
UNIT 1 FEATURES OF CLASSICAL CRITICISM

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 What Do We Mean By Classical Criticism?
 - 1.2.1 Introduction to Plato and Aristotle
 - 1.2.2 Plato's Main Ideas
 - 1.2.3 Aristotle's Main Ideas
 - 1.2.4 Concept of Dialogue
- 1.3 Oratory and Rhetoric
 - 1.3.1 The Beginnings
 - 1.3.2 The Flowering
- 1.4 Poetry as Inspiration
- 1.5 Myth
- 1.6 Three Styles of Poetry
- 1.7 Music as Integral to Literary Composition
 - 1.7.1 The Monophonic Nature of Greek Music
 - 1.7.2 The Greek Musical Scales
 - 1.7.3 Emotions, Ethics and Musical Modes
- 1.8 The Concept of Mimesis
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Questions
- 1.11 Glossary
- 1.12 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, hopefully you will

- know what classical criticism means
- learn about Plato and Aristotle, their lives, their works, their ideas
- be able to appreciate the oral tradition of classical times
- understand the basics of ancient literary criticism

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The difference between our culture that appreciates literature, and even the performing arts through printed or electronically stored documentation and the ancients (for whom a performance was hardly repeated the same way), is precisely this: we can store a work of art and postpone our response to it. The ancients had to perform and respond at the same time.

This resulted in a special aesthetics in which nearness between the speaker/actor/poet/singer and his/her audience became crucial. Because of this immediacy of communication in all ancient arts, whether poetry, music, or even philosophical dialogue, a strong emotional response from the audience also became inevitable. Emotions therefore, acquired a primary importance in all the ancient literary concepts such as those of imitation (mimesis), inspiration, ethics or pleasure (*hedone*).

When one thinks about the Greek art of imaginative creation, there are a couple of concepts that are very different from our present day ideas. For the Greeks, the

individual poet, playwright, dramatists, or musician was not supposed to make his/her mark by novelty or individual style that departed from tradition in a big way. The ancients liked new things but as a continuation of tradition and the established norms. Also the ideas of the artists were not welcome if they were shocking or very individualistic in thought. The poet merely claimed that his/her products were only transmitted by him/her. The credit of originality of creative going to the Muses.

Not only the inspiration to create came from the Muses, the creation of the artist was also a copy of the world that had been created by a force much greater than him/her. Theories of art for this reason believed the artist to be an imitator. Mention has already been made of them earlier on but we shall look at this in greater detail when we analyse the ideas of Plato and Aristotle keeping the concept of imitation in mind.

Another significant concern of the Greeks was the ethical value of art. Not only must the poet, an imitative painter of this world created by the gods, acknowledge his/her lower place, s/he must also ensure that whatever s/he produces is good and useful. The ancients left room for innovation but not for experimentation of doubtful worth. There was no room for a philosophy that advocated art for art's sake. Sometimes this concern for social worth of art, led to a severe censure of the artist as in the case of Plato who thought that no art can be good as, all of it consists of unreality and untruth. Or, as in the case of Aristotle, it led to a patronisation of the artist, because for Aristotle the artist brought us knowledge and a deeper understanding of the world.

Last but not least, the capacity of art to please by emotional arousal was also a demand on the poetic imagination. The emphasis in ancient times was not so much on making art a vehicle for ideology or social reform but more on its capacity to

Poetry and drama must please in a healthy way and provide an emotional outlet from the daily state of tension. This aim of art as emotional cure was best developed by Aristotle through his concept of catharsis. In the following units we shall see how all these ideas combine to create the value system of ancient literary criticism.

1.2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CLASSICAL CRITICISM

The Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English defines 'classical' as being in accordance with ancient Greek or Roman models in literature or art or with later systems and standards based on them, particularly with reference to balance, regularity and simpleness of art. The eight to the fourth centuries B.C. a period yet to be paralleled in the history of human civilization, for its brilliance in literature, philosophy and the visual arts, is normally known as the 'classical age'. Even as children in school, we are often advised to read 'classics'. What do the teachers mean by the 'classics'? 'Classics' are works of fiction, like Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, that are relevant to all ages, through all times. 'Classics' are books that have stood the test of time for their relevance, their universal appeal, simplicity, regularity of form and a sense of beauty and balance. Would you agree with this view? Long before the term literary criticism came into practice, literary theory existed as far back as fourth century B.C. In fact the earliest work of literary theory is considered to be Aristotle's *Poetics*, where in he offers his famous definition of tragedy. Plato and Aristotle in Greece and Horace and Longinus in Rome formed the core of classical criticism in ancient times. It should however be remembered that the Greeks influenced the Romans as is obvious from the works of Seneca, Virgil and the later twentieth century Graeco-Roman models used by writers of the French and German courtly romances. Learners should note at this stage, that though the term 'classical criticism' denotes both the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, this block will

concentrate only on Greek critical theory, for practical purposes and also because Greek civilization is older than its Roman counterpart, and the latter were greatly influenced by the former.

Most Universities would normally offer Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus, as a part of classical criticism. But the focus would be limited to just the *Republic*, *Poetics*, *Ars Poetica* and *On the Sublime*. What we have done instead is to offer you a detailed understanding of ancient Greek thought as, the impact of this school of thought is to be felt even today. We have already mentioned that the Greeks influenced the Romans so much so that the Roman dramatist Seneca, imitated the Greek tragedians and Vigil was influenced by Homer. Aristotle's influence is to be felt, over much drama of the 16th century, right till the 18th century. Classical influence was strongest in France and England in the 17th and 18th centuries, and in German writers like Goethe, and Schiller, towards the end of the 18th century. In the 20th century, the influence was considerable in French drama, in the plays of Sartre among others.

