

B. A.- III English (Special)
Paper VII Literary Criticism
Module I

Introduction to Literary Criticism:
Nature and Function of Literary Criticism

Introduction to Literary Criticism:

i. Definition

- The word "criticism" comes from a Greek word meaning "judgment."
- Criticism involves making judgments.
- Literary criticism is about judging and evaluating works of literature.
- Its function is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of literary works and assess their artistic value.
- Literary criticism encompasses the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of literature.
- It evaluates literary works based on factors like genre, structure, and value.
- Literary criticism explores what literature is, what it does, and its worth.
- It helps readers understand literature by providing different perspectives.
- Literary criticism considers aspects like structure, context (social, economic, historical), and how texts manipulate readers.
- It enhances the relationship between authors, readers, and literary texts.

- Different approaches or lenses reveal deeper meanings in literature.
- Each lens has strengths and weaknesses, and all are valuable.
- Becoming a pluralist in criticism is better than rigidly supporting one approach.
- Criticism involves judging art and literature, defining, analyzing, and evaluating literary works.
- It includes description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works.
- Literary criticism explores various aspects of literature.
- Historical figures like Plato, Aristotle, Sidney, Dryden, Johnson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Arnold contributed to the investigation of literature's nature and value.
- Earlier investigations focused on evaluation rather than interpretation.
- Plato, for example, criticized literature for stirring up passions instead of nurturing the intellect.

ii. The principles of criticism

- Critics need standards of judgment and certain qualifications and tools.
- Every literary work comprises three elements: matter, manner, and capacity to provide aesthetic pleasure.
- Historically, critics established rules for assessing technical excellence in literary works, such as plot construction, diction, style, meter, and language.
- These rules have changed over time, but the essential quality of literature lies in its ability to appeal to the imagination.
- Human nature and literary principles are considered universal and permanent.
- Three principles of literary criticism are observed:

1. **Pursuit of Truth:** Literary criticism seeks poetic truth, which is the truth of ideas and experiences within a work of art. This differs from scientific truth.

2. **Symmetry (Construction):** This principle involves selecting and arranging material correctly. Writers should choose specific aspects of reality and arrange them to emphasize those selected aspects. Aristotle emphasized the importance of this for the imaginative appeal of literature. Critics assess if the parts of the composition relate to each other, are proportionate, and contribute to the overall composition.

3. **Idealization:** Idealization is about considering the aesthetic consciousness of the reader. It involves selecting aspects of reality for artistic treatment in a way that minimizes or avoids unpleasant elements that might disrupt the reader's aesthetic experience. This ensures that a work of art provides pleasure to the reader.

iii. Functions of Literary Criticism

- Literary criticism's primary function is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a work of art and determine its value.
- The main role of criticism is to enlighten and stimulate readers and provide fresh perspectives.
- A true critic possesses sound knowledge of the subject and can uncover qualities like power, beauty, and depth of significance in a work.
- Critics may act as pathfinders, breaking new ground in their analysis with a passionate and

friendly approach.

- The primary functions of literary criticism are interpretation and judgment.
- The view of criticism is influenced by the critic's intellectual philosophy and life outlook.
- Criticism is shaped by the critic's personal likes, dislikes, and biases, which are, in turn, influenced by the socio-political context in which they exist.
- Critical theories are molded by the prevailing spirit of the times.

iv. Literary criticism vs Literary theory

- Modern literary theorizing and criticism began in the 19th century but reached its zenith in the 20th century, often called the "age of criticism."
- The complexity of literary theory is evident in the various critical movements and the enthusiasm of critics.
- The influence of new psychologies was significant in criticism.
- A.N. Jeffares emphasizes the connection between literature, literary criticism, and literary theories.
- He argues that studying literature requires an understanding of contexts and texts, including the historical, political, philosophical, economic, and cultural background.
- Literature has both literal and super-literal meanings, with criticism aiming to reveal the latter, which includes ideological implications.
- Literary theory and criticism are essential for understanding and analyzing literature.
- They enhance our understanding of literature and the world we live in.
- They improve logical, creative, and insightful thinking when analyzing literary works.

