
UNIT 1 FEATURES OF CLASSICAL CRITICISM

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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*, *Analytics*, *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 *Pithioloiai* (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*, *Nicomachean 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 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

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Secondary Reading

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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 artististic 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.

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Besides creating a morally degrading effect, for Plato, art was an untruthful representation of reality. The artist was not only imitating the imperfect objects of this world, s/he was also pretending to know things of which s/he actually had no understanding. For instance, he says, that Homer was not a military general and had won no wars but he still portrays warring heroes. Nor was Homer, argues Plato, a teacher of any reputation or following but he is said to have the last word of wisdom on everything. Though much of this criticism of art and the artist is in an exaggerated satirical vein, there was no justified role for the poet, the dramatist or the minstrel in his state as they all were the misrepresenters of truth. At this point we may look into the general Greek ideas of representation or 'mimesis' as it was called.

2.2 PLATONIC VIEW OF MIMESIS

'Mimesis', in Greek thought primarily meant 'making' of one sort or another. This is well recorded in Plato. Plato gave a new metaphysical and epistemological perspective to mimesis, enlarging its meaning from 'making' by human hands to 'making' by universal force. Yet, mimesis, not only in Plato's definition but in the use of the concept in the whole of western tradition, always retained the sense of not only 'making,' but of 'making' a copy of some original which was never totally independent of the model. (Gupt 93).

In Platonic theory, all art (*techne*) has been taken to mean some kind of manipulation close to craft. In the *Sophist*, Plato has divided *techne* into acquisitive, productive and creative categories of which the last brings into existence things not existing before. However, the highest art, in the scheme of Plato is not music or poetry, but statecraft, which is compared to the making of a tragedy in the *Laws* (817B) and to sculpture in the *Republic* (420C).

All production, in a general way, is 'mimesis'. In the Greek usage, there was not only the term 'mimesis' but others such as *mithexis* (participation), *homoiosis*, (likeness) and *paraplesia* (likeness) and which were close to the meaning, of *mimesis*. These terms were also used to show the relationship 'between an image (*eidolon*) and its archetype. Moreover, not only are objects imitated by pictures of them, but the essences of things are imitated also by names that we give to those things. For example, the essence or the dogness of a dog is imitated by the name 'dog' given to that creature (*Cratylus* 423-24). Similarly, reality is imitated or mimetised by thought, eternity by time (*Timaeus* 38b). The musician imitates divine harmony, the good man imitates the virtues, the wise legislator imitates the Form of God in constructing his state, god (*demiourgos*) imitates the Forms in the making of this world.

2.2.1 Theory of Forms

Thus, imitation is not only a production, it is a following of something which the imitator must set before himself/herself. For every kind of activity there must be an Ideal to be followed, and every Ideal or Form must have its Super-Form. But to avoid endless regression, Plato postulated that there was a primary Form, which was the essential nature of every object or even thought. The Form was immutable and complete and could not be embodied in anything of this world. Worldly objects are idols or imitative images (*eidola*) of the Ideal Forms, and artist, pictures or poetic descriptions, are, in turn, images (*eidola*) of the objects of the world. Mimesis, then always falls short of the original. If the image were perfect, that is, it expresses in every point the entire reality of its object, then it, would no longer be an image, but an example of the same thing (*Cratylus* 432 trans. Jowett, qtd. Beardsley 35). Because it leaves out important qualities, it is a lower order of reality than the archetype. In Plato's metaphysics this is the general presumption. The wordly knife falls short of the Ideal knife. Platonic mimesis, and thus, all art according to Plato, remains a turning away from the Truth.

2.2.2 The Lower Status of Art

There are many kinds of mimesis that Plato has in mind. All these, however, are images created after worldly images of the Forms. Plato postulates that sometimes mimesis is an accurate reproduction of the original, with all the properties to produce a genuine likeness (*eikon*), at other times mimesis may be a semblance (*phantasma*). *Phantasma* is a false representation and poets and painters, according to Plato, are adept at doing this. Hence in his tract called *Phaedrus*, Plato gives them a lower status. The method adopted to show the lower status of the artists is reflected in their residential location in the Underworld. When the newly arrived souls, having beheld true being, sink into various degrees of forgetfulness, and are placed on the nine levels of the Underworld, Socrates says, that the sixth (class) shall be fittingly given to a poet, or any other imitative artist (Beardsley 38). Socrates views the artists, the worshippers of true knowledge, as seducers from the truth. As a way of knowledge the arts are certainly not commendable. They also undermine morality. Plays like the *Medea*, argues Plato, appeal to the baser parts of our soul that stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine reason (*Republic* 605b). To sum up, Plato sees little good in art, and it is doubtful if he would have liked to compare the *catharsis* that he acknowledged as occurring in the ritual of Corybantes who listened to music and were purified of their diseases, with the emotional relief that the audience feel after going through an artistic experience.

2.3 PLATO'S DEFINITION OF TRUTH

It must be understood that for Plato there was no possibility of a category such as "artistic truth" as different from the Truth. There could be only one reality and that was available to the philosopher who saw things beyond the illusion. Plato had rejected the idea that poetry could communicate the truth through its own language because he had more or less rejected the traditional idea of poetry or art being a gift (*phya*) from the Muses. If all creation was a process of "making" or creation starting from the Form to the worldly objects, and then through poetic consciousness to art products, then making or mimesis can be the only process of creation leaving no room for an independent creation by the poet. The artist cannot intercept the mimetic chain. It may be argued that even while the poet is making a copy of a copy, s/he can still be credited with the status of a maker whose work brings knowledge to the world. For Aristotle this was the intrinsic value of art. But for Plato, as inspiration and *phya* were suspect, art was more of a deception or at best an emotionally manipulative make-belief and hence to be avoided. As the dialogue on art runs in Book X of the *Republic*:

"So the artist has neither knowledge nor correct opinion about the goodness or badness of the things he represents."

"Apparently not"

"So the poet too as artist, will be pretty ignorant about the subjects of his poetry."

"Completely ignorant"

"But he will go on writing poetry, in spite of his ignorance of all he writes about and will represent anything that pleases ignorant multitude."

"What else can he do?"

Well," I concluded, "we seem to be pretty well agreed that the artist knows little or nothing about the subjects he represents and that his art is something that has no serious value; and that this applies to all tragic poetry, epic or dramatic."

"Yes, entirely agreed." *Republic* (602) (Lee).

In the Platonic scheme, the way to knowledge was not inspirational but investigative. One had to reject falsehoods, misconceptions and popular notions, one by one, to arrive at the essence of the object of enquiry. In the essence lies the reflection of the Form of an object or thing. The Form alone is real as it is unchanging. All changing things can be a basis for opinions but not knowledge (*episteme*), (*Phaido*), that the immortal soul attains through virtue by controlling its appetites through resolve and reason. Virtue is hence equivalent to knowledge. Lack of virtue is ignorance, knowledge is happiness. As artistic creation and enjoyment do not work through controlling the appetites but rather tend to arouse them through emotional expansion, they cause ignorance.

2.4 PLATONIC IDEA OF SOCIAL WELL BEING

The artist as the promulgator of ignorance cannot have a place in the Utopian state that Plato envisaged in the *Republic* or later in his final work the *Laws*. Just as the appetites must be controlled and kept under constant check through resolve, reason and virtue to prepare the soul for knowledge, so should the guardians endowed with superior training and selective breeding control the general population to keep a society productive and law abiding. Beginning with the above premises, Plato could not but have given a small and highly restricted place to the poet in his *Republic*. Plato felt that for young students most epic poetry of Homer and Hesiod was weak in morals as it showed gods and heroes in a poor light. Plato did not think that the power of art to show human weaknesses and contradictions in the divine conduct portrayed in the ancient myths was part of the investigative process. Even to act a role was disastrous for a future guardian of the *Republic* as it prevented the development of single unflawed "ethos" in him. As Socrates puts it in Book III (394) :

But as we argued originally that our guardians were to be freed from all forms of manual work; their live's work was to be the provision of perfect freedom for our state, a task to which they were to devote all their energies. That, therefore, is the only role they must play, in life or literature; and with this end in view the only characters on which they must model themselves from their earliest years must be men of courage, self control, independence, and religious principles. They must no more act a mean part than do a mean action or any other kind of wrong. For we soon reap the fruits of literature in life and prolonged indulgence in any form of literature leaves its mark on the moral nature of a man, affecting not only the mind but the physical poise and intonation."

Plato shows the way to most purists and moralists who, though having their different definitions of the highest aim of life, still agree that art deflects from forming the human character for the highest purpose. Unknowingly, Plato made ground for his Christian successors like Augustine and Justin who forbade theatre, masks and acting saying that the actor gives up his/her own personality created in the image of God to take up another role, thus abetting the devil in practising deceit.

Plato accepted the traditional Greek view that experiencing emotional employment in art formed the character of audience and artist. But whereas in the Greek rituals, healing practices and traditions of performance, emotion and ethical formation were interconnected in a complex way and were considered socially useful, for Plato the relationship was simply of one kind. By experiencing or indulging in an emotion in art, the habit of reviving that emotion becomes a reflex in the audience.

"If you consider that the poet gratifies and indulges the natural instinct for tears and the desires...full vent to our sorrows both of which be restrained in our private misfortunes. Our better nature, being without adequate moral or intellectual training, releases its control, on the grounds that it is some one else's suffering it is watching and that there is nothing wrong in praising and pitying another man with some claim to godness, even though his grief is excessive; besides, it reckons the pleasure it gets as sheer gain, and would certainly not consent to be deprived of it by condemning the whole poem. For very few people are capable of realising that our feelings for other people must influence ourselves, and that if we let ourselves feel excessively for the misfortune of others it will be difficult to restrain our feelings."

"Poetry has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain which normally accompany our actions. It feeds them when they ought to be starved and makes them control us when we ought, in the interest of our own welfare and happiness, to control them." *Republic Book X* (606).

For this very reason he forbade not only theatre but in general the use of Mixolydian and Hyper Lydian scales of music in songs as they were expressive of pathos used in dirges and laments, and of Lydian and Ionian modes known to be languid enough to make the guardians soft-hearted and lethargic. Continuing in this vein Socrates, sees no utility for many complicated musical instruments in his Utopia as only the heroic scales were desirable.

As a promoter of illusions, misconduct and erratic behaviour, the poet with all his fellow artists hardly deserves to be a citizen of the perfect state :

"Then we can fairly take the poet and set him beside the painter. He resembles him both because his works have a low degree of truth and because he appeals to a low element in the mind. We are therefore quite right to refuse to admit him to a properly run state, because he stirs up and encourages and strengthens the lower element in the mind at the expense of reason, which is like power and political control to the worst element in a state and ruining the better elements. The dramatic poet produces a similar state of affairs in the mind of the individual, by encouraging the unreasoning part of it, which cannot make distinction of size and confused large and small, and by creating images far removed from reality."

"I agree." *Republic (Book X, 605)*

The role of the poet is conclusively declared as subversive to the interest of the state. Her/His presence was therefore not allowed and s/he was banished. Plato's denigration of art as stated in the *Republic* has become proverbial. All purists, moralists and even dictators who feel threatened by either the emotional power of art or by its investigative acumen have upheld him as their predecessor.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

As we said at the outset, Platonic condemnation of art stems from his metaphysical and utopian premises. It has been speculated that Plato was well aware of the military weaknesses of the Athenian state in comparison with the disciplined armies of the Spartans. He, therefore, wanted no stone unturned in prescribing the strongest ideals for Athens.

It may also be added that by the time of Plato a decline in the quality of theatrical productions had already set in. Bad art and poor taste among the art lovers were

perhaps too noticeable. Even the greatest advocates of art do not recommend bad taste to uphold artistic freedom, therefore Plato, so anxious to save society from the ravages of a decadent politics, found art to be not much of an ally in his reformist endeavour. He had a justification to some extent for reminding us that "bad taste in theatre may insensibly lead you into becoming a buffoon at home." Decadent art does create weak and irresponsible human beings, as evidenced from many histories. But all said, it is also clear that the aim of his attack was not bad taste or poor standards, but art per se. Even the best of art and the highest of taste were misleading and weakening for the moral fibre in the Platonic scheme. Plato did deal a very severe blow to art. It was left to Aristotle to counter that bias and establish in most admirable terms the value and dignity of poetry and tragedy in particular to the extent that his ideas became the bed-rock of literary criticism in the classical age.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is the reason for Plato's hostility towards art?
2. Give an account of Platonic attitude towards mimesis?
3. What are the reasons for the artist to be kept away from the ideal state of Plato?
4. Is there any relevance of Platonic attitude to art in our times of information and entertainment?