1.2.1 An Introduction to Plato and Aristotle

In ancient Greece, the schools of Philosophy and Rhetoric were theoretical training grounds for the young men of these city states. Moreover for them, their interests were not specialised, they applied their knowledge of philosophy and rhetoric to every kind of subject matter. Rhetoric was more widely studied than literary theory or 'poiesis' as some would (like Richard Harland), prefer to call it. Moreover it was the rhetoricians who studied rhythm, diction and figurative language, all with a view to create educated young men well trained in the powers of oration. At this juncture, we need not go into a detailed study of the socio-political life in those times, suffice it to say that young Greek men were trained under two main schools that of philosophy and rhetoric, the rhetoricians studied 'poiesis' or what can now be termed literary theory or criticism.

1.2.2 Plato's Main Ideas

For Plato (429-397 B.C.), 'poiesis' or what we call literary theory or even criticism was an imitation or, 'mimesis'. ('Poiesis' (GK) translates into poetry, in English, but the focus of these two term is very different, for the Greeks lyric poetry had a very small part to play as compared to the epic or drama. Plato and Aristotle moreover theorised not about lyric poetry, but about tragedy and comedy, about drama, so Richard Harland suggests the more appropriate use of the terms literary theory/criticism for the Greek 'poiesis'). Plato called 'poiesis' an imitation or 'mimesis' because he believed drama to be a reproduction of something that is not really present, and is therefore a 'dramatisation of the reproduction' (Richard Harland, p.6). What he means is that in a play or an epic, what happens is this – the poet recreates an experience, the audience watch that re-created experience, they are in fact encouraged to live through that experience as if they are physically within the time and space of that experience. Not only this, Plato, also goes on distinguish between 'mimesis' and 'digenesis'. "Mimesis' is the speech of a character directly reproduced,' whereas 'digenesis' is 'a narration of doings and sayings where 'the poet speaks in his own person and does not try to turn our attention in another direction by pretending that someone else is speaking .' [Plato, quoted in Harland, p.7). With this distinction between 'mimesis' and 'digenesis', it is easy for us to discern that drama is entirely 'mimetic', whereas epic is mimetic only where dialogue is reproduced directly, where the poet tells the story it is digenic. In short, this is what later critics called 'showing' and 'telling' respectively. Plato however disapproved of imitation, and of dramatised dialogue.

But why did Plato disapprove of mimesis? Plato was a firm believer of the true form. He believed in only the most real reality. He objected to dramatised

dialogue on the grounds that such dramatisation encouraged people to live lives other than their own. Something, parents tell children even today regarding the invasion of cable T.V. Plato was merely warning people against the danger of aping roles blindly, he feared that the influence of mimesis/imitation could be so great that it could take over the minds and lives of young impressionable people completely and become of primary importance. Plato was not comfortable with the idea of grief caused by scenes of suffering in the plays. He assumed that a temporary catharsis could infect the audience so strongly that they could become emotionally uncontrollable.

His basic argument against mimesis was the fact that both drama and epic imitate the world of perceptual appearances. For him, the only reality was that of abstractions. The poet in his eyes, imitated an appearance of the abstraction and a play/an epic was hence a derivative of the derivative., hence thrice removed from reality. 'They are images, not realities.' (Plato, Republic, p.67, quoted by R. Harland p.9). While the rhetoricians never questioned society on philosophy, Plato was the first serious thinker to question society along theoretical lines, all this is clearly to be seen when one reads his *Republic*.

Continuing from Plato's thought processes and his theory, the Neo-Platonists of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. interpreted Plato's reality of abstractions to be the Thoughts of God. These theorists seemed to imply that the artists as a whole could perhaps bypass the world of sensory appearances and achieve direct access to *the true*. Though they did not really contribute to 'poiesis' as such, their interpretations paved the way for the claims of the poets as missionaries and the poet's words as missionary words/truth.

Plato's works include the *Republic*, *Ion*, *Cratylus*, the *Dialogues of Plato* and *Phaedrus* among others. Plato has dealt at large with the notion of the poet as divinely inspired in the *Phaedrus*, and has talked about the place of the poet in a good society in the *Republic*. In fact in Book II he discusses the education of the good citizen, he also examines the nature of poetry and the value of imaginative literature. Book X of the *Republic* discusses the nature of poetry at length. His most important contribution to literary theory lies in the form of his objections to 'poiesis'. He presents this argument brilliantly with reference to a painter. As we said earlier, Plato believed in true reality, in the ideal, in abstractions. For him objects were nothing more than an imitation of the reality or the ideal, he felt that an individual imitating an imitation would produce an imitative form that was thrice removed from the ideal. Similarly, poetry for Plato did the same thing – it was inferior because it was the imitation of an imitation.

His pupil Aristotle was to later examine the nature and differentiating qualities of 'poiesis' and to prove that 'poiesis' was true, serious and helpful, whereas Plato had maintained that it was false, trivial and harmful, and that the poet should be kept out of his republic.

