his poetic significance which, ironically, is universalizable. Many of Horace's odes are concerned with death, a common enough theme; what is relatively peculiar to him is that his (conventional) endeavor to transcend death, his refusal to accept death as an absolute limitation on meaning and language, is indissolubly tied to his acute consciousness of his humble origin. The issue of "origins" lies at the heart of Horace's political ambivalence which, in turn, underpins his polyvalent aesthetic stance. Despite Juvenal's cynical remark that "When Horace cried '*Rejoice*!' / His stomach was comfortably full,"3 Horace tends to see his art as something aligned with poverty rather than riches. He appears almost obsessed with his mediocre subsistence. (We might share Juvenal's cynicism on the ground that Horace's "modest" house was actually a twenty-four-room mansion with three bathing pools, though this was indeed modest compared with the vast possessions of many of the senatorial class.) In the *Ars*, Horace had erected a sharp opposition between a business mentality and the frame of mind conducive to writing poetry: "do you think that when once this . . . anxiety

about property has stained the mind, we can hope for the composition of poems?" (*AP*, 330–331). The same opposition informs the poems, not merely in the form of passing disgruntlement but as part of the worldview controlling them. Horace's views of poetry are ostensibly entirely practical in their motives and devoid of metaphysical, political, or religious implications. He is more concerned with the immediate labor behind poetry as a craft. But those broader concerns, deflected into the status of formal phenomena in Horace's verse, lurk underneath the guise of philosophical, political, and financial indifference.

Horace's equivocation toward Augustus is well known. In some odes, such as II.12, he disclaims any ability to sing of Caesar's exploits. This, says Horace with typical irony, would require "plain prose."4 By the fifth ode of book IV (i.e., after being commissioned by Augustus to compose the *Carmen saeculare*), he seems to accept Caesar's rule as secure and prosperous. But underlying this chronological movement from equivocation to allegiance is a more subtle emotional development; more subtle because less overtly political, but political nonetheless. Horace's apparent recalcitrance from politics is couched in a quasi-religious and aesthetic language, decked with the ornaments of Roman mythology and ethics. But his devotion to the Muses and the gods is half-hearted: even where he self-corrects his earlier "illusions" (perhaps "inspired" by Augustus' renovation of religious pieties), as in *Odes*, I.34:

> I, who have never been
> A generous or keen
> Friend of the gods, must now confess
> Myself professor in pure foolishness . . .

It seems that his "devotion" to these external powers is channeled largely through his manipulation of them: "I am the Muses' priest" (*Odes*, III.1). Certain insights of Hegel on the Roman Empire cast an interesting light on Horace's situation here. In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel characterizes Roman religion as "an instrument in the power of the devotee; it is taken possession of by the individual, who seeks his private objects and interests; whereas the truly Divine possesses on the contrary a concrete power in itself." Yet when Horace speaks of his verse as an immortal monument, this is not mere self-aggrandizement, boasting that somehow, he alone

will survive death. It is equally an assertion that life's most important and durable gifts are those unconstrained by immediate political circumstances or contingencies of religious and ethical practice. Hence the monument is as much political as aesthetic, affirming as an ultimate value the withdrawal from temporal affairs, a withdrawal that is enshrined in and defines subjectivity. This cherishing of the private over the public is a symptom of Horace's refusal to see the meaning of subjectivity as dispersed through the objective forms of Roman law and duty. In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel drew a famous analogy between the later Roman Empire and the modern bourgeois state. In these societies, individuality is abstract; valued only in terms of property and possessions, it has no real content. Hegel says that in this period, any true ethical spirit perishes in the condition of "right" or "law"; the "Unhappy Consciousness" is the "tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute."6 Horace inhabits a world where this kenosis or emptying of subjectivity has already begun. He himself laments the passing of earlier generations with hardier morals and a less decadent approach to life (*Odes*, III.6).

Horace's inconsistency is almost systematic. He pays lip service to the gods, the Muses, and the administrative exploits of Augustus Caesar. But it's the vacuum in subjectivity, as later noted by Hegel, which he longs to fill. Even the themes of conquest and government are assessed in the deflected form of their implications for subjectivity:

> Govern your appetites: thereby you'll rule more
> Than if you merged Libya with distant Gades . . .
>
> (*Odes*, II.2)

In the same poem Horace warns against greed which, "when indulged, grows like the savage dropsy." Moreover, conquest has its limitations: "the swift years . . . Old age and death . . . no one conquers" (*Odes*, II.14). Horace insists that death's lake will be crossed by both "Rulers of kingdoms" and "needy peasants" alike. And even piety will not avert this end. These apprehensions eventually ripen into a blatant questioning of the very notion of conquest:

> Why do we aim so high, when time must foil our
> Brave archery? Why hanker after countries

Heated by foreign suns? What exile ever
Fled his own mind?

(*Odes*, II.16)

It's worth recalling here a point argued effectively by Perry Anderson: since the economy of the entire Roman world depended on the slave mode of production, systematized on a massive scale and involving a rupture between labor and the intellectual-political activities of free citizens, the empire was stagnant in technological terms and only through geographical conquest could it maintain itself. Anderson's point derives of course from Marx, who had noted that in the Roman Empire all productive work was vilified as slave labor: "the labor of the free was under a moral ban." What incentives could slaves have to increase their efficiency by technological or economic advances?

The only route for expansion was a "lateral" one of military conquest, which in turn yielded more wealth and more slave labor. As Anderson has it, "Classical civilization was . . . inherently *colonial* in character" (*PF,* 26–28). From this point of view, Horace's text can be read as questioning the very foundation of Roman civilization. Given his inclination to the "inward" in the midst of a brutal Roman world where inwardness, where the content of human subjectivity, had little significance, could we read Horace's attitudes as subversive? They certainly invert conventional Roman values and the Roman emphasis on public duty; it is only poetry, in Horace's eyes, which can conquer death (*Odes,* IV.8). And poetry is of its essence private; Horace at one stage mockingly writes a poem about being asked to compose a poem. He asserts his own scheme of values: simple living, a mind free from envy, and devotion to his muses.

UNIT 4: HORACE AND HIS CONCEPT OF POETRY

Ironically, although Horace is generally against the idea of private property, looking back as he does to an age where there was "Small private wealth, large communal property" (Odes, II.15), he is all for this principle in the realm of poetry, as he states in the Ars: "A subject in the public domain you will have the right to make your own, if you do not keep slavishly to the beaten track"

[publica materies privati iuris erit, si / non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem] (AP, 131–132). Once again, Horace is concerned to redefine the connection between publicus and privatus. His insight here may go deeper than at first appears. His opposition to the principle of "private property" is not simply a reaction against the social imbalance of wealth or even the financial rat-race (a favorite point of commentators on Horace). The notion of "private property" is closely tied to the nature of the individual. Talking of the Roman legal system, Perry Anderson affirms that the "great, decisive accomplishment of the new Roman law was . . . its invention of the concept of 'absolute property'" (PF, 66). This had also been affirmed by Hegel, whose treatment of its implications for subjectivity is illuminating. Hegel is altogether cynical of the concept of private right. He argues that in the figure of the emperor, whose will was absolute, "isolated subjectivity . . . gained a perfectly unlimited realization." And this one, capricious, monstrous will presided over a bland equality of subjects: "Individuals were perfectly equal . . . and without any political right . . . Private Right developed and perfected this equality . . . the principle of abstract Subjectivity . . . now realizes itself as Personality in the recognition of Private Right." The point here is that, as Hegel goes on to say, "Private Right is . . . ipso facto, a nullity, an ignoring of the personality."

For Hegel, the principle of private right is a symptom of the necessary collapse of the Roman republic: there is no object (spiritual or political) beyond the objects dictated by individual greed and caprice. We needn't assert that Horace was thinking in Hegelian terms in order to believe that he too was aware of private right as an index of moral and spiritual disintegration, of the absence of a genuine subjectivity measurable in humans, rather than merely abstract legal, terms. And, for all the emphasis he places on the need for literature to satisfy an audience, his withdrawal into a reconstituted subjectivity encompasses his aesthetics. He tends to regard himself as a recluse, preferring to satisfy the poetic standards of a chosen few. He assumes the posture of recusatio, refusing to attempt any epic praise of imperial and public deeds (CHLC, V.I, 251). The inky cloak of scholarly elitism fits him with a conventional smugness: "I bar the gross crowd. Give me reverent silence. / I am the Muses' priest" (Odes, III.1). Horace's religion, of course, is poetry. This securing of a heaven of invention, a haven of privacy in the midst of a callously public world, this refilling of the substantive emptiness of "privacy," amounts to a redefinition of values, as well as of the essentially "human." This redefinition does carry a subversive potential.

But, in common with much deconstructive criticism, this withholding of political complicity is an isolated gesture, with no contextualizing framework of practice to render it politically meaningful or effective. What exactly is the "human" into which Horace retreats? To begin with, it entails in the Ars an essentialism whereby human nature is fixed: "nature forms us within from the start to every set of fortune" (AP, 108). This goes hand in hand with an abstract view of the determinants of social changes: "The years as they come bring many advantages with them and take as many away as they withdraw" (AP, 175–176). This is almost on a par with Derrida's attribution of the historical growth of various philosophical oppositions to one indifferent cause: "the movement of différance." Moreover, Horace seems to view "truth" and "beauty" as unproblematic concepts.

Again, Horace's reaction against the present is too often couched in praise of the past. The virtues he commends are unequivocally classical: which isn't intrinsically culpable except that these virtues are unashamedly associated with peace of mind and avoidance of hazard:

auream quisquis mediocritatem
diligit tutus . . .

All who love safety make their prize
The golden mean and hate extremes . . .

(Odes, II.10)

Although, unlike the translation given above, Horace's Latin does not include the word "extreme," his lines imply an Aristotelian hypostatization of the concept "extreme": as with Aristotle, the mean is defined in negative terms, by what it is not. The "extreme" is treated as an entity in itself, held up as something to be avoided. This could be read as a concerted peripheralization of what is viewed as unconventional or threatening to the established order. But we should also recall that for Aristotle the "mean" was a moral end in itself. Horace's reduction of it to the status of a mere means toward attaining the privileged end of "safety" is even more conservative than Aristotle's formulation. Aristotle had at least qualified his definition of moral virtue, which consists "essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us".

Moreover, it is not just safety which Horace cherishes. All his "riches," the things he craves, such as good health, peace of mind, and poetry (Odes, I.31); derive from his lack of commitment even to non-commitment. These lines have a self-betraying twist:

> As wealth grows, worry grows, and thirst for more wealth.
> Splendid Maecenas (splendid yet still a knight),
> Have I not done right in ducking low to keep
> My headpiece out of sight?
>
> (Odes, III.16)

By "ducking low," by refusing to raise his head, Horace is referring to his shrinking from material ambition and greed. But he has ducked low in another sense: politically his head was indeed out of sight. His work makes radical gestures but they remain just that, gestures. Horace is often held up as a bold spokesman for the Roman republican ideals he saw crumbling all around him. While there can be no doubt of Horace's powerful poetic gifts of satire, subtlety, and concision, that is a perspective which mirrors the history of Horace criticism, which has made the Ars a classic, more than it does the actual narratives of the Augustan state.

Two such narratives occur in the writings of Tacitus and Suetonius. These surely tell us that no assessment of Horace's views can be undertaken without some political perspective as to the nature of Augustus' rule. Suetonius portrays Augustus as evolving from an earlier, ruthless and fickle character into a clement and benevolent ruler "assiduous in his administration of justice." Suetonius emphasizes that the senate even insisted on Augustus' absolute authority. Ironically, Tacitus, who has invoked the censure of left-wing historians for his "quietist" expression of the worldview of the Roman senatorial class, offers a more cynical account. There was no opposition to imperial rule, says Tacitus, because "the boldest spirits had fallen in battle . . . while the remaining nobles . . . preferred the safety of the present to the dangerous past." Would this be an apt description of Horace's mentality? Horace, as the son of a freedman, was hardly "noble." Nor, having fled the field at the battle of Philippi, was he one of the "boldest spirits" even before Octavian's rule was consolidated. Tacitus seemingly laments the passing of republican ideals, urging that in the new order "there was not a vestige left of the old sound morality" (Tacitus, 5–

11). And yet, despite certain comments suggesting that "liberty" and "sovereignty" are incompatible (Tacitus, 678), Tacitus begins his History by saying that after "the conflict at Actium, . . . it became essential to peace, that all power should be centered in one man" (Tacitus, 419). Nonetheless, in his history of Agricola, Tacitus makes a British chieftain describe to his troops the Roman imperial enterprise as follows: "To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude [wilderness] and call it peace" (Tacitus, 695).

That the principate was necessary to peace is a common enough view. It is accepted by Hegel, and even Perry Anderson writes that the "Roman monarchy of Augustus . . . punctually arrived when its hour struck" (PF, 70). But our problem remains: if this view was genuinely accepted by Horace, why his equivocation? And why was his criticism so tempered? One solution would be to say, with R. M. Ogilvie, that in contrast with other renowned poets of his day, Horace lacked the social standing (something he was ever conscious of) to make authoritative pronouncements, and had no real prospect of a political career. In support of this, we might adduce Cicero's statement that certain political offices are "reserved to men of ancient family or to men of wealth." But Cicero, like Ovid and Propertius, took risks. What better evidence is there for this than Plutarch's description of Antony's soldiers cutting off Cicero's head and hands for his writing of the Philippics? Or Ovid's banishment to a dreary outpost, never revoked? Moreover, Suetonius states that some of Augustus' decrees, such as his marriage laws, aroused open opposition. His views were often impugned openly in the senate, without retribution. In the sphere of literature, "Augustus gave all possible encouragement to intellectuals." He was, however, chiefly interested in moral precepts in literature and "expressed contempt for both innovators and archaizers . . . and would attack them with great violence: especially his dear friend Maecenas." How vulnerable, then, was Horace, that other "dear friend" of Maecenas? It's a favorite line of Horace commentators to say that his poems "avoid the appearance of systematic argument." In doing this, does Horace avoid systematic argument itself? Perhaps the baby went out with the bathwater – in all three of his bathing pools.

But let us not be unduly harsh. Many historians agree that, all said and done, the republic in its final phase was already rotten: individual self-aggrandizement had already replaced loyalty to the state. Hence, we have the individual (rather than state-sanctioned) military exploits of Caesar

and Crassus. The republic had been, in any case, only a nominal democracy, actual power residing with unbroken continuity in the aristocratic class. The imperial administration, moreover, kept intact the basic legal framework of the republic, especially its economic laws. The primary change was that the will of a monarch be replaced that of an oligarchy. Both during and after the republic, the will of the citizen in practice counted for little. This is reflected in the prevailing philosophies of the time: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Epicureanism. It was Epicureanism more than Stoicism which claimed Horace's lifelong allegiance, a school of thought which was cynical of the gods and which discouraged social and political involvement. No doubt a poet in Horace's equivocal position found here a platform for his own non-involvement. But again, Hegel's views here are illuminating. He suggests that the purpose of all of these philosophies was the same: to render the soul indifferent to the real world. They were all a "counsel of despair to a world which no longer possessed anything stable."