2.7 GLOSSARY

noitalics

General meaning of the term is knowledge. Plato uses in a special sense defining it as supreme understanding of the ultimate truth.

Plato (429-397 B.C.)

He was born into an aristocratic family of Athens. Very early in life he was captivated by Socrates. On his death in 399, along with other fellow students he left Athens for Megara and for twelve years of exile from Athens he travelled to Italy, Egypt and perhaps many other places. On his return, he established his Academy a mile outside Athens, where he spent the rest of his forty years.

His works consisting of twenty-five dialogues, an *Apology* and some letters have survived well. He is also known as a great stylist and perfecter of the philosophic dialogue. The philosophy of Plato is regarded as a transmission of Socratic ideas. As there is nothing that Socrates wrote himself, it is impossible to distinguish between what Socrates may have said and what Plato has reiterated.

Socrates (469-399 BC)

He was the son of a sculptor who had served as a foot soldier and remained rather poor in life. He married Xanthippe who was known for her foul temper. He studied physics under Archelaus but soon developed himself as an independent thinker. To his great fortune, his reputation was greatly enhanced by a pronouncement from the Delphic oracle that there was no man wiser than him. He was a brave soldier and a political critic. As a man he had remarkable physical endurance, was indifferent to comforts, full of humour, religious in conduct though not conventional, and friendly to all. His views are known only through the works of his disciple Plato.

techné

A general word for all kinds of skills and crafts including the fine arts.

2.9 SUGGESTED READING

Primary Texts

Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. 5 vols. 3rd Ed. Oxford, 1893.

The Republic. Trans. H.D.P. Lee. Penguin, 1955.

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Secondary Reading

Adkins, Arthur W.H. *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century*. New York: Norton, 1972.

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UNIT 3 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF IMITATION

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Aristotelian View of Mimesis
- 3.3 The Media of Mimesis
 - 3.3.1 Rhythm, Language, and Harmony
- 3.4 Theatre As a Unifier of Arts
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- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions
- 3.7 Glossary
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall look at

- the manner in which Aristotle departed from the basic notions of his master Plato with regard to the theory of representation of art or mimesis
- Aristotles scheme of mimesis as a sophisticated amplification of the mythic concept of the muses

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aristotle, unlike his teacher, has immense respect for the tragic poet. He elevates the art of tragedy to a level higher than the epic. To those familiar with the commonly established hierarchy of poets in the classical times, his view was a modification of the existing order in which the position of Homer and Hesiod was at the top and the status of the epic as the fountain head of inspired wisdom was unparalleled. But Aristotle argued his case very logically to redefine theatre as a total art and tragedy as the most sublime of its genres. We shall emphasise the contribution of Aristotle in revealing tragic performance, and thus theatre, as a total art that consists not merely of dialogue, characters and plot, but of no less importance, the elements of spectacle, music and dance. In fact, one of the reasons why he regarded tragedy as superior to the epic was that tragedy had these elements. "...because it has all the epic elements—it may even use the epic metre—with music and spectacular (visual) effects as important accessories and these produce the most vivid of pleasures" (*Poetics* XXVI : 4).

It has often been said that the extant text of the *Poetics* is incomplete. The portions on comedy and presumably on satyrikon are missing. Assuming the kind of thoroughness with which Aristotle wrote, very likely there were other portions of the tract. But what does survive still is an overall view of art with which the *Poetics* opens. That should leave us in no doubt that in terms of mimetic representation and theatrical practice whatever is said about tragedy applies to comedy and satyrikon as well. In fact, poetry, painting, music and drama of all kinds are all non-utilitarian arts using mimesis through different media.

The *Poetics* of Aristotle opens with the statement that mimesis is a valuable method for artistic representation. He then goes on to define that rhythm,

language, and harmony are the basic channels through which artistic imitation is made possible. After stating that epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, flute or lyre playing are all 'modes of mimesis,' Aristotle states that mimesis in different art forms is achieved differently, and that the object and manner of mimesis is different in each case (*Poetics* I; 2-4).

Having established that language, rhythm and harmony shall be the medium of mimesis for dramatic forms, he then postulates that these media are manifested as the six elements of tragedy, namely, myth or plot, ethos or the characters, *dianoia* or argument, lexis or diction, *melopoiia* or music and finally *opsis* or the visual spectacle. Broadly speaking, these six elements are found in all other forms such as the comedy and the satyr. We shall examine the role of these elements in the later Units.

3.2 THE ARISTOTELIAN VIEW OF MIMESIS

With Aristotle the concept of mimesis undergoes a major transformation. It retains the condition of being a copy of a model, but the Platonic denigration is reversed. This reversal is based on a metaphysical revision. The permanent reality is not transcendental in Aristotle's opinion. When an artist makes an object, he incorporates certain universal elements in it but he does fall short of any absolute model of universality. Because of the universality contained in art, in Aristotle's view, art, as all other imitation leads to knowledge. The pleasure that mimesis provides is on account of knowledge that is acquired through mimesis, even though this knowledge is of particulars:

"And since learning and admiring are pleasant, all things connected with them must also be pleasant; for instance, a work of imitation, such as painting, sculpture, poetry, and all that is well imitated, even if the object of imitation is not pleasant; for it is not this that causes pleasure or the reverse, but the inference that the imitation and the object imitated are identical, so that the result is that we learn something." (*Rhetoric* I, xi, 1371 b; trans. Freese qtd. by Beardsley 57)

Besides possessing didactic capacity mimesis is defined as a pleasurable likeness. Aristotle defines the pleasure giving quality of mimesis in the *Poetics*, as follows:

"First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.' Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature." (*Poetics* IV.1-6)

As a corollary it follows that the artist is no liar, but on the contrary, leads us to Truth. However, Aristotle seems to have limited his vision when it comes to enumerating the objects of imitation. In Plato, all creation was an imitation of Forms, which were transcendental. For Aristotle, though the Form (*eidos*) of every object existed, it was not a transcendental reality but something within Nature which Nature itself tends to attain. Further, it is said that for Aristotle, Art helps Nature in this endeavour of attaining the perfection of Form. This interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics has been based upon his two oft-quoted sayings, "Art imitates Nature" (*Physics* iii.2 194a 21.) and "the artist may imitate things as they ought to be" (*Poetics* XXXV: 1).

Amplifying from this Butcher has concluded: "If we expand Aristotle's idea in the light of his own system, fine art eliminates what is transient and particular and reveals the permanent and essential features of the original. It discovers 'form' (*eidos*) towards which an object tends, the result which nature strives to attain." (150)

There is little in the writings of Aristotle that can explicitly sustain such a conclusion. This discovery of the form (*eidos*) in objects tends to make Aristotle into a shadow of Plato. Aristotle admits that there is something permanent and enduring in art, but that something could be called *eidos*, is beyond substantiation from Aristotle's writings. Similarly, the dictum, art imitates nature, has given rise to many interpretations over the centuries. "It has been argued that the inner principle of Nature is what art imitates. But if we follow out his thought, his (Aristotle's) reply would appear to be something of this kind. Nature is a living and creative energy, which by a sort of instinctive reason works in every individual object towards a specific end " (Butcher 155). The teleological and structural pattern of tragedy seems to have been transferred on to Nature by Butcher. This was a typical nineteenth century view of Aristotelian philosophy. Since the Renaissance, different definitions of Nature have been foisted upon Aristotle's dictum, art imitates Nature. For the purpose of drama, the most disastrous one was that of realism, which having captured fiction by techniques of portraiture, landscape, and caricature, transferred these on to drama.

Aristotle was clear that the purpose of imitation in drama, was to provide proper pleasure by imitating action. Mimesis of men in action was mimesis of all human life. Through music, the artist imitates, anger and mildness as well as courage or temperance (*Politics* v. viii.5.134a 18) and ethical qualities and emotions. Similarly, he says, "Dance, imitates character, emotions and action" (*Poetics* I:5). We should be content to note that in drama he applied the general theory of mimesis, which he thought, was both for the sake of pleasure and knowledge. But even the Aristotelian affirmation of pleasure in art was not sufficient to free art from being constantly compared with its original, that is the worldly objects. This originally Platonic habit, has been strong throughout western criticism which repeatedly gauges art in terms of how truthfully or realistically it represents the world, how much of an understanding of the world can it bring to us, one way or another.

3.3 THE MEDIA OF MIMESIS

3.3.1 Rhythm, Language, and Harmony

After stating that epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, flute or lyre playing are all 'modes of mimesis,' Aristotle states that mimesis in different art forms is achieved differently, and that the object and manner of mimesis is different in each case (*Poetics* I; 2-4). He states that the three media for all arts are as follows:

For there are persons who, by conscious act or mere habit, imitate and represent various objects through the medium of colour and form, or again by voice; so in the arts above mentioned, taken as a whole, the imitation is produced by rhythm, language and harmony, either singly or combined. (*Poetics* I:4)

Leaving aside painting and sculpture which use colour and other forms (materials), the arts of performance like music, dance and drama, use rhythm, language and harmony. Flute and lyre use rhythm and notes only, and dancing uses only rhythm. But for Aristotle, rhythm is not a mere beat or a division of time, but movement with regularity, be it the mere movement of the body or that of notes. That is why, dancing, he says, imitates character, emotion and action by rhythmical movement (I:5).

Poetry or verse whether creative or informative imitates through language alone, but dithyrambic and elegiac poetry, tragedy and comedy use all three means. In dithyrambic and elegiac poetry all three means are used together, but in tragedy and comedy now one means is employed, now

another (I.5). What is true of tragedy and comedy can be taken as true of all drama, satyr plays included. Aristotle's brevity of plan has prevented him from saying anything further about the manner in which rhythm, language and harmony are employed in drama.

About the details of language (*lexis*) one can gather quite a few things from Aristotle's comments on language which he categorised as one of the six elements of tragedy. But the nature of harmony (which he called *melopoiia* and enumerated as another element of tragedy) is hardly touched upon by him. So is rhythm never mentioned again in the *Poetics*. No wonder, then, that one has to look elsewhere to gather information about the use of music in the Greek theatre. Aristotle perhaps took musical employment in drama for granted and, therefore, refrained from stating anything further about it. But the result of what may have been for him a redundancy, was disastrous for the post-Renaissance readers of the *Poetics*. The practical art of theatre-music being extinct, the Europeans reconstructed a picture of Greek drama in which there was hardly any place for rhythm or music. Greek drama was envisaged as a primarily rhetorical affair (an impression reinforced by Roman tragedies) far removed from the balance of visual and aural channels of theatrical expression that ancient drama depends so much upon.

But if Aristotle left out the details of musical application he was at least explicit in stating it as a medium of mimesis. However, he not only neglected but left out from his description of tragedy the visual content of Greek performances constituted by the physical movements and complex gestures of the actors and the chorus. More than their mask and costume, the Greek actors had a repertoire of highly emotive gestures, just as the chorus members had a repertoire of a variety of dances to create complex visual effects.

3.4 THEATRE AS A UNIFIER OF THE ARTS

The role of theatre that brought the arts of speech, song, enunciation, dialogue as song-like enunciation, gesture, music and dance all together in a unified whole was unique in classical times. We shall see very shortly how this was done. The details for this are not all given by Aristotle in a single tract, but the information can be gathered from diverse sources. Aristotle has defined it very well as *lexis* (linguistic content) and *melopoiia* (musical content) in his enumeration of the six elements of tragedy.

3.4.1 Rendering of Lexis through Rhythm and Tone

The gap between speech and song was not so wide in ancient theatres as it is in our theatres today. For the ancients this gap was partially filled by the very nature of their languages which would seem rather musical to us. In ancient Greek, words were made up of long and short syllables of measured quantity. The short was roughly half of the long. (Some have speculated that stress was used in ancient Greek, but there is little proof of it in the writings of classical authors, (Stanford 65).

The speakers of these languages would have been more aware of the effects of rhythm than those people whose languages were not so rhythmically well measured. For the Greeks, all utterances, whether in prose, poetry or song, were in measured rhythms. Although, this exactness of the measure of long and short syllables may have been difficult to maintain in daily speech, in formal speech, recitation or song, it could have been achieved without any special effort. Moreover, the effects of rhythm would have been consciously enjoyed. For the same reason it must have been easy to compose music for poetry, as rhythm was the common basis for speech, metre and song. As regards the Greek practice Stanford notes:

"Classical writers recognized speech, especially when pronounced with resonant and rhythmical way that orators and actors used, had all the properties of song, though to a less perceptible degree. Both were regarded as forms of *mousike* and both were produced by the same instrument" (63). The 'instrument' here is the human voice as speech or song, both considered parts of *mousike*. Rhythm is the connecting element, which was also a method of emotional arousal.