1.2.3 Aristotle's Main Ideas

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) as mentioned in the previous section, was Plato's pupil. But he differed from his master Plato, in that he was more interested in describing and classifying things as they were. Though he followed Plato in defining poetry as 'mimesis' he did not condemn it like Plato did. He regarded 'mimesis' as a natural healthy impulse. Aristotle differed from Plato because, for the former, the world was dominated by the model of the biological organism. He believed that each living being strove to realise the ideal, the true within himself/herself/itself. For Aristotle, 'Art initiated Nature'. This would imply that the arts, like 'Nature' work towards the unfolding of inherent potential. Aristotle did not consider 'mimesis' to be mere copying. Whereas Plato believed poetry to be cut off from

the universal, it being removed from *the true*, Aristotle devised a higher truth for poetry – that of understanding the underlying generalities of the species. At this point, it would be helpful for us to stop and think about what is being said. We have here two opposite and differing views between the two grand masters of classical criticism. He also made a distinction between the type of narrative chronicle written by Greek historians like Thucydides and poetry. He believed poetry to be ‘something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts, [*Poetics*, ch ix, p. 33-34, trans. T.S.Dorsch]. He also propounded that ‘probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities’ and that ‘a convincing impossibility is preferable to a nonconvincing possibility.’ [Ibid., ch 24, p.68, ch. 25, p.73] Aristotle’s theories are related to biological organisms. Just as each species of plant, has its own distinctive principles of growth and fulfilment, so does each genre, thereby suggesting that an epic does not need to live up to the tragedy, or tragedy to comedy. Each genre evolves in itself as do species of plants. What Aristotle does by classifying poetry in this manner, is that he avoids the judging of all works by the same standards and avoids attributing uniquely individual qualities to individual works, but he himself ends up considering tragedy to be superior to epics and the like. While stating that tragedy is superior to the epic, he is largely guided by Sophocle’s *Oedipus Tyrannous*, and he makes distinctions even within the genre of tragedy. Aristotle believed that both tragedy and the epic should have unity of action whereby the ‘various incidents must be so arranged that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted.’ [Ibid, ch 8, p.43] He also said that a work of art should be such that it takes into account the capacities and limitations of the spectators/the audience. In other words what Aristotle proposed for the tragedy was unity of action, place and time, which was to become famous later as the three unities. Yet another contribution of Aristotle’s was the notion of ‘Katharsis’ (in English it is spelt catharsis) or a ‘distinctive emotional response’ to be aroused in the audience. What is to be aroused is a pity that arises out of fear, and that too fear with pity as opposed to self-centred fear. He believed that such an evocation of ‘pity-charged fear’ (Harland, p.13) would imply a sense of awe and of something terrible about to befall the hero. Such contemplation was directly opposed to Plato who rejected both the poet and poetry from his republic, as he felt their presence and their capability in arousing such powerful emotions would render the citizens of the Greek city states emotional basket-cases. Aristotle on the other hand believed the evocation of pity and fear to be therapeutic to the audience, to serve as purgation or cleansing and therefore healthy.

Aristotle classifies the various genres of poetry, discusses their nature, the goals to be followed, the appropriate effect of tragedy and then goes on to talk about the type of tragic hero who could produce this effect. The description of the tragic hero is to be found discussed at length in his *Poetics*. The appropriate type of hero is ‘a man remarkable for neither virtue nor vice, for neither justice nor depravity, but a man whose fall is due to some error or weakness, some hamartia.’ [Ibid., ch 13,]. We can hereby conclude that according to Aristotle’s theory, the status of the character must fit in with the actions that are attributed to him, so as to produce the desired emotion effect. Aristotle’s discourse is all about the establishing of set goals, and once that has been achieved, he imparts instructions on how to achieve them. The two, Master and Pupil differ largely in their perceptions and understanding of the notion of mimesis. Classical Criticism is fairly objective, it is an “attempt at expressing infinite ideas and feelings in a finite form, whereas romanticism is an attempt to express a kind of universal poetry in the creation of which the [Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), qtd. J A Cuddon, p.123] poet made his own Laws.” Romanticism is a response to classicism in Romanticism, the individual or the subject is more important. It is easy enough for us to see how this course itself has been structured in the form of a dialogue, as

one movement is a response to another movement in the history of literary criticism.

Aristotle's other works include *On Rhetoric*, *On Soul*, *On Metaphysics*, *Analytcs*, *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Nichoman Ethics*, to name a few.

1.2.4 Concept of Dialogue

Dialogue will be discussed at length in the later units of this block, what I would like to draw your attention to at this stage is the fact that this course, *Literary Criticism and Theory* too is in the form of a dialogue. We begin with classical criticism whereby we have two grand masters Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle's theorising as we have seen is a response to Plato's thesis, every unit in this block has been structured on the lines of a dialogue. The world dialectics appeared in English, in the 14th century. Dialectics is the art of discussion and debate, or the investigation of truth by discussion. Extending from Plato's dialogues, dialectics plays a very important and influential role in German idealist philosophy. Kant and Hegel were contributors and propounders of dialectical criticism. Fichte propagated the thesis, antithesis and synthesis version of the dialectical process. Arising out of this dialectics was an indication of a "progressive unification through the contradiction of opposites," (R. Williams, p.107). Here we have just given you the basic definition of the dialectical process which does not move in a linear fashion, but progresses as thesis, antithesis and synthesis. However, you will find out more about the concept of dialectics in Block V. Also closely related to dialectics is the notion of dialogues made famous by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtian (1895-1975). David Lodge has expressed Bakhtianian dialogues, very aptly. He says that Bakhtian perceives the use of language as being essentially 'dialogic'. "Every speech act springs from previous utterances and being structured in expectation of a future response." According to Bakhtian, the Novel is a product of the 'dialogic imagination' and the novel rather than embodying a single voice is made up of a 'polyphony' of voices. With this basic introductory background, let us now take you to the forms of ancient Greek thought:

