

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
SEMESTER V
CORE COURSE VI – LITERARY CRITICISM
(EN 1541)
PART 1

Plato



- ▣ Ideas as ultimate reality
- ▣ Art as thrice removed from reality
- ▣ Twin standards of good for the individual and the state.
- ▣ Art as dangerous to both.
- ▣ Philosophy superior to poetry.

THE FUNCTION OF POETRY

- ▣ Not only please but instruct morals as well.
- ▣ Worth determined by its contribution to knowledge of virtue.
- ▣ Only a good teacher can be a good artist.
- ▣ Poetic truth must be the highest truth.

ATTACK ON POETRY

- ▣ Questions the validity of “inspiration” as opposed to intellect.
- ▣ It appeals to emotions than reason.
- ▣ Suspicious of the power of literature to move the readers
- ▣ Presents both Gods and Heroes in unfavorable light.

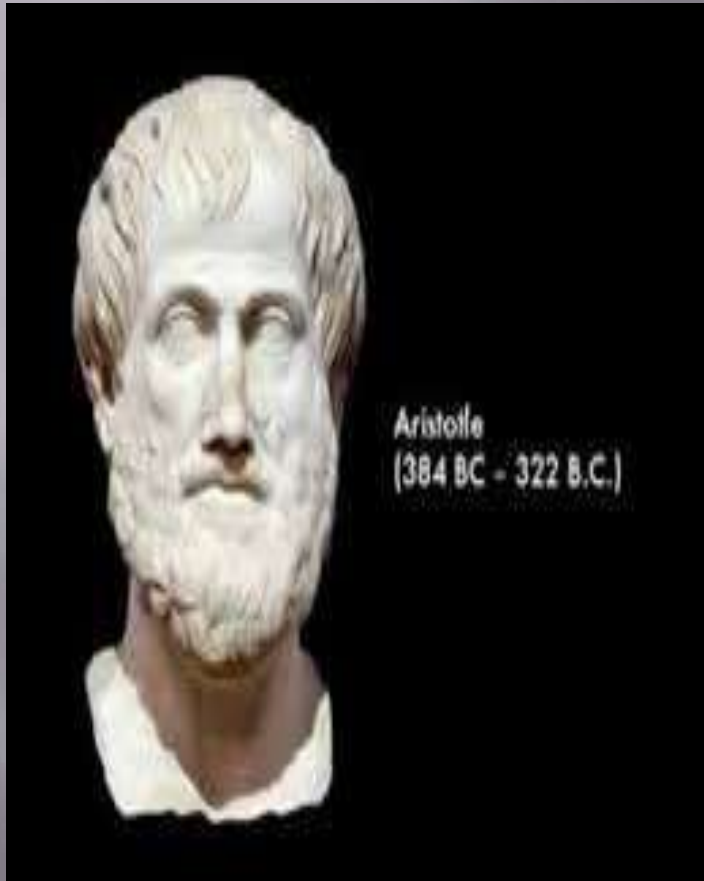
ON DRAMA

- ▣ Appeals to baser instincts to please the audience
- ▣ Impersonating heroes can stimulate good qualities and vice versa
- ▣ Comic characters should be lovable.

CONTRIBUTIONS

- ▣ Division of poetry into dithyrambic (lyrical), mimetic and the mixed kind (like epic)
- ▣ Questions the nature and function of poetry.
- ▣ The concept of mimesis.

Aristotle



- ❑ Disciple of Plato
- ❑ Teacher of Alexander the Great.
- ❑ Major Works: *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*
- ❑ *Poetics*, incomplete, 26 chapters
- ❑ Mainly concerned with tragedy, which was in his day, the most development form of poetry.
- ❑ Disagreeing with much else that Plato said, Aristotle agreed that art was essentially Mimesis
- ❑ But, he maintained, (good) art was neither useless nor dangerous, but rather natural and beneficial.

Defends poetry

- ▣ Calls poet an imitator who imitates one of 3 objects:
 - things as they are or were
 - things as they are said or thought to be
 - things as they ought to be
- ▣ Taking pleasure in imitation is an inborn instinct
- ▣ Instinct for harmony and rhythm
- ▣ Aristotle does not agree with Plato in the function of poetry making people weaker and emotional/too sentimental. For him, *catharsis* is ennobling and it humbles a human being.
- ▣ Poetry appeals to emotions
- ▣ Tragedy arouses pity & fear leading to catharsis
- ▣ Therefore emotional appeal of poetry is good

- ▣ The primary purpose of art is to please.
- ▣ Aristotle believes that the end of poetry is to please; however, teaching may be the by-product of it. Such pleasing is superior to the other pleasures because it teaches civic morality. So all good literature gives pleasure, which is not divorced from moral lessons.
- ▣ “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *katharsis* of such emotions.

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ON EPIC

- ▣ Older than tragedy
- ▣ It resembles tragedy in nature and differs in form.
- ▣ Plot has complication, turning point & denouement.
- ▣ Plot can be simple or complex.
- ▣ Has unity of action & cause catharsis.

