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Unit – X

PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

1. Aristotle : *Poetics*
2. Dryden : *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*
3. Coleridge : *Biographia Literaria* Ch. XIV and Ch. XVII
4. Keats : Letters (from *English Critical Tradition* – Macmillan)
5. T. S. Eliot : "Metaphysical Poets"
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[See **Appendix** for all eleven critical texts in full]

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1. Aristotle : *Poetics*

Introduction:

Aristotle (born 384 BCE, Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece—died 322, Chalcis, Euboea) was one of the greatest **Greek philosopher**s who ever lived and the first genuine scientist in history. He made pioneering contributions to all fields of philosophy and science, he invented the field of **formal logic,** and he identified the various scientific disciplines and explored their relationships to each other. Aristotle was also a teacher and founded his own school in Athens, known as the **Lyceum**.

Aristotle's most famous **teacher was Plato** (c. 428–c. 348 BCE), who himself had been a student of Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE). Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, whose lifetimes spanned a period of only about 150 years, remain among the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy. **Aristotle's most famous student** was Philip II's son Alexander, later to be known as **Alexander the Great**, a military genius who eventually conquered the entire Greek world as well as North Africa and the Middle East. Aristotle's most important philosophical student was probably Theophrastus, who became head of the Lyceum about 323.

A disciple of Socrates, he was deeply distressed when Socrates was condemned to death on a charge of having corrupted the young by his teaching. In fact Socrates had only made them critical of the existing order. His celebrated technique of instruction was by question and answer, to probe those he would educate and elicit from them admissions which, when analysed, revealed underlying ignorance and misunderstanding. This **'Socratic' method** was adopted by Plato. He presented his **teaching in dialogues**, using Socrates as the central spokesman. Socrates lures his listeners into expressions of opinion, then dissects them, and brings to light contradiction, absurdity, or shallowness inherent in what they have said. The utilisation of this method makes for entertaining reading, but it can easily mislead the inexpert reader.

The Socratic Method:

- It is an argumentative dialogue involving question and answer to foster critical thinking, is also called the **elenchus** (logical refutation).

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- To get to the heart of the subject matter in a discussion, the Greek philosopher **Socrates** (469–399 BC) asked the interlocutors a series of probing questions until a contradiction surfaced.
- This dialectic method **helps unmask the fallacy** behind the initial assumptions of the interlocutors and helps them see the varied aspects of a given topic. The participants, thus, are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills through systematic reasoning. To achieve this end, Socrates pretended to be ignorant initially and let others speak their mind fully, thereby revealing their inconsistencies ultimately. This ironic practice of his came to be called the '**Socratic irony**' (feigning ignorance to expose others' ignorance).
- In sum, Socrates' method of participatory learning through arguments and counter-arguments is called the Socratic Method, an enduring contribution to Western philosophy. Nevertheless, the researchers are still haunted by the '**Socratic problem**' (attempts to work out the identity of the real Socrates and his philosophies through solid sources).

A Treatise on Tragedy

The Greek philosopher **Aristotle**, in his treatise on tragedy ***Poetics***, defines 'tragedy' as:

- "A tragedy, then, is a *mimesis* of an action – that is, it is [morally] serious and purposeful, having magnitude; uttered in heightened language and [using] each of its resources [i.e. dialogue and song] separately in the various sections [of the play], [the action presented] by people acting rather than by narration; bringing about through [a process of] pity and fear [in the events enacted] the purification of those destructive or painful acts" (Chapter VI of *Poetics*; George Whalley's translation).

- **"The Six Aspects of Tragedy-making":**

  For Aristotle, there are six major elements in tragedy:

  1. plot (*mythos*)
  2. character (*ethos*)
  3. thought (*dianoia*)
  4. diction (*lexis*)
  5. music (*melos*)
  6. spectacle (*opsis*)

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- '**Plot**' (an aesthetic arrangement of dramatic actions) is considered by Aristotle as 'the first principle' and '**the soul of tragedy'**, and it should have the unity of action ("an artistic whole"). From *Poetics*:

  "We have already agreed that tragedy is a mimesis of an action - purposeful and whole - and of magnitude (for it is possible for a thing to be whole and yet not have magnitude). **A 'whole' is [something] that has a beginning, a middle and an end.** A 'beginning' is what does not necessarily have to follow anything else, but after which something naturally is or happens; an 'end', the other way round, is what naturally is after something else, either of necessity or usually, but has nothing after it; a 'middle' is what comes after something else and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, therefore, must neither begin at an accidental starting-point nor come to an accidental conclusion, but must have followed the principles we have given."

- To Aristotle's "unity of action", the 16th- and 17th-century critics of drama added two other unities (time and place) and constituted "**the three unities**".

  1. **The unity of time**:
     the time represented in a play should be restricted to two or three hours (the time taken to act out the play) or to a maximum of twenty-four hours (the duration of a single day).

  2. **The unity of place**:
     the action of a play should be restricted to a single location.
  3. **The unity of action**:
     the organic whole of a play consisting of a beginning, a middle and an end.

- **Other Aspects of Tragedy** (Aristotle): mimesis, hamartia, anagnorisis, peripeteia and catharsis

  1. **Mimesis**:
     - Imitation: Art is an imitation of life.
     - Literary works imitate (or mirror) reality and reproduce it aesthetically.
     - At the beginning of *Poetics,* Aristotle notes that "**epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most forms of flute and lyre playing all happen to be, in general, imitations**."

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- While **Plato** posits that imitation is **two steps removed from the truth** or realm of the ideal (the poet imitating an object that is itself an imitation of an ideal form), **Aristotle** contends that poetry is more universal, more general than things as they are. For "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may. happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity."
- It is the historian, not the poet, who writes of what has already happened. The **poet's task**, declares Aristotle, is to write of what could happen. "Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."
- Aristotle explains the origin of poetry as the natural consequence of humanity's love of imitation, tune, and rhythm. People enjoy looking at accurate copies of things, he says, even when the things are themselves repulsive, such as the lowest animals and corpses. The philosopher accounts for this enjoyment by claiming that it is the result of people's love of learning; in seeing accurate copies, one learns better what things are. This view is in **opposition to Plato's idea that art corrupts the mind because it presents copies of copies of reality** (physical objects being considered mere copies of the universal idea or kind).
- Aristotle believed that universals, or characteristics, are to be found only in things, while Plato thought that the universals had some sort of separate existence.
- **Comedy** represents inferior persons in that they are a laughable species of the ugly. The comic character makes mistakes or is in some way ugly, but not so seriously as to awaken pity or fear.
- **Epic poetry** differs from tragedy in that it has a single meter and is narrative in form. A further difference results from the Greek convention that a tragedy encompasses events taking place within a single day, while the time span of the epic poem is unlimited.
- A significant work on this subject is ***Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*** by the German scholar **Erich Auerbach**.
- In contrast, **Oscar Wilde** wrote in his essay "**The Decay of Lying**" (1891): "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals"; "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life"; "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art."

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2. **Hamartia**:
   - The hero's **tragic flaw**s (such as ignorance, pride, misjudgement)
   - Oedipus was a great deal ignorant of his crimes. Nevertheless, in the first place, it was his overweening pride (hubris) that was responsible for his fall.
   - The arrogant Oedipus refused to step aside and let King Laius pass at the junction of three roads. In the subsequent confrontation, he killed Laius (who was his father). Then, he entered Thebes, solved the Sphinx's riddle, and married the widowed Queen Jocasta (who was his mother).

3. **Anagnorisis**:
   - The tragic hero's **moment of recognition** (of truth)
   - Oedipus recognises that King Laius was his father and it dawns on the tragic hero that he was the one who killed him at the place where three roads meet. So, Oedipus comes to know that he has brought the plague upon Thebes.
   - Further, he realizes to his doom that he has married his own mother and had four children (Eteocles, Polyneices, Antigone and Ismene) with her, and thus the beginning of his downfall (peripeteia).

4. **Peripeteia**:
   - The sudden **reversal of the hero's fortunes** and situations, which, in tragedy, initiates the fall of the protagonist
   - After realising the truth (anagnorisis), Oedipus has to face the tragic consequences of his actions (as a murderer of his father and as a violator of the incest taboo).
   - Subsequently, the death of Queen Jocasta (by hanging) devastates Oedipus, who then blinds himself with her golden brooches. Furthermore, Oedipus was exiled. In the end, the blind Oedipus has to leave Thebes.

5. **Catharsis**:
   - Literally means 'spiritual cleansing'; the **evoking of pity and fear in the audience;** the tragic end of Oedipus moves the spectators.
   - The chorus in *Oedipus Rex* asks the audience to take note of Oedipus's pathetic end and to learn from his mistakes:
     "And none can be called happy until that day when he carries
     His happiness down to the grave in peace."

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Excerpts from *Poetics*: [See **Appendix** for full text]

A tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious and has a wholeness in its extent, in language that is pleasing (though in distinct ways in its different parts), enacted rather than narrated, **culminating, by means of pity and fear**, in the cleansing of these passions . . . So tragedy is an imitation not of people, but of action, life, and happiness or unhappiness, while happiness and unhappiness have their being in activity, and come to completion not in a quality but in some sort of action . . .

An extended whole is that which has **a beginning, middle and end**. But a beginning is something which, in itself, does not need to be after anything else, while something else naturally is the case or comes about after it; and an end is its contrary, something which in itself is of such a nature as to be after something else, either necessarily or for the most part, but to have nothing else after it – It is therefore needful that well put-together stories not begin from just anywhere at random, nor end just anywhere at random . . .

Since it is peculiar to tragedy to be an imitation of actions arousing pity and fear …and since the former concerns someone who is undeserving of suffering and the latter concerns someone like us . . . **the story that works well must . . . depict a change from good to bad fortune**, resulting not from badness one that arises from the actions themselves, the astonishment coming about through things that are likely, as in **the Oedipus of Sophocles**. A revelation, as the word indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, that produces either friendship or hatred in people marked out for good or bad fortune. The most beautiful of revelations occurs when **reversals of condition** come about at the same time, as is the case in the Oedipus.

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2. John Dryden : *An Essay Of Dramatic Poesy* (1668)

Introduction:

Samuel Johnson called **Dryden "the father of English Criticism"** and said that "modern English prose begins here" in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. In "The Life of Dryden", Johnson remarks: "**He found it [English poetry] brick, and left it marble**."

John Dryden, (born August 9 [August 19, New Style], 1631, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England—died May 1 [May 12], 1700, London), **the first Poet Laureate of England** (1668–1689), dramatist, and literary critic who so dominated the literary scene of his day that it came to be known as the Age of Dryden (**Restoration Age) (1660–1700).**

His **first play, *The Wild Gallant,*** a farcical comedy with some strokes of humour and a good deal of licentious dialogue, was produced in 1663. It was a comparative failure, but in January 1664 he had some share in the success of ***The Indian Queen***, a heroic tragedy in rhymed couplets in which he had collaborated with Sir Robert Howard, his brother-in-law. Dryden was soon to successfully exploit this new and popular genre, with its conflicts between love and honour and its lovely heroines before whose charms the blustering heroes sank down in awed submission. In the spring of 1665 Dryden had his own first outstanding success with ***The Indian Emperour***, a play that was a sequel to *The Indian Queen.*

As late as November 1675, Dryden staged his last and most intelligent example of the genre, ***Aureng-Zebe***. In this play he abandoned the use of rhymed couplets for that of blank verse. Equally fine in a different mode was his tragedy ***All for Love: The World Well Lost*** (1677), **based on** Shakespeare's ***Antony and Cleopatra*** and written in a flowing but controlled blank verse. He had earlier adapted *The Tempest* (1667), and later he reworked yet another Shakespeare play, *Troilus and Cressida* (1679). His ***Annus Mirabilis*** (1667, 'year of miracles') commemorates the year 1665-66: the Londoners' survival of the Great Fire.

As **poet laureate** in those critical months Dryden could not stand aside, and in November 1681 he came to the support of the king with his ***Absalom and Achitophel***, so drawing upon himself the wrath of the Whigs. Adopting as his framework the Old Testament story of King David (Charles II), his favourite son Absalom (Monmouth), and the false Achitophel (Shaftesbury), who persuaded Absalom to revolt against his father, Dryden gave a satirical

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version of the events of the past few years as seen from the point of view of the king and his Tory ministers and yet succeeded in maintaining the heroic tone suitable to the king and to the seriousness of the political situation.

In the same year, anonymously and apparently without Dryden's authority, there also appeared in print his famous extended lampoon, ***Mac Flecknoe***, written about four years earlier. What triggered this devastating attack on the Whig playwright **Thomas Shadwell** has never been satisfactorily explained. This hilarious comic lampoon was both **the first English mock-heroic poem** and the immediate ancestor of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*.

In his longest poem, the beast fable ***The Hind and the Panther*** (1687), he argued the case for his adopted church against the Church of England and the sects. His earlier ***Religio Laici*** (1682) had argued in eloquent couplets for the consolations of Anglicanism and against unbelievers, Protestant dissenters, and Roman Catholics. Biographical debate about Dryden has often focused on his shifts of political and religious allegiance; critics, like his hostile contemporaries, have sometimes charged him with opportunism.