The emotional effects of rhythm were a subject of serious study in Greece since the fifth century. Thrasyarchos, the early expert in appeals of pity, was particularly interested in them. Subsequently moralists like Plato, as well as rhetoricians continued to examine their ethical qualities (Stanford 65). As Plutarch has observed, "use of successive long syllables express caution, calmness or melancholy, and successive short syllables eagerness, agitation and excitement..." (Stanford 66).

Moreover, rhythm like melody, was a vibration of sound and could produce or generate the emotions which were regarded as movements in the psyche. "Rhythm could have a stronger effect than melody, since the heart beat is essentially rhythmical. The Greek physicians Herophilos and Galen compared the rhythm of the heart, with its systole and diastole, to that of a metrical foot" (66). The choice of a particular metre for a given dramatic utterance was based on this principle. Many instances from classical plays are cited by Stanford and Aylen to illustrate the use of metres for creating specific rhythmic effects.

A theoretical support is found in Aristotle as well, who though passing over the topic in the *Poetics*, comments upon it in his *Rhetoric*. As Stanford reports, "That orator who wishes to arouse emotion must know how to use rhythm, volume and voice melody ('the sharp, low and middle tone') for that purpose." He adds that those (actors) who use these properly nearly always won the prizes in the dramatic contests. (Stanford 71). Here, besides rhythm, the sharp, low and middle tones of speech are said to be useful for emotional communication. In day to day speech, voice modulation or the rise and fall of pitch, is a sure indication of changes in emotional states. The shrill tones of joy, the guttural pitch of sadness or the quivering tones of fear or excitement are universal. In music, the ascent and descent of tones upto three registers is based on this same natural law. Likewise in dramatic dialogue, the application of voice modulation, creates predictable effects.

In fact, its ample use bridges the gap between speech and song. In the Greek theatre there was no use of prose at all. The constant use of poetic metre imposed a rhythm that was always far removed from the intonation of conversational speech. The Greek view was simple; why go through the pain of composing in metre if it is to be rendered as unmeasured speech. Besides, in the theatre only a fraction of the verse was not sung. "The only part of tragedy or comedy that were spoken are the passages in iambic trimetre, the metre of dialogue verse, which it used to be natural to translate into English black verse, and for which in modern English verse there is no obvious equivalent" (Aylen 104). This spoken portion, even if it was not chanted must have used the sharp, low and middle tones that Aristotle has mentioned. Regarding iambic trimetre and delivery in general, Pickard-Cambridge sums it up as follows:

"The practice of Greek actors included speech unaccompanied by music, speech accompanied by instrument (what is often called recitative and song). The first was normally employed for the portions of a play written in iambic trimetre (these metres being closest to speech) whether in dialogue or in monologue, the second for delivery of tetrametres and of iambs inserted in the midst of lyric systems, the third for lyrics. The texts which give direct evidence of this are few and except as regards recitative raise no difficulty." (*Dramatic Festivals of Athens* 156)

Even the whole of the text composed in iambic trimetre was not invariably spoken. Much of the iambic trimetre was recited with flute accompaniment when it formed part of the lyric system.

This leaves very little spoken dialogue in Greek theatre, even if we resume that it was rendered in conversational cadence. The Greek actor, then, spent most of his time reciting or singing.

3.4.2 Ancient Dances used in Theatre

Greek dancing was part of the unified art of *mousike* which included singing and instrument playing. There also existed a general acceptance that dance was not mere exuberance of body but that its motions were meant to convey a specific meaning. As Pickard-Cambridge points out, "the Greek regarded all dancing as mimetic or 'expressive,' especially in its employment of rhythmical gestures and motions" (*Dramatic Festivals of Athens* 247). The gestures, having their own significance were according to Pollux, "intimately associated with the words from moment to moment especially in, hyporkhematikon genos, as if words and parts of body were connected by strings which the former pulled" (249). The unification between dance movements, both of gestures and posture, and the words, spoken or sung, was a common practice in some mimetic arts. While defining the media of mimesis, Aristotle stated that in drama language, rhythm and harmony were all used together.

In the dramatic episodes related to mysteries and secret cults, the chorus perhaps drew upon the choreography of the Thesmophoric dances of Demeter. May be, Aristophanes did, in some way (hopefully not in parody) use, the Eleusian nocturnals in his play. All that is known about the nocturnals is that torches were used by the dancers. Most of these cult dances were ecstatic, clamorous and frenzied and were held in secret by the members. Some dances were open to everybody like the Corybantes performing before Cybele which, were also supposed to cure the mentally ill.

Among the sexually sensational dances were the ones held at the temple of Artemis. Religious dances often required snake handling (some times made out of dough) particularly at Apollo's Delphic shrine where his victory over the Python was orchestrally enacted. Theatrical performances must have also used such sacred emblems like snakes and other conventional costumes to help the audience identify these dances. For example, fawn skin, fox pelts and panther skins were used by Dionysian dancers, particularly by the feminine dancers called the *bassari*. Of the non-cult kind, though not exactly secular (for no such thing could have existed then), were the dances performed on public occasions. Sacred songs, poetic accounts of heroic and divine adventures sung by a singer or by a chorus with flute and lyre accompaniment, paeans, supplications for battle victory and warding-off of pestilence or calamity, were amongst the many kinds of public performances and prayers which included dance. Hyporkhema was a well-known dance form in vogue as early as the Homeric times in which song, dance, instrument and pantomime were used in combination. It was often held in the honour of Zeus. Of the war dances and exercises, the *purrix* was the most famous. In Sparta, the performances of *purrix* were rough but in Athens they were soft and graceful.

Of all the dance forms that provided entertainment the *pantomimi* was perhaps the most intriguing. For every episode the actor changed his costume and the mask. He had about five scenes to go through. As an acting technique *cheironomia* was used extensively. It was so effective that a dancer when challenged by Cynic Demetrius performed only by *cheironomia*. He kept aside the instruments and chorus, and told the whole story so well "that the amazed and convinced Demetrius called out, Man, pantomimus, I hear what you are doing. Not only do I see you, but you seem to me to be speaking with your very hands" (Lawler 141).

The dramatic genres themselves are said to have developed from dance genres like *dithyramb*, *phallika* or *komos*, all of which were associated with the worship of Dionysus. The dances of this cult contributed to the choreography of dramatic chorus in a major way. The exact procedures of this worship were a secret, but it is known that in the Dionysian dances torches were taken into woods where screaming women were 'entered into by the god'. In the resultant frenzy, they raged about in the woods tearing apart small animals. It is commonly accepted that the noble and dignified *emmelia* was the dance of tragedy.

The dances of comedy had many things to portray, not just a variety of humans but also strange beings, animals, clouds, and birds. The proverbial dance of comedy, the *kordax* was lewd, sexually blatant and vigorous. Much emphasis, all sources say, was on a lascivious rotation of belly and buttocks to create an image of lowliness suitable to comedy. In the satyr plays a similar dance called *skinnis* was performed by the fat and ugly silenoi who were given a horse's ears, tail and hooves, and a phallos, costume of goat skin looking very much like the satyrs of Dionysus.

3.4.3 Unification of Dance with Words

The choruses of fifth century drama include some very great lyric poems. But when they performed, they were received as a unity of song, dance, groupings, colour and spectacle. "It is this unity that we must never forget. To understand and recreate this, it is with the unity, of word and dance that we must start." (Aylen 115).

Not only was all dance meant to mimetically express the meaning of the verse, its rhythm was also required to match the metre of the verse. Taking a cue from T.B.L. Webster, Aylen contends that particular dance movements were connected to particular metres used in the choral lyrics.

The Greek lyrics in the plays, known as strophe, antistrophe and epode, were written in such metres that they suggested a musical score for the music composer. At the same time, they suited certain choreographic movements. In other words, dances must have been chosen by the theatre directors to match the natural rhythms of the metres. The tragedians like Sophocles wrote the songs of the chorus in dochmian metre so that dances with violent movements could be used to suit the action. Similarly, the cretic metre could have been useful to the kicking in the dance called *skinnis* and the slow ionic metres would have matched well with sinuous motions of the back bends in the dance of the women worshippers of Dionysus. The result was a performance in which a perfect combination of rhythmic poetry, song and dance was presented in theatre.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Aristotle succeeded in salvaging the great contribution of the ancient Greeks, namely the art of theatre from the merciless damnation by Plato through providing a constructive definition of mimesis. His definition became the ground on which all the magnificent edifices of various theories of representation were created from the Renaissance to the modern times. In them all, as was laid down by Aristotle, it was accepted that mimesis is based upon a study of life as we see it and that it is pleasant and educative. It was credited a moral function. Thus Aristotle imparted a metaphysical, moral and aesthetic worth to mimesis and thus to art which Plato had denied on all these three counts.

In the next unit, we shall examine how mimesis works in tragedy.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. How does Aristotle change the significance of mimesis through a new definition?
2. Does mimesis apply to theatre only or to various other arts and how?
3. What are the major media of mimesis that are found in dramatic productions?
4. Is there a philosophical base for Aristotle's redefinition of mimesis?
5. Why is tragedy regarded as a better art forms than epic by Aristotle?

3.7 GLOSSARY

Archilochus (circa 7th -8th cent B.C.)

The earliest iambic and elegiac poet, who lived in the seventh/eighth century B.C. He is regarded as a great innovator in metre and language. His songs, sung to the accompaniment of the flute, were very personal in feeling and were models of lyricism for later poets.

Artemis

A pan-Hellenic Greek goddess ruling specially over the forest animals. She was perhaps worshipped in an earlier form by the Minoans also. Her status in the Olympian hierarchy was rather humble. She seemed to have been the deity for fertility and child-birth though she herself was a virgin and was perhaps a rural deity to begin with. In sacrifices to Artemis only small cattle like goats were offered. During the course of time she also acquired the status of a major city goddess.

Atheneaus (around A.D. 200)

Famous for his work *The Learned Banquet*, which was written in the genre of symposium talk, where a large number of authors, philosophers, law-makers gather to interact. He mentions or quotes from 1,250 authors, 1,000 plays and 10,000 lines of poetry.

Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.)

He was born in the township of Eleusis and grew up seeing the growth of democracy at Athens after the fall of tyranny. He fought in the two crucial battles that of Marathon and Salamis which saved Greece from Persian occupation. Aeschylus was probably initiated into the Eleusian mysteries as well, all of which seemed to have contributed to the making of his strongly patriotic and deeply religious temperament. The heroes of his plays are mostly fighters rebelling against circumstances or divine will but in the end brought around to reconciliation with Cosmic justice. His plots are simple, with no complications of change of fortune or *anagnorises*. But he relies upon spectacle and grandeur to create an effect of cosmic orderliness.

Aeschylus wrote a large number of tetralogies out of which a few have survived as complete works and a large number as fragments or mere titles. Some of the tetralogies that Aeschylus wrote are as follows (1) *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *Seven Against Thebes* with the satyr play *Sphinx* (2) *Suppliants*, *Egyptians*, *Danaides* with the satyr play *Amymone* (3) *Orestia* comprising of *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*, and the satyr play *Proteus* and (4) *Lykourgia* consisting of *Edone*, *Bassari*, *Neanoskoi* and the satyr play *Lycurgus*. Besides these there is a huge number of titles that must have made tetralogies but the exact

combinations are not known. These include *Myrmidones*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Promethues Unbound*, *Argivians*, *Eleusians* etc. His first victory in the contests was perhaps in 484 and the last production in 456. He travelled only as far as Sicily outside Greece.

cheironomia

Signs made by hands and fingers used to represent various things in Greek dance, mime and theatre.

Demeter

The Greek goddess of corn and fruit, a major diety for seasonal ceremonies.

elegiac poetry

Basically the "elegiac" is a kind of a meter that developed from the epic hexameter. It was Critias who first used the word, "*elegos*" and even in early Greek literature it was taken for granted that elegy is a kind of lament. However, early elegies were not always laments. They could be flute-songs as in Archilochos and Callinu, or military songs addressed to soldiers and historical songs as in Mimnerus. By the sixth century elegiac compositions came to be used for epitaphs on memorial stones and for laments also. Elegy then kept on developing for all kinds of memorial works down to the modern times.

Eleusis

An ancient and important sacred town close to Athens which had its own rulers till 7th century B.C. It was famous for the ceremonies of Demeter and Peresphone which attracted devotees from all over the Greek world. Games were also held here every four years.