Difference between Literary Theory and Literary Criticism:

- Literary theory consists of rules and principles used to evaluate literary works.
- Literary theories provide different lenses through which texts can be interpreted.
- There is no one superior theory, and readers often choose a theory to gain a new perspective on a text.
- Modern literary criticism is about producing meaning through interpretative strategies

applied by readers.

- Interpretations depend on the questions posed to a text.
- Literary criticism involves applying critical theory to a literary text, even if critics aren't consciously aware of the theoretical assumptions guiding their interpretation.
- The terms "criticism" and "theory" are often used interchangeably because criticism is seen as incorporating theory due to its reliance on theoretical assumptions.

The qualities (characteristics) of a critic

Qualities of a Critic:

1. **Rare Sensibility:** A critic should possess a unique and exceptional sense of judgment, demonstrating a keen sensitivity to the nuances of literary works.
2. **Widely Read:** Being well-read is crucial for a critic, as a broad knowledge of literature allows for a deeper understanding of various styles, themes, and contexts.
3. **Proper Training:** Critics should have received appropriate training and developed technical skills in different branches of literature to analyze and evaluate works effectively.
4. **Objectivity:** A critic must rise above personal, religious, national, political, or literary biases to maintain objectivity in their assessments.
5. **Imaginative Sympathy:** Critics should exhibit imaginative sympathy, being sensitive and humane in their interpretations of literary works, considering the emotional and creative aspects.
6. **Understanding of Human Psychology:** A sound knowledge of human psychology and human nature aids in comprehending the motivations and behaviors of characters within literature.
7. **Versatile Knowledge:** A critic should have a comprehensive understanding of various branches of literature, encompassing different genres, styles, and historical periods.
8. **Mind of the Author:** To provide insightful analysis, critics should strive to understand the author's intentions and perspective, delving into the mind behind the work.

9. **Philosophical Mind:** Possessing a philosophical mindset allows a critic to explore the deeper themes, ideas, and implications present in literary texts.

10. **Varied Experience:** A critic should be well-versed in the works of great authors from multiple languages and cultures, drawing upon a rich and diverse literary background to inform their evaluations and comparisons.

Module II Classical Criticism

A) The Concept of Tragedy

B) The Ideal Tragic Hero

A) The Concept of Tragedy

Aristotle's Contribution to Tragedy:

- Aristotle's groundbreaking work, "Poetics," sheds light on the concept of tragedy.
- He held a deep admiration for Greek tragedians like Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, who elevated the art of drama and influenced his theories on classical drama.

Definition of Tragedy:

- Aristotle defined tragedy as an imitation of a serious and complete action of a certain magnitude.
- Tragedy uses language enriched with various forms of embellishment.
- It portrays action rather than narrating events.
- Tragedy aims to evoke a sense of pity and fear in the audience, leading to catharsis (purification) of these emotions.

Distinguishing Tragedy from Comedy:

- Comedy focuses on individuals acquiring heroic stature, while tragedy delves into the serious aspects of human nature.
- Comedy often portrays characters as worse than they are in real life.
- Tragedy emphasizes serious action, while comedy often features grotesque actions.

- Aristotle's concept of imitation means creative reproduction rather than mere copying.

Importance of Plot in Tragedy:

- Aristotle places greater importance on the plot or action in tragedy, overshadowing character.
- The action in a tragedy must be complete and follow a logical sequence.
- It should have a well-justified beginning, middle, and end.
- The beginning sets the stage, the middle builds on previous events, and the end concludes the action.

Six Elements in Tragedy:

- Aristotle identifies six elements in tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song.
- Plot and character are the most significant, with plot serving as the central element.