His last work for Tonson was ***Fables Ancient and Modern*** (1700), which were mainly verse adaptations from the works of Ovid, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Giovanni Boccaccio, introduced with a critical preface. He died in 1700 and was buried in Westminster Abbey between Chaucer and Abraham Cowley in **the Poets' Corner**.

Heroic couplet (decasyllabic couplet)

- a 2-line stanza (a rhyming pair of lines) in iambic pentameter
- the commonest poetry form in English
- first used in English by Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women*
- perfected by Dryden and Pope in the 17th century
- Pope made 'heroic couplet' a self-contained or closed unit (two symmetrically balanced lines conveying a complete thought). The thought in this form never runs on to the next line. Example:

  from Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*:

  All human things are subject to decay,

  And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.

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In *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden **defined 'play**' as "A just and lively Image of Humane Nature, representing its Passions and Humors, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is subject; for the Delight and Instruction of Mankind.

An Essay of Dramatic Poesy is written as **a debate on drama among four friends** – Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander – on River Thames while taking refuge on a barge during the battle between the British and Dutch navies.

Crites ("critic") is identified with **Sir Robert Howard**, Dryden's brother-in-law. Eugenius (well-born") refers to **Charles Sackville**, who was Lord Buckhurst and Dryden's patron. Lisideius represents **Sir Charles Sedley**. Neander ("new man") is **Dryden** himself.

Crites speaks	on behalf of ancient writers;
Eugenius	on modern writers;
Lisideius	on the merits of French drama;
Neander	on the merits of English drama and the value of rhyme in drama.

The debate comes to an end when the barge reaches Somerset-stairs. "Walking thence together to the Piazze, they parted there; Eugenius and Lisideius to some pleasant appointment they had made, and Crites and Neander to their several lodgings."

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

Lisideius . . . conceived a Play ought to be, ***A just and lively Image of Humane Nature, representing its Passions and Humors, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is subject; for the Delight and Instruction of Mankind.***

Crites, being desired by the Company to begin, spoke **on behalf of the Ancients**, in this manner: Certainly, to imitate the Ancients well, much labor and long study is required . . . Those Ancients have been **faithful Imitators** and **wise Observers** of that Nature, which is so torn and ill represented in our Plays, they have handed down to us a perfect resemblance of

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her; which we, like ill Copiers, neglecting to look on, have rendered monstrous and disfigured.

Aristotle ['s *Poetics* and] Horace's *Art of Poetry* . . . "Out of these two has been extracted the Famous Rules which the French call, *Des Trois Unitez*, or, **The Three Unities**, which ought to be observed in every Regular Play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action.

"The **unity of Time** they comprehend in **twenty-four hours**, the compass of a Natural Day . . . all Plays are acted on the Theater in a space of time much within the compass of hours, that Play is to be thought the nearest imitation of Nature, whose Plot or Action is confined within that time . . . For the **Second Unity**, which is that **of place**, the Ancients meant by it, That the Scene ought to be continued through the Play, in the same place where it was laid in the beginning: for the Stage, on which it is represented, being but **one and the same place**, it is unnatural to conceive it many . . .As for the **third Unity** which is that **of Action**, the Ancients . . . the Poet is to aim at one great and **complete action**, to the carrying on of which all things in his Play, even the very obstacles, are to be subservient . . . For two Actions equally labored and driven on by the Writer, would destroy the unity of the Poem; it would be no longer one Play, but two . . .There ought to be one action, says [the French tragedian Pierre] Corneille, that is one complete action which leaves the mind of the Audience in a full repose . . .

"If by these Rules (to omit many other drawn from the Precepts and Practice of the Ancients) we should judge our modern Plays; 'Tis probable, that few of them would endure the trial . . .

I must desire you to take notice, that the greatest man of the last age, **Ben Jonson**, was willing to give place to them in all things: He was not only a professed **Imitator of Horace**, but a learned Plagiary of all the others . . .and whether you consider the bad Plays of our Age, or regard the good ones of the last, both the best and worst of the Modern Poets will equally instruct you to esteem the Ancients."

Crites had no sooner left speaking, but **Eugenius** who waited with some impatience for it, thus began: [W]e must make use of the advantages we have received from them [the Ancients]; but to these assistances we have joined our own industry; for (had we sat down with a dull imitation of them) we might then have lost somewhat of the old perfection, but never acquired any that was new.

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[I]n the first place . . . **the Greek Poesy**, which Crites has affirmed to have arrived to perfection in the Reign of the old Comedy, was so far from it, that **the distinction of it into Acts was not known to them**. . .

All we know of it is from the singing of their Chorus, and that too is so uncertain that in some of their Plays we have reason to conjecture they sung more than five times: **Aristotle** indeed **divides the integral parts of a Play into four**: First, The Protasis or **entrance**, which gives light only to the Characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action: Secondly, The Epitasis, or **working up of the Plot** where the Play grows warmer: the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass: Thirdly, the Catastasis, or **Counterturn**, which destroys that expectation, embroils the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you, as you may have observed in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage; it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness than it brought them on: Lastly, the Catastrophe, which the Grecians called *lysis*, the French *le denouement*, and we the discovery or **unraveling of the Plot**: there you see all things settling again upon their first foundations, and the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the Play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it.

[W]hen I condemn **the Ancients**, I declare it is not altogether because **they have not five Acts to every Play**, but because they have not confined themselves to one certain number.

Next, for **the Plot**, which Aristotle called *to mythos* and often . . . *synthesis* [the ordering of the actions], and from him the Romans *Fabula*. . .**in their Tragedies** it was only some Tale derived from Thebes or Troy, or at least some thing that happened in those two Ages; which **was worn so threadbare by the Pens of all the Epic Poets**, and even by Tradition itself of the Talkative Greeklings (as Ben Jonson calls them) . . . the Audience . . . sat with a yawning kind of expectation . . . their appetites were cloyed with the same dish, and the Novelty being gone, the pleasure vanished: so that one main end of Dramatic Poesy in its Definition, which was to cause Delight, as of consequence destroyed.

In their Comedies, the Romans generally **borrowed their Plots from the Greek Poets** . . . some god . . . com[e] down in a machine [*deus ex machina*]. . .the **Characters are** indeed the Imitations of Nature, but **so narrow** as if they had imitated only an Eye or an Hand, and did not dare to venture on the lines of a Face, or the Proportion of a Body.

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[T]he **Unity of Place**, however it might be practiced by them, was never any of their Rules. . . The unity of time, even **Terence himself** (who was the best and the most regular of them) **has neglected**: His *Heautontimoroumenos* or *Self-Punisher* takes up visibly two days . . . Now the Plots of their Plays being narrow, and the persons few, [the unity of Action] one of their Acts was written in a less compass than one of our well-wrought Scenes . . .

[The Ancients] have failed both in laying of their Plots, and managing of them, swerving from the Rules of their own Art, by misrepresenting Nature to us, in which they have ill satisfied one intention of a Play, which was delight, so in the instructive part they have erred worse: instead of punishing Vice and rewarding Virtue, they have often shown a Prosperous Wickedness, and Unhappy Piety: **They have set before us a bloody image of revenge** in Medea, and given her Dragons to convey her safe from punishment. A Priam and Astyanax murdered, and Cassandra ravished, and the lust and murder ending in the victory of him that acted them: In short, there is no indecorum in any of our modern Plays, which if I would excuse, I could not shadow with some Authority from the Ancients.

And one farther note of them let me leave you: **Tragedies and Comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same person**; but he who found his genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain, that I need not instance to you, that Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence, never any of them writ a Tragedy; Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Seneca, never meddled with Comedy; the Sock and Buskin were not worn by the same Poet . . .

[F]or Love Scenes you will find few among them, their Tragic Poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with Lust, Cruelty, Revenge, Ambition, and those bloody actions they produced; which were more **capable of raising horror than compassion in an audience** . . .

Eugenius's opinion concerning the Ancients . . . were ended.

Lisideius, "[W]ho had writ best, **the French** or English, forty years ago, I should have been of your opinion, and adjudged the honor to our own Nation; but since that time," (said he, turning towards Neander) . . .

Corneille and some other Frenchmen reformed their Theatre, (which before was as much below ours as it now surpasses it and the rest of Europe) . . . In the unity of time you find

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them so scrupulous . . . in the unity of place they are full as scrupulous . . . The unity of Action in all their Plays is yet more conspicuous, for **they do not burden them with under-plots, as the English do**; which is the reason why many Scenes of our Tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main Plot; and that we see two distinct webs in a Play. . . and two actions, that is, two Plays carried on together, to the confounding of the Audience . . . **There is no Theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English Tragicomedy, 'tis a Drama of our own invention**, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so, here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion; a third of honor, and fourth a Duel: Thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of Bedlam.

I have noted one great advantage they have had in the Plotting of their Tragedies; that is, they are always grounded upon some known History . . . Another thing in which the French differ from us and from the Spaniards, is, that **they do not embarrass, or cumber themselves with too much Plot**. . .by pursuing close one argument, which is not cloyed with many turns, the French have **gained more liberty for verse**, in which they write: they have leisure to dwell upon a subject which deserves it; and to represent the passions . . . without being hurried from one thing to another . . .

Not that I commend **narrations** in general, but there are **two sorts** of them; one of those things which are antecedent to the Play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us, but, 'tis a fault . . . because we see they are seldom listened to by the Audience, and that is many times the ruin of the Play . . . and indeed it is somewhat unreasonable that they should be put to so much trouble . . . But there is another sort of Relations, that is, of things happening in the Action of the Play, and supposed to be done behind the Scenes: and this is many times both convenient and beautiful: for, by it, the French avoid the tumult, which we are subject to in England, by representing Duels, Battles, and the like . . . For what is more ridiculous than to represent an Army with a Drum and five men behind it . . .

I have observed that **in all our Tragedies, the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die**; 'tis the most Comic part of the whole Play. . . . there are many actions which can never be imitated to a just height: dying especially is a thing which none but a Roman Gladiator could naturally perform upon the Stage when he did not imitate or represent, but naturally do it; and therefore it is better to omit the representation of it.

Lisideius concluded in this manner; and **Neander** after a little pause thus answered him:

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But of late years Molière, the younger Corneille, Quinault, and some others, have been imitating of afar off the quick turns and **graces of the English Stage**. They have mixed their serious Plays with mirth, like our Tragicomedies since the death of Cardinal Richelieu . . .

A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait upon a journey, that we may go on with greater ease. A Scene of mirth mixed with Tragedy has the same effect upon us which our music has betwixt the Acts, and that we find a relief to us from the best Plots and language of the Stage, if the discourses have been long . . . to the honor of our Nation . . . **we have invented . . . for the Stage** than was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any Nation, which is **Tragicomedy**.

And this leads me to wonder why Lisideius and many others should cry up the barrenness of the French Plots above the variety and copiousness of the English. Their Plots are single, they carry on one design which is pushed forward by all the Actors, every Scene in the Play contributing and moving towards it: **Ours, besides the main design, have under-plots** or by-concernments, of less considerable Persons, and Intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main Plot: just as they say the Orb of the fixed Stars, and those of the Planets, though they have motions of their own . . .

[O]ur variety, if well ordered, will **afford a greater pleasure to the audience** . . . As for his other argument, that by pursuing one single Theme they gain an advantage to express and work up the passions . . . I confess their verses are to me the coldest I have ever read . . . their Speeches being so many declamations, which tire us with length; so that instead of persuading us to grieve for their imaginary Heroes, we are concerned for our own trouble, as we are in the tedious visits of bad company; we are in pain till they are gone.

As for Comedy, Repartee is one of its chiefest graces; the greatest pleasure of the Audience is a chase of wit kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed. And this our forefathers, if not we, have had in Fletcher's Plays, to a much higher degree of perfection than the French Poets can arrive at.

'Tis very true what he has urged, that one character in all Plays, even without the Poet's care, will have advantage of all the others; and that the design of the whole Drama will chiefly depend on it. But this hinders not that there may be more shining characters in the Play many

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persons of a second magnitude, nay, some so very near, so almost equal to the first, that greatness may be opposed to greatness, and all the persons be made considerable, not only by their quality, but their action. **'Tis evident that the more the persons are, the greater will be the variety, of the Plot.**

I must acknowledge with him, that the French have reason when they hide that part of the action which would occasion too much tumult upon the Stage, and choose rather to have it made known by the narration to the Audience. . . . To conclude **on this subject of Relations**, if we are to be blamed for showing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for discovering too little of it . . .