- oratory
- rhetoric

1.3 ORATORY AND RHETORIC

1.3.1 The Beginnings

The art of oratory is one of the well-noted skills among the heroes of Homer's *Iliad*. Speeches of Nestor, Menelaus and Odysseus were considered to be models of good speaking by the later rhetoricians of antiquity. Although there is not much in terms of formal system in these speeches, it is quite obvious that the art of public speaking as a potent instrument of swaying public opinion through argument was successfully practised very early. But there is also not much doubt, as Aristotle later observed, that the need for public speaking became most pronounced with the rise of democratic states in fifth century B.C. (particularly in the city states of Athens and Syracuse). At this time, the first ever manuals (*technai*) were composed by Corax and Tisias showing the differences between forensic speech and other subjects and how to exaggerate and underplay facts and arguments. Another major figure of the period was Gorgias. As an ambassador to Athens (for some time) he prescribed a system for using rhymes, assonances and figures of speech to make declamation impressive. And so was Thrasymachus, who composed model speeches for different applications. In short, the art of rhetoric had a basis in practical usage. Thus developed the institution of speech-writers who were comparable to the advocates and solicitors in the legal forums of our time.

A student of Gorgias and Tisias called Isocrates became very famous at the beginning of the fourth century as a rhetorician and speech-writer, though he himself was a poor orator. A good number of the works of Isocrates were written as tracts that contained arguments for political causes of the period. Isocrates besides adding to the art of rhetoric infused a sense of moral validity departing from the earlier vogue of keeping oratory and rhetoric purely utilitarian. The introduction of an educative purpose into rhetoric was a trademark of that period. The movement was taken up by Plato who emphasised in his tracts, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, the moral value of good and effective speech.

1.3.2 The Flowering

The most detailed treatise on the subject is by Aristotle, and is called the *Rhetoric*. It is in three parts. He first puts forth the idea that the theory of rhetorical argument. It is distinct from the philosophical argument, then he goes on to deal with the art of appealing to the emotions and prejudices of the audience and finally with the subject of the style to be adopted. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the most exhaustive text that not only gives an account of the style that an orator or a rhetorician may employ, it is also the most detailed analysis of human emotions found in antiquity. For Aristotle, it was very important to effectively carry through one's argument relying not merely on logic but on the emotional manipulation of the listeners. In ancient times the reaction to the speech was required to be more or less immediate, hence the moulding of the mind during communication was crucial. In the courts as well as in the political assemblies, emotional appeals were decisive. Aristotle was clearly keeping in mind the speaker, the logiographos and the stage actor.

A detailed account of the Aristotelian theory of emotions will be made in Unit 5. Here we may mention his observations on style. According to him, qualities of style to be cultivated are clarity, appropriateness, urbanity and elaboration. Metaphor was a preferred figure of speech for him.

Among the great practitioners of the art, though not a composer of manuals on it, was Demosthenes (384-322). Though of noble birth, misfortune struck him and he was disinherited. Through his legal skills he not only recovered the family property he had missed out on but also became a great speech writer, public figure and military general.

In general the Greek rhetorical tradition prescribed that an oration should be divided into "parts of speech" such as introduction, narrative, statement, proofs and epilogue. All the subjects were made to follow this pattern whether it was a speech for legal, forensic or literary purpose. This structure formed the basic pattern of writing essays of all kinds in the later cultures of the western world and is still followed in legal and other formal writing.

1.4 POETRY AS INSPIRATION

As pointed out earlier, in ancient Greece, poetry was regarded as a gift of the gods. The poet was considered a special person who was different from other human beings because s/he received communication from the Muse of poetry. In this sense s/he was the "prophetes" of the Muse. S/he was thought of as a person, more or less, in a state of possession. This placed him/her in a position of power as well as privilege but denied him/her the modern credit for individual innovation. His/her creations were not credited with making new contributions to the wealth of literature because of his/her personal talent but because of his/her capacity to be a medium.

It was also a matter of cultural belief that poetic "knowledge" is not cultivated by technique but by divine endowment. Although, as in all traditional systems, technical perfection was attained after undergoing a very rigorous discipline, it was not regarded as a necessary product of personal exertion. In simple language, for the ancients, poets were neither made, nor born, but chosen by the gods. Poetry was not considered to be entirely within the control of the poet.

The poet could, therefore, also produce poems which were not quite rational or seemingly true. Poetry could not always be explained empirically. It could be a true tale or a false one and yet both were believed to be efficacious. The retention of old myths which in later times seemed barbarous or unjust was thus justified as poetic inspiration and licence. But opposed to this view was another school of thought, the more empirical one, for which the flights of imagination were not to cross the limits of observation. Very early in the literary criticism of the Hellenic world, these two streams of thought became evident. The followers of one valued inspiration and prophetic utterance, said, "the deceiver is wiser than the deceived". Art was a meaningful deception which conveyed a knowledge which may not be seemingly rational but has a logic of its own. In this way, they upheld the irrational aspect of the myths, while others criticised them on grounds of moral infirmity. The myths do not seem either good social examples nor instructive. The conduct of gods shows them in poor light. Plato was among the critics of poetic inspiration. For him, the ancient myths did not fit the rational scheme of a perfect republic nor of a political order. Even though his concept of the Forms is rather mystical and not quite rational, he was suspicious of emotional fervour in any form as he was convinced that it destroyed reason. His analytical disciple Aristotle, on the contrary, conceded the educational and aesthetic worth of emotion in art.