The Dominance of Plot:

- Plot is considered the core of tragedy, around which the entire structure is built.
- Character plays a secondary role in comparison to plot.
- Tragedy imitates action and life, not just individuals.
- A tragedy can exist without strong character development but not without a compelling plot.
- The plot should revolve around a central theme that intertwines all elements, illustrating a change in the character's fortune.

Tragic Hero:

- In Aristotle's view, the tragic hero is neither purely virtuous nor villainous.
- The hero's downfall is a result of an error in judgment or human frailty.
- The audience experiences pity and fear through the hero's actions and ultimate suffering.
- This emotional experience serves as a catharsis, purging the audience of these emotions.

In summary, Aristotle's "Poetics" provided a foundational framework for understanding tragedy in literature. He emphasized the significance of plot, the role of the tragic hero, and the cathartic effect on the audience, contributing significantly to the development of literary criticism and dramatic theory.

B) The Ideal Tragic Hero

Aristotle's Concept of the Tragic Hero:

According to Aristotle, an ideal tragic hero possesses specific characteristics to create the emotional responses of pity and fear in the audience. These characteristics are as follows:

1. **Eminence:** The tragic hero should be a person of high stature or eminence, someone who holds a significant position in society. Their actions should carry weight and importance.
2. **Basic Goodness:** The hero should fundamentally be a good person, although not purely virtuous. Absolute virtue in a character would not evoke the required emotions of pity and fear; instead, it might lead to disgust.
3. **Minor Flaw:** The tragic hero should have a minor flaw or tragic trait in their character. This flaw becomes the root cause of their downfall, suffering, and eventual death.
4. **Pity and Fear:** The hero's misfortune should result from this minor flaw, and it should be neither too virtuous nor too wicked. Their fall generates feelings of pity (for the undeserved suffering) and fear (due to the resemblance of the hero to the audience).

Characteristics of a Tragic Hero:

Aristotle outlines additional characteristics that a tragic hero should possess:

1. True to Self: The hero should stay true to their character throughout the play.
2. True to Type: They should embody qualities consistent with their character type.
3. True to Life: The hero's actions and motivations should be realistic and plausible within the context of the play.
4. Probable and Beautiful: Their actions should be probable, but they should also possess a certain beauty that surpasses everyday life.

Aristotle's Classification of Character Endings:

Aristotle classifies character endings into four categories:

- A good person coming to a bad end (shocking and disturbing).
- A bad person coming to a good end (neither moving nor moral).
- A bad person coming to a bad end (moral but not emotionally impactful).
- A rather good person coming to a bad end (ideal for tragedy).

The Concept of Hamartia:

- Hamartia, often referred to as a "fatal flaw" or "tragic flaw," is a key element in Aristotle's theory.
- Hamartia may include moral flaws, technical errors, errors in judgment, ignorance, or even arrogance (hubris).
- It is this flaw that leads the tragic hero into conflict with Fate (Nemesis) and ultimately to their downfall.

In summary, Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero involves a character of eminence, fundamentally

good yet not purely virtuous, with a minor flaw or error in judgment. This character change, due to a flaw, should evoke feelings of pity and fear in the audience, leading to catharsis and a deeper understanding of human nature and the consequences of actions.

Module III

Preface to Shakespeare by Dr. Samuel Johnson

Dr. Samuel Johnson's Preface to The Plays of William Shakespeare is a classic work of English literary criticism. In this preface, Johnson lays out his editorial principles and provides an analysis of both the strengths and weaknesses of Shakespeare's works. Many of Johnson's ideas have become foundational principles in modern literary criticism, while others reveal more about his personal biases than Shakespeare's genius. Johnson's eloquent prose adds weight to his views.