Discourse of the three Unities . . . by their **servile observations** of the unities of time and place, and integrity of Scenes, they have **brought upon themselves that dearth of Plot, and narrowness of Imagination**, which may be observed in all their Plays. How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of hours? There is **time to be allowed also for maturity of design**, which amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in Tragedy cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning. . . by tying themselves strictly to the unity of place, and unbroken Scenes they are forced many times to omit some beauties which cannot be shown where the Act began; but might, if the Scene were interrupted, and the Stage cleared for the persons to enter in another place . . . and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there; As, suppose it were the King's Bed-chamber, yet the meanest man in the Tragedy must come and dispatch his business rather than in the Lobby or Court-yard (which is fitter for him) for fear the Stage should be cleared, and the Scenes broken.

[T]he Plots, our own are fuller of variety . . . We have borrowed nothing from them; our Plots are weaved in English Looms: we endeavor therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from **Shakespeare and Fletcher**: the copiousness and well-knitting of the intrigues we have from **[Ben] Jonson** . . .(not to name our old Comedies before Shakespeare, which were all writ in verse of six feet, or Alexandrines, such as the French now use) I can show in Shakespeare, many Scenes of rhyme together, and the like in Ben Jonson's Tragedies: In *Catiline* and *Sejanus* sometimes thirty or forty lines . . . Fletcher's Pastoral of *The Faithful Shepherdess*; which is for the most part Rhyme, though not refined to

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that purity to which it hath since been brought: And these examples are enough to clear us from a servile imitation of the French.

To begin then with **Shakespeare**; he was the man **who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul**. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.

Beaumont and Fletcher of whom I am next to speak, had with the advantage of Shakespeare's wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study. . . .

As for [**Ben**]**Jonson** . . . Humor was his proper Sphere . . .Having thus spoken of the Author, I proceed to the examination of his Comedy, *The Silent Woman*. . . . The action of the Play is entirely one; the end or aim of which is the settling of Morose's Estate on Dauphine. The Intrigue of it is the greatest and most noble of any pure unmixed Comedy in any Language ...

Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.

I am of opinion, that **Rhyme** is unnatural in a Play, because Dialogue there is presented as the effect of sudden thought. For a Play is the imitation of Nature; and since no man, without premeditation speaks in Rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the Stage . . . For this Reason, says Aristotle, 'tis best to write Tragedy in that kind of Verse which is the least such, or which is nearest Prose: and this amongst the Ancients was the Iambic, and with us is blank verse, or the measure of verse, kept exactly without rhyme. These numbers therefore are fittest for a Play . . .**Rhyme is incapable of expressing the greatest thoughts naturally, and the lowest it cannot with any grace**. . .

[I]n serious Plays [i.e. tragedies] where the subject and characters are great, and the Plot unmixed with mirth, which might allay or divert these concernments which are produced, **Rhyme is there as natural**, and more effectual than blank Verse. . . . Rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to Epic Poesy cannot equally be proper to Dramatic, unless we could suppose all men born so much more than Poets, that verses should be made in them, not by them.

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I answer you therefore, by distinguishing betwixt what is nearest to **the nature of Comedy**, which is the imitation of common persons and ordinary speaking, and what is nearest the nature of a serious Play: this last is indeed the representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher pitch. The Plot, the Characters, the Wit, the Passions, the Descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the Poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. **Tragedy** we know is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly, **Heroic Rhyme** [heroic couplet] is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.

[T]he dispute betwixt the **Epic Poesy and the Dramatic**. . .The Genus of them is the same, a just and lively Image of human nature, in its Actions, Passions, and traverses of Fortune: so is the end, namely for the delight and benefit of Mankind. The Characters and Persons are still the same, viz. the greatest of both sorts, only the manner of acquainting us with those Actions, Passions and Fortunes is different. Tragedy performs it *viva voce*, or by action, in Dialogue, wherein it excels the Epic Poem which does it chiefly by narration, and therefore is not so lively an Image of Human Nature.

* * *

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3. Coleridge : *Biographia Literaria* Ch. XIV and Ch. XVII

Biographia Literaria: Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions **(1817)** was initially conceived in 1814 as a preface to *Sibylline Leaves*.

Introduction:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (born October 21, 1772, Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England—died July 25, 1834, Highgate, near London), English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher. His *Lyrical Ballads*, written with William Wordsworth, heralded the English Romantic movement, and his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is the most significant work of general literary criticism produced in the English **Romantic period (1798 – 1832)**. In it, Coleridge argued that poetry has its "**immediate object pleasure, not truth**".

Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* anonymously in **1798**. The French Revolution (1789–1799) was one of the major sources of inspiration for them.
The first volume of ***Lyrical Ballads*** (1798) contains **23 poems** of which 19 were written by Wordsworth and 4 by Coleridge. It opens with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and closes with Wordsworth's "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey"
The 4 poems by Coleridge:

1. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (in seven parts)
2. "The Foster-Mother's Tale"
3. "The Nightingale: A Conversational Poem"
4. "The Dungeon"

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

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He composed under the influence of laudanum the mysterious poetic fragment known as "**Kubla Khan.**" During the autumn and winter of 1797–98, he wrote his most famous poem, **"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"**, drawing upon the ballad form. The main narrative tells how a sailor who has committed a crime against the life principle by slaying an **albatross** suffers from torments, physical and mental, in which the nature of his crime is made known to him. From "Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

In his Gothic ballad entitled "**Christabel,**" he aimed to show how naked energy might be redeemed through contact with a spirit of innocent love

Lake Poets

- Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey lived in the Lake District and later came to known as "Lake poets".
- With his friend **Southey, Coleridge** devised a utopian scheme: **Pantisocracy,** ('all of equal power'), an egalitarian community where all rule equally. But, the project didn't materialise because of its unviability.
- Coleridge and Southey collaborated in the three-act play ***The Fall of Robespierre*** (1974).

Asra poems

- Written by **S. T. Coleridge**, these poems which include the poem "To Asra".
- They register his affection for Sara Hutchinson. 'Asra' is an anagram of 'Sara'.
- Sara Hutchinson was the younger sister of Mary Hutchinson. Wordsworth and Mary got married later.
- Coleridge's "**Dejection: An Ode"**, which discusses his feelings of love for Sara Hutchinson, was sometimes grouped under 'Asra poems'.

Watchman was another a short-lived journal run by Coleridge in 1796.
Coleridge published **a periodical**, ***The Friend***, from June 1809 to March 1810 and ceased only when Sara Hutchinson, who had been acting as amanuensis, found the strain of the

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relationship too much for her and retired to her brother's farm in Wales. Coleridge, resentful that Wordsworth should apparently have encouraged his sister-in-law's withdrawal, resolved shortly afterward to terminate his working relationship with William and Dorothy Wordsworth and to settle in London again.

His **plays** include

1. *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794; with Robert Southey),
2. *Remorse* (1813)

From Hazlitt's "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (1823)

- The next day **Wordsworth** arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and **Don Quixote-like**. He was **quaintly dressed** (according to the costume of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons.
- Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more dramatic the other more lyrical. **Coleridge** has told me that he himself **liked to compose in walking over uneven ground**, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas **Wordsworth** always wrote (if he could) **walking up and down a straight gravel walk**, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption.

The Perfect Critic

- In his essay "The Perfect Critic" (in *The Sacred Wood*, 1920), T. S. Eliot writes:

  "Coleridge was perhaps **the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the last**. After Coleridge we have Matthew Arnold; but Arnold I think it will be conceded was rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic, a popularizer rather than a creator of ideas."

Sobriquet: Coleridge is called **the Sage of Highgate.**

In ***Table Talk***, he defined 'prose' and 'poetry' as follows:

"[P]rose = words in their best order; poetry = the best words in their best order."

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Coleridge's poetic theory:

In **Chapter XIII** of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge defines:

- The **primary Imagination**

  the living Power and prime **Agent of all human Perception**, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.

- The **secondary Imagination**

  an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will . . . **It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates**, in order to re- create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

- **Fancy**

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

Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*

- A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth . . .[P]oetry of the highest kind may exist without metre . . . [**W]illing suspension of disbelief for the moment**, which constitutes poetic faith.
- GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

Wordsworth vs. Coleridge

- After *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth and Coleridge grew apart.
- In his "Preface" (1800), Wordsworth claims that he describes "common life" in a "language really used by men".

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- In "**Chapter XVII**" of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge challenges the claim: "[T]he language of Mr. Wordsworth's homeliest composition differs from that of a common peasant . . . varies in every country, nay in every village."
- Although he was closely associated with Wordsworth, Coleridge does not hesitate to indicate the points at which he differed from his colleague. **He takes issue most strongly with Wordsworth's assertion** that the speech of low and rustic life is the natural language of emotion and therefore best for poetry.
- Coleridge **stresses rather the choice of a diction as universal as possible, not associated with class or region**, and he says that it is this kind of language that Wordsworth has, in fact, used in almost all of his work. He argues that in the famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was, to a certain extent, exaggerating in order to make clear the advantages of natural, simple language over the empty poetic diction typical of the poetry of the time.
- He criticizes **Wordsworth's "inconstancy of the style,"** a tendency to shift from a lofty level to a commonplace one; his occasionally excessive attention to factual details of landscape or biography; his poor handling of dialogue in some poems; his "occasional prolixity, repetition, and an eddying instead of progression of thought" in a few passages; and, finally, his use of "thoughts and images too great for the subject."

Excerpts from the Text

[See **Appendix** for full text]

CHAPTER XIV:

Occasion of the Lyrical Ballads, and the objects originally proposed— Preface to the second edition—The ensuing controversy, its causes and acrimony— Philosophic definitions of a Poem and Poetry with scholia.

[*Lyrical Ballads* – Two cardinal points of poetry]

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry

1) the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a **faithful adherence to the truth of nature**, and
2) the power of giving **the interest of novelty** by the modifying colours of imagination.

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The thought suggested itself . . . that a series of poems might be composed of **two sorts**. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, **supernatural** . . . For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from **ordinary life** . . .

In this idea originated **the plan of the LYRICAL BALLADS**; in which it was agreed, that **my endeavours** should be directed to persons and characters **supernatural**, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that **willing suspension of disbelief for the moment**, which constitutes **poetic faith**.

Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of **novelty to things of every day**, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us . . .

With this view I wrote **THE ANCIENT MARINER**, and was preparing among other poems, THE DARK LADIE, and the CHRISTABEL, in which I should have more nearly realized my ideal, than I had done in my first attempt.

But Mr. Wordsworth's industry had proved so much **more successful**, and the number of his poems so much greater, that my compositions, instead of forming a balance, appeared rather an interpolation of heterogeneous matter.

To the second edition he added **a preface** . . . he was understood to contend for the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds . . . **the language of real life** . . . From this preface . . . arose the whole long-continued controversy.

[The controversy and its aftermath]

Had Mr. Wordsworth's poems been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time described as being . . . they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them.

But year after year increased the number of Mr. Wordsworth's **admirers**. They were found too not in the lower classes of the reading public, but **chiefly** among **young men of strong sensibility and meditative minds**; and their admiration . . . was distinguished by its intensity, I might almost say, by **its religious fervour**.

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With many parts of this preface . . . **I never concurred**; but on the contrary objected to them as **erroneous in principle**, and as contradictory . . . both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater part of the poems themselves.

At all events, considering it as the source of a controversy, in which **I have been honoured more than I deserve** by the frequent conjunction of my name with his, I think it expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with **the opinions supported** in that preface, and in what **points I altogether differ**.

But in order to render myself intelligible I must previously, in as few words as possible, explain my views, first, of a Poem; and secondly, of Poetry itself, in kind, and in essence.

[Prose vs. Poem]

A poem contains **the same elements** as a prose composition; **the difference** therefore must consist **in a different combination of them** in consequence of a different object being proposed.

[I]t is **distinguished** from prose **by metre, or by rhyme**, or by both conjointly . . . So much for the superficial form. A difference of object and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction.

But the **communication of pleasure** may be the immediate object of **a work not metrically composed**; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, **as in novels and romances**.

Would then the **mere superaddition of metre**, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise.

[Poem]

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

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[A] legitimate poem, I answer, it must be one, **the parts of which mutually support and explain each other**; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement.

The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgment of all countries, in equally **denying the praises** of a just poem, on the one hand, **to a series of striking lines** or distiches, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, becomes **disjoined** from its context, and forms a separate whole, instead of a harmonizing part . . .

The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but **by the pleasureable activity of mind** excited by the attractions of the journey itself.

Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air;—**at every step he pauses and half recedes**; and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward.

[Poetry and the Poet]

My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the **Fancy and Imagination** in the early part of this work.

What is poetry?—is so nearly the same question with, **what is a poet?**—that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity . . . He **diffuses a tone and spirit of unity**, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of **Imagination.**

This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control . . . reveals "itself in the balance or **reconcilement of opposite or discordant" qualities**: of sameness, with difference; of the

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general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects . . .

[Conclusion]

Finally, **Good Sense** is the Body of poetic genius, **Fancy** its Drapery, **Motion** its Life, and **Imagination** the Soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent **whole**.

*

***CHAPTER XVII*:** [See **Appendix** for full text]

Mr. Wordsworth adds, 'accordingly, such a language' (meaning . . . the language of rustic life purified from provincialism) 'arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent . . .

I object . . . to an equivocation in the use of the word 'real'. Every man's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man's language has, first, its *individualities*; secondly, the common properties of the *class* to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of *universal* use.

[T]he language of Mr. Wordsworth's homeliest composition **differs from that of a common peasant**. . . [T]he language so highly extolled by Mr. Wordsworth varies in every country, nay in every village . . . the existence or non-existence of schools . . . and readers of the weekly newspapers . . .

* * *

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4. Keats : Letters (from *English Critical Tradition* – Macmillan)

Introduction:

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

His first mature poem is the sonnet **"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"** (1816), which was inspired by his excited reading of George Chapman's classic 17th-century translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Keats's "1819 Odes"

Keats wrote his famous odes in 1819:

1. "Ode on a Grecian Urn"
2. "Ode on Indolence"
3. "Ode on Melancholy"
4. "Ode to a Nightingale"
5. "Ode to Psyche"
6. "To Autumn"

From **"Ode on a Grecian Urn"**

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
. . .
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter
…
Beauty is truth, truth beauty

In the "**Ode to a Nightingale**" a visionary happiness in communing with the nightingale and its song is contrasted with the dead weight of human grief and sickness, and the transience of

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youth and beauty—strongly brought home to Keats in recent months by his brother's death. The song of the nightingale is seen as a symbol of art that outlasts the individual's mortal life.

From **"Ode on Melancholy"**

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die

Lines from ***Endymion***:

(dedicated to **Thomas Chatterton**, a young talent who committed suicide)

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases: it will never
Pass into nothingness: but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

Lines from ***Isabella, or the Pot of Basil***:

So the two brothers with their *murdered* man
Rode past fair Florence

Keats's fragmentary poetic epic, ***Hyperion***, is his last attempt, in the face of increasing illness and frustrated love, to come to terms with the conflict between absolute value and mortal decay that appears in other forms in his earlier poetry. The poems "Isabella," "**Lamia**," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and Hyperion and the odes were all published in the famous 1820 volume, the one that gives the true measure of his powers. It appeared in July, by which time Keats was evidently doomed. He had been increasingly ill throughout 1819, and by the beginning of 1820 the evidence of tuberculosis was clear.

Plays written by John Keats

1. ***Otho the Great****: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1819, in collaboration with his friend Charles Brown)
2. *King Stephen: A Dramatic Fragment* (1819)

P. B. Shelley's "Adonaïs: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc."

- The Hebrew word *adonai* means 'Lord'.

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- The title also refers to the beautiful youth Adonis in Greek mythology. He was the mortal lover of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Adonis was killed by a wild boar.
- This elegiac poem is written in **55 Spenserian stanzas**.
  (John Keats's ***The Eve of St. Agnes*** (composed in **42 Spenserian stanzas**)
  (**Spenserian stanza** is a 9-line stanza. The first eight lines are in iambic pentameter and the last in iambic hexameter. The last line is called '**alexandrine**', a line in iambic hexameter or twelve syllables. Rhyme scheme: *ababbcbcc*)
- In his pastoral elegy in the tradition of Milton's "Lycidas", Shelley claims that the reason for Keats's death was the harsh evaluation of *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* (1818) in the *Quarterly Review* by an anonymous writer.
- Shelley thought that the anonymous critic was Robert Southey (though it was actually by John Wilson Croker). So, Shelley represented Southey as "the Nameless Worm", the serpent which murdered Keats (Adonais) with its poison.

Satanic School

- The term "**Satanic School**" – originated by **Robert Southey** in his preface to *A Vision of Judgement* in 1821 – refers to:
  - P. B. Shelley
  - John Keats
  - Lord Byron.
- Southey considered them "men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations".
- The writings of these authors were considered immoral by Southey, and, for him, their works were "characterized by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety".

Cockney School

- The term "**Cockney school**" refers to
  - Leigh Hunt
  - John Keats
  - William Hazlitt
- It was employed in the hostile reviews in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817.

The excerpts from Keats's letters give us glimpses of his thoughts about poetry, and of the concerns that occupied him in 1817 and 1818, the years before he would write some of his

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best-known works. His letters have also served generations of writers with provocative ideas and insights into poetry and the creative process. In the letters, he writes about beauty, the imagination, and the concept of "**Negative Capability**" — "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."

Keats also address the merits of other poets, including Milton, Keats' contemporary Wordsworth, and Shakespeare, who Keats admired above all other writers. He often calls out for qualities he wishes he could attain as a poet and person, as when he asks "for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" In other letters Keats shows his talent for original metaphors and insights into life, as when he likens life to a "large Mansion of Many Apartments," in which we slowly feel and find our way through darkened rooms." Such observations and imaginative spurts make Keats's letters required reading for any poet or critic and as important as Keats's poems.

The recipients of the letters are friends—the poet and insurance clerk John Hamilton Reynolds, and Benjamin Bailey; Keats's brothers George and Tom; and John Taylor—a member of the publishing house Taylor and Hessey where his long poem Endymion was published. This correspondence with his brothers and sister, with his close friends, and with Fanny Brawne gives the most intimate picture of the admirable integrity of Keats's personal character and enables the reader to follow closely the development of his thought about poetry—his own and that of others.

Excerpts from the Letters: [See **Appendix** for full text]

1. Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination – **What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth** – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty

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2. **Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December 1817**

[W]hich Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean ***Negative Capability***, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

3. **Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818**

Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity; it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance. Second, its touches of Beauty should never behalf way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural to him, shine over him and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the Luxury of twilight. . . **That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.**

4. **Letter to James Hessey, 9 October 1818**

The genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man; it cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. **That which is creative must create itself**—In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks . . .

5. **Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818**

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or **egotistical sublime**, which is a thing per se and stands alone) . . . **A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity; he is continually in for and filling some other Body**.

6. **Letter to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 16 August 1820**

My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk . . .

* * *

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5. T. S. Eliot : "Metaphysical Poets" (1921)

Introduction:

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

In the essay **"The Metaphysical Poets"**, T. S. Eliot

- ❖ admires the sensibility of metaphysical poets to blend thought (wit) and feeling skillfully.
- ❖ However, Eliot resents that "**a dissociation of sensibility**" (the rupture between thought and feeling) has set in during the seventeenth century with Milton and Dryden.

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

Mr. [J. C.] Grierson's book [*Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*] is in itself a piece of criticism and a provocation of criticism; and we think that he was right in including so many poems of Donne, elsewhere (though not in many editions) accessible, as documents in the case of "metaphysical poetry." The phrase has long done duty as a term of abuse or as the label of a quaint and pleasant taste. The question is to what extent the so-called metaphysicals formed a school (in our own time we should say a "movement"), and how far this so-called school or movement is a digression from the main current.

Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically "metaphysical"; the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it. Thus Cowley develops the commonplace

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comparison of the world to a chess-board through long stanzas (*To Destiny*), and Donne, with more grace, in *A Valediction*, the comparison of two lovers to a pair of compasses.

[S]ome of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts:

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,

where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of "bright hair" and of "bone." This **telescoping of images** and **multiplied associations** is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period which Donne knew; not to mention Shakespeare, it is frequent in Middleton, Webster, and Tourneur, and is one of the sources of the vitality of their language.

[Dr.] Johnson, who employed the term "metaphysical poets," apparently having Donne, Cleveland, and Cowley chiefly in mind, remarks of them that "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." The force of this impeachment lies in the failure of the conjunction, the fact that often the ideas are yoked but not united; and if we are to judge of styles of poetry by their abuse, enough examples may be found in Cleveland to justify Johnson's condemnation. But a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry.

And in one of the finest poems of the age (a poem which could not have been written in any other age), the *Exequy* of **Bishop King**, the extended comparison is used with perfect success: the idea and the simile become one, in the passage in which the Bishop illustrates his impatience to see his dead wife, under the figure of a journey.

It is to be observed that the language of these poets is as a rule simple and pure; in the verse of George Herbert this simplicity is carried as far as it can go – a simplicity emulated without success by numerous modern poets.

Johnson has hit, perhaps by accident, on one of their peculiarities, when he observes that "their attempts were always analytic"; he would not agree that, after the dissociation, they put the material together again in a new unity. . . . [T]here is a **direct sensuous apprehension of thought**, or a **recreation of thought into feeling**, which is exactly what we find in Donne

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[T]he time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. **A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility**. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly **amalgamating disparate experience**; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

We may express the difference by the following theory: The poets of the seventeenth century [the Metaphysical poets], the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed **a mechanism of sensibility** which could devour any kind of experience. . . . In the seventeenth century [with the works of Modern poets] a **dissociation of sensibility** set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, **Milton and Dryden**. . . .[W]hile the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. The feeling, the sensibility, expressed in the *Country Churchyard* (to say nothing of Tennyson and Browning) is cruder than that in the *Coy Mistress*.

The second effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, in the second *Hyperion*, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.

In French literature the great master of the seventeenth century – Racine – and the great master of the nineteenth – Baudelaire – are in some ways more like each other than they are like anyone else. The greatest two masters of diction are also the greatest two psychologists, the most curious explorers of the soul. It is interesting to speculate whether it is not a misfortune that two of the greatest masters of diction in our language, Milton and Dryden, triumph with a dazzling disregard of the soul.

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May we not conclude, then, that Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, Cowley at his best, are in the direct current of English poetry, and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection?. . .[W]e must remember that Johnson tortures chiefly the chief offenders, Cowley and Cleveland. It would be a fruitful work, and one requiring a substantial book, to break up the classification of Johnson (for there has been none since) and exhibit these poets in all their difference of kind and of degree, from the massive music of Donne to the faint, pleasing tinkle of Aurelian Townshend – whose *Dialogue between a Pilgrim and Time* is one of the few regrettable omissions from the excellent anthology [*Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*] of Professor Grierson.

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6. I. A. Richards : "Four Kinds of Meaning" in *Practical Criticism* (1929)

Introduction:

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

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

During the 1930s, Richards spent much of his time developing **Basic English**, a system originated by **Ogden** that employed only **850 words**; Richards believed a universally intelligible language would help to bring about international understanding.

"Four Kinds of Meaning":

1. Sense — what one says
2. Feeling — the attitude towards what one says
3. Tone — the attitude towards one's listener
4. Intention — the effect one aims to achieve on the listener

Excerpts from the Text

[See **Appendix** for full text]

[Epigraph]

> From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they that cast up many little summs into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not ; and at last finding the errour visible, and not mistrusting their

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> first grounds, know not which way to cleere themselves ; but spend time in fluttering over their bookes ; as birds that entring by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in. ***Leviathan.***

The ***original*** **difficulty of all reading**, the problem of *making out the meaning*, is our obvious starting-point. The answers to those apparently simple questions: 'What is a meaning?' 'What are we doing when we endeavour to make it out?' 'What is it we are making out?' are the master-keys to all the problems of criticism.

For our purposes here a division into four types of function, **four kinds of meaning**, will suffice. It is plain that most human utterances and nearly all articulate speech can be profitably regarded from four points of view. Four aspects can be easily distinguished. Let us call them *Sense*, *Feeling*, *Tone*, and *Intention*.

1. ***Sense***.

We speak ***to say something***, and when we listen we expect something to be said. We use words to direct our hearers' attention upon some state of affairs, to present to them some items for consideration and to excite in them some thoughts about these items.

2. ***Feeling.***

But we also, as a rule, have some **feelings *about these items*, about the state of affairs we are referring to**. We have an **attitude** towards it, some special direction, bias, or accentuation of interest towards it, some personal flavour or colouring of feeling; and we use language to express these feelings, this nuance of interest. Equally, when we listen we pick it up, rightly or wrongly; it seems inextricably part of what we receive; and this whether the speaker be conscious himself of his feelings towards what he is talking about or not. I am, of course, here describing the normal situation, my reader will be able without difficulty to think of exceptional cases (mathematics, for example) where no feeling enters.

3. ***Tone***.

Furthermore, the speaker has ordinarily ***an attitude to his listener***. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate *recognition of his relation to them*. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. Again the exceptional case of

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dissimulation, or instances in which the speaker unwittingly reveals an attitude he is not consciously desirous of expressing, will come to mind.

4. *Intention.*

Finally, apart from what he says (Sense), his attitude to what he is talking about (Feeling), and his attitude to his listener (Tone), there is the **speaker's intention, his aim, *conscious or unconscious*, the effect he is endeavouring to promote**. Ordinarily he speaks for a purpose, and his purpose modifies his speech. The understanding of it is part of the whole business of apprehending his meaning. Unless we know what he is trying to do, we can hardly estimate the measure of his success. Yet the number of readers who omit such considerations might make a faint-hearted writer despair. Sometimes, of course, he will purpose no more than to state his thoughts (i), or to express his feelings about what he is thinking of, *e.g*. Hurrah! Damn! (2), or to express his attitude to his listener (3). With this last case we pass into the realm of endearments and abuse.