Marx says much the same thing: "the Epicurean, [and the] Stoic philosophy was the boon of its time; thus, when the universal sun has gone down, the moth seeks the lamplight of the private individual."19 A common saying of the Epicurean sect was that "tyrants for all their violence could not destroy the internal happiness of the wise man." Hence, although we can sympathize with Horace's position, we should bear in mind that his potentially subversive withdrawals into subjectivity, like his prescriptions in the Ars poetica, were not original but merely commonplaces of his day. His originality was exclusively on the level of form, and it is here that he merits undoubted praise. It seems that Augustus has been universally praised for bringing "order" to the Roman state. Within this scheme of thinking, Horace's text is indeed marked by the merits and limitations of ambivalence. But it took a thinker of Marx's historical acuity to assert blandly that the "order" of Rome "was worse than the worst disorder." The emperors had simply regularized the republican exploitation of the provinces, resulting eventually in "universal impoverishment" throughout the empire. Perhaps we should give the last word to Engels:

> "Old Horace reminds me in places of Heine, who learned so much from him and who was also au fond quite as much a scoundrel politice. Imagine this honest man, who challenges the vultus instantis tyranni [the threatening face of a tyrant] and

> grovels before Augustus. Apart from this, the foul-mouthed old so and so is still very lovable."

What greater, and more honest, tribute could Horace ask for?

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critically evaluate *Ars Poetica* as a commentary on poetry and its classical perspectives.
2. What do you know about the literary atmosphere of the time when Horace lived and wrote?
3. Comment critically on the structure of Horace's treatise.
4. What do you understand by the phrase, "Ut pictura poesis"?

BLOCK II

UNITS: 5-8

ON THE SUBLIME

BY

LONGINUS

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT 5: AN INTRODUCTION TO LONGINUS – LIFE AND WORKS

Longinus, full name Cassius Longinus (about 213-273 AD), was a Greek rhetorician and an eminent philosopher. He is assigned to be the author of *On the Sublime* (Greek *Peri Hypsous*), one of the great seminal works of literary criticism. His native place is uncertain; some say that Longinus was born in Emesa, while others say he was born in Athens. Educated at Alexandria, he also earned a reputation as the most famous scholar of his time. In later life, he traveled to Asia Minor as a minister of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. Along with Zenobia he is reported to have been executed at the age of sixty by the Roman emperor Aurelian in 273 on charges of conspiring against the Roman state.

In the “Preface” to his work *On Ends*, which is preserved in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Longinus himself relates that from his early age he made many journeys with his parents, that he visited many countries and became acquainted with all those who at the time enjoyed a great reputation as philosophers, among whom the most illustrious were Ammonius Saccas, Origen the Pagan, Plotinus, and Amelius. Of the first two Longinus was a pupil for a long time, but Longinus did not embrace the Neoplatonism then being developed by Ammonius and Plotinus, rather he continued as a Platonist of the old type. Longinus in his study of philosophy made himself thoroughly familiar with Plato's works; and that he himself was a genuine Platonist is evident from the fragments still extant, as well as from the commentaries he wrote on several of Plato's dialogues.

After Longinus had learnt all, he could from Ammonius at Alexandria and the other philosophers whom he met in his travels, he returned to Athens. He there devoted himself with so much zeal to the instruction of his many pupils that he scarcely had any time left for writing. The most distinguished of his pupils was Porphyry. At Athens, Longinus seems to have lectured on philosophy and criticism, as well as on rhetoric and grammar, and the extent of his knowledge was so great, that Eunapius calls him "a living library" and "a walking museum". The power for which Longinus was most celebrated was his critical skill, which was indeed so great that the expression "to judge like Longinus" became synonymous with "to judge correctly".

After having spent much of his life at Athens composing the best of his works, he went to the East, either to see his friends at Emesa or to settle some family affairs. It seems to have been on that occasion that he became known to queen Zenobia of Palmyra, who, being a woman of great talent, and fond of the arts and literature, made him her teacher of Greek literature. As Longinus had no extensive library at his command at Palmyra, he was obliged almost entirely to abandon his literary pursuits. He soon discovered another use for his talents, for when king Odaenathus died Queen Zenobia undertook the government of the empire. She availed herself of the advice of Longinus; it was he who advised and encouraged her to shake off Roman rule and become an independent sovereign. As a result, Zenobia wrote a spirited letter to the Roman emperor Aurelian. In 273, when Aurelian took and destroyed Palmyra, Longinus had to pay with his life for the advice which he had given to Zenobia. Longinus must have been especially pained by this catastrophe, as

the queen asserted her own innocence after having fallen into the hands of the Romans, and threw all the blame upon her advisers, particularly Longinus.

On the Sublime apparently dates from the 1st century AD, because it was a response to a work of that period by Caecilius of Calacte, a Sicilian rhetorician. About a third of the manuscript is lost. In modern times it was not until 1554 that the treatise of *On the Sublime* was published, and it was subsequently translated by the French critic Boileau in 1674. The earliest surviving manuscript ascribes it to Dionysius Longinus. Later it was noticed that the index to the manuscript read “Dionysius or Longinus.” The problem of authorship embroiled scholars for centuries, attempts being made to identify him with Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Cassius Longinus, Plutarch, and others. The solution has been to name him Pseudo-Longinus. Regardless of the author or dates the work is of major significance for the history of literary criticism.

The eighteenth century particularly saw the golden age of Longinus, and interest in him has continued unabated. *On the Sublime* is second only to Aristotle's *Poetics* in its influence. Its concern is with great writing (perhaps a better translation than "the sublime"). The five "sources,” or "causes,” of great writing are listed as vigour and nobility of mind (the ability to seize upon great ideas); powerful emotion; skill in the use of figures; diction (including the use of metaphors and new words); and the appropriate arrangement of words. Of these the first two are the most important. As Moses Hadas said in his *History of Greek Literature*, "Longinus' object is to define true grandeur in literature as opposed to sophomoric turgidity and frigid pretentiousness."

Notwithstanding his many avocations, Longinus composed a great number of works, which appear to have been held in the highest estimation, all of which have perished. Among the works listed by the *Suda* there are *Homeric Questions*, *Homeric Problems and Solutions*, *Whether Homer is a Philosopher*, and *two publications on Attic diction*. The most important of his philological works, *Philological Discourses*, consisting of at least 21 books, is omitted. A considerable fragment of his *On the Chief End* is preserved by Porphyry. Under his name there are also extant Prolegomena to the *Handbook of Hephaestion* on metre, and the fragment of a treatise on rhetoric, inserted in the middle of a similar treatise by Apsines. It gives brief practical hints on invention, arrangement, style, memory and other things useful to the student.

UNIT 6: AN INTRODUCTION TO *ON THE SUBLIME*

After the period of the early Principate, there were two broad intellectual currents that emerged during the first four centuries. The first of these was known as the Second Sophistic (27 BC–AD 410), named after a new generation of Sophists and rhetoricians who took for their model the classical language and style of Attic Greece. The second was the philosophy of Neo-Platonism, whose prime exponent was Plotinus.

The major rhetorical treatise of this period was written in Greek: entitled *peri hupsous* or *On the Sublime*, it is conventionally attributed to "Longinus," and dates from the first or second century AD. It was the most influential rhetorical text through much of the period of the Second Sophistic, and has subsequently exerted a pronounced influence on literary criticism since the seventeenth century, somewhat against the grain of the classical heritage derived from Aristotle and Horace. It has fascinated critics of the modern period on account of its treatment of the sublime as a quality of the soul or spirit rather than as a matter of mere technique. In the later classical period and the Middle Ages, the treatise appeared to be little known. It was initially published during the Renaissance by Robortelli in 1554. It was subsequently translated into Latin in 1572 and then into English by John Hall in 1652. In modern times the concept of the sublime owed its resurgence to a translation in 1674 by Nicolas Boileau, the most important figure of French neoclassicism. The sublime became an important element in the broad Romantic reaction in Europe against neoclassicism as well as in the newly rising domain of aesthetics in the work of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant.

There is only one surviving manuscript of On the Sublime, with a third of the text missing, and it is not known for certain who the author was. The manuscript bears the name "Dionysius Longinus," which led ancient scholars to ascribe the work to either Dionysius of Halicarnassus or a third-century rhetorician, Cassius Longinus. Modern scholars have been more inclined to date the manuscript to the first or second century.

The author must certainly have been a rhetorician and his essay is personal in tone, addressed to Postumius Terentianus, his friend and one of his Roman students. At the beginning

of his text, Longinus proposes to write a systematic treatise on the sublime, whereby he will both define his subject and relay the means of understanding it. He offers an initial definition, stating that the sublime consists "in a consummate excellence and distinction of language, and... this alone gave to the greatest poets and historians their pre-eminence... For the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves." Longinus adds that "what inspires wonder casts a spell upon us and is always superior to what is merely convincing and pleasing" (1.3-4). The difference between such inspiration and conviction, as he explains, relates to power and control: we can control our reasoning but the sublime exerts a power which we cannot resist (14). Longinus distinguishes dramatically between other compositional skills and the sublime. Inventive skill and appropriate use of facts, for example, are expressed through an entire composition. But the sublime, he says, appears like a bolt of lightning, scattering everything before it and revealing the power of the speaker "at a single stroke. Longinus appeals to experience to confirm the truth of these claims (L4). Like Horace before him, Longinus now enters the long-raging debate as to whether art comes from innate genius or from conscious application of methodology and rules.

His answer echoes the compromise offered by Horace. Longinus argues that nature is indeed the prime cause of all production but that the operations of genius cannot be wholly random and unsystematic, and need the "good judgment supplied by the rules of art (11.2-3). At this point two pages of the manuscript are missing when the text resumes, we find Longinus giving examples, taken from various poets, of the faults which an artist can fall into when reaching for grandeur. The first fault is “tumidity” when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into “folly,” producing effects which are overblown or bombastic. Tumidity “comes of trying to outdo the sublime.” Longinus identifies the opposite fault, “puerility,” as the most ignoble of faults. He defines it as "the academic attitude, where over-elaboration ends in frigid failure" (III.3-4). When writers try too hard to please or to be exquisite, says Longinus, they fall into affectation. A third fault is what the first-century rhetorician Theodorus called "Parenthyrson."2 Longinus explains that this term refers to "emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed or unrestrained where restraint is required." Emotion which is not warranted by the subject is "purely subjective" and hence shared by the audience (III.5).

After proceeding to offer several examples of frigidity, Longinus reaches a generalization which sounds strangely familiar to us: "all these improprieties in literature," he urges, "are weeds sprung from the same seed, namely that passion for novel ideas which is the prevalent craze of the present day" (IV.5). His real point, however, is that virtues and vices spring from the same sources: it is the very pursuit of beauty, sublimity, agreeable phrasing, and exaggeration - in short, the very pursuit of an elevated style which can result in the faults earlier described (IV.5).

How can the poet avoid these faults? The first thing he needs is a "clear knowledge and appreciation" of what is truly sublime. Yet such knowledge does not come easily, like all literary judgment, it must be the fruit of ripe experience (IV.6), Longinus' subsequent definition of the sublime indeed appeals to experience in a manner later echoed by Arnold, Leavis, and others. The true sublime, Longinus tells us, "elevates us" so that "uplifted with a sense of proud possession, we are filled with joyful pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard." Such genuine sublimity is to be distinguished from a mere "outward show of grandeur" which turns out to be "empty bombast" (VII.1-3). The true sublime will produce a lasting and repeated effect on "a man of sense, well-versed in literature"; this effect will be irresistible and the memory of it will be "stubborn and indelible." As with Arnold and Leavis, Longinus' view of greatness in literature appears to be an affective one: we judge it by its emotional effects on the reader or listener (the Latin affectus as a noun means "disposition" or "state," and as a verb, "affected by"), Also anticipating these much later critics, be posits an ideal listener as a man of culture and sensibility. Longinus broadens his definition to say that the “truly beautiful and sublime . . . pleases all people at all times” (VII.4). By this, he appears to mean all “qualified” people of various periods and tastes: when there is enduring consensus among a community of cultured listeners, this is evidence of the truly sublime nature of a literary work. In a broad sense, Longinus also anticipates various consensual theories ranging from those of Edmund Burke to reader-response critics.

UNIT 7: SOURCES OF THE SUBLIME AND ITS VARIOUS FEATURES

In an important passage, Longinus cites five “genuine sources” of the sublime: (1) the command of “full-blooded” or robust ideas (sometimes expressed by translators as “grandeur of thought”);

(2) the inspiration of "vehement emotion"; (3) the proper construction of figures – both figures of thought and figures of speech; (4) nobility of phrase, which includes diction and the use of metaphor; and (5) the general effect of dignity and elevation. This general effect, Longinus tells us, embraces the previous four elements. Longinus intends, so he claims, to consider these elements systematically but he sometimes digresses. To begin with, he argues, as against a previous writer on the sublime, Cecilius, that sublimity is not identical with emotion or always dependent upon it. Certain emotions can be mean or base and many sublime passages exhibit no emotion (VIII.1–2). Returning now to the first source of the sublime, the command of solid or weighty ideas, Longinus refers to this faculty as "natural genius," affirming that it is a gift of nature rather than something acquired; this facility, he says, plays a greater part in sublimity than the other sources. His examples of sublimity here are intended to express what might be viewed as his fundamental position: citing Homer, he reflects that "a great style is the natural outcome of weighty thoughts, and sublime sayings naturally fall to men of spirit" (IX.1–3). At this point, six further pages of the manuscript are missing; when the text resumes, Longinus cites two passages from the *Iliad*.

One of these attains sublimity, he says, because it "magnifies the powers of heaven [the gods]" and the other falls short because it is "irreligious" and shows "no sense of what is fitting" (IX.5– 7). Those passages in Homer are sublime "which represent the divine nature in its true attributes, pure, majestic, and unique" (IX.8). Interestingly, Longinus also cites early passages from the Old Testament ("Let there be light") as expressing "a worthy conception of divine power" (IX.9). In these passages Longinus seems to find sublimity in the expression of profound and appropriate religious sentiment which displays a sense of decorum and which justly marks the relation of divine and human. Great writers, then, achieve sublimity through their grandeur of thought, by expressing a vision of the universe that is morally and theologically elevated. It is not clear, however, how these qualities of sublimity could fall under the five "sources" initially listed by Longinus; one might conjecture that they could answer to either the demand for "weighty" ideas or "the general effect of dignity."

In a famous passage on Homer, Longinus draws some further inferences: Homer shows us, he claims, that "as genius ebbs, it is the love of romance that characterizes old age." The *Iliad*,

composed in the heyday of Homer's genius, is alive with dramatic action; it is marked by "consistent sublimity" that resides in the "sustained energy" of the poem which is "brimful of images drawn from real life." In contrast, as is characteristic of old age, narrative predominates in the *Odyssey*, which is a mere "epilogue" to the *Iliad*. In the later poem, the "grandeur remains without the intensity." In the ebbing tide of his genius, Homer "wanders in the incredible regions of romance," and indeed "reality is worsted by romance" in the *Odyssey* (IX.12–14). Longinus here appears to add two further dimensions to his conception of the sublime: firstly, it is associated with dramatic action rather than narrative; and secondly, it is firmly rooted in reality as opposed to romance. Another inference made by Longinus is that "with the decline of their emotional power great writers and poets give way to character study." Homer's character sketches in the *Odyssey,* says Longinus, follow the style of the "comedy of character" (IX.15). Again, we might ask whether these attributes of sublimity are related to the five "sources" of the sublime. It may be that dramatic action is associated by Longinus with "vehement emotion" and that realism is the medium for the expression of "solid" or "robust" ideas: clearly, for Longinus, the fanciful nature of romance represents a departure from such solidity.