Eleusian Mysteries

The Mysteries in Greece were of Demeter and Dionysus of which the former was held at Eleusis. The devotees gathered in Athens and after bathing in the sea went to Eleusis in a **procession**. In a hall at the temple of Demeter rituals were held while singing, **seeing** special emblems, and performing certain acts of worship.

Euripides (about 485- 406 B.C.)

He came from a family of the priests of Apollo and is said to have composed his works in the isolation of a cave in Salamis. There was little political activity that he personally indulged in but he was a friend of many doubting sophists and philosophers of his time such as Socrates and Anaxagoras. For his unconventional ideas he incurred the displeasure of Cleon, the then virtual ruler of Athens. Most probably for this reason he left the city to join the court of the Macedonian king Aechelaus where he died a couple of years later.

The first great success of Euripides was the victory at Athens in 451 B.C. But it was not many times that he got the prize at the Dionysian festival though he is said to have competed twenty-two times. He won only once more in 428 B.C. for *Hippolytus* and then posthumously in 405 B.C. In other words, he was not given due recognition by his contemporaries. In all, he wrote ninety-two plays.

The surviving texts have come down in two groups, one as a selection of some plays with commentary and the only as plays. The first group contains: *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Hacuba*, *Troades*, *Phoenicians*, *Orestes*, *Bacchea* and *Rhesus*. The other collection contains besides these, *Helen*, *Electra*, *Heraleidai*, *Heracles*, *Supplices*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Iphigenia at Tauris*, *Ion*, and *Cyclops*.

Euripides is credited with projecting the ancient gods with lesser reverence bringing them closer to human weaknesses. He avoided sublimity and revelled in

poignancy. He is certainly the father of psychological characterisation emphasising inner conflict rather than outer combat.

Sophocles (496-406 B.C.)

Son of a rich merchant belonging to Colonus, Sophocles was a highly skilled musician and dancer who led the paeans as a singer with the lyre at the victory celebration after the battle of Salamis. He won his first victory in 468 B.C. and also made a mark acting at the ball playing a character called Nausicaa. Active in social sphere as well, for some time he was appointed the imperial treasurer and was twice elected as a general who fought along with Pericles. He was also a priest of the healing god Halon and built a temporary temple in his own house for Asklepios. Reconciled thus to the religion and politics of Athens he never accepted an invitation to another court. Shortly before his death he performed with his own chorus, the *Mourning* for Euripides. Out of the 123 plays he wrote, he won 24 victories.

Some of his best known plays among the surviving ones are *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Trachiniai*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus Coloneus*. He introduced the third actor, enlarged the chorus from twelve to fifteen and brought in scene-painting into the productions of tragedy.

satyrikon

The humorous play performed after a trilogy in a dramatic festival. It represented a myth of satyrs.

Thesmophoria

An exclusively women's festival held all over Greece in autumn to celebrate Demeter. Bowers of plants were raised and women stayed in them also fasting for a day. It was basically a festival celebrating the sowing of the new corn. One of the most significant festivals for processions and rituals in ancient times. It finds a mention in many plays and poems of the ancient period.

3.8 SUGGESTED READING

Primary Texts

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UNIT 4 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY-

Part I

Structure

4.0	Objectives
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall

- look at Aristotle's view of tragedy
- analyse the six elements of tragedy
- look at the way music was used in ancient Greece
- study the concept of catharsis

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is worthwhile to note that unlike modern theatre, ancient Greek theatre was religious. Plays were performed only during festivals, a time when society communicated with its ancestors and gods. This choice of timing influenced the nature of theatrical performances and the techniques of presentation. For instance, Greek theatre, not only grew out of dance, it also retained dance and music as major activities. The strong emotions generated while worshipping the gods and the ancestors also provided an aesthetics of emotional arousal which we find at its core. This aesthetic value was formulated as *catharsis*. These dramatic festivals were often held at sites such as the temple of Asklepios at Epidauros where patients were also treated for diseases.

The dramatic theory in the *Poetics* of Aristotle can be said to consist of four principles of the ancient classificatory system. Firstly, the concept of mimesis, which is common to all fine arts; secondly, the treatment of the various genres of poetry, namely epic, tragedy and comedy; thirdly, the division of tragedy into six

elements—plot (*muthos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*), language (*lexis*), music (*melopoia*), and spectacle (*opsis*); and fourthly, cryptic statement about *catharsis* upheld by Western critical tradition as a principle of Aristotelian aesthetics. The subject of mimesis can be considered in two ways, as a principle and as a practice. As a principle, mimesis is a kind of human urge that creates drama and is endowed with aesthetic values. As a practice mimesis is a way of handling theatrical devices to reflect the principle.

In the history of western literature and aesthetics, all these four concepts, namely mimesis, genre classification, the six elements of tragedy or drama, and finally *catharsis* have become the focal point of discussion right from the Renaissance to the present day. The Aristotelian principles of art are none other than these four. All the theories of art such as the Elizabethan, the Neo-Classical, the Romantic and the Modernist have taken up the issues of debate from here. The western notions of the real, the natural, the good and the beautiful or the moral have related and re-interpreted Aristotle. It is, therefore, very essential that we clearly understand the primary notions of mimesis, genres, tragic elements and *catharsis* as initially defined by Aristotle so that we can see their evolution in the later developments in Western culture.

In the last Unit, we explored the concepts of mimesis and commented on the genres, now we shall examine the six elements of tragedy (by extension of all drama) that make up the structure of the play. In other words, we shall see how through the six elements, a play makes an imitation or mimesis of life and brings about *catharsis*.

4.2 THE SIX ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY

The six elements of tragedy are to be seen as separate only for the sake of analysis. On the stage they form a unity. Again for the sake of convenience they have been defined by Aristotle as internal and external. Plot, character and thought are subjective, hence internal. They are not as obvious as the visual and auditory content of theatre such as diction, music and spectacle. Nor is it to be imagined that any one of them is more important than the other. When Aristotle calls myth 'the soul of tragedy', he does not mean that other elements are dispensable or less essential. The myth only holds together the other elements of the play structurally. In terms of the total performance, a play has a very complicated structure which consists of all the speaking, gesturing, dancing, singing and moving that goes on in the performing area. Yet the series of episodes or the story, has been regarded as the basic structure of a play even though it is merely the ground upon which many complex patterns are raised.

4.3 MYTH (PLOT) AND ETHOS (CHARACTER)

For the ancients, *mythos* or myth simply meant the story, commonly translated into English as plot. However, it is better to use the term myth, not only as it retains the flavour of the original meaning, but it also keeps us away from confusing it with the usual meaning of the modern term "plot" which implies intricate turn of events, full of surprise and suspense. As there was no convention in ancient times of writing on events of everyday life for the serious genre of tragedy, the stories of only some famous houses could be the subject of tragedy. The story, thus, came from the collective memory of the culture that created and nurtured them.

As is well known, Aristotle has called myth 'the soul of tragedy'. To understand this we must keep in mind that dramatic action (*praxis*) in ancient drama consisted not so much of characterisation or portrayal as was the case in the later

European drama, but was an imitation (*mimesis*) of an action made up of a series of dramatic events or episodes.

4.3.1 Myth or Plot as an Organic Whole

In a play, the aim was to show a passage from an earlier state of being of the protagonist to his/her later state. This passage of episodes or action has been called myth. The structure of this myth or plot is seen by Aristotle as an organic whole, almost like the body structure of a living animal. This is indicated in his definition of tragedy, which like an animal's body, must have a definite shape or a magnitude :

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of certain magnitude, for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end... Again, a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude, for beauty depends on magnitude and order...As, therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in the view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by memory."
(*Poetics* VII:3-4)

"Magnitude is in itself the outer structure which is supported by the unity of action and that the whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed" (*Poetics* VIII:4). To give the poet the liberty to create magnitude and wholeness, Aristotle allows him to make changes in the events. Thus, poetry can modify history, as it is a more philosophical and higher form than history. Teleology, that is the unity leading to the end, makes it even higher. The poet can even alter traditional legends as he is a maker of plots rather than of verses.

The wholeness and magnitude provide a unity of action to the plot. We must clearly understand that for Aristotle there is only one kind of unity, that of action. He does not prescribe unities of time and place. These were attributed to him by the Renaissance critics. In the construction of myth or the plot, events should follow in a manner that seems credible, having an 'air of design,' even in the coincidences of the myth to heighten the effect of tragic wonder.

4.3.2 Two Kinds of Myths, Simple and Complex

Aristotle defines, two kinds of plots, the simple (*aploi*) and the complex (*peplegmenoi*). The first is without reversal of fortune (*peripetia*) and recognition of a past act or identity or person (*anagnorisis*) and the second has both. This analysis of the myth is not applicable to tragedy alone. Just as magnitude and unity of action would be required in any myth, tragic or comic, *peripetia* and *anagnorisis* are not for tragedy only. *Peripetia* can be useful in comedy too, and so can *anagnorisis*. *Peripetia* "is a change by which action veers to its opposite, subject always to the rule of probability or necessity." It creates the great ironic effect. The latter is defined as a "change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet to face good or bad fortune." On the whole the system can be employed both for tragic and comic myths, or for the tragi-comic ones like Euripides' *Helen*, where *peripetia* and *anagnorisis* clearly work together towards a happy ending.

4.3.3 Pathos or Suffering

The third part of a myth, that is the scene of suffering is called *pathos* and is

destructive and painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounding and the like (*Poetics* XI:6), and is required only in the tragedies where there is a reversal from good to bad or a final destruction. There was a view in Aristotle's time that the best tragedies were those in which the final destruction was averted (*Poetics* XIII:7). But for Aristotle such was a second rate tragedy. It is obvious from the *Poetics* that such tragedies were more popular and that poets often succumbed to the wishes of the audience. Perhaps such was the case with Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*. The analysis of suffering, hamartia and tragic reversal of fortune should not make us think that the unity of action, magnitude and wholeness were only to serve the tragic purpose of arousing horror and pity. Magnitude and wholeness are necessary for the comic plot as well, and so would be the unity of action. These three are actually the basic properties that any plot must have.

4.3.4 Ethos or Character

Broadly speaking, characters in a tragedy had to be 'good men' and those in comedy and satire, were 'mean persons.' So all characters fall into the category of either admirable people or ludicrous folks. Aristotle has mentioned the qualities of the protagonist of a tragedy. The first requirement was his goodness, which his speeches must reflect in the shape of a moral purpose. This was required of even women and slaves. The second thing to aim at, is propriety. There is a type of manly valour: but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate (*Poetics* XIV: 2). Aristotle wishes women to be subdued if they are to reflect goodness. Thirdly, a character must be true to life; this is a distinct thing from goodness and propriety, as here described. The fourth point is consistency; for though the subject of the imitation, which suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent (*Poetics* XV: 3). Most of all the poet should make a likeness which is true to life and yet be more beautiful ... preserve the type and yet ennoble it (*Poetics* XV: 7). In all these externals of a character, the most essential thing is ethos or that which reveals a moral purpose, showing that kind of thing a man chooses or avoids (*Poetics* VII:1). Putting all these into a concrete shape Aristotle has given us a pattern of what the tragic hero should be like. He should be a good man, though not exceptionally good but 'like ourselves.' As he was always supposed to be of a royal household he would be valourous too. Moral choices are made by all the protagonists without dithering. It may be a Hippolytus, Antigone, Orestes or Hecabe. The protagonist does not take too long to decide. S/he gives the reasons for making the choice, deliberately revealing the thought process behind the choice.

This willful sharing with the audience was an important feature of dramatic process and was called *dianoia*. In cultures which do not foster individualism, the protagonist was obliged to explain his conduct to his family, friends, the city and the gods. The greatness of *ethos* or character was judged by the courage with which moral choices were made. A confused procrastinator like Hamlet, unable to make a timely choice, would have been an anti-hero to the ancient Greeks.

4.3.5 Hamartia or The Tragic Failing

Reflections upon the nature of things or an analysis of the human condition was not the aim of *dianoia*. Thinking was for choosing, doing this or that. Action was the culmination of ethos. But in spite of his best efforts and courageous choice, Man fails. To explain the logic of failure, Aristotle has used the term *hamartia* which means hitting off the mark. It is an error of judgement made inadvertently.