We shall find in the protocols instances, in plenty, of failure on the part of one or other of these functions. **Sometimes all four fail together**; a reader garbles the sense, distorts the feeling, mistakes the tone and disregards the intention; and often a partial collapse of one function entails aberrations in the others.

If we survey our uses of language as a whole, it is clear that **at times, now one now another of the functions may become predominant**. It will make the possible situations clearer if we briefly review certain typical forms of composition. A man **writing a scientific treatise**, for example, will **put the *Sense* of what he has to say first**, he will subordinate his *Feelings* about his subject or about other views upon it and be careful not to let them interfere to distort his argument or to suggest bias. His *Tone* will be settled for him by academic convention; he will, if he is wise, indicate respect for his readers and a moderate anxiety to be understood accurately and to win acceptance for his remarks. It will be well if his *Intention*, as it shows itself in the work, be on the whole confined to the clearest and most adequate statement of what he has to say (Function I, Sense). But, if the circumstances warrant it, further relevant aims an intention to reorientate opinion, to direct attention to new aspects, / or to encourage or discourage certain methods of work or ways of approach are obviously fitting. Irrelevant aims the acceptance of the work as a thesis for a Ph.D., for example, come in a different category.

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[T]he statements which appear in the poetry are there for the sake of their effects upon feelings, not for their own sake. Hence to challenge their truth or to question whether they deserve serious attention as statements claiming truth, is to mistake their function. The point is that many, if not most, of the statements in poetry are there as a means to the manipulation and expression of feelings and attitudes, not as contributions to any body of doctrine of any type whatever.

With **narrative poetry** there is **little danger of any mistake arising**, but with '**philosophical' or meditative poetry there is great danger of a confusion** which may have two sets of consequences. On the one hand there are very many people who, if they read any poetry at all, try to take all its statements seriously and find them silly. '**My soul is a ship in full sail,**' for example, seems to them a very profitless kind of contribution to psychology. This may seem an absurd mistake but, alas! it is none the less common. On the other hand there are those who succeed too well, who swallow '**Beauty is truth, truth beauty. . .** .' [Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"] , as the quintessence of an aesthetic philosophy, not as the expression of a certain blend of feelings, and proceed into a complete stalemate of muddle-mindedness as a result of their linguistic naivety.

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7. William Empson : "The Seventh Type of Ambiguity" (1930)

Introduction:

William Empson, in full **Sir William Empson**, (born September 27, 1906, Hawdon, Yorkshire, England—died April 15, 1984, London), English critic and poet known for his immense influence on 20th-century literary criticism and for his rational, metaphysical poetry. Empson was educated at Winchester College and at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He earned degrees in mathematics and in English literature, which he **studied under I.A. Richards**.

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

Ambiguity:

In general use, the term 'ambiguity' refers to **a lack of clarity** in a situation. In language use, particularly writing, it is generally regarded as an error or flaw. This view of the term was dominant until the publication of Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), a work that had a powerful impact on the development of New Criticism.

Empson used the term to describe a literary technique in which **a word or phrase conveys two or more different meanings**. He defined ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language." Included among the "seven types" is the traditional meaning of the term, but the chief interest of the book lies in examples of the
ways in which **ambiguity can enhance the experience of poetry**.

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Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)

[THE FIRST TYPE]

First-type ambiguities arise when **a detail is effective in several ways at once**, e.g. by comparisons with several points of likeness, antitheses with several points of difference, 'comparative' adjectives, subdued **metaphors**, and extra meanings suggested by rhythm. Annex on Dramatic Irony.

[THE SECOND TYPE]

In second-type ambiguities **two or more alternative meanings are fully resolved into one**. Double grammar in Shakespeare Sonnets. Ambiguities in Chaucer, the eighteenth century, T. S. Eliot. Digressions on emendations of Shakespeare and on his form 'The A and B of C.'

[THE THIRD TYPE]

The condition for third-type ambiguity is that **two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously**. Puns from Milton, Marvell, Johnson, Pope, Hood. Generalised form when there is reference to more than one universe of discourse; allegory, mutual comparison, and pastoral. Examples from Shakespeare, Nash, Pope, Herbert, Gray.

[THE FOURTH TYPE]

In the fourth type the **alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author**. Complete poems by Shakespeare and Donne considered. Examples of alternative possible emphases in Donne and Hopkins. Pope on dowagers praised. Tintern Abbey accused of failing to achieve this type.

[THE FIFTH TYPE]

The fifth type is **a fortunate confusion, as when the author is discovering his idea in the act of writing** (examples from Shelley) or not holding it all in mind at once; examples from Swinburne). Argument that later metaphysical poets were approaching nineteenth-century technique by this route; examples from Marvell and Vaughan.

[THE SIXTH TYPE]

In the sixth type **what is said is contradictory or irrelevant and the reader is forced to invent interpretations**. Examples from Shakespeare, Fitzgerald, Tennyson, Herbert, Pope, Yeats.

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[THE SEVENTH TYPE]

The seventh type is **that of full contradiction, marking a division in the author's mind**. Freud invoked. Examples of minor confusions in negation and opposition. Seventh-type ambiguities from Shakespeare, Keats, Crashaw, Hopkins, and Herbert.

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

[T]he **seventh type of ambiguity** [. . .] occurs when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind.

[W]ords in poetry, like words in primitive languages (and like, say, the Latin *altus*, high or deep, the English *let*, allow or hinder), often state **a pair of opposites without any overt ambiguity**; that in such a pair you are only stating, for instance, **a scale**, which might be extended between any two points, though no two points are in themselves opposites; and that in searching for greater accuracy one might say '**2 per cent, white**' and mean **a very black shade of grey**. Or one might admit that the criterion in this last type becomes **psychological rather than logical**, in that the crucial point of the definition has become the idea of a context, and the total **attitude to that context of the individual**. [. . .] it is at once an indecision and a structure, like the **symbol of the Cross**.

Opposites, again, are **an important element in the Freudian analysis of dreams**; and it is evident that the Freudian terminology, particularly the word 'condensation' could be employed with profit for the understanding of poetry. Now a Freudian opposite at least marks dissatisfaction; the notion of **what you want involves the idea that you have not got it**, and this again involves the 'opposite defined by your context' which is what you have and cannot avoid.

The **study of Hebrew**, by the way, and the existence of English Bibles with alternatives in the margin, may have had influence on the capacity of English for ambiguity; Donne, Herbert, Jonson, and Crashaw, for instance, were Hebrew scholars, and the flowering of poetry at the end of the sixteenth century corresponded with the first thorough permeation of the English language by the translated texts. This is of interest because Hebrew, having very unreliable tenses, extraordinary idioms, and a strong taste for puns, possesses all the poetical advantages of a thorough primitive disorder.

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I invoke **primitive languages** on the authority of Freud (Notebooks, vol. iv. No. 10), and cannot myself pretend to understand their mode of action. The early **Egyptians**, apparently, wrote **the same sign for 'young' and 'old,'** showing which was mean by an additional hieroglyphic, not to be pronounced, which may have taken the place of gesture in conversation. [. . .] Thus one speaks of the **two ends of a stick**, though from another point of view one of them must be the beginning. [. . .] Indeed, **Arabic** is a striking case of the mental sophistication required to use a word which covers its own opposite [. . .] The many examples one can find in English (**a 'restive' horse**, for instance, is a horse which is restless because it has been resting for too long) are almost all later developments in the same way.

Thus the **seventh type** of ambiguity involves both the **anthropological idea of opposite** and the **psychological idea of context**, so that it must be approached warily. I should take as an example [. . .] martial words of **Dryden**:

> The *trumpet's* loud clangour
> Invites us to arms
> With shrill notes of anger
> And mortal alarms.
> The double double double beat
> Of the thundering drum
> Cries, heark the Foes come;
> Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.
>
> (***Song for St. Cecilia's Day***.)

[**T]error**, must be **part of** the judgment of the most normally **heroic mind**, and that, since it is too late for him to retreat, the Lord has delivered him into your hands. **Horses**, in a way very like this, display mettle by a continual expression of timidity.

Such a mode of expression comes nearer to verbal ambiguity when it may be analysed in terms of the incidental conveniences of language, such as **sound-effects**, and thus put into the first type.

> I taught my silkes, their whistling to forbeare,
> Even my opprest shoes, dumb and speechlesse were.
>
> (**DONNE, *Elegy***, iv. 51.)

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Dumb* and *speechlesse have the same meaning, but their sound describes the silence and the noise, respectively, to which his attention is directed. It is worth noting that ***opprest*** is a pun, and ***taught*** a metaphor [. . .] *opprest* means both 'even when I put my weight upon them' and 'poor good creatures, what a trial it must have been for them not to cry out before my path, and proclaim the greatness of their master!' *I taught my treads* evenly and cautiously; *silkes* and again *whistling* give the rustle of the rich cloak, which for two strides has swung loose, as he tiptoes down the passage.

And again [. . .] one may regard even quite casual expressions of relief, or the throwing off of anxiety, or what not, as of the seventh type. Thus **Macbeth**, faced suddenly with the Thaneship of Cawdor and the foreknowledge of the witches, is drowned for a moment in the fearful anticipation of crime and in intolerable doubts as to the nature of foreknowledge. Then, throwing the problem away for a moment (he must speak to the messengers, he need not decide anything till he has seen his wife)

> Come what come may,
> Time, and the Houre, runs through the roughest Day.

These opposites may be paired with **predestination and freewill**: 'The hour will come, whatever I do, when I am fated to kill him, so I may as well keep quiet; and yet if I keep quiet and feel detached and philosophical all these horrors will have passed over me and nothing can have happened.' And in any case (remembering the martial suggestion of roughest day), 'Whatever I do, even if and when I kill him, the sensible world will go on, it will not really be as fearful as I am now thinking it, it is just an ordinary killing like the ones in the battle.'

No less complete opposites are a normal property of the language of faint and distant innuendo:

> In her youth
> There is a prone and speechlesse dialect
> Such as move men.
> (***Measure for Measure***, I. ii. 185.)

This is the stainless **Isabel**, being spoken of by her respectful brother. ***Prone*** means either 'inactive and lying flat' (in retirement or with a lover) or 'active,' 'tending to,' whether as ***moving men***, by her subtlety or by her purity, or as moving in herself, for pleasure or to do good. *Speechlesse* will not give away whether she is shy or sly, and dialect has abandoned the effort to distinguish between them. The last half-line makes its point calmly, with an air of

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knowing about such cases; and, indeed, I feel very indelicate in explaining **Claudio**'s meaning. [. . .] he is making no moral judgment of his sister's character, and only thinking that as a weapon against Angelo she is well worth being given a try.

Thus in the **Keats** *Ode to Melancholy*

No, no; go not to Lethe; neither twist

tells you that somebody, or some force in the poet's mind, must have wanted to go to Lethe very much, if it took four negatives in the first line to stop them. The desire to swoon back into pure sensation, abandonment of the difficulties of life, femininity (from the masculine point of view), or death from consumption is taken for granted in the reader, and this is powerful as a means of putting it there.

It is not so much that **'not'** was said lightly and might easily be ignored as that it implied a conflict [. . .]

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for a hermitage. (***To Althea.***)

The point of the poem is to describe those services that are freedom; constancy to a mistress, loyalty to a political party, obedience to God, and the limited cosiness of good company; thus to focus its mood, to discover what shade of interpretation **Lovelace** is putting on the blank cheque of a paradox, is in a sense to define the meaning of *not* in the first two lines.

[I]n the following examples from Crashaw it is more obvious that the psychoanalyst would be interested than that opposites are being employed. **Crashaw's poetry** often has **two interpretations, religious and sexual**; two situations on which he draws for imagery and detail. [. . .] The '**context**' here is that a saint is being adored for her chastity, and the metaphors about her are veiled references to copulation. Such a passage, then, must be placed in my seventh class, because the context defines the two situations as opposites; two opposed judgments are being held together and allowed to reconcile themselves, to stake out different territories, to find their own level, in the mind.

The great ***Hymn to the Name and Honour of the admirable Sainte Teresa*** is so innocently interpretable that I need only quote some passages to make this point clear.

. . . she breathes all fire;

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Her weak breast heaves with strong desire
Of what she may with fruitless wishes
Seek for amongst her mother's kisses.

I am not saying that this is an ambiguity; it is the **overt metaphor of Christ as her spouse**. But the treatment of the metaphor amounts to a strange mixture of feeling.

[. . .] I shall first consider a sonnet by Gerard Manley **Hopkins**, ***The Windhover, to Christ our Lord***, as a more evident example of the use oi poetry to convey an indecision, and its reverberation in the mind.

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh air, pride, plume, here
Buckle; AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, oh my chevalier.

Confronted suddenly with the **active physical beauty of the bird**, he conceives it as the **opposite of his patient spiritual renunciation**; the statements of the poem appear to **insist that his own life is superior**, but he cannot decisively judge between them, and holds both with agony in his mind. *My heart in hiding* would seem to imply that the *more dangerous* life is that of the Windhover, but the last three lines insist it is *no wonder* that the life of renunciation should be the more lovely. ***Buckle*** admits of two tenses and two meanings: 'they do buckle here' or 'come, and buckle yourself here'; buckle like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action, and buckle like a bicycle wheel, 'make useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion.'