Longinus adds a further factor to his notion of sublimity: the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole (X.1). Citing examples from Sappho and Homer, he suggests that these writers have organized "all the main points by order of merit . . ., allowing nothing affected or undignified or pedantic to intervene" so as to produce the effect of sublimity by means of an "ordered and . . . coherent structure" (X.7). Closely connected with, but distinct from, this power of combination, says Longinus, is the device of "amplification": whenever the subject matter admits of fresh starts and halting places, phrases can be multiplied with increasing force, using exaggeration, emphasis on arguments or events, or by careful assemblage of facts or feelings (XI.1–2). However, Longinus departs from previous definitions which equate amplification with sublimity. Sublimity, he suggests, "lies in elevation" and is found "in a single idea," whereas amplification lies in quantity and redundancy. Amplification consists "in accumulating all the aspects and topics inherent in the subject and thus strengthening the argument by dwelling upon it. Therein it differs from proof, which demonstrates the required point" (XII.1–3).4 In illustration of this difference between sublimity and amplification, Longinus cites the rhetorical styles of Demosthenes and Cicero: the former has a sublime power of rhetoric which

"scatters everything before him" like a flash of lightning while the latter, using amplification, is like "a widespread conflagration" devouring all around it (XII.4). What also emerges from Longinus' comments here is that, while sublimity and amplification are mutually distinct, they both differ from formal argument in that they employ alternative means of persuasion: sublimity strikes the hearer and possesses him whereas amplification ponders over an argument, bringing it out in various guises.

There is another road which leads to sublimity, remarks Longinus, and it is Plato who lights up this path for us: the path of imitation of great historians and poets of the past. Just as the priestess of Apollo is inspired by the divine power of this god, so too a writer can be inspired by the "natural genius of those old writers" (XIII.2–3). Plato himself borrowed profusely from Homer. And such borrowing, Longinus reassures, is not theft but "rather like taking an impression from fine characters . . . moulded figures" (XIII.4). Moreover, Longinus sees the process of influence not as passive and static but as an active endeavor of the contemporary writer to vie with the ancient poets. Such was Plato's relationship with Homer: one of striving "to contest the prize." Longinus adds that "even to be worsted by our forerunners is not without glory" (XIII.4). He (and the Hellenistic tradition behind his insights here) also anticipates Arnold's "touchstone" theory of tradition whereby we measure contemporary works against a set of acknowledged classics: when we are attempting to achieve sublimity, urges Longinus, we should ask ourselves how Homer or Plato or Demosthenes would have pursued this task. We must also ask ourselves how such great writers would have responded to our own work: "Great indeed is the ordeal, if we propose such a jury and audience as this to listen to our own utterances." Longinus adds that we should also bear in mind the judgment of posterity; if we refuse to say anything which "exceeds the comprehension" of our own time, our conceptions will be "blind" and "half-formed" (XIV.1– 3). In these important passages, Longinus articulates a conservative concept of tradition which proved to have lasting influence: not only Arnold, but also Eliot, Leavis, and earlier writers such as Pope (and, before Longinus, the Alexandrian scholars) formulated similar prescriptions whereby a contemporary writer's greatness could be measured only in relation to standards set by an acknowledged canon of great writers. Nonetheless, Longinus' own formulation allows for creative strife between past and present writers, acknowledging that present authors can in principle achieve sublimity. In this, he anticipates more liberal attitudes toward tradition such as that enshrined in Harold Bloom's

notion of the "anxiety of influence" whereby an author "misreads" previous writers so as to stake out for himself an area of originality.

UNIT 8: SUBLIME AND IMAGINATION

If imitation is one path to the sublime, another path is through the highway of imagination. In delineating this path, Longinus anticipates many discussions of this topic by the Romantics. He observes that "Weight, grandeur, and energy" (i.e., the basic components of the sublime) are largely produced by the use of images. He states the prevailing use of the term "Imagination": it is applied to "passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience" (XV.1–2). However, whereas the Romantics tended to see imagination primarily or exclusively as a characteristic of poetry, Longinus distinguishes between the use of imagination in poetry and in prose or oratory. In both of these, the aim is to excite the audience's emotions and to present things vividly. What distinguishes them is that the deployment of imagination in poetry "shows a romantic exaggeration, far exceeding the limits of credibility, whereas the most perfect effect of imagination in oratory is always one of reality and truth" (XV.2, 8). In contrast with many modern critical theories which see no sharp division between poetry and prose, Longinus is skeptical of the attempts of "modern" orators in his day to transgress these boundaries: certain orators, he observes, make their speech poetical, deviating "into all sorts of impossibilities." The appropriate use of imagination in rhetoric, says Longinus, "is to introduce a great deal of vigour and emotion into one's speeches, but when combined with argumentative treatment it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them" (XV.8–9). In such cases, he explains, the imaginative conceptions of the speaker far surpass "mere persuasion": "our attention is drawn from the reasoning to the enthralling effect of the imagination, and the technique is concealed in a halo of brilliance" (XV.11–12). Hence, while reason is by no means dispensable in argument, it is clear that imagination is seen as a higher power. So far, Longinus has analyzed three sources of sublimity: natural genius, imitation, and imagination. He now moves to a further source, the use of figures. The first example he offers here is the use of an oath or what Longinus terms an "apostrophe" in a speech by Demosthenes. This renowned speaker advocated a policy of war for the Athenians to resist domination by Philip of

Macedon, father of Alexander the Great: "You were not wrong, men of Athens, in undertaking that struggle for the freedom of Greece . . . no, by those who bore the brunt at Marathon." In using this oath, asserts Longinus, Demosthenes transforms his argument "into a passage of transcendent sublimity and emotion." The use of this figure allows the speaker "to carry the audience away with him" and to convince the defeated Athenians that they should no longer view the defeat at Chaeronea as a disaster (XVI.2–3). While once again, in the example given above, Longinus shows how an argument can be rendered more powerful and persuasive by figurative rather than purely rational means, he cautions his reader that there is a general suspicion toward the "unconscionable use" of figures. A judge, for example, or a king, might feel offended or manipulated by the figurative strategies of a skilled speaker, in which case he will become hostile to the actual reasoning of the speech. Hence Longinus recommends that a figure is most effective when it is unnoticed: it can be appropriately obscured by sublimity and a powerful effect on the emotions. Demosthenes' use of the oath is cited as an example of this covert procedure: the figure is concealed "by its very brilliance."

What is sublime and emotionally moving, urges Longinus, is closer to our hearts and always strikes us before we even realize that figures are being used. Longinus cites a number of other important figures. One of these is the figure of rhetorical "question and answer, which involves the audience emotionally" (XVIII.1–2). Another figure which conveys apparently genuine and vehement emotion is inversion of the order of words, phrases, or sentences. Such inversion mimics the actual use of language by people in situations of fear, worry, or anger. The best prose writers, says Longinus, use inversions to "imitate nature and achieve the same effect. For art is only perfect when it looks like nature and Nature succeeds only by concealing art about her person" (XXII.1). Such inversion, which alters the natural sequence of words and phrases, gives the effect of improvisation, allowing the audience to share the excitement of the situation (XXII.3–4).

Other figures cited by Longinus are accumulation, variation, and climax: these figures range over changes of case, tense, person, number, and gender. Such changes can produce a "sublime and emotional effect." What all of these figures help us to see, according to Longinus, is that emotion is an important element in the sublime. What is emphasized in Longinus' treatment

of them is the ability of language to take control suddenly – and irrationally – over the emotions, the power of language when used in unusual combinations, when it is forced to deviate from a conventionally anticipated structure. It is small wonder that Longinus falls outside of the classical tradition and provided so much inspiration for Romantic views of art. Indeed, his view that a powerful passage cannot be paraphrased without loss has become part of the thinking of the whole modern era about poetry, from the Romantics through the New Criticism. Moreover, in appealing to numerous examples, Longinus illustrates the rhetorical practice of close textual reading; such close attention to the text as a verbal structure was not the monopoly of modern formalists and New Critics but had been part of the repertoire of rhetoric for centuries.

Longinus now moves to other aspects of what he had earlier cited as the fourth source of the sublime, nobility of diction, thought, and metaphor. He is in no doubt that all orators and historians aim at the use of appropriate diction as "their supreme object." It is fine diction which gives the style "grandeur, beauty, a classical flavor . . . and endues the facts as it were with a living voice." Again, he warns that majestic diction is to be reserved for stately and important situations (XXX.1–2).5 Metaphors are especially useful in treating commonplace subjects and descriptions: figurative writing has a natural grandeur and metaphors contribute to sublimity (XXXII.5–6).

Longinus raises a long-debated question: "Which is better in poetry and in prose, grandeur with a few flaws or correct composition of mediocre quality, yet entirely sound and impeccable?" A related question, he remarks, is whether literary value should be accorded to the largest number of merits or to the merits that are intrinsically great (XXXIII.1–2). Predictably, Longinus' own position is that great excellence, even if it is not uniformly sustained, should always be valued more highly: perfect precision risks being trivial; mediocre natures take no risks; genius and divine inspiration will not easily fall under any rule (XXXIII.2–5). Hypereides, explains Longinus, has more merits than Demosthenes; nonetheless his speeches "lack grandeur; they are dispassionate, born of sober sense, and do not trouble the peace of the audience." Demosthenes, in contrast, "seems to dumbfound the world's orators with his thunder and lightning. You could sooner open your eyes to the descent of a thunderbolt than face unwinking his repeated outbursts of emotion" (XXXIV.4). Perhaps here it becomes clearer than anywhere else in Longinus' text how, faced with an audience immediately embroiled in a given political situation, a speaker could not attain

maximum persuasive power merely by deploying reason and an abstractly convincing argument or even by producing a speech which was technically perfect. All of this could be mobilized into persuasive power only if the audience could be "disturbed," only if its emotions were first kindled as if by a bolt of lightning and then fanned by the technical virtues of the speech.

Longinus' next passage effectively presents the metaphysical assumptions underlying his entire text. It is a passage which clearly anticipates the aesthetics of Kant and many of the Romantics. "Nature," he says, has distinguished us over other creatures, and has "from the first breathed into our hearts an unconquerable passion for whatever is great and more divine than ourselves. Thus, within the scope of human enterprise there lie such powers of contemplation and thought that even the whole universe cannot satisfy them, but our ideas often pass beyond the limits that enring us. Look at life from all sides and see how in all things the extraordinary, the great, the beautiful stand supreme, and you will soon realize the object of our creation. The little fire we kindle for ourselves keeps clear and steady, yet we do not therefore regard it with more amazement than the fires of Heaven, which are often darkened, or think it more wonderful than the craters of Etna in eruption, hurling up rocks and whole hills from their depths and sometimes shooting forth rivers of that pure Titanic fire . . . what is useful and indeed necessary is cheap enough; it is always the unusual which wins our wonder." (XXXV.2–5)

Hence Longinus' stress on emotion as a vital element of the sublime does not rest on a simple appeal to the heart over abstract reasoning but is an intrinsic expression of his view of the purpose of humankind. This purpose, far from according with a classical recognition of our finitude and proper place in the cosmic scheme, is to strive beyond our own human nature toward the divine; and this striving is accomplished on the wings of "unconquerable passion." Longinus subsequently says that sublimity lifts men "near the mighty mind of God" (XXXVI.1).

All of these dispositions anticipate the Romantics; also, like the Romantics, Longinus superordinates the "wonderful" and sublime over that which is merely "useful" and "necessary." This seemingly simple opposition and prioritization is an index of a broad shift away from a classical worldview: whereas Aristotle actually prescribed necessity and probability, universality and typicality, as the bases for poetry's engagement with the world, Longinus advocates precisely

what deviates from such universality. It is an aesthetic premised not on what is central to human experience but precisely on what escapes such centrality, on what stands as rare at the pinnacle of experience and is expressible only by genius. When we appeal to emotion through the achievement of sublimity in writing, we appeal to that which relates us primally to our highest purpose in life, the recognition through nature of the limitless potential of our own being.

Indeed, Longinus refers to Homer, Demosthenes, and Plato as "demi-gods" who, redeeming their other faults through "a single touch of sublimity," are justly revered by posterity. The more compromising conclusion at which Longinus arrives is that since technical correctness is due to art and the height of excellence is achieved by genius, "it is proper that art should always assist Nature. Their co-operation may thus result in perfection" (XXXVI.3–6).

Longinus now turns to the final source of sublimity, "the arrangement of the words themselves in a certain order" (XXXIX.1). Melody, he says, is a natural instrument of persuasion and pleasure; it is also a means of achieving grandeur and emotion. Composition, he proceeds, is "a kind of melody in words – words which are part of man's nature and reach not his ears only but his very soul" such that the speaker's actual emotion is brought into the hearts of his hearers (XXXIX.1– 3). Citing as an example two lines of a speech by Demosthenes, Longinus explains in detail how the effect of sublimity is produced as much by the melody – resting on dactyls, the "noblest of rhythms" – as by the thought (XXXIX.4). More fundamental than anything else in the production of sublimity is the composition or arrangement of the various elements of a passage into a unified, single system. Longinus advocates an artistic organicism, using an analogy which has subsequently served countless writers: just as with the members of the human body, so it is with the elements of sublimity: "None of the members has any value by itself apart from the others, yet one with another they all constitute a perfect organism" (XL.1). Some phrases may actually be vulgar or commonplace but in their appropriate place they may contribute to the overall sublimity of a passage (XL.3). Longinus makes a distinction here between "extreme conciseness" which "cripples the sense" and "true brevity" which "goes straight to the point." On the other hand, prolix passages are "lifeless" (XLII.1–2). Trivial or commonplace words and phrases can also debase a passage, says Longinus (XLIII.1–2): "the proper course is to suit the words to the dignity of the

subject and thus imitate Nature, the artist that created man" (XLIII.5). These prescriptions for art were not undermined until the advent of realism in the latter nineteenth century.

The final surviving part of the manuscript is perhaps the most revealing of Longinus' world view and how his notions of literature grew out of his clearly negative assessment of his own era. Many scholars have cautioned that the purpose of Longinus' entire manuscript is simply to produce a practical treatise on style, and that his use of the word "sublime" refers to no more than an elevated or lofty style. While it is true that Longinus' treatment of sublimity is far more general than that of modern critics who viewed it as a distinct aesthetic category, that treatment is nonetheless grounded in circumstances exhibiting certain important parallels with those behind many Romantic aesthetics.

As with many of the preceding sections, Longinus addresses this last section to Terentianus, relating to him a "problem" which characterizes their era: "in this age of ours we find natures that are supremely persuasive and suited for public life, shrewd and versatile and especially rich in literary charm, yet really sublime and transcendent natures are no longer, or only very rarely, now produced. Such a world-wide dearth of literature besets our times" (XLIV.1–2). The problem seems to be that while there are some writers who possess technical competence, truly great or sublime literature is no longer being produced. Longinus purports to offer two explanations of this phenomenon, the first by an acquaintance of his, a philosopher; the second, his own. The philosopher challenges what he calls the "hackneyed" explanation that true genius flourishes only in a democracy. Rather, he seems to suggest, democracy in his time has degenerated into an "equitable slavery" in which "we seem to be schooled from childhood."