A large number of Greek tragedies have little room even for *hamartia*. *Andromache*, *Suppliants*, *Antigone*, *Daughters of Troy*, *Electra*, *Eumenides*, are all plays in which misfortune sets in motion even before the protagonist realises its

presence. In the majority of the tragedies the events are predetermined, a god has decided to destroy someone as in *Hippolytus*, or family duty holds the individual in absolute bondage as in *Oresteia*, *Electra* or *Antigone*. Hamartia, then, is a brief appearance in the action sequence of the hero, as an action which at the time of doing does not seem that consequential such as Oedipus' killing the old man in ignorance, or Hippolytus' rebuking the advances of his mother.

The value of hamartia was highly raised in Christian as well as in modern moralistic tragedy where the downfall of the hero is caused by a cardinal sin or a serious lapse. In Christian or moralistic tragedy, pity for the protagonist and horror at excessive suffering, are both benumbed. In the Greek world, there was no free-will. Even by making the right choice the hero could not avert a calamity or suffering, because his suffering was not always caused by his weakness. It was not the ambition of a Macbeth, the jealousy of an Othello or the arrogance of a Lear, nor was it the inner sin that destroyed a man, but instead it was the dilemma imposed upon him by forces far beyond his control that caused his destruction. His ethos/character was revealed in his choosing an admirable way to death. Here suffering comes not from within but from without. Instead of the Semitic, this was the Indo-Greek perception of Man's destiny. Here, two terms, *moira* and *hubris*, often used in this context, further indicate the helplessness of mankind. *Moirai*, literally meaning portion or the family share, metaphorically came to indicate the share of misfortune allotted by the gods. *Hubris* meant the daring, sometimes transgression, that the hero made in his desperate effort to escape impending misfortune. *Hubris* and hamartia were rather intertwined in the course of action. It should nevertheless be remembered that hubris and moira are not terms used as categories by Aristotle. They were concepts used by the Greeks to define human behaviour.

4.4 DIANOIA AND LEXIS

Defining Dianoia, Aristotle says:

"Third in order is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory, this is the function of political art and the art of rhetoric: and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civic life: the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid something, are not expressive of ethos/character. Thought on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated." (*Poetics VI:16*)

4.4.1 Dianoia and the Protagonist

The inner questioning that goes on in the mind of a character and makes him choose one way or another is called dianoia. The ability to choose, the moral fibre or the courage to choose, is called ethos, but the ferment of thoughts that leads to the point of choice is known as *dianoia*. This thought process often becomes part of the dialogue when a character bemoans his/her plight and speculates on the nature of things. For this reason Aristotle insists that dianoia be regarded as an essential element of tragedy.

The general maxims that a character quotes in support of his decision are also called dianoia. It is not just any thinking like plotting, scheming, hoping or wishing that can qualify to be called dianoia, but only a debate which has a moral or philosophical perspective in relation to the action of the protagonist. The emphasis laid by Aristotle on this dialectical dianoia is doubtless connected with

the decisive influence exercised by political debate and forensic pleading in Greek theatre, the "agon" of ecclesia (assembly) or of the law-courts being reproduced in the agon of the drama (Butcher 343).

4.4.2 Lexis

Lexis and *melopoia*, though, among the six cardinal elements of tragedy have been given very little notice in the *Poetics*. This has created the impression that they had a poor place in Greek theatre. The fact is otherwise. As their function was too obvious even to the average observer, Aristotle seems to have skipped them from his serious analysis.

Lexis or language in theatre can be divided into two parts; the spoken word and the sung word. The spoken word in the form of natural conversational speech was not much used in ancient theatre. It was always a studied pitch variation, ranging from intoned speech to fully embellished song. There was also a variety of usage in between the intoned word and the song. In Naturalistic European theatre there has always been a gap between the spoken dialogue and the song or the sung word.

But as there was no such gap in ancient times, theorists then did not emphasise much on the distinction between the spoken word and the sung word. Instead, what was more important to them, was the distinction between the linguistic content of the word and its musical content. Sound was considered to generate meaning in two ways, i.e., by language and by music. Language was transformed in theatre into dramatic discourse through intonation, pitch variation, or song, and all these three ways combined to make up the ancient actor's dialogue. On *lexis*, Aristotle says:

"Next, as regards Diction, one branch of the inquiry treats Modes of Utterance. But this province of knowledge belongs to the art of Delivery and to the masters of that science. It includes, for instance, what is a command, a prayer, a statement, a threat, a question, an answer, and so forth. To know or not to know these things involves no serious censure upon the poet's art... We, may therefore, pass this over as an inquiry that belongs to another art, not to poetry." (*Poetics* XIX, 4-5).

This exclusion of Modes of Utterance from inquiry, reveals that Aristotle looked upon diction only in terms of phonology, grammar and figures of speech, and not at its conversion into dramatic discourse. If a dramatist need not know what is a command, a threat, etc., then who else should? It is no wonder that after the above quoted observation Aristotle proceeds to consider only the functional aspects of language such as letters, syllables and so forth.

4.4.3 Kinds of Style

We may go on to see what he has to say on a playwright's linguistic style. Aristotle seems to recommend a balance between the clarity produced by the usage of current words and the loftiness achieved by extraordinary usage which avoids obscurity or eccentricity:

"The perfection of style is to be clear without being mean... That diction, on the other hand, is lofty and raised above the commonplace which employs unusual words. By unusual, I mean strange (or rare) words, metaphorical, lengthened anything, in short, that differs from the normal idiom, yet a style wholly composed of such words is either a riddle or a jargon;...For by deviating in exceptional cases from the normal idiom, the language will gain distinction, while at the same time, the partial conformity with usage will give perspicuity. (*Poetics* XXII, 1-5)

Some examples of style that he takes up from the dramatic poets suggest that loftiness was much admired by Aristotle. But on the possible ways in which language, or rather the total verbal content may have been actually performed on the Greek stage, the *Poetics* is of little help.

4.5 MELOPOIIA OR THE MUSICAL ELEMENT

4.5.1 Application of Music in Theatre

The Greek chorus and the actors had the liberty to use all the prevalent musical forms as there was no restriction for ritual reasons. The immense variety of tunes and melodies with the subtle nuances of tone colour could have provided a vast area of cultural reference. Tone colour or in other words the subtle variations in the nature of notes, on which melodic music depends for creating its effects, entirely, is not so much a matter of universal laws as of cultural associations with given melodies. For instance, in Indian music we believe in the association of certain tone colours with seasons or specific emotional states. In fact, the association is perceived only as a result of training. The Greek dramatists must have used the same ploy.

Giving an example of cultural memory used by the composer, Stanford says, "If a dramatist wished to evoke poignant memories from the political past of Athens he could introduce a tune from the popular drinking songs (*skolia*) that went back to the time of tyranny of Peistratids..." (52). But other than particular jingles or tunes, the modes and their melodies must have been used to introduce new tunes for songs by the chorus. According to Plutarch (*Moralia* 1136C-E) and Aristoxenos, Aristotle believed that Sappho invented the highly emotional musical scale called the Mixolydian and that the tragedians took it from her and used it along with the Dorian scale (Stanford 51). Aristoxenos is also the source of a statement in the anonymous *Life of Sophocles* (23) that Sophocles introduced the Phrygian scale into tragedy. And according to Psellos, Sophocles also brought in the Lydian scale (Stanford 51). Such statements indicate that the great playwrights improved drama by not only providing fresh scripts of high literary value, they were composers of music and dance as well. As the famous saying goes, Phrenikos invented "as many dance steps as the waves of the sea."

The value of music was pivotal in tragedy; recognising which Nietzsche observed that, as the genius of music had fled from tragedy in modern times, tragedy is, strictly speaking dead. As regards the actual sounding of ancient Greek music, Leo Aylen is perhaps not too off the mark when he says : "But if an Indian composer were to set a Sophocles chorus to the raga appropriate to the mood of the piece, making use of the exact rhythm score that Sophocles has left and using only a unison tune accompanied in unison by a rough reed instrument, then for his audience he would have got very near indeed to the music of Sophocles." (109)

4.6 OPSIS OR THE VISUAL CONTENT

4.6.1 The Totality of Opsis

It has been repeatedly pointed out that opsis has not only the last but the least place in the Aristotelian scheme. Although opsis should be taken to mean everything visual in theatre such as formation of dancers in the chorus, the costumes, movements, gestures and hand signs (*cheironomia*) of the actors, still it is commonly believed that Aristotle had limited the sense of the word to stage scenery only. The totality of opsis was immense in Greek theatre. Any study in

this area should not underestimate its richness and function on account of Aristotle's negligence in describing these aspects of performance. Even though, Aristotle has not written at length on the subject of gestures, references were however made to it by other classical authors like Athenaeus and Lucian in the context of dance in ancient Greece.

4.6.2 Visual Parts of a Tragedy

Let us begin by recapitulating a Greek performance. All plays began with a prologue, spoken by a single actor or at times by two. The chorus then entered, often from the right side (spectator's view) singing and dancing. The tragic chorus consisted of five files (*xuga*) and three ranks (*stoikhoi*) and the comic of six files and four ranks. Sometimes, this entry, called *parodos*, may have been in a single file (Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 239-40). As in all choric arts the flute player came in with the chorus. Positioned in the orchestra, the chorus danced till the *parodos* was over. Their leader, called the *koryphaios*, was number three in the first file which also was the closest to the stage area.

Then followed a dramatic episode or an act in which the actors spoke or sang to each other to which the chorus also reacted mostly in song. At the end of the episode the actors withdrew and the chorus sang a choral ode, a system consisting of strophe, antistrophe and epode. This unique feature of Greek drama was pure song, dance and mime, with the flute player also playing and dancing. The chorus presented a dramatic response, in continuation of the dramatic action, to the episode, making it an expression of hope, sorrow, despair or happiness through song and dance. The actors, then, entered again and the same cycle was repeated.

On the termination of the final episode came the part of performance called *exodos*, consisting of an ode system, some dialogue and a brief song. The chorus then went out of the amphitheatre in the same formation of files and ranks. Thus we find that acting was sharply divided between the actors and the chorus. Whereas the actor or actors would speak, recite or sing, the chorus with some exceptions, only sang. As is commonly accepted now, their song was always accompanied by dance.

4.6.3 Greek Gesture and Dance

We know that the use of gestures for orators was prescribed by the Greek rhetoricians for arousing emotions and effective communications. Quintilian has given an account of how the head, face, arms, body and feet can be made to express joy, sorrow, humility, abhorrence, wonder and many other emotions. But the orator, he suggests, should not use mimetic gestures and be as unlike a dancer as possible. He adds that an actor should not even attempt to imitate the voice of the character (Stanford 85).

One can infer that gestures of many kinds must have been employed as revealed by a close reading of some plays. From *Libation Bearers* (lines 24-31), *Suppliant Women* (lines 110-11), *Electra* (lines 146-50) actions like veiling the head, beating the hand and the body vigorously, tearing and hair pulling, gnawing the face with finger-nails and tearing garments can be inferred easily. Supplicants would frequently prostrate themselves to touch the protector's knees and extreme appeals of pity by women would be accompanied by the gesture of baring their breasts, as was done by Clytemnestra in the *Libation Bearers* (lines 896-98) and by Electra in *Electra* (line 1207), and by Polyxena in *Hecuba* (line 560). Embracing, caressing, hand-clapping and even kissing, in spite of a mask, are described in *Alcestis* (line 402); *Trojan Women* (line 763); *Phonecian Women* (line 1671) and *Herakles* (line 186).

4.6.4 Dances in the Orchestra of Theatre

The names of a very large number of dances from the Cretan to the Greco-Roman are known. "As we have seen, a great deal of information has come down to us on the dance of Greek tragedy. However, the exact appearance of those dances eludes us. No director of a Greek tragedy can claim to set forth an 'authentic' reproduction of the ancient dances"(Lawler 85). However, in an attempt to vaguely visualise what the dance movements may have looked like we can draw upon some sources of information.

Firstly, from brief descriptions of various dances that were performed during ritual, festive and sportive occasions; from dances included in art forms like dithyramb and tragedy, nomoi, paeon; and from entertainment occasions dances like huporkhema and pantomimi performed by professionals. Secondly, there is a rudimentary dance theory to be found in the writings of some late authors like Athenaeus, Lucian, Pollux, Quintilian and Plutarch. They all indicate that a definite choreology for the purpose of teaching and practising dance existed in Greece. Sophocles is said to have written a book on it which is now lost (Lawler 82). In Greece, as in all cultures, dances of the people may have been transmitted informally. Dances of shrines and mysteries may have been taught in Thiasoi but in the theatrical tradition a choreology must have been essential to sophisticate and assimilate popular dances into theatric dance forms.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Aristotle, provides a framework for us to see the art of tragedy in its totality and as a theatrical experience. While Plato's primary concern was to see the function of tragedy in the utopian state, Aristotle's aim was to analyse tragedy as it was to be found in Greek culture. The idealistic fervour of the master comes to be contrasted with the empirical zest of the disciple. Not that Aristotle was not keen to define the best kind of tragedy and suggest standards of better writing, but his faith in the utility of tragedy was steady.