In great contrast with this proud but helpless suffering is a doctrinal poem by **George Herbert**, which uses the same methods. In '**The Sacrifice**,' [. . .] the speaker is Jesus [. . .] we reach the final contradiction:

Lo here I hang, charged with a world of sin
The greater world of the two . . .

as the complete Christ; scapegoat and tragic hero; loved because hated; hated because godlike; freeing from torture because tortured; torturing his torturers because all-merciful ; source of all strength to men because by accepting he exaggerates their weakness; and, because outcast, creating the possibility of society.

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8. Northrop Frye : "The Archetypes of Literature" (1951)

Introduction:

Northrop Frye, in full Herman Northrop Frye, (born July 14, 1912, Sherbrooke, Que., Can.—died Jan. 23, 1991, Toronto, Ont.), **Canadian educator and literary critic** who wrote much on Canadian literature and culture and became best known as one of the most important literary theorists of the 20th century.

In 1947 he published ***Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake***, which was a sweeping and erudite study of Blake's visionary symbolism and established the groundwork for his engagement with literary theory. In ***Anatomy of Criticism*** (1957) he challenged the hegemony of the New Criticism by emphasizing the modes and genres of literary texts. Rather than analyze the language of individual works of literature, as the New Critics did, Frye stressed the larger or deeper imaginative patterns from which all literary works are constructed and the **recurring importance of literature's underlying archetypes**.

In later works Frye supplemented the examination of archetype and genre with practical criticism; he studied T.S. Eliot (1963), John Milton's epics (1965), Shakespearean comedy (1965) and tragedy (1967), and English Romanticism (1968). *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* appeared in 1970, and ***The Great Code: The Bible and Literature***, a study of the mythology and structure of the Bible, was published in 1982.

ARCHETYPES: conventional cultural and literary patterns
Greek, *arche* = original, *typos* = figure or image

Archetypes are typical elements such as **images and symbols that recur from culture to culture, from one literary text to another**, and across a wide range of literary forms and genres. And, Archetypal / Myth Criticism studies the conventional and generic elements (symbols, images, characters, narrative designs, themes) that recur frequently in myth and literature, carrying primordial human emotions; thus, studying a literary work as part of the whole of literature.

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KEY FIGURES, WORKS AND CONCEPTS:

1. **James G. Frazer**

[Scottish anthropologist and folklorist]

Works:

The Golden Bough: A Study of Comparative Religion (1890)

Totemism and Exogamy (1910)

2. **Jessie Weston**

[English folklorist]

Work:

From Ritual to Romance (1920)

3. **Carl Jung** ['Jung' is pronounced 'Y-oong'.]

[Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist]

Works:

"On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art" (1922)

Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature (1966)

Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (1969)

Concepts:

Primordial images; Psychic residue; Collective unconscious

'the Hero': (a major archetype in the quest narrative, representing the evolving mind; a figure of movement or change in pursuit of individualism)

'the Shadow': (an archetype that represents the dark side of the individual mind; a repository of repressed impulses; a battlefield of psychical conflicts)

'the Self': (an archetype of totality, symbolizing a balanced mind that unifies conflicting qualities; it contains a latent potential of transformation and so it can transform into other archetypes such as the Hero or the Shadow)

'the Mother': (a prime archetype of the deepest levels of the unconscious mind; an incarnate Mother Earth; a synthesis of dualities – nurturing/devouring; merciful/pitiless . . .)

'the Father': (an archetype of order and authority; a figure of lawgiver and punisher; a possessor of occult knowledge; a symbol of destruction – tyrant – as well as a source of strength – a caretaker)

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'Animus': (male side of the female psyche)

'Anima': (female side of the male psyche)

4. **Amy Maud Bodkin**

[English literary critic]

Work:

Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination (1934)

5. **Northrop Frye**

[Canadian critic]

Works:

Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (1947)

"The Archetypes of Literature" (1951)

Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957)

1. "Historical Criticism: A Theory of Modes"
2. "Ethical Criticism: a Theory of Symbols"
3. "Archetypal Criticism: A Theory of Myths"
4. "Rhetorical Criticism: A Theory of Genres"

The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (1982)

6. **Joseph Campbell**

[American professor, vastly worked on comparative mythology]

Work:

The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949)

7. **Otto Rank**

[Austrian psychologist]

Work:

The Myth of the Birth of the Hero (1909)

8. **Robert Graves**

[English poet and novelist]

Work:

The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth (1948)

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9. **Baron Raglan**

[British soldier and author]

Work:

The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama (1936)

In "**The Archetypes of Literature**", Northrop Frye insists on studying 'literary psychology' (an author's peculiar formation of symbols), 'literary history' (the origin of the genre) and '**literary anthropology**' (the search for recurring patterns) to make criticism a systematic study. This kind of an organised approach makes literary criticism an art and helps dethrone 'pseudo-criticism' (sentimental commentaries and casual value-judgements). Thus, with the structured archetypal approach, Frye identifies how myth constructs a central narrative through the solar, seasonal and life cycles:

Dawn	– **Spring**	– Birth phase	– **Romance** (genre)
Zenith	– **Summer**	– Marriage phase	– **Comedy**
Sunset	– **Autumn**	– Death phase	– **Tragedy**
Darkness	– **Winter**	– Dissolution phase	– **Satire**

Edited Experts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

Our survey of critical techniques has taken us as far as literary history. Total literary history moves **from the primitive to the sophisticated**, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then **the search for archetypes** is a kind of **literary anthropology**, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folktale.

The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence **the myth is the archetype**, though it might be convenient to say **myth only** when referring to **narrative**, and **archetype** when speaking of **significance**.

In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative.

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	Solar cycle	**Seasonal cycle**	**Organic cycle**	**Myth**
1	Dawn	Spring	Birth phase	The Birth of the Hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation, of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death. **Subordinate character**s: Father, Mother; **Archetype:** Romance, dithyrambic & rhapsodic poetry
2	Zenith	Summer	Marriage / Triumph phase	Apotheosis, sacred marriage, entering into Paradise **Sub. characters:** Companion, Bride; **Arch.:** Comedy, pastoral & idyll
3	Sunset	Autumn	Death phase	Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice, and of the isolation of the hero **Sub. characters:** Traitor, Siren; **Arch.:** Tragedy, elegy
4	Darkness	Winter	Dissolution phase	Myths of triumph of darkness; myths of flood, of the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, götterdämmerung myths **Sub. characters:** Ogre, Witch; **Arch.:** Satire

We have identified **the central myth of literature**, in its narrative aspect, with **the quest-myth**. If we look at the quest-myth as a pattern of imagery, we see the hero's quest first of all **in terms of its fulfilment**. This gives us our central pattern of archetypal images, the vision of innocence which sees the world in terms of total human intelligibility.

It corresponds to, and is usually found in the form of, **the vision of the unfallen world** or heaven in religion. We may call it **the comic vision** of life, in contrast to **the tragic vision**, which sees the quest only **in the form of its ordained cycle**.

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The Central Pattern of the Comic and Tragic Visions

	World	Comic Vision	Tragic Vision
1	Human	A community, or a hero who represents the wish-fulfilment of the reader	Tyranny or anarchy, an individual or isolated man, the leader with his back to his followers, the bullying giant, the deserted / betrayed hero
		Archetype of images of symposium, communion, order, friendship, love, marriage	
2	Animal	Community of domesticated animals, a flock of sheep/lamb, dove	Beasts, birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons
		Archetype of pastoral images	
3	Vegetable	Garden, grove or park, tree of life, rose, lotus	Sinister forest, wilderness, tree of death
		Archetype of Arcadian images	
4	Mineral	City, temple, a precious stone	Deserts, rocks, ruins, or sinister geometrical images like the cross
		Archetype of geometrical images	
5	Unformed	River	Sea
		Archetype of images of the river & four bodily humours; the sea & beast images – leviathan and similar water monsters	

Obvious as this table looks, a great variety of poetic images and forms will be found to fit it. **Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium,"** to take a famous **example of the comic vision** at random, has the city, the tree, the bird, the community of sages, the geometrical gyre and the detachment from the cyclic world.

Our tables are, of course, not only elementary but grossly oversimplified, just as our **inductive approach to the archetype** was a mere hunch. The important point is not the

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deficiencies of either procedure, taken by itself, but the fact that, somewhere and somehow, the two are clearly going to meet in the middle. And if they do meet, **the ground plan of a systematic and comprehensive development of criticism** has been established.

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9.Lionel Trilling : "Sense of the Past" (1942, first published)

in ***The Liberal Imagination*** **(1950)**

Introduction:

Lionel Trilling, (born July 4, 1905, New York, N.Y., U.S.—died Nov. 5, 1975, New York, N.Y.), **American literary critic** and teacher whose criticism was informed by **psychological**, sociological, and philosophical **methods** and insights.

Trilling's critical writings include studies of Matthew Arnold (1939) and E.M. Forster (1943), as well as collections of literary essays: ***The Liberal Imagination*** (1950), *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (1965), and *Sincerity and Authenticity* and *Mind in the Modern World* (both 1972). He also wrote *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture* (1955) and ***The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*** (1962).

In **"The sense of the past"**, first published in 1942 in the *Partisan Review* and eight years later in *The Liberal Imagination*, Trilling contends that **literature is related to history in three** different if complementary **ways**. First, literature is historical, in his view, in the sense that it usually narrates, as the official history itself does, "personal, national, and cosmological events" (Trilling, 2008: 184). Secondly, literature is historical because it inevitably relates to a literary tradition and, in doing so, it incorporates and modifies literary history. Finally, for Trilling, literature is related to history in the sense that "side by side with the formal elements of the work, and modifying these elements, there is the element of history, which, in any complete aesthetic analysis, must be taken into account".

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

In recent years **the study of literature** in our universities has again and again been called into question, chiefly on the ground that what is being studied is not so much literature itself as the history of literature. John Jay Chapman was perhaps the first to state the case against the literary scholars when in 1927 he denounced the "archaeological, quasi-scientific, and documentary study of the fine arts" because, as he said, it endeavored "to express the fluid universe of many emotions in terms drawn from the study of the physical sciences."

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Criticism made its attack on **the historians of literature** in the name of literature as power. The attack was the fiercer because literary history had all too faithfully followed the lead of social and political history, which, having **given up its traditional connection with literature**, had allied itself with the physical sciences of the nineteenth century [. . .]

One of the attractions of **the genetic study of art** [how the work of art came into being] is that it seems to offer a high degree of certainty. Aristotle tells us that every study has its own degree of certainty and that the well-trained man accepts that degree and does not look for a greater one. [. . .] Up to a point the scientific study of art is legitimate and fruitful; the great thing is that we should recognize the terminal point and not try to push beyond it [. . .] What the partisans of the so-called **New Criticism** revolted against was the scientific notion of the fact as transferred in a literal way to the study of literature. They **wished to restore autonomy to the work of art**, to see it as the agent of power rather than as the object of knowledge. The faults of these critics we know. Perhaps their chief fault they share with the scientific-historical scholars themselves—**they try too hard**.

But there is **another fault** of the New Critics of which we must take notice. It is that in their reaction from the historical method **they forget that the literary work is ineluctably a historical fact**, and, what is more important, that its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience. **Literature**, we may say, must in some sense always be an historical study, for literature is an historical art. It **is historical in three separate senses**.

In the old days **the poet was supposed to be himself an historian**, a reliable chronicler of events. Thucydides said that he was likely to be an inaccurate historian, but Aristotle said that he was more accurate, because more general, than any mere annalist; and we, following Aristotle, suppose that a large part of literature is properly historical, the recording and interpreting of personal, national, and cosmological events.

Then literature is historical in the sense that **it is necessarily aware of its own past**. It is not always consciously aware of this past, but it is always practically aware of it. The work of any poet exists by reason of its connection with past work, both in continuation and in divergence, and what we call his originality is simply his special relation to tradition. The point has been fully developed by T. S. Eliot in his well-known essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." And Mr. Eliot reminds us how each poet's relation to tradition changes

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tradition itself, so that the history of literature is never quiet for long and is never merely an additive kind of growth. Each new age makes the pattern over again, forgetting what was once dominant, finding new affinities; we read any work within a kaleidoscope of historical elements.

And in one more sense literature is historical, and it is with this sense that I am here chiefly concerned. In the existence of every work of literature of the past, its historicity, its *pastness*, is a factor of great importance. In certain cultures **the pastness of a work of art** gives it an extra-aesthetic authority which is incorporated into its aesthetic power. But even in our own culture with its ambivalent feeling about tradition, there inheres in a work of art of the past a certain quality, an element of its aesthetic existence, which we can identify as its pastness. Side by side with the formal elements of the work, and modifying these elements, there is the element of history, which, in any complete aesthetic analysis, must be taken into account.