Key Points from Johnson's Preface:

1. **Universal Themes:** Johnson lauds Shakespeare for his focus on universal themes rather than the particular. He praises Shakespeare for creating plays that are "just representations of general nature," relying on an understanding of human nature rather than relying on bizarre effects to achieve success.
2. **Characterization:** Johnson admires Shakespeare's art of characterization, highlighting its variety, depth, credibility, and its ability to captivate the audience. He notes that Shakespeare's characters are often more representative of human nature as a whole, rather than mere individuals.
3. **Timeless Appeal:** Johnson believes that Shakespeare's plays have endured because they transcend time and nationality. They depict characters who are universally relatable, representing "the genuine progeny of common humanity."
4. **Total Effect:** Johnson argues that the greatness of Shakespeare's plays lies in their overall impact, encompassing natural action, dialogue, and characterization. He criticizes earlier editors who focused on highlighting specific passages rather than appreciating the holistic effect.
5. **Enumerating Faults:** Johnson's criticism isn't solely praise; he also enumerates Shakespeare's

faults. He attributes these faults to carelessness in publication, the evolving nature of Elizabethan English, colloquial language, allusions to topical events, and the rapid flow of ideas.

6. **Obscurities:** Johnson recognizes that some of Shakespeare's obscurities arise from the conventions and necessities of the age and stagecraft rather than from inherent flaws in Shakespeare's writing.

7. **Character Analysis:** Johnson's emphasis on character analysis in Shakespeare initiated a trend in literary criticism that would dominate for over a century. This focus on understanding human nature through characters became a central theme in dramatic criticism.

In summary, Samuel Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare is a seminal work in literary criticism, appreciating the universality and depth of Shakespeare's work while acknowledging its flaws. Johnson's analysis and insights have significantly influenced the study of Shakespeare and literature as a whole.

Module IV Literary Terms

1) Symbolism:

What Is Symbolism?

- Symbolism is a literary device using symbols (words, people, marks, etc.) to represent deeper meanings beyond the literal.
- Not limited to literature; symbols are part of everyday life, like patriotic colors or road signs.

How Has Symbolism Been Used Throughout History?

- Early forms of storytelling used symbols, like cave paintings.
- Ancient Greek theater used symbols in religious contexts.
- Throughout history, symbolism represented desires, emotions, and religious themes in literature.

3 Types of Symbolism in Literature:

1. **Religious symbolism:** Often sanctioned by religious authorities and found in religious

texts.

- Examples: "Paradise Lost" by John Milton, "The Brothers Karamazov" by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

2. **Romantic symbolism:** Pervasive in world literature, especially in poetry.

- Examples: Shakespeare's sonnets, Edna St. Vincent Millay's modernist stanzas.

3. **Emotional symbolism:** Depicts metaphysical emotions using physical symbols.

- Examples: Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine in French literature, William Butler Yeats and Seamus Heaney in English literature.

3 Ways to Use Symbolism in Writing:

- Add emotion: Symbols evoke emotions, leaving a lasting impact.

- Example: Lady Macbeth's guilt symbolized by an uncleanable spot of blood in Shakespeare's "Macbeth."

- Add imagery: Symbols provide visual elements to complex themes.

- Example: "Burnt wood disappearing into smoke" in Seamus Heaney's poem visualizes the concept of drifting consciousness.

- Connect themes: Symbols link themes and convey deeper meanings.

- Example: The color green in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" represents money and materialism.

2) Realism

- **Definition:** Literary realism portrays everyday experiences realistically, focusing on mundane life as it is without dramatization or romanticization. It often depicts middle and lower-class society.

- **History of Literary Realism:**

- Originated in nineteenth-century France as a reaction to Romanticism.

- Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert were early realist writers in France.

- **History of Literary Realism in the United States:**

- William Dean Howells was an early American realist known for middle-class novels.

- Mark Twain, with "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," captured middle American life.

- Other notable American realists include Stephen Crane, John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Edith Wharton, and Henry James.

- History of Literary Realism in the United Kingdom:

- Literary realism existed in England through early novelists like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, addressing middle-class issues.