Aristotle not only described the genre of tragedy in its six parts, he recorded how these diverse parts made a whole. In spite of the fact that he dwelt very little on the musical and dance related parts of the art as they were practiced in his time, his enumeration of these as essential elements preserves for all future generations the true nature of Greek tragedy. But for Aristotle's statement we would have forgotten the input of spectacle and music and remembered only the value of plot as what survives through time is the verbal play, text and not the practical art of production representing the unity of word, gesture, dance and music.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the purpose of Aristotle in defining tragedy ?
2. Explain hamartia, magnitude and myth.
3. Comment on the value of music in Greek tragedy.
4. Is there any contemporary relevance of the Aristotelian scheme of the elements of tragedy?

4.9 GLOSSARY

komos

A festive procession with all kinds of ritual exuberance.

Maenads

Feminine worshippers of the cult of Dionysus, who gathered in the woods outside the city and did not allow any man to participate in the rituals.

phallika

A ritual song-dance held during the rural festivals of Dionysus celebrating the male organ.

4.10 SUGGESTED READING

Primary Text

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UNIT 5 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY-

PART II

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Pleasure Proper to Tragedy
- 5.3 Catharsis
- 5.4 Arousal of Emotion
- 5.5 European Interpretation of Aristotle
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we surveyed the various parts of tragedy as defined by Aristotle. In this unit we shall

- look at the effects a tragedy is supposed to have on the audience
- examine the concepts of proper pleasure (*oikeia hedone*) and catharsis

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Although, Aristotle has talked about the proper pleasure (*oikeia hedone*) of tragedy, it is axiomatically accepted that this *hedone* is felt within the folds of catharsis which is a general mental state that tragedy must bring about (where? in the play as Else suggests, or in the audience as Butcher says). Catharsis, then has been accepted as the end of tragedy, and by implication of all drama. But as we shall see, this was not true according to the text of the *Poetics*.

As a result of an exclusive reading of Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy (*Poetics* VI:2), catharsis has been regarded as the sole aim of tragedy. But it is obvious, that for Aristotle, whatever may have been the function of tragedy and however essential catharsis may have been to it, catharsis alone was not the purpose of tragedy. Besides catharsis, Aristotle has mentioned in the *Poetics*, a 'pleasure which is proper only to tragedy' and which presumably is not to be found in comedy or any other literary form. Are "proper pleasure" (*oikeia hedone*) and catharsis mutually exclusive, synonymous or intertwined?

5.2 PLEASURE PROPER TO TRAGEDY

There are three places in the *Poetics* where pleasure is talked about. In the first place, Aristotle says that tragedy cannot afford every kind of pleasure but only that which is proper to it, and this comes about from pity and fear through imitation (14:3). In the second place, pleasure is said to be derived from completeness and wholeness of action in a plot (23:1). In the third instance, pleasure is said to be a result of music and spectacular effects (26:4). As the famous definition has it:

"Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude: in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play in the form of action, not of narrative: through pity and fear effecting the purgation or katharsis of these emotions." (Butcher 23)

From this it is clear that *hedone* and catharsis are not mutually exclusive as both are caused by the arousal of pity and fear through imitation. Music causes pleasure and so does catharsis, as it is said in the *Politics*. Pleasure is also caused by the completeness of action which in itself is meant to arouse pity and fear. Thus, even though, proper pleasure (*hedone*) and catharsis are seen to be intertwined they should be recognised as distinct from each other. In no case, should catharsis alone be regarded as the end of tragedy, as is often done by literary critics. About the nature of proper pleasure (*hedone*), Aristotle states that every activity has its own proper pleasure. Thus proper pleasures in the comic, tragic, satyric, epic and nomioic genres will all be different. Aristotle does not propose that underlying all these delights there may be a common denominator, a literary or a poetic pleasure (*poietike hedone*).

5.3 CATHARSIS

There has been a sustained attempt to postulate that catharsis could be a common and basic aesthetic experience. But the very meaning of catharsis has been a source of conflicting interpretations. In the nineteenth century one major way of looking at catharsis was to take it as a medical term transferred to poetic criticism. Cleansing (*kenosis*) in the Hippocratic writings denotes the entire removal of healthy but surplus humours: Catharsis is the removal of the afflictions or excesses ("*ta lupounta*") and the like of qualitatively alien matter (Butcher 253). (This doctrine of imbalance of vital forces later on called humours, as the primary cause of disease, is of purely Indian origin. As demonstrated by Filliozat, the science was well formulated in India as early as the Atharva Veda and travelled to Greece through Persia). According to the Hippocratic theory, an imbalance among the elements of air, bile (of two kinds) and phlegm causes each and every disease. The cure lying in subduing the overswollen element and restoring the balance between the four elements.

Besides this well-stated medicinal doctrine, there was also the practice of curing madness through musical catharsis. The patients were made to listen to certain melodies which made them "fall back into their normal state, as if they had undergone a medical or purgative (cathartic) treatment" (*Politics V.viii.7.1342 a 15* qtd. in Butcher 249). It is further added that not only is catharsis achieved musically but that "those who are liable to pity and fear, and in general, persons of emotional temperament pass through a like experience; ...they all undergo a catharsis of some kind and feel a pleasurable relief" (Butcher 251). The nature of catharsis described in the *Politics* should be true for the *Poetics*, as Aristotle himself has stated that his observations are of a general nature in the former treatise but shall be more detailed in a later work. Therefore, those who presumed that tragic catharsis like musical catharsis restores normally healthy emotional state, were not so wrong.

But this rather clinical definition of catharsis does not satisfy the literary theorists. As early as Butcher it was felt there was more to it. "But the word, as taken up by Aristotle into his terminology of art, has probably a further meaning. It expresses not only a fact of psychology or of pathology, but a principle of art" (253). The tragic pity and fear he postulated, "in real life contain a morbid and disturbing element ... As the tragic action progresses, the lower forms of emotion are found to have been transmuted into more refined forms" (254). He further postulated that this purification is also a change of the personal emotion to the universal. Purged of the "petty interest of the self" (261) emotion now becomes a representation of the universal, so that the "net result is a noble emotional satisfaction" (267). It is not difficult to discern that catharsis is equated with aesthetic pleasure in which noble emotional satisfaction is an essential feature. "But whatever may have been the indirect effect of the repeated operation of catharsis, we may confidently say that Aristotle in his definition of tragedy is

thinking, not only of any remote result, but of the immediate end of the art, of the aesthetic function it fulfils" (Butcher 269).

In my opinion, to raise the balancing function of catharsis to the level of universalisation is to stretch the concept too far. Certainly, the restorative function of catharsis may bring relief such as a sick person feels upon recovery. But it is a presumption on the part of Butcher that universalisation takes place because the element purged from the dramatic emotion is that of personal "petty interest of the self" (261). The Aristotelian catharsis, or for that matter the whole tradition of catharsis, by music or Dionysian orgies, has personal cure or satisfaction as its end. Inner restoration, but not the enjoyment of a new aesthetic element, can at best be the purpose of catharsis. The factors of enjoyment, of "*oikeia hedone*", are different as stated earlier.

Other than regarding it as purgational, there has been another major way of interpreting catharsis. The dual concept of purity and impurity which pervaded the physical, moral, religious and spiritual life of the Greeks was the most deep-seated factor governing their daily activities. The duality of pollution (*miasma*) and purgation (*catharsis*) was part of the Indo-European belief system. We find that in Greek plays, all tragic action is dependent on acts of transgression such as the murder of a kin, sexual defilement, affronts to deities, and so on. These acts brought pollution (*miasma*) upon the protagonist and the people around him. In Greek religion there were prescriptions for expiation of such crimes, just as in India rituals were prescribed for purging of pollution. In tragedies, the very ritual of expiation was often enacted, as in the *Oresteia*. In most plays, the protagonist was expelled from the community by death or banishment; there was expulsion (*kenosis*) of the sinner and purification (*catharsis*) of a given location, city, grove or household. Whereas in some plays, as in the *Oresteia*, this cycle was shown in its completeness, in other plays it was shown partially. In some other plays as in *Hecabe* or *Women of Troy*, there is only *miasma* and no *katharsis*. Looked at in this way, tragedy was a depletion of the cycle of *miasma* and *catharsis*.

To my mind, the annual enactment of tragedy was to reaffirm the *miasma-catharsis* duality, which was a major cultural value of ancient Greek society. In all ancient societies the purpose of retelling the myths, particularly on festive occasions, was many-fold; it was to preserve and transmit the stories, to re-state the beliefs they enshrined, and to relive the behaviour patterns sanctified by tradition. The retelling always had a ritual significance even if it took the form of dramatic enactment for the purpose of entertainment. Entertainment and ritual were intertwined in ancient theatre. In this manner, tragedy was a reliving of the pollution-purity cycle by both the actors and the spectators. The community, the protagonist, his/her acts, and the aroused emotions of the audience, all underwent a catharsis.

In his analysis of catharsis, Gerald Else has rightly grasped the spiritual significance that catharsis had for the Greeks, but he restricts the scope of purgation to the acts of the protagonist. For Else, remorse makes the hero eligible to the spectators' pity, and this pity along with the hero's remorse proves that the act of transgression was actually a pure (*catharos*) act. Thus catharsis is the process of proving purity. As Else puts it:

The filthiness inheres in a conscious intention to kill a person who is a close kin. An unconscious intention to do so, i.e., in intention to do so without being aware of the kinship as Oedipus did not know that he killed his father would therefore be pure, *catharos*. But purity must be proved to our satisfaction. Catharsis would then be the process of proving that the act was pure in that sense.

How is such a thing proved? According to *Nicomachean Ethics* (3,2, 1110b19 and 1111a20), by the remorse of the doer, which shows that if he had known the facts he would not have done the deed. In *Oedipus*, the thing which establishes this to our satisfaction is Oedipus' self blinding. It, then, effects a purification of the tragic deed and so makes Oedipus eligible to our pity. (Else 98)

From this interpretation it seems that Else does not believe that catharsis benefits the audience and their emotions in anyway. In his reading of the famous passage in the *Poetics*, catharsis is purification of the tragic deed and not of the emotions of the spectators. This goes against all other instances of catharsis as mentioned by Plato and Aristotle. The examples they have given indicate a change in the mental state of the spectators or music listeners. Besides, it is nowhere indicated by Aristotle that pity in tragedy was aroused for the purpose of regenerating and purifying the sin and the sinner. He is more concerned with showing how we can feel pity for the protagonist. This feeling in us is more capable of providing catharsis to us rather than just providing that the act of the hero was catharos. If the concept of catharsis is to have any general utility, it must be presumed that the cycle of pollution and purgation (*miasma* and *catharsis*) effects an emotional catharsis in the audience as well. A harmonious view of catharsis which combines its spiritual, clinical and aesthetic effects is more in keeping with the unified approach of the ancients.

5.4 AROUSAL OF EMOTION

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle does not explicitly state that the purpose of the dramatist's art should be to create emotional excitement. He seems to take that for granted. But he does say this much; the pleasure proper to tragedy "comes from pity and fear through imitation" (*Poetics* (XIV:3)). The accounts of ancient authors are sufficient to indicate that the production of Greek plays, particularly tragedy, was geared towards strong emotional arousal. "Even the best of us when we listen to a passage from Homer or from a tragedy... we delight in surrendering ourselves" (*Republic* 605c-d). Herodotus has recorded that when Phrynichos in 494 BC produced his tragedy on the recent capture of Miletos by the Persians, the Athenian audience 'fell to weeping' so distressingly that the magistrates fined the dramatist heavily and banned further performances of the play" (Stanford 5). The actors prided themselves if they were able to fill the seats with weeping multitudes. In what sounds like a gross exaggeration today but may very well have been true, "in the beginning of his *Eumenides* the spectators were so shocked by the frightful appearance of the Furies that children fainted and women had miscarriages" (Stanford 6). The account of a rhapsode reciting poetry, as given by Plato (*Ion* 535C) shows that his hair stood on end. The reciter while delivering epic poetry was filled with enthusiasm and the audience felt it immediately. Dionysios of Halicarnassos mentions this kind of audience response and admits that even reading to himself the speech of Demosthenes resulted in the same effect:

"But whenever I take up any of the speeches of Demosthenes I get possessed with a kind of ecstasy (*enthousia*) and I am led this way and that, changing one emotion for another, doubt, agony, fear, scorn, hate, pity, benevolence, anger, spite, taking in turn all the emotions that have the natural power to master the human mind. And it seems to me that there is no difference between me in this condition and the people who are being initiated into the rites of the Great Mother and the Corybantes and other rites of that kind." (Demosthenes 22 qtd. Stanford 9)

It may be presumed that the actors who cultivated their art much in the same manner as the rhapsode reciters would have commanded the same response in spectators. There was also some writing on the art of emotional arousal, which is

borne by the fact that the author of the treatise commonly known as *On the Sublime* wrote a monograph on *pathos*, which is lost. The term used by him and by other writers for the power of arousing and controlling emotions was "*psuchagogia*", which literally means, 'leading the *psuche*' (Stanford 5). The *Poetics* while taking *psuchagogia* for granted does not give any system for its employment in drama. However, Aristotle has quite a few things to say on emotional manipulation in his *Rhetoric* besides the observation in *On the Psuche* (403a 4ff) that the emotions (*pathe*) all involve physical symptoms and that some observable bodily effect result from all of them (Stanford 22).