We never drink, says the philosopher, from "the fairest and most fertile source of literature, which is freedom." Consequently, he argues, we are prone to servile ways and flattery. Just as prison confines and stunts the body, so all slavery, however equitable, "might well be described as a cage for the human soul, a common prison." The philosopher remarks that, while in such circumstances slaves can be granted some faculties, "no slave ever becomes an orator" (XLIV.3–6) for he does not have the habit of speaking freely.

Longinus appears to dispute such an explanation. The real source of mediocrity in literary composition he locates in the "love of money, that insatiable sickness from which we all now suffer, and the love of pleasure," both of which "enslave us." After wealth is thus made a "god," there follow in its wake other vices: extravagance, swagger, conceit, luxury, insolence, disorder, and shamelessness. The result of this process is that "men no longer then look upwards . . . their greatness of soul wastes away from inanition and is no longer their ideal, since they value that part of them which is mortal and consumes away, and neglect the development of their immortal souls." Given that "we have sold our souls for profit at any price," Longinus asks, can we expect that "there is left a single free and unbribed judge of the things that are great and last to all eternity?" Finally, in a passage whose import extends readily to our own world of mass consumerism, he states: "what spends the spirit of the present generation is the apathy in which all but a few of us pass our lives, only exerting ourselves . . . for the sake of getting praise or pleasure out of it, never from the honourable and admirable motive of doing good to the world" (XLIV.6–11). Some scholars, such as G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, have found Longinus' reply "bitterly disappointing" on the grounds that it almost ignores the philosopher's substantial comments and that it merely rehearses commonplaces of Stoic thought, attributing the prevailing frivolity and general ethical malaise to greed and the pursuit of pleasure. Ste. Croix also disputes the conventional scholarly assumption that, in talking of a degeneration from democracy to slavery, the philosopher is referring to the transformation of the Roman republic into an empire ruled by one man. He points out that, typically of Greek works of this period, Longinus' text is almost exclusively concerned with Greek literature, and reveals almost no interest in Roman letters. As such, it makes no sense to claim that the institution of the principate somehow debilitated Greek literature, which was hardly affected by changes in the Roman form of government. A far better case can be made, argues Ste. Croix, "for saying that Greek literature, apart from Homer and the early poets, did indeed rise and fall with *demokratia* – in the original and proper sense!" In other words, the sentiment about literary decline originated with the Greeks, who realized that Greek literature had flourished most under democracy.

However, we view it, the worldview expressed in Longinus' account is quite clear in its system of values: the soul over the body, the immortal, permanent, and selfless over the perishable, transient, and self-interested. The world view is Stoic and Platonic – even Neo-Platonic – but also

somewhat Christian in its emphasis. In an argument which is now perhaps controverted by many scholars, O. B. Hardison fascinatingly suggested that Longinus' text, if its author was indeed a pupil of Plotinus as some scholars have claimed, "illustrates the late classical Neo- platonic aesthetic which also appears to have encouraged late classical Asianism." What is interesting about this speculation is Hardison's correlative insight that this Asianism was the closest approximation to a theory of art for art's sake during this period, and that it took not only literary form but also a "flowering of epideictic oratory." This tendency toward artistic autonomy was stimulated by rhetorical rather than poetic theory.

Whether we accept or dispute Hardison's insight, the parallels between Longinus' worldview and those of the Romantics are clear. Moreover, if we view Longinus' influence as moving in a broadly "aesthetic" direction toward notions of relative artistic autonomy, we can see that the debate between classicism and Romanticism was played out not only from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries but also in the Hellenistic world itself and in the early Roman Empire (as in the Stoic, moral, and educational tenor of Vergil's epic as opposed to the more aesthetic and individualistic flavor of Ovid's poems). Indeed, Longinus' explanation of the dearth of sublimity in his world is remarkably close to Shelley's condemnation of the modern capitalist world where the principle of utility and profit is opposed to the selfless principles of poetry.

We find here, inasmuch as we can judge from an incomplete manuscript, the true motives for Longinus' need to explain the sublime, and his stress on emotion as the avenue to the fulfillment of our higher nature whereas mere reason, as in Shelley's view, is constrained within the realm of pragmatic interests.

In the light of the context sketched above, Longinus' preoccupation with the sublime might be seen as a call for spiritual reorientation, a movement away from rationality and merely technical competence, itself a reflex of materialist and pragmatic thinking, toward acknowledgment of a profounder and more authentic strain in human nature that, through its exercise of emotion and imagination, sees itself not in isolation but as part of a vaster and divine scheme. This call has been repeated endlessly in numerous guises in various literary periods. The themes raised by Longinus, and much of his mode of treating them, persist into our own day, in the realms of

literature, politics, law, and the media: the idea that poetry or indeed prose can emotionally transport, rather than merely persuade, a listener; the idea of organic unity and totality; the nature of imitation; the connection between reason and imagination, reason and emotion, beauty and utility, art and genius, art and nature; and, most importantly, a recognition of the power of language – founded on grandeur of thought and the skillful use of figures – to attain sublimity, thereby transforming our perception of the world.

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critically comment on Longinus's concept of the sublime**.**
2. Critically comment on the relationship between sublime and imagination.

BLOCK III

UNITS: 9-12

"PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE"

BY

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT – 9

UNIT 9 (A): AN INTRODUCTION TO SAMUEL JOHNSON – LIFE AND WORKS

Samuel Johnson, the son of Michael, a bookseller, was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire, on September 18, 1709. At an early age, he contracted a tubercular infection from his nurse that left him physically handicapped with bad eyesight and partial deafness. Later, a bout of smallpox left him with facial scars. In spite of his handicaps, he was determined to be independent and did not accept help from others. He was unable to play regular sports but made up by learning other skills: boxing, swimming, leaping and sliding on frozen lakes and ponds. He first went to Lichfield grammar schools and later to Stourbridge. At both schools, he was acknowledged as a leader, both by his teachers and his fellow-students. After a gap of two years, he went to Pembroke College, Oxford University and studied there for thirteen months but had to leave in 1729 because of financial difficulties. He was fiercely independent and refused any kind of charity. While at Oxford, he had only one pair of torn shoes with his toes coming through and one night, a man placed a pair of new shoes in front of his room and when Johnson found them the next morning, he threw them away in anger and wounded pride. Once out of Oxford, he went into depression for nearly two years and fearing that he might become insane, even contemplated suicide. At this time, he also developed a compulsive tic that remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1732, Johnson went to Birmingham. Here the Porters helped him get out of his depression and regain his self-confidence. Elizabeth Porter appreciated and cared for Johnson and in 1735, after the death of her husband, she married Johnson, twenty years his senior. In the same year, Johnson published his first book, a translation. With the financial support of his wife, Johnson opened a private school and David Garrick, who later became a famous actor of the day, was one of his pupils here. However, the school venture was not a success and he and Elizabeth moved to London in 1737. In London, he earned a meagre livelihood, working as translator and writer. While at Litchfield and London, he wrote his tragedy Irene. He wrote regularly for the Gentleman's Magazine and contributed "Preface"s, short biographies, essays, reviews, and poems. His poem, London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal, published in May 1738, made his reputation. Pope pronounced that the author of this poem would become famous. In 1744, Johnson wrote *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl Rivers*, a revealing life account of his mysterious friend, Richard Savage. Today this is recognized as a significant milestone in the art of writing "critical biography".

The year, 1745 proved a literary turning point in Johnson's life. He published a pamphlet on Macbeth that won him Warburton's praise, which he valued highly, because it came at a time when he most needed it. At this time, he also began thinking about publishing an English Dictionary. In 1746, he signed an agreement with a group of publishers, accepting a payment of 1575 pounds. The Italians published a dictionary in 1612, which took them 20 years to prepare. The French dictionary published in 1694, engaged 40 scholars, who took 55years to prepare it and then another 18 years to revise it. The Oxford English Dictionary, which was a collaborative work of more than 70 scholars, took nearly 70 years to complete. Johnson planned to complete his ambitious project in three years but it took him nearly eight years to complete. This in itself was a remarkable achievement. The dictionary was published in 1755. His financial condition improved once Johnson received 1,575 pounds for the project.

In 1749, Johnson published his much-acclaimed poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes: The Tenth Satire of Juvenal". In the following years, he wrote a large number of essays for his journal The Rambler. In 1759, Johnson published his brilliant work Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia. In October 1765, Johnson's last great work, The Plays of William Shakespeare, which had been delayed for so long, was published. The last period of Johnson's life was spent in the company of his friends, especially the Thrales and James Boswell. On 17 June 1783, Johnson suffered a stroke. He made great efforts to overcome it, but was also plagued by various other ailments. He died quietly on 13 December 1784. On his death, his friend William Gerard Hamilton, Member of Parliament, paid a great tribute to him saying that Johnson had left a chasm that no man could fill. His friend and admirer Boswell later went on to write The Life of Samuel Johnson, which presents Johnson as an extraordinary man.

UNIT 9 (B): A DISCUSSION OF "PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE"

In 1756, Johnson published his Proposal for printing by subscription, the Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare, corrected and illustrated by Samuel Johnson. Once the subscription was advertised, he received a large sum of money personally. He foolhardily promised to bring out the work in a year's time but unable to bring it out at the promised time, he came under scathing

attacks, especially by the poet Charles Churchill. The upbraiding in verse by Churchill made him restart work on his edition of Shakespeare. It was finally published in eight volumes, octavo size in 1765, and nine years after the publication of the Proposal. The collection has a "Preface" (72 pages in Johnson's first edition), which is acknowledged as the best part of the edition and considered a great piece of neo-classical literary criticism. The "Preface" enumerates Shakespeare's "excellencies" as well as his "defects. His biographer and friend Boswell states: "A blind indiscriminate admiration of Shakespeare had exposed the British nation to the ridicule of foreigners. Johnson, by candidly admitting the faults of his poet, had the more credit in bestowing on him deserved and indisputable praise"(Boswell 491).

The "Preface" has two sections: one dealing with Johnson's critical analysis of Shakespeare as a dramatist, and the other part dealing with an explication of the editorial methods used by Johnson in his Edition of Shakespeare. Johnson begins the "Preface" by asserting that people cherish the works of writers who are dead and neglect the modern. Johnson partly agrees with the 18th century critics that antiquity be honored, especially in the arts, as opposed to the sciences because the only test that can be applied to them is that of "length of duration and continuance of esteem" (3). He states that if a writer is venerated by posterity, it is a proof of his excellence and he cites the example of Homer. He says the ancients are to be honored not merely because they are ancient but because the truths that they present have stood the test of time. He then applies this criterion to Shakespeare: Shakespeare "may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit" (5).

In his analysis of Shakespeare, Johnson adopts a multidimensional approach. He examines the bard's works from different angles and presents him as timeless and universal, but he also presents him as a product of his age and time. As a neo-classicist, he tries to maintain a structural balance of praise and blame for Shakespeare. He adopts an "ahistorical and a historical" approach to our understanding of Shakespeare (Desai 5). He tries to make a distinction between the appeal of Shakespeare to his contemporaries and to future generations. He says that since times and customs have changed, the depiction of the particular manners of Shakespeare's age, are no longer of interest to contemporary audiences. In his opinion, Shakespeare continues to be admired not for

depicting the customs and manners of his own age but for the representation of universal truths: "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature" (7).

UNIT – 10

UNIT 10 (A): SHAKESPEARE – A POET OF NATURE

In the first part of the "Preface" Johnson praises Shakespeare as "a poet of Nature", who "holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life": all his characters be they Romans, Danes or kings represent general human passions and principles common to all humans (8). In Johnson's view, Shakespeare's scenes are populated "only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion" (13). Another merit he finds in Shakespeare is that though Shakespeare's characters depict universal human passions, yet they are distinctly individualized. He also appreciates Shakespeare for not focusing only on the passion of love but dealing with different kinds of passion exhibited by humankind. He refutes the charge levelled against Shakespeare by critics that Shakespeare represents noble characters of different nations as buffoons and drunkards. He considers these charges 'petty cavils of petty minds". He says Shakespeare "always makes nature predominate over accident; and that if he preserves the essential character, he is not very careful about the accidental distinctions" (15). He clinches his argument by saying: "a poet overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with a figure, neglects the tapestry" (15). He concludes with a metaphorical tribute to Shakespeare: "The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets; passes by the adamant of Shakespeare" (29).

He views Shakespeare's plays as neither tragedies nor comedies but as just representations "exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow" (17). While the ancients concentrated on producing either comedy or tragedy and no Greek or Roman author attempted to do both, Shakespeare possessed the genius to do both in the same composition. His mingled drama violated the rules of dramatic writing but for Johnson realism supersedes the claim of rules: "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature….The end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing" (20). He further states that "mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in

its alterations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life" (20). Johnson considers this mingling justified as Shakespeare's plays both "instruct and delight". Nor does he feel that the mixing of tragic and comic scenes in any way diminish or weaken the passions the dramatist aims at representing on the other hand he feels that variety contributes to pleasure.

UNIT 10 (B): SHAKESPEARE – A GENIUS IN PORTRAYING THE COMIC SPIRIT AND HIS FAULTS

Johnson considers Shakespeare a genius in writing comedy. He agrees with Rhymer that Shakespeare possessed a natural flair for comedy. He thinks Shakespeare had to toil hard for the tragic scenes but the comic scenes appear to be written with great spontaneity: "His tragedy seems to be skill. His comedy to be instinct" (28). He asserts that Shakespeare obtained his comic dialogues from the common intercourse of life and therefore their appeal has not diminished over time.

SHAKESPEARE'S FAULTS

After his praise of Shakespeare, Johnson goes on to point out the faults of Shakespeare. Johnson distinguishes between art and life. He says the audience is always aware that they are watching a fictionalized representation and can enjoy tragedy only for this reason, although the enjoyment is directly proportional to the realism with which the characters are depicted.

As a true neo-classicist, Johnson is extremely didactic in his approach to Shakespeare. He believes that however true to life an artist proposes to be, the creative artist may not sacrifice "virtue to convenience". Johnson thinks Shakespeare is more concerned about pleasing than instructing. In the eyes of Johnson, Shakespeare lacks a clear and distinct moral purpose and sometimes seems to write without any moral purpose at all. He disapproves of Shakespeare on moral grounds: "he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his person's indifferently through right and wrong and at the close dismisses them without further care and leaves their examples to operate

by chance" (33). This "barbarity" Johnson cannot pardon for he believes that it is always the duty of the writer "to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place" (33). In this connection, in his notes on *King Lear*, he condemns Shakespeare for sacrificing the virtue of Cordelier: "Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles" (Johnson in Desai 155). He goes on to say:

> "A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life; but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue." (155)

Johnson also finds faults with Shakespeare's plots and thinks they are loosely formed and not pursued with diligence. He finds this reflected in Shakespeare's neglect to utilize the opportunities that come his way to instruct and delight. Additionally, he adds that Shakespeare seems not to labour enough towards the ending of his plays such that "his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented" (35). He also finds Shakespeare guilty of violating chronology and verisimilitude relating to time and place for "he gives to one age or nation , without scruple, the customs, institutions and opinions of another"(36). He criticizes Shakespeare for making Hector quote Aristotle in *Troilus and Cressida* and also critiques him for combining the love of Theseus and Hippolyta with that of the Gothic mythology of Fairies.