But the quarrel between poetry and philosophy was a continuing one. The philosophers used language to investigate into the nature of things, while the poet, the orator and the rhetorician were aiming at creating an effect on the audience for establishing emotional truth. Literary criticism hovered in between favouring the poets sometimes and the philosophers at other.

1.5 MYTH

Myth is the core of all Greek poetry, drama, narrative, prose and lyric. The Greek word 'mythos' simply means story. But the kinds of stories that have been preserved from the very start of racial and collective memory of the Greek culture were already distant from the life of an ordinary Greek by the fifth century B.C.

In all cultures myths are narratives that have been preserved in racial memories through ritual enactments on religious days or representations in sculpture, pottery, temple walls, special seals, shields, vases, holy objects and all other kinds of artifacts including toys. In poetry, plays, music they found the most explicit statements.

There are various modern theories about what is the purpose of myths and what practical utility they have in a culture. All these theories are ways of looking at the history and literature (oral and written) of the non-European cultures such as the African, native American and Asian, or ancient Mediterranean through the eyes of the the Euro-American nations that have lost their own myths and faith in the religious cosmology of Christianity. In all these ways of making meaning out of myths, a basic methodology is followed whereby all myths are reduced to a symbolic way of representing a single idea.

Thus myths are seen by moderns as narratives showing conflict of natural elements, or indicating a cycle of seasons, or the cycle of fertility, growth and

decay, or the cycle of desire, obstruction, fulfillment, partial satiation or frustration, or of racial migrations of linguistic or religious groups, or a clash of civilisations. But whatever may be the theorising about myths in our times, in ancient cultures myths were practically used by them as part of their belief systems to govern the lives of people who had a close emotional relationship with the gods, goddesses, ethereal beings, fantastic creatures, heroes, kings and ancestors that figured in the myths.

In the Greek world, this preservation of the myths and their transmission was done by poets, paean and dithyramb singers, dramatists, players of ancient harps called kithars and rhapsodists. The last of these sang the epics in earlier times with musical instruments and kept alive the ancient Homeric pronunciation till the Alexandrian times. Their rendering brought them very close to theatre actors and there is little doubt that their style influenced the singing of the chorus in Greek theatre. Like all performing artists they kept alive the close connection between poetry and music.

The study of mythology and its interpretation, or rather its attempted reduction to philosophical message also came into vogue rather early. Heraklitos and Palaiphatos are among the first mytho-analysts who thought that certain philosophical ideas were perverted in the transmission of myths. The controversy was part of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy, between creative truth and the analytical mind. But the most significant aspect of myth employment for the Hellenic people was its ritual use. It formed the basis of a large number of cults, mysteries, hero-worships and the celebration of days sacred to the temple gods. Artists, ancestors, medicine men and oracles were also elevated to the level of demi-gods through the agency of myth. Thus it was the cause behind various community actions of a wide range. It is not possible for us to appreciate the value of myths in ancient Greek life if we think of them as stories used in theatre. The emotional appeal of myths in theatre was based on their connection with the daily life of rituals and religion.

1.6 THREE STYLES OF POETRY

It seems that in the fifth century B.C. there were two major styles, high and low, which Aristophanes had ridiculed. Aristotle mentioned the virtues of diction we have mentioned above. But full-scale categorisation began with Theophrastus for whom the major "characteristic" styles were austere, elegant and majestic. This distinction was upheld for nearly five hundred years with Longinus supporting it in his famous tract on the *Sublime*. As a purifier of tradition he insisted that the emotional impact should not be overlooked by authors in their pursuit of ornamentation.

The matter of style was largely dependent upon the audience targeted. Aristotle as we shall discover in the later unit emphasised audience receptivity and the manipulation of their emotions. Much of this theory rested in the Greek idea of "leading the psyche" to be described in Unit 4.

1.7 MUSIC AS INTEGRAL TO LITERARY COMPOSITION

The simply spoken word or the silently read word that passes for literary composition today was nowhere to be found in ancient times. Poets, paean and dithyramb singers, actors, chorus singers, Kitharodes and rhapsodes either sang, chanted or enunciated their words. Enunciations of verses in the speeches of orators or parts of drama also employed the musical element. Thus, music and the word were constantly united for any performance or public expression. It is

important, therefore, that the nature of the music of antiquity in terms of its generic shape, scales and theories of relationship to emotions is properly understood by us today.

1.7.1 The Monophonic Nature of Greek Music

In Europe around the time of the Renaissance, a new musical system started to develop which made the understanding of the ancient musical system impossible. The new polyphonic harmony set to a tempered scale where the octave is divided into twelve equal intervals, was an entirely new European innovation. This system, in which many instruments play the same tune or its parts in different chords to create a symphony, was a marvelous creation. But it also engendered a musical opaqueness; those with ears attuned to it are prevented from enjoying the monophonic music of other lands, ancient or modern.

Before the innovation of European polyphony only the monophonic line was recognized as the base for constructing patterns of notes. A large number of instruments or voices followed the same line. The musical score of Greek classical theatre has hardly survived except for a single fragment revealing a line from Euripedes' *Oresteia*. And so, we are virtually without any evidence, and are dependent upon a few passages of the writers who just refer to it in passing (Pickard-Cambridge 257). But the records on Greek musical grammar have survived and it can be presumed safely that even though what is available to us today was put down on paper centuries later by Aristoxenus (a disciple of Aristotle) it was more or less the same system as was practised by the Greek dramatists of the fifth century B.C.