EPICS & TRAGEDY

- ▣ Has 4 parts- plot, character, thought & diction.
- ▣ Imitates by narration and is longer than tragedy.
- ▣ The epics employ the marvelous unlike tragedy
- ▣ No song & spectacle.

Tragedy as superior to Epic

- ▣ Appeals to cultivated audience
- ▣ Performance & music gives greater pleasure
- ▣ Limited length gives greater unity
- ▣ Concentrated effort is more pleasurable than one which is spread over a long time and diluted.
- ▣ “Tragedy, he maintains, is richer in its effects, adding music and spectacle to epic resources; it presents its stories even when read no less vividly than the epic; it has a stricter unity; its methods are more concentrated; and it produces more effectively the requisite emotional result, *i.e.*, the pleasure from a catharsis of pity and fear.”

MIMESIS

- ▣ Translates as imitation
- ▣ Imaginative literature as an imitation of real life
- ▣ Material from life has to be careful and organized

CATHARSIS

- ▣ Means purgation
- ▣ A beneficial effect of tragedy
- ▣ In a tragedy emotions of pity and fear are aroused , expressed and contained in such a way that the spectator is left in a more balanced and disciplined emotional state as a result of experience.

Hamartia

- ❑ The Greek word “Hamartia” means “missing the mark”.
- ❑ Hamartia is not a moral failing and it is unfortunate that it was translated as “tragic flaw” by Bradley.
- ❑ Aristotle himself distinguishes Hamartia from moral failing. He means by it some error or judgment. He writes that the cause of the hero’s fall must lie “not in depravity, but in some error or Hamartia on his part”.
- ❑ He does not assert or deny anything about the connection of Hamartia with hero’s moral failings.
- ❑ Hamartia is an error or miscalculation, but the error may arise from any of the three ways:
 - ❑ It may arise from
 1. “ignorance of some fact or circumstance”,
 2. from hasty or careless view of the special case,
 3. or thirdly, it may be an error voluntary, but not deliberate, as acts committed in anger.

▣ Hamartia is an error, or a series of errors, “whether morally culpable or not,” committed by an otherwise noble person, and these errors derive him to his doom. The tragic irony lies in the fact that hero may err mistakenly without any evil intention, yet he is doomed no less than immoralists who sin consciously. He has Hamartia and as a result his very virtues hurry him to his ruin. Says Butcher:

“Othello in the modern drama, Oedipus in the ancient, are the two most conspicuous examples of ruin wrought by character, noble indeed, but not without defects, acting in the dark and, as it seemed, for the best.”

Three Unities

- ▣ The unity of action: a play should have one single plot or action to sustain the interest of the spectators and it can also lead him to proper purgation.
- ▣ The unity of time: the action in a play should not exceed the single revolution of the sun.
- ▣ The unity of place: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.

Six parts of tragedy

- ▣ Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Thought, Diction, Spectacle, Song.
- ▣ The plot must be “a whole,” with a beginning, middle, and end.
- ▣ The plot must be “complete,” having “unity of action.”
- ▣ The plot may be either simple or complex, although complex is better. Simple plots have only a “change of fortune” (*catastrophe*). Complex plots have both “reversal of fortune” (*peripeteia*) and “recognition” (*anagnorisis*) connected with the catastrophe.

- ▣ **Character has the second place in** - Characters in tragedy should have the following qualities:
- ▣ “good or fine.” Aristotle relates this quality to moral purpose and says it is relative to class: “Even a woman may be good, and also a slave, though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless.”
- ▣ “fitness of character” (true to type); e.g. valor is appropriate for a warrior but not for a woman.
- ▣ “true to life” (realistic)
- ▣ “consistency” (true to themselves). Once a character's personality and motivations are established, these should continue throughout the play.
- ▣ “necessary or probable.” Characters must be logically constructed according to “the law of probability or necessity” that governs the actions of the play.
- ▣ “true to life and yet more beautiful” (idealized, ennobled).

- ▣ **Thought is third in importance**
- ▣ Aristotle discusses the stylistic elements of tragedy; he is particularly interested in metaphors
- ▣ **Song, or melody, is fifth, and is the musical element of the chorus.** Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be “mere interludes,” but should contribute to the unity of the plot
- ▣ **The end of the tragedy is a *katharsis* (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear.**

Comedy

- ▣ Tragedy represents men as nobler than they are, comedy represents men as worse than they are.
- ▣ About men who have some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive.