Although Johnson lauds Shakespeare's skill in writing comic scenes, yet he does not gloss over the faults. He finds Shakespeare's language coarse and the jests gross in many comic dialogues. He comments that the gentlemen and ladies indulging in these coarse exchanges appear to be no different than the clowns. Johnson cannot excuse Shakespeare even if this coarseness was prevalent in Shakespeare's time, for he thinks that as a poet he should have known better. The meanness, tediousness and obscurity in Shakespeare's tragedies Johnson considers the undesirable effect of excessive labor. He finds Shakespeare's narration often verbose and prolix, full of verbiage and unnecessary repetition. He also accuses Shakespeare of not matching his words to the occasion. His set speeches he finds "cold and weak" and designed by Shakespeare to show his

knowledge but resented by the reader. At times, he finds Shakespeare's language high sounding and not appropriate to the sentiment or the thought he wishes to express.

"Repeatedly Johnson finds Shakespeare's tragic scenes marred by a sudden drop in emotional temperature caused by some infelicity of language – a pun, a conceit, a hyperbole" (Desai 77). Johnson directs a scathing attack on Shakespeare's fondness for a quibble. He describes Shakespeare's love for a quibble through various amusing analogies. He says a quibble was to him "the golden apple for which he will stoop from his elevation" or "the fatal Cleopatra for which he was willing to lose the world and was content to lose it" (44). Desai remarks: "had Shakespeare been a lesser poet, Johnson's expectations would have been proportionately modest. But with Shakespeare the potential is always so great; the fulfillment sometimes inadequate. In short, Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare's tragic scenes is born out of his admiration for him" (Desai 77).

UNIT – 11

UNIT 11: SHAKESPEARE'S VIOLATION OF THE UNITIES

Shakespeare violated the law of the unities of time and place established and recognized by both dramatists and critics. 18th century critics considered this violation a defect in Shakespeare. Johnson disagrees and thinks it is possible to defend Shakespeare on this account. He argues that the Histories by virtue of their very nature need to keep changing time and place and additionally since they are neither comedies nor tragedies, they remain outside the purview of violation. He believes that Shakespeare, apart from the Histories, maintains the unity of action and follows the Aristotelian rules. His plots have a beginning, middle and an end and the plot also moves slowly but surely towards an end that meets the expectations of the reader. Johnson acknowledges that Shakespeare does neglect to follow the unities of time and place that have been held in high esteem since the time of Corneille, but according to him, the rules are not founded on tenable principles. His critical analysis reveals their irrelevance. He says that the critics insist on the observance of the unities of time and place, as they believe it contributes to dramatic credibility. They hold that

the audience would find it difficult to believe in an action spread over many months and years when the actual stage performance lasts only three hours. In addition, since the audience is seated in the same place for the duration of the play, their belief would be strained if one action takes place in Alexandria and the other in Rome. To refute these arguments Johnson states that all art is artifice and that the audience too is aware of this. His argument is that if the audience sitting in a theatre in London can believe in the reality of the first act taking place in Alexandria, then they can very well imagine the second act taking place in another country. By the same logic, the spectators can imagine the lapse of months or years between acts. However, he argues the audience is not totally incredulous; rather, the audience is, as would be stated later by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in a "willing suspension of disbelief". Johnson states that tragic actions would not give pleasure if the audience thought that it was all happening in reality on stage. The real source of pleasure lies in the fact that the enactment brings realities to mind.

UNIT – 12

UNIT 12: SHAKESPEARE AND THE ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

In Johnson's analysis of Elizabethan England, England emerges as a nation "just emerging from barbarity" where "literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank" and the general public was raised on popular romances (65). Johnson states that very often Shakespeare uses these familiar and popular romance sources as the building blocks for his plays so that the not-so-learned spectators could easily follow the story.

In the absence of any established facts about Shakespeare's learning, Johnson believes that Shakespeare did not know French and Italian and that what he borrowed from foreign sources was borrowed from English translations of foreign works. Johnson asserts that since English literature was yet in its infancy in Elizabethan England, Shakespeare had no English models of drama or poetry to follow - neither character nor dialogue was yet understood. Therefore, Johnson considers Shakespeare a pioneer who introduced character and dialogue into drama. He attributes

Shakespeare's excellence not so much to learning but to his own genius. Repeatedly, Johnson stresses the fact that Shakespeare's natural genius was aided by his close personal observation and experience of life. Johnson states that Shakespeare's extraordinary presentation of human nature and character could not have come from reading psychology because no psychology books were available at this time, but emerged from his talent of observing life, as Shakespeare's knowledge of the inanimate world was as wide and exact as that of human beings. Johnson considers Shakespeare, a pioneer. He says:

> "Shakespeare is always original; nothing is derived from the works of other writers. He is comparable only to Homer in his invention. Shakespeare is the pioneer of English drama - the originator of the form, the characters, the language and the performances. Shakespeare was the first playwright to establish the harmony of blank verse and to discover the qualities of the English language for smoothness and harmony." Shakespeare was the first successful playwright whose tragedies as well as comedies was successful and gave appropriate pleasure."

The rest of the "Preface" concentrates on the lack of availability of authentic texts, Shakespeare's carelessness in not getting his plays published, the various emendations made by critics since the time of Shakespeare until Johnson's own time, and his own editorial methods.

BACKGROUND TO THE PUBLICATION OF JOHNSON'S EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE

Most of Shakespeare's plays were published almost seven years after his death. Johnson is critical about Shakespeare's indifference to getting his plays published and for writing for immediate profit and pleasure. He says that not only did Shakespeare not care to leave authentic versions of his plays for posterity; rather, even the few that were published in his lifetime did not get his attention and scrutiny. As a result, corrupted texts with alterations and additions based on conjecture survived and created confusion and obscurity. He feels other causes too contributed to the corruption of the texts: (a) the printing method (b) the use of copiers(c) the mutilation of

speeches by actors who wished to shorten them and (d) Shakespeare's own ungrammatical style of writing.

The fourth Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published in 1685. A number of editions of Shakespeare were published between1709, Johnson's year of birth and 1765, the year of publication of Johnson's edition. The following editions were printed between 1709 and 1765:
Nicolas Rowe, First Edition, 1709: "Rowe divided the play into acts and scenes, modernized the spellings, marked the entrances and exits of characters, and prefixed a list of dramatis personae to each play; in short, he made the text of Shakespeare more intelligible and attractive to eighteenth-century readers than it was before"(Desai 27). He also added a formal biography of Shakespeare that Johnson retained for his edition although he was unhappy with its style.

Alexander Pope's Edition, 1725: Further mutilation of the text as Pope made copious arbitrary emendations.
Lewis Theobald's Edition, 1734: Unlike his predecessors, did not use the unreliable fourth Folio as his text. He based his texts on the Quartos and the first Folio.
Sir Thomas Hamner's Edition, 1744: Was of little value. Warburton's Edition, 1747: Was not of much significance.

JOHNSON'S EDITORIAL METHODS

Johnson had access to all the above given editions while writing his own edition. In the *"*Preface*"*, he acknowledges his debt to his predecessors and includes all their "Preface"s. In a way, Johnson is to be credited with bringing out a variorum edition of Shakespeare's plays. Johnson not only commented on the merits and faults of the earlier emendatory critics but also included the different versions of lines and passages of the available texts and the subsequent emendations along with his own notes and emendations. Johnson states that his edition of Shakespeare's plays carries three kinds of notes (a) illustrative: to explain difficulties (b) judicial: to comment on "faults and beauties" (c) emendatory: to correct corruptions in the text. He acknowledges that he exercised restraint in making the emendations and was "neither superfluously copious nor scrupulously reserved" (131).

Johnson states that he has been successful in shedding light on some obscure passages and made them more understandable to the readers. However, with great humility he accepts that there are many others passages that he himself was unable to understand and leaves their interpretation to posterity. Johnson also states that he treads the middle ground between "presumption and timidity" by trusting in those publishers "who had a copy before their eyes" and also avoids too much conjectural criticism (142).

JOHNSON'S ADVICE TO THE READERS

Johnson advises the readers to enjoy the complete play first without interruption and without thinking about the obscurities. Only when the pleasure of novelty ceases should the reader turn to his notes to understand and appreciate individual lines and passages and get more enjoyment. Johnson exhorts the readers to form their own judgement about Shakespeare's plays. He thinks notes are "necessary evils "and proclaims that he wishes to serve only as a guide and instructor. He cautions the readers not to go by his judgement of praise or condemnation, as his judgement might be flawed. He also humbly acknowledges that his work is not perfect.

Johnson ends his *"*Preface*"* by once again acknowledging Shakespeare's greatness and dismissing the views of those who did not find him learned by stating that "he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature" and that he possessed the "largest and most comprehensive soul" (160).

JOHNSON'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Johnson's *"*Preface*"* to Shakespeare, even by modern standards is an exemplary piece of literary criticism although it does have its limitations. Johnson boldly went against the grain of his time in defending Shakespeare for not following the unities of time and place and for mingling tragic and

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

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Comment on the Johnson's achievements.

2. Write a note on Johnson's editorial method.

3. Write a note on Shakespeare and The Elizabethan England.

4. What were the various aspects that led Johnson to criticize Shakespeare?

5. Comment on Johnson’s take on Shakespeare’s violation of unities.

BLOCK IV

UNITS: 13-16

"PREFACE" TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*

BY

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT – 13

UNIT 13 (A): INTRODUCTION TO THE "PREFACE"

Wordsworth's "Preface" not only heralded a new type of poetry, but also laid the foundation of many Romantic ideas and assumptions about poetry. More significantly, it is a uniquely original combination of prescriptive poetic theory and poetic practice. Long and influential discussions on poetry had been written in the immediately preceding period, the neoclassical eighteenth century but none of these theoretical essays had sought to prove their theories by citing original poetic compositions. As we are going to see, Wordsworth's indebtedness to eighteenth century literary theories as well as to earlier critical theories must be recognized, but equally significant is his originality. This originality lies, according to some critics, in the "programmatic spirit" of Wordsworth. After Wordsworth, it became difficult to base criticism on abstract rules which were supposed to be self-evidently true. In this respect Wordsworth may be said to have replaced the classical critical tradition by a fresh spirit of enquiry that has been compared with that of Aristotle in his *Poetics*. "Wordsworth restores Aristotle's stress upon the importance of practice and makes the rules once more grow out of the usage". As examples of this approach, we may refer to Wordsworth's ideas regarding the subject matter and language of poetry. In the neo-classical eighteenth century the general belief was that poetry must deal with some conventional topics. Wordsworth, on the other hand, asserted that poetry could be written on any subject in which the human mind was interested. This belief is today so common that the radical nature of Wordsworth's assertion may not be immediately obvious. Secondly, Wordsworth challenged the neoclassical view that poetry should be written in a special kind of language, full of conventional poeticisms, and as distinct from the common language of people as possible. Wordsworth, while emphasizing the experimental nature of his own poetry, confidently claimed that the real language of man, devoid of all artificial figures of speech and unnatural expressions, is the source of his own poetic idiom, since poets are not angelic creatures, but human beings who write for other human beings. Both these claims of Wordsworth are largely demonstrated by his own poetic practice.

UNIT 13 (B): THE "PREFACE" AS A ROMANTIC MANIFESTO

The "Preface" is often taken as the first important critical document that marks a clear break with the neo-classical eighteenth century. Wordsworth's rejection of eighteenth-century poetic diction, his identification of the language of poetry with that of prose, and his endeavour to write poetry in a selection of the real language of men are three of the most far-reaching concepts in Romantic poetic theory. Wordsworth's plea for naturalism in poetic language is combined with "emotionalism", as seen in his definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and as taking its origin in "emotion recollected in tranquility". These are the leading aspects of Wordsworth's theory as outlined in the final revised version of the *"*Preface*"*. These ideas proved historically important, though in some of his later criticism, such as the three *Essays on Epitaphs* and in his correspondence, Wordsworth modified these ideas considerably. The principal ideas in the "Preface" may not have any particular appeal to our time but to dismiss those as of no consequence would betray a total ignorance of romantic literary criticism.

Wordsworth's objection to poetic diction and his strong advocacy of the real language of people signalled the arrival of a new kind of poetry. At the end of the eighteenth century the poetic devices of the tradition beginning with Dryden had become outworn stereotypes. Wordsworth was the first Romantic to realize that this diction, heavily dependent on personifications, periphrases and Latinate phraseology, was, to use Wordsworth's own adjectives, "vicious", "adulterated", "distorted", "glossy", "unfeeling", while he felt that his own new poetic style was "natural". Wordsworth's rejection of neo-classical poetic diction is based on numerous and heterogeneous reasons. First of all, he rejects poetic diction in the sense of a fixed sanctified vocabulary which excludes any expression it considers low, or trivial, or vulgar. Secondly, he objects to particular stylistic devices, such as personification, periphrasis, Latinisms, and grammatical licences; to syntactical features like inversions and antitheses, and to forms and structures which are readymade, sanctified by use. All these objections were to be repeated later by other Romantics. To put it simply, Wordsworth and the other Romantics were rejecting the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Gray's notion that "The language of the age can never be the language of poetry" and that English poetry had a language "peculiar to itself".

However, Wordsworth also suffers from the limitations inevitable in the case of any extreme reaction against past practices. Thus, his use of the word "language" is so imprecise that it invited Coleridge's criticism of his own poetic practice as failing often to live up to his ideal. Moreover, Wordsworth himself uses many devices against which he raised his voice. The almost Miltonic sonority of his blank verse in a poem like "Tintern Abbey" is as far removed from the ordinary speech of the rustics as it is possible to imagine. Wordsworth, of course, speaks of a "selection of the real language of men" and admits that there are "impurities" in the language of rustics which have to be removed before it can be used in poetry.

As M. H. Abrams has shown, it is possible to trace in Wordsworth's theory of poetry vestiges of some eighteenth-century beliefs and ideas. Like eighteenth-century primitivists such as Blair and Kames, he maintains that "the earliest poets wrote naturally, feeling powerfully, in a figurative language". Some other traces of eighteenth-century belief in Wordsworth's poetic theory will be pointed out later. We are not surprised therefore to find that Wordsworth's criticism of the Augustan critical tradition is by no means indiscriminate. But his insistence on humble and rustic life as the proper subject matter of poetry and on the real language of people as its proper language is unwavering and in conformity with the ideals of the French Revolution, especially Rousseau's call to go back to nature. The revolutionary ideals inspired Wordsworth and the other Romantics not only to find dignity in the lives of common people but also to assert the equality of human beings. But there is also a contradiction between Wordsworth's stated aim of describing the lives and manners of humble and rustic people, that is, people belonging to a class different from his own, and his definition of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and as taking its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. In respect of his choice of subject matter Wordsworth is actually following the mimetic theory of art, which can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle; but in the way he defines poetry, Wordsworth adheres to an expressive poetics. While the mimetic view of poetry is a legacy of eighteenth-century aesthetics, the expressive notion of poetry is typically Romantic and found an echo in later Romantic theories of poetry. Wordsworth's description of the poet as "a man speaking to men" and of poetry as shedding natural and human tears is also an important ingredient of Romantic aesthetics.