1.7.2 The Greek Musical Scales

The Greek scales were derived from the notes as placed on harps like kithara and phorminx. Here, one string (chord) was fixed for one note. The scales (systema) were constructed from a building block of four notes (tetrachords) which were brought together in conjunct or disjunct manners. There was no standard pitch for notes then as is the practice in European music today. Like the Indians do even now, the ancient Greeks, it seems, varied the pitch of their tonic. A given tetrachord was divided into three, diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic, according to the position of tones on it. Each kind was called a *genos*. The first and the last tones of a tetrachord were fixed, the middle two shifted their positions to make the *genos*. Each of the *genos* was further varied by a change of position of notes. The diatonic had two positions, high and soft, chromatic had three, tonic, hemiolic and soft, and the enharmonic had just one position. The variations of genera were called colours (*chroai*).

Among the many puzzles of the ancient musical system is the position of the tonic. Its position in a System or the *harmoniai* is difficult to ascertain today. In a given mode change of tonic from one note to another would have changed the melody. We cannot be sure today if such modulation was practised. Another puzzle is the existence of seven note scale or heptachordon which was also called *harmoniai*, as is mentioned by Aristoxenus. Perhaps Plato was referring to the heptachordon *harmoniai* tradition which for him had names such as Ionian and Syntonolydian and which are not to be found in the list of Aristoxenus.

1.7.3 Emotions, Ethics and Musical Modes

From the variation of scales, *harmoniai* and *genos-chroai* one can see that the wealth of melodic intonation available to the Greeks was immense. The *chroai* can be found paralleled only in the Indian system of *shruti* variation and it must have provided for the expression of a very wide and subtle range of emotions. Of

the relationship between harmoniai and emotions a few celebrated sayings have survived which indicate for sure the Greek belief that music was regarded as the most effective means of emotional arousal and character formation. Theophrastos, Aristotle's nephew explained them on the grounds that both music and emotions were the result of movements, music being caused by physical vibrations, emotion by vibrations in the psyche. They also believed that the main sources of music were grief, joy and enthousiasmos (Plutarch, *Moralia*, Stanford p.50).

Aristotle made the observation that rhythms and melodies very clearly represent emotions like anger, softness, temperance and all their opposites emotions (Politics V (viii) 5. 1340a 18 qtd. Butcher 129). He went on to clarify that musical tunes even without words have the power to change the ethical nature of man (Problems xix 27. 929b qtd Butcher 131). Regarding the harmoniai and their association to specific emotions there is no description in the works of later musicologists like Aristoxenus but in the opinion of Plato, melodies such as the the Dorian melody scale is manly and heroic, and the Phrygian melody scale is ecstatic. Scales like the Mixolydian and the Syntonolydian, he felt were mournful, and Lydian and Ionian scales were fit for revelry. On the whole there seems to have been three categories of the harmonai or the musical scales, namely the Lydian, Phrygian and Dorian for the pathetic, ecstatic and heroic feelings respectively, and the mixed forms such as the Ionian scale and the Mixolydian scale were ramifications of the first, the Hypophrygian of the second and Hypodorian of the third.

1.8 THE CONCEPT OF MIMESIS

The concept of 'mimesis' or imitation was not formulated in the Homeric or pre-classical period. Hesiod and Thucydides did not dwell upon the implications of 'mimesis' because the use of myths was an unquestioned traditional practise. By the time of Plato, discussions on the content of truth in myths acquired not only a currency but the myths themselves came to be debated upon and analysed. The distinction between the actual and the fictional or imaginary seemed to have arisen when the skills and arts (*technai*) were classified into two categories, the useful arts and the creative arts. We shall go more deeply into this problem later. Very early in classical times, the concept of 'mimesis' itself came under the focus of a major debate which had so far centered around the myth. The crux of the debate was the question, did 'mimesis' provide us with truth or with falsehood in art. Plato, who suspected artistic inspiration, thought that mimesis was a misleading copy of the real world, whereas Aristotle propounded that it was the most natural way, not only to learn but to create a better world than the one we have.

On the two major views of Plato and Aristotle, we shall expound them in the Units 2, 3 and 4. They are not given here to avoid repetition.

There can be no underestimation of the importance of the idea of 'mimesis' or imitation in western art. Right from the ages of the Greeks and through the European revival of the Renaissance till present times, the concept of 'mimesis' has been discussed and practiced by poets, dramatists, novelists and philosophers. The central question that has taxed all minds has been, what is the relationship of art to the world we live in and experience? Is art going to create a form unrelated to the cosmos around us and if not so is it going to be faithful in its representation or does it have the liberty to be totally fanciful and self occupied. The answer to these questions have depended upon the diverse philosophies that have been entertained during the course of history. For the moralist, art, and therefore artistic representation, must be promotive of ethical values and portray the world in a manner that helps us lead better lives. Some would even say that art is supposed to promote social and political change and even establish certain

utopias. For the patrons of artistic imagination and experimentation art is meant to explore experiences that are not easily available in everyday life. It is not meant to reaffirm the moral commandments. It should question established notions of all kinds and show the limitations of morality and social doctrines. It should point out the ineffable and the mysterious and also represent the world in such a manner.