The New Critics exercised their early characteristic method almost exclusively upon lyric poetry, a genre in which the historical element, although of course present, is less obtrusive than in the long poem, the novel, and the drama. But even in the lyric poem the factor of **historicity is part of the aesthetic experience** [. . .] We are **creatures of time**, we are creatures of the historical sense [. . .]

If, for example, we try to make **Shakespeare** literally contemporaneous, we make him monstrous. He is contemporaneous only if we know how much a man of his own age he was; he is relevant to us only if we see his distance from us. [. . .] the same is true of [Wordsworth's] *The Prelude*

The question is always arising: **What is the real poem**? Is it the poem we now perceive? Is it the poem the author consciously intended? Is it the poem the author intended and his first readers read? Well, it is all these things, depending on the state of our knowledge. But in addition the poem is the poem as it has existed in history, as it has lived its life from Then to Now, as it is a thing which submits itself to one kind of perception in one age and another kind of perception in another age, as it exerts in each age a different kind of power.

[T]he **anti-historical critics** [. . .] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren [. . .] disclaim all historical intention. [. . .] To read a poem of even a hundred years ago requires as much

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translation of its historical circumstance as of its metaphors. [W]hether or not it is made conscious and explicit, **the historical sense is one of the aesthetic and critical faculties**.

E. E. Stoll, the well-known **Shakespearean critic**, has settled the matter out of hand by announcing the essential difference between what he calls "convention" and what he calls "life," and he insists that the two may have no truck with each other, that we cannot say of Shakespeare that he is psychologically or philosophically acute because these are terms we use of "life," whereas Shakespeare was dealing only with "convention." This has the virtue of suggesting how important is the relation of "convention" to "life," but it **misses the point** that **"life" is always expressed through "convention"** and in a sense always *is* "convention," and that convention has meaning only because of the intentions of life.

Professor **Lovejoy** [. . .] assured us that "the ideas in serious reflective literature are, of course, in great part philosophical ideas in dilution." [. . .] **We must question this** [. . .] And this leads to another matter about which we may not be simple, the relation of the poet to his environment. **The poet**, it is true, **is an effect of environment**, but we must remember that he is no less a cause. He may be used as the barometer, but let us not forget that he is also part of the weather.

Corollary to this question of environment is **the question of influence**, the influence which one writer is said to have had on another. [. . .] Yet another thing that we have not understood with sufficient complication is **the nature of ideas** in their relation to the conditions of their development and in relation to their transmission. Too often we conceive of an idea as being like the baton that is handed from runner to runner in a relay race. But an idea as a transmissible thing is rather like the sentence that in the parlor game is whispered about in a circle; the point of the game is the amusement that comes when the last version is compared with the original. As for the origin of ideas, we ought to remember that an idea is the formulation of a response to a situation; so, too, is the modification of an existing idea.

Words cannot control us unless we desire to be controlled by them. And the same is true of the control of systematic ideas. We have come to believe that some ideas can betray us, others save us. [. . .] Our resistance to history is no doubt ultimately to be accounted for by nothing less than the whole nature of our life today. It was said by Nietzsche—the real one, not the lay figure of cultural propaganda—that **the historical sense** was an actual faculty of

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the mind, "**a sixth sense**," and that the credit for the recognition of its status must go to the nineteenth century. [. . .] **Karl Marx**, for whom history was indeed a sixth sense, expressed what has come to be the secret hope of our time, that man's life in politics, which is to say, man's life in history, shall come to an end.

History, in its meaning of **a continuum of events**, is not really likely to come to an end. There may therefore be some value in bringing explicitly to mind what part in culture is played by history in its other meaning of an ordering and understanding of the continuum of events. There is no one who is better able to inform us on this point than **Nietzsche**. [. . .] he defines what the historical sense is and does. It is, he said, "the capacity for divining quickly the order of the rank of the valuation according to which a people, a community, or an individual has lived." [. . .] The **historical sense**, that is, is to be understood as the **critical sense**, as the sense which life uses to test itself. [. . .]

And the merit of his definition of the historical sense, especially when it is taken in conjunction with the example of himself, is that it speaks to the historian and to the student of art as if they were one person. To that person Nietzsche's definition prescribes that **culture** be studied and judged as **life's continuous evaluation of itself**, the evaluation being understood as never finding full expression in the "**operating forces**" of a culture, but as never finding expression at all without reference to these gross, institutional facts.

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10.Brooks : "Irony as a Principle of Structure" (1949)

Introduction:

Cleanth Brooks, (born Oct. 16, 1906, Murray, Ky., U.S.—died May 10, 1994, New Haven, Conn.), **American teacher and critic** whose work was important in establishing the New Criticism, which stressed **close reading** and structural analysis of literature. Brooks's critical works include *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). His ***The Well-Wrought Urn*** (1947) include his renowned essays: **"The Language of Paradox"**, "The Light Symbolism in 'L'Allegro-Il Penseroso", **"The Heresy of Paraphrase"**. Authoritative college texts by Brooks, with others, reinforced the popularity of the New Criticism: *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943), written with Warren, and *Understanding Drama* (1945), with Robert Heilman.

New Criticism was a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. It emphasized close reading, particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. The movement derived its name from **John Crowe Ransom**'s 1941 book *The New Criticism*. Also very influential were the critical essays of **T. S. Eliot**, such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet and His Problems," in which Eliot developed his notion of the "**objective correlative**." Eliot's evaluative judgments, such as his condemnation of Milton and Shelley, his liking for the so-called metaphysical poets and his insistence that poetry must be impersonal, greatly influenced the formation of the New Critical canon.

New Critics believed the structure and meaning of the text were intimately connected and should not be analyzed separately. In order to bring the focus of literary studies back to analysis of the texts, they aimed to **exclude** the **reader's response**, the **author's intention**, **historical and cultural contexts**, and moralistic bias from their analysis.

Studying a passage of prose or poetry in New Critical style required careful, exacting scrutiny of the passage itself. Formal elements such as rhyme, meter, setting, characterization, and plot were used to identify the theme of the text. In addition to the theme, the New Critics also looked for **paradox**, **ambiguity**, **irony**, and **tension** to help establish the single best and most unified interpretation of the text

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Irony refers to the technique of **implying something very different from what one is ostensibly saying**.

Verbal irony:

A statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. A more complex instance of irony is the famed sentence with which Jane Austen opens Pride and Prejudice (1813): "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"; part of the ironic implication is that a single woman is in want of a rich husband.

Sarcasm:

In common parlance is sometimes used as an equivalent for irony, but it is far more useful to restrict it only to the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise. Sarcasm derives from the Greek verb "sarkazein," "to tear flesh."

Socratic irony:

It takes its name from the fact that, as he is represented in Plato's dialogues (fourth century BC), the philosopher Socrates usually dissembles by assuming a pose of ignorance, an eagerness to be instructed, and a modest readiness to entertain opinions proposed by others; although these opinions, upon his continued questioning, turn out to be ill-grounded or to lead to absurd consequences.

Dramatic irony:

It involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, for example, represents a very complex instance of tragic irony, for the king ("I, Oedipus, whom all men call great") engages in a hunt for the incestuous father-murderer who has brought a plague upon Thebes; the object of the hunt turns out (as the audience, but not Oedipus, has known right along) to be the hunter himself; and the king, having achieved a vision of the terrible truth, blinds himself.

Cosmic irony (or "the irony of fate")

It is attributed to literary works in which a deity, or else fate, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate and mock them. This is a favorite structural device of Thomas Hardy. In his *Tess of the*

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D'Urbervilles (1891) the heroine, having lost her virtue because of her innocence, then loses her happiness because of her honesty, finds it again only by murder, and having been briefly happy, is hanged.

In the 20th century irony plays a central role in New Criticism, where the term is used to denote an essential characteristic of poetry, the capacity of poetic language to reconcile opposites. Thus, for example, in Cleanth **Brooks's new critical reading of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn,**" the ironic meaning of the poem is that "the frozen moment of loveliness is more dynamic than the fluid world of reality, only because it is frozen." In this sense irony means something very close to paradox.

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

One can sum up **modern poetic technique** by calling it the rediscovery of metaphor and the full **commitment to metaphor**. [. . .] [O]ur conventional habits of language have to be reversed when we come to deal with **poetry**. For here it is **the tail that wags the dog**. Better still, here it is the tail of the kite-the tail that makes the kite By-the tail that renders **the kite** more than a frame of paper blown crazily down the wind. [. . .] The tail of the kite, it is true, seems to negate the **kite's function**: it weights down something made to rise; and in the same way, the concrete particulars with which the poet loads himself seem to deny the universal to which he aspires. [. . .] The commitment to **metaphor** thus implies, with respect to general theme, a **principle of indirection**.

The context endows the particular word or image or statement with significance. Images so charged become symbols; statements so charged become dramatic utterances. But there is another way in which to look at **the impact of the context upon the part**. The part is modified by the pressure of the context.

Now **the *obvious* warping of a statement by the context** we characterize as **"ironical."** To take the simplest instance, we say "this is a line state of affairs," and in certain contexts the statement means quite the opposite of what it purports to say literally. This is sarcasm, the most obvious kind of irony. Here a complete reversal of meaning is effected: effected by the context, and pointed, probably, by the tone of voice. [. . .] **Gray's *Elegy*** will furnish an obvious example.

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Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of death?

In its context, the question is obviously rhetorical. The answer has been implied in the characterization of the breath as fleeting and of the ear of death as dull and cold. The form is that of a question, but the manner in which the question has been asked shows that it is no true question at all.

What indeed would be a statement wholly **devoid of an ironic potential**—a statement that did not show; my qualification of the context'? One is forced to offer statements like "**Two plus two equals four,"** or "The square on the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the two sides." The meaning of these statements is unqualified by any context; if they are true, they are equally true in any possible context. [. . .] But [. . .] any "statement" made in the poem bears the pressure of the context and has its meaning modified by the context.

Consider this example: The speaker in Matthew **Arnold's "Dover Beach"** states that the world, "which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams . . . hath really neither joy nor love nor light. . . ." For some readers the statement will seem an obvious truism. [. . .] the lines are to be justified in the poem in terms of the context: the speaker is standing beside his loved one, looking out of the window on the calm sea, listening to the long withdrawing roar of the ebbing tide, and aware of the beautiful delusion of moonlight which "blanches" the whole scene. [. . .] How is the statement to be validated? We shall probably not be able to do better than to **apply T. S. Eliot's test**: does the statement seem to be that which the mind of the reader can accept as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience?

[T]he same thing as **I. A. Richards' "poetry of synthesis"**—that is, a poetry which does not leave out what is apparently hostile to its dominant tone, and which, because it is able to fuse the irrelevant and discordant, has come to terms with itself and is invulnerable to irony. **Irony**, then, in this further sense, is **not only an acknowledgment of the pressures of a context.** [. . .] In many poems the pressures of the context emerge in obvious ironies. **Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"** or **Raleigh's "Nymph's Reply"** or even **Gray's "Elegy"** reveal themselves as ironical, even to readers who use irony strictly in the conventional sense. But can other poems be subsumed under this general principle, and do they show a

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comparable basic structure? The test case would seem to be presented by the lyric, and particularly the simple lyric. Consider, for example, one of **Shakespeare's song**s [from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*]:

Who is Silvia: what is she
    That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
    The heavens such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.

On one level the song attempts to answer the question **"Who is Silvia?"** and the answer given makes her something of an angel and something of a goddess. [. . .] But since Silvia's other virtues include holiness and wisdom, and since her grace has been lent from above, I do not think that we can quite shut out the **theological overtones**.

The motive for **the bestowal of grace**—that she might admired be—is oddly untheological. But what follows is odder still, for the love that "doth to her eyes repair" is not, as we might expect, **Christian "charity"** but the little **pagan god Cupid** ("Love doth to her eyes repair, /To help him of his blindness.") [. . .] The second line, in this context, means also that the love god lives with the kind Silvia, and indeed has taken these eyes that sparkle with kindness for his own. Is **the mixture of pagan myth and Christian theology**, then, an unthinking confusion into which the poet has blundered, or is it something wittily combined? It is certainly not a confusion, and if blundered into unconsciously, it is **a happy mistake**.

One can draw more innocent and therefore more convincing examples from **Wordsworth's Lucy poems**.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
    Beside the springs of Dove,
A maid whom there were none to praise
    And very few to love;

A violet by a mossy stone
    Half hidden from the eye!
Fair as a star, when only one
    Is shining in the sky.

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Which is Lucy really like—the violet or the star? The context in general seems to support the violet comparison. The violet, beautiful but almost unnoticed, already half hidden from the eye, is now, as the poem ends, completely hidden in its grave, with none but the poet to grieve for its loss. The star comparison may seem only vaguely relevant—a conventional and here a somewhat anomalous compliment: Actually, it is not difficult to justify the star comparison: to her lover's eyes, she is the solitary star. She has no rivals, nor would the idea of rivalry. in her unselfconscious simplicity, occur to her.