GENESIS OF THE "PREFACE"

Lyrical Ballads was published in 1798, which has been described as the best-known publication date in the history of English literature. The first edition of the volume of poems, written by Wordsworth and Coleridge, carried as a foreword only a brief "Advertisement" defending his "experiments" in a new kind of poetry. This "Advertisement" was enlarged into a ""Preface"", which was first published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. This critical document was considerably enlarged in 1802, chiefly by the addition of a long passage best known for its discussion of the question, "What is a poet?" The Appendix on poetic diction was also added in 1802, and this enlarged version was reprinted in 1805. The *"*Preface*"* is generally known as containing solely Wordsworth's views, but Coleridge claimed that it was "half as child" of his brain too. Nevertheless, Coleridge claimed in 1802 that there was "a radical difference in our opinions" regarding poetry and he criticized Wordsworth's poetic theory in greater detail later in his *Biographia Literaria*. It has, however, been shown by some recent scholars that Coleridge was actively involved in the formulation of most of the leading ideas in the *"*Preface*"*. Coleridge said that the *"*Preface*"* arose "out of conversations so frequent that with exceptions, either of us could positively say which started any particular thought." In view of all this it is difficult to accept without any kind of reservation Coleridge's claim that he had radically different opinions about poetry from the beginning.

Even if Coleridge was not willing to admit later the extent of his collaboration with Wordsworth in the composition of the *"*Preface*"*, the fact remains that there was a fundamental difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge regarding the nature of poetry and is language. As M. H. Abrams has shown, Wordsworth essentially opposes "nature", in various senses, to "art", but Coleridge believes that this opposition cannot be sustained. In Coleridge's opinion, great poems are "natural" only in the sense that they follow poetic devices and conventions which are "the defining characteristics of art" (Abrams). In Coleridge's own words, the greatest poetry reconciles the opposites of nature and art, and "while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature". More specifically, Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth

regarding the latter's assertion that the language of poetry and that of prose are essentially the same, that poetry is best written in the language of rustics and that metre is not essential to poetry.

UNIT – 14

UNIT 14 (A): POETIC DICTION AND WORDSWORTH

Since one of Wordsworth's major aims in the *"*Preface*"* is to reject poetic diction, we must try to understand what constitutes this kind of diction. The phase itself came to acquire considerable importance in English literature as a result of Wordsworth's misgivings about it expressed in the *"*Preface*"*. In itself, the phrase does not necessarily have an unsavoury connotation, but Wordsworth consistently uses it in the *"*Preface*"* in the sense of a false diction of poetry. He proudly asserts, "There is little in [*Lyrical Ballads*] of what is usually called poetic diction." Like Wordsworth, many writers believe that "poetic diction" means artificial language full of archaic expressions, circumlocution, personifications and other devices which are not found in ordinary everyday language. But there are many others who believe that "poetic diction" means the specifically poetic words and expressions which heighten the imaginative appeal of poetry. In the Appendix added to the '"Preface"' by Wordsworth in 1802, he gives his views on "what is usually called Poetic Diction". The basic assumptions in this Appendix are commonplaces in eighteenth century primitivistic theories of poetry, as pointed out by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. According to Abrams, "It was standard procedure in Wordsworth's day, when characterizing poetry, to refer to its conjectured origin in the passionate, and therefore, naturally rhythmical and figurative, outcomes of primitive men. This belief displaced Aristotle's assumption that poetry developed from man's instinct to imitate, as well as the pragmatic opinion that poetry was invented by stages to make their civil and moral teachings more palatable and more memorable."

When Wordsworth identifies a particular vocabulary and word-order as poetic diction, he thinks primarily of the minor eighteenth century poets who imitated Milton, and poets like Erasmus Darwin and the Della Cruscans (a short-lived school of sentimental poetry, founded by Robert Merry). More generally, he thinks of the widespread agreement among poets and critics that there

should be a clear distinction between the language of prose and that of poetry, corresponding to a distinction between "poetical" and "non-poetical" subjects. All topics were not considered worthy of poetic treatment, nor was it considered proper to use any kind of language for poetry. The general belief in the neo-classical eighteenth century was that different poetic genres, such as elegy, ode, epic, required different kinds of language. We can now identify the various aspects of the poetic diction which Wordsworth attacks. First of all, there is the tendency to use stock adjective-noun combinations, as in the following phrases: "the fair fields," "the radiant sky", "the verdant meadow." In his *Essay on Criticism*, Pope satirizes the common — common in bad poems — habit of using predictable and stereotyped phrases: "Where'er you hear the cooling western breeze/In the next line it flutters through the trees." Secondly, poetic diction liberally uses periphrases, calling common, everyday things by most uncommon names, because of a mistaken belief that common words spoil the dignity of serious poetry. In much eighteenth century poetry sheep are referred to as "the fleecy flock" and birds are called "the feathered tribe." Sometimes periphrasis is carried too far, as when a spade is called "the implement rectangular / That turneth up the soil." The third aspect of poetic diction is the use of learned, archaic words, including Latinisms (Latinized words). These are very common in Milton's poetry, especially *Paradise Lost*, in which the subject often calls for an elevated diction. But when imitated by bad poets, these expressions appear stilted and artificial. Milton often used Latinized constructions, inverting the normal word-order, because he wanted to achieve the magnificence and remoteness from everyday reality which, in his view, his epic subject demanded. In the same way, when Milton used the periphrasis "optic glass" to refer to Galileo's telescope, he was not using poetic diction, but a common term used in his day. But the poets who wrote in a pseudo-Miltonic diction did not have that kind of justification. Wordsworth singles out personification as yet another aspect of poetic diction, along with other artificial figures of speech, as we shall see later.

In order to show how ambiguous the term "poetic diction" is and how difficult it is to know which specific expressions can be called "gaudy and inane" (Wordsworth's own adjectives), we may think of Wordsworth's own practice in a poem like "Tintern Abbey." In that poem, written in sonorous Miltonic blank verse rather than the natural language of human beings, we find adjective-noun combinations like "beauteous forms," "corporeal frame", "gloomy wood". Perhaps Geoffrey Tillotson is right when he says that the passionate attack made by Wordsworth on eighteenth-

century poetic diction is all the more passionate because the eighteenth-century is in his blood and "will not be expelled."

UNIT 14 (B): THE PROPER SUBJECT-MATTER OF POETRY ACCORDING TO WORDSWORTH

Almost all of Wordsworth's objectives as a poet as stated by himself in the *"*Preface*"*, can be subsumed under a broad category: permanence. Permanence was regarded as an important criterion of a work of art by neo-classical critics who generally argued that the classics are great because they have survived the test of time. It is on this consideration that Dr. Johnson calls Shakespeare a classic. However, Wordsworth's aim is different: he wants for his poetry a subject matter and a language that will have permanent appeal. This standard of permanence is for Wordsworth of much wider application than to literature alone; it is closely related to his idea of the permanence of 'nature', in several senses of the word.

Wordsworth first looks for permanence in the subject matter of poetry. After declaring that he has chosen low and rustic life as his subject-matter, he justifies his choice on the following grounds. First, it is in that kind of life that "the essential passions of the heart" find a better soil in which to attain maturity, are less restrained, and find expression in a simpler language. Secondly, in that condition of life "our elementary feelings" are found in a simpler state, and hence can be studied more accurately and communicated more powerfully. Thirdly, the manners of rural life are determined by those essential feelings, can be better understood because of the nature of rural occupations, "and are more durable". Finally, it is in rural life that the passions of men are incorporated with the "permanent forms of nature". As the use of the comparative degree indicates, Wordsworth throughout contrasts the rustics with the sophisticated inhabitants of the city. Compared with them, the rustic appears to Wordsworth as a "pure archetype of human greatness", to use the poet's own words in *The Excursion*. The rustic is for Wordsworth the ideal human being, in a Platonic sense, as well as a pure person, in a chemical sense. The rustic's language is preferred by the poet because it is "a more permanent and far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets". Wordsworth's argument can be summed up in this manner: the rustic is an ideal man and speaks an ideal language. It may be, and has been, doubted whether the rustics of late eighteenth-century England were really such ideal people. But Wordsworth

proceeds “by assertion and analogy, not by way of the sociological evidence which the argument requires”, as W.J.B. Owen puts it.

There are very important political reasons for Wordsworth’s interest in low and rustic life and his assertion that essential humanity can be found only there. Though usually seen as a poet of nature, Wordsworth always regarded his true subject matter as the study of mankind. In his own life Wordsworth had experienced injustice at the hands of the aristocracy. He was increasingly convinced, even before the outbreak of the French Revolution (1789), that injustice was inherent in English society. This belief prompted him as a poet to deal with victims of social injustice, such as vagrants, rural paupers and the dispossessed, as well as other marginalized groups. In poems like “The Convict”, “The Female Vagrant” and “The Thorn”, Wordsworth is concerned with victims of social injustice. The late eighteenth century was an age of social and economic upheaval, brought about by such developments as increasing industrialization, the rapid increase in the population of the cities, the system of land enclosure increasingly resorted to by large estates. These factors, linked with the spread of poverty, gave birth to a radical political spirit among the middle classes. The French Revolution was inspired by the ideals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, and Wordsworth, who was in France during the outbreak of the Revolution, believed passionately in these ideals in his youth. His contemporary, William Hazlitt, described the “levelling” idealism that prompted the *Lyrical Ballads:* “It partakes of and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse ... is a levelling one” *(The Spirit of the Age)*. Wordsworth’s preference for humble and rustic life as the subject matter of poetry was also motivated by a primitiveness derived from rural culture. He argues that he chose humble life as the subject of his poetry because he believes that such a primordial existence is able to preserve the basic elemental feelings of mankind. Wordsworth mentions in the *“*Preface*”* the “increasing accumulation of men in cities” as an important reason for increasing sensationalism and vulgarization in English national life. In Wordsworth’s perception, rural life and values were not contaminated by the horrors of urban and industrial values encroaching upon people’s lives and enslaving their minds. One of Wordsworth’s own poems in the *Lyrical Ballads,* “The Idiot Boy”, depicts most of the positive values that Wordsworth claims to find in rustic life. In this poem, Betty sends her mentally challenged son for

doctor and the son gets lost. The essential passion depicted in the poem is the "material passion". Betty Foy's motherly feelings are obviously not "under restraint", as they might have been in the case of a sophisticated urban woman. Betty's feelings are "simple" because they are unmixed with any sense of shame that might have affected a more self-conscious mother whose treatment of her mentally challenged son in public would have been more restrained or inhibited. Wordsworth himself told an admirer of his poetry, John Wilson, that feelings of shame often induce "gentlefolks" to dispose of imbecile children. Finally, Betty's language, simple and uninhibited, expresses forcibly her obsessive love for her imbecile son.

UNIT – 15

UNIT 15 (A): WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF THE POETIC LANGUAGE

As we have seen, Wordsworth's claim in the *"*Preface*"* that he has "taken as much pains to avoid as others ordinarily take to produce" what he calls "poetic diction" amounts to a declaration that poetry would henceforth be written in a new kind of language. This declaration is one of the things which make the *"*Preface*"* a crucial programmatic statement of Romanticism. The term "poetic diction" refers to the kind of linguistic stylization which was prescribed as the ornamental language, appropriate for poetry, by traditional rhetorical doctrine, from ancient classical times to the eighteenth century. As a recent critic has commented, Wordsworth's insistence throughout the *"*Preface*"* on the "real language of men" as the proper stylistic paradigm of poetry amounts to a radical dissociation of poetry from the prescriptions of rhetorical doctrine. Coleridge criticized Wordsworth's theory of poetic language, but his assertion in *Biographia Literaria* that "whatever lines can be translated into other words of the same language…either in sense or in association… are so far vicious in their diction", implies a rejection of poetic diction. This rejection of poetic diction is not unique to Wordsworth and Coleridge; they illustrate a widespread attitude characteristic of Romanticism generally.

We have already seen what "poetic diction" is; it remains now to examine the reasons for Wordsworth's choice of "the language really used by men" in preference to poetic diction. The kind of theory to which Wordsworth's ideas are opposed is found in a letter written to his son by an eminent eighteenth-century patron of letters, Lord Chesterfield. In that letter Lord Chesterfield draws a distinction between the language of prose and that of poetry. Prose, according to him, is the language of common conversation, while poetry is "a more noble and sublime way of expressing one's throughs": "In prose you would say, 'the beginning of the morning' or 'the break of day', but that would not do in verse; and you must rather say 'Aurora spread her rosy mantle'. Aurora, you know, is the Goddess of the morning. This is what is called poetical diction". But this idea of making the language of poetry ornamental is foreign to Wordsworth's view of the ideal poetic language. Wordsworth rejects figurative embellishments because he wants to use the natural language of man. In sharp contrast to Chesterfield's view that the language of prose is necessarily different from that of poetry Wordsworth assets that there is no essential difference "between the language of prose and metrical composition." The lines quoted from Chesterfield's letter will give us a valuable perspective on Wordsworth's theory of poetic language. Wordsworth says that poetry should be written in "a selection of the real language of men", that this language is far more philosophical and permanent than poetic diction, and that the language of prose and that of poetry are identical. In the Appendix on poetic diction Wordsworth maintains that the earliest poets wrote from passion excited by real events and therefore even their figurative expressions were natural; but poetic diction takes over when figures of speech are used which are not justified by real passion. About the language of his own poetry, Wordsworth claims that it is "a selection of real language of men." But he is careful to add that if the poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures." Wordsworth thus concedes that the real language of men, when it expresses passion, employs metaphors and figures. Though it appears to contradict the earlier assertion that the real language of men uses "simple and unelaborated expressions", this view is actually common-place in some eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetic theories which are derived from primitivistic theories of language and literature.

Wordsworth goes on to identify the real language of men with the language of rustics. Regarding the subject matter of his poetry Wordsworth has already expressed his preference for humble and rustic life, thinking of the rustic as "a kind of spiritual athlete" regarding the language of his poetry, he appears to imply that the rustic is also "a kind of linguistic athlete" (the words are used by Owen). In both subject and language Wordsworth wants to return to basic and permanent features of thinking, feeling and speaking. As we have seen, if the rustic is an ideal person, his language must also be ideal, according to Wordsworth. But Wordsworth also insists on a "selection" of this language, and he later uses the word "purification", by which he means the "real defects", the "lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust". In this connection Wordsworth also shows that he is aware of the ungrammatical constructions and provincialisms that are often found in the language of rustics. In the fragmentary *Recluse*, written a few years after the *"*Preface*"*, Wordsworth admits that —

"That shepherd's voice, it may have reached mine ear
Debased and under profanation, made
The ready organ of articulate sounds
From ribaldry, impiety, or wrath,
Issuing when shame hath ceased to check the brawls
Of some abused Festivity--so be it.
I came not dreaming of unruffled life,
Untainted manners; born among the hills,
Bred also there, I wanted not a scale
To regulate my hopes; pleased with the good"

In the same poem he expresses the conviction that in the language of the rustics there is:

"An art, a music, a strain of words
That shall be life, the unacknowledged voice of life.
Shall Speak of what is done among the fields.
Done truly There, or felt, of solid good
And real evil, yet be sweet withal."

UNIT 15 (B): THE LANGUAGE OF PROSE

For Wordsworth, this language of permanent appeal is at first the language really used by men, then the language of rustics, and finally, as we are going to see now, the language of prose. Wordsworth makes no attempt to define the language of prose, merely saying that it has to be "well written" prose. We gather from the context that prose is the language of rustics as well as a selection of the language really used by men. Wordsworth does not offer any example of good prose either. What he offers is a definition by negatives. First of all, the language of prose avoids personifications of any kind. Secondly, it contains very little of poetic diction. Poetic diction includes "phrases and figures of speech" which have been mistakenly regarded by many as "the common inheritance of poets." The language of prose also avoids expressions "which have been foolishly repeated by bad poets", but such expressions may be said to belong to the category of poetic diction. Though often suspicious and uneasy about them, Wordsworth allows that "personifications of abstract ideas" are permissible when they are "prompted by passion". Wordsworth's objection to personifications and poetic diction arises out of his belief that these elements do not "make any regular or natural part" of "the language of men". But Wordsworth seems to be aware that a language is not properly defined simply by negatives and therefore proceeds to define the language of prose in positive terms.