The Greeks had examined these questions very early and hence their ideas, particularly of Plato and Aristotle, are the starting point of this debate.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

Thus we see that in classical times the main issues were different from our modern concerns not only because of major cultural differences but because of a different technology that governed the conditions of communication. As in the ancient world literary compositions were not entirely secular, but often part of religious or semi-religious activities, the spoken word was constantly associated with the physical movements of the orator, minstrel or the actor, the dancing chorus, the religious procession or a political assembly. The lone reader pouring over a manuscript was an exceptional situation and discussion among the intellectuals were again very limited. Literature as dialogue as we shall see in the last unit was a development of the symposium situation which was dominated by the orator in the beginning but came to be commanded by the teaching analyst after Socrates. Thus the aesthetics that comes to be developed is that of nearness of the sender (poet, actor, writer) to the receiver (listener, audience reader), of a familiarity of codes and of known conventions. With a lesser degree of intellectual exertion required to appreciate the familiar modes of art a surer and stronger emotional response from the receiver was ensured. In the following units we shall see how theatre in particular depended upon a familiarity with myth, costume, music and other artistic conventions to achieve the desired result.

1.10 QUESTIONS

1. How did the quarrel between poetry and philosophy develop in classical criticism?
2. What is the contribution of inspiration in Greek poetic creation?
3. How does music combine with use of words conceptually and practically in ancient literature?
4. What are the standard styles recommended for good writing?

1.11 GLOSSARY

Aristophanes (about 457- 385 B.C.)

The most famous composer of plays of the period called Old Attic Comedy. He was highly skilled in parody and satire which he pushed to the limits of fantasy made dramatically very convincing. He was democratic in thought but supported rather traditional values of life suitable to the common man. He satirised famous personalities of his times like Cleon, Socrates, Aeschylus and Euripides. Of the thirty two plays he is said to have written, only eleven survive. His earliest works *Banqueteers* and *Babylonians* (427-6 B.C.) are lost. *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Plutus*, *Frogs*, *Ecclesiazusae* (425 - 392 B.C.) are among the great surviving ones.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle was the son of a well known medical practitioner, Nicomachus who came from the Asklepiian tradition located in Macedonia. At the age of seventeen, Aristotle became a student of Plato. After Plato was succeeded by Speusippus, he left the Academy along with Xenocrates to form a study circle in the island of Assos and stayed there till 345 B.C., and then moved to Mytilene in Lesbos where he researched deeply in zoology. In 342 B.C., he was invited by Phillipos of Macedonia to tutor his son Alexander but after three years he returned to Athens.

In Athens, he established his school near the Mt. Lykavitos with a big covered courtyard (*peripatos*) by the name of which his philosophy came to be known. A wide variety of research, funded by Alexander and others, was conducted by his many brilliant disciples under his guidance. Aristoxenus researched on music, Theophrastus on botany, Meno on medicine, Eudemus on mathematics. Likewise, many histories in cosmology, physics, astronomy and theology were compiled at his academy. After the death of Alexander, he was asked to leave Athens in 323 B.C. Aristotle went to Chalcis where he died of a stomach disease within a year.

His early works in dialogue form are mostly lost and so are the data base manuscripts of much of his scientific research. The dialogues now lost were modelled on Plato's and were perhaps called *On Rhetoric*, *On Soul*, *On Philosophy*, *On Metaphysics* and the like. Known from other ancient references, the lost works include *Pithiioikai* (accounts of victors at Pythian games), *Nomima* (tract on barbaric customs), *Politeia* (constitutions of the Greek states), and *Didascaliai* (records of Athenian drama events).

Of what the subsequent ages found most useful and have therefore better survived, the prominent works are *Analytics*, *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Metaphysics*, *Nichomian Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* (fragment). Aristotle was a great classifier and more of an empiricist but less a revelatory thinker as compared to Plato.

Aristoxenus

Philosopher and musical theorist, a student of Aristotle. He wrote many works dealing with the lives of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato. He is a major source of information on ancient performing arts.

Catharsis

Catharsis (Gk Katharsis, 'purgation') Aristotle uses the word in his definition of tragedy in chapter VI of *Poetics*. 'Tragedy through pity and fear effects a purgation of such emotions'. In this sense, it would imply that tragedy, having aroused powerful feelings in the spectator, has also a therapeutic effect; after the storm and climax there comes a sense of release from tension, of calm.

Dithyramb

Initially a song in the rituals of Dionysus which according to Archilochos was brought from Corinth to Athens. Later it developed into a choral genre for which competitions were held.

Dorian

Believed to be the last of the invaders from Northern Greece who overpowered the Mycaeneans in around 1000 B.C. They occupied the regions of Argos, Sicyon, Megara etc., and then moved down to Crete.

Hellenic and Hellenes

"Hellenic" refers to the culture and history of the Hellenes, the name by which the

Greeks be known by even today. Greece is, therefore, also called Hellas. Originally the Hellenes belonged to the region around Dodona, a part of South Thessaly. Along with the Dorians they spread all over Greece. In Homer, the Greeks are called Achaeans, Argives and Danai. The Hellenes as a name became popular for all Greeks only after seventh century B.C.

Hesiod

Believed to be prefer as old as Homer, his *Theogonia* is an account of the conflict between the Olympian gods and their predecessors. His other important composition called *Works and Days* gives rules of social conduct, the concept of five ages, and homely advice for good living.

Longinus

The name or perhaps the pen-name of an author who composed a literary treatise called *On the Sublime (Peri Ipsous)*. This incomplete, yet very influential work emphasises the literary theory that grandeur and sublimity are hollow without the impact of emotions.

Muses

The Greek goddesses of music, literature, poetry, painting, tragedy, comedy and philosophy and other branches of art were categorised into nine by Hesiod. They were said to be the daughters of Zeus and Memosyne, and are represented as heavenly dancers often led in performance by Apollo. The cult of the Muses was prevalent all over Greece from early Homeric days till late Roman times. Philosophers and artists of all kinds considered them their patron goddesses and hence source of inspiration.