The violet and the star thus balance each other and between themselves define the situation: Lucy was, from the viewpoint of the great world, unnoticed, shy, modest, and half hidden from the eye, but from the standpoint of her lover, she is the single star, completely dominating that world, not arrogantly like the sun, but sweetly and modestly, like the star. The implicit contrast is that so often developed ironically by John Donne in his poems where the lovers, who amount to nothing in the eyes of the world, become, in their own eyes, each the other's world—as in "The Good-Morrow," where their love makes "one little room an everywhere," or as in "The Canonization," where the lovers drive into the mirrors of each other's eyes the "towns, countries, courts"—which make up the great world; and thus find that world in themselves.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

the potential **irony** almost becomes overt. [. . .] It is evident that **it is her unnatural slumber that has waked him out of his**.

I have argued that **irony**, taken as **the acknowledgment of the pressures of context**, is to be found in poetry of every period and even in simple lyrical poetry. But in the poetry of our own time, this pressure reveals itself strikingly. A great deal of **modern poetry** does use irony as its special and perhaps its characteristic strategy. [. . .] At any rate, to the honor of the modern poet be it said that he has frequently succeeded in **using his ironic techniques to win through to clarity and passion**. Randall **Jarrell's "Eighth Air Force"** represents a success of this sort.

I have suffered, in a dream, because of him,
Many things; for this last saviour, man,

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I have lied as I lie now. But what is lying?
Men wash their hands, in blood, as best they can:
I find no fault in this just man.

There are no superfluous parts, no dead or empty details. **The airmen in their hutment** are casual enough and honest enough to be convincing. The raw building is domesticated: there are the flowers in water from which the mascot, a puppy, laps. There is the drunken sergeant, whistling an opera aria as he shaves. These "murderers," as the poet is casually to call the airmen in the next stanza, display a touching regard for the human values. How, then, can one say that man is a wolf to man, since these men "play before they die, like puppies with their puppy." But **the casual presence of the puppy in the hutment** allows us to take the stanza both ways, for the dog is a kind of tamed and domesticated wolf, and his presence may prove on the contrary that the hutment is **the wolf den**. After all, the timber wolf plays with its puppies.

The note of casuistry and cynical apology prepares for a brilliant and rich resolving image, the image of Pontius Pilate, which is announced specifically in the third stanza:

I will content the people as I can
And give up these to them: behold the man!

The Pontius Pilate metaphor, as the poet uses it, becomes a device for tremendous concentration. For **the speaker** (presumably the young airman who cried "O murderers") is **himself the confessed murderer** under judgment, and also the Pilate who judges, and, at least as a representative of man, the savior whom the mob would condemn.

What is the meaning of "**Men wash their hands in blood, as best they can**"? It can mean: Since my own hands are bloody, I have no right to condemn the rest. It can mean: I know that man can love justice, even though his hands are bloody, for there is blood on mine. It can mean: Men are essentially decent: they try to keep their hands clean even if they have only blood in which to wash them.

Poetry must carry us beyond the abstract creed into the very matrix out of which, and from which, our creeds are abstracted. That is what "The Eighth Air Force" does. That is what, I am convinced, all good poetry does. [. . .] **The kite** properly loaded, tension maintained along the kite string, rises steadily *against* the thrust of the wind.

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11. Allen Tate : "Tension in Poetry"

(in *The Man of Letters in the Modern World*, 1955)

Introduction:

Allen Tate was a poet, critic, biographer, and novelist. Born and raised in Kentucky, he earned his BA from Vanderbilt University, where he was the only undergraduate to be admitted to **the Fugitives**, an informal group of Southern intellectuals that included John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, and Robert Penn Warren. Tate is now remembered for his association with the Fugitives and **Southern Agrarians**, writers who critiqued modern industrial life by invoking romanticized versions of Southern history and culture. Tate's best-known poems, including "**Ode to the Confederate Dead**," confronted the relationship between an idealized past and a present he believed was deficient in both faith and tradition.

As a leading member of the **New Criticism** school, Tate put forward **tension** as a special tool to assess poetry. The term is "derived from lopping the prefixes off the logical terms extension and intension."

Extension = literal/denotative meaning
Intension = figurative/connotative meaning

Tension, **a balance** maintained in an artistic work (such as a poem, painting, or musical composition) **between opposing forces** or elements; a controlled dramatic or dynamic quality. Tate used "tension" to refer to the elements that are necessary for a work to be considered whole or complete. This sense of tension was derived by Tate from two terms used in logic—extension (**literal meaning**) and intension (**metaphorical meaning**)—from which he dropped the prefixes, and it refers to a mutually dependent relationship between these different forms of meaning. Though the existence of both kinds of meaning creates a conflict, they are both necessary because it is **this conflict or tension that gives poetry its meaning**.

Excerpts from the Text: [See **Appendix** for full text]

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Many poems that we ordinarily think of as good poetry – and some, besides, that we neglect – have certain common features that will allow us to invent, **for** their **sharper apprehension**, the name of a single quality. I shall call that quality **tension**.

Mass language is the medium of "communication," and its users are less interested in bringing to formal order what is sometimes called the "affective state" than in arousing that state. [. . .] What Mr. William Empson calls patriotic poetry sings not merely on behalf of the State; you will find it equally in a lady-like lyric and in much of **the political poetry** of our time. It is the poetry of the mass language, very different from the "language of the people" which interested the late **W. B. Yeats**. For example:

> What from the splendid dead
> We have inherited—
> Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed subdued—
> See now the slug and the mildew plunder.
> Evil does overwhelm
> The larkspur and the corn;
> We have seen them go under.

From this stanza **by Miss [Edna St. Vincent] Millay** we infer that her splendid ancestors made the earth a good place that has somehow gone bad -- and you get the reason from the title: **"Justice Denied in Massachusetts."** How Massachusetts could cause a general desiccation, why (as we are told in a footnote to the poem) the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti should have anything to do with the rotting of the crops, it is never made clear. **These lines are mass language**: they arouse an affective state in one set of terms, and suddenly an object quite unrelated to those terms gets the benefit of it; and this effect, which is usually achieved, as I think it is here, without conscious effort, is **sentimentality**. Miss Millay's poem was admired when it first appeared about ten years ago, and is no doubt still admired, by persons to whom it communicates certain feelings about social justice, by persons for whom the lines are the occasion of feelings shared by them and the poet. **But if you do not share those feelings**, as I happen not to share them in the images of desiccated nature, **the lines and even the entire poem are impenetrably obscure**.

I am attacking here **the fallacy of communication in poetry**. (I am not attacking social justice.) It is no less a fallacy in the writing of poetry than of critical theory. [. . .] if one wants

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a landmark -- that **it began to prosper after 1798**; for on the whole nineteenth-century English verse is a poetry of communication. The poets were trying to use verse to convey ideas and feelings that they secretly thought could be better conveyed by science (consult Shelley's *Defense*), or by what today we call, in a significantly bad poetic phrase, the Social Sciences.

I assume here what I cannot now demonstrate, that Miss **Millay's poem is obscure** but that Donne's "Second Anniversarie" is not. As another example of this brand of obscurity I have selected at random a nineteenth-century lyric, **"The Vine," by James Thomson**:

> The wine of love is music,
> And the feast of love is song:
> When love sits down to banquet,
> Love sits long

The language here appeals to an existing affective state; it has **no coherent meaning** [. . .] the more closely we examine this lyric, the more obscure it becomes [. . .]

Cowley's "Hymn: to light," a hundred-line inventory of some of the offices performed by the subject in a universe [. . .]

> The Violet, springs little Infant, stands,
> Girt in thy purple Swadling-bands:
> On the fair Tulip thou dost dote;
> Thou cloath'st it in a gay and party-colour'd Coat.

This, doubtless, is metaphysical poetry; however bad the lines may be – they are **pretty bad** – they have no qualities, bad or good, in common with "The Vine." Mr. [John Crowe] **Ransom** has given us, in a remarkable essay, "**Shakespeare at Sonnets**" (*The World's Body*, 1938), an excellent description of this kind of poetry: "The impulse to metaphysical poetry . . . consists in committing the feelings in the case . . . to their determination within the elected figure." That is to say, in metaphysical poetry the logical order is explicit [. . .] as Mr. Empson has demonstrated in his elucidation of Marvel's "The Garden."

"The Vine" is a **failure in denotation**. **"Hymn: to light"** is a **failure in connotation**. The language of "The Vine" lacks objective content. Take "music" and "song" in the first two lines; the context does not allow us to apprehend the terms in extension; that is, there is no reference to objects that we may distinguish as "music" and "song"; the wine of love could

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have as well been song, its feast music. In "Hymn: to light," a reduction to their connotations of the terms *violet*, *swadling-bands*, and *light* (the last being represented by the pronoun *thou*) yields a clutter of images that may be unified only if we forget the firm denotations of the terms.

I have referred to a certain kind of poetry as the embodiment of **the fallacy of communication**: it is a poetry that **communicates the affective state**, which (in terms of language) results from the irresponsible denotations of words. There is a vague grasp of the "real" world. [. . .] The **companion fallacy**, to which I can give only the literal name, **the fallacy of mere denotation**, I have also illustrated from Cowley: this is the poetry which contradicts our most developed human insights in so far as it fails to use and direct the rich connotation with which language has been informed by experience.

We return to the inquiry set for this discussion: [. . .] the term ***tension***. I am using the term not as a general metaphor, but as a special one, derived from lopping the prefixes off the logical terms ***ex*tension** and ***in*tension**. What I am saying, of course, is that the meaning of poetry is its "tension," the full organized body of all the extension and intension that we can find in it. The remotest figurative significance that we can derive does not invalidate the extensions of the literal statement. [. . .]

The meanings that we select at different points along the infinite line between extreme intension and extreme extension will vary with our personal "drive," or "interest," or "approach": **the Platonist** will tend to **stay pretty close to** the end of the line where **extension** [denotative meaning] . . . is easiest, for he will be a fanatic in morals [. . .] the Platonist might decide that **Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"** recommends immoral behavior to the young men in whose behalf he would try to suppress the poem. [. . .] but [. . .] the full tension of the poem [. . .] the conflict of sensuality and asceticism.

I should like to quote now [. . .] a stanza from **Donne [**'s **"A Valediction: Forbidding Morning"]**

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

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Her Donne brings together the developing imagery of twenty lines under the implicit proposition: **the unity of two lovers' soul is a nonspatial entity, and is therefore indivisible**. [. . .] Now the interesting feature here is the logical **contradiction** of embodying the unitary, non-spatial soul in a spatial image: the **malleable gold** is a plane whose surface can always be extended mathematically by one-half towards infinity; **the souls** are this infinity. The finite image of the gold, in extension, logically contradicts the intensive meaning (infinity) which it conveys; but it does not invalidate that meaning. [. . .] by means of **the sly "yet"** Donne subtly guards himself [. . .] The lovers have not endured a breach but they are simple, miserable human beings, and they may quarrel tomorrow.

[I]n Ransom's fine phrase, **the metaphysical strategy** [. . .] would her indicate the point on the intensive-extensive scale at which the poet deploys his resources of meaning. The **metaphysical poet** as a rationalist **begins at** or near **the extensive** or denoting end of the line; the romantic or **Symbolist poet** at the other, **intensive end**; and each by a straining feat of the imagination tries to push his meanings as far as he can **towards the opposite end**, so as to **occupy the entire scale**.

[P]oetry of tension, in which the "strategy" is **diffused into the unitary effect**.

There are three more lines that I wish to look at: a tercet from [Dante's] ***The Divine Comedy*** [. . .] as my final instance of tension [. . .] The damned of the Second Circle are equivocally damned: **Paolo and Francesca were illicit lovers** [. . .] when Dante first sees the lovers they are whirling in a high wind, the symbol here of lust. When **Francesca's conversation with the poet** begins, the wind dies down, and she **tells him where she was born**, in these lines:

> The town where I was born sits on the shore,
> Whither the Po descends to be at peace
> Together with the streams that follow him.

For although Francesca has told Dante where she lives, in the most directly descriptive language possible, she has told him more than that. [. . .] By a subtle shift of focus we see **the pursued river as Francesca in Hell**: the pursuing tributaries are a new visual image for the pursuing winds of lust. [. . .] as the winds, so the tributaries at once pursue and become one with the pursued; that is to say, Francesca has completely absorbed the substance of her sin—she is the sin; as, I believe it is said, the damned of the *Inferno* are plenary incarnations of the

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sine that has put them there. The tributaries of the Po are not the winds of list by analogy of visual images; they become identified by means of sound [. . .]

After the wind has abated, then, we hear in the silence, for the first time, its hiss, in the susurration to the descending Po. **The river** is thus both **a visual and an auditory image**, and since Francesca is her sin and her sin is embodied in this image, we are entitled to say that it is a sin that we can both hear and see.

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Appendix

(Unit – X: Critical Texts in Full)

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