Wordsworth admits that it is not easy to define the language of prose in positive terms, and therefore resorts to generalities. He says that he has always, in his own poetic practice, "endeavoured to look steadily at my subject". But then he adds a point which amounts to yet another negative, saying that in his poems "there is little falsehood of description." His next point, though not negative, is somewhat vague: "my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance." Wordsworth eventually offers a kind of solution to the difficulties faced by him in defining a permanent language of prose: if we extract from the conventionally poetic

language of poetry all the so-called poeticisms, we are left with what is essentially the language of prose. In examining this critical position of Wordsworth's, we shall consider, respectively, the possible source of Wordsworth's observations, the validity of these observations, and their critical value. Regarding the source of Wordsworth's ideas two works have been cited by scholars as significant. One is the first prose Interlude to Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*. (Erasmus Darwin, an eighteenth-century physician and botanist, wrote poetry with the avowed intention of enlisting "imagination under the banner of Science." He embodied the botanical system in the long poem, *Loves of the Plants.*) The subject of the Interlude is the "essential difference" between prose and poetry. One major difference is that poetry contains very few words expressing abstract ideas, while prose abounds in them. The reason for this, according to Darwin, is that the poet appeals principally to the eye while the prose-writer uses abstract terms. Since the poet wants to create a visual impact, he uses personifications and "Allegories" because these figures of speech bring the objects before the eye; poetry even expresses sentiments in the language of vision. Darwin thus asserts that personification is a stylistic feature which specifically belongs to poetry.

The second work which Wordsworth undoubtedly had in mind is an article entitled "Is verse Essential to Poetry?" which was written by William Enfield and published in *The Monthly Magazine* for July 1796. The article was written with the purpose of showing that the term "poetry" can be applied to what we may call "poetic prose", and that the term should not be confined to works in verse. Though Wordsworth's aim is completely different, a superficial resemblance between Enfield's arguments and those of Wordsworth has been found. An extract from this article, cited by Owen will show the resemblance between the two views:

> "The character of poetry, which may seem most to require that it be limited to verse, is its appropriate diction. It will be admitted that metaphorical language, being more impressive than general terms, is best suited to poetry. That excited state of mind, which poetry supposes, naturally prompts a figurative style. But the language of fancy, sentiment and passion is not peculiar to verse. Whatever is the natural and proper expression of any conception or feeling in metre or rhyme, is its natural and proper expression in prose .... If the artificial diction of modern poetry would be improper, on similar occasions, in prose, it is equally improper in verse."

Enfield recognizes a kind of imaginatively heightened diction as proper to both prose and poetry, and assests that artificial diction is not necessary in either prose or verse. According to him, one does not need the licence of metre to use the figurative language of passion in prose as well as in verse. But Wordsworth's point is different: in his view, it is possible, even desirable, to use the language of prose in verse in order to express real passion. Besides, Enfield adds the qualification that the prose he has in mind is "metaphorical" and "figurative", in fact "poetic". Wordsworth has no use for this argument. Thus both Erasmus Darwin's views on the essential difference between prose and poetry and Enfield's equation of verse and "poetic prose" serve as points of departure for Wordsworth when he says that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition".

Ever since Coleridge challenged the equation of the language of poetry and that of prose, Wordsworth's assertion has been repeatedly criticized. Coleridge was surprised that Wordsworth, who had a poetic style only less individual and distinctive than that of Shakespeare and Milton, should have argued for a common language for prose and poetry. But one way of defending Wordsworth's view is to point out that the greatest poets in the English language have achieved their most remarkable poetic effects by incorporating the rhythms of actual speech in their metrical language. However, let us first try to understand Wordsworth's argument in the light of the example he himself cites. Wordsworth chooses a sonnet written by Thomas Gray, "Sonnet on the death of Richard West", as an example of poetic diction. The choice of Gray is entirely appropriate, because it was he who, as we have seen, observed that "The language of the age can never be the language of poetry." Wordsworth has himself italicized some lines of the sonnet as being equally appropriate to prose and poetry. These are the italicized lines: "A different object do these eyes require;/My lonely anguish melts no heart bit mine;/And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;/... I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear, /and weep the more because I weep in vain". The language of these lines, according to Wordsworth, does not differ from prose except in respect of rhyme and in the use of the adjective "fruitless" (in the last of the quoted lines) for the more natural adverb "fruitlessly". Wordsworth's example is aptly chosen because Gray's sonnet, though prompted by real passion, contains many examples of poetic diction: "reddening Phoebus" instead of "the sun" in the second line; "lifts his golden fire" instead of "rises" in the same line: "amorous descant" in place of "love song", "green attire" in place of "green grass" and so on. Accordingly,

only five lines (quoted earlier) of the entire sonnet receive Wordsworth's approval for being no different from the language of prose. The lines meet Wordsworth's approval because they do not contain personifications, Latinisms (except in "fruitless"), periphrases (e.g., "reddening Phoebms", "green attire" in the other lines) and poeticisms as in "lonely anguish" in the second line of the sonnet. But apart from such details, one other aspect of the sonnet may be taken to provide a further clue to what Wordsworth means by "the language of prose". The italicized lines have the quality of understatement: they do not even once mention the fact of death which must have deeply affected the poet. Such understatement, or statement deliberately shorn of so-called poetic expressions, characterizes many of Wordsworth's own most famous lines. The line most frequently cited in this connection is the one in 'Michael'. "And never lifted up a single stone"; there is nothing obviously poetic in this line, and yet it conveys as effectively as possible the whole tragedy of a poem which is more than 500 lines long. It must also be pointed out, however, that it is possible to find in Wordsworth's own poetry many "prosaisms". The following lines from Book VI of *The Prelude* have often been cited as an example of language that can hardly be called poetry:

> "Through those delightful pathways we advanced, Two Days, and still in presence of the Lake, which winding Up among the Alps, now changed slowly its lovely Countenance, and put on A sterner character."

As Coleridge pointed out in another connection, the words are appropriate to prose, "but are not suitable to metrical composition". The lines have been criticized by a more recent critic as written in the jargon of a guide-book for tourists. Coleridge made another important point in his refutation of Wordsworth's position: the word-order in poetry must often necessarily differ from that in prose. Nevertheless, with the line from 'Michael' in mind, we can say that "the language of prose" in Wordsworth's sense of the phrase may be taken to refer to those many lines of his poetry which suggest the pathetic without wallowing in pathos, the awful without the awe. Such understatement has even been called Wordsworth's most characteristic device of rhetoric. One may thus conclude that the validity of Wordsworth's equation of the language of prose with the language of poetry is dependent on our agreeing with his view that a poetic diction is undesirable and also transitory in its appeal. But the equation is not acceptable as a critical doctrine, or even as a statement of Wordsworth's habitual poetic practice. Wordsworth neither gives, nor could he have given, any definition of prose. For one thing, there are so many kinds of prose even in a single literary period

that the term "language of prose" is bound to appear vague and imprecise. Moreover, the language of prose, like the language of poetry, can never be stable: it varies according to function, taste and age. The usefulness of Wordsworth's equation of the language of prose and that of poetry is limited to the recognition that poetry is best written in a language devoid of conventional poetic devices. We may go further and suggest that Wordsworth's search for a permanent and universal language of poetry was destined to be futile, because a living language undergoes change and therefore can never be stable or permanent like Latin, which is a dead language and therefore fixed and stable. If it were not so, Wordsworth himself would not have felt the need to "modernize" Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale*. Moreover, it is not possible even for an English-speaking moderately educated reader to read Shakespeare or Milton without a linguistic gloss. A permanent poetic language is impossibility because it has to ignore the processes of growth and change from which no living language is immune.

UNIT – 16

UNIT 16 (A): WORDSWORTH'S IDEA OF A POET

A question arising naturally from Wordsworth's confident equation of the language of prose with the language of poetry is: why does he himself use in his poetry metre, which makes the most obvious distinction between prose and poetry? In the *"*Preface*"* of 1800, Wordsworth proceeds to answer this question and offer a justification of metre immediately after making that equation. But in the *"*Preface*"* of 1802, which is the text you shall be reading, this justification is postponed in order to accommodate a long and eloquent description of the role and function of a poet. Since this description is justly celebrated as a passage containing many of Wordsworth's fundamental perceptions regarding the nature of the poet and of poetry, we are now going to examine the passage in some detail.

These questions are raised by Wordsworth himself as he launches into a grand and eloquent description of the poet and his role. This description of the dignity and nature of the office and character of a poet was characterized by Coleridge as "very grand, and of

a sort of Verulamian power and majesty". "Verulamian" means "in the manner of Bacon's prose", a manner that is usually described as "majestic" but "constrained." Wordsworth first emphasizes the essential humanity of the poet: "He is a man speaking to men". This assertion of the poet's ordinary humanity is significant when placed against the tendency to regard the poet as exalted far above ordinary humanity and therefore requiring an elevated language in which to communicate with his readers (see Lord Chesterfield's letter to his son). By stressing the poet's ordinariness Wordsworth would appear to bring him down to the level of common humanity and to suggest that the difference between a poet and an ordinary human being is one of degree, not one of kind. But then he goes on to enumerate so many unusual and extraordinary abilities which the poet must possess that it might appear to some that the difference is in effect one of kind. (I hope most of you would question Wordsworth's easy assumption that the poet is a *man* speaking to *men*.) The qualities which the poet must possess, according to Wordsworth, are awesome. Compared with the men to whom he speaks, the poet has more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm, a greater knowledge of human nature, a more comprehensive soul, and a mind that is exquisitely fitted to the universe. The phrase "comprehensive soul" is especially important, for it reminds us of Dryden's famous tribute to Shakespeare as a poet having "the largest and most comprehensive soul." The poet has also the ability to conjure up passions in himself which resemble those produced by real events. He has a greater readiness and power to express what he feels. This last quality of the poet seems to be based on the first century AD Roman teacher of rhetoric, Quitilian's, account of the successful orator, who is susceptible to experiences "whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes."

Wordsworth consistently affirms that the poet, since he deals with general truth, ought not to "break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments." The poet, according to him, is constantly in touch with the general truth. Wordsworth's account of the "general truth" is nominally based upon Aristotle's famous passage in the *Poetics*: "Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing." What Aristotle actually says in Chapter IX of the *Poetics* is that poetry is "a more philosophical and a higher thing than history." The inaccuracy is due to the fact that Wordsworth, as he himself admits, has been "told" of Aristotle's remarks and has not read the treatise himself. In comparing the poet with the historian or the biographer Wordsworth

again uses Aristotle's terms, but his observation that the poet's is the easier task is not Aristotelian at all. Moreover, Wordsworth's emphasis on the pleasure felt and conveyed by the poet is much more pronounced than Aristotle's. Wordsworth claims that the pleasure-giving function of poetry is consistent with an important principle of the universe. "This necessity of producing pleasure," he says, is far from being "a degradation of the poet's art." The poet's ability to give pleasure is an indirect acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe and homage paid to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which a human being "knows, and feels, and lives, and moves." Michael Mason rightly draws attention to the second part of Wordsworth's remark: "that the aesthetic element in literature reflects an inalienable law of the human organism, to the effect that we are always in some sense in a condition of pleasure." Otherwise, in Wordsworth's view, we cannot become active and sentient beings. Mason also points out that Wordsworth's thinking here is indebted to the eighteenth-century theologian and psychologist, David Hartley. Hartley combines theology and psychology in his argument that the predominating influence of pleasure in our life is an indication that in our mental life we do not suffer the consequences of the Fall of Man. In short, poetic pleasure is an echo of something in the pattern of the universe and of human life. We should also notice in this connection the kind of inspired language which Wordsworth uses. This language, especially when Wordsworth speaks of the grand elementary principle of pleasure in which a human being "knows, and feels, and lives, and moves", has been called by Lionel Trilling "bold to the point of being shocking", because it "controverts" the Bible (Acts 17: 28) which says that "in him [Christ] we live, and move, and have our being." Wordsworth no doubt also has Milton in mind when he speaks of "the native and naked dignity of man" to which poetry is homage. In *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Adam and Eve are described in these words: "with native honour clad/In naked majesty seemed lords of all." Wordsworth has earlier quoted from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I, while emphasizing poetry's intimate concern with common humanity: poetry sheds "no tears such as Angels weep," but natural and human tears.

Wordsworth's emphasis on pleasure is, as Mason has observed, represents a startling transformation of stock aesthetic and psychological ideas. A common critical notion in the eighteenth century was that the aim of giving pleasure distinguished poetry from other kinds of writing. However, this goal was associated, as in Richard Hurd's 'A Dissertation on the Idea of Universal Poetry', with the ornamental, stylized and fanciful elements in poetry, while imitation

was usually located in the prosaic aspects of poetic discourse. “Wordsworth reveres this scheme boldly, making pleasure not only mimetic, but mimetic of a profound and inalienable part of human nature”. Since Wordsworth’s views on poetic diction, personification and figurative language generally are very different from those discussed by Hurd, whose “Disertation” was published in 1766, it is not surprising that the sources of poetic pleasure are located by Wordsworth in the real language of men. Wordsworth considers only metre and rhyme as admissible sources of poetic pleasure and rejects the other conventional attributes of poetry as artificial. In relating poetic pleasure to human nature Wordsworth also enlarges an orthodox eighteenth-century psychological theory, namely, the idea that “self-love” is the basis of our actions and beliefs. The idea can be found in John Dennis, John Locke, and David Hartley. Hartley, while denying that the “desire of happiness” controls our actions, believed that our motives are prompted by simple sensations that always have a pleasurable or painful aspect.

UNIT 16 (B): WORDSWORTH’S THEORY OF METRE

After this long discussion of the poet’s role and function, Wordsworth comes to the question which arises naturally out of his assertion that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition: “why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse?” Wordsworth’s answer to this question takes the form of a full-fledged theory of metre which calls for detailed examination. First of all, Wordsworth concedes that metre is not an essential component of poetry, that it is only a “superadded charm”. But he rightly anticipates that he might be accused of inconsistency in advocating the use of such an artificial device as metre in poetry which uses the real language of men. Wordsworth tries to obviate this apparent inconsistency by using the same argument with which he justifies the use of natural language in poetry — universal and permanent appeal. The usefulness of metre as a device for heightening the pleasure of poetry is proved by “the concurring testimony of ages” and by “the consent of all nations.” Wordsworth then deals with the charge that since rhyme and metre make it obvious that poetry is not prose, with what logic does he argue that the languages of prose and poetry are identical? Wordsworth thinks that metrical form does not remove the language of poetry from that of prose, because “the distinction of metre is regular and uniform.” In other words, verse does differ from prose, but the

difference is due to a constant factor. Since metre is a constant factor, it can be ignored in the discussion of what is subject to in poetry, namely, its language. It is possible to write metrically regular and rhymed verse in "poetic diction" or "the language of prose." The choice of metre, according to Wordsworth, has no logical bearing on the poet's choice of language: the choice is in fact determined by other factors.