In the first eleven chapters of the second book of *Rhetoric* it is shown that an orator can arouse anger, affection, friendliness, enmity, hatred, fear, shame, pity, indignation and many other emotions. The supreme emotion on which tragedy depends most is pity (*eleos*). The English word pity, Stanford thinks, is not an appropriate translation of *eleos* as the one who pities tends to be regarded as superior to the person who is pitied. Compassionate grief, he suggests, is a better rendering of the meaning of the term as in this there is sympathy for the sorrow that is witnessed. The Sanskrit word 'karuna' carries the same import. In *Rhetoric*, *eleos* is defined as a kind of pain (*lupe*) felt at the sight of a painful or destructive event happening to someone who does not deserve it, an evil and fearful event close at hand which one might expect to happen to oneself or to a relative or friend (*philos*) (Stanford 24). Situations in life that can arouse *eleos* are all too well-known and the tragic authors knew them well. However, situations like the loss of a child, a father's murder, the abduction of a wife, horror at unjust sexual compulsions and innumerable others that arouse *eleos* can become tragic or provide 'pleasure proper to tragedy' only if pity (*eleos*) is placed with the framework of cosmic helplessness. The might or a force greater than man should be obvious for eliciting compassion. Close to *eleos* was another feeling which was often employed, particularly in tragedy. This was known as philanthropy, a compassionate reaching out to human values. Prometheus, in the play by Aeschylus, is an excellent example of one who stands for philanthropia and thus commands our admiration.

The other major tragic emotion is fear (*phobos*) which seems to imply an instinct to run away. Stanford suggests that terror is a better translation of *phobos* as the intensity of the emotion is often very great. Anxiety and apprehension are also named as *merima*, *tarbos* and *prontis* (28). The symptoms of fear as described by rhetoricians and dramatists are in ascending order of intensity paleness, chilliness, fast pulse, shivering, shuddering, shrieking, hair standing on end, prostration (Stanford 28). When fright was sudden or so acute that it caused stupefaction, it was called *ekplexis*. When a deed is done in ignorance and later it is discovered that great harm has been caused to a dear one, the shock caused is *ekplexis*. Not only may fear cause this state but, intense eros may also bring about *ekplexis* as was the case with Phaidra.

In the scheme of Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, anger (*menis* or *cholos*) is given the greatest prominence. For orators it is often expedient to provoke the crowds, but even in drama it is the most natural emotion for plots with conflict. After all, prime Greek poetry is about the wrath of Achilles. A milder form of *cholos* is *orge*, the desire for revenge when harm has been done to a friend. This feeling impels one to defend one's honour, makes the blood boil, and burns, the heart with rage. Closely allied with anger, is hatred. Whereas anger cannot last for long and is cured by time, hatred can be everlasting and incurable. Anger if placated may turn into pity specially on seeing how a terrible act in anger has reduced the sufferer to a pitiful condition. But hatred (*misos*) may often result in self-annihilation, as was the case with Clytemnestra, Cassandra and Hecuba. One form of hatred is revulsion or loathing (*stugos*), shown on the stage by spitting and similar actions. When there was justified anger (what we call moral indignation)

it was known by the name of *nemesis*. In the *Rhetoric* it is called *phthonos* (Stanford 34). "*Nemesis*, connected with a verb meaning 'to apportion' was embodied at the highest religious level in the dread goddess of the temple at Rhamnous in Attica, who struck down those who exceeded the limits of appropriate behaviour, as in *Philoctates*, line 518" (Stanford 34).

Among other important emotions that are discussed in the *Rhetoric* are *aischune* and *aidos*. The first is shame felt before or after a dishonourable deed, such as throwing one's shield in battle or illicit intercourse. *Aidos* is the reverence that the virtuous feel for good principles and which is intensified by the thought of not having lived up to high standards. *Aidos* led to Phaidra's suicide and to Jocasta's, and prevented Hippolytos from breaking his oath. Next to anger, if not as strong, is the sexual emotion *eros*. As classical Greek comedy was not emotionally refined but expressly vulgar, there was little room in it for erotic depth and subtlety. But in tragedy there was ample room for psychological probing. However, the nature of *eros* in tragedy is that of a passion which leads astray, a kind of madness of mind and body, a compulsion that overrides social constraints, in brief, something lamentable rather than commendable. It is often depicted as a sickness that strikes women more strongly than men, or at least makes them the agency of destruction. Of the less dominant emotions found in Greek theatre there are filial affection (*storge*), gratitude (*charis*) and general affection or friendship (*philia*). So is love of the native city or land (*philopatria*). For all these emotions mentioned above, Stanford makes two categories; visceral and sentimental:

Of all the emotions...the strongest and most visceral are terror, anger, passionate desire, hate and grief. Terror and grief are mainly passive and self-centred, the others are dynamic and extrovert. Grief is the least dynamic and most introverted of all, tending, as it does, to inhibit external action. On the other hand its symptoms and gestures in tragedy can be as violent as any. Some other feelings mentioned tend to become sentiments or mental conditions rather than emotions when they occur in their quieter forms *philanthropia*, *storge*, *philia*, *epichairekakia*, *pothos*, *tarache* and *zelos* (45)

This kind of division into visceral and sentimental, or any other based on relationships between emotions, or one set of emotions to another, does not exist in Aristotle. His art of handling the emotions (*psuchagogia*) is descriptive not analytical. The fact remains, however, that a scientific way of looking at emotions and employing them in public speech, rhetorical writing, courts and theatre was well known to the ancient Greeks.

5.5 EUROPEAN INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE

It is well known, but not so often admitted and explicated, that during the Renaissance new European theatre drew upon just a few elements of Aristotle's *Poetics* and not much out of the performing techniques of the ancient Greek theatre. It used the theoretical framework of Aristotle and the text of the Greek plays, actually more of the Latin ones, to create a new theatre tradition in spirit and form and entirely different from the ancient one. European theatre art took shape under the impact of the emerging print culture and the natural sciences. For this reason it became secular in purpose and realistic in presentation. Its aesthetic fabric placed man at the centre of the universe (in thrust, if not in statement), and while it prompted rational debate on new intellectual issues, it devalued emotional pleasure as a function of the theatre. It recast the Aristotelian concepts of plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*) and language (*lexis*) for its own performances: it reduced the visual spectacle (*opsis*) to a signless functionality and virtually banished music (*melopoia*). The new theatre was claimed by its proponents to be modelled after the six elements of the Aristotelian definition of

tragedy and the principle of imitation (mimesis) through which art was supposed to improve upon Nature, and hence mankind.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

Aristotle says, "pleasure proper to tragedy", and by implication in all plays, was to be derived, apart from completeness of action in a plot (*Poetics* 23:1) and from music and optical effects (26:4), from pity and fear through mimesis (14:3). His famous definition of tragedy (VI:2) states that tragedy creates catharsis through pity and fear. It is, therefore, clear that in the Aristotelian scheme of artistic creation the sequence was as follows. Mimesis was the prime method that result in a powerful emotional arousal which provided for the audience not only a specific sort of pleasure (*hedone*) but also a relief or catharsis. I have elsewhere discussed in detail the relationship between pleasure and catharsis (Gupt 271-3). At this moment it is enough to note that Aristotle postulated the validity of not one but both. The Aristotelian scheme has been one of the major models of positing both the moral and the hedonistic functions of art.

5.7 QUESTIONS

1. Is catharsis the only effect of a tragic performance on the audience or do they experience something else too?
2. What are the different ways of looking at the concept of catharsis?
3. What does Aristotle mean by "pleasure proper to tragedy"? By what elements of a tragedy is it brought about ?
4. Why was there so much insistence on emotional experience in classical aesthetics?

5.8 GLOSSARY

Hippocrates

Lived in the island of Kos and was trained in the medical tradition of Asklepios. Though it is contested that most of the works surviving under his name were written by him, he does symbolise a definite doctrine of medicine that was prevalent from the classical period to the medieval times.

Phrynichos

Plato thought that Phrynichos was one of the originators of tragedy along with Thespis. He won his first victory around 508 B.C. The subject of his plays were the contemporary events of the Persian wars. Aristophanes was a great admirer of his style. No complete work of his survives.

pothos

desire, longing, regret, destitution or want.

tarache

confusion, disorder, tumult, noise or sedition.

zelos

zeal, eagerness, envy, passion or emulation.

5.9 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 6 CRITICISM AS DIALOGUE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Dialogue in Mimes
- 6.3 A kind of Mimesis
- 6.4 Socratic Parlance
- 6.5 Later Tradition
- 6.6 Investigative Versus Expository Dialogue
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Questions
- 6.9 Glossary
- 6.10 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall look at how

- Dialogue began—as a reproduction of an interesting conversation
- It developed into an argumentative dialogue
- It became popular in 'mime' and in "theatre".

6.1 INTRODUCTION

At its best dialogue as a classical genre was primarily a philosophical and investigative enterprise but even then it was not far from an art form. Besides unfolding a hypothesis, it was spoken by characters who were presented as persona befitting the opinion voiced by them. Dialogue was inter-related, from the very beginning, with all other forms of public speech. It was a form of oratory and rhetoric employed in various forums of Greek society such as the courts, political gatherings and theatre.

The beginnings of dialogue as a discernable genre are seen in the works of Herodotos and Thucydides. In narratives written by these authors, philosophical dialogues are debates between real or imaginary characters. The discussion between Solon and Croesus in the works of Herodotos and the so called Melian dialogue in the writings of Thucydides are two well known examples. These pieces were also influenced by the theatrical dialogues of the times.

6.2 DIALOGUE IN MIMES

In the development of the philosophical dialogue, the impact of the quasi theatrical art form called *mimos* was quite significant. *Mimos* or mime was one of the earliest modes of performance extant till fourth century A.D. Based on dance, early examples of this art are found in the "*deikeliktai*" or the masked men of Sparta, the "*autokabдали*" or the improvisors of Central Greece and the "*phlyakes*" of the Italian region. Early mime was performed in the market places, at banquets and weddings. It was a combination of story-telling, dance, mimicry, song and dialogue performed by acrobats and jugglers. Xenophon, a speaker of the Platonic *Symposium*, mentions a mime performed in a banquet, that tells the story of Dionysos and Ariadne.

A well known name among the mime writers in the fifth century B.C. was that of Sophron of Syracuse who composed pieces meant "for men" and "for women" in Dorian rhythmic prose close to the popular speech of the times full of common

proverbs. Some of the titles of Sophron's mimes, such as *The Women Quacks*, *The Old Fishermen* and *The Women Visitors to Isthmia* indicate that unlike tragedies and comedies this genre dealt with life at the lower rungs of society and was entirely comic in nature. The tradition of Sophron was kept alive by his son but not one title of any of his mimes has survived.

By the third century B.C. the influence exercised by the poetic dialogue of tragedy and comedy made the writers of mime use verse. Herodas, whose origin and place of operation are not known, produced literary mimes with dialogue in a metre of the iambic variety. Sticking to the old themes of the genre, his pieces like *The Bawd*, *The Pimp*, *The School Master*, *The Women Worshippers*, *The Jealous Mistress* and the *Dream* provide a wide variety of events that were covered by this highly popular and entertaining art form. It is important to note that unlike tragedy which was performed only twice a year for specific religious festivals, the mimetic shows were enacted all around the year. The dialogues of the mimes, therefore, exercised a far more pervasive influence on the shape that this genre took whether in theatre or even philosophical writings. Mime writers also remained in close interaction with poets of high standing because these genres like the epic and the bucolic poems often contained dialogues. Highly literary mimes such as those of Theocritus were also an acceptable genre and were sometimes sung or enacted.