- Types of Literary Realism:

1. **Magical Realism:** Blurs fantasy and reality by adding magical elements to a truthful world. (Example: "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel García Márquez)

2. **Social Realism:** Focuses on working-class and poor living conditions. (Example: "Les Misérables" by Victor Hugo)

3. **Kitchen Sink Realism:** A subset of social realism, portraying the lives of young working-class British men who frequent pubs. (Example: "Room at the Top" by John Braine)

4. **Socialist Realism:** Glorifies the struggles of the proletariat, particularly adopted by Communists. (Example: "Cement" by Fyodor Gladkov)

5. **Naturalism:** Extremist realism influenced by Darwin's theory, believing science explains social and environmental phenomena. (Example: "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner)

6. **Psychological Realism:** Focuses on character motivations and often comments on social or political issues. (Example: "Crime and Punishment" by Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

3) Humor

Definition of Humor:

- **Definition:** Humor is a literary tool used to induce amusement or laughter in the audience. It aims to alleviate monotony and boredom by presenting new and funny aspects of life. Humor is commonly found in literature, theater, movies, and advertising, with the primary goal of making the audience happy.

Types of Humor:

Humor is the end product, and it can be achieved through various devices, including:

1. Hyperbole/Exaggeration
2. Incongruity
3. Slapstick
4. Surprise

5. Sarcasm
6. Irony
7. Pun

Examples of Humor in Literature:

Example #1: Pride and Prejudice (By Jane Austen)

In Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," humor is prevalent throughout. For instance, Mr. Bennet humorously responds to his wife's complaints about his understanding of her nerves by saying, "I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least." The novel also features humorous interactions between Elizabeth and Darcy as they initially find each other disagreeable but later engage in playful teasing.

4) Paradox:

- **Definition:** A paradox is a literary device that presents a statement or situation that contradicts itself but contains a plausible kernel of truth. It often challenges conventional thinking and invites readers to ponder deeper meanings.

Comparison with Antithesis and Oxymoron:

- **Antithesis:** Antithesis is a figure of speech that juxtaposes two contrasting ideas. It focuses on the opposition of these ideas without necessarily containing a contradiction within itself. For example, Neil Armstrong's statement, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," uses antithesis to emphasize the significance of the event.

- **Oxymoron:** An oxymoron is the combination of two words with contradictory meanings. Unlike a paradox, it doesn't necessarily involve opposing ideas or themes but rather the contradiction exists within the words themselves. For instance, "sweet sorrow" in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is an oxymoron.

Difference Between Literary and Logical Paradox:

1. **Logical Paradox:** A logical paradox is a contradiction that defies logic and remains unresolvable. It challenges fundamental principles of reasoning and often leads to inconclusive or self-contradictory conclusions. For example, Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise questions the nature of motion and appears unsolvable.

2. **Literary Paradox:** A literary paradox, on the other hand, presents a contradiction that ultimately reveals a deeper meaning or insight. It may initially appear contradictory, but upon further examination, it serves to convey a thought-provoking message. John Donne's "Death, thou shalt die" is a literary paradox that suggests that the fear of death does not exist in heaven.

Examples of Paradox in Literature:

- In Shakespeare's **Hamlet**, the titular character states, "I must be cruel to be kind." This paradox highlights Hamlet's belief that his actions, which may seem cruel, are ultimately in the service of kindness, as he seeks to avenge his father's murder.

- In George Bernard Shaw's **Man and Superman**, the protagonist Jack Tanner says, "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules." This paradox challenges the idea of following established norms and expresses Shaw's contempt for convention.

- Oscar Wilde employs paradoxes in **The Importance of Being Earnest** for comedic effect. Cecily Cardew's statement, "To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up," humorously highlights the idea that pretending to be natural is, in itself, an act.

Paradoxes in literature can serve various purposes, from adding depth to characters to conveying themes, expressing humor, or encouraging readers to think critically about the text.