Paean

Originally composed as a song of praise to Apollo or other gods, the paean was sung on social occasions, war treaties and other felicitations. It was often sung in unison led by experts.

Plutarch (about 50- 120 A.D.)

He was deeply attached to his family at Chaironia but was also very familiar with Athens and Rome, where he lectured and in Egypt and its neighbourhood where he travelled. For the last thirty years of his life he was a priest at the sacred temple of Apollon at Delphi and was a favourite of Emperor Hadrian who helped him revive the dignity of the shrine. His writings reflect the message that there must prevail a partnership between the Hellenic culture as the great educator and Rome the ascending imperial power.

A large number of works in Greek and Latin are attributed to him, 227 according to the ancient list of Lamprias. In medieval times a collection of his minor works was compiled and called *Ethica (Moralia)*. There is a sizable corpus of spurious material that has got mixed with his writings but is of great significance nonetheless. His rhetorical works include *de gloria Athniensium*, of the moral works *de superstitione* is significant, the well known dialogues are *Amatorius* and *de Pythia oraculis*, and the philosophic works are *Quaestioness Platonicae* and in *Timaeo*. The best known works are the *Lives of Ceasars*.

Plutarch had a great influence on the Byzantine scholars down to late medieval times.

Quintilian

Born in about A.D. 30, he was educated by the orator Domitius Afer, he became a rhetorician receiving huge amounts from the aristocracy for the lessons he gave them in advocacy, rhetoric and literature. He wrote in Latin asserting its value in the face of Greek. His major work, *Institutio Oratoria* is a mine of information on the art and education of orators during the Roman era.

Rhapsodes

Professional reciters of poetry, particularly of the epics of Homer. They played the kithara while singing and in that case, were called **kitharodes**. They rendered the text with great emotion reflected in their voice and song. Till a very late date, they preserved the archaic pronunciation of their texts.

Thucydides

The historian general who wrote about the Peloponessian Wars fought between (431-404 B.C.) Athens and Sparta in eight volumes. While these wars coincide with the great flowering of theatre in Athens and other city-states, they also weakened the Hellenic civilization by discouraging democratic governments and encouraging military hegemony. Thucydides belonged to a well to do family from Thrace. His account of the wars is regarded as the most authentic and exhaustive one. Thucydides is also remebered as a fine stylists of Greek prose.

1.12 SUGGESTED READING

Primary Text

Work of Aristotle. Trans. W.D. Ross. London: Oxford UP, 1928.

Secondary Reading

Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics From Classicial Greece to the Present :a Short History.* Alabama : U of Alabama P,1932.

Frankel, Hermann *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy :A history of Greek epic, lyric, and prose to middle of the country.* Trans. By Moses Hades and James Wilis. New York: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book. Harcourt Brace Novanovich.

Harland, Richard. *Literary Theory From Plato to Barthes an introductory history* Macmillian Press, 1999.

Morgan, Teresa. *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds.* Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kennedy, G.A. *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* 1963.

Kirk, G.S. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers.* Cambridge: U.P., 1983.

Orians, R.B. *The Origins of European Thought.* Cambridge: University Press, 1951.

Stanford, W.B. *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions: An Introductory Study.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

UNIT 2 PLATO ON IMITATION AND ART

Structure

2.0	Objectives
2.1	Introduction
2.2	Platonic View of Mimesis
	2.2.1 Theory of the Forms
	2.2.2 The Lower Status of Art
2.3	Plato's Definition of Truth
2.4	Platonic Idea of Social Well Being
2.5	Let Us Sum Up
2.6	Questions
2.7	Glossary
2.8	Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall aim to find out

- why Plato maintained this particular kind of view towards artistic representation
- how it was based upon a certain kind of metaphysics that he entertained
- about his theory of mimesis

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The easiest thing is to imagine Plato as an enemy of art because he viewed art products of all kinds, whether poetry, theatre or painting as inferior copies of the ultimate reality. But it should be borne in mind that Plato's primary aim was not to evaluate the worth of aesthetic pleasure but to point out that representation through art was inferior to the ultimate truth. His concerns were not artistic but philosophical. As we have pointed out in unit 1, he was suspicious of emotional arousal of any kind and of the use of words made to establish emotional truth to sway audiences. His views on poetry or "poesis" (making) and "mimesis" (imitation) both reflect the urge to know the truth beyond words.

In his *Republic*, he has given us a picture of what a perfectly governed state should be and how that state can be created by educating young men and women. The rulers and the helpers of the Platonic Utopia, are not mere administrators or military strategists. More than statesmen, they are philosophers who have a deep understanding of the true nature of things. The ideal state, hence, is ruled by philosophers who have received the right type of education according to his ideals. In this educational system, Plato maintained that there was no room for the teaching of poetry and drama as these were neither healthy for the creation of a strong moral character needed in an administrator nor did they provide any knowledge of the world.

Most poetry of the contemporary Greek curriculum, Homer in particular, was unsuitable as it showed gods and heroes with moral infirmities and sometimes even savagery. Such examples were not conducive to the formation of a worthy character. Also as most of this poetry was sung to the lyre in those times, Plato pointed out that only those melodic scales should be used which inculcate heroism and courage. Likewise, enacting plays was harmful because in acting a person gave up his own demeanour and adopted the behaviour of another character often not very praiseworthy. Plato thus empathised with the others. For Plato, the very purpose of art, was disruptive to the unswerving concentration of a guardian or a citizen of his Utopia.