The popularity of mimes increased with the decline of serious and high quality drama and as vulgarity and obscenity invaded the performances. They were given new names such as *paignia* and *hypothesis* and their performers were called *magodoi* and *mimologoi*. By this time any kind of serious and thoughtful interchange through dialogues had become impossible. The *Oxyrhynchos Papyri* contain a farcical mime in which a girl, Charition, escapes from the clutches of a South Indian king and his followers who speak what the western scholars thought to be "psuedo-Indian" but has now been claimed to be the ancient dialect called "Tulu", a precursor of the Kannada language. Mime had immense popularity in the Roman world as well, but because of its increasing vulgarity it came into conflict with the Christian Church and in spite of persecution by the religious establishments it survived into the Middle Ages as the art of performing *jongleurs*.

In all mime, because there was no concentration on action, but more so on creating odd characters and situations, dialogue became the focal point of interest. Although it was often sung dialogue, specially in the genre called the pantomime, the spirit of argumentation was well conveyed. It was the juxtaposition of opposing points of view that made the dialogue extremely interesting to the audience and a valid channel of criticism.

6.3 A KIND OF MIMESIS

It would be a mistake to presume that the ancients thought of dialogue as an actual reproduction of an argument that took place between two or more characters. The kind of conversation that is claimed to be reported with accuracy in today's media was beyond the intentions of ancient writers of dialogue in whatever form. Dialogue was regarded as a mimesis, an imitation, an artistic recreation of a supposed conversation or good talk between recognisable persons from historical or contemporary life but drawn as characters. In those times, realistic and accurate reporting of the words of the speakers was not the prime purpose. It was more significant to preserve the main ideas and the conflicting views supposedly upheld by the speakers.

The main theme of a dialogue was well stated, though digressions were considered essential to create greater interest. The situation for a given dialogue

was topical but the theme had to be of an enduring nature. In fact, the art of conversation was preserved by the epic, the mimetic and the theatrical tradition and recording of all important talks in philosophical, political or cultural arenas had to be done according to the tradition of mimetic dialogue.

It may as well be kept in mind that the primary purpose of dialogue as representational conversation was to offer a criticism of things. It was to bewail, lament or just to satirise in order to assess things as positively good or bad. It should also be kept in mind that unlike present day cultures that uphold a relativistic approach to moral problems and often regard pluralism as an ideal, ancient Greek culture, though being open-minded to a lot of sophistry, debate and discussion, insisted that the prevalent norms of conduct be followed rather strictly. Therefore, dialogue was primarily used as a means of social censure. It is wrong to imagine that merely the delight in free discussion by the leisured class was the aim of dialogue. It is an erroneous impression we may form today by reading the dialogues of Plato and Aristotle regarding them as teachers philosophising to friends and disciples of the aristocratic class. In the classical period, even at Athens, the views and activities of the philosophers were constantly under public scrutiny, sometimes even censure, culminating in public wrath as it happened with Socrates.

Dialogue was supposed to constantly redefine and uphold the norms of ethical behaviour. Socrates paved the way for philosophic analysis through the mode of dialogue.

6.4 SOCRATIC PARLANCE

The early forms of Socratic dialogue must have been the scribblings that his disciples and admirers made soon after their encounters with this rare man. From this developed, undoubtedly, the rewriting of these dialogues as mimetic creations based on earlier material. The major composers of these dialogues with Socrates were Plato, Xenophon and Aeschines.

In the Platonic Dialogues, some twenty-five in number, there is a wide variety of style and approach as they were composed by Plato over a long period of time with changes in his philosophic position. The earlier pieces such as *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Crito* and *Hippias Minor* are very much occupied with the projection of the personality of Socrates. In Plato's portrayal, the famous philosopher is shown as an ugly man with a magnetic mind. He was jovial, celebrative of life, good humoured and even erotic. He maintained austere habits and displayed great physical endurance. Judging from his own words in *Crito* he lived to be seventy if not more, but if "seventy years" is interpreted as adult age, then he was ninety at the time of his death.

The Socratic method of the earlier dialogues is to seek real knowledge which leads to the happiness of an individual as well as general and personal good. By asking various questions regarding knowledge of a particular thing or an idea, and rejecting all the answers to those questions, Socrates establishes that knowledge of a thing or a concept, is knowing the true "form" or "essence" of it and no example of this essence can be given. The Socratic method of first inviting others to give answers or suggesting answers himself and then pretending that each answer has almost hit the truth and then showing the contradiction with other solutions, is a dramatic device used with a good deal of humour or irony. But it is done with dead seriousness as the Platonic "essences" can be indicated only by revealing the contradictions entailed in any worldly hypothesis and conceptions. Dialogue is used here for juxtaposition of viewpoints in a dramatic clash.

In the middle period, of the dialogues such as *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*, the investigative stance is subdued and a more expository mode is adopted. More

is said on the nature of forms and better and clearer prescription on issues, in the *Republic*. In the last phase of *Parmenides*, *Sophists*, *Timeus* and the *Laws*, dialogue is severely reduced. Sometimes correct answers are given not by Socrates but by another "philosopher" in a didactic manner. Reduction of the dramatic suspense and the entertaining account of conflicting views seem to have been done deliberately. The purpose is not, as in the early dialogues, to show the philosopher as the seeker, full of doubt and visible conflict, but one who has already arrived and is a bringer of wisdom.

At this point we must point out the difference between the Greek method of dialogue making and the later European style of argument making. On the whole, the Greek dialogue preserved the ambience of truth emerging from an investigation or conversation held among many people. It also gives the impression of a group effort, though it may be the final word of a single person as in the case of the Socratic dialogue. The subject of the dialogue also is not clear from the beginning. In short the uncertainty of a conversational result is manifest in the Greek dialogue. Whereas in the European style of arguing the subject matter, the main premissis and the reasons for and against the thesis are all sequently laid out. The European tradition of argumentation which started with the writings of a theological nature and after the Renaissance exhibited a huge variety of subjects, actually followed not the Greek tradition of dialogue but that of oratory or legal speech rendering which we have commented upon in the first Unit. An oration was supposed to be divided into "parts of speech" such as introduction, narrative, statement, proofs and epilogue. Essay writing that began with Bacon and developed in the tracts of Sydney and Milton and then into expansive writings of Hegel and others, shaped as a series of reasons given to defend a thesis, has been derived from the structure of Greek speeches.

6.5 LATER TRADITION

The genre of dialogue writing so perfected by Plato was emulated by his disciple Aristotle. Most of the dialogues were written before the death of Plato and had acquired recognition in ancient times. Unfortunately they are extant in fragments only. But the short crisp conversation characterising Plato's dialogues was never taken up by Aristotle who preferred long expositions finally summed up by the writer himself. After him, there was a lull in dialogue writing and it was only after two centuries, that Plutarch and Loukianos produced some worthwhile pieces.

There are just a few dialogues of Plutarch of Chaironia that are extant. They lack the Platonic depth but are useful for gathering information on the way of life prevalent in during his times (circa A.D 50 to A.D 120). *De sollertia animalium* is a debate on the question of whether water animals are more intelligent than land animals. His other books are patterned after learned table talk. *De genio Socratis* combines history with the analysis of oracular powers, and *Amatorious* discusses eroticism. His Pythian dialogues, *Apud Delphos*, *de Pythiae oraculis*, *Daimones* and *Defectu oraculum* are very significant.

Lucian or Loukianos (born around A.D. 120 in Samosata and died around A.D. 180), who produced about eighty dialogues was a pleader and lecturer by profession who travelled far and wide. His earlier dialogues are full of satiric humour, and influenced a great deal by mime, ridiculing popular religious ideas, human vanity and philosophic pretensions. His later works were more serious under the influence of Plato. But he cannot be called an original stylist or thinker.

Dialogue writing was zestfully emulated in the Latin tradition though authors like Cicero preferred to evolve a form which was closer to the expository mode of Aristotle than the dramatic method of Platonic investigation.

The Sophists, a class of teachers, some of whom were also philosophers, promoted the preservation of the art of dialogue and rhetoric as part of the educational skills they imparted to their students. The sophists were mainly professional tutors who went around from city to city, teaching young men of rich families useful skills of the day such as, preparing speeches for political assemblies, courts of law, and other public gatherings. Sophistry, which in its degenerated form symbolised meaningless argumentation, in its better usage was the art of persuasion and discussion. In the Roman period, sophistry was restricted to literary exercises and after the second century declined under Christian impact which censured its association with pagan religion and philosophies.

6.6 INVESTIGATIVE VERSUS EXPOSITIONAL DIALOGUE

In the development of the analytical tools whether for the purpose of legal, dramatic or philosophical activity there are two clear stages. The first is the investigative method in which clear conclusions are indicated after a good deal of analysis. The second is the expository way in which a hypothesis is stated and amplified. Both the methods were never used exclusively but the first method dominated in the earlier phase which apexed in the dialogues of Socrates and the second came of age with Aristotle. The first coincided with the age of theatre and democracy, the second with tyrannies and imperialism. But beyond their location in Greek history, the two approaches became good examples of literary compositions for the later ages.

In later European writing, for instance, *Hamlet* and *The Divine Comedy* can be cited as modelled on the investigative and the expository traditions of the dialogue respectively. *Hamlet* works his way through endless questioning and comes to the conclusion that "ripeness is all". Dante explains the order of the universe through the enunciations of Beatrice on unquestioning faith "as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen." Similarly, enigmatic poets like Blake would fall in the first category and the expansive ones like Pope or even Wordsworth in the other. Examples could be found in literatures of the non-European languages also which felt the impact of Greek literature directly or indirectly after colonisation.

Broadly speaking, the ironic and the moralistic approaches are the two critical heritages of the Greek dialogue. For the sake of simplicity they may be traced back to methods employed by Plato and Aristotle respectively. These two approaches or frames of mind are to be seen not only in the literary tradition of later European writing but also among the philosophers. In literary works, poetry, fiction and drama can frequently be seen as falling into one category or the other. Even twentieth century understandings of dialogue content in poetry such as the "three voices" of poetry by T.S. Eliot, namely, the poet speaking to himself, the poet addressing others and the poet as a dramatic persona, are an expansion of the Greek tradition.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

The dialogue, like tragedy, is one of the special contributions of Hellenic culture to world literature. As a genre, it combines sharpness of investigation, whether of a social or a philosophic concern, with the imaginative rendering of the dramatic mode. It reflects the antidogmatic urge to dismantle established notions causing social oppression or intellectual sterility. It seems that as the art of conversation found various applications in Greek social life, dialogue as a formal way of preserving oral interchanges of significance in courts, political gatherings, theatre

and various performing arts, was recognised. Thus it became a mimesis that preserved the subject matter in an artistic way worthy of being handed down to future generations. It seems to have flourished most in times when democracy had an upper hand in the political system. However, it cannot be taken for granted that it reflects a society that attained a high degree of freedom. Socrates, the progenitor of the greatest dialogues was put to death, which he willingly accepted, for expounding his ideas through this very method of investigative and sceptical speech. Dialogue, thus exemplifies all the facets of the ancient mind : quest for truth, capacity to contradict and ridicule the established norms and an acceptance of the social boundaries set for the individual by custom and religious sanctions.

6.8 QUESTIONS

1. What are the earliest known examples of dialogue writing ?
2. How does the dramatic tradition contribute to the growth of dialogue ?
3. What are the most distinguishing features of the Socratic dialogue as found in the writings of Plato ?
4. How does Aristotle's dialogue writing differ from Plato's and what impact has it on later writings ?

6.9 GLOSSARY

Aeschines Socraticus

He is to be distinguished from the famous orator politician of the same name who lived half a century later and opposed Demosthenes. Aeschines the philosopher, named after Socrates for his association as a close disciple, was present at the condemnation and execution of his master. He was an orator as well and perhaps for a profession wrote speeches in the law courts. He nurtured Xenokritos as his disciple but was not very successful materially. To escape poverty he moved to the court of Syracuse but returned to Athens. Of his dialogues featuring Socrates are *Miltiades*, *Kallias*, *Axiochos*, *Aspasia*, *Telauges*, *Rinon*, and some others not verified as genuine.

6.10 SUGGESTED READING

Primary Texts

Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. 5 vols. 3rd Ed. Oxford, 1893.

The Republic. Trans, H.D.P. Lee. Penguin, 1955.

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Secondary Text

Morrison, Karl F. *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*. New Jersey: University of Princeton, 1982.