Wordsworth then proceeds to consider the advantages of metre. The absence of metre, he contends, will give a shock to the reader who has come to associate it with poetry. Many poems, for example, medieval ballads, though written on humbler subjects and in a language far more naked and simple than what we find in *Lyrical Ballads*, have given pleasure to generations of readers, presumably because they are composed in metrical language. In the "overbalance of pleasure" which such poems arouse in the reader's mind, metre plays a major role. Secondly, because of its "regularity." metre can "temper and restrain" the passion or the excitement which poetry often arouses in the mind. Another quality of metre, according to Wordsworth, is its "normality" which has the effect of cancelling the "unusual and irregular state of the mind" which is produced by poetry. Wordsworth attributes this quality to metre mainly for two reasons: metre is in itself something regular; and by association, it is connected with "a tess excited state." Moreover, the pleasure that metre by itself is capable of giving reduces in large measure the excessive pain that is often produced by moving descriptions of passion. There obviously is poetry which does not contain such moving descriptions of passion, poetry which is lighter in vain, but even in the case of such poetry metre has an important role to play in enhancing the reader's pleasure. More significantly, the very artificiality of metre, the fact that it is not a natural part of language, has an important bearing on the effect of poetry. The language which Wordsworth recommends for poetry is the real language of man; thus, its predominant characteristic is naturalness or reality. Metre, on the other hand, has a tendency "to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition." It tends to produce in the reader's mind "an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely." The presence of metre is a constant reminder to the reader that the poem in question is a work of art that put in real language; he is reading a poem and not an actual report of real life.

A striking parallel to this view of Wordsworth's can be found in eighteenth-century critical theory. In the *"*Preface*"* to his great edition of Shakespeare, Dr. Samuel Johnson while defending Shakespeare from the orthodox neo-classical critics' charge that the dramatist did not observe the so-called unities of time, place and action, observes that the delight which we derive from tragedy arises "out of our consciousness of fiction." As he puts it, "Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind." Wordsworth's view is that in poetry dealing with passion the presence of metre ensures that the reader does not commit the mistake of taking the poet's imitation for reality. This argument of Wordsworth, however, is liable to be interpreted in a way wholly unintended by the poet-critic. It can be said that it metre has the effect of increasing the consciousness of poetry's fictionality, an artificial poetic diction should also be able to produces a similar effect. But the whole point of Wordsworth's argument is that metre, when used in poetry written in the real language of men, produces a desirable effect of contrast. The contrast arises out of the simultaneous perception of the realism of the poet's language and the artificiality of the metrical form. But if both the language of poetry and the element of metre are artificial, the contrast will disappear. Wordsworth then invokes an aesthetic principle to justify this contrast between "nature" and "art" in the language and metrical form of the poetry he wants to promote: "the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude." The language which Wordsworth proposes to use in his poetry is "similar" to that of real life; but the presence of metre makes it "dissimilar." The aesthetic principle used by Wordsworth as part of his argument is actually a commonplace of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory.

Wordsworth uses two other arguments to defend his use of metre. The first argument relates to the role of metre in accentuating or reducing passion. Wordsworth says that sometimes metre can "impart passion to the words," thereby contributing to the total effect of "pleasure" created by poetry. Two of Wordsworth's observations can bring us close to his meaning. The first is that the reader has been accustomed to connect with a particular movement of metre a particular feeling. The second point is to be found in Wordsworth's account of the effect of the metre used by him in the poem, "The Thorn." As for the first point, the poet who deals with a cheerful passion and whose language is inadequate to convey that passion may use a metre which has cheerful associations;

the same consideration applies to the poet dealing with a melancholy passion. Regarding the second point, Wordsworth adds in a note that in his poem 'The Thorn', in order to ensure dramatic propriety, he has used language incommensurate with the passion and inadequate to raise the reader to a height of desirable excitement." However, in order to "impart passion to the words", the poet has used a "lyrical and rapid metre", so that an apparently quick movement will be imparted to a poem which in fact moves slowly. Wordsworth no doubt means that the rapidity of the metre will give to the words of the poem associations of excited and urgent utterance, though the words actually "move slowly", that is, are longwinded and repetitious, in keeping with the principle of dramatic propriety. Wordsworth's second major argument in defence of metre is a natural offshoot of his earlier argument regarding the regulatory role of metre. Because of the "regularity" metre and because of its association will "a less excited state," metre ensures that even the most painful descriptions of passion, as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, do not distress us to the extent of robbing us of the aesthetic pleasure conveyed by such passages. On the other hand, Samuel Richardson's novel, *Clarissa Harlowe*, wrings out the last drop of pathos from painful situations, and because it is in prose, we are reluctant to re-read or enjoy aesthetically the relevant passages. The same effect is created by an extremely popular domestic drama written in prose by Edward Moore and published in 1753. It is hardly possible, however, to attribute the cause of the difference in aesthetic effect to the presence of metre in Shakespeare and its absence in Richardson and Moore, for the artistic abilities involved are radically different; but Wordsworth's basic point, namely, that metre regulates and makes bearable, even enjoyable, extremely painful descriptions of strong passion, is not controversial at all.

Wordsworth himself admits that his theory of metre is incomplete. He does not, for example, have anything to say about the art of poets like Spenser and Milton who employ unusual rhythms in the metrical context of their poetry in order to emphasise the meaning of words. He says nothing of the art of poets like Shakespeare and Donne who skillfully use actual rhythms of speech as an effective contrast to the formal constraints of metre. Nevertheless, it has been rightly said that Wordsworth explores, more profoundly than any earlier poet or theorist, the aesthetic and psychological factors which lie behind the appeal of metre.

UNIT 16 (C): WORDSWORTH'S DEFINITION OF POETRY

Perhaps the most famous passages of the *"*Preface*"* are those in which Wordsworth describes the nature of poetry, first calling it a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and then describing it as "emotion recollected in tranquility." Often regarded as Wordsworth's definitions of poetry, these two statements have been quoted and requoted in textbook after textbook on the nature of poetry. Sometimes each of these is quoted in isolation as Wordsworth's considered opinion regarding poetry. But we are going to see, while examining in detail the full implications of each observation, that they must be taken together in order to arrive at a comprehensive idea about Wordsworth's views on the nature of poetry.

"SPONTANEOUS OVERFLOW OF POWERFUL FEELINGS

The first of Wordsworth's observations on the nature of poetry occurs early in the *"*Preface*"* and must be quoted in full to counter the tendency to isolate the phrase quoted above and take it as Wordsworth's complete definition of poetry. While speaking of "the triviality and meanness" which are often introduced into their poetry by some contemporary poets and which are justly criticized by some reviewers, Wordsworth says that though the subject matter of his own poetry is taken from humble and rustic life, it cannot be called mean or trivial, since each of his poems has "a worthy purpose". We shall soon see what Wordsworth means by "worthy purpose," but the point at issue here is the full comment on the nature of poetry: "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subject but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply." Already Wordsworth is qualifying his opening statement that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings by adding that these feelings must be accompanied by deep thought. Nevertheless, the phrase about "spontaneous overflow" has appealed to the imagination of many as the quintessential Romantic notion of poetry. The reasons for this perception are because the phrase appears to define lyric

poetry and it is the lyric which can be taken as the most characteristic poetic form of the Romantics; in fact, for most theorists of Wordsworth's generation, the lyric was the essentially poetic form, and usually the type of poetry whose attributes are ascribed to poetry in general. As M.H. Abrams has shown, the concept of poetry as the expression or overflow of feeling is to be found in almost all the important critics of the Romantic period, "in conjunction with philosophical theories as disparate as Wordsworth's sensationalism and Shelley's Platonism, the organic idealism of Coleridge and the positivism of John Stuart Mill". The ideas of spontaneity, along with sincerity, and of the integral unity of thought and feeling, are the essential criteria of poetry for the Romantics, as opposed to the neoclassic criteria of judgement, truth, perfect matching of content with preexisting poetic form. The doctrine of spontaneity or sincerity is also implied in Keats's comment that if poetry does not come as naturally as leaves to a tree, it need not come at all. But the doctrine as expressed by Wordsworth has been criticized on several grounds. After pointing out that Wordsworth modifies his initial description of poetry as spontaneous overflow by saying that it takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility, Rene Wellek observes that Wordsworth often relies on the initial inspiration, the "inward impulse", in composing his poetry. Wordsworth says that often the numbers came to him spontaneously, that they "came in such a torrent that he was unable to remember it", that he "poured out a poem truly from the heart." Nevertheless, if sincerity were the only criterion of good poetry, the passionate outpourings of love in the poems written by adolescents would have to be regarded as good poetry. Another critic, Graham Hough, observes that if good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, we have to leave Milton's *Lycidas* and People's *Rape of the Lock* out of the category of good poetry. However, as Wellek also observes, Wordsworth is not an advocate of emotionalism in the raw. He often acknowledged the share of consciousness in poetic creation. He was also in the habit of constantly and meticulously revising his verse. He declared that "my first expressions I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are best." However, in thinking of poetry as a spontaneous overflow and as taking its origin in emotion, Wordsworth advances an expressive theory of poetry, the theory that poetry is "expression", that it is in some way an outpouring of the poet's own emotions. This theory is difficult to reconcile with the poet's own other theory that the poet finds his subject matter in the lives of humble and rustic people, that he even adopts as far as possible the language of this class of people.

According to this other theory, the poet, who belongs to a different class, imitates the lives and manners and language of the rustics. This is the theory of poetry as imitation, a theory as old as Plato and Aristotle, and one of the main tenets of eighteenth-century critical theory.

"EMOTION RECOLLECTED IN TRANQUILITY"

This other famous phrase used in the *"*Preface*"* reinforces the view that for Wordsworth poetry is not just a verbal response to the stimulus of passion or emotion. While justifying his use of metre and commenting on the pleasure it produces, Wordsworth offers this account of the nature of poetry : "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility : the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment". The point of quoting such a long passage will, I hope, be gradually obvious. But first I want you to notice that Wordsworth himself links the two definitions of poetry to suggest that they should be taken together. Various stages in the composition of poetry are clearly indicated in this passage. First, there is what we may call a primary emotion aroused by some object, experience, scene, etc. Secondly, there is the stage of recollection of this emotion in tranquility; in other words, the poet remembers that on a particular occasion, he felt a particular emotion. The third stage is one in which the state of tranquil recollection is transformed into one of actual emotion. The transformed emotion may be called a secondary emotion, which is kindred or similar to the primary emotion. The fourth stage is that of actual composition. Finally, the emotion arising from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, which Wordsworth does not specifically identify.

The stages described above, especially the first three stages, can be felt to be part of common experience. When we recollect a personal loss, the original sorrow is experienced again; when we remember a personal humiliation, the original emotion of anger is aroused again. The fourth stage is experienced by the poet exclusively. Wordsworth's description of the final stage

has invited much critical comment, especially with regard to the "various pleasures" and "the state of enjoyment". It may be argued that the pleasures are aroused by the metrical forms of poetry, as Wordsworth has previously shown. But such pleasures arise in the reader's mind, while in this context Wordsworth is obviously thinking of the poet's experience during composition. An explanation of the pleasures felt by the poet may be found in Wordsworth's sonnet beginning "There is a pleasure in poetic pains." That sonnet expresses the poet's satisfaction in "the sense of difficulty overcome". The difficulty is caused by the problem of finding the right expression for what the poet wants to convey:

"How oft the malice of one luckless word
Pursues the enthusiast to the social board,
Haunts him belated on the silent plains?
Yet he repines not, if his thought stands clear,
At last, of hindrance and obscurity."

The poet experiences pleasure after embodying his thought successfully in appropriate language. This pleasure is unique to the poet, and not shared by the reader, who does not experience the poet's sense of achievement.

In the light of the lines on poetry taking its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility, the process of Wordsworth's own poetic composition may now be briefly examined. The poet's emotion is aroused on some particular occasion by some experience. This experience is in some way connected with an important subject. If the subject is not important, the poet's feelings would not be powerful enough to be an incentive to the composition of a poem. At a later stage, the original emotion is recollected in tranquility. During the interval, the emotion has been evaluated as "important", "connected with important subjects". The mood of tranquility gives way to a rekindling of the primary emotion, and this signals the moment of composition. The process of composition is accompanied by a pleasure which arises out of poetic pains. Wordsworth never specifically mentions the length of time between the primary emotion and its rekindling; but it is not necessarily a long one. Wordsworth wrote many poems almost as soon as he was drawn by the subject, for example, "The Thorn", "Tintern Abbey." But it is significant that both poems involve recollection: the former is prompted by the recollection of a ballad, while the latter is inspired by

an earlier visit to the landscape. Some other poems of his, such as *The Waggoner*, emerge "From hiding-places ten years deep."

VALIDITY OF THE DEFINITION

As for the validity of the theory of poetic composition, indicated in the two famous definitions of poetry, critical opinions differ. There are many poems to which the theory is applicable. Keats's Ode "To Autumn" seems to have been written almost as soon as the poet experienced the autumnal scene. On the other hand, Shelley's elegy *Adonais*, though prompted by Keats's death, has at its heart Shelley's remembered anger at the critical maltreatment of his own poetry. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is based on the remembered stimulus of the song of the bird, while the poem also draws upon other painful memories. As we have seen, some of Wordsworth's own poems derive from emotion long recollected in tranquillity, while some other poems of his seem to have been composed on the spur of the moment. Therefore, Wordsworth's theory of poetry, though applicable to many great poems of his and other poets', is not generally valid. But T. S. Eliot's dismissal of Wordsworth's theory of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility is patently unfair, because Eliot's own view of the poet's mind as a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings and images is not very different from that of Wordsworth. Indeed, W.J.B. Owen has shown that many later theories of poetry are essentially similar to that of Wordsworth. To give two examples, T.S. Eliot says in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that "certain images" which the poet has used in his own verse "recur, charged with emotion, rather than others"; another major twentieth-century poet, Stephen Spender, says in *The Making of a Poem* that "our ability to imagine is our ability to remember what we have already once experienced and to apply it to some different situation".

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp.*
2. Blades, John. *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads.*
3. Brown, Marshall. Ed. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol V.*

4. Mason, Michael. Ed. *Lyrical Ballads.*
5. Owen, W.J.B. *Wordsworth as Critic.*
6. Owen ed. *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism.*
7. Tillotson, Geoffrey. *Augustan Poetic Diction.*
8. Wellek, Rene. *A History of Modern Criticism, Vol. III.*
9. Murray, Patrick. *Literary Criticism.*
10. Watson, John. *English Poetry of the Romantic Period.*

The author of the module gratefully acknowledges his profound debt to the books mentioned above.

ASSIGNMENTS

Short-answer Type

1. Briefly indicate the historical importance of the "Preface".
2. How far did Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborate in the writing of the "Preface"?
3. Bring out the main characteristics of poetic diction.
4. What was the original form of Wordsworth's statement of his poetic aims? How many times was the ""Preface"" revised?

Essay Type Questions

1. In what sense is Wordsworth's " "Preface"" a Romantic manifesto?
2. Why does Wordsworth reject poetic diction? What kind of language does he propose in its place?
3. Why does Wordsworth adopt a selection of the real language of men in his poetry?

4. “There neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”. Elucidate.
5. How does Wordsworth defend the use of metre in his own poetry? Why is the defence necessary?
6. How does Wordsworth describe a poet?
7. Summarize Wordsworth’s observations on the relationship between poetry and general truth.
8. Wordsworth defines poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and as taking its origin in “emotion recollected in tranquility”. Do you find any contradiction between the two definitions? Give a reasoned answer.

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