Horace

65 B C to 80 B C



- ▣ 2 books of Satires, 4 books of Odes, and 3 books of Epistles(the last of which is called **Ars Poetica**)
- ▣ Along with Virgil revived the ancient Greek tradition in Roman literature

Ars Poetica

- ▣ A long poem in 541 lines in latin
- ▣ Originally entitled the “Epistle to the Pisos”
- ▣ The name given by Quintilius
- ▣ Influenced by Aristotle’s *Poetics*
- ▣ divided in three sections, dealing with poetry (*poiesis* or matter), the poem (*poiema* or form) and the poet (*poietes*), respectively
- ▣ The treatment is a loose and conversational one, and to that extent it is "an Art written without art," as Scaliger used to say.
- ▣ The medieval and neoclassical critics will develop the tradition of the *ars poetica* turning it into a special poetical genre: that which is concerned with the principles of poetry itself. Boileau's *Art poétique*, or Pope's *Essay on Criticism* will be typical examples

On poetry

- ❑ Poetry is not mere imitation but mixture of fact & fancy.
- ❑ Poet imitates life in his own creative way to create art that is both pleasing & very near the truth
- ❑ Poet unites the agreeable and the profitable
- ❑ Great poetry is both pleasure giving & morally improving
- ❑ **The aim of the poet is either to benefit, or to amuse, or to make his words at once please and give lessons of life.**

- ▣ Nature & property of poetry is to “ charm the mind’
- ▣ Restates the emotional appeal of poetry as the charm lies in its power to move reader’s hearts.
- ▣ Theme should be simple(from familiar material) and uniform.
- ▣ Epic poetry uses dactylic hexametre, for tragedy, comedy and satire iambic metre.
- ▣ Choice and arrangement of words should be right.
- ▣ The poet’s skill lies in making familiar words appear strange and the strange ones familiar.

On drama

- ▣ Plot should be borrowed form familiar materials , preferably Greek legends.
- ▣ The author can distinguish himself by original treatment of familiar plot.
- ▣ If a new theme is chosen it has to be consistent.
- ▣ The story should be an indivisible whole in structure.
- ▣ Violent or repugnant sights should be reported than shown on stage
- ▣ Chorus should follow 2 rules:
 - a. be an integral part of plot & not disturb the unity of action
 - b. its commends should be directed to a noble end

- ▣ Plays should have five acts
- ▣ the *deus ex machina* must not be used in unworthy occasions.
- ▣ Characters should either be drawn on ancient Greek legends or completely new invented ones.
- ▣ Demands truth to life.
- ▣ Dramatic speech should observe propriety
- ▣ only three actors can speak at one time in a scene
- ▣ recognizes the superiority of Greek models; Roman poets and playwrights he sees in general as rude and careless as far as technique is concerned.

On decorum

- ▣ Decorum is that which underscores the entirety of the importance of poetry.
- ▣ Horace explains his notion of decorum in terms of a) the proper balance between the didactic and the entertaining, b) the proper regard for audience, and c) the mimesis of nature and of art.
- ▣ The main role of art is to keep everything in its right place and give it its right share in the whole. This idea of technical knowledge as a principle of restraint and order we call *decorum* : it is a classicist conception *par excellence*.

Longinus



- ▣ Written as an epistolary piece to “dear Terentianus,” “On the Sublime” examines the work of more than 50 ancient writers under the lens of the sublime.

- ▣ On the Sublime” directly influenced poets such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope, and the idea of the sublime played a central role in the work of the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- ▣ *sublimity is “a certain distinction and excellence in composition.”*
- ▣ By the word ‘sublime’ Longinus means “elevation” or “loftiness”—all that which raises style above the ordinary, and gives to it distinction in its widest and truest sense.
- ▣ Both nature and art, says Longinus, contribute to sublimity in literature.

- ▣ Longinus finds five principal sources of the sublime, the first two of which are largely the gifts of nature the remaining three the gifts of art (1) grandeur of thought, (2) capacity for strong emotion, (3) appropriate use of Figures, (4) Nobility of diction, and (5) dignity of composition or a happy synthesis of all the preceding elements.

1) Grandeur of Thought

- ▣ sublimity is the echo of greatness of soul
- ▣ he who would attain distinction of style must feed his soul on the works of the great masters, as Homer, Plato and Demosthenes, and capture from them some of their own greatness.

2) Capacity for Strong Emotion

- ▣ nothing contributes more to loftiness of tone in writing than genuine emotion.
- ▣ But the emotions have to be ‘true emotions’ and ‘in the right place’.

(3) Appropriate Use of figures

- ▣ Figures of speech should not be used mechanically, rather they must be rooted in genuine emotion.
- ▣ The grandeur of any figure “will depend on its being employed in the right *place* and the right *manner*, on the right *occasion*, and with the right *motive*.”

(4) Nobility of Diction

- ▣ includes choice and arrangement of words and the use of metaphors and ornamental language
- ▣ The discussion of diction is incomplete because four leaves of this part of the book are unfortunately lost.
- ▣ Among these ornaments of speech Longinus considers metaphor and hyperbole.

(5) Dignity of Composition

- ▣ a dignified composition or the arrangement of words.
- ▣ It should be one that blends thought, emotion, figures, and words themselves—the preceding four elements of sublimity—into a harmonious whole.
- ▣ A proper rhythm is one of the elements in this